

# Parents as Service Users

of Children's Services  
in England and Germany

Research Report

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# Preface

The research project presented in this report is part of my PhD thesis that I submitted in autumn 2008 at the University of Warwick under the title: 'New Public Management, Citizenship and Social Work: Children's Services in Germany and England'. This report is a summary of the thesis. If you wish to discuss any aspect of it or order an electronic copy of the whole thesis, please get in touch. You can find my contact details on the left.

The results of the study are based on the analysis of policy documents and organisational procedures as well as interviews with social workers in an English and a German Children's Social Service. The interviews were conducted between August 2005 and April 2006.

## A big 'Thank you'

goes to the two participating Children's Services as well as all interview participants for their time, energy and feedback at a time when they were confronted with a variety of changes, challenges and uncertainties.

Best regards

Katrin Bain

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# Introduction

In June 1999, Tony Blair, then British Labour Prime Minister, and Gerhard Schröder, then German Social Democratic Chancellor, released a joint statement laying out the future for Europe's Social Democrats (Schröder and Blair, 1999). Their statement is an attempt to move away from the traditional left-wing Social Democratic position, towards the centre, and in so doing to find a balance between the Social Democratic values of 'fairness and social justice, liberty and equality of opportunity' (Schröder and Blair, 1999) and a modernisation programme that would strengthen the role of the market economy.

The tools intended to achieve the modernisation of public services are taken from reform initiatives commonly summarised under the term New Public Management (NPM). NPM aims at replicating the language, organisational structure and market forces of the private sector in the public sector (Schedler and Proeller 2003).

This is the starting point for a research study looking at the impact of NPM and public services modernisation on users of personal social services. This study is an exploration of how users of children's services are constructed in contemporary social policy and social work practice. Its overall aim is to uncover how citizenship is represented in national and local policy documents, in local organisational procedures and by social workers in children's services in England and Germany. It will also illuminate similarities and differences between English and German representations of citizenship in both the making and implementation of policies.

# Background

## **Introducing the consumer**

One central element of NPM has been the representation of public services users as customers or consumers. This challenges the traditional formulation of social citizenship which prevailed in the post-war welfare state and was seen as rights bestowed on the citizen by the state. It is now assumed that service users' expectations of the public sector are shaped by positive consumer-experiences in the private sector. On the one hand an attempt has been made to model public services on their private sector counterparts by offering individualised services and choice, considering service users' views in performance reviews and setting up complaints procedures. On the other hand, it is expected that citizens will take responsibility for their own livelihoods rather than being dependent on welfare (Budäus ,1998; Clarke, 2005). The study considers the impact of these changes on users of personal social services.

## **Children's services**

The area chosen to explore the changes described above are children's services. Children's services in Germany and England are characterised by providing preventive services as well as being responsible for the protection of children. This can lead to the involuntary use of services by parents. In the existing literature, concerns have been raised about the compability of consumerism and involuntary use of services. This has so far not been researched.

## **Citizenship**

This report uses the language of citizenship to talk about and make sense of the representation of service users in children's services. Citizenship in this context is understood as an academic and political concept as well as a lived experience (Lister et al. 2007, 1). This allows not only for cross-national comparisons but also for subnational sectoral and situational differences (Lister et al., 2007, 4). Citizenship is thus understood as a multi-layered concept:

Jones and Gaventa (2002) [...] point out how citizenship as an identity and practice 'is likely to differ across the spaces in which people's lives are played out: the home and personal relations, local and national politics, to the global arena' (2002, p 19). (Lister et al., 2007, 10)

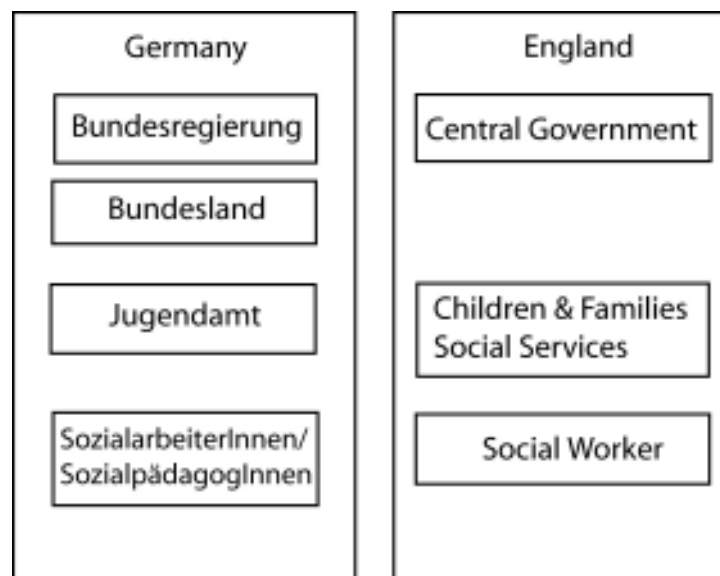
From this understanding it can be assumed that citizenship as a lived experience is not a coherent concept but a fluid concept defined and shaped by context. Similarly, the exploration of shifts from 'old' to 'new' should include scope for competing, overlapping and fragmented conceptions:

Narratives of change structured around clear oppositions between past and present, or 'old and new', present an oversimplified view of change [...], simple narratives of change that imply a general shift from the 'old' to the 'new' tend to tidy away some of the complexity and messiness of change. What is rather more interesting is to explore the way in which different elements of new and old are packaged and repackaged to produce organisational forms in which multiple regimes are overlaid on each other. (Newman, 2002, 78)

The research design presented in the next section uses a framework that allows for competing, combined and overlapping understandings of parents as service users.

# Research Design

A qualitative, cross-national comparative case study was conducted (Yin, 2003). Below is a figure of the different levels of the case study research:



On the policy and organisational level a documentary analysis was conducted. In addition interviews with managers and social workers were conducted. The interviews were semi-structured and had three parts. The interviews usually started with a vignette.

A vignette is a brief text representing a constructed case, usually a scenario of a person in a specific situation, that includes information about events [...]. It is presented to an interviewee who is asked to judge the situation, propose an appropriate way of handling it, and (if necessary) justify the choices made. (Schnurr et al., 2001, 10)

The vignette was constructed as a typical case that could be applied in the context of both countries. It took the form of a referral received by a social worker of a case of neglect:

You receive a referral on the Miller family. The three children - Marie 6, Hannah 2, and Michael 8 months - live with their father and mother. The paediatrician (D) / health visitor (GB) is concerned that the parents are not looking after the children properly. The children often wear dirty clothes and standards of hygiene in the home are very poor. Neighbours have reported that Marie and Hannah are playing unsupervised in the street, sometimes until late in the evening. Marie's primary school teacher is also worried. She says that Marie always seems to be tired, has problems concentrating and comes to school without a lunch-box. The teacher's anxiety has increased recently because Marie has said that her parents leave all three children at home when they go shopping.

In the vignette three people raise concerns: neighbours, a primary school teacher and a member of the health profession most likely to be in contact with the baby who is one of the children in the case.

The second and third parts of the interview consisted of two sets of cards. The first set of cards contained terms that could be used to speak about the parents with whom social workers work. The cards were a stimulus to get a better understanding of the roles in which social workers and managers see the parents they work with, as well as to gain an insight into the language used by practitioners in the organisation. The second set of cards contained elements, like manager, education, policy etc., that might influence social work practice.

At the end of each interview the participant chose a pseudonym under which quotes from the interview would be published. Some of the interview participants were worried that because of their ethnicity or gender they might be identified by colleagues. In response to these concerns I decided to give the source of the quote in the following way:

- 1st letter states the country: G = Germany, B = England
- 2nd letter states the position: S = social worker, M = manager

# Research Sites

## ***Jugendamt* Mittelstadt**

The *Jugendamt* Mittelstadt has four local general social services offices (Allgemeiner Sozialer Dienst, ASD), with city-wide specialist offices for fostering and adoption. On average, each team has around eight social workers, including the team leader. All offices share the building with other city council services such as the benefit office. The buildings are openly accessible; there is no receptionist or security at the entrance, simply a chart with services, names of employees and room numbers. Visitors are left to their own devices to find their way around. Visitors go directly to the office of the social worker they want to see. The only exceptions are the director of the *Jugendamt* and the director of the ASD, who have secretaries to whom visitors report. All social workers have individual offices that they use to receive visitors. Each social worker has a direct phone line and the city council has decided against voice mail, as it believes that each caller has the right to have his or her call answered in person. Each team has a duty rota with one social worker per day being available to take calls and visits for colleagues who are not in. Cases are allocated according to the street the family lives in, with each social worker being responsible for certain streets in the district. They take referrals in their streets and hold the cases for as long as the family lives within their area.

Team leaders are exempt from a certain percentage of casework in order to attend management meetings and lead the team. During the rest of the time they are frontline social workers, like the rest of the team members.

## **Midcity Children and Families Social Services**

Midcity's Children and Family Social Services is divided into four local offices with specialist teams for fostering and adoption and children with disabilities. The office buildings have a reception with a glass counter, where visitors have to report to admin staff. The doors to the rest of the building are locked with combination locks. Visitors are seen in visitors' rooms, which are equipped with panic buttons. Service users are not usually allowed in the part of the building where the social workers have their offices, as the risk of assaults against social workers is considered too high. The offices are open-plan with up to five social workers sharing an office. Managers have individual offices. There is a general phone number for each area office and admin staff answer calls, connect to the social worker or take messages. In addition to the admin team, each Local Office consists of three teams (intake, long-term and family support), each led by a team manager who does not hold cases but who is closely involved in the decision-making regarding the cases.

Families that request services or are referred to social services for the first time are allocated to the intake team. Once it is decided that a long-term intervention is needed, the case is transferred to a worker in the long-term team. The Family Support Team does what the name says: supports families as part of a child protection or child in need plan. Cases are allocated according to the social workers' workloads. Each team has a duty rota, with one social worker per day dealing with unallocated or new cases, or the cases of colleagues who are not in the office.

# Countryfile Germany

## **Political System**

Germany is a federal republic consisting of 16 *Bundesländer* (constitutional states). All *Länder* are states in their own right with their own constitutions and divisions of power. Representatives of the *Länder* form the *Bundesrat* (Federal Council). The *Bundesrat* is one of two legislative bodies on the federal level - the other one being the *Bundestag* (Lower House of German Parliament), whose members are elected in general elections. Members of the *Bundestag* are elected according to the principle of proportional representation. This means that Germany is ruled by a coalition government. In addition *Länder*-elections are not synchronised. It is common for majorities in the *Bundesrat* to change during one legislative period. Most bills need to be agreed by the *Bundestag* and *Bundesrat*. Essentially this requires a cross-party consensus, which makes radical and fast changes nearly impossible (Wollmann, 2000, 3-4). In addition the governing principle for municipalities is *Kommunale Selbstverwaltung* (local self-government), which gives municipalities the right to regulate all local affairs on their own responsibility, within the legal framework set on the federal level.

In the area of personal social services for children and young people the Child and Youth Services Act (Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz, KJHG) states that each county and municipality has to set up a *Jugendamt* (youth welfare office). Municipalities are free to organise and structure the *Jugendamt* as long as they stay within the legal framework, therefore different organisational models can be found across the country (Liebig, 2001).

## **Jugendhilfe**

The Jugendamt is a statutory body for youth work and youth welfare services (*Jugendhilfe*).

Jugendhilfe includes all regular social pedagogic services that children and young people receive outside family, education and training, as well as all legal norms that aim at enforcing and protecting the rights of children and young people to upbringing, human dignity, socialisation and development of personality. (Lampert and Althammer, 2001, 357 - my translation)

The services included are listed in the KJHG. It is based on the principle that, outside of schools, the state has no child-rearing competencies that can compete with the parents' rights (Maas, 1991, 9). Therefore the KJHG offer mainly preventive services and is worded as a 'service bill', offering support to parents rather than intervention into family life (Jordan and Sengling, 2000, 67-68). Parents have the right to apply for *Hilfe zur Erziehung* (HzE, socio-educational provision for children with problems). The KJHG also includes the right to request and choose a service as well as a statutory participation procedure.

The *Jugendamt* is responsible for the planning of these services but not for their provision. The law gives the voluntary sector precedence over statutory bodies in the provision of services.

In addition to these preventive services the *Jugendamt* also has the task to protect children and young people from abuse and neglect.

Service quality and performance is managed on the organisational and/or municipal level. Social workers as well as managers are often involved in the development of local standards.

# Countryfile England

## **Political System**

England is the only one of the four countries of the United Kingdom (UK) without its own national parliament or assembly. It is governed by the central British government in Westminster. The UK is a constitutional monarchy with the Queen as the head of state. Today the Queen's tasks are mainly nominal and everyday politics are the responsibility of the two chambers of parliament – the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The members in the House of Commons are elected in general elections, whereas the members of the House of Lords either inherit their seats or are appointed for life. The House of Lords has a revising function. It can suggest changes to legislation and block it for two sessions of parliament (which is approximately a year) but unlike the German *Bundesrat* cannot block it entirely (Flynn, 1996). Unlike Germany, the UK is a unitary state, which means that 'the powers of government are held by a central authority, or set of authorities. Local or regional authorities may exist, but any powers they possess will have been granted to them by the central authority and could be withdrawn by that authority' (Bentley et al., 2002, 94). Central government, for example, establishes the parameters for social work, which are then implemented by Local Authorities (LA).

Children's Services are the responsibility of LAs, who provide services under government legislation, guidance and control. LAs have to meet performance targets set by central government. National auditing bodies inspect LAs regularly, summarise performance in star ratings (similar to hotels) and publish ranking tables.

## **Children's Services**

The key act for social work in Children's Services is the Children Act 1989 (CA 1989). It makes provision for preventive family support services and child protection. In practice the emphasis is on the protection of children. This is partly due to limited resources and partly due to the history of child welfare legislation. Child Welfare Legislation in England has historically been influenced by inquiries into child deaths. The death of Victoria Climbié in 2000 led to the latest high-profile inquiry to entail a new legislative framework for the structure of Children's Services. The Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report was a pivotal moment for the future of Children and Families Social Services. It is unusual for virtually all the recommendations of an inquiry to be accepted. This shows the high importance that the government placed on improving the safety and protection of children.

Local Authorities have a duty to provide services to meet children's needs in the community and promote their wellbeing (CA 1989, Sec. 17 [1]). These services are generally known as family support (services). 'The 'general duty' is owed to all children in need within the local authority's boundaries but it is not owed to each child in need individually' (Allen, 2005, 94). Because this general duty is not attached to individual rights to receive such services, local authorities may fulfil their legal duty by offering family support only to parts of the community. Access to preventive family support services is subject to meeting eligibility criteria and in some Local Authorities services are only offered to children in need of protection.

# Findings

In the following the key findings of the study will be presented.

## **Citizenship**

The research study found that citizenship is not a singular concept. Based on different assumptions about citizenship present in policy documents, organisational procedures and in the interviews with social workers and managers, five conceptions of citizenship have been developed in each of the two countries. These conceptions are not rigid but should rather be understood as ideal types that constitute discursive resources that social workers can draw on, combine and redefine in order to make sense of their day-to-day interactions with service users.

The five conceptions in England have been designated as follows:

- the demanding-responsible consumer-citizen
- the franchisee parent
- the partner parent
- the non-compliant, failing parent
- the personalised-depersonalised parent

The five conceptions in Germany have been designated as follows:

- the critical-rational citizen
- the social parasite citizen
- the statutory parent
- the responsible-respected parent
- the overburdened-neglecting parent

The following sections look at these conceptions and their impact for the social worker - service user relationship in more detail.

## **Consumerism - a new paradigm?**

The 'demanding-responsible consumer-citizen, the 'critical-rational citizen' and the 'social parasite citizen' relate to the modernisation of public services agenda. At the heart of these is a changed understanding of the citizen-state relationship and the rights and responsibilities attached to it. One central element of the modernisation initiatives explored in the research study is the redefinition of service user as customer or consumer:

These days no service provider can go without regular communication with its customers about service expectations and perceptions. The tools range from general citizen- and customer-surveys via an efficient complaints procedure to the active shaping of products by citizens in the quality management process (KGSt, 1997, 20 - my translation).

But Modernising Government is also about something else. It is a clear statement by the Government of what government is for. Not government for those who work in government; but government for people – people as consumers, people as citizens. (Prime Minister 1999, 5)

With the exception of one participant in each country, the interview participants considered 'consumer' and 'customer' unsuitable to describe their relationship with parents as service users for a variety of reasons. First, being a 'consumer' was understood as being linked to retailing and the exchange of products for money, which was seen different from the social workers' understanding of their role as professionals:

We are not in the market place, we intend to genuinely help people with difficulties, and we are not doing for economic gain or financial gain, so in my opinion using customer, consumer suggests that you are in the market place, and you are trying to market your product, trying to make a gain, which is not the case in this situation. (BS4)

Secondly, the notion of service users as consumers is closely linked to offering choice. In Children's Services limited resources and the statutory duty of child protection limit choice:

If you were to take this a step further and say 'the customer is king' - that is tricky. [...] in the social sector this is tricky. Because if you would follow that it could happen that the beneficiary would like the Mercedes, or a Mercedes for their families but we can only offer the Fiat. (GM4)

They don't have choice, they can't tell us to go away and they can't go, or generally can't go, somewhere else (BS11)

In the two Children's Services studied, the impact of NPM is organisational and structural rather than having had a direct influence on the social worker – service user relationship.

In both countries social workers criticised the volume of documentation that takes time away from face to face work with service users (see next section).

Children's Services are being standardised to make social work measurable. In England it is the central government that is concerned with the standardisation of services. It aims at offering a similar level of services nationwide. In order to achieve this, it publishes a continuous stream of policy guidance. Local Authorities are inspected regularly and are ranked according to their performance compared with other Local Authorities. In Germany standardisation happens mainly at an organisational level. In Mittelstadt, a common threshold for '*Kindeswohlgefährdung*' retained in a computer programme with tick boxes has been developed. This project is based within a wider quality management project in Mittelstadt – involving all social workers and managers - aimed at standardising services. Offering the services in

the same way citywide and applying the same thresholds in the interaction with the family is seen by managers as increasing the quality of services. Social workers are critical of these developments as will be described in the following section.

### **Human and Helping - the professional ideal of social work**

Interview participants in Germany and England reflected on their experiences as social workers from an ideal understanding of their role, which in both countries competes with the modernisation initiatives described in the previous section. Social workers saw their main role as being in human interaction with service users, to offer help and support and to initiate change. This common understanding of social work is in both countries contrasted with modernisation initiatives in line with NPM that have shifted the focus away from fieldwork and towards standardised administrative procedures and documentation:

And all of this, in my opinion, gets lost in this system of standardising and consulting on everything and if possible to pack it into some sort of forms. And sometimes I think: You do here what they ask you to do and what was your work previously, what is your understanding of social work you do in your freetime, by being available for a conversation with people. (GS3 – my translation)

You feel you almost have to apologise for going out of the office to see people. The view seems to be you should be behind your desk looking at the computer screen or answering the telephone you know it is almost going out seeing people seems a bit of a luxury you know.(BS11)

The aspect that social workers miss most in their current working environments is the lack of direct work with service users:

Social work had lost his way and I suppose as I was describing has become such a bureaucratic job we are always commissioning other people to do the work we should do. We don't do any direct work ourselves. (BS11)

What has changed is the intensity with which one can conduct casework in the ASD. Meaning: own support, to accompany families a short way, conduct family conversations oneself, deal with conflict situations. This was previously much more frequent. It was an inherent part of the ASD work; today it only exists as rudimentary. Usually these cases are categorised as HzE – and therefore transferred to a provider who offers these services. (GM3 – my translation)

The changes in practice have so far not changed the professional ideal of social work as a human and helping profession and social workers try to reconcile this ideal with the realities of working in state social work.

The discrepancy between the professional ideal of social work as a helping profession and the realities of everyday practice was described as early as 1980 by Lipsky:

In turning the spotlight on professional practice, Lipsky was concerned with the dilemmas experienced by individuals in public service. They are drawn to public service, Lipsky asserted, because they want to be of help to others. However, in the real world of day-to-day practice they have to operate in 'a corrupted world of service', where they struggle with insufficient resources and vague policy goals (Lipsky 1980: xiii). (Evans and Harris, 2004, 872)

The interview participants in both countries face exactly these dilemmas.

## **Family and Parenthood**

The service user - professional relationship in Children's Services is mainly shaped by the understanding of family and parenthood, which differs widely in Germany and England. The following sections draw on the conceptions of citizenship identified earlier to develop these differences.

## *Germany*

### *The statutory parent*

Social workers and managers in Mittelstadt who participated in the research project based their practice and service user contact first and foremost on the statutory framework. The basic law protects the family but allows for state intervention to protect children from neglect and abuse where necessary, in a similar vein to the European Convention of Human Rights, which is also valid in England. Family, as understood by the basic law, is the nuclear family, meaning parents and children, including step-, foster- and adoptive-children, but not the extended family. Family is central to child welfare legislation (KJHG). The KJHG is based on the principle that outside schools, the state has no child-rearing competencies that compete with parents' rights. This puts parents' rights in a strong position and has led to the KJHG being worded as a 'service bill' offering mainly preventive services and support rather than intervention.

Legislation offers a definition of parent, parental responsibility and rights to services, that is guiding for practitioners. German legislation defines parenthood, as well as responsibilities and rights, using blanket clauses. These need to be filled in with current norms, values and moral understanding. Therefore in addition to the 'statutory parent' two social categories of parenthood have been identified: the 'responsible-respected' and the 'overburdened-neglecting' parent.

### *The responsible-respected parent*

The 'responsible-respected parent' brings his/her child/ren up according to societal expectations and in return has great freedom in choosing a life-style appropriate for his/her family. The parent is seen as more than 'just' a parent, but as an individual with goals beyond parenthood, such as a career. The state offers support services to enable parents to fulfil their roles and live their chosen lifestyle. The 'responsible-respected' parent might not always receive the services applied for, either because of limited resources or because professional assessment considers them unsuitable, but he/she does have the freedom to refuse alternative services offered and thereby exit from state support.

### *The overburdened-neglecting parent*

The 'overburdened-neglecting parent' on the other hand does not have the option to exit the system. S/he is seen as being overwhelmed by the plurality of lifestyle-choices and overburdened with the upbringing of his/her children. Children in these families are at risk of abuse and neglect and are unlikely to reach their full potential. In these cases state intervention is compulsory and, while parental participation is still desired, it is not necessary. In Germany '*Kindeswohlgefährdung*' (endangerment of child well-being and welfare) justifies compulsory state intervention. '*Kindeswohl*' (the best interest and welfare of the child) is an undefined concept of law and needs to be filled with content on a case-by-case basis. Generally speaking, the state intervenes in cases where children's basic rights, as set out in the basic law, are violated.

The social workers assume two different roles when dealing with the 'responsible-respected' or 'overburdened-neglecting parent'. In their contact with the 'responsible-respected parent', they see themselves as providers of services that people with legal entitlements request. They visit the 'overburdened-neglecting parent' in their role as the state watchdog, to fulfil their governmental monitoring duty. They are very clear about the differences in their roles as well as the parents' rights and responsibilities.

### *England*

England has no history of family policy. Instead, policies are based around the individual; in the areas relevant to the research this is usually the child/ren. Despite the lack of family policy in Britain, the Children Act 1989 considers it to be 'in the children's best interests to be brought up in their own families wherever possible' (DoH 2000, 5). In this context a much wider understanding of family and parent is applied than is the case in Germany:

The term parent means the child's mother, married father and all those with Parental Responsibility. It also means anyone with actual care of the child who, in the absence of a person with parental responsibility for the child, should be consulted about actions taken as a result of these procedures.

(Midcity Children's Services Procedures Manual)

In England there is no clear distinction between preventive services and child protection. Services are offered on a continuum, ranging from family support to foster care and adoption. Service provision is dependent on meeting the organisation's eligibility criteria as assessed by the social worker, rather than driven by individual rights to services.

Accordingly the conceptions of citizenship identified in the English context are more like facets of one type rather than distinct conceptions as in Germany.

#### *The franchisee parent*

The dominant conception in English social work is the 'franchisee-parent'. The conception of the 'franchisee parent' is rooted in child-centred social work. From that perspective, parents are seen in their role as providers of adequate care for their children. This role of providing a stable and loving home is not exclusive to parents, but can be provided by any suitable carer. Social workers can use the full range of social work interventions, ranging from family support services to child protection to foster care, as tools to support parents in this role. Parents are advised to engage with the professionals and comply with the intervention to prevent escalation into higher-level-need services. The overall objective of this conception of citizenship is to offer children a safe and loving place.

#### *The personalised-depersonalised parent*

Over half of the interviewed social workers address parents as 'mum' and 'dad' to accentuate this role. This conception has been named the 'personalised-depersonalised parent'. 'Mum' and 'dad' is a very intimate form of address, which is usually reserved for use by one's children. It seems inappropriate for a service user – professional relationship.

At the same time it is a very impersonal address because it does not acknowledge the parent as an individual in his/her own right, but once again sees her/him in his/her role of the carer for the child.

In the interviews this has been linked with a gendered understanding of parenthood. The mother is seen as the primary carer and social workers see it as her duty to safeguard and protect her children. The perceptions of fathers are twofold: either the father is seen as the male breadwinner, unaware of the domestic situation as he is working outside the home, or he is the perpetrator of the problem and thus the trigger for social work intervention. When the second of these perceptions is the reality, intervention focuses on the mother's protection skills because services for men, such as anger management, are virtually non-existent.

The English 'franchisee-parent' is supplemented by the 'partner-parent' and 'non-compliant, failing parent', depending on his/her willingness to co-operate.

### *The partner-parent*

'Partnership with parents' is a guiding principle of the Children Act 1989. A closer analysis of its meaning shows that its main purpose is to minimise parental resistance rather than seeing parents as equal partners in service planning and delivery (HMSO, 1999, 76). Indeed, the existing power relationship between social workers and women/parents prevents the possibility of a partnership based on an agreement amongst equals.

Procedural rights that offer possibilities for parental involvement, like attending meetings and complaints procedure do exist, but practice stays far behind the common understanding of partnership as 'a contractual agreement among equals' (Smith 2005: 81). At best, partnership is used in practice to describe a genuine interest in the views of women/mothers and to take these views into account in the decision-making process.

#### *The non-compliant, failing parent*

'Non-compliant failing parents' are those who are seen as not willing to work with the social worker in the interests of the children and thereby are seen as failing in his/her duty to care adequately for the children. The objective is to mould parents and/or child/ren's behaviour to conform with social norms and to ensure that parents accept their duty towards the upbringing of their children. This is to be achieved by enhancing the control over parents to force their compliance. Parents' only form of participation is to comply with social work intervention and/or court orders. Through the continuum of services described earlier, non-compliance can lead to stricter control of parents and a higher level of (unwanted) services.

### **Parental Participation**

One key element in the conceptions of citizenship presented above is the extent of parental participation. In the area of preventive services German legislation gives parents stronger rights and opportunities for participation than in England. In the area of child protection parental

participation is in both countries not necessary as the child welfare is the focus. In English policy documents the difficulties of parental participation, such as the high level of skills and knowledge needed, have been increasingly acknowledged. Commonly, two approaches to supporting parents are promoted:

a) Advocacy: An advocate will prepare the parents for the meeting, establishes the wishes of the parents and will help them to verbalise those during the meeting.

b) Family Group Conference (FGC): A FGC offers families a forum to find a solution to the concerns raised by social workers.

The implementation of both approaches is patchy in Midcity. Conversely, neither the German policy documents nor the interview participants addressed difficulties around parental participation. While parents' rights are stronger in Germany than in England, procedures are not as straight forward because:

- parents need knowledge about their right to apply for services
- parents need to have the knowledge about available support
- the Jugendamt is, in the general public's perception, linked to children being taken into care and parents might be scared to contact it.

In order to involve parents in a meaningful way it is important to acknowledge that a percentage of parents will need help to participate, and advocates as well as FGCs have proven helpful in achieving this. Parents should also be given a realistic perspective of the possibility of participation; the English rhetoric of partnership with parents has proven to be misleading in suggesting that parents have more say than they actually have. In this context the clear division between prevention and protection that can be found in Germany is helpful.

# Conclusion

This report summarised a research study undertaken in a German and an English Children's Service to explore how parents are constructed in policy, organisation and social work practice in the context of public services modernisation. The results reported here are necessarily selective. The PhD thesis as well as the publications that derived from this research offer a more detailed analysis and argumentation.

The findings of the studies suggest that 'citizenship' is not a singular concept. In each country five different conceptions of citizenship could be identified. These are ideal conceptions that serve as discursive resources that politicians, managers and social workers draw on in different combinations, depending on the situation and context.

It can be concluded that policy initiatives, organisational structure and social work practice are shaped by the wider historic and political context from which they emerge. In the context of the modernisation of social services, rather than emerging from consumerism as a dominant paradigm, conceptions of citizenship are competing, contested and combined in different ways.

The studies also found that in children's services, the impact of NPM is at a mainly structural and organisational level with regards to elements other than consumerism. NPM entered the German and English context at different times and at different political levels. Also, the political structure and constitutional foundation differs widely in both countries.

Despite these differences the social workers in both countries perceived the impact of NPM in a similar way, as a rise in standardisation and documentation at the cost of direct work with service users. It has not changed the social worker - service user relationship, which is largely determined by the understanding of family and parenthood.

Parenthood in Germany is a legal status that includes both the responsibility for the safe upbringing of one's children, and the right to receive support from social services. Parents are perceived by social workers as being the holders of these responsibilities and rights. In contrast, parenthood in England is an identity. In their contact with Social Services, English parents are perceived solely as their children's carers, to the extent that they are referred to and addressed as 'mum' and 'dad' by social workers.

It is hoped that the citizenship typology as well as the international perspective help policy makers and social workers to reflect critically on how they construct service-users.

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