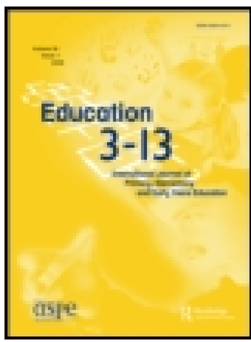

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Education 3-13

International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rett20

Policy actors in a hostile environment: the views of staff in maintained nursery schools in England

Alice Bradbury, Kate Hoskins & Lewis Fogarty

To cite this article: Alice Bradbury, Kate Hoskins & Lewis Fogarty (2021): Policy actors in a hostile environment: the views of staff in maintained nursery schools in England, Education 3-13, DOI: 10.1080/03004279.2021.1956561

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2021.1956561

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Published online: 30 Jul 2021.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 80

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rett20

EDUCATION 3-13
https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2021.1956561

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

Policy actors in a hostile environment: the views of staff in maintained nursery schools in England

Alice Bradbury [a], Kate Hoskins[b] and Lewis Fogarty[b]

[a]UCL Institute of Education, University College London, London, UK; [b]Department of Education, Brunel University, London, UK

ABSTRACT

The nearly 400 maintained nursery schools in England are schools for children aged 2–4 years. They hold a unique position in offering state-funded provision for this age group, outside of a primary school environment, and are disproportionately located in areas of disadvantage [EE. 2020. *Briefing Note: The Comprehensive Spending Review and Funding for Maintained Nursery Schools*. Accessed 13 October 2020. https://early-education.org.uk/sites/default/files/Briefing%20note%20-%20CSR%20and%20maintained%20nursery%20schools%27%20funding.pdf]. While there have been policy-based attempts to reduce the impact of social deprivation on educational outcomes, we argue that education policy has created a hostile environment for nursery schools. This arises from the national strategies on funding, 'free hours' for parents, and staff qualifications, alongside social policy. Based on interview data with staff and leaders in four nursery schools, the paper explores the views of these teachers and discusses them as policy actors within a precarious environment, faced with possible closure. We explore their agency as they navigate this hostile terrain and their ways of maintaining their sense of professional pride and commitment to social justice.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 1 April 2021
Accepted 6 July 2021

KEYWORDS
Nursery schools; early years; policy enactment; disadvantaged pupils; policy actors

Introduction

Maintained nursery schools in England are part of a complex early years sector, made up of state and private providers. Nursery schools are state-funded schools catering for children aged 2–4 or 3–4 (before compulsory school age), with their own building and headteacher, and specialist early years teachers and practitioners. There are 389 nursery schools in England with over 40,000 children enrolled (EE 2020). Although they make up a small proportion of the early years sector they have significance in terms of reducing the impact of disadvantage because they are disproportionately located in areas of social deprivation (EE 2020).

The existence of state-maintained nursery schools within the mixed private and public early years sector is a policy anomaly arising from changes to the approach to early years education in the post-war period (Palmer 2011). Children of this age also attend private nurseries or nursery classes based in primary schools, or remain at home. However, nursery schools are seen as a positive element of the system, or a 'jewel in the crown' of early years, due to their impact on children and particularly children from poorer backgrounds (Powell 2019).

CONTACT Alice Bradbury a.bradbury@ucl.ac.uk; @alicejbradbury

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

During the years of Conservative-led government of the 2010s, nursery schools were affected by a number of key early education policy decisions relating to funding and staff qualifications. Most notably, the decision to extend the 'free hours' provided to working parents from 15 hours to 30 in 2015, alongside changes to the funding formula, affected the viability of nursery schools as independent institutions. Since 1980, a third of nursery schools (around 200 schools) have closed down, despite parents' and teachers' campaigns to keep them open (EE 2015). These issues are representative of the early years sector more widely, which has historically been subject to incoherent policy agendas despite government rhetoric. For example, over the last decade: as Moss and Cameron summarise, 'Governments since 2010 have maintained a policy interest in ECEC but continued to avoid addressing the flaws and dysfunctionalities of the system' (2020, 8).

This paper explores the views of nursery school teachers and leaders during this period of negative policy, conceptualising them as policy actors (Ball et al. 2011) within a hostile environment,[1] who are nonetheless still able to exercise agency in their daily professional practice. Following Emirbayer and Mische (1998, 963) we view agency as:

> A temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also orientated towards the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualise past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment).

Our data reveal that participants' expressions of agency are demonstrated through their continued professional pride in the exceptionalism of nursery schools and commitment to helping the disadvantaged[2] children in their communities. The data discussed are drawn from a project exploring the role of nursery schools in reducing disadvantage, based on 17 interviews with staff and school leaders from four nursery schools in different areas of England. We begin with some background on nursery schools.

Context: nursery schools as 'hidden assets'

Maintained nursery schools in England cater mainly for children aged 3–5, though they may also take younger children such as two-year-olds with 'free hours'. As such they differ fundamentally from private nurseries and pre-schools, and from primary schools which cater for children aged 4–11 (though these may also have a 'nursery class' for age 3–4). They owe their existence to an early twentieth-century desire to provide health and social care for working-class young children, and allow their mothers to work (Tizard, Moss, and Perry 1976). The period 1900–1929 saw the 'rise of the nursery school' (Whitbread 1972). The educational benefits of schools were increasingly emphasised in the 1930s (Palmer 2011), though it remained that an emphasis on physical well-being set nursery schools apart from ordinary schools. In the post-war period, despite the support for nursery schools in the 1944 Education Act, a number of factors limited the expansion of this sector further, including policy reforms which did not take into account the needs of working mothers (Palmer 2011). During the era of post-war 'policy neglect' (Cameron and Moss 2020, 3), debates about how best to cater for this age group eventually swung in favour of nursery classes in schools, but existing nursery schools remained open, and continue to operate into the twenty-first century (Palmer 2016). As with early years policy in general, policy on nursery schools has historically been 'patchy with little overall planning' (West and Noden 2016, 1).

At present, nursery schools are in decline: a third have closed since 1980 and just 389 remain open in 2020 (EE 2020). In 2015 Early Education (the British Association for Early Years Education – EE) argued 'many face continual uncertainty as to their future' (EE 2015, 1). Now, in the 2020s, they face 'severe strains on their budgets and an uncertain future' (EE 2020, 1). Nursery schools provide 4% of the free provision for 3/4-year-olds in England (DfE 2018b), but they support higher than average proportions of children with additional needs (EE 2015, 2020). Nearly two-thirds of nursery schools are located in the 30% most deprived areas (EE 2020). Almost all nursery schools receive additional funding through the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) which is allocated

per qualifying pupil, as well as providing for many pupils who are not eligible but come from disadvantaged families. The EYPP is not funded at the same rate as the school Pupil Premium, however, with nursery schools receiving £302 per child compared to £1345 per child in schools (EE 2020; DfE 2015).

Some nursery schools operate in conjunction with Children's Centres or have links with other schools and early years providers, such as networked childminders. The decline of the Children's Centre programme, which brought together a range of health, education and social services under one roof, has also had a negative impact on nursery schools. They are often a key part of a community, providing additional services for parents alongside their educational function (Hoskins, Bradbury, and Fogarty 2020a). In times of austerity, nursery schools have become a 'front-line service', and in the era of the COVID-19 crisis, nursery schools continue to have an important role for their local communities (Hoskins, Bradbury, and Fogarty 2020b). Indeed, their importance was indicated by government commitment to funding nursery schools in June 2020 (DfE 2020).

In terms of Ofsted inspection judgements, nursery schools are the highest rated part of the early years sector (Ofsted 2018). They employ qualified teachers as well as nursery nurses and other early years practitioners, and are led by a headteacher, in contrast to other settings for this age group (Gambaro, Stewart, and Waldfogel 2015; Lloyd 2018). Policy relating to staff qualifications in early years was a particular point of contention during the 2010s. The Nutbrown Review (2012) recommended increasing the required qualification levels but the e proposals were rejected. This was one of the 'missed opportunities' of the era, demonstrative of a lack of coherent strategy (Moss 2014a; see also Roberts-Holmes 2013). The 2013 policy document *More Great Childcare* included proposals to reduce the required ratio of staff to children, which proved highly controversial within the sector (Morton, 2013 cited in Lloyd 2015) and were subsequently abandoned. As Cameron describes, New Labour's efforts to increase the qualification profile in early years ''were removed by the Coalition government' (2020, 69–70). In the latter half of the decade, the early years workforce remained 'split and devalued' (Cameron 2020, 72); split between the higher-paid qualified teachers and other practitioners, and devalued in terms of pay and low status. This issue of staff qualification is important as research studies have demonstrated multiple ways in which highly qualified staff are better placed to improve outcomes for children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds (DfE 2017b; Hillman and Williams 2015).

The higher level of qualifications of staff in nursery schools means that they are also more expensive per pupil than other early years providers. Funding was the main reason for closures through the 2010s. A 2014 survey of nursery schools found that 74% of respondents were concerned about the future viability of nursery schools, particularly because of the unpredictability of funding (EE 2015).

In this regard, the provision of 'free hours' for parents who are working and earning a certain wage, funded by the state, has been a problematic policy. Three- and four-year-olds in England for 15 hours per week in term time, or 30 hours if both parents work and earn above a threshold but below £100,000 per annum. In addition, two-year-olds who are classified as disadvantaged receive 15 hours per week, and some nursery schools also provide for these children (sometimes referred to as 'Terrific Twos' or the two-year-old room). The funding per hour is set at a rate where settings have had to ask parents to fund food, milk, nappies and other resources, in order to continue to function (Richardson 2013). Where they include provision for disadvantaged two-year-olds, nursery schools make a loss (EE 2015). The hourly rate paid for 'free hours' is the same for nursery schools as other providers, despite their higher running costs (EE 2020).

Since the introduction of the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) in 2017, nursery schools have received additional funding in recognition of their work in deprived areas and additional costs. This supplementary funding replaced the money which nursery schools previously received, which had been removed in the EYNFF. However, the supplementary funding for nursery schools was not a permanent solution, leaving headteachers with great uncertainty over future budgets, and unable to plan (EE 2020). More recently, the complex pressures caused by the

COVID-19 crisis have further endangered the financial stability of nursery schools (Gibbons 2020), leading to the statement of additional funding from government.

Although nursery schools are widely regarded as providing a highly valued service, albeit in small numbers, leading to them being described as a 'jewel in the crown' (Powell 2019) of early years, there is little research on the experiences of staff working in nursery schools. This paper addresses this gap by exploring the views and experiences of staff in nursery schools, and exploring further their relation to policy as policy actors and the importance of social justice within their work.

The politics of early years

In England and internationally, policy relating to early years education and care has been driven by three main policy rationales (Lloyd and Penn 2014): children's development and educational outcomes; facilitating parental employment; and a social justice aim of reducing the impact of disadvantage. Lloyd (2015) argues the commitment to these three rationales 'fluctuated' during the period 2010–2015, and we would argue this incoherence throughout the 2010s contributed to the hostile policy terrain we see in our data.

Nursery schools are affected by various policies related to education, childcare, and staff qualifications, as well as wider social policy on housing and state benefits, as discussed in relation to our research data below. Government rhetoric on early years education has repeatedly emphasised the importance of provision for both children's development and later educational outcomes, and parents' ability to work (DfE 2013). However, Lloyd describes the first half of the 2010s as an era when 'Young children's rights and interests appear to have been subjugated to the perceived interest of the economy and the government's deficit-reduction strategies' (2015, 152–153). This does not appear to have changed in the latter half of the decade, as economic imperatives have been prioritised, for example in the provision of 30 hours only for working parents.

Ideologically, state provision for three- and four-year-olds (as in nursery schools) is justified by human capital theory within the neoliberal policy context of the UK. Human capital theory aims to improve the productivity of the populace and make the most of the capital of each citizen (Campbell-Barr and Nygård 2014). As Moss writes, 'A simple equation beckons and beguiles: 'early intervention'+'quality'=increased 'human capital'+national success (or at least survival) in a cut-throat global economy' (2014b, 3). In England, providing 'free hours' for parents is guided by the principle of allowing parents (mainly women) to work, as much as aiding the development of children (Lee 2019).

These neoliberal perspectives are also apparent in the mixed state and private form of the early years sector, where parents can choose to send their child to a private nursery, a nursery class in a state primary school, or a state nursery school. Competition between providers is intended to drive up standards, and providers are given Ofsted ratings, like schools, to help parents choose. Studies have explored how choices are limited, however, by locality, hours of opening, cost, and admissions criteria (Chen and Bradbury 2020; Vincent, Braun, and Ball 2010).

Theoretical perspectives

This paper draws on perspectives from policy sociology to understand how policy affects nursery schools and their staff. Although we are focused on the *context of practice* within the policy cycle (Gewirtz, Ball, and Bowe 1995), the underlying ideas about what early years provision is for and represents, which are drawn from policy texts and rhetoric, are also a focus. We are interested in the influence of these ideas from policy on practices, as well as the *enactment* of policies (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012) such as the effects of the 15/30 free hours in real-life settings. By enactment we mean how staff understand, interpret, implement and, at times, reject policy in their setting, as *policy actors* (Ball et al. 2011). Like teachers in primary or secondary schools, teachers and leaders in nursery schools enact policy in ways which are affected by context. It is thus important that each of the nursery schools where we conducted research operate in areas of disadvantage (in

common with many nursery schools). However, as we discuss in the section below, they each have their own particular contexts which affect how policy is enacted.

We conceptualise the nursery school teachers we interviews as *policy actors*, following the schema set out by Ball et al., which describes the position of teachers in relation to policy as: *narrators, entrepreneurs, outsiders, transactors, enthusiasts, translators, critics* and *receivers* (Ball et al. 2011, 626). In particular, and recognising the very different contexts of nursery schools from secondary schools, we explore how the teachers in our data operate as *narrators* (though not happily so), and as *critics* and *receivers*, accepting policy begrudgingly. *Narrators*' policy work is 'Interpretation, selection and enforcement of meanings, mainly done by headteachers and the SLT'; *critics* are involved in the maintenance of counter-discourses, but *receivers* are more vulnerable, with their policy work distinguished by 'coping, defending and dependency' (626). Our respondents, as in Ball *et al*.'s work, move between these subject positions. The analysis here is guided by the idea that policy is a process, which is ongoing: nursery school staff experience the direct or indirect impact of the continued influence of various policies, and as a result they take on multiple positions as policy actors.

The research study

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 17 participants at four nursery schools (see Table 1). The four schools were selected due to their location in areas of disadvantage, and variation in terms of local area. A further selection criterion was that they were graded by the Ofsted inspection service as 'good' or 'outstanding' in their most recent inspection. In each setting, we interviewed a range of staff, from headteacher to classroom teacher, in order to explore a range of perspectives. The four settings were:

- Buttercups Nursery School – located in a leafy county just outside of London. There is a very mixed intake of middle-class and working-class children and a broad spectrum of EAL and SEND needs within the cohort.
- Daffodil Nursery School – located in a London borough which has traditionally been home to working-class communities but is undergoing gentrification. The children who attend Daffodil come from both this newer middle-class community and the local authority housing that surrounds the school.
- Hillside Nursery School – located in a leafy county outside London. The intake consists of mainly working-class children with a range of additional needs, often including EAL, along with some middle-class families too.

Table 1. List of participants.

Pseudonym	Nursery school	Job title
Betty	Buttercups	Class teacher
Kim	Buttercups	Nursery nurse
Naomi	Buttercups	Class teacher
Samantha	Buttercups	Co-head teacher
Sasha	Buttercups	Class teacher, Pupil Premium Co-ordinator
Victoria	Buttercups	Assistant head teacher
Karen	Daffodil	Deputy head teacher
Linda	Daffodil	Head teacher
Nadia	Daffodil	Class teacher
Fran	Hillside	Class teacher
Andrew	The Meadows	Class teacher
Gail	The Meadows	Class teacher
James	The Meadows	Head teacher
Mary	The Meadows	Class teacher
Sara	The Meadows	Class teacher
Tara	The Meadows	Head of Children's Centre
Yvette	The Meadows	Class teacher

- The Meadows Nursery School – located in an urban area that suffers from high levels of deprivation. There are real problems with overcrowded housing and most of the children attending the school experience this and other challenges associated with socioeconomic deprivation.

At each site we interviewed a member of the leadership team (headteacher, assistant head, deputy head) and class teachers, except at Hillside where we were only able to interview one class teacher. Variations in the size of the school and availability meant we interviewed fewer staff at Daffodils and Hillside.

Interviews were conducted by members of the research team, who adhered to an agreed set of procedures and parameters and a research code of practice, which ensured the quality of data collected. We used a standard schedule focused on participants' experiences, perceptions and understandings of the role of the nursery schools in the local community. We asked about the nursery school's activities in relation to disadvantaged children, responses to policy change, and their views of themselves as agents of social justice. Participants' responses were detailed and lengthy, providing rich data from a variety of viewpoints, but with clear commonalities between the respondents and across the schools.

The interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed. Analysis was conducted using NVivo software using a coding system designed by the team, and discussed collectively. The theoretical framing of policy enactment discussed above informed the analysis of the data discussed here. Codes were drawn from the research questions but also arose out of detailed analysis of the research data, leading to key areas of focus which are detailed here and in other publications (Hoskins, Bradbury, and Fogarty 2021).

The research was conducted within the ethical protocols set out by the British Education Research Association (BERA) (2018) and Brunel University London, and ethical approval was obtained before any data were collected.

Findings

Our findings are organised first around three key policy areas which demonstrate the difficulties presented by policy for these teachers, and the complexity of their relationships to policy. We begin with discussion of the budgetary pressures and resultant uncertainty for nursery schools, followed by the tensions identified when enacting the related 15–30 free hours policy and the broader issue of staff qualifications. We then move onto a second section on the wider social policies that affect the communities that nursery schools serve, particularly the impact of austerity policies on levels of social deprivation. A final third section then considers the agency of these teachers as policy actors as they enact policy, looking at their continued belief in nursery schools as uniquely high-quality early years provision, and their methods of continuing their social justice missions despite the hostile policy terrain they work within.

Hostile education policies

Budgets

Nursery school staff told us that policy had both reduced budgets and made their financial situation in future less uncertain. Nursery school headteachers are responsible for their own budgets, but face additional pressures to primary schools as they do not benefit from economies of scale (EE 2020). As mentioned, at the time of the interviews the supplementary funding for nursery schools to compensate for their lower funding under the EYNFF was not guaranteed for the future. These financial considerations were having an impact on the nursery schools in several areas. Respondents mentioned reduced spending of resources and staff most prominently, as well as the ability to act as an early years hub, supporting other providers:

> I think it's a fantastic aim [to reduce disadvantage] but it needs to be funded properly. (Linda)

> … you know it's very difficult then to outreach and support the other early years settings in the borough, when you're sort of being sort of stripped back as a setting yourself. (Victoria)

> You know things like nurture groups and things like that that we can run here are great for families who are perhaps disadvantaged and we really can help them see how they can support at home. But that takes members of staff and that takes training and that takes financial backing and things, so if there's the financial backing for that, then absolutely we can do that, so money is often an issue for staffing. (Naomi)

We see in the quotes above here how staff work as policy *narrators*, where 'narratives are both retrospective and prospective and work to "hold things together" and "move things on" and construct historical continuities or dramatic breaks with the past' (Ball et al. 2011, 627). Victoria's further comment that 'we're finding resources tighter, money to spend on high quality staff is being reduced' suggests a narrative of declining conditions, which was also echoed in other interviews.

For respondents at all levels, the lack of certainty about future budgets was a particular worry in terms of staffing and training, and potential closure:

> If they're going to going scale down the money they're putting into nursery schools, then it will be less and less, because you'll have less teachers, you'll have less courses that people can afford to be put on and things like that (Betty)

> You know we might take on our last cohort of children in September because funding for nursery schools is only guaranteed till August 2020, and the schools in [LA] are facing really big reductions in their funding (James)

The narrative of decline noted earlier is apparent here, as James talks about potential closure, and Betty discusses having fewer teachers. At times these teachers are *critics*, challenging reduced budgets and the impact on children, with their concerns intertwined with the narration of a particular story of policy neglect.

As explained, this concern over budgets has been alleviated to some extent since 2019, as during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic the UK government confirmed supplementary funding to provide certainty for the sector (DfE 2020). However, as this will simply maintain funding at the levels discussed above, without additional resources, campaigners continue to call for further funding to make their long-term future secure (Dromey, Villiers, and Brine 2020).

The 15/30 hours policy

As explained, the UK government funding of free hours means that there are children attending nursery schools part time for 15 hours (two-year-olds and some three- and four-year-olds with non-working parents) and full time for 30 hours (three- and four-year-olds with working parents). This policy, which built on free hours policies established during the Labour governments of the 2000s, is popular with parents (Chen and Bradbury 2020; Paull and LaValle 2018). However, since the expansion to 30 hours, there have been a number of problems for all early years providers, including nursery schools. One concern raised in research has been the potential for the policy to result in widening inequalities, given variations in take-up by different social groups (Campbell, Gambaro, and Stewart 2018; Stewart and Waldfogel 2017). The 'free hours' system is an example of 'policy incoherence', argue Lewis and West, because disadvantaged children are less likely to 'experience the social mixing that has been shown to result in better outcomes' and also 'more often experience the poorer quality provision offered by PVI providers' (2017, 343).

Our respondents identified several elements of the policy which were problematic for nursery schools, including that it is 'very difficult to manage' because of uncertainty over numbers of children (Linda) and that 'even if they're eligible for a thirty hour place, they [families] don't find it easy to access it' (James). The 15–30 hours policy has implications for how nursery schools operate in terms of staffing, groupings and admissions: school leaders have to make decisions about how to provide the free hours and there are implications for parental engagement and the stability of funding, as numbers are calculated on a termly rather than yearly basis. As policy actors, they are

forced to make difficult choices about when and how to provide the ‘free hours’, and who to prioritise if they are oversubscribed. They have little control over the details of the policy such as the eligibility criteria, but are responsible nonetheless for the enactment of this complex policy in their nursery school. As policy actors here they appear far more as *receivers*, who feel powerless in the face of policy.

The participants’ narratives in relation to the 15–30 hours policy were not all negative, however. Staff welcomed the provision of free hours as enabling many children to attend the nursery school, and as seen above, were enthusiastic about the benefits of specialist early years provision for disadvantaged and vulnerable children:

> Deprivation is quite high in many ways, so you know the majority of our children you know are from a deprived area. Obviously they are funded so they are our most vulnerable children, so it’s really important that we encourage and support them into good quality nursery settings and settings. […] We only have a limited space for those, all these vulnerable children that are eligible for these funded fifteen hours, so part of my role is to ensure that the parents are aware of that and that we can support them into accessing other quality provisions (Tara)

This advocacy for the policy sits alongside some of the practical considerations above. Nursery schools’ previous positions as a free state-funded providers means that ‘free hours’ have added to the complication of finances and organisational issues. The 15/30 free hours policy has resulted in different patterns of attendance, which are not necessarily useful for the child. One issue raised was that children struggle if they only attend afternoon sessions, because they only qualify for 15 hours: Sasha explained ‘they’re [parents are] trying to get lunch down them to get them here for half past twelve, and it’s becoming more and more of a stress’. As suggested in wider research on the policy, there are unintended consequences for children who are not eligible for 30 hours groups (Campbell, Gambaro, and Stewart 2018; Stewart and Waldfogel 2017).

The lack of flexibility created by the 15/30 free hours policy was also criticised by nursery schools which had previously been able to provide additional hours, funded by the local authority (LA) to children from disadvantaged families:

> This thirty hour code thing, you know we … obviously we’ve got the fifteen hours and then the local authority would then give us the budget, you could use then at your discretion, you know if you had a child who you thought would benefit from free time. So what we used to do is get all our children part-time, fifteen hours and then work out how many full-time spaces we could offer and offer them out. Whereas now it’s very strictly you’re either thirty hours or you’re not, which is not the way we like to work (Karen)

At Daffodil nursery school, staff preferred to adapt their provision to children’s needs, rather than be driven by the 30 hours policy. Under the previous system, children who were only entitled to 15 hours (for example, because one parent was not in work) could be allowed to still attend for 30 hours a week because the LA provided additional funding to be used at the headteacher’s discretion. Karen’s concern was echoed by her colleague Nadia, who argued:

> … the funding for those families is very important because we do, I do see that side, and there is always like, I wish I could do more. (Nadia)

These teachers are enacting policy while maintaining their commitment to the previous system, which was regarded as fairer. The current system, ‘is not the way we like to work’, because it is inflexible in terms of eligibility. In this case, and in other nursery schools in our study, the funding of free hours was welcomed in principle as an investment in early years, but the operation of the policy in reality was problematic and limiting. Underlying some of this frustration was a feeling that there was little consultation with the sector on how the policy should work: as Karen summed up, ‘I think the more money they can give us the better, but I think they need to listen to us to know where the money needs to go’. There was a sense in this case that policy was something done to the nursery schools – that they were policy *receivers* – rather than something they were able to influence or adapt.

Staff qualifications and retention

Children attending nursery schools are taught by teachers with qualified teacher status or early years qualified teacher status, with support from other practitioners trained to Level 3.[3] Private nurseries, in contrast, rarely employ a qualified graduate teacher. For our participants, this was a key feature of nursery school which was to be protected and valued:

> Because we're a school, by statute we have to have qualified teachers in the organisation, we have a different Ofsted than private providers […] we have to have more funding, at the moment. But those qualified teachers do just raise the provision really, they come with that whole early child development (Samantha)

> I still think it's very likely that that [research] finding, that Level 3 practitioners work better when they're in a team that's led by a teacher, I think that's likely still to be true. So we see that the performance of a lot of our Level 3 early years educators is really exceptional and I think that's because they've got the constant guidance and coaching and support from their team leader (James)

> We can't reduce disadvantage until we have the appropriate staff in place, in regards to our children's learning and development. […] I feel our children will always be at a disadvantage if we don't have an underpinning foundation of those practitioners to support those children and those families, and that's not going to happen unless we get them properly trained, properly qualified, properly recognised for what we can do. (Tara)

As Tara suggests in this quotation, the value of employing qualified staff in early years has not always been recognised or adequately funded. As mentioned, the Nutbrown review was not implemented, and there continue to be debates over the qualifications required to teacher young children (DfE 2017a). Part of the ambiguity in policy over necessary qualifications arises from the traditional low status perception of early years teachers in the United Kingdom; as Sara commented, 'It's not really valued'. These perceptions arise from the young age of the children and the largely female workforce (Hargreaves and Hopper 2006). In this context, it was seen as important that policy recognised the value of highly trained early years staff:

> [It's important] to have qualifications in place, so that we have quality staff doing this job, and it's not just seen as, "Oh anybody could just get in there and just sort of pass the time looking after children and just running round after children". But to sort of value it as a profession in itself, that it is really important and people need to be skilled in this and know what they're doing to be able to support children in their earliest years. (Sara)

Sara's view here is supported by research which suggests that qualifications do make a difference to children outcomes; 'the competences of the workforce are one of the more salient predictors of ECEC quality' (Urban et al. 2011, 27). It was clear that the changing discourses around qualifications in early years present in policy had an impact on these nursery schools, leaving them in a position where they felt they needed to fight for recognition of the value of qualified staff, and the funding to employ them. Again, this was an example of feeling *subject* to policy, rather than able to translate it as appropriate to the context.

A further difficult element of the policy environment in terms of staffing related to the problems of retaining staff. In the London nursery school, there were concerns about the high cost of housing and how this had an impact on staff retention:

> We, as I say, we're lucky, we've got a lot of local staff, but I think if you are trying to attract people into London, wages are a major concern because the housing is so expensive, not buying a house, renting is so expensive, so … I think this is where a lot of schools have difficulty because you do it for so long, you put a lot of effort into those staff and then they have to leave (Linda)

These wider issues, which we discuss further in the final section of analysis, reflect broader issues in teacher retention (DfE 2018a) and social policy. Losing highly trained staff was seen as a problem at Buttercups nursery school, where Betty had recently qualified but would no longer be employed, because 'funding doesn't allow for them to keep me', meaning that her specialist early years skills, built up during her training and her induction year at the nursery school are lost. Again, funding was key to retaining the highly skilled staff needed at a nursery school: as Victoria summed up, 'constantly you know we're finding resources tighter, money to spend on high quality staff is being reduced'.

The wider context of austerity

As well as being affected by education policy, nursery school staff also experience the impact of wider social and fiscal policies. The Conservative-led governments of the 2010s were dominated by policies of austerity, designed to reduce government spending after the high spending of the New Labour years and the financial crash of 2008. Austerity policies included changes to the benefit system which resulted in 'alarming' reductions in income for families, which, it was warned 'will damage the life chances of hundreds of thousands of children growing up under austerity' (Tucker 2017, 5). Funding for local authorities was also reduced, meaning a reduction in staff and services for schools; there was a 'disconnect between early years and other social welfare policy' under the Coalition government (Lloyd 2015, 144). The impact of these policies was being felt at the nursery schools in our study. For example, at Daffodil Nursery School, Linda explained that 'at one point we had a speech and language therapist who was available to come into nursery every half-term and support us [but] that service is no longer available'. The more dramatic impact, however, was on the social circumstances of the families who attend the nursery school. Some examples of the kind of issues raised were:

> There is high levels of poverty, there is overcrowding, you now housing is a massive issue for the children here [..] On the home visits that I go to, there are families, huge families, you know, four, five children in one room, and that has a big impact on the children. (Mary)

> Their child's education or their child's learning might be the last thing that they're worried about, they might have other issues like housing and all the other … mental health […]

The issues raised here relating to poverty and overcrowding reflect the wider findings of research on the social impact of austerity policies on children (Lyndon 2019; Ridge 2013). The problems faced by the families who use these nursery schools produce extra work for staff, who have become a 'frontline service', catering for multiple social needs as well as providing education (Authors 2020). In this way, wider social policy has an impact on nursery schools, adding further to an already difficult policy environment. As policy actors, they are again *receivers*, subject to the effects of social policy (and are of course also subject to it themselves outside of work), which creates more work as a greater burden of support for local families falls on them. The closure of Children's Centres can be seen as a further factor in this increased need to provide support. In this case, nursery schools are not responsible for enacting the policies of austerity, but their working lives are affected by them; the narrative is one of concern and anxiety.

Nursery school teachers' agency

Nursery schools as high-quality provision

In this section, we wish to emphasise how nursery school teachers are agentic in their reactions to policy, as well as being subject to the difficult pressures discussed above. They are not simply victims of policy, fearful about the future, but are able instead to maintain a sense of professional pride in the quality of their provision. This was, we suggest, perhaps linked to their status as specialist early years teachers and leaders, as they had the professional confidence to question the impact of policy. This was evident in descriptions of the unique nature of nursery schools as specialist early years providers:

> The opportunities the children get at nursery school sort of exceeds possibly what they'd get in another provision. […] We're fortunate to have, we're rich in resources and rich in expertise, so our staff really understand child development, they know those building blocks and where those next steps are for those children … we sort of have it, we have it on tap, it's here within the building, so therefore parents can access that. (Samantha)

> You know they've access, as I say to such fabulous resources, not just … the actual physical resources but the staff, you know that we are all you know trained to, you know whether they be teachers or highly qualified early years professionals. (Sasha)

Our participants were passionate about the benefits of their provision, and the learning that resulted from having additional early years specific resources and highly trained staff. As Tara

said, 'You've seen those resources and those wonderful activities that we can provide, see how much those children learn'. This story of nursery schools as high-quality providers is reinforced by research evidence (Gambaro, Stewart, and Waldfogel 2014, 2015). Frequently nursery schools are the only early years provision in an area which disadvantaged families are able to access, making them even more vital. As Betty explained: 'without nursery schools, those children won't go anywhere'.

This belief in the power of nursery schools to help disadvantaged children was complemented by positive comments about the value of working in a nursery school environment from some participants:

> it's just something that's so, I think instilled throughout the whole of the organisation, that sometimes, yeah, we just take it for granted that it is the case but … There's a high level of … of input from the top down and regular meetings, regular briefings, coming together on at least a three times a week basis, team planning, rotation of people as well, so everyone gets to bounce ideas off each other. Any ideas that are put forward as well are always listened to and always accepted, (Andrew)

> we all want the same for the children, we all want them to develop and do their best and you know us to do the best for them and let them you know to have these opportunities and experiences. And you can see as you're walking round the nursery, like all the staff members, they're passionate and they're happy to be here. You won't see anyone that's not in the zone here, if you know what I mean? (Gail)

These comments – which incidentally suggest that retaining teachers (where budgets allow) is also an issue of school ethos and climate – show that a shared sense of worth as early years professionals is maintained, despite the negative impacts of policy enactment. These teachers do not see their funding problems as an indication that they are not effective or not doing the best for the children. It seems they are able to resist these implications due to their professional pride in their work, instead of focusing on a narrative of a shared passion and ethos.

Maintaining a social justice mission

Although there were many mentions of the additional pressures on nursery schools and reductions in what they were able to provide, there was also evidence in our data of the continued efforts of nursery school staff to combat the effects of poverty and poor housing. For example, James explained that their outdoor areas allowed children 'to run and to climb and to get all of those experiences that they might struggle to get otherwise'; the nursery school finds a way to provide opportunities for physical activity.

Often this commitment to alleviating poverty was justified on moral grounds, as in Samantha's comment here about giving away uniform and resources:

> And if we give uniform away, that's absolutely the right thing to do, and we make play dough and we send that play dough home or we'll give resources and it goes … that sort of 'child first' moment really, so it kind of always goes back to what's right for that child. (Samantha)

This focus on the child is indicative of the power of an early years ethos where each child is unique and valued as an individual. For Betty, it was important that the additional provision for children who received the EYPP, such as free lunches, did not single out particular children: 'It gives them the chance to feel equal, to not have that stigma attached to them … You know our children here wouldn't know that they're pupil premium'.

James described this attitude towards their communities as 'the best tradition of the nursery school movement', where staff 'see the richness and the potential of the children, as well as being honest about the kind of challenges and the difficulties they face'. Andrew explained 'It's about always keeping the child at the centre, front and centre of everything that we do'. These efforts extended beyond the child to the entire families, as Mary noted: 'to really make sure that the children aren't disadvantaged and left behind, you know, that we're doing everything that we can to support families really, it's supporting the families that is the thing, not just the children'.

It is significant that, despite the hostile policy environment described above, the nursery school staff we spoke to were still committed to reducing the impact of disadvantage and took

opportunities to do so whenever possible. Their social justice mission continued despite, rather than due to, government policy. As policy actors they maintained a great deal of agency, railing against a system which presented many challenges. They also displayed a great deal of positivity and passion for their nursery schools, despite their fears of a longer-term decline in the sector.

Conclusion

The history of nursery schools in England reveals the continued importance of policy on the survival of these unique schools; they have always been subject to the ups and downs of policy, as James explained in relation to The Meadows:

> It opened during that period in the seventies when there was that big expansion of nursery education for urban priority areas. […] The nursery school got a significant amount of funding as one of the third wave of SureStart[4] Children's Centres, so the old nursery school was knocked down and the bigger premises we're in at the moment were built then with an integrated Children's Centre and an expanded nursery school. So in the 2000s this place benefited from a kind of really significant investment from both the local authority and national government through the SureStart local programme. (James)

The halcyon days of nursery school expansion in the 70s and the SureStart programme in the 2000s are in marked contrast to the hostile environment for nursery school in the 2010s. Within a neoliberal early childhood education sector, there is currently real concern over the future of nursery schools, as suggested by publications from the UK parliament's All-Party Parliamentary Advisory Group (APPG) on Nursery Schools (Dromey, Villiers, and Brine 2020).

Government policy in relation to the pre-school sector has been counter-productive, damaging the very settings which cater for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and have been shown to be high-quality (EE 2020). As we have seen, staff see policies relating to funding, the15/30 free hours, qualifications and retention as having all made the continued existence of nursery schools a struggle. In addition, there is increasing social need due to austerity policies. This situation will be exacerbated by the stresses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as there is higher unemployment, and rates of illness and mortality from the virus are greater in poorer communities; the combination of factors has been described as a 'perfect storm' (Gibbons 2020). These findings suggest that nursery schools need support and funding to allow them to expand and have an impact on more children, not fewer: as one respondent put it, 'my only sadness is that we're not there for every single child' (Victoria). If nursery schools shut, it is likely that many children from disadvantaged families will not attend any early years provision at all, so the take-up of the 15/30 free hours will be reduced. As well as the loss of the specialised skills of nursery school staff and the additional services provided at nursery school, this will ultimately have an impact on the most vulnerable children.

In this paper we have examined how, as policy actors, nursery school staff enact policy in complex ways, adapting to suit the needs of their local communities, for example in how they structure attendance. This enactment is made difficult, however, by policy which reduces funding or sets rules about eligibility for 'free hours' which do not fit with their needs, and they are frequently frustrated by the inadequacies of policy in relation to nursery schools, and positioned as *receivers* of policy. At the same time they are concerned about the impact of broader policies on the home lives and welfare of the children they teach. The schema of policy actors developed in research in secondary schools (Ball et al. 2011) is useful here in highlighting how these teachers move between positions of *narrator*, *critic* and *receiver* of policy, though we have also shown that the context of early years is very different.

However, we also wish to emphasise that these teachers are not merely subject to policy, but active agents in their enactment of policy: they maintain a strong belief in the unique quality of a nursery school education and continue to do all they can to support children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds. Unlike teachers in primary schools, they are faced with an existential

threat in the form of potential closure, but interestingly their response appears to be a greater passion for their work: as one respondent commented, 'You need maintained nurseries, because what will happen to all those children?!' (Mary). This exploration of the views of nursery school staff further develops our understanding of the complexities of enacting policy in early years, providing an example of policy actors operating in a hostile environment, and how this inter-relates with feelings of professionalism and a commitment to social justice.

Notes

1. The term 'hostile environment' was used to describe the UK Home Office's attempts to make the UK somewhere unwelcoming and difficult for migrants in the 2010s – though it has older military and legal usages. It has since been used to describe situations where multiple pressures make continued existence or success of a group or organisation difficult.
2. The term 'disadvantaged' is used here – with an awareness of the problems of labelling children – in line with the UK government definition, which is: children whose parents receive certain state benefits, children in local authority care, and children with special educational needs and disabilities (DfE 2017b).
3. Level 3 training refers to a level beyond compulsory education in England, often taken by young people aged 17–19, but preceding Level 4 which equates to the first year at university.
4. Sure Start was a programme set up by the Labour government from 1999 designed to alleviate child poverty by providing integrated health, social and educations services. By 2010, there were over 3000 Sure Start Centres in areas with high levels of poverty affecting children under four (Belsky, Melhuish, and Barnes 2007).

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to our research participants for taking the time to be interviewed. The project was funded by Brunel University.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The project was funded by the Brunel University London.

ORCID

Alice Bradbury http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3269-6199

References

Ball, S., M. Maguire, and A. Braun. 2012. *How Schools do Policy: Policy Enactments in Secondary Schools*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Ball, S. J., M. Maguire, A. Braun, and K. Hoskins. 2011. "Policy Actors: Doing Policy Work in Schools." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 32 (4): 625–639.

Belsky, J., E. C. Melhuish, and J. Barnes, Eds. 2007. *The National Evaluation of Sure Start: Does Area-Based Early Intervention Work?* Bristol: Policy Press.

British Educational Research Association. 2018. *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. Accessed 10 December 2020. https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018.

Cameron, C. 2020. "Towards a 'Rich' ECEC Workforce." In *Transforming Early Childhood in England: Towards a Democratic Education*, edited by C. Cameron, and P. Moss, 67–82. London: UCL Press.

Cameron, C., and P. Moss. 2020. *Transforming Early Childhood in England: Towards a Democratic Education*. London: UCL Press.

Campbell, T., L. Gambaro, and K. Stewart. 2018. "'Universal' Early Education: Who Benefits? Patterns in Take-up of the Entitlement to Free Early Education among Three-Year-Olds in England." *British Educational Research Journal* 44 (3): 515–538.

Campbell-Barr, V., and M. Nygård. 2014. "Losing Sight of the Child? Human Capital Theory and Its Role for Early Childhood Education and Care Policies in Finland and England Since the Mid-1990s." *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 15 (4): 346–359.

Chen, H., and A. Bradbury. 2020. "Parental Choice of Childcare in England: Choosing in Phases and the Split Market." *British Educational Research Journal* 46 (0): 281–300.

DfE. 2013. *More Great Childcare: Raising Quality and Giving Parents More Choice*. London: Department for Education.

DfE. 2015. *Early Years Pupil Premium: Model Form and Letter for Parents*. Accessed 14 December 2020. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-pupil-premium-model-document-and-letter-for-parents.

DfE. 2017a. *Early Years Workforce Strategy*. Accessed 3 December 2020. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/596884/Workforce_strategy_02-03-2017.pdf.

DfE. 2017b. *Education Provision: Children Under 5 Years of Age*. Accessed 22 January 2017. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-provision-children-under-5-years-of-age-january-2017.

DfE. 2018a. *Factors Affecting Teacher Retention: Qualitative Investigation*. Accessed 20 August 2020. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/686947/Factors_affecting_teacher_retention_-_qualitative_investigation.pdf.

DfE. 2018b. *Provision for Children Under 5 Years of Age in England, January 2018*. Accessed 13 October 2020. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/719273/Provision_for_children_under_5_2018_-_text.pdf.

DfE. 2020. *Early Years Support Package to Help Close Covid Language Gap*. Accessed 3 December 2020. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/early-years-support-package-to-help-close-covid-language-gap.

Dromey, J., T. Villiers, and S. Brine. 2020. *Letter to The Rt Hon Stephen Barclay MP from All Party Parliamentary Group on Nursery Schools, Nursery and Reception Classes*. Accessed 3 December 2020. https://www.early-education.org.uk/sites/default/files/Letter%20to%20HMT%20implications%20of%201%20yr%20spending%20review%20on%20MNS%20sustainability.pdf.

EE. 2015. *Maintained Nursery Schools: The State of Play Report*. Accessed 3 December. https://www.early-education.org.uk/sites/default/files/Nursery%20Schools%20State%20of%20Play%20Report%20final%20print.pdf.

EE. 2020. *Briefing Note: The Comprehensive Spending Review and Funding for Maintained Nursery Schools*. Accessed 13 October 2020. https://early-education.org.uk/sites/default/files/Briefing%20note%20-%20CSR%20and%20maintained%20nursery%20schools%27%20funding.pdf.

Emirbayer, M., and A. Mische. 1998. "What is Agency?" *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (4): 962–1023.

Gambaro, L., K. Stewart, and J. Waldfogel. (Eds.). 2014. "Equal Access to Early Childhood Education and Care? The Case of the UK." In *An Equal Start?: Providing Quality Early Education and Care for Disadvantaged Children*, 29–52. Bristol: Policy Press.

Gambaro, L., K. Stewart, and J. Waldfogel. 2015. "A Question of Quality: Do Children from Disadvantaged Backgrounds Receive Lower Quality Early Childhood Education and Care?" *British Educational Research Journal* 41 (4): 553–574.

Gewirtz, S., S. Ball, and R. Bowe. 1995. *Markets, Choice and Equity in Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Gibbons, A. 2020. *Maintained Nurseries Face 'Perfect Storm' Due to Covid*. Accessed 13 October 2020. https://www.tes.com/news/maintained-nurseries-face-perfect-storm-due-covid.

Hargreaves, L., and B. Hopper. 2006. "Early Years, Low Status? Early Years Teachers' Perceptions of Their Occupational Status." *Early Years* 26 (2): 171–186.

Hillman, J., and T. Williams. 2015. *Early Years Education and Childcare: Lessons from Evidence and Future Priorities*. London: Nuffield Foundation.

Hoskins, K., A. Bradbury, and L. Fogarty. 2020a. *The Re/Constructed Role of Nursery Schools as Local Community Hubs in the Current Context of Austerity - TACTYC (Association for Professional Development in Early Years) Occasional Paper*. Accessed 19 August 2020. https://imx07wlgmj301rre1jepv8h0-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Occasional-Paper-15.pdf.

Hoskins, K., A. Bradbury, and L. Fogarty. 2020b. *Why Nursery Schools are a Secret Weapon in the Fight Against Inequality*. Accessed 3 December 2020. https://theconversation.com/why-nursery-schools-are-a-secret-weapon-in-the-fight-against-inequality-142687.

Hoskins, K., A. Bradbury, and L. Fogarty. 2021. "A Frontline Service? Nursery Schools as Local Community Hubs in an Era of Austerity." *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 1476718X2096985–1476718X2096985.

Lee, S. F. 2019. "Governing 'Disadvantage' Through Readiness: A Foucauldian Policy Genealogy of Funded Nursery Places for two-Year-Olds." *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, doi:10.1177/1463949119864200.

Lewis, J., and A. West. 2017. "Early Childhood Education and Care in England Under Austerity: Continuity or Change in Political Ideas, Policy Goals, Availability, Affordability and Quality in a Childcare Market?" *Journal of Social Policy* 46 (2): 331–348.

Lloyd, E. 2015. "Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in England Under the Coalition Government." *London Review of Education* 13 (2): 144–156.

Lloyd, E. 2018. *Underpaid and Undervalued: The Reality of Childcare Work in the UK*. Accessed 14 October 2020. https://theconversation.com/underpaid-and-undervalued-the-reality-of-childcare-work-in-the-uk-87413.

Lloyd, E., and H. Penn. 2014. "Childcare Markets in an Age of Austerity." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 22 (3): 386–396.

Lyndon, S. 2019. “Troubling Discourses of Poverty in Early Childhood in the UK.” *Children & Society* 33 (6): 602–609.
Moss, P. 2014a. “Early Childhood Policy in England 1997–2013: Anatomy of a Missed Opportunity.” *International Journal of Early Years Education* 22 (4): 346–358.
Moss, P. 2014b. *Transformative Change and Real Utopias in Early Childhood Education: A Story of Democracy, Experimentation and Potentiality*. Oxon: Routledge.
Moss, P., and C. Cameron. 2020. “Introduction: The State We’re In.” In *Transforming Early Childhood in England: Towards a Democratic Education*, edited by C. Cameron, and P. Moss, 1–18. London: UCL Press.
Nutbrown, C. 2012. *Foundations for Quality: The Independent Review of Early Education and Childcare Qualifications*. Accessed 3 December 2020. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nutbrown-review-foundations-for-quality.
Ofsted. 2018. “Childcare Providers and Inspections.” *Childcare Providers and Inspections Main Findings as at 31 August 2018*. HM Government. Accessed 26 July 2021. publishing.service.gov.uk.
Palmer, A. 2011. “Nursery Schools for the Few or the Many? Childhood, Education and the State in mid-Twentieth-Century England.” *Paedagogica Historica* 47 (1-2): 139–154.
Palmer, A. 2016. “Nursery Schools or Nursery Classes? Choosing and Failing to Choose Between Policy Alternatives in Nursery Education in England, 1918-1972.” *History of Education* 45 (1): 103–121.
Paull, G., and I. LaValle. 2018. *Evaluation of the First Year of the National Rollout of 30 hours Free Childcare*. Accessed 3 December 2020. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/740168/Evaluation_of_national_rollout_of_30_hours_free-childcare.pdf.
Powell, L. 2019. *House of Commons Backbench Business*. Accessed 13 October 2020. https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-01-31/debates/0AD4FA19-0825-45E4-BAE6-DFC321FA5688/MaintainedNurserySchools.
Richardson, H. 2013. *Will Free Childcare Really be Free?* Accessed 3 December 2020. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-24203518.
Ridge, T. 2013. “‘We are All in This Together’? The Hidden Costs of Poverty, Recession and Austerity Policies on Britain’s Poorest Children.” *Children & Society* 27 (5): 406–417.
Roberts-Holmes, G. 2013. “The English Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) and the ‘Split’ Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) System.” *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 21 (3): 339–352.
Stewart, K., and J. Waldfogel. 2017. *Closing Gaps Early: The Role of Early Years Policy in Promoting Social Mobility in England*. Accessed 3 December 2020. https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Closing-Gaps-Early_FINAL.pdf.
Tizard, J., P. Moss, and J. Perry. 1976. *All our Children: Pre-School Services in a Changing Society*. London: Maurice Temple Smith.
Tucker, J. 2017. *The Austerity Generation: The Impact of a Decade of Cuts on Family Incomes and Child Poverty*. London: Child Poverty Action Group.
Urban, M., M. Vandenbroek, A. Lazzari, J. Peeters, and K. van Laere. 2011. *Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care (CoRe)*. London: University of East London/University of Ghent.
Vincent, C., A. Braun, and S. Ball. 2010. “Local Links, Local Knowledge: Choosing Care Settings and Schools.” *British Educational Research Journal* 36 (2): 279–298.
West, A., and P. Noden. 2016. *Public Funding of Early Years Education in England: An Historical Perspective. Clare Market Papers, 21*. London: London School of Economics and Political Science.
Whitbread, N. 1972. *The Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School: A History of Infant and Nursery Education in Britain, 1800-1970*. London: Routledge and K. Paul.