# Disciplinary Power in Early Childhood Education and Care Funding Policies in England: How the 15 and 30 hours are exacerbating ‘splits’

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I, Sharon Vince, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

# Abstract

This thesis explores current early childhood education and care (ECEC) funding policies in England which entitle the children of working parents on a minimum income to 30 hours of government funded ECEC, whilst children from homes on very low incomes or without both parents working are allocated just 15. It argues that these policies have exacerbated 'splits' – the split between early education and childcare in the sector, between children in some of the most vulnerable families on low incomes and their peers, and *within* ECEC practitioners, who must often compromise their child-centred values and beliefs when enacting the policies. A theoretical framework encompassing policy enactment theory, Foucauldian concepts of discourse and disciplinary power and micropractices of power which examine how disciplinary power is evident within practice, are utilised to explore how power operates through the funding policies.

Qualitative data collected from interviews with 19 early years practitioners in a range of settings across the sector is analysed using reflexive thematic analysis to identify the discourses evident. The way in which the policies are enacted is demonstrated, including the temporal and sometimes spatial 'split' of children entitled to 15 and 30 hours, the loss of discretionary hours for vulnerable families and the subsidy maximising behaviours employed by some maintained settings. The intensification of competition that the funding reforms have resulted in, and the impact this has had upon the 'split' between the maintained and private factions of the ECEC sector, is also examined. The effect that this has upon ECEC practitioners, exacerbating the split between the child-centred pedagogue and entrepreneurial, neoliberal worker is explored. I conclude that ECEC funding policies in England are maintaining and increasing these splits across the sector, and that this requires consideration with the policies due to be expanded to infants by 2025.

# Impact Statement

This thesis makes a number of original contributions to knowledge that I will seek to disseminate within academia through the publication of journal articles. The first of these is the way in which children and families are being 'split', both materially and discursively, according to their funding entitlement. The exacerbation of the 'split' system of ECEC in England through subsidy maximising behaviours in primary schools is also a new concept. This is achieved through primary schools encouraging the uptake of places in nursery classes (to secure funding) through the suggestion that a place in the reception class can be secured through nursery attendance. It builds upon Spakes and West's (1998) research into the way in which primary schools behaved similarly following the introduction of nursery vouchers in 1997. This thesis also introduces the term 'supraprofessional', used to indicate the ECEC practitioner who not only practices in line with their belief in the rights of each unique child and the value of diversity, but who also performs as a flexible, competitive neoliberal worker. Finally, the study expands on policy enactment theory, developed by Braun, Ball, and Maguire (Ball et al., 2011b, 2011a, 2012; Braun et al., 2010, 2011), suggesting ways in which the theory (developed through empirical research in secondary schools) can be adapted to be more relevant to the early years sector.

Beyond academia, this thesis has the potential to impact upon practice within ECEC settings. Through trade publications and talks at events for practitioners, there is the possibility to engage directly with the sector. The aims of engagement with practitioners will be two -fold; first, to raise awareness of the 'split' supraprofessional struggling to assimilate the child-centred values with neoliberal demands, and second to introduce consideration of how the policies are enacted in settings. Sharing findings around the 'split' self of the ECEC practitioner aims to raise awareness of how widespread these tensions are within the sector. As Pierlejewski (2023, p. 528) states, "The care of the self…depends on the acceptance of the

divided subject.” Understanding the ‘split’ self may be the beginning of such acknowledgement. Through discussing the potential consequences of enacting the funding policies that result in children and families being segregated, I also aim to help practitioners consider this practice. The completion of this thesis is timely as it coincides with the extension of the funding policies, with the 30 hours being expanded to include infants from nine-months-old from September 2025. Therefore, there is the possibility of increased interest in the research as a result.

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# Chapter 1: A Story of Splits in Early Childhood Education and Care in England: An introduction

This thesis explores English early childhood education and care (ECEC) funding policy reforms and the way in which they have produced or widened 'splits' - splits between children and families of different socio-economic backgrounds, between settings which have been disciplined into competing with one another, and splits *within* ECEC practitioners, who must often enact policies that compromise their values and beliefs. The funding policies mean that children with both parents (or one parent in a single parent family) working for at least 16 hours a week and earning the minimum wage or above receive 30 hours of government funded ECEC a week, whilst children from households not meeting that threshold can attend for only 15 hours a week[1], the universal provision. In addition to highlighting the 'splits' these policies are causing or augmenting, the study explores how ECEC settings are enacting these policies in practice and how the policies contribute to discourses surrounding poverty and 'entitlement' to state support.

This chapter begins with an explanation of the 'split' between childcare for children under the age of three years and early education for those between three and five years. The discussion then focuses upon how this split is relatively common across Anglophone countries and Continental Europe (Moss 2012; Sousa & Moss, 2022), yet policies that prioritise childcare for working families, such as the 30 hours, appear to be less common. Attention then turns to the rationale for this research, drawing upon my experiences as a part time teacher in a nursery class when the funding reforms were introduced. The background to the funded early education entitlements (FEEE) is then explored, outlining the trajectory from the introduction of nursery vouchers for all by the Conservative government in 1996 (West & Noden, 2019), to the introduction of 30 funded hours for working parents only.

The anticipated negative impact of the FEEE policies upon equity and equality, particularly the availability and affordability of ECEC places, is then discussed, followed by consideration of how the policies shape children and families discursively, central to this study's focus. The scope of the research and the

[1] 'Per week' is used in policy and throughout this thesis. However, the government funded hours are available for only 38 weeks per year, in line with the number of weeks school-aged children attend for.

terminology utilised within it is then explained before the research questions are introduced. The contribution that the study makes to research, and the gaps in the literature that it fills, are then stated, before an outline of the thesis is presented. I begin with a discussion of the 'splits' in ECEC and why the term is adopted in this study.

## 'Splits' in ECEC in England and Elsewhere

Given the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study (which are explained in the next chapter, 'Theorising Splits and Divisions'), and in particular the use of Foucault's concept of 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1982), the thesis could have adopted the term 'division' rather than 'splits'. The term 'split' is utilised here in keeping with its use in multiple books and papers theorising issues in ECEC in England. Most prominently, it is used to describe the 'split' system of 'childcare' and 'early education' in ECEC (eg Cameron & Moss, 2020a; Moss, 2014; Roberts-Holmes, 2013). 'Childcare' is provided for children under the age of three years, predominantly in privately run day nurseries which employ poorly qualified staff, with similarly poor recompense (Moss, 2014). 'Early education', meanwhile, is the reserve of children aged three- to five-years, with a greater role for the maintained sector (namely nursery schools plus nursery and reception classes in primary schools), and the employment of staff with higher qualifications as a result (with teaching qualifications required for these roles in maintained schools) (ibid). As Moss (2012, p. 7) states, "This is not a case of different but equal, but different and unequal, with 'childcare' and services for under 3s less favourably treated than education and services for over 3s." Therefore, whilst there have been attempts to unite the sector, such as the introduction of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (Department for Education, 2012) in 2012 which encompassed *all* early years providers for the first time, including childminders[2], the split remains.

[2] It should be noted that, as of December 2023, childminders have been issued with a separate version of the framework with one of the most notable differences being the removal of the requirement for childminders to attend training related to the EYFS.

To expand on early years provision available in England, ‘childcare’ is typically available from infanthood and is provided primarily by private nurseries, that is, nurseries which operate to make a profit (sometimes also referred to in this thesis and across the sector as ‘day nurseries’). Voluntary and independent providers include pre-school groups operated by volunteers, childminders working in their own home and independent nursery schools (including specialist schools such as Montessori schools). Together, these providers are classified as the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector, sometimes also referred to as ‘group providers’. This is the largest tranche of providers, supplying 67% of ECEC places in England (Department for Education, 2023a). As stated above, the maintained sector consists of nursery and reception classes in primary schools and maintained nursery schools. Of the almost 1.6 million children attending an ECEC setting in December 2023, 349,600 of these (22%) were registered at a maintained setting (Department for Education, 2023a). However, many children of this age continue to attend settings in the PVI sector, for the reasons discussed below. In addition to these two categories of early years providers there are childminders, offering care and education in their own home, and supplying just under 11% of ECEC places (Department for Education, 2023a). The result is a “disparate sector that both lacks coherence and is socially divisive” (Cameron & Moss, 2020a, p. 2) as different providers supply varying types of ECEC to different families, depending on their employment status and patterns, income, location and so on.

Childcare does not, according to this split, necessitate a well-qualified workforce, with only 11% of staff in group based settings qualified to Level 6 (undergraduate degree level) or above (Department for Education, 2021a). This compares to 32% in school-based settings (ibid). This is reflected in the mean pay within the two types of setting, with an average wage of £7.10 per hour in the private sector compared to £8.43 in maintained providers (Social Mobility Commission, 2020). Low pay within the sector is also exemplified by the proportion of the workforce being paid at a rate beneath the National Living Wage; 12% of staff working in nursery classes and schools, and 18% in group settings (Department for Education, 2021a). Whilst this demonstrates the lack of respect for and value placed upon ECEC in general in England, the “different and unequal” (Moss, 2012, p. 7) regard for the private sector as compared to the maintained is evident.

A further difference is in the provision of full day places. Private day nurseries and childminders are more likely than nursery schools and classes to offer full time ECEC, with full time often meaning 8:00 am to 6:00 pm to allow parents to travel to and from work (Chen & Bradbury, 2020). The average number of hours settings are open each day varies from seven for nursery classes and school, to 10 in private day nurseries and with childminders (Department for Education, 2023a). This means that many three- and four-year-olds continue to attend 'childcare' settings rather than moving to 'early education' in the maintained sector (ibid). Because full time provision is less likely to be offered by maintained settings than private and voluntary nurseries, school-based settings are also less likely to offer the 30 funded hours. Whereas 92% of private and voluntary settings offer the 30 funded hours, this figure is only 76% within maintained settings (Department for Education, 2021a). There are further divisions between nursery classes in primary schools and nursery schools, with 99% of the latter offering 30 funded hours compared to only 75% of nursery classes (Department for Education, 2021a). As discussed in chapter seven, this appears to be due to more existing infrastructure to provide full time places in nursery schools compared to primary schools. Whilst this thesis recognises that the balance of 'childcare' and 'early education' varies setting by setting and is dependant upon *type* of setting, overall the notion that care and education can be separated in the early years is rejected.

Alongside these splits in the provision of 'early education' and 'childcare' are the aims, particularly in policy. 'Early education' is centred around advantages for children, both in terms of their current development and future educational (and economic) potential (eg Allen, 2011a; Sylva et al, 2004a). There are also claims of long-term benefits to the economy due to a reduction in welfare spending and crime (Allen, 2011a, 2011b; Allen & Duncan Smith, 2008), demonstrating the underlying neoliberal basis of ECEC funding, with its focus on 'human capital' (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021), as discussed in depth in chapter three. 'Childcare', meanwhile, supports working parents and families (Department for Education and Skills, Department for Work and Pensions, HM Treasury, 2002). In earlier policy documents (eg Paull & LaValle, 2017), the differentiation between the universal 15 hours of 'early education' and the additional 15 hours of 'childcare' (to make 30 hours) for working families was made clear, and this is still evident in some Local Authority

policies (eg Brent Council, 2024). However, more recent publications have used simply ‘childcare’ (GOV.UK, 2023), ‘early education and childcare’ (seemingly preferred by Local Authorities, eg Local Government Association, 2023) or ‘free entitlements’ (Department for Education, 2018; Foster et al, 2023) when referring to both the 15 and 30 hour policies. Nonetheless, the initial variation in terminology reveals the differing aims of the policies (Lewis & West, 2017), a contention that will be explored in more depth throughout this thesis.

Pierlejewski (2023) has also described the ‘split’ self of the early years, divided between being a ‘physicist’ teacher concerned with measuring children’s progress through data, and the ‘philosopher’ teacher who leads activities according to children’s interests and engages in play with them. The two roles are summarised as being the “’data teacher’ and ‘true early years teacher’” by one participant (Pierlejewski, 2023, p. 528). Ball (2003, p. 221), meanwhile, discusses “’splitting’ between the teachers own judgements about ‘good practice’ and students ‘needs’ and the rigours of performance”. With the term already part of the lexicon of teacher subjectivity and ECEC more broadly, expanding upon its meaning appeared logical.

It is worth noting here that, whilst the ‘split’ system of early education and childcare is not unique to England, a system in which working parents are prioritised for *more* government funded ECEC than families on low incomes appears to be. The ‘split’ system exists across Continental Europe, the USA, Australia and other English-speaking countries, although it operates with different priorities. As Moss (2012, p. 7) observes:

> Countries in the English-speaking world typically have an ‘early education’ system limited to one or two years of part-time attendance, often in a primary school-based nursery or kindergarten class; the ‘childcare’ system takes children up to 3 and often beyond, being available for a full day. By contrast, many countries in Continental Europe have a three year ‘early education’ system, often available for a full school day, and a ‘childcare’ system confined to children under 3.

Only in the Nordic countries (Lloyd, 2012; Moss, 2012; Sousa & Moss, 2022), and a few outliers such as Slovenia (Moss, 2012), Estonia (OECD, 2020), Denmark and Italy (Bertram & Pascal, 2016), does truly integrated early education and care (beyond the two merely being managed by the same government department) exist

for children from one year (or younger) until school age, with provision for all mostly in the same centres.

Policies which favour families with two working parents and a minimum income are more difficult to locate, with most governments opting to fund ECEC for children from families on low incomes. In the Estonian ECEC system, highly regarded due to the country's position near the top of the OECD's PISA table (OECD, 2023), fees are capped at 20% of the minimum wage and are often based on a sliding scale according to family income (OECD, 2020). In the USA, the Head Start programme, which targets families on low incomes to participate in ECEC, has existed since 1964 and continues alongside state funding, vouchers or subsidies for parents who could not otherwise afford to pay for ECEC (Arrighi & Maume, 2007). There have been a number of further historical examples of such initiatives including Best Start in Australia, Early Start in Ireland and Sure Start in England (Sousa & Moss, 2022) which have focused upon utilising ECEC as a means to address poverty. How the priorities of the UK government have shifted from providing for the most vulnerable families to emphasising the childcare needs of working parents is discussed in detail in chapter three. Below is an explanation of how the exacerbation of these 'splits' through FEEE policies became apparent in practice.

## 'Splits' in ECEC in Practice: The Rationale for this Research

The study materialised from my experiences working as a part-time nursery teacher in a school with a class of three- and four-year-olds. Some children attending the nursery were in receipt of the 30 hour entitlement whilst others attended for 15 hours a week because only one parent was working, or one or both parents were not working enough to qualify for 30 funded hours (it should be noted that the policy also places a cap on earnings for the funding entitlement, meaning if at least one parent earns £100,000 a year or more than the child will receive 15 rather than 30 hours of funded provision. However, none of the families I worked with were in this position).

As I worked only two days each week, I had a job share partner who was employed for the remaining three days. Whilst I was new to the school, my job share partner had worked there for several years, and at the beginning of the school year she

informed me that the “30-hour children” made more progress than their peers who attended for only half that time, and that “you can do so much more with them”. However, it was when a child started school some weeks into the first term that I began to seriously question the segregation and division between children attending for 15 hours and their full-time peers. I attached a photograph of the new child to a coat peg, indicating that this was their space for their belongings. Upon returning to work the subsequent week, following my job share partner’s three days of teaching, I realised that the photograph of the child had been moved to the left-hand side of the cloakroom, which was split into two sections. Scanning the other photographs on the left-hand side, I realised that all of the children who had pegs on this side of the cloakroom attended school part-time for 15 hours, whilst the pegs on the right-hand side belonged to children who received the 30-hour entitlement. The cloakroom had been split according to 15 or 30 hour attendance. Whilst this was a relatively inconsequential observation, I questioned how the division might impact upon the interactions between children of the two groups having witnessed the informal and very social times that children shared in that area.

As the term went on, I observed part-time children forming friendships with other children who only attended part-time and watched as they left school chatting together with their parents at 11:30 am, their 30-hour peers leaving the classroom to all go and eat lunch in the school dining hall together, before spending the afternoon in one another’s company. I supported parents in completing the online forms that would allow them to obtain the ‘code’ permitting their child to attend the nursery for 30 hours, and saw the impact of families losing the code as their employment status or working hours shifted, meaning that the child’s attendance halved from 30 hours to 15. In some cases, a family’s eligibility would alter from 15 hours to 30, and then revert back to 15, with staff and children confused by these changes. In pupil progress meetings with the headteacher, the development of each child was discussed and the trend that children attending for 30 hours were progressing more quickly was recognised. Having recently completed a Masters dissertation which utilised Foucault’s theory of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977a) I pondered what other ‘dividing practices’ (Foucault, 1982), that is, actions that classify individuals and seek to separate them from others in different categories, may be produced by the funded early education entitlement (FEEE) policies. This study explores the

disciplinary techniques of the FEEE policies that classify, normalise and exclude children and families based upon their socioeconomic background. The funding policies, and the eligibility criteria for families to receive government funded ECEC, are explained below.

## Early Years Funding Policy in England

Whilst ECEC may now be regarded as the site of a policy storm (Bradbury, 2018), with layers of policy producing wide reaching reforms, it existed in a relative policy vacuum until the mid-1990s. Whilst government funded ECEC has been settled on as an area for state intervention since its introduction by the Conservative government in the 1990s, the aims and tools of these policies have shifted dramatically according to the prevailing ideology. In 1996, John Major pledged that nursery provision would be available for all four-year-olds whose parents sought it, with parents provided with a voucher worth £1,100 to be spent on pre-school attendance at any setting (Sparkes & West, 1998). The aims of this demand-side policy were in keeping with the wider ambitions of education policy of the time- to promote parental choice, increase diversity of provision and raise standards (Sparkes & West, 1998). The scheme was widely regarded as unsuccessful, with a lack of planning and the fact that the voucher failed to cover most of the cost of childcare cited as some of the reasons for its failure (Sparkes & West, 1998). Most ECEC provision at this time was supplied by private nurseries, with childcare being of little concern to the state (West, 2006).

The following Labour government introduced 12.5 hours of childcare for 4 year olds in 1998, with payment sent directly to providers (Lewis & West, 2017). The policy aim was to increase maternal employment rates and thus raise the incomes of families, particularly those living in poverty, and was accompanied by working tax credits for childcare as part of Labour's wider welfare reforms (Lewis & West, 2017). Simultaneously, Sure Start was launched, a flagship policy aimed at reducing the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers in the reception year at the beginning of their schooling, primarily through supporting parents in their role

(Eisenstadt & Oppenheim, 2019). The Sure Start Children's Centres that were established from 2003 also meant that there was an increase in the provision of ECEC in the maintained sector, with the Local Authority responsible for this provision. Government funded childcare, Sure Start and working tax credits for childcare combined to make work more attractive to parents (primarily mothers), supporting Labour's wider policy aims surrounding raising family incomes and reducing child poverty (Eisenstadt & Oppenheim, 2019), but also focusing on ECEC as a means to increase employment rates for the first time (Millar & Ridge, 2002; Piachaud & Sutherland, 2001).

However, beyond any impact upon child development and family income, Sure Start garnered widespread interest in and support for ECEC, cementing the area as a site for policy intervention (Bouchal & Norris, 2013). This new interest and demand for ECEC meant that an increase in providers and staff was required. The Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative, announced in 2000, provided grants for nurseries to be set up or expanded as part of its aim to create an extra 45,000 full time childcare places in the 20% most deprived areas (NNI Research Team, 2007). 63% of the settings built or expanded as part of the scheme were in the private or voluntary sector whilst 20% were maintained settings, demonstrating that whilst private nurseries still dominated, provision in the maintained sector was expanding (NNI Research Team, 2007).

By 2004, the primary goals of government funded ECEC had shifted to child development (HM Treasury, 2004) and parental choice. Findings from the influential Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) project began to emerge and suggested that quality early education could have a significantly positive impact upon children's outcomes in primary school and beyond (Sylva et al., 2004a). 'Quality' became a concern given that the EPPE findings emphasised its importance to children's developmental outcomes, and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), regulation which included curriculum guidance, assessment requirements, staff:child ratios and so on for children from birth to five years, was introduced in 2008 and encompassed all ECEC providers, including childminders, for the first time

(Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008). Despite this focus on 'quality' and child development outcomes, the role of parental choice and having diversity of provision was also emphasised, as demonstrated by the title of the 2004 ten-year childcare strategy, 'Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children' (Stewart, 2013). The policy stated that whilst Local Authorities had the responsibility of ensuring there was an adequate number of ECEC places available in the area, maintained provision should only be introduced if private or voluntary providers could not meet demand (Stewart, 2013), marking a shift towards favouring private provision.

Government funded nursery education was extended to three-year-olds and increased to 15 hours a week by the Labour government in 2010 (Lewis & West, 2017). In the same year, the Child Poverty Act 2010 was passed with cross party support, with funded ECEC instrumental to goals to reduce the number of children living in poverty. ECEC, and government spending on ECEC, would, it was claimed, pay 'double dividends' (Lewis, 2009) as it had the short-term outcome of family incomes being increased thanks to maternal employment (Department for Education and Skills, Department for Work and Pensions, HM Treasury, 2002), whilst long-term outcomes for children would be improved thanks to attendance at an ECEC setting (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011; Sylva et al., 2004a). The Act was given Royal Assent in March 2010 (Kennedy, 2014), just weeks before Labour lost the general election in May of that year.

A range of policies introduced by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition government from 2010 confirmed 'school readiness' as a new goal of ECEC. Referring to the birth to five foundation years, Allen (2011b, p. xviii) stated "(i)ts prime objective should be to produce high levels of 'school readiness' for all children regardless of family income". The EYFS Profile assessment at the end of the reception year, when children are aged four or five years, was changed in 2012, with more of a focus upon reading (specifically using synthetic phonics to read), writing and mathematics (Roberts-Holmes, 2017). These policies reaffirmed the role of ECEC in producing human capital, with early years settings seen as central to

improving societal wide outcomes through preparing children for school and thus, so the narrative says, securing improved educational and employment outcomes and fewer costs in the form of welfare, health and justice spending (Ang, 2014; Moss, 2014; Robert-Holmes & Moss, 2021).

The Phonics Screening Check (PSC), designed to assess children's ability to decode real and 'pseudo words' using their knowledge of synthetic phonics, was also introduced in 2012 (Standards and Testing Agency, 2017). The results of both are reported to the Local Authority and Department for Education. Whilst the PSC takes place in year 1, preparation for this high stakes test can begin in nursery classes with three- and four-year-olds, with pedagogy being formalised and practices such as ability grouping occurring in response (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012; Bradbury, 2018; Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017a, 2017b). Many practitioners responded to these assessment reforms with anger, viewing the changes to pedagogy as being misaligned with their child-centred values and professional knowledge (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017b; Roberts-Holmes, 2015). The 'school readiness' approach also places ECEC at the bottom of the education ladder, subservient to the compulsory education sector (Moss, 2012; Robert-Holmes & Moss, 2021).

Alongside these concerns is the role that the school readiness discourse plays in producing 'truths' about children from families on a low income to justify intervention, as children from families on a lower income are consistently more likely to fail to reach the 'Good Level of Development' (GLD), the standard children are expected to reach at the end of the reception year (eg Department for Education, 2018b), and thus be represented as school 'unready'. However, whilst this outcome is presented as an objective fact, it can be seen as a product of the way in which ECEC practitioners construct children from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds based on the deficit discourse surrounding them, and the white middle-class values that abound in ECEC curricula and assessment. As Bradbury (2011, p. 673, original emphasis) argues, "the EYFSP assessment system in early years education has a role in *producing* inequality, and that results cannot be taken merely as records of inequality". Furthermore, the curriculum and assessment in ECEC in England

favours white, middle-class children whose first language is English, and for whom a formal curriculum will be more recognisable (Bradbury, 2013a, 2013b; Moss, 2000; Neaum, 2016). Policy produces the 'truth' that children from lower socio-economic will underachieve, priming staff in ECEC settings of this 'fact' and justifying intervention into the lives of children and families from lower socio-economic groups, and at an increasingly young age.

During the years in which the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition government were in power, the aims of policies concerning ECEC policy fluctuated according to which party the Minister responsible belonged (Lewis & West, 2017). With a Liberal Democrat MP holding the role from 2010 to 2012, the goals were focused on child development and reducing the attainment gap between children living in deprivation and their peers. Nonetheless, the imperative to reduce child poverty was lost, with the emphasis rather on how to mitigate the impact of disadvantage on educational outcomes. This was against the backdrop of wider austerity measures and resulting welfare reforms following the global financial crash of 2008. ECEC funding policies introduced at this time, including 15 hours of 'early learning' for the 20% (and later 40%) most disadvantaged two-year-olds which was first announced in 2011 (Department for Education, 2013a), reflect this approach to reduce the *effects* of poverty rather than reducing poverty itself. The appointment of Conservative MP Liz Truss as Childcare Minister in September 2012 saw a shift in objectives, with childcare for working parents firmly centred as the purpose of government funded ECEC. This was visible in the decision to allow parents to use the funded hours over two to five days (previously the hours had to be taken over three to five days) (Akhal, 2019a), indicating that they could be used for longer periods of childcare to allow longer working days for parents (Lewis & West, 2017).

A shift in public attitudes towards the welfare system followed the English riots of 2011, with media coverage resulting in harsher opinions towards recipients of benefit payments (Reeves & de Vries, 2016). Unencumbered by a more socially liberal coalition partner following the 2015 general election, the government swiftly introduced a range of policies which exploited this policy window (Newburn et al.,

2018), targeting what were portrayed as workless, feckless families unable to provide for their 'benefit broods' (Jensen, 2018). This included a two-child benefit cap, with child benefit and Universal Credit payments made only for the first two children born after 5th April 2017, regardless of the actual size of the family (Department for Work and Pensions & HM Revenue & Customs, 2017). With the wider policy focus placed upon employment and minimising the welfare system, childcare rather than child development became the emphasis of ECEC funding policy (Lewis & West, 2017). The Conservative government introduced the additional 15 hours of funded ECEC that had been pledged as part of the election campaign, taking the total to 30 hours, for children with two working parents (or a working lone parent) only. The policy clearly referred to the additional 15 hours of ECEC as 'childcare', unlike the two-year-old policy which explicitly stated the entitlement to 'education' (Lewis & West, 2017). The role of ECEC as a tool to enable parental employment was confirmed in a 2019 response to a Select Committee report, in which the Department for Education stated "The Government firmly believes that work is the best route out of poverty. The extended entitlement (30 hours) has a part to play in improving social mobility through supporting and incentivising work" (Department for Education, 2019, p. 11).

Tax free childcare was introduced alongside, with the same eligibility criteria as the 30 hours, another tool to encourage parents to gain employment or work more hours. Tax free childcare operates through parents setting up an account via an online government portal, paying money into the account which the government tops up by 20%, then using this account to pay childcare fees. The 30 hours functions slightly differently. Whilst parents must complete the same process of confirming their employment status, income and so on to verify their eligibility, once approved they are then given a code to pass on to their provider. The provider then enters this code into an online system which allows them to be paid for the 30 hours place by the Local Authority. Eligibility for both must be validated every three months, through parents reconfirming their employment status, income and so on. For both schemes, a grace period of between three to six months (depending on when the family become ineligible) is given for families whom report a change in status such as a parent becoming unemployed, allowing the child to receive 30 hours of ECEC, and

the provider to be paid, until the end of that time (Department for Education, 2018). The FEEE policies and their aims are summarised in table 1.

**Table 1: FEEE Policies and Aims**

| | Two-Year-Old Policy | Universal 15 Hours | Extended 30 Hours | Tax-Free Childcare |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Policy** | 15 hours a week (for 38 weeks a year) of funded ECEC. | 15 hours a week (for 38 weeks a year) of funded ECEC. | An additional 15 hours a week of ECEC, totalling 30 hours (for 38 weeks a year) | Government pays 20% of childcare costs up to a maximum of £2,000 a year per child |
| **Eligibility** | Available to families in receipt of Income Support, Universal Credit (with a maximum household income of £15,400), Child and/or Working Tax Credit (with a maximum household income of £16,190) & some other benefits. Looked after or previously looked after children, and those with an Education and Health Care Plan or in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, are also eligible. | Available to all three- and four- year olds. | Available to children with parents (or a parent if a lone parent family) earning at least the equivalent to 16 hours at minimum wage. Neither parent can be earning more than £100,000. | As 30 hours eligibility. |
| **Aims** | To narrow the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers at the end of the reception year. | To promote child development. | To encourage parental, particularly maternal, employment. | As 30 hours. |

It should be noted that, whilst this thesis focuses upon the 'split' between families receiving the 15 universal hours for three- and four-year-olds and those entitled to 30 hours, referring to the latter as more advantaged, I recognise that even families in receipt of the 30 hours could be living in poverty. The eligibility criteria- two working parents earning the equivalent of 16 hours work per week paid at minimum wage- could mean that a family entitled to 30 hours have a joint wage of just £17,339,

considerably below the average of £31,786 (Office for National Statistics, 2023), and a low income for families living in more expensive areas of the country such as London and the South East. As shown in the table above, families with at least one parent earning £100,000 or more are also exempt from the 30 hours (but remain entitled to the universal 15 hours). However, as only 4% of the population earn this figure or more (HM Revenue & Customs, 2023), this is applicable to a small number of families.

The rate of payment for settings from Local Authorities to settings is determined using the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF), a method of calculating payments using a base rate plus an additional needs component to allow settings to provide extra support for children with disabilities, those whom speak English as an additional language and those entitled to free school meals (FSM), a proxy for poverty (Department for Education, 2022a). The payment is also adjusted according to the area in which the setting is situated, to cover any additional outlay related to location such as higher rent, and a funding floor has been established to ensure Local Authorities receive a minimum hourly rate (set up £4.87 for the year 2023/4) (Foster, 2022). Maintained nursery schools receive supplementary funding to support their role as a standalone school with the associated costs of a headteacher and senior leadership team, as well as the higher staffing costs due to employing qualified teachers (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019). The EYNFF was introduced in 2017, alongside the 30 hours and tax free childcare policies, with its aim to ensure that the funding passed from central government to Local Authorities was equitable, and that Local Authorities passed on this money to settings fairly, with parity between funding for all ECEC providers regardless of whether they were a private nursery, in the maintained sector, or a childminder, for example (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, 2017).

The layering of these funding policies, with differing and sometimes conflicting aims, has resulted in a loss of policy coherence (Wincott, 2006). A report titled ‘Tackling Disadvantage in the Early Years’ from the Education Select Committee agreed that “There seems to be little strategic direction to Government policy on early years”

(House of Commons Education Committee, 2019, p. 3). Funded ECEC is no longer merely a means to improve educational outcomes for children, particularly for those living in poverty, or a tool to promote parental, especially maternal, employment. Instead, ECEC needs to promote all of this. Furthermore, ECEC policy now targets the expansion of the ECEC market itself (Lewis & West, 2017), with private nurseries, and large nursery chains in particular, recognised as dominating the market (Simon et al., 2022). As Lewis and West (2017, p. 335) state, there are three "main issues and sources of tensions in the development of ECEC policy: availability, affordability and quality." This 'split' in policy objectives reflects a long-running 'split' within the sector itself.

## Funded ECEC Provision and Inequalities

Childcare had become a key manifesto area during the 2015 General Election, with the Conservative party's pledge of 30 hours gathering attention (Mason, 2015). However, on the same day that the policy pledge was launched, leaders in the sector expressed concerns that the policy would be financially unsustainable given the underfunding of the existing 15 hours policy (Weale, 2015). In the following months, more headlines announced that the scheme was underfunded:

> "David Cameron's free childcare pledge is underfunded, says leading think tank" (The Independent, 3rd October 2015, Jane Merrick)
>
> "David Cameron's free 30-hour childcare plan 'underfunded'" (The Telegraph, 1st June 2015, Emily Gosden and Steven Swinsford)

Underfunding the policy would, the articles explained, ~~would~~ result in a decline in the quality of ECEC being offered by settings as nurseries would not receive adequate funding to cover their costs. Fears abounded that unqualified and inexperienced staff would be employed to reduce outgoings (Johnes & Hutchinson, 2016). Warnings that the policy would also lead to an increase in the cost of childcare outside of the funded hours, and that some settings would be unable to offer the funded hours, were also issued (Early Years Alliance, 2017).

The introduction of the 30 hours policy in September 2017 was accompanied by a significant marketing campaign (Paull & Valle, 2018). However, as the reality of the implications of the underfunding of the policy became apparent to parents, headlines decrying the fact that the hours were not in fact 'free' became more common:

> "Looking forward to those 30 hours of free nursery care? Think again." (The Observer, 27th August 2017, Donna Ferguson)
>
> "Government amends 'misleading' claims for 30 hours free childcare scheme" (The Observer, 3rd December 2017, Donna Ferguson)

Parents became frustrated with providers as the impact of the underfunding of the policy became evident. Many nurseries had introduced additional fees for parents that purportedly paid for consumables such as food, nappies and baby wipes, plus 'additional activities' such as yoga, dance or trips (Department for Education, 2018). As predicted, many increased the hourly cost of provision outside of the 30 hours to make up for the shortfall in funding, with 71% reporting the need to do this in the first year after implementing the policy (National Day Nurseries Association, 2018). The fact that the government funds 30 hours of provision during term time only for 38 weeks a year became apparent, as parents learnt that this equates to just 22 hours a week over 52 weeks of the year. A complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority saw the government forced to make this clearer in marketing (Ferguson, 2017b). Nonetheless, for some parents, these factors meant that nursery fees were *higher* due to the introduction of the 30 hours policy (Maslin, 2017).

Simultaneously, the effect that the policy was having upon settings was beginning to garner interest. The 30 hours policy had been introduced in the same financial year as the National Living Wage and an increase in pension costs, creating a perfect financial storm for all providers, but particularly for private settings which also faced a rise in business rates (National Day Nurseries Association, 2018). The National Day Nurseries Association (2018) reported that, on average, nurseries were losing £1.90 per hour for every three- and four- year-old attending the setting. In the first year following the introduction of the 30 hours policy, there was a 153% increase in the number of nurseries closing, with many citing financial unsustainability because of the 30 hours as the driver (National Day Nurseries Association, 2019a). The closures

were disproportionately located in more deprived areas, where settings would not have been able to collect income through increasing fees for parents and relied more upon government funding (Archer & Merrick, 2020), leading to concerns that the 30 hour policy was further creating inequalities through restricting the provision of places for families on the lowest incomes.

The fear that the funding reforms would disadvantage children from the most economically deprived families was also being discussed. Andreas Schleicher, director of education for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), criticised the 30 hours policy for excluding the children who stood to gain the most (Weale, 2017). A report from the Education Select Committee recognised that “The introduction of tax-free childcare and 30 hours of free childcare has tilted public childcare spending towards better-off families” (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019, p. 15). Evidence provided to the Committee from organisations such as the Sutton Trust and the Education Endowment Foundation argued that the 30 hour policy would widen the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers on entry to school (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019).

The impact of the funding reforms on vulnerable children and families more widely was also being recognised. Discretionary funding of hours for children and families who required additional support had previously been supplied through the Local Authority (Archer & Merrick, 2020), with nursery leaders deciding themselves which children would receive these extra funded hours based upon their local knowledge of the needs of families. This discretionary funding has been lost in many Local Authorities, with the EYNFF, 30 hours or funding cuts from central Government cited as the reason behind this (Crown, 2018). Furthermore, there have been concerns raised that the two-year-old policy, the aim of which is to narrow the attainment gap in the early years and beyond, is at risk due to the 30 hours, with fewer places available for younger children (Akhal, 2019a). The impact of the funding reforms upon inequalities is explored in more depth in chapter four.

Many of the issues above, the financial precarity and increased closures of settings in particular, have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis. Fieldwork for this study took place from February to April 2020, before and during the first lockdown in England, and as settings were beginning to grapple with the practical and financial implications. Due to this time frame, issues surrounding the financial impact of the pandemic were not widely discussed during interviews. Furthermore, the strain that the pandemic placed upon those working in ECEC is recognised as one of the reasons for the current recruitment and retention crisis in the sector, along with low levels of pay, particularly when considered alongside roles which require comparable or lower levels of qualification (Early Years Alliance, 2021b). This means that settings are being forced to pay agency staff, at an increased cost (Early Years Alliance, 2021b). The cost-of-living crisis since the end of 2021 has further deepened the financial difficulties that settings face, with increased energy and food costs. These challenges are framed by wider issues around working in ECEC during a time of increased costs and government cuts- families that need more support because of rising bills and inflation and a lack of support available from other avenues, staff living on low wages and needing to access support such as food banks themselves (Bradbury & Vince, 2023), and funding for ECEC failing to increase in line with high inflation (Drayton & Farquharson, 2022). With more settings closing, providers operating reduced opening hours to manage energy and staffing costs, as well as staffing levels, the number of childcare places, including the number of funded places, available is likely to decrease further (Jarvie, 2023).

## The Discursive ‘Split’

Whilst the impact of this ‘split’ in provision upon the gap in learning and development between disadvantaged children and their peers will be discussed in this thesis, it is not the main focus. Instead, this study seeks to explore how the ‘split’ works discursively, and how children are constructed through the pervading discourses surrounding what it means to be a family in/eligible for the 30 funded hours. The thesis utilises a number of theoretical tools to examine how the funding policies are

enacted in different settings, how power operates through the policies, and how discourses construct children and families.

Policy enactment theory developed by Ball, Braun and Maguire (see Braun et al, 2010; Ball et al, 2011a; Ball et al, 2011b; Ball et al, 2012) is employed to understand how the FEEE policies operate within settings and may be exacerbating a split between children living in poverty and their peers in spatial terms. How providers decide upon how to spread 15 and 30 hours across the week, whether a child's attendance pattern influences which room they are allocated to and whether children and families entitled to 15 and 30 hours are arriving and leaving the setting at the same time will be examined, for example. Policy enactment theory will be used to understand how the contexts of a setting – material (relating to the income plus buildings), situated (the location of the provider, and what this means for the socio-economic status of local families and their ability to pay for ECEC), professional (the qualifications, experience plus values and beliefs of practitioners) and external (level of Local Authority support, for example) (Braun et al, 2011) – influence how such decisions are made. I propose that enactments of the FEEE policies, particularly those which result in a split between 15 and 30 hour funded children, are permissible due to this discursive split and operate to maintain it.

Concepts from Foucauldian theory, particularly his genealogical method (Ball, 2013; Foucault, 1977a) and ideas of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977a), discourses (Foucault, 1977b) and the regime of truth (Foucault, 1980) are utilised to explore how the discursive split between families on low incomes and those not has been constructed and maintained. Through discourses which position families living in poverty as being in deficit, the 'disadvantaged' family and child come to be known to practitioners through discourses which position them as deficient. This study is interested in how the ECEC funding reforms may be working in collaboration with wider family policy, the media and historical discourses around poor families to maintain this 'discourse of derision' (Ball, 1990). Disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977a) is a useful tool to employ here as it encourages questions regarding how power operates through the normalisation, classification and distribution of individuals.

Gore's (1995; 2001) micropractices of power, developed to reveal this disciplinary power within pedagogical practices, are therefore a helpful device in allowing a light to be shone upon exactly how this power manifests itself. These micropractices of power bring together the macro perspective of disciplinary power in the funding policies with the highly localised, setting specific and context dependent enactment of these policies. Through exploring whether and how these micropractices of power (such as surveillance, normalisation, classification, distribution and regulation) are visible across settings, "continuity in the broad 'techniques of power'" (Gore, 1995, p. 182) can be examined. These micropractices of power, along with the Foucauldian concepts introduced above and policy enactment theory, are discussed in more depth in chapter two on Theorising Splits and Divisions.

## Scope of Study and Terminology

It is worth pausing here to mention the limits of this study. As explained above, this thesis examines the discourses of the 'disadvantaged' family and child and how they form a regime of truth (Foucault, 1979), the ways in which power operates through the FEEE policies and how the policies are disciplining families, settings and ECEC staff. In this study, I am asserting that the dominant discourses surrounding children receiving 15 hours of ECEC are that they will underachieve (eg Ofsted, 2014) and that they are cared for and educated inadequately by their parents (Allen, 2011a; Allen & Duncan Smith, 2008) who represent the feckless 'undeserving poor', that is, those who are considered to live in poverty because of their own idleness (Ashurst & Venn, 2014). Conversely, families of children who are entitled to 30 hours are constructed as 'normal'. These dominant discourses, I argue, are constructed in part by policy. The FEEE policies, and the 30 hours policy in particular, form part of an assemblage of policies that seek to 'responsibilise' families, making them accountable for their own successes and failures.

The study does not aim to question the material reality of young children living in poverty and the fact that their circumstances may impact on their educational achievement. As a nursery teacher, I carried out home visits to children living in cold, barely furnished flats with no toys or books in sight, sometimes with parents suffering from mental ill health. Following a visit to one particularly stark home where I met a

mother suffering from severe depression, I called into question this entire study. Surely it was advantageous for this child to attend a warm, comfortable, stimulating nursery with healthy adults to care for her, even if only for the mornings? These doubts eventually helped me to articulate my concerns, which are not with the subject of the policy (I do not wish to challenge the assertion that, for some young children, attending nursery is beneficial), but with the discourses around families living in poverty that the policies help to maintain.

I also acknowledge that the use of the term ‘disadvantaged’ to describe children and families living in poverty can be regarded as derogatory, a label used to denote poor parenting with the blame shifted to individuals and structural inequalities ignored (Clarke, 2007; Jensen, 2018). The term is used here in keeping with current government eligibility criteria for the funded two-year-old provision programme, which is widely termed ‘disadvantaged two-year-old funding’ (eg Gibb et al., 2011; Teager & McBride, 2018). This includes families receiving certain benefits including Universal Credit and Income Support with income less than £16,190 a year, as well as children with an education and health care plan (EHCP), those entitled to Disability Living Allowance, and those in care or who have left care following an adoption or special guardianship (GOV.UK, 2023).

Nonetheless, terms such as ‘deprivation’ and ‘low income’ are used to describe the living conditions of families in poverty. They are not used, however, to signify inadequate parenting. Equally, the terms ’15 hour children’ and ’30 hour children’ have been deployed for the sake of brevity, to avoid overlong descriptions such as ‘Children entitled to 30 hours’. Again, the role that this terminology may play in contributing to the discourses surrounding the separation of children into these two groups is acknowledged, despite the very purpose of this thesis being to challenge this discourse and the binary ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor (Ashurst & Venn, 2014) connotations that, I argue, accompany the labels. Indeed, I recognise that this may be an example of “critical sociology in education … play[ing] its part in a framing of the problem of educational disadvantage that is not so neatly separate from the deficit logic that is antithetical to its project” (Hattam & Smyth, 2015, p. 281). There is a risk that deficit views of those living on low incomes are represented and reproduced in research examining the impact of poverty (Walkerdine, 1997), an unintended consequence of such work, and I regret if this is the case. However,

whilst not wishing to sustain deficit discourses surrounding families in poverty, there is also the need to recognise the material reality of poverty and its impact upon learning and development.

## Research Questions

The experiences discussed above led to the formation of the following research questions:

1. How are the free early education entitlement (FEEE) policies enacted in practice?
2. What are the discourses that permeate the FEEE policies?
3. Do the FEEE policies function as a ‘dividing practice’? If so, how?
4. How do the FEEE policies impact upon the subjectivity of ECEC practitioners?

The research questions were explored by conducting semi-structured interviews with 19 practitioners working in a range of early years settings, allowing for information to be gathered regarding how the FEEE policies function in practice and how they are impacting upon children and practitioners themselves.

## Gaps in Literature and Contribution to Research

It is the effect of the FEEE policies upon practitioners and their subjectivity that is one of the primary gaps in literature to be filled by this research. Previous research has discussed how the low pay in the sector, a long-standing issue but one which has been intensified by the underfunding of the FEEE policies and the pandemic, has resulted in settings employing practitioners without the experience or qualifications needed (Early Years Alliance, 2021a). Other studies have found a pronounced reduction in the proportion of qualified staff working in ECEC settings, particularly in PVIs (CEEDA, 2018) in the year following the introduction of the 30 hours policy (National Day Nurseries Association, 2019a), with the problem exacerbated by the pandemic (Department for Education, 2022b). Elsewhere, much

attention has been paid to the experiences of practitioners during the COVID-19 pandemic, again considering the impact on recruitment and retention (LaValle et al, 2022), stress amongst the workforce (Early Years Alliance, 2021a) and high levels of illness and absence (Department for Education, 2022b). However, research has yet to consider how the funding reforms may be affecting the subjectivity of ECEC practitioners through altering the work they do and the decisions some are required to make surrounding families' access to ECEC. This has guided the formation of the research question 'How do the FEEE policies impact upon the subjectivity of ECEC practitioners?'

Similarly, there is a body of existing evidence regarding how the sector as a whole is responding to the FEEE policies, and the underfunding of the policies in particular. Previous studies have examined whether the policies have been successful in meeting their aims of encouraging ECEC attendance and maternal employment, and increasing family's incomes (Paull & LaValle, 2017). Whether the 30 hours policy in particular is resulting in fewer ECEC places available for disadvantaged two-year-olds (Albakri et al, 2018) and for those entitled to the universal 15 hours (Early Years Alliance, 2018) has also been considered. So too has the impact of the FEEE policies on available places for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (Early Education, 2018) and those who had previously been given additional free hours on a discretionary basis due to the vulnerability of the child or family (Archer & Merrick, 2020). However, there has yet to be a study examining the contexts surrounding how and why settings make decisions to enact the FEEE policies in particular ways, which is what the research question 'How are the free early education entitlement (FEEE) policies enacted in practice?' seeks to explore.

Others studies have considered whether the fact that the most disadvantaged children are entitled to only half the number of funded hours that their more materially fortunate peers are entitled to is widening the attainment gap in the early years (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019; Archer & Merrick, 2020). Instead, the focus of this research is to explore how discourses, particularly those around the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, make divisions between families, those on low incomes and those not, both possible and palatable. The use of

Foucauldian concepts to analyse the discursive importance of these policies is an original contribution. Furthermore, policy enactment theory (see Braun et al 2010; Ball et al 2011a; Ball et al 2011b; Ball et al 2012) is employed here in the early years, with consideration of the alterations that need to be made to the contexts which had originally been developed using ethnographic research from secondary schools.

This study has particular relevance given the current and proposed further expansion of the FEEE policies to include children as young as nine months old. The March 2023 Budget included an announcement that as of April 2024, working parents would be eligible for 15 hours per week of funded ECEC for two-year-olds, with this extended to nine-month-old infants from September 2024 (Foster & Foley, 2024). From September 2025, this will be increased to 30 hours a week for all children under the age of five (ibid). The definition of working parents is to remain the same, those earning at least the equivalent of 16 hours per week at the national minimum wage and no more than £100,000 per year. With such a wide expansion probable, examination of the 'splits' the FEEE policies are contributing to is timely.

## Structure of the Thesis

The exploration of these 'splits' created or exacerbated by the FEEE policies as discussed above, utilising data from interviews with EYFS practitioners are the focus of this thesis. The theoretical tools I employ to frame this analysis, the policy background to the funding of ECEC provision and the methodological considerations are all explored before the analysis of this data is presented. The thesis is structured as follows.

Chapter two, 'Theorising Splits and Divisions', outlines the theoretical framework that guided data analysis and the conceptualisations inherent within this thesis. Here, Foucault's theories of discourse (Foucault, 1977b), disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977a), genealogy and dividing practices (Foucault, 1971) are described, and their relevance to the topic considered. Gore's (1995) analysis of disciplinary power in

education settings, and the resulting ‘micropractices of power’ that the study introduced, are then explored and related to the study, following on from MacNaughton’s (2005) adaptation of these ‘micropractices’ to early childhood studies. Policy enactment theory (eg Ball et al., 2012; Braun et al., 2010, 2011) is also introduced.

In chapter three, ‘The Split Between the Deserving and Undeserving Poor’, the policies which led up to and resulted in this ‘split’ in provision are examined in more detail using a genealogical approach (Foucault, 1971). Here, the concern for the ‘intergenerational cycle of poverty’, the location of poverty within the brain, discourses around children as Human Capital and the use of childcare to promote women’s workforce participation are discussed. These are traced from the 17th Century to the present day, exploring the continuities and breaks in policy.

The research evidence surrounding the impact that the FEEE reforms have had upon children, families and settings to date is then discussed in chapter four, ‘The Effects of the ECEC Funding Reforms in England’. These include the ways in which the underfunding of the policies have led to the permanent closure of some settings, increased competition, privatisation and the loss of discretionary provision for the most vulnerable families. The impact of the policies upon ‘women’s work’- both the work of mothers and those employed as ECEC practitioners- is also examined here.

Chapter five, ‘Methods and Methodology: Collecting Data to Explore the ‘Splits’’ details the methodological issues of the research ~~are explored.~~ My ontological and epistemological positions are made clear, and a reflective and reflexive account of the research is presented. The ethical issues are examined, and the profile of the participants is introduced. The methods, namely semi-structured interviews, and the shift to online and telephone interviews due to the COVID-19 pandemic, are discussed.

The first of the four analysis chapters, chapter six ‘Policy Enactment: Creating and Responding to Splits and Divisions’, explores how the FEEE policies are enacted by different settings, using policy enactment theory (eg Ball et al., 2012; Braun et al., 2010, 2011). Here, the centrality of context of the different settings to their interpretation and implementation of the funding reforms is analysed, and the theory is expanded to be applicable to early years settings, taking into account the relevance of the mixed market. These contexts are considered in relation to the policy actors (Ball et al., 2011a) interpreting them. How settings offer the 30 hours, how spaces for children from some of the most economically deprived households and those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) may be limited due to the 30 hour policy, and how the costs of provision outside of the funded hours has increased for parents in some settings is all discussed within this chapter. The ways in which the ‘split’ between children entitled to 15 and 30 hours are enacted are also considered here, along with discussion of the ‘subsidy maximising behaviours’ that some settings engage in, an original contribution to knowledge in the field.

Chapter seven, ‘Funding Reforms and the Widening of the Split System in ECEC in England’, then considers how the funding policies are exacerbating the ‘split’ between the private and maintained sectors. The role of increased competition, due to the underfunding of the 30 hours policy in particular, is a focus in this chapter, along with what this means for relationships between providers. The increased privatisation of the maintained sector in response to this competition is discussed.

‘Regimes of Truth, Time and Disciplinary Power in ECEC Funding Policies’ are explored in chapter eight, which goes on to explore disciplinary power and regimes of truth within the policies and their enactments. The dominant discourses evident within practitioner interviews are uncovered, before Gore’s (1995) micropractices of power, particularly classification, surveillance, regulation, normalisation and exclusion, are employed to demonstrate how power operates through the funding policies. Distribution, apparent in the separation of children into different spaces according to their eligibility for 30 hours, is explored in particular detail as a ‘dividing practice’ (Foucault, 1971).

The final analysis chapter, ‘ECEC Funding Policies and ‘Split’ Practitioner Subjectivity’, considers the impact of the funding policies upon practitioner subjectivity and professional identity. With the reforms demanding that practitioners engage in competitive practices that, at times, prioritise the financial viability of a setting over best practice or the wellbeing of children, the effect of this upon early years staff with child-centred values is examined.

Chapter ten, ‘Conclusion: The Power of Discourses in Producing ‘Splits’’ draws the thesis to a close by highlighting the original contribution to knowledge this thesis makes in the form of extending policy enactment theory to the early years, conceptualising ‘subsidy maximising behaviours’, and examining the impact of the FEEE policies upon the subjectivities of ECEC practitioners. Here I draw together my findings, returning to the research questions and explaining how they have been answered by the data gathered. Discussion of the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research in this area are also included here.

This thesis continues with chapter two, ‘Theorising Splits and Divisions’, in which the theoretical tools utilised to examine how the splits are produced or exacerbated are explained.

# Chapter 2 – Theorising Splits and Divisions

## Introduction

This study focuses on funding policy reforms in the early years sector in England. To explore and explain the impact these policies are having upon practice in early years settings and practitioners, and to expose the power relations inherent within them, a number of theoretical tools are employed. I begin by exploring postructuralism and, in particular Foucault's concepts of discourse, disciplinary power, biopower and governmentality, connecting these theoretical notions with the aims of the study. In particular, I draw upon Gore's (1995) micropractices of power to elucidate how power functions through and within the funding policies. I go on to introduce policy enactment theory, which considers the centrality of context in how policies are interpreted and assimilated (or not) within educational establishments, with emphasis upon how this theory, based upon empirical research within secondary schools, can be adjusted to accommodate the differing features and values of the early years sector. The feminist methodology employed within this study is also discussed, and the tensions between it and poststructuralism discussed.

## Poststructuralism and Foucault

Poststructuralism, with its challenge of structuralist's beliefs in stable meanings and history, enabled Foucault's rewritings of history (Williams, 2005). Whilst Foucault laid no claim to being a poststructuralist (Ball, 2013a), he is, nonetheless, one of the key philosophers associated with the field of thought (Olssen, 2003; Williams, 2005). Foucault's position as one of the prominent poststructuralist philosophers can be ascertained by comparing his work to the four themes that are prevalent throughout poststructuralist writings:

> 1)the return to thinking historically; 2) the return of thinking about the subject; 3) the emphasis on difference; and 4) the return to thinking philosophically about ethics." (Schrift, 2018, p. 178).

Through the genealogical approach he took to rewriting the history of social phenomena such as sexuality and madness, the focus on the subject and the

differences between and within them (outlined below) and the development of 'the care of the self' as a form of ethics, Foucault's work can be seen as having a clear association with the field of poststructuralism.

His work has been criticised for failing to offer a  single coherent theory, proposing instead an assemblage of ideas (Morris & Patton, 1979). Nonetheless, this multiplicity of Foucault's theories will be employed here as a toolbox, drawn upon to discuss a variety of power relations. A number of Foucault's concepts, such as genealogy, discourses, regime of truth, disciplinary power (including time as a disciplining technique), biopower, and governmentality are relevant to this thesis and are explored below. As Simmons (2018) asserts, the use in utilising a poststructuralist lens to social issues such as those posed by the early years funding reforms is not to resolve problems. Instead, through employing these tools, I aim to highlight the dominant discourses, historical positioning and power relations which have resulted in families, and families living in poverty in particular, being constructed in certain ways. I will begin in the next chapter by employing a Foucauldian genealogy to document the splits and divisions between children living in poverty and those not.

## Foucault's Genealogy

The genealogy, or "history of the present" (Foucault, 1977a), examines how modern institutional practices have emerged from contestations, unions and power in the past (Garland, 2014). Ball (2017) asserts that a Foucauldian genealogy starts with the "perception that something is terribly wrong in the present" whilst Hook (2005, p. 4) refers to it is "a methodology of suspicion and critique, an array of de-familiarising procedures and reconceptualisations." A genealogy looks at the minutiae of everyday life, of the details of day to day experiences and "the knowledge of types, classes, categories and cases" (Ball, 2017). Furthermore, "the point is not to make sense of our history in the present but to make it unacceptable" (Ball, 2013b).

Starting with the assertion that there is something wrong in the present, a genealogy presents not simply a history of the subject, but an exploration of the *emergence* (Foucault, 1980) of discourses, where they become visible and where they

disappear. Jones (2021, p.12) points to the “junctions and accidents” that result in discourses becoming dominant through either power or chance, and genealogy involves locating the junctures at which history changed. What is critical about such an examination of the history of discourses is that, through exposing how they have come into creation, it becomes apparent that they are not ‘truth’, nor are they permanent. As Jones (2021, p. 12) states, “Such a history is for Foucault an ‘effective history’, not because it reveals ‘what really happened’ but because it shows that things are not as necessary as all that and may well have been, and critically therefore could be, different.”

However, that is not to say that a genealogy should present a smooth trajectory. Rather, “Genealogy seeks out discontinuities where others found continuous development” (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983, p. 106). Tamboukou (1999, p. 203) discusses how the delineation of these disruptions “call into question the supposed linear evolution of history.” Through discounting the idea that there is constant ‘progress’ in society (Meadmore et al, 2000), that instead discourses come to dominate through luck, by mistake or following a struggle for influence, the transient and provisional status of these discourses is brought into view, and alternatives appear possible. Links are made between these moments of discontinuity to the problems of the present day in what Foucault termed *descent.* This approach ensures that the genealogy remains focused on its task of presenting other possibilities (Meadmore et al, 2000; Jones, 2021).

Care must also be taken to ensure that a genealogy does not fall into the trap of proposing that the history within it is truth. “To the contrary, a genealogy is an attempt to outline a *possible* account for the origin of a phenomenon: to write one of the – in principle – multitude of narratives of its descent” (Foucault, 1984, p. 63). Indeed, Foucault himself acknowledged “I am fully aware that I have never written anything other than fictions” (Foucault, cited in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 204). Jones (2021, p. 13) warns that such histories “are illusionary grand narratives that are no more than the erroneous imposition and violence of discourse itself. This kind of history is deceitful lending an air of inevitability to the present that is false.”

The use of this and other concepts established within Foucault's theory are well established throughout critical policy sociology studies in education (eg Ball 1993a, Ball 2013, etc) and whilst his abstractions have not permeated research in early years education to the same degree, Glenda MacNaughton's book *Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies* (2005) presents the possibilities of applying Foucauldian theory in this field, outlining the way in which 'developmentally appropriate practice' has been embraced in the sector as a regime of truth, supported by the scientific backdrop of developmental psychology. More recent research in ECEC has also drawn upon Foucault's concepts (eg Cohen, 2008; Maynard, 2007; Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016). To begin this exploration of the ways in which Foucault's theories are relevant to this study, I need to first explain the way in which discourses construct a regime of truth.

## Power, Discourses and the Regime of Truth

As discussed in more detail in chapter three, a number of dominant discourses produce a regime of truth in ECEC today. Foucault utilised the term discourse in a variety of ways (Ball, 2013), yet he most commonly used it to refer to "a body of thinking and writing that used shared knowledge for talking about a topic, shared concepts for understanding it and shared methods for examining it" (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 20). Parker (1989, p. 61) defines the term as a "system of statements which construct an object". Alongside this construction of an object through what is said about it is what is *not* said and what *cannot* be said. As Foucault (1977b, p. 43) explained, discourses consist of what is "already-said", "not-said" and "never-said". It is important to note, however, that the objects Foucault speaks of being constructed in this way were social; madness, homosexuality and so on, rather than material. Discourses are also a social practice, produced within a society and contingent upon practices situated within history.

As Sam (2019) contends, "In addition to focusing on what discourse is, it may serve better to include what discourse does". Discourses make it possible for us to think and speak about a subject in a particular way that is framed by this shared understanding, but also restricts us from thinking beyond that. According to Ball (2013, p. 20), "Discourses produce the objects about which they speak….the

operation of discursive practices is to make it virtually impossible to think outside of them." Therefore, power is inherent within discourses, as discourses come to establish what is considered to be truth and knowledge (Ball, 2013). Some voices are privileged in the production of this truth of what constitutes an object whilst others are ignored or silenced, rendering discourses as representative of those whom can speak with legitimacy. This 'authority of delimitation' (Foucault, 1977b), consideration of who holds the authority to name and define these objects, indicates where power comes from in constructing discourses.

Discourses can combine to form a regime of truth (Foucault, 1980). These regimes of truth are unique to each society (Foucault, 1977c) and portray and maintain an outlook on the world using a common language. As Cohen (2008) propounds, a regime of truth can be formulated from a policy, with people accepting the discourses presented within policy as established facts. The concepts of discourses, dominant discourses and the regime of truth can be utilised here to explore how children and families living in poverty are constructed, including through the funding policies.

## Biopower- Biopolitics, Disciplinary Power and Normalisation

### Biopolitics

Biopower, or regulatory power, explains how these dominant discourses work to shape not only the individual but the *population*. Biopower is separated into two threads; disciplinary power which operates on the individual body (explored in more depth below), and biopolitical power, with its aim to 'optimise' the life of entire populations (Foucault, 1998), "bio-regulation of the state" (Stoler, 1995, p. 82). Biopoltics is concerned with "birthrate, longevity, public health, housing and migration" (Foucault, 1998, p. 140), with control of the population achieved through policy adjustments in these areas. The concept is of use here as the provision of additional government funded childcare only to working families is viewed in this study as biopolitical, a means of encouraging those parents who are not working or who are earning a low income to work or to work more hours to increase their income. The FEEE policies form just one part of an assemblage of policies creating this biopolitical power, with others including welfare reforms which limit the number

of children parents can claim Universal Credit or Child Tax Credit for to two children (Department for Work and Pensions & HM Revenue & Customs, 2021), an attempt to manage what have been discursively constructed as ‘benefit broods’ (Jensen, 2018).

Foucault does not discuss the sexed nature of this subject, for as Gillborn (2010, p. 17) states, “predictably, the women in the cases are singled out for special attention, with open revulsion at a woman ‘churning out’ children following sex with different men.” Whilst much of this focus on women is in the media (with Jensen (2018) detailing the attention placed on mothers in television programmes such as Supernanny and Benefits Street as well as in the tabloid press), it is also evident in policy. Following the 2011 riots in England, a Troubled Families Unit was created with the aim of leading “a programme of targeted intervention for families with multiple problems, including crime, anti-social behaviour, truancy, unemployment, mental health problems and domestic abuse” (Bate & Bellis, 2018, p.3). Despite the terminology of ‘families’ used, the projects funded by the Troubled Families Unit, such as the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP), focused on mothers performing their duties ‘sensitively’ to ensure the optimum brain development of children (Gillies et al, 2017). The role of feminism in the theoretical and methodological framing of this study is explored later in this chapter.

## Disciplinary Power

Whereas biopolitics is concerned with power at the level of the population, disciplinary power focuses on the individual. In ‘Discipline and Punish’ (Foucault, 1977a), Foucault theorises a shift from sovereign power with physical punishment and even torture of the body at the centre, to a new disciplinary power from the 18th Century, with the body and its movements tightly controlled and regulated rather than punished. The aim of disciplinary power was to create docile bodies, bodies that were fully utilised and totally effective in terms of producing the output required, “the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its forces” (Foucault, 1977a, p. 136). Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983, p. 157) discuss the effect of these disciplinary technologies upon the public, stating that

power functions “not by crushing them or lecturing them, but by ‘humble’ procedures of training and distribution”. The techniques employed included a focus on efficiency of movement, on the minutiae of every movement and gesture, but also the ‘modality’:

> It implies an interrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result and it is exercised according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space and movement. These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called ‘disciplines’. (Foucault, 1977a, p. 137)

### *Time as a Disciplining Technology*

One of the disciplining technologies central to disciplinary power, as stated above, is time. The timetable, the tight functioning of the body in accordance with time, and the efficient use of the body and time with none wasted, work in conjunction to produce ‘docile bodies’ that are entirely focused upon a task. Whilst the timetable is a self-explanatory technique, visible in almost all educational settings, the control of the body through the “temporal elaboration of the act …[and] correlation of the body and the gesture” (Foucault, 1977a, p. 152-3) require more explanation. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977a) provides the example of a child being trained in the act of handwriting, with all parts of the body- feet, knees, elbows, hands – positioned in such a manner to make the task as efficient as possible. Foucault (1977a) finally points to the ‘exhaustive use’ of time as a technology to produce docile bodies, the timetable breaking down time into units that can be heavily supervised to ensure they are being utilised effectively, the amalgamation of body and act so intertwined that no time is lost on inefficiency. The utilisation of time as a disciplining technology is of use in this study given that time is at the foundation of the FEEE policies.

Distribution, how people are allocated to spaces, is also central to discipline. Enclosure is necessary to keep homogenous groups together, whilst keeping others out. This is also necessary to continue the most efficient use of the body, free from distraction or disturbance. Early years settings are an example of such enclosure, the collecting in one space of many children of approximately the same age to aid efficiency, the industrialisation of childcare. To promote efficiency, the space must also be functional, that is, suitable for the work and activity that takes place within it.

Within this enclosure there is partitioning, the further separation of individuals to ensure they can be located, for example, the placing of an infant within a baby room at a nursery, or a 40-month-old child in a room dedicated to three- and four- year-olds. Finally, there is a ranking system, ensuring individuals know "the place one occupies in a classification" (Foucault, 1977a, p. 145). As Foucault (1977a, p. 147) states, "Things must be so arranged that those whose parents are neglectful and verminous must be separated from those who are careful and clean." This study seeks to examine whether children are distributed according to their classification as a 15 hour or 30 hour child, the former seen as synonymous with worklessness, an indication of disciplinary power functioning through the funding reforms. Through examining the utilisation of classification, distribution and time in regard to the funding policies in practice, this study seeks to explore how power operates through them.

## Normalisation- and how biopolitics and disciplinary power function together

Biopolitics and disciplinary power are joined by the power of the norm, the standard against which comparisons and judgements are made. Foucault (2020, p. 252) argues that the norm is "the one element that will circulate between the disciplinary and the population alike". Ball (2013) refers to the former as power positioned within practice, and the latter as that inherent within policy. In the context of the FEEE policies, the two function together to formulate what it is to be a 'normal' pre-school aged child, or a 'normal' family with a young child. At the biopolitical level, the funding policies work to encourage parents of young children to work or work more hours through the funding reforms. This bioregulation works not only to encourage parents on lower incomes to seek employment or work more hours but is visible in wider family policies discouraging reproduction amongst those claiming welfare benefits, such as the two-child policy cap discussed above. One of the aims of this study is to uncover how the disciplinary power of the FEEE policies, which operates in practice (Ball, 2013), is visible in early years settings enacting them. Gore's (1993, 1995) micropractices of power are utilised to enable this. They are discussed in more depth next.

## Gore's (1993; 1995) Micropractices of Power

Gore (1993, 1995) proposed eight 'micropractices of power' that seek to explain how disciplinary power operates within education specifically, based upon empirical research of pedagogical practices in a range of settings. These micropractices of power (surveillance, normalisation, exclusion, classification, distribution, individualisation, totalisation and regulation) draw upon Foucault's (1977a) notion of disciplinary power, using empirical data to expose the ways in which power manifests itself through ordinary day-to-day pedagogical practices, unveiling the power relations inherent within the taken for granted in classrooms and other education settings. Whilst Gore's (1993, 1995) study focused on a number of institutions ranging from a high school physical education class to a feminist reading group, MacNaughton (2005) applies Gore's work to an early childhood context, suggesting ways in which the micropractices of power can be used to trouble truths surrounding 'normal' child development. Here I consider how some of Gore's (1993, 1995) micropractices of power could function within early years settings to reveal the power of and within the funding reforms.

### *Classification*

Underpinning the micropractices of power is classification, which involves differentiating between groups or individuals (Gore, 1995; MacNaughton, 2005). Classification is necessary for comparisons or judgements between groups to be made. Gore (1995) provides the example of students failing or passing assessments, with the micropractice of classification producing students who are 'failing' or 'achieving', with both Ball (2013) and Bradbury (2021) expanding on how learners are classified through assessment practices. Through classification, "education's role in sorting, selecting, and excluding certain students is exemplified" (Gore, 1995, p. 175). MacNaughton (2005) provides an early years context, explaining that a practitioner will classify young children according to the stage of development they have reached, making implicit judgements regarding 'typical' or 'delayed' development related to truths surrounding child development. In the context of this

study, I seek to explore if and how children may be classified according to their status as recipients of either 15 hours or 30 hours of government funded provision.

### *Normalisation*

For such judgements and classification to be meaningful, there needs to be a standard which a group or individual is compared to. This is a process of normalisation, or 'normalising judgement' (Foucault, 1977a), defined by Gore (1995, p. 171) as "'invoking, requiring, setting or conforming to a standard - defining the normal". Comparison is fundamental to normalisation, with individuals compared to a minimum standard, an average, or a pinnacle that is aspired to (Foucault, 1977a). This allows for individuals to be rated in reference to the standard, but also in relation to one another. Children are regularly assessed throughout schooling, compared to national, government-prescribed 'age related expectations' but also compared to one another. Presenting an example within the early years context in which developmental norms are an accepted regime of truth, MacNaughton (2005) explains that children will be observed and assessed in relation to these norms, early years practitioners bestowing a normalising judgement regarding whether children are achieving milestones or not. I seek to examine whether 30 hours attendance has become the norm in relation to the ECEC funding policies being examined here, a standard for parents to aspire to if they have yet to achieve it. If eligibility for 30 hours is presented as the norm, then 15 hours attendance becomes the opposite- the abnormal. This is defined by exclusion.

### *Exclusion*

Exclusion defines what is the norm, and what is pathological or anolamous, a deviation from the norm. This is a delineation of what is desirable and what is not within educational settings and practices (Gore, 1995). As Gore (1995) explains, exclusion is rife within education, with some traits and behaviours viewed as preferable, such as concentration and compliance, and others such as

rambunctiousness or extreme introversion deemed unacceptable. Ball (2013, p. 48) discusses exclusion in grammar schools, which admit children based upon their academic performance, where “The school became in many respect an expression of humanity and a demarcation of the limits to humanity- who was not educable, of value, worth investing in”. This is also evident now in the intervention culture in schools, whereby children are removed from some classes to provide additional support or extension of their learning (Bradbury, 2021). I seek to explore whether 30 hours attendance has become viewed as the ‘norm’ in some settings following the funding reforms. Regardless, those children entitled only to the universal 15 hours are, by definition, excluded from the 30 hours.

However, there is the risk of overstating the extent to which children receiving only the universal 15 hours provision for three- and four-year-olds are the subjects of such exclusion here, as many of these children would have been entitled to 15 hours as ‘disadvantaged’ two-year-olds, unlike many children receiving 30 hours (Archer & Merrick, 2020). However, as discussed in chapter four, the two-year-old funding policy positions the children and families as deficient, contributing to the narrative that those who go on to receive the 30 hours are normative. This anomaly exemplifies the tensions within the policy reforms and the contradictions between the policy aims, with the two-year-old policy seeking to close the attainment gap between children living in poverty and their peers and the 30 hours aiming to encourage parental employment.

### *Surveillance*

According to Gore (1995, p. 169) surveillance refers to “supervising, closely observing, watching, threatening to watch or expecting to be watched”. MacNaughton’s (2005) discussion of surveillance in an early years context explores the example of practitioners being observed. She argues that practice will be informed by the beliefs of those observing surrounding what ‘good’ early years practice is. If ‘developmentally appropriate pedagogy’ is deemed ‘good’ practice, this is what staff will enact whilst being observed. MacNaughton (2005, p. 31) comments that, in doing so, “they will bring to life a developmental regime of truth.” As discussed in the previous chapter, the 30 hours policy works through the provision of

a code which verifies a family's entitlement to the provision. I propose that the code, and the application process to obtain the code, works as a form of surveillance. This is explored more in this thesis.

### *Regulation*

The code also alerts settings to which families are entitled to 30 hours and which are not, helping them to establish rules around which children can attend and when. This is a form of regulation, the production of rules that specify restrictions and can include sanctions and rewards (Gore, 1995; MacNaughton, 2005). MacNaughton (2005) provides the example of an early years practitioner deciding on the daily routine of a setting, such as whether and when to include nap times for children, according to developmental truths that include what age children should nap until, and for how long. With the ECEC funding reforms, there may be rules around the times that children attend for, based upon their entitlement. Again, the body is the site of power here, "it bears and manifests the effects of regulating discourses" (Foucault, 1984, p. 82), with children only able to attend at the times they are entitled to according to the funding policies. How this power operates in practice is one of key areas of focus of this research. Regulation is also linked to distribution, how children are organised in the space of the early years setting.

### *Distribution and Individualisation*

The distribution of children – "arranging, isolating, separating, ranking" (Gore, 1995, p. 174)- in space is closely linked to Foucault's (1977a) notion of the body as the site of disciplinary power. Grouping children according to ability (Bradbury et al., 2021) or, in an early years context, depending on their level of development (MacNaughton, 2005), is an example of distribution, with children occupying different spaces in a school or early years setting depending on which group they belong to. Gore (1995) explains that, beyond simply revealing the power inherent within pedagogy and, in this case, policy, it also makes visible the power relations between learner and teacher, with the teacher having the power to place the learner into a specific space. This study seeks to examine whether and how children are

distributed according to the number of funded hours of provision they are entitled to. The very nature of the policy means that children will be distributed in this manner to some extent, with some children in settings for the majority of the day and others attending only for the morning or afternoon, but how this policy is borne out in practice is yet to be examined in research. Foucault (1982) refers to the separation of subjects in this manner as 'dividing practices', one of the methods of subjectification. This is explored in more depth below.

## Subjectification, 'Dividing Practices' and Resistance

## Subjectification

Foucault stated the main objective of his work was to "create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subject" (1982, p. 777), with the creation of subjectivity being the "unifying feature of Foucault's thought, underlying the transitions between his archeological, genealogical, and ethical periods" (Schrift, 2018, p. 181). He argued that subjectivity was created through power relations, with dominant discourses clashing and combining to form subjectivities (Foucault, 1980). Foucault regarded the term 'subject' to have two meanings, relating to being "subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subjects to" (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). This thesis will discuss the subjectification of the early years practitioners who participated in the study, particularly the dividing practices that split practitioners within (Pierlejewski, 2023).

### *Dividing Practices*

It was proposed that this process of subjectivation occurs through three routes- "the transformation of human beings into subjects of knowledge" (Schrift, 2018, p.181), the way in which a person turns themselves into a subject, and 'dividing practices', that is, the way in which people are divided *within* and/or divided *from* one another, with Foucault (1982) giving examples of this in the form of division between the sane from the mad, the sick from the healthy and the poor from the rich. One of the topics

this study seeks to examine is the professional subjectivities created through this operation of ‘dividing practices’, exploring the dominant discourses that form the identity of the ‘good’ professional in the early years and how the FEEE policies may be impacting upon this. Furthermore, the way in which the FEEE policies are a ‘dividing practice’, separating children and families entitled to 30 funded hours from those only eligible for the universal 15, is considered.

### *Practitioner Subjectivities*

Ball and Olmedo (2013) discuss the way in which the professional subjectivities of teachers are formed through requirements relating to qualifications, training and other ‘standards’. Ball (2016, p. 1130) explains the role that staff targets, appraisals and performance related pay play in the construction of professional subjectivity, explaining how “the self and government meet” through these “sites of veridiction…We are incited, hailed, to recognise ourselves in their terms.” This shaping of professional subjectivity through such external forces, including policy, can be viewed as the biopolitical moulding of teaching staff, the forging of identities on a grand scale through national standards and requirements. Archer (2022) argues that early years practitioners in England are discursively positioned through policies pertaining to standards that highlight the role of marketisation and commodification of early education, performativity and accountability, surveillance and responsibilisation. In summary, their professional identities are constructed through neoliberal technologies. Throughout this thesis I will argue that early years professionals are being positioned through the neoliberal ideology which dominates in early childhood education and care (see for example Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017b; Dahlberg et al., 2013; Moss, 2014), and explore the reaction to the FEEE policies, particularly the 30 hours policy which was introduced to encourage mothers back to the workplace and increase the working hours of those already participating in it, of early years practitioners. In particular, I wish to consider the way in which practitioners may resist enacting these policies.

## Resistance

Whilst definitions of resistance are multiple (such as those offered by Duncombe, 2002; Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018; Scott, 1990), Routledge (1997, p. 361) succinctly summarises the expansive range of forms resistance may take, defining it as:

> …any action imbued with intent that attempts to challenge, change or retain 'particular circumstances relating to societal relations, processes and/or institutions. . .[which] imply some form of contestation. . .[and] cannot be separated from practices of domination.

Resistance is often conceived of in terms of "great radical ruptures" (Foucault, 1998, p. 96), or what Michael Apple (2012) described as 'decentred unities'; that is, organised group resistance. However, Foucault also discussed resistance as being located "everywhere in the power network" (1998, p. 95), and his work delineated the "plurality of resistances" (1998, p. 96) with differing levels of urgency, organisation, approach and longevity. Scott's (1985) ethnographic work was one of the first to challenge the notion of resistance as a centralised, united response, instead detailing the multiplicity of ways in which workers in Malaysian paddy fields displayed their discontent through individual acts. Ball (2016, p. 3) presented these as "strategic skirmishes", with ongoing battles. hooks and West (1991) refer to this as 'thin' resistance, as opposed to the systemic and larger scale 'thick' resistance. Archer (2021) went on to detail the multiple and often covert 'micro resistances' that early years professionals enact in their professional lives, disrupting practices around assessment in particular, and making way for their values and beliefs around early childhood instead.

Resistance is intertwined with professionalism in education. Small, local acts of resistance are recognised as being part of the identity of secondary school teachers (Maguire et al, 2015) and primary school teachers (Keddie, 2018; Braun & Maguire, 2020), although it is also recognised that for many teachers, there is an acceptance of their role in the neoliberal education machinery that they have reconciled (Wilkins, 2011). However, it has been argued that the role of resistance in subjectivity is greater for early years practitioners (Bradbury, 2019a) given their commitment to child centred early education and care, which is often seen as being at odds with the accountability demands around the curriculum and assessment. This new focus on performativity has been denoted the 'de-professionalisation' and 're-professionalisation' of early years teachers (Osgood, 2006). For some, this 'doing

without believing' (Braun & Maguire, 2020) results in 'cynical compliance', "tokenistic, half-hearted and tactical adherence of some teachers to the requirements" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 183). Bradbury (2019a) also discusses compliant resistance, engaging in policy because it is believed to be helpful or in line with values provided it is enacted in a particular way. Additionally, the experience of many practitioners means that they have a broader 'field of memory' (Foucault, 1977a), or "access to different discursive archives" as Ball et al (2011a, p. 636) explains. They can remember practices prior to the funding reforms and draw upon these to develop a counter discourse.

Lilja and Vinthagen (2018) presented a typology of resistance, with counter repressive resistance used to denote that which opposes sovereign power, and productive resistance the term used to identify resistance against disciplinary or biopower. It is this latter form of power which "targets the disciplinary institutions and biopower strategies that produce and structure subjectivities, ways of life, desires and bodies, by destabilizing, displacing or replacing such production" (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2018, p. 212). As Mills (2003) states, through choosing whether to enact or resist power, individuals hold considerable power. The formation of subjectivity itself has become the site of resistance (Foucault, 1982), with Ball (2016) speaking of 'refusing neoliberalism' rather than resistance, recognising that there is no longer one dominating power to be resisted. This refusal of neoliberalism encompasses negating our own practices (Ball & Olmedo, 2013) as we construct ourselves in the image of neoliberal technologies such as performance management targets, appraisals, evaluations and so on (Ball, 2016). Given that neoliberalism shapes not just what we do, but who we are, this refusal involves rejecting our subjectivity and becoming something, someone, else (Ball, 2016). Archer (2022) examines how practitioners reject discourses surrounding the 'ideal' early years professional and the neoliberal discourses which have constructed this, outlining the micro resistances that they engage in. What a refusal of neoliberal in the context of the FEEE policies involves, and the role this plays in the formation of practitioner's subjectivities, is one of the lines of inquiry in this study, with the aim of adding to this small body of empirical work surrounding resistance amongst early years practitioners.

## Critical Policy Sociology

This study is influenced by the field of critical policy sociology in education. Ball (1994, p. 2) defines the purpose of critical policy sociology as "to examine the moral order of reform and the relationship of reform to existing patterns of social inequality". The field draws upon education policy analysis studies, divided into three traditions by Dale (1986). Whilst the social administration tradition, focused upon how to "improve administrative practices of the welfare state" (Regmi, 2017, p. 59) presided from the 1940s to 70s, this was replaced in the 1980s by a concern with how policy could respond to some of the social problems of the time, the policy analysis tradition. More recently, policy sociology has evaluated how effective those policies aimed at addressing social problems have been in resolving them, named the social sciences tradition by Dale (1986). The 'critical' in critical policy analysis comes from a rejection that policy analysis is apolitical and impartial (the traditional approach), and focuses instead upon the unequal allocation of power, knowledge and materials (Young, 1999), exploring the "social and political factors that produce dominant educational knowledge and practices, and [asking] …whose interests they serve" (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 9). Doing so can support social justice aims of education (McLaren, 1999) and, in this case, ECEC.

Critical policy sociology centres an evaluation of policy with regards to the impact it has upon the resolution of social issues. This leads me to use Bowe et al's ( 1992) policy cycle to conceptualise the creation of the funding policy reforms, the impact that they are having upon practice, and the second-order effect on issues of inequality. Bowe et al (1992) proposed a three-stage policy cycle (in blue), with the addition of two further stages developed later by Ball (1994; in yellow) to delineate how policy is created, interpreted and implemented, ~~and, later by Ball,~~ to consider the effects of policy upon issues related to social justice.

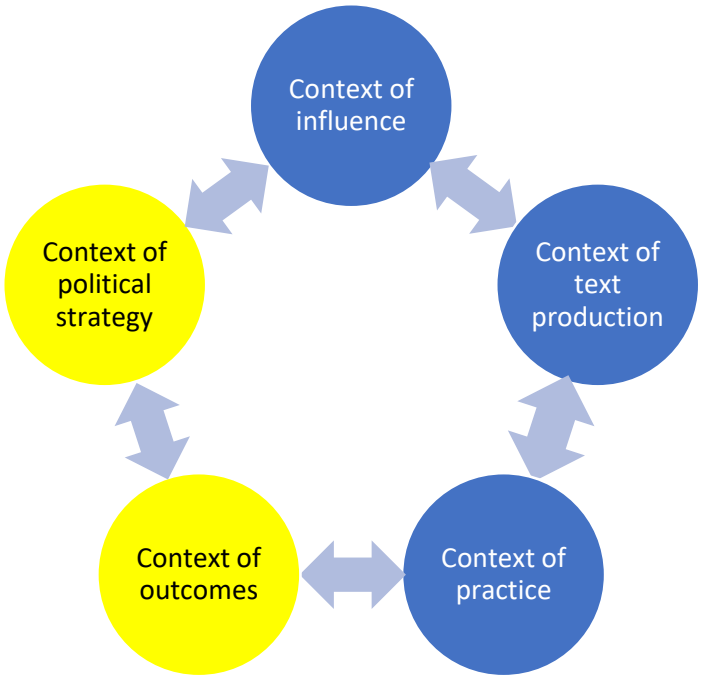



Fig. 1 – the policy cycle, adapted from Bowe et al (1992) and Ball (1994).

The context of influence refers to the compromise and contestations made behind the scenes, the creation of policy discourses that seek to establish, in the context of this study, the purpose of ECEC. It is at this stage that powerful actors within government, but also beyond in lobby groups and the mass media, for example, initiate the process of policy creation. The influence of individuals cannot be underestimated, as discussed in the examination of early intervention and the first 1000 days agenda in chapter three, 'The Split Between the Deserving and Undeserving Poor'. Bowe et al (1992) explain that the context of text production, the inscribing of policy into a written format, is the representation of policy, the policy as presented for acceptance, made to appeal yet often ignorant to demands of day-to-day work within education. Whilst Bowe et al (1992, p. 21) discuss 'text', they acknowledge that policy may take the form of a speech, an official promotional video, a guide to the legal text and so on, with these "secondhand accounts" sometimes the only engagement that practitioners have with the official policy. Yet it is, of course, these practitioners who will be engaging with policy on the ground, in the context of practice. Here, Bowe et al (1992) emphasise that simple implementation is a fallacy, practitioners and settings will enact policies in accordance with their unique background, beliefs and values. This context of practice has been developed into theory surrounding policy enactment and is explored in more depth below. Finally,

Ball (1994) added the context of political strategy. This is the assertion that alternative policies that may be more successful in remedying inequalities should be proposed. Whilst this is not the focus of this thesis, it would be remiss not to conclude with such recommendations, a failing in the task of "unmasking…power for the use of those who suffer it"(Sheridan, 1980, p. 221).

Having considered how a policy can be enacted in multiple ways depending on the background and values of educational institutions and their staff, Ball (1994) added the context of outcomes. This refers to the effect that the policy has upon inequalities, how the first order effects (the way in which the policy has altered practice) have impacted upon issues of social justice and inequity. In this study, I seek to examine how the ECEC funding policy reforms are shifting practice in the early years, and what the effects of a policy which favours more materially advantaged children may be. This is a consideration of the context of outcomes for these policies, an exploration of the first and second order effects. Nonetheless, I accept the assertion that recognising policy effects is a difficult endeavour, given that policies exist as assemblages rather than as discrete entities (Bowe et al, 1992).

Regmi (2017) asserts that critical policy sociology has six assumptions at its foundation- value based study, political study, historical study, multidisciplinary study, assemblage study and discourse study. Critical policy sociology studies assert that policies are bound by values, whether explicit or not (Levinson et al., 2009), and that researcher values and their impact upon their work should be accounted for via reflexivity, as is attempted in chapter five. Such research also recognises the importance of politics, as policies are "'ideological and political artefacts which have been constructed within a particular historical and political context" (Gale, 1999, p. 399). Regmi (2017, p. 68) relates this political aspect of critical policy sociology to the policy cycle (Bowe et al, 1992; Ball, 1994), explaining "if policy analysts ignore the contexts they will have incomplete findings especially on answering questions such as: where did a particular policy idea come from? Whose political interest did it serve? And who were left behind in the process of policy cycle?". Such questions are paramount in uncovering issues of power. In this thesis, the contexts of influence and text production are considered in chapter three whilst the contexts of practice and outcomes will be explored through the data collected in an attempt to explore

the funding reforms in relation to the full policy cycle. As Ball (1993a, p. 10) declares, “The challenge is to relate together analytically the *ad hocery* of the macro with the *ad hocery* of the micro without losing sight of the systematic bases and effects of *ad hoc* social actions.” This is considered in more detail below.

The need to consider the historical context of policies is also recognised by critical policy sociology studies. Ball (1997, p. 266) refers to the importance of “the ways in which policies evolve, change and decay through time and space”, imploring researchers to take seriously the historical background to policies. The exploration of the history of ECEC in England in chapter three, focusing upon the provision of nursery schools for the most deprived children and nursery classes for the majority (eg Palmer, 2011) should provide such a history.

Regmi (2017) asserts that critical policy sociology studies are multidisciplinary, in relation to both the fields that they draw upon, and the methods that they use. This thesis contemplates the relevance of wider family and welfare policies that are interwoven with ECEC and education policies to discursively construct families living in poverty as the ‘undeserving poor’ (see chapter three), drawing upon the historical background discussed above. This is closely linked to Regmi’s (2017) discussion of policy assemblage and the need to recognise that policies do not exist in isolation. Such studies also employ multiple methods, such as the use of participant interviews alongside policy analysis in this study.

As stated above, this thesis is concerned with amalgamating study of the broader issues surrounding the creation of the ECEC funding reforms with that of the effects, the impact they are having on the ground. It is an attempt to “bring together structural, macro-level analysis of education systems and education policies and micro-level investigation, especially that which takes account of people's perceptions and experiences” (Ozga, 1990, p. 359). The compromises, complexities and multiplicity of aims of the ECEC funding reforms in England are discussed in chapter four. With regards to the data collected, I am more concerned with conceptualising the myriad ways in which they policies can be read and interpreted, with how the ECEC funding policies are being enacted in practice and how this enactment is influenced by the context of the settings and practitioners, how the policies construct

and constrain subjectivity and agency, and how discourses are visible through these enactments. As Ball (1993a, p. 12) states “Policies do not normally tell you what to do; they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed. A response must still be put together, constructed in context, off-set against other expectations. All of this involves creative social action not robotic reactivity”. The contexts that shape this response to policy, or policy enactment, is explained now in more depth.

## Policy Enactment

To consider the ways in which power may be operating through funding policies, I need first to explore the ways in which early years settings are enacting the policies. As discussed above, policy implementation is not unambiguous and monolithic. This study draws upon the work of Braun, Ball, and Maguire (Ball et al., 2011b, 2011a, 2012; Braun et al., 2010, 2011) which delineates the centrality of context in determining how schools interpret and implement education policy. It recognises that policy making is not limited to the production of policy texts by government, and involves “negotiation, contestation or struggle between different groups who may lie outside the formal machinery of official policy-making” (Ozga, 2000, p. 113). Their theory of policy enactment corresponds with Ball’s (1993a) notion of policy as text, which suggests that policy documents are created through negotiation and compromise and implemented in a similar flurry of brokering and concessions in localised settings- schools, and in this study, early years settings.

The ‘ad hocery’ that Ball (1993a) refers to in his earlier work is explicated in the theory of policy enactment and the contexts it considers as fundamental. The dimensions that shape policy enactment; the situated, material, professional and external contexts (Ball et al., 2012; Braun et al., 2011), are explored below. Whilst each context is defined individually, I am concerned with the interactions of the contexts, with how an assemblage of factors influence policy enactment, in an attempt to explain some of this ‘ad hocery’ of policy interpretation and implementation in localised settings. Also of concern here are specific differences between secondary schools, site of the original policy enactment research conducted

by Ball, Braun and Maguire, and the early years settings that form the basis of this study. It is this theory I shall draw upon to

### *Situated Context*

The situated aspects of a school include the history, location, and intake, although "Location and intake are of course interrelated" (Braun et al., 2011, p. 588). With regards to the early years funding reforms, this is particularly pertinent. Communities which face the highest levels of material deprivation will have some of the lowest rates of entitlement to 30 hours, as only children with working parents earning the equivalent to 16 hours at minimum wage receive this funded provision**.** ECEC providers located within these areas are therefore likely to have fewer children attending for 30 hours, and hence be less affected by the issues surrounding this policy. Similarly, settings in the wealthiest areas may discover that the income of some parents is above the maximum permitted - £100,000 per annum, per parent – and be relatively unconcerned by the impact of the 30 hours policy. The location and will impact upon how many children are entitled to 15 and 30 hours, whether parents are able to pay for additional hours of childcare beyond the funded hours, how many children are entitled to the funded two-year-old provision and so on, having a profound impact upon the intake of a setting. Private providers are also less likely to set up nurseries in more deprived areas, discouraged by the lack of profitability (Simon et al., 2022). Therefore, the situated context of a setting is interwoven with material factors.

### *Material Context*

Whilst the budget of a setting is an obvious example of its material context, this also includes the building and infrastructure, staffing, and available technology (Braun et al, 2011). The financial health of a setting, and where the majority of its funding comes from, may have a considerable impact upon how it enacts the funding policies, particularly the 30 hours policy. Typically, maintained nursery schools and nursery classes have obtained most of their funding through the government, whilst settings in the private and independent sectors have relied on parents paying fees

(eg Penn, 2013). In another example of the interaction between the material and situated contexts, those in the PVI sector could stand to have less money coming in if the government funding rates are below those they charged to parents.

### *Professional Context*

The professional context involves "examining teachers' values and commitments and experiences and policy management within schools" (Braun et al, 2011, p, 591). This includes ascertaining the depth of their involvement in enacting policy. The experience of practitioners is pertinent here, as it influences the extent to which they become embroiled in enacting policy. Ball et al (2011a) identified different policy actors in schools, ranging from receivers (typically early career teachers or support staff seeking to manage their work through the guidance from policy), to enthusiasts who advocate for policy, modelling its enactment and recruiting others. Table 2 below summarises the various policy actors that can be found within schools and the work that they conduct in enacting policy.

**Table 2: Policy actors** (Ball et al, 2011a).

| **Policy Actors** | **Policy Work** |
|---|---|
| Narrators | Headteachers, managers and other leaders responsible for interpreting and deciding exactly how the policy will be implemented within their setting. |
| Entrepreneurs | Advocates who champion policy and facilitate its enactment. |
| Outsiders | Those who work outside of the setting but are still influential in enacting policy – eg LA advisors, trainers and so on. |
| Transactors | Accountability of policy effectiveness, tracking and monitoring its implementation and impact. |
| Enthusiasts | Exemplification of policy, model to others. |
| Translators | Translating government policy into workable local policy for the setting. |
| Critics | Those who voice opposition to policy and maintain narratives of previous policies and the importance of child-centred policy and pedagogy. |
| Receivers | Junior and newly qualified practitioners managing new roles for whom consideration of policy is hyper localised |

| | |
|---|---|
| | and considered only where it is directly relevant to their work. |

Again, the focus upon early years practitioners rather than primary teachers is relevant, as professional identity differs between the two groups. Bradbury (2019a) argues that resistance to what is viewed as developmentally inappropriate policy forms part of the identity of the 'good' early years practitioner. Archer (2021, p. 6) discovered that "micro-resistances are multiple and often undertaken in response to macro-level policy demands and meso-level policy implementation" by early years practitioners, who carry out "inconspicuous forms of resistance". Therefore, the role of policy critic, seen rarely within Ball et al's (2011a) study in secondary schools, may be more prevalent within the early years sector and could affect how the funding reforms are enacted in early years settings.

### *External Context*

Finally, the external factors that influence policy enactment include relationships with other settings and schools, Ofsted rating, wider legal requirements, and level of support from the Local Authority or other networks. The Statutory Framework for the EYFS (Department for Education, 2021; 2023a; 2023b) discussed above emphasises the need to consider the funding reforms amidst policy assemblages, rather than as a distinct, standalone entity. The mixed market in ECEC in England means that, again, the sector faces challenges that differ to those in 5-18 education. The majority of schools in England are either maintained, with support from the Local Authority, or part of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) overseeing numerous schools that can collaborate, with only 1,322 of the 24,454 schools being stand-alone academies (Department for Education, 2022d; National Statistics, 2022a) the composition of the early years is, as mentioned above, more diverse. Of particular interest in this study are the interactions between the contexts that generate a particular form of enactment of the early years funding policies, and the way in which some factors are superseded by other dimensions- for example, how the material position of a school may dominate decision making and override concerns that arise due to professional context.

Given the complex relationships between the theories utilised within this study, a visual presentation of how the theories are connected and interwoven is presented in figure 2.

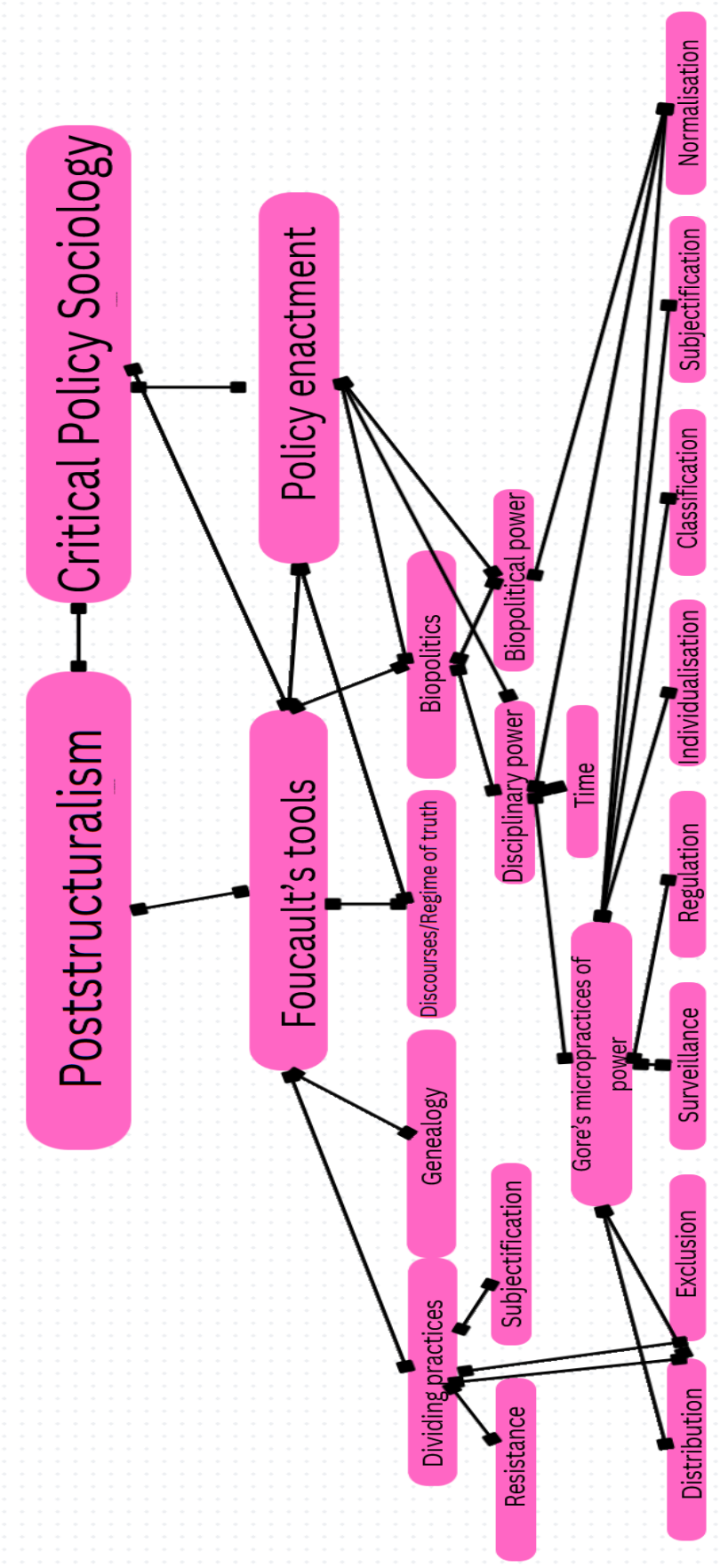



Fig. 2 – Relationships between theories

## Feminism

Feminism is also important to this thesis, and particularly to my own subjectivity and researcher positionality (this is discussed in more depth in chapter five, 'Methods and Methodology: Collecting data to explore the 'splits''). However, defining feminism is a challenging endeavour. Historical definitions have emphasised feminism as the struggle for equal political, economic and legal rights, but in doing so have maintained the position of men as the norm (Offen, 1998), or 'the One', whilst othering women (Beauvoir, 2015). Furthermore, whilst feminists from disparate groups have sometimes fought for the same outcomes, such as votes for women, their reasoning has sometimes been incompatible. For example, Cameron (2018) explains how some feminists argued that women's similarity to men meant they should be afforded the same rights, whilst others simultaneously pointed out how the differences between the two sexes were so significant that women's issues could not be sufficiently represented by men. Therefore, Cameron (2018, p. 9) rejects offering a definition of feminism and instead offers two statements which, she posits, are central to it: "1. That women currently occupy a subordinate position in society; that they suffer certain injustices and systemic disadvantages because they are women. 2. That the subordination of women is neither inevitable nor desirable: it can and should be changed through political action". The definition of feminism utilised in this study is based upon these assertions.

Furthermore, this thesis encompasses an intersectional view of feminism (Crenshaw, 1989), the belief that whilst women inhabit a subordinate position in society, the position of women is not equal due to further inequalities because of racism and classism, also discussed by Audre Lorde in the 1970s and 80s (eg Lorde, 1984). Intersectional feminism works partially to dispel the 'Othering' of women, through emphasising the heterogenous experiences of women and the impact that interacting factors such as class, race, disabilities and religion have upon women's lives. hooks (1984, p. 19) also explains how intersectionality affects the goals of feminists, meaning that equality with men should not be the aim:

> Women in lower-class and poor groups, particularly those who are non-white, would not have defined women's liberation as women gaining social equality with men… Knowing that men in their groups do not have social, political, and economic power, they would not deem it liberatory to share their social status.

Instead, hooks (ibid) explained the need for the removal of domination and subjugation in all relationships, a view considered indicative of radical feminism.

However, it should be recognised that whilst some women are disadvantaged by the associations of different aspects of their identity, others gained from it, particularly more economically advantaged white women. During the second wave of feminism in the 1960s, women's economic freedom through their participation in the workforce was emphasised (Beauvoir, 2015), and the need for child care to facilitate that was one of the four demands made at the first Women's Liberation Conference in 1970 (Randall, 1996). hooks (2014, p. 4) explains that ~~upon,~~ "Most women, especially privileged white women, ceased even to consider revolutionary feminist visions, once they began to gain economic power within the existing social structure". Upon gaining from the aims of feminism, many women abandoned them.

The failure of feminism to continue its focus on childcare in the UK is a long standing and complex issue (Randall, 1996) which was reignited during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the demands on women in particular to care for children whilst working came to the fore (Sevilla et al., 2020; Sevilla & Smith, 2020). One blog piece written by June O'Sullivan, CEO of the London Early Years Foundation (LEYF) social enterprise nursery chain, asked at the time 'Have feminists failed childcare?' (O'Sullivan, 2021), questioning not only why available, affordable, high quality education and childcare is not central to the aims of third wave feminism, but also why low pay and low status has become accepted for staff working in the sector, 97% of whom are women (Haux et al., 2022).

However, these questions highlight the contradictions inherent within feminism and childcare- that, in England currently, the need for affordable childcare for some women is at odds with the need for higher pay for those working in the sector. This demonstrates the point that Cameron (2018, p. 14) makes, regarding how "Different

systems of dominance and subordination, such as sexism and racism, intersect to produce different outcomes for different groups of women, and not infrequently conflicts of interest between them." There is a clear conflict of interest between the women using childcare and those providing it that highlights the importance of intersectionality and the need to explore issues around childcare from a feminist position.

## Theoretical Tools: Resolving Tensions

These theoretical tools, whilst possibly appearing disparate and disconnected, work together to answer the research questions in this study. Whilst policy enactment theory (Ball et al., 2011b, 2011a, 2012; Braun et al., 2010, 2011) will be utilised to explore why the FEEE policies have been implemented in particular ways in different settings according to context, Foucault's theories will be employed to examine the ways in which power operates through the policies. Furthermore, it is impossible to ignore the relationship between power and policy, with power here referring to a productive form rather than a dominant, top-down concept. The way in which policies are enacted is a result of power relations, and, as is explored in the next chapter and throughout this thesis, power and discourses are inherent within policy, as recognised by the original work on policy enactment (Ball et al, 2012). Foucauldian theory has been used alongside policy enactment theory in previous studies (eg Ball et al, 2012).

The tensions between the theories of Foucault and feminist causes are more difficult to reconcile. Bartky (2020) criticises Foucault's disregard of feminism and treatment of 'the body' as a whole, with no concern regarding whether the body is male or female. She also points to Foucault's notion of power being situated everywhere with a move away from sovereign power and domination, which refutes one of feminisms regarding women as being subjugated by the patriarchy (Bartky, 2020). Furthermore, whilst Foucault proposes that subjectivity is produced by social factors, for feminists this rejects the material reality that results in women's domination. Perhaps most importantly for feminists, however, is the lack of concern for emancipation within Foucault's theory, which instead works to "capture a sense of something significant

about contemporary society that they are incapable of explicating" (Smith, 1990, p. 70).

Nonetheless, Quinby and Diamond (1988) highlighted four areas in which feminist and Foucauldian theory converge: identification of the body as the site of power, an emphasis on discourse, the idea of power being locally situated and criticism from both of the normalisation of and predilection for the masculine. McNay (1992) also points to Foucault's work on sexuality and discipline as being aligned with feminism, and goes on to discuss how Foucault's later works, particularly 'The Care of the Self' (Foucault, 1990) and 'The Use of Pleasure' (Foucault, 1984b), in which the limitations of notions of the 'docile body' are recognised, are more in keeping with ideas of agency and emancipation central to feminism.

The following chapter, 'The Split Between the Deserving and Undeserving Poor', presents a genealogy tracking this division from the seventeenth century to the present with a particular focus on how children, parents and families are framed as functioning or defective. The discourses that permeate this split, such as the 'intergenerational cycle of poverty' and notions of the brain as a site for the causes of poverty, are explored in depth.

# Chapter 3 – The Discursive Split Between the Deserving and Undeserving Poor

The FEEE policies introduced in chapter one, in which children from the most disadvantaged homes are provided with less support in the form of fewer funded ECEC hours as three- and four- year-olds, have not emerged from a vacuum. This chapter uses a genealogical approach (Foucault, 1977a) to chart the continuities – and ruptures- in policy approaches to poor families from the 17th Century to the present. A number of discourses can be tracked throughout this period. These include a concern for the "intergenerational transmission of disadvantage" (Allen & Duncan Smith, 2008, p. 9) and how this has been used as justification for the intervention into the lives of families living in poverty. They include a focus on the brain as the site of the causes (and effects) of poverty. The liberal, and later neoliberal, concern for children as Human Capital, from the industrial revolution to the present, is also considered here. So too is the use of childcare to promote women's participation in the workforce, from the nursery schools that allowed women to work in factories during World War II, to the 30 hours policy today. Within these discourses, the 'splits' between the poorest families, marked out as 'other', and the rest of society, positioned as the norm, is documented.

## From 'Deserving' and 'Undeserving' to 'Eligible' and 'Ineligible': A Genealogy of 'Splits' and Families Living in Poverty

### The 17th and 18th Century: The Beginning of the 'Deserving' and 'Undeserving' Poor

Whilst the current interest in ECEC is fuelled by neoliberal discourses around parental employment and Human Capital Theory, unease regarding the biologising and hereditary nature of poverty can be traced back many centuries. Josiah Child, MP, wrote in 1670, "The Children of our poor bred up in Beggary and Laziness are by their idle habits contracted in their Youth, rendered for ever indisposed to Labour and serve only to stock the Kingdom with Thieves and Beggars" (Child, 1670, p.1).

The view that children of the poor would grow up to be poor and/or criminals abounded. Following the introduction of the Workhouse Test Act in 1723, which forced anyone applying for poor relief (food and clothing for the destitute) to enter a workhouse, the number of workhouses in England increased by around 600 (Tomkins, 2006). The Gilbert Act of 1782 attempted to reverse this brutal condition through the establishment of 'poor houses' for those too elderly, infirm or sick to work, whilst those who were physically able to work were forced into employment (Tomkins, 2006). This was the beginning of the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor- those genuinely unable to work, and those too idle or feckless to do so. Children were deemed 'deserving' as it was recognised that they could not be held responsible for their situation (Bradshaw, 2007).

A prevalent theme throughout the centuries is of philanthropic endeavours to 'save' children born into poverty, often with these solutions to the problem of poor children exploited in such a way as to promote economic growth of the country as a whole, of individuals, or both. The work of philanthropist Jonas Hanway is such an example. Hanway was instrumental in passing the 1762 'Act for the keeping regular, uniform and annual registers, of all Parish Poor Infants under a certain age' (Hanway, 1762), which required workhouse masters to record the details of all children under the age of four years whom resided in their workhouse. Alongside the child's name, the child was categorised with a letter to denote whether the child was a foundling (F), bastard (B) or casual (C) (outside of the parish in which they usually resided). This operated as a form of classification (Gore, 1995) of poor children, with 'bastard' children feared whilst 'foundlings', usually thought to be legitimate, were pitied (Zunshine, 2005).

A bread shortage in 1795-6 prompted Sir Frederic Eden to examine the lives of paupers. Presenting his findings in three volumes titled 'The State of the Poor', Eden's study lists those in workhouses across several parishes, exemplifying the importance of statistics at the time (Eden, 1797). Eden divides the poor into "the really deserving objects of relief, who begs from necessity; and the idle impostor, who makes begging a trade" (Eden, 1797). The parish poor registers included categorise the poor further, into 'idiot', 'bastard', 'lunatic', 'of a feeble make' and so

on, the poor are othered. The body of the poor comes under intense scrutiny, with Eden detailing the diet in workhouses across parishes that produces docile bodies (Foucault, 1977a) provided with enough fuel to work but not so much that there is any energy left for protest (Eden, 1797). An entire chapter in the first volume is devoted to the "diet, dress, fuel and habitation of the Labouring Classes" (Eden, 1797). Eden suggests that the poor would do well to be more thoughtful with their diet, and that their low income could be stretched to purchase a wider range of foods, in an example of the way in which the undeserving poor were blamed for their circumstances. Eden writes of the important of keeping records that classify the poor, "distinguishing therein their age, ability of body, disposition of mind, trade and other employment, and what they are most apt and fit for" (Eden, 1797). This classification determined the type of work that those in the workhouse performed and how they were distributed, demonstrating how the disciplining techniques (Foucault, 1977a) operated in conjunction with one another.

The 'disposition of the mind' was of particular concern, for there was a widely held belief that 'idiocy' was a condition passed down from one generation to the next, and that the behaviours of the poor were due to the structure of the brain rather than the structure of society. Eden (1797) goes on to talk of the importance of shaping the young, malleable child into a form more fitting with that required in society, stating that workhouses should "mould the infant reason into such habits of thinking and acting, as may best promote, not only the weal of each individual, but the general welfare". Furthermore, "great efforts were made to care for the children in the workhouse, to ensure they did not repeat the mistakes of their parents" (Fowler, 2014, p. 1). Early intervention, it seems, was a concern even in the eighteenth century. What's more, the motivation for 'saving' poor children- to establish a productive future workforce- is explicit in Eden's (Eden, 1797) report, as he writes "in rescuing the *Infant Poor* [original emphasis] from beganny and want, the sources of useful population are augmented". However, Eden concedes, in a statement strikingly predictive of many uttered by twenty-first century politicians, "No government has, or pretends to have, any such absolute right to control a parent on the instruction of his child" (Eden, 1797), acknowledging the difficulty that the state has over controlling the private sphere of life.

The following year, in 1798, Thomas Malthus published ‘An Essay on the Principle of Population’. The foundation of Malthus’ argument was that growth in food production could not keep pace with population growth, and as a result, poverty was an inescapable reality unless the birth rate was ‘managed’ (Malthus, 1798/1998). Malthus himself declared that he felt sympathetic towards the poor (Malthus, 1817) yet was in favour of abolishing relief for the poor, arguing that the poor should be able to settle wherever they could find work, and that the poor should be free of the oppression from the overseers. He also proposed that eradicating such support would increase the amount of food available, as that consumed in workhouses “diminishes the shares that would otherwise belong to more industrious and more worthy members” (Malthus, 1798/1998, p. 27), in another clear distinction between ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor. Furthermore, without the poor laws, Malthus claimed, couples would ensure that children were born into a financially stable family. Malthus’ theories are also associated with the birth of the eugenics movement, proposed by some to reduce the working classes in a society (Schlosser, 2009). This is unsurprising, given that Malthus (1798/1998, p. 53) stated:

> by an attention to breed, a certain degree of improvement, similar to that among animals, might take place among men. Whether intellect could be communicated may be a matter of doubt: but size, strength, beauty, complexion, and perhaps even longevity are in a degree transmissible.

Malthus’ “attention to breed” and discussion of the embodiment and biology of poverty is a biopolitical statement, discussion of how, through policy, the population could be shaped and controlled (Foucault, 1998).

## The 19th Century: The continuation of the split between the deserving and undeserving poor in workhouses during the Industrial Revolution

By the turn of the eighteenth century, societal concern regarding the lives of the poor, a perceived crisis of morals and, in particular, the high levels of criminal, delinquent children had grown (Ashurst & Venn, 2014), with the uprising of the poor during the French Revolution unsettling the British middle and upper classes who relied on the poor for household labour (Thompson, 2013). This anxiety was felt by a number of writers and scholars at the time, whose works and theories emphasised

the economic importance of steering children away from crime and into the folds of a productive life of employment.

Malthus' thesis, the prevailing view on poverty at the time, was arraigned by Robert Owen's 1812 'Essays on the Formation of Character' (Owen, 1840). Owen contended that it was possible for anyone, regardless of income or background, to be educated so as to become gainfully employed. He also recognised the role of the powerful elite in creating conditions that led to extreme poverty, and that it was poverty that led the poor to immoral, and often criminal, actions, arguing that much of society were "ignorant of the true causes of bodily and mental character" (Owen, 1840). Owen propounded that the education of poor children would result in improved conditions not only for the children themselves, but for the whole of society thanks to the associated reduction in crime. The view that poverty is embodied and that children's minds were plastic and mouldable at a young age is evident in Owen's (1840) essay:

> …train children from the earliest infancy in good habits of every description…They will also ensure, with the fewest possible exceptions, the health, strength and vigour of body; for the happiness of man can be erected only on the foundations of health of body and peace of mind.

Owen demonstrated commitment to his theory by opening a school for children of his mill workers in 1816 (Bradburn, 1966). The school consisted of a large garden, in which the children were to play for the majority of the day, with a large hall that provided shelter from inclement weather, and provided space for teaching and the cultural activities that children participated in (Lambert, 2011). Music, dancing and similar pursuits were important to Owen and the children would regularly perform, demonstrating that the poor "had the same bodies and literally could dance the same dances" (Lambert, 2011), rejecting previous claims surrounding the embodiment of poverty.

Of course, as a cotton mill owner, Owen had a vested interest in 'training' children to become strong yet docile bodies, capable of work and content with their circumstance thus reducing the chance of unrest. Indeed, at this time, the concern for pauper children had largely been superseded by interest in their capacity to fulfil the labour requirements of the industrial revolution (Tuttle, 2021). Some visitors to

the mill and school were critical of the lack of autonomy of the children and workers, and perceived the dances and happy nature of the children as performative. One visitor, William M'Gavin (1824) wrote to Owen stating:

> …you consider mankind as mere machines, or what you call "passive compounds", possessing no more of an immortal spirit than your great water-wheel; and you think you can regulate their movements as easily as you can do those of your great and small gear.

M'Gavin's description of Owen's 'passive compounds' bears a striking resemblance to Foucault's (1977a) illustration of 'docile bodies', with limbs positioned in a manner that extricates work in the most efficient way possible.

1816 also saw Owen provide evidence at a parliamentary select committee concerning the lives of children from poor families, the 'Select Committee on the State of Children Employed in the Manufactories in the UK'. In the same year, the 'Committee Investigating the Causes for the Alarming Increase of Juvenile Delinquency in the Metropolis' sat. The latter cites "The improper conduct of parents" as the first 'cause' of the increase in gangs of young boys on London's streets (Committee for Investigating the Causes of the Alarming Increase of Juvenile Delinquency in the Metropolis, 1816). The Committee concluded that unemployment, drunkenness and marriages with no shared wealth were behind the neglect of some pauper children. This view was disputed by several cotton mill owners who provided evidence, with most stating that parents working in mills provided suitable care for their children, although one dissenting voice, Josiah Wedgwood, proclaimed that much of the children's wages were spent by parents on alcohol (Select Committee on State of Children employed in Manufactories of United Kingdom: Minutes of Evidence, 1816). The state of children's minds was again of concern, with Robert Owen arguing that "their growth and their minds were materially injured by being employed at those ages within the cotton mills". Employing children only once they reached ten years of age, the time preceding that spent in education, and limiting workdays to ten hours would bring about "a very considerable improvement to the instruction of the rising generation; and a very considerable diminution in the poor rates" according to Owen (Select Committee on State of Children employed in

Manufactories of United Kingdom: Minutes of Evidence, 1816). Here, the development of children was considered alongside their economic potential.

Thomas Malthus produced a second volume of his 'Essay on the Principle of Population' in 1826, restating his theory that the population needed to be managed to ensure that there was sufficient food, and affixing a claim that poverty was due to the 'improvidence' of the poor, who failed to save in times of plenty (Malthus, 1826). Malthus' theories which individualised poverty were profoundly influential on the amendment of the poor laws in 1834. The view that poverty was a result of circumstance and, as such, the poor should receive assistance shifted with the introduction of the 1834 Poor Law Act (Senior, 1834), popularly known as the New Poor Law (Williams, 2020) which introduced much harsher conditions in workhouses. It was thought that such severity would deter all but those who had no absolutely no choice- the elderly, disabled and ill, the 'deserving poor'- from entering workhouses (Fowler, 2014). The law further categorised inmates of workhouses. Several categories existed, with inmates split according to sex and age. Children aged seven years and above slept away from their parents and, as categories of inmate were assigned separate areas of the workhouse, had infrequent contact with parents, although they were permitted one 'interview' per day (Fowler, 2014). This categorisation and distribution, the positioning of paupers into separate spaces according to their category, again denotes disciplinary power, with the segregation of children from their parents a further attempt to remove them from their influence which, it was believed, would result in a lifetime of poverty and criminality (Ashurst & Venn, 2014).

The Act disproportionately affected unwed women and their children. Previously, women had been able to apply for an affiliation order which held absent fathers financially responsible for their offspring. The New Poor Law made obtaining such an order much more difficult, and essentially meant that mothers had to singlehandedly provide for their child, often entering a workhouse to do so (Sheetz-Nguyen, 2012). It was women's sexual behaviours that were deemed irresponsible, and the burden of childcare was placed firmly with women. Biopolitical aims of reducing the population were focused solely on controlling women's bodies. With men's role in illegitimacy

ignored and unpunished, the number of children born to unmarried mothers increased (Henriques, 1979), along with the number of children abandoned or victim of infanticide (Sheetz-Nguyen, 2012).

Responsibilisation and the individualisation of poverty that the 1834 Poor Laws emphasised saw the beginning of two decades in which the discourse around pauper children shifted. Ashurst and Venn (2014, p. 70) describe how “This was a period in which the construction of poor children as ‘other’ becomes firmly embedded within an emerging discourse which identified these children as in need of control, containment or protection”. Poor children were removed from view through policies which saw those convicted of crime transported to Canada, Australia and South Africa to provide agricultural and domestic labour. As criminality was believed to be an inherited disposition, education was disregarded as a solution for it would only result in more sophisticated crimes bring committed.

This assumption was challenged by Mary Carpenter, daughter of a Unitarian minister and schoolmaster, who opened a ragged school in Bristol in 1846 having observed destitution following the introduction of the 1834 Poor Laws (Ashurst & Venn, 2014). Carpenter’s ragged school drew praise from an HMI inspector, whom noted that he was unaware of “any other ragged school where there was so large an amount of intellect and well-directed effort exerted to raise the school, to train up self-acting beings” (Ashurst & Venn, 2014). Despite establishing such a successful school, Carpenter was cognisant of its limitations and, having witnessed the majority of her pupils jailed, embarked upon a campaign which involved writing books, convening and presenting at conferences and proffering evidence at Select Committees, attesting that impoverished children needed education rather than punishment (Gehring & Bowers, 2003).

Carpenter also argued that various categories of school were required to provide for different ‘classes’ of children. Ragged schools would provide for those children unable to attend schools due to poverty and lack of appropriate clothing. Carpenter called for “The establishment of *Industrial Schools*, with food given, for those children, who, through extreme poverty or vice, subject themselves to the interference of the police, for their vagrant and pilfering habits” (Carpenter, 1851).

Such children were labelled as the ‘perishing’ classes. Children of the ‘dangerous classes’, those whom had already been punished for unlawful activity, who believed crime was more profitable than employment were to attend a third type of school, a reformatory. Reformatory schools were essentially juvenile detention centres, but Carpenter emphasised that, if children were to be rehabilitated, education must be prioritised. This categorisation of children and subsequent filtration into different institutions was a form of ‘dividing practice’, with children divided through classification according to their background, and distribution into separate spaces as dictated by category (Foucault, 1977a).

Later in the century, the British child rescue movement began, fuelled by evangelical Christians and private charities who saw an opportunity to profiteer through fundraising for impoverished children (Gillies & Edwards, 2017). The first Barnado’s home, a house for ‘waifs and strays’ in London’s East End, notorious for poverty and crime at the time, was established by Thomas Barnado in 1870 (Murdoch, 2006). The ‘before and after’ images of children created by Barnado and his team were key in creating representations both of poor children, and how they could be ‘saved’ from poverty and the associated criminality and degeneracy. The appearance of children as they entered the home would be purposefully exaggerated to create a narrative of poverty and neglectful or abusive parenting, with children photographed barefoot and with tangled hair, having had dirt applied to their faces and their clothing torn (Murdoch, 2006). The ‘after’ photos showed clean, well dressed, happy children, typically engaged in cleaning or some other industrious activity to demonstrate their newfound worth to society (Murdoch, 2006). These images were successful not only in raising funds for the Barnado’s charity, but for maintaining ideas of poverty and demonstrating how children could be ‘saved’ by the middle classes engaged in the rescue movement (the origins of both Action for Children and The Children’s Society are also based on this movement) (Gillies & Edwards, 2017).

## The Nursery School Movement of the Early 20th Century

At the beginning of the 20th Century, nursery schools were introduced in some of the most deprived areas of London. Following the success of night camps which provided nutritious food, washing facilities and a bed for girls overnight, Rachel McMillan founded an open air nursery school in an impoverished area of Deptford in 1914 (Liebovich, 2018), almost 100 years after the first nursery school was established by Robert Owen. Rachel, along with her sister Margaret, held socialist views and both were committed to genuinely improving conditions for the children living in the slums. They believed, quite controversially at the time, that as children were too young for employment, it was impossible for them to take responsibility for their circumstances and accordingly all children belonged to the category of 'deserving poor' (Liebovich, 2018). Equally unusually, Margaret McMillan (her sister, who died in 1917) believed that most parents wanted the best for their children, eschewing the commonly held view that poor parents were incapable of such ambition.

Nonetheless, themes regarding the embodiment of poverty, of 'training' the mind and of an early intervention agenda were visible within the McMillan's work. Having seen a younger sibling of one of the original night camp attendees die, Margaret took an interventionist stance and decreed that the nursery school must be open to children from the age of two years to prevent ill health (Jarvis & Liebovich, 2015). In keeping with this focus on health, upon arriving at the nursery in the morning children would immediately be bathed, a symbol of the nursery school removing the dirt, bacteria and general lack of hygiene associated with poverty (Liebovich, 2018). Furthermore, in keeping with Eden's (1798/1998) assertion that the young, malleable mind could be moulded to produce effective future workers:

> The Manchester Guardian reported on 22 May 1930: Margaret McMillan addressed an open meeting ...on the subject of 'Nursery Schools'. ...Miss McMillan ...described very trenchantly the nature of the problem [in Manchester] emphasising that the age of 2 was immensely more important than any age that followed it. A child's destiny was practically settled by the age of 5 (Jarvis & Liebovich, 2015, p. 924).

The view that cognitive development occurred at a faster rate in very young children than at other times of life was held by other members of the Nursery School Association (NSA) (Jarvis & Liebovich, 2015), and it was seen as imperative that children were trained in good 'habits' that would enable their escape from the slums. This extended to the way in which children spoke; "Margaret focused on the children developing speech patterns that were considered respectable in broader society and to help them break the habits of using colloquial language in order to gain respect and support the children in gaining access to better work and careers in adulthood" (Liebovich, 2018).

However, two developments challenged the very purpose of nursery schools. With the outbreak of WWI just months after the establishment of the McMillan's open air nursery, the nursery school adopted another purpose; to provide childcare for women newly employed in the manufacture of munitions (Liebovich, 2018). Furthermore, Margaret McMillan faced opposition to her views on the very purpose of nurseries within the NSA, of which she was president. Other members of the NSA, including Grace Owen, principal of a nursery teacher training college in Manchester, favoured nursery classes in infant schools over nursery schools. Owen felt that education was more important than nurture, and that it was best delivered by trained teachers in infant schools (the same teachers whom McMillan felt were unfit to care for the youngest children) (Jarvis & Liebovich, 2015). McMillan "saw such a development as what we might nowadays term 'schoolification', and therefore incompatible with her more holistic 'nurture' principles" (Jarvis & Liebovich, 2015). This disagreement around the *raison d'etre* for nurseries led to McMillan resigning from her role within the NSA in 1929 (Jarvis & Liebovich, 2015), indicating, perhaps, that the battle for nursery schools to be places that supported those living in poverty had been lost.

Nonetheless, the discussions regarding who nursery education should be for, whom should provide and where it should take place continued in the years between the First and Second World Wars. In evaluating what *type* of provision should be delivered for under-fives, the Board of Education engaged in 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1977b) through establishing three categories of children, "those who

needed nursery schools to rescue them from degradation, those for whom a less expensive nursery class would do the job adequately and those who would be better off staying in their respectable homes with mother" (Palmer, 2011, p. 140). This was confirmed by the 1918 Education Act (Board of Education, 1918) which obligated local education authorities to provide nursery schools, or nursery classes in schools, for children aged two to four years of age "whose attendance at such a school is necessary or desirable for their healthy physical and mental development". The governmentality of bodies and minds of nursery aged children is inscribed in policy for the first time, a clear biopolitical statement. An early intervention agenda is also tangible; a preliminary version of nursery regulations in 1918 stated "One reason for the provision of Nursery Schools is indeed to reduce the large numbers of preventable defects now observed in entrants to the Public Elementary School, and the associated educational handicap and resulting incapacity". (Selby-Bigge, 1918, as cited in Palmer, 2011, p. 144). The connotation was clear: for children living in deprivation, attending nursery school was preferable to being cared for by parents.

1918 also saw the introduction of the Maternity and Child Welfare Bill (Maternity and Child Welfare Bill, 1918), an act allowing authorities to provide day nurseries that were specifically to provide childcare whilst women worked. Such childcare became necessary again during World War II. Day nurseries were overseen by the Ministry of Health rather than the Board of Education, demonstrating a further divide between care and education (Tizard et al., 1976). Cecil Maudslay, a senior civil servant with some responsibility for nurseries, advocated that day nurseries should provide care for children under the age of two years, whilst those aged from two to five years should attend nursery schools and, if that were not possible, nursery classes (Palmer, 2016). However, inspections of day nurseries during the Second World War were overwhelmingly negative, with criticisms centred on both a lack of regard for children's development and inadequate concern for their health. The quality was so poor that Maudslay wrote to the secretary of the Board of Education to insist that, following the war, those under the age of two years stayed at home with their mother, regardless of how squalid their situation was, whilst those aged between two and five years attended nursery, ideally nursery schools (Maudslay to Secretary of the Board, January 12, 1943, as cited in Palmer, 2016). Day nurseries were considered unsuitable.

With nursery schools deemed necessary only for children from the poorest homes, they were built in areas of high socio-economic need, whilst nursery classes were established within infant schools for children living in less deprived surroundings (Palmer, 2011). Despite this, the suitability of nursery classes was contested, with Nursery School Association members bemoaning the inadequate training of teachers, large class sizes and lack of provision around health and nutrition in such classes at a meeting in 1939 (Palmer, 2011). This was in accordance with a Board of Education report from 1905 which stated that attendance of infant school was of no advantage to children aged three to five years, and that "the mechanical teaching in many infant schools seems to dull rather than awaken the little power of imagination and independent observation which these infants possess" (Board of Education, 1905). Nonetheless, nursery classes seemed to be preferred by LEAs during the interwar period, possibly because they were cheaper and because LEAs believed educational instruction in infant schools would lead to better educational and economic outcomes in the long run. Whatever the motive behind this policy, 1195 places were established in nursery schools and 9000 children provided for in nursery classes by 1938 (House of Commons Debate, February 3rd 1938, as cited in Palmer, 2011).

The end of World War II in England, as in many other countries in Europe, saw a resurgence of interest in education, seen by many as a means to rebuild the country and avert such atrocities in the future (Palmer, 2016). This is evident in the quote that opens the 1943 White Paper, Educational Reconstruction; "Upon the education of the people of this country the fate of this country depends" (Board of Education, 1943). For Maudslay, education for *all* young children in nursery schools, regardless of their background, was fundamental to this aim, and he gathered support from Butler, then Minister of Education. The provision of nursery education in nursery schools for *all* children was recommended in the White Paper, with the explicit aims of supporting working mothers, and identifying and treating "the remedial treatment of defects which may be difficult to eradicate if they are left untreated until the child enters school in the ordinary way at the age of 5" (Board of Education, 1943). The pliability of young children and the value of early intervention was also discussed; "There is no doubt of the importance of training children in good habits at the most

impressionable age and of the indirect value of the nursery school in influencing the parents of the children" (Board of Education, 1943, p. 6). Here, the disciplinary power in nursery education is evident, with parents the subjects of surveillance and discipline in addition to children. However, educating all young children in nursery schools would have meant an end to the categorisation of children, with the type of institution that they attended indicative of their place within society.

The recommendation from the 1943 White Paper that nursery schools should be available to all did not transfer to the 1944 Education Act due to protests from numerous assenting parties. First, the requirements of working mothers had not been considered, and women, and their employers, strongly protested when plans for the expansion of nursery schools was announced (Palmer, 2016) Nursery schools operated only during school hours and term time, meaning that working women's childcare needs would not be served by them. Many Local Education Authorities, particularly those in rural areas, also objected to the plans, arguing that in some cases, nursery classes within infant schools would be the most pragmatic, and economical, resolution (Palmer, 2016). Finally, infant headteachers were opposed to nursery schools, although the Board of Education repudiated headteachers concerns, speculating that their objections were founded on the loss of funding infant schools would encounter if they were no longer to educate two- to five-year-olds (Palmer, 2016).

Post World War II, then, saw split early education and childcare provision with day nurseries for working mothers, and education in either nursery schools or nursery classes. This status quo remained, with nursery schools preferred by the (renamed) Ministry of Education and the number of such schools growing slightly between 1947 and 1951, whilst the number of nursery classes established fell (Palmer, 2011). This progress was halted by post war austerity, which meant nursery schools were eschewed by LEAs in favour of less expensive nursery classes (Palmer, 2016). Nonetheless, it is important to remember the small number of children this affected, by 1965, just under 7% of under-fives were enrolled in any type of nursery provision (Department of Education and Science, 1967).

## Nursery Schools vs Classes vs Being ‘Cared for by Mother’

The Plowden Report (Department of Education and Science, 1967) proposed widespread expansion of nursery education, employing the word ‘education’ rather than ‘care’ throughout the report, signifying that the purpose of nurseries was to be child development rather than childcare for working mothers. The report even stipulated that “Low priority should be given to full-time nursery education for children whose mothers cannot satisfy the authorities that they have exceptionally good reasons for working” (Department of Education and Science, 1967). This recommendation was based on evidence presented by psychologists including Dr. John Bowlby, who emphasised the importance of the child-mother relationship on child development (Department of Education and Science, 1967). Such research also influenced the recommendation that nursery education should be part time. This is an example of how the ‘new knowledge’ of the time, developmental psychology, influenced policy, and how the emphasis on the mother-child bond in particular was used to justify this form of biopower, with women’s bodies again the subject of such discipline.

The Plowden report justified the expense of nursery education as “nursery provision on a substantial scale is desirable, not only on educational grounds but also for social, health and welfare considerations” (Department of Education and Science, 1967). The report outlined the gains to be made through enrolling children in nursery education, but detailed a small scale study which suggested that, statistically, no difference could be found in the attainment of those children who attended a nursery school or class and those who did not, adjusting for differences in background (Douglas & Ross, 1965). This study, which influenced the authors of the Plowden report, referred disparagingly to poor mothers;

> The nursery school children differ in three major respects from the rest of the sample; they live in homes that are more crowded and have fewer amenities, their mothers, according to the health visitors, give their children poorer standards of care, and a larger proportion are in paid employment (Douglas & Ross, 1965, p. 75)

A distinct division between the ‘deficit’ of children from poorer families and the competence of their wealthier peers is presented, a ‘dividing practice’ (Foucault,

1980) that categorises children as ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’, as ‘competent learners’ or ‘lacking in language’. The report conjectured that the advantages of nursery for children from poorer homes would be particularly pronounced as “some working class children have insufficient encouragement, example and stimulus in the situations of their daily life to build up a language which is rich and wide ranging in vocabulary” (Department of Education and Science, 1967). Elsewhere, the report acknowledged that children under compulsory school age were already competent learners rather than ‘empty vessels’, conceding that “Long before a child is five he is already using words and is often familiar with books, toys and music. The issue is not whether he should be 'educated' before he reaches school age because that is happening anyway.” (ibid., p. 118).

The Plowden report also introduced the concept of ‘critical periods’ to education and discussed the relevance of brain development. A study which involved stitching together kitten’s eyelids, with the result that the corresponding brain cells failed to develop without stimuli, is cited (Hubel & Wiesel, 1962). Suturing the eyelids of adult cats, the experiment found, did not result in the animals losing their vision, leading the authors of the study to proclaim the existence of critical periods for some functions. A number of other studies regarding critical periods involving rats and ducklings are cited, reiterating the need for certain stimulus at a very young age. The report acknowledges that whether critical periods exist for young children is unknown, and concedes that a more moderate view should be taken; “It is likely that, in the sphere of learning, periods of maximum sensitivity rather than of critical now-or-never-ness exist”(Department of Education and Science, 1967). Nonetheless, the study was utilised as evidence to argue for the need of early childhood education.

Despite recommendations from the Plowden Report that nursery education should be expanded to improve educational and social outcomes, it continued to be neglected in policy and regarded only as a compensatory measure for those children receiving inadequate care at home throughout the 1970s (Department of Education and Science, 1990; Lewis, 2013). This was despite publicly funded and provided ECEC becoming established throughout Europe during this period (Lewis, 2013). However, the number of young children attending any paid childcare provider grew in the following decade, from 22% in 1980 (Martin & Roberts, 1984) to 28% in 1994

(Finlayson et al 1997 as cited in Hansen et al., 2005), as maternal employment became increasingly common. However, it is worth noting that childminders provided the bulk of this paid childcare (Hansen et al., 2005).

## Towards Universal Childcare Provision under New Labour

The Rumbold Report (Department of Education and Science, 1990) recognised the growing demand for childcare, the lack of provision in some areas and the variability in quality, and called for policy to address the imbalances. The response of the then Conservative government was to introduce a nursery voucher scheme in 1996, £1100 a year that could be exchanged for a place in a day nursery, nursery school, nursery class or voluntary setting (Sparkes & West, 1998). The voucher scheme was devised to promote parental choice, of importance to the Conservative party with a General Election to follow in 1997 and can be seen as part of the wider marketisation of education. Furthermore, the policy attracted criticism for promoting inequality. The flat rate of £1100 per child was insufficient to pay for a place at a more expensive private nursery, meaning that these settings were often reserved for families on higher incomes who could pay the difference and for whom the voucher was a childcare subsidy (Sparkes & West, 1998). In maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in schools, however, the difference between the voucher value and the cost of the place was funded by the LEA (Sparkes & West, 1998), making such settings more attractive to parents on a lower income. Thus, the nursery voucher scheme was another ‘dividing practice’ that resulted in the segregation of children, with those from families with a higher income entering more expensive provision and children from poorer backgrounds attending settings in the maintained sector, in either nursery classes or nursery schools. The rebranding of the Department for Education as the Department for Education and Employment in 1995 is indicative of a shift towards education as preparation for employment, and early education as enabling parental, particularly maternal, employment.

The nursery vouchers were quickly abolished when Labour won the General Election in 1997 (House of Commons, 1997) and just 12 months after their victory, they published the first Childcare Strategy, ‘Meeting the Childcare Challenge’ (Blunkett & Harman, 1998). ‘Childcare’ for working parents came to the fore, with the word

appearing 527 times in the document whilst the term ‘education’ featured just 119 times. The green paper focused on provision for *all* children, stating that success would be measured by “better outcomes for children, including readiness to learn by the time they reach school” (Department for Employment and Education, 1998) and more parents entering work, training or education. These bifurcated aims are symbolic of New Labour’s policy on childcare and early education, and whilst child outcomes and parental employment rates were often simultaneously acknowledged, it was the latter that was prioritised as it was believed it would lift families out of poverty, thus improving children’s life chances as well as filling the public purse.

### *New Labour’s ECEC Policies*

New Labour enacted far reaching policies which not only changed provision for children and families, but saw the early years at the centre of political discussion for the first time (Bouchal & Norris, 2013). These included introducing 12.5 hours per week of nursery education for all four-year-olds, the first real example of universal ECEC provision, and transforming taxation to include Working Tax Credits (tax support for those on lower incomes) to include a Childcare Element, paying 70% (and later 80%) of childcare costs to encourage parents to work (Powell, 1999). Paid maternity leave was extended from just 18 weeks to nine months, with some of this transferable to fathers for the first time (Eisenstadt, 2011). With the exception of the universal provision of 12.5 hours of ECEC for all children, these policies were clearly aimed more at increasing parental employment than at improving child development outcomes. Nonetheless, wider family policy included a commitment to reducing child poverty, with ECEC regarded as a dual purpose tool in this aim as it helped families to increase incomes, whilst also improving longer term outcomes for children living in poverty (Eisenstadt & Oppenheim, 2019). The discourse of the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage is still plain to see here.

### *ECEC in the Context of ‘The Third Way’*

The methods that New Labour incorporated in encouraging both parental employment and child development were in keeping with the ‘Third Way’, which its architect, Anthony Giddens (1998, p. 117), defined as utilising “investment in human

capital wherever possible, rather than the direct provision of economic maintenance. In place of the welfare state we should put the social investment state". The 'Third Way' comprised four main tenets: "an active, preventive welfare state; the centrality of work; the distribution of opportunities rather than income; and the balancing of rights and responsibilities" (Powell, 1999, p. 15). These were evident throughout New Labour's childcare policies. For example, 'rights and responsibilities' were made equal through lower childcare costs thanks to the offer of funded 12.5 hours of provision per week and the Childcare Element of Working Tax Credits, alongside increased training and preparation for work and an onus on parents to search for employment (Eisenstadt, 2011). Similarly, the 'centrality of work' was evident within these policies. Meanwhile, universal ECEC was regarded as a means of encouraging a 'preventive' society through promoting child development and, it was believed, future education and employment outcomes, in keeping with the human capital premise at the centre of the Third Way (Giddens, 1998). New Labour's focus on ECEC as a means to improve life for families now whilst simultaneously supporting future education and employment outcomes for young children was based upon a range of 'new knowledge', predominantly from the USA.

### *The Role of 'Evidence' in New Labour's ECEC Policies*

This focus upon evidence, rather than ideology, was regarded as a new method of policy making (Eisenstadt, 2011). One of the fields from which evidence was drawn was neuroscience, an area which had become prominent thanks to technological advances in brain imaging, to the extent that the 1990s were termed 'the decade of the brain' (Tandon, 2000). Causing a stir in neuroscience in the years immediately following Labour's first election victory were pictures of MRI scans purportedly illustrating the brains of two three-year-olds, one 'normal' and the other having suffered from 'extreme neglect' (Perry, 2002). The brain of the 'normal' three-year-old appears larger than that of the child whom was subject to 'extreme neglect', which also has more prominent dark patches. These images went on to become iconic in ECEC (Gillies et al., 2017) and their use by the Coalition government is discussed later in this chapter. However, the 'Birth to Three Matters' report published

in 2003 (Sure Start, 2003) is the first English policy document to discuss the role of the brain in young children's development (Macvarish et al, 2015).

The MRI images had already provoked plentiful discussion in ECEC in the USA, where James Heckman, a Nobel prize winning economist, had produced what he termed 'The Heckman Equation', which is as follows:

(Heckman, 2023)

Heckman's work presented the notion that every dollar invested in ECEC in the US would give a return of between seven and 12 dollars (Heckman et al., 2010), following earlier research which gave a more precise figure of saving $7.16 with every dollar spent on ECEC (Schweinhart et al., 1993) and was used in lobbying the US government to provide publicly funded ECEC (Schweinhart, 2016). These figures were calculated by estimating changes to government income through increased taxation thanks to higher earnings and through savings due to reductions in crime, teenage pregnancy, and drug and alcohol abuse (Schweinhart et al., 1993). The methods of these studies have been criticised for issues such as small sample size and overinflated estimates (Gelman, 2013), yet Heckman's research was cited in Barack Obama's 2013 State of the Union Address (Obama, 2013). Nonetheless, the discourse surrounding the 'returns on investment' to be made through ECEC and the

emphasis upon young children as human capital fit with New Labour's Third Way ideology and have become part of what Moss (2014) terms the 'story of quality and high-returns' that dominates in ECEC today. Hence, the 'return on investments' discourse of ECEC became established in the UK too in an example not of policy borrowing per se (Burdett & O'Donnell, 2016), but rather policy learning (Raffe & Spours, 2007), as discussed below.

The research of both Schweinhart et al (1993) and Heckman (eg Heckman et al, 2010) were based upon findings from the US Head Start program and the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, which both began in the 1960s. The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project originated as a study conducted by psychologist David Weikart in a deprived area of Michigan (Eisenstadt, 2011). Weikart, disheartened by levels of deprivation and poor educational outcomes for those in the local area, sought to explore whether high quality pre-school could improve outcomes (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1990). Participants, all African American children living in low income families, were assigned to either a control group, who did not attend pre-school, or the test group, who attended pre-school aged three- and four-year-years, for a period of 30 or 60 weeks (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1990). When following up the two groups at the age of 27, researchers found higher employment rates and earning, and reduced arrests and welfare reliance amongst the group who had benefited from the programme (Schweinhart et al., 1993).

In the UK, there was evidence emerging around the potential long-term gains from young children's attendance at 'high quality' ECEC settings and a home learning environment that included early learning activities from the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project (Sylva et al., 2004a). The report highlighted how a positive home learning environment which contributed to a child's cognitive and social development would include:

> …reading with the child, teaching songs and nursery rhymes, painting and drawing, playing with letters and numbers, visiting the library, teaching the alphabet and numbers, taking children on visits and creating regular opportunities for them to play with their friends at home (Sylva et al., 2004b, p. v).

Crucially, it was claimed that an enriching home learning environment could be achieved regardless of the parent's income or educational background, that it was what parents did rather than who they were that mattered (Sylva et al., 2004a), reiterating the notion of parenting as a verb (Williams, 2004). The claim also ignored the material reality of parents living in poverty and struggling to afford books, educational toys and visits. Once again, mothers were positioned as being responsible for the success or failure of their children.

For those children not fortunate enough to live in a home learning environment with such educational resources, the report was reassuring as it posited that disadvantaged children would gain disproportionately from attendance at a high-quality ECEC setting (Sylva et al., 2004a). This benefit came not only from the increased rate of development across a range of domains, but also due to the greater family income thanks to the provision of childcare, the 'double dividends' (Lewis, 2009) of ECEC provision. The study helped to create a narrative around attendance at pre-school being 'better' for children than staying at home (eg Gaunt, 2004), particularly for disadvantaged children. This can be viewed as a resurgence of the discussions surrounding who nursery schools and nursery classes were for between the 1940s and 60s, with only the most respectable, middle-class mothers deemed fit to care for their children at home (Palmer, 2011). However, whereas women had previously been required to demonstrate a necessity to work to warrant full-time nursery provision for their child(ren) (Department of Education and Science, 1967), they were now being instructed to work to provide for their children and improve their life chances in keeping with neoliberal demands. Sure Start, touted as New Labour's flagship policy (Bouchal & Norris, 2013), would evolve to support both of those aims.

### *The Universalism of Sure Start*

As Naomi Eisenstadt, one of the senior civil servants who developed Sure Start, attests, the policy was influenced by the High/Scope Perry Preschool project, but there were limitations. The High/Scope project was heavily targeted, with strict restrictions to ensure that only the very poorest families could participate, and the

programme failed to consider the stigmatisation that may occur as a result of this (Eisenstadt, 2011). Central to Sure Start, however, was a commitment to universalism. This was alongside Labour's provision of 12.5 hours of funded ECEC for *all* children (Eisenstadt & Oppenheim, 2019). Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) were introduced in 1998 in the 20% poorest wards in England, yet *all* families with a child under the age of five years could use the services for free (Lewis, 2011) in what could be termed 'targeted universalism'. Whilst the aim was to minimise any stigma around using the services (Eisenstadt, 2011), there was the risk of labelling Sure Start localities as 'problem areas' (Power & Willmott, 2005). SSLPs aimed to provide a range of services for families under one roof, with GP and midwifery services, housing, benefits and employment advice all offered, in addition to training courses to support mother's employment (Lewis, 2011). Childcare itself, however, was rarely offered through SSLPs.

In 2003, it was announced that SSLPs would be replaced by Children's Centres with a focus on childcare across England (Lewis, 2011). This was seen as one way "of meeting the government's objective of getting 70 per cent of lone mothers into work, which in turn was seen as part of what was needed to halve child poverty by 2010" (Lewis, 2011, p. 76). This demonstrates the way in which childcare policies were driven by larger fiscal and welfare policies, with the children using ECEC secondary to the needs of parents and the economy. However, in all but the 30% most deprived areas, Children's Centres ceased to exist as a 'one stop shop' for advice and support regarding employment, training, housing, benefits and so on in an example of "'progressive universalism' (for example, Balls, 2005), which in the case of services meant universal provision, with the greatest help for those in the most need" (Eisenstadt & Oppenheim, 2019).

One of the key aims of Sure Start was to support parents in their role (Eisenstadt, 2011), at a time when parenting had become a verb, something that mothers and fathers *did* rather than simply *who they were* (Williams, 2004). Effective parenting came to be seen as a technique or series of skills, rather than being focused upon relationships (Clarke, 2006), and was therefore something that could be taught and developed. With the evidence of neuroscience and 'returns on investments' behind Sure Start, the action that needed to be taken became clear: teach parents (meaning

mothers) how to do the job of parenting to support young children's brain development and reduce government spending on areas such as welfare payments, health and crime. Intervening into family life and the role of parents had previously been considered taboo by governments, but, as is explored below, became a feature of New Labour's social policy (Hancock & Mooney, 2012; Parr, 2017),

### *Parenting and Family Policy under New Labour- the Birth of the ASBO*

Alongside the support for families in terms of an increase in childcare funding and availability was a focus on anti-social behaviour and the role of parents. In its 'Respect Action Plan' (Home Office, 2006, p. 2), Tony Blair's government outlined how:

> Worklessness, serious drug and alcohol misuse, even involvement in crime can become associated with problem behaviour. Where parents are involved, that can place their children at serious risk. Worst of all, it can transmit poor behaviour and disadvantage between generations and contribute to the involvement of children and young people in crime or anti-social behaviour.

Once again, disadvantage is presented as transmissible from parent to child, an inheritable disease. The publication of the action plan followed the introduction of anti-social behaviour orders, or ASBOs, in 1998 and the Anti-Social Behaviour Act of 2003 (McDonald, 2006), with ASBO becoming part of the common vernacular, synonymous with working class youth and the discourse of an 'underclass' that abounded in the UK in the 1980s (Lassalle, 2014).

40% of ASBOs were given to 10-17-year-olds (Macdonald & Telford, 2007), resulting in the blame for anti-social behaviour being placed firmly at the feet of schools and parents. In addition to ASBOs, anti-social behaviour was to be tackled by parenting experts deployed across the country in 77 anti-social hotspots (Jensen, 2018). The anti-social behaviour of working-class youths, which included gathering in groups outside shops and other public areas, was criminalised and they were judged against middle class values and behaviours (Cleland & Tisdall, 2005) in what became something of a class war, with moral panic amongst the middle class setting in (le Grand, 2015).

Perhaps most importantly, this made family life and the home a legitimate site for policy intervention (Macvarish, 2014), at least, amongst *some* families. A clear distinction was made between deserving and undeserving families; those struggling to control wayward teenagers could still be positioned as 'good' parents, it was those who no interest in doing so who became ripe for intervention, in the form of ASBOs or parenting orders (Tisdall, 2006). Eradicating child poverty had become a key policy for the New Labour government, for those deserving families committed to working hard and raising children with the 'right' middle class values (Gewirtz, 2001). Those families with children engaged in anti-social behaviour were positioned as undeserving and considered best dealt with by the criminal justice system, rather than in need of support (Goldson, 2002).

## Targeted Provision from the Coalition Government Onwards - The New 'Deserving' and 'Undeserving' Poor

In the context of austerity following the 2008 global financial crisis, the Coalition government (formed of a Conservative majority and Liberal Democrat minority), made sweeping welfare cuts which disproportionately affected families (Eisenstadt & Oppenheim, 2019). An Early Intervention Grant was introduced to replace the Sure Start Grant, essentially removing the branding of Labour's flagship policy whilst simultaneously halving spending on this area (Puffett, 2015). Labour's Department for Children, Schools and Families was swiftly renamed as the Department for Education in a move that signalled policy aimed at children and families was not to receive the regard it had done previously. With the removal or reduction of universal services and structural reforms that saw welfare redistribution lowered, interventions targeted at individual families were introduced (Lloyd, 2015).

In fact, the Conservative party's approach to family policy was presented before they received the most votes in the 2010 election, in a 2006 report titled 'Breakdown Britain' from the Social Justice Policy Group, commissioned by David Cameron (Social Justice Policy Group, 2006). The report argued that, whilst Labour had focused on income as the chief source of poverty, there were five 'pathways' to

poverty; low educational achievement, benefit dependence, drug and alcohol addiction, debt and family breakdown (ibid). The difficulties of family life for those on low incomes was not discussed. Right wing notions of the importance of the two-parent family were presented, as were arguments surrounding the intergenerational cycle of deprivation, in a continuation of messages from New Labour family policy. However, those at the Social Justice Policy Group recommended a targeted approach to family support in a departure from New Labour's universalism.

This targeted approach was evident in the introduction of 15 funded hours per week (for 38 weeks a year) for the 20% (and later 40%) most economically deprived two-year-olds, announced by Liberal Democrat Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg in a speech regarding social mobility (Clegg, 2010). That Clegg announced the policy was significant. At this point, the Minister with responsibility for ECEC was a Liberal Democrat MP, and the party held much more sway over decisions regarding early education and childcare. Clegg (2010) stated that "patterns of inequality in one generation should not be automatically replicated in the next" in a continuation of concern regarding poverty as inheritable. The increase in the universal provision for three- and four-year-olds from 12.5 to 15 hours a week also took place under the Coalition government's reign. Nonetheless, this provision of targeted support for the most vulnerable represented a shift from Labour's universalism and signified the Coalition focus on social mobility as opposed to child poverty (Eisenstadt & Oppenheim, 2019). Neuroscience, originally utilised by New Labour to promote the benefits of early education and Sure Start, instead became a justification for this targeted provision.

### *Discourses of Neuroscience Repurposed as Justification for Divisions*

Neuroscience had been applied to an increasing range of fields in recent years and was now used as a justification for early intervention, including early childhood education (Moss, 2014). Neuroscience provided an evidence base for 'the story of quality and high returns' or, as Vandenbroeck (2017) asserts "...the neurosciences are used to shape early childhood education as a commodity and investment of which we expect an economic return." Vandenbroeck (2017) also speaks of the way

in which neuroscience has been accepted as a Truth of early childhood education, elucidating “Truth with a capital T...as I use the concept here, is not an objective fact, but a construction, a way of seeing, and thus – inevitably- a way of not seeing.” It featured prominently in the first early intervention report produced by Graham Allen MP ‘Early Intervention: The Next Steps’ (Allen, 2011b). The report focused on how atypical early childhood development and later problems were due to abnormal brain development, particularly in the first three years of a child’s life, and that this was due to poor parenting. Allen (2011b) argues that this is because:

> The early years are far and away the greatest period of growth in the human brain. It has been estimated that the connections or synapses in a baby’s brain grow 20-fold, from having perhaps 10 trillion at birth to 200 trillion at age 3.

As White and Wastell ( 2017) point out, there is little mention of neuroscience in the second Allen report, the evidence has been laid out, the findings have been accepted as Truth and they now simply need to be acted upon.

The cover of the first Allen report featured images of two MRI brain scans, one of a healthy, normally developing three-year-old, and the other the noticeably smaller brain of a child of the same age whom has suffered “extreme neglect” (Allen, 2011b, 2011a). The latter MRI scan image was taken from a study which looked at children in orphanages (Perry, 2002). Whilst a child living in poverty is far from desirable, it is an entirely different situation to a child suffering extreme emotional abuse and then removed from his or her family. Nonetheless, as Gillies et al (2017, p. 7) state:

> This brain scans picture has become iconic, a key motif in political and thinktank reports concerning children’s upbringing and outcomes from across the spectrum. It provides a graphic visual image for assertions that poor parenting causes lasting damage to babies’ and young children’s brain development.

This is just one of the criticisms of the misuse of neuroscience in early childhood education. Bruer (1999) states that language acquisition is the only area of learning to have ‘critical periods’ and that, in fact, the brain is fairly malleable, adapting itself to different situations. Both Bruer (1999) and other neuroscientists (eg Rose and Abi-Rached, 2013; Schmitz and Höppner, 2014) have explained that growth in synapses followed by connections being pruned happens throughout the lifespan.

Nonetheless, the myth of the critical period of the first three years has become part of the 'Truth' of early childhood education. As discussed below, the riots in England that happened just months after the publication of the Allen reports provided a window for this 'Truth' to be utilised in ECEC policy as well.

## The 2011 England Riots – a Policy Window for 'Troubled Families' and the 'First 1001 Days' Agenda

### *The 2011 Riots and the Troubled Families Programme*

On Thursday 4th August 2011, Metropolitan Police officers shot and killed Mark Duggan in Tottenham, North London. Facts around the incident were debated, and a vigil held on Saturday 6th August ended in violence following a lack of communication from the police (Jensen, 2018). Incidents involving violence, setting vehicles and buildings alight and looting spread across London and, in the following days, cities across England. However, the clear link between the murder of Duggan and the riots was dispelled by many politicians, particularly Conservative MPs, with an alternative reason proposed: 'Troubled Families'.

On the 15th August 2011, Prime Minister David Cameron gave a speech on the aftermath of the riots and the government response to them in his constituency. Rejecting the notion that poverty and inequality were implicated, Cameron (2011) instead focused on the role of families:

> Families matter. I don't doubt that many of the rioters out last week have no father at home…if we want to have any hope of mending our broken society, family and parenting is where we've got to start…we've got to get out there and make a positive difference to the way families work, the way people bring up their children…and we've got to be less sensitive to the charge that this is about interfering or nannying.. within the lifetime of this Parliament we will turn around the lives of the 120,000 most troubled families in the country.

'Troubled families' became a key political phrase. In the speech, Cameron (2011) referred to work that was already being done but vowed to "put rocket boosters under this programme". The Troubled Families Programme (TFP) was announced

later in 2011 and launched in April 2012, with £448 million made available to Local Authorities to provide a key worker to 120,000 families and implement interventions as deemed necessary (Bate & Bellis, 2018). A report containing case studies of troubled families released in 2012 came to the conclusion that "Intergenerational transmission of problems such as being in care, poor parenting, violence, abuse, low aspirations, non-attendance in school and few or no qualifications was rife" (Casey, 2012, p.46). The report highlighted that poor parenting was due to parents having experienced neglect or abuse themselves, but mothers were singled out for blame in statements such as "the experiences of the women and couples we spoke to grew out of the families they grew up in" (Casey, 2012, p.46).

In addition to saving the blighted lives of those children living in 'troubled' families, another aim of the TFP was to save public money. It was stated that the cost of child protection, criminality, welfare payments, drug and alcohol misuse and so on was £9 billion per year (van Poortvliet, 2012). The TFP therefore managed to amalgamate the "standard neoconservative emphasis on parenting, and the late neoliberal conception of the value of family in terms of return on investment" (McGimpsey et al., 2017, p. 915).

The TFP was quickly criticised for using the statistic of 120,000 troubled families. This number encompassed a huge range of families whom had never committed crime or anti-social behaviour, but were instead included because of the multiple disadvantages they faced (Levitas, 2012). The TFP worked to conflate 'troubled' families with families living in poverty (Crossley, 2018a; 2018b), whilst sections of the media delighted in portraying these families as a 'new underclass' (Hellen, 2014). Levitas (2012, p. 8) explained how "'troubled families' discursively collapses 'families with troubles' and 'troublesome families', while simultaneously implying that they are dysfunctional as families. This discursive strategy is successful in feeding vindictive attitudes to the poor." As Crossley (2018a) posits, the TFP presented families living in poverty as the new 'undeserving poor'.

### *The First 1001 Days Movement*

With fathers apparently absent from their children's lives, it was clearly the way that mothers were bringing up their children that required intervention. This was

confirmed in a blog piece by Andrea Leadsom (2012) on the Conservative Home website:

> The worst of the rioters are charged with being void of respect and values. It is a fair accusation, but this is not simply learned behaviour from TV shows or the selfish aspects of our social culture. It's far deeper rooted than that. In fact, from the first day of a baby's life, the quality of the affection and attention he or she receives from their adult carer (usually Mum) literally shapes the way the brain develops, with profound consequences for how they will develop later in life.

The implication is clear: women (primarily poor women) were failing their children through failing to provide enough 'affection and attention', resulting in inadequate brain development and, ultimately, children 'being void of respect and values.' Neuroscience and the critical period discourse merges seamlessly with the 'troubled families' narrative.

The piece was written by Leadsom in 2012 shortly after she had attended the 'Two is Too Late' conference, an event with over 500 delegates including MPs from across the parties, discussing brain development and early intervention as framed by the riots of the previous year (Gillies et al., 2017). Leadsom went on to become Founding Patron of Parent Infant Partnership, an organisation providing mothers with support to enable mother-infant bonding based upon the principles of attachment theory (Gillies et al, 2017), and in 2014 led on the publication of 'The 1001 Critical Days', a cross-party manifesto detailing what was required for "every baby to receive sensitive and responsive care from their main caregivers in the first years of life" (Leadsom MP et al., 2014, p. 9). 27 further MPs, along with a range of parenting, health care and ECEC organisations, gave the report their backing.

The report and the conference signified the beginning of the 'First 1001 Days Movement' (Parent Infant Foundation, 2024) in the UK, with organisations and individuals joining forces to emphasise the importance of parent-infant attachment and the emotional wellbeing of babies, and how this would impact on brain development and future learning, wellbeing and health. A First 1001 Days All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) was formed and, in 2015, they released a report titled

‘Building Great Britons’ (First 1001 Days All Party Parliamentary Group, 2015). The report opens with the line “The cost of failing to deal adequately with perinatal mental health and child maltreatment has been estimated at £23 billion each year” (ibid, p. 3), illustrating the Human Capital concerns masquerading as sympathy and care. The report (ibid, p. 3) goes on to expand on this:

> This is not ‘rocket science.’ Technically it is ‘neuro-science.’… Society prospers, and is an enriching environment in which to live, according to the nature of its citizens. The more our citizens are physically and mentally healthy, well educated, empathic, prosocial, hardworking and contributing to the costs of society, the better society will flourish. As there is a rise in the proportion of citizens who are damaged, physically or mentally ill, poor at relationships, antisocial, violent or criminal in their behaviour, and placing a drain on society’s resources, so the quality of society worsens. The groundwork for good citizenship occurs in the first 1001 days.

Put simply, if babies’ brains are not shaped properly by their parents (meaning mothers) before the age of two years, they will go on to be a ‘drain on society’.

In the USA, the ‘Two is Too Late’ drive and messages surrounding the importance of brain development had been proliferating for several years before, although the terminology used focused on ‘sensitive periods’ and ‘windows’ of development (Harvard Center on the Developing Child, 2007), taking into account criticisms that the underlying science had been overblown (Bruer, 1999). However, whilst the research was utilised in the USA to campaign for State funded ECEC, in England it was used to support the targeted intervention (Gillies et al., 2017) previously discussed. With funding for universal services such as Sure Start slashed as part of government austerity measures following the global financial crash of 2008 (Eisenstadt & Oppenheim, 2019), these targeted interventions such as Family Nurse Partnerships, etc. Neuroscientific findings were misused to justify this; after all, not *all* children required support, only those with mothers who were unable or unwilling to care for them adequately (Gillies et al, 2017). Rather than money being spent on welfare payments or other forms of support, it could provide ‘interventions’ such as nurse visits that provided surveillance and regulation of poor and often young mothers, ensuring that they were shaping babies’ brains appropriately (ibid). Meanwhile, with the blame for any problems with child development placed on

mothers, politicians emerge as caring and compassionate for their concern, whilst structural inequalities remain (Macvarish et al, 2015). As Edwards et al (2015, p. 167) posit, the policies position "poor mothers as architects of their children's deprivation."

### *From Social Mobility to Parental Employment- A Shift in Focus in the Coalition*

2012 was also the year that saw Liberal Democrat MP Sarah Teather replaced by Conservative MP Liz Truss in the role of under-secretary for Childcare and Education. The shift was significant, as demonstrated by Truss' white paper 'More Great Childcare' (Department for Education, 2013b) which emphasised consumer choice and deregulation of the sector to reduce costs for parents (Wild et al., 2015). One of the suggestions to reduce costs for parents was to change staff to child ratios, allowing childminders to care for up to four children under the age of two years rather than three, a proposal vehemently opposed by unions and early years organisations, with a response to the plans from TACTYC titled 'Legislating for Less Great Childcare' (TACTYC, 2013). The white paper referred to childcare rather than early education in an indication of the changes at the Department for Education, and the Conservative view of ECEC as a tool to facilitate maternal employment. This was further evident once the Conservative party won the 2015 General Election outright.

## 'Eligibility' as the New 'Deserving' and 'Undeserving' Poor Under the Conservative Government

### *The Introduction of the 30 Hours Policy Under the Conservative Government*

Childcare had become central to the 2015 election manifestos of all parties, with the Conservatives pledging to introduce 30 government funded hours per week (Conservative Party, 2015) whilst Labour promised to provide 25 hours in their manifesto (titled 'Britain only succeeds when working people succeed. This is a plan to reward hard work') (Labour Party, 2015). The motivation behind this proposed increased spending on ECEC was clear, with the Conservative manifesto committing to "provide 30 hours of free childcare to working parents of three and four year-olds –

so you are able to work" (Conservative Party, 2015, p. 3). An entire section of the manifesto discussed 'Giving your child the best start in life' (Conservative Party, 2015, p. 33), yet here neither ECEC or early education was mentioned at all.

Following the Conservative Party's victory in the General Election of May 2015, a trial of the policy involving councils across England began just four months later (Lepper, 2015). An evaluation of the trial concluded that the 30 hours resulted in "longer work hours for mothers and fathers; and some indication of higher work retention for mothers" (Paull & La Valle, 2017, p. 18). This appeared to bolster the national rollout of the programme, whilst concerns from providers surrounding the underfunding of the policy (Ferguson, 2017a) and warnings from organisations such as the Sutton Trust around the potential for the policy to widen the attainment gap (Stewart & Waldfogel, 2017) seemingly went unheard. The 30 hours policy was introduced throughout England on 1st September 2017 (Department for Education & Greening, 2017), resulting in the split system of 15 hours for some of the most vulnerable three- and four-year-olds and 30 hours for children of working parents that currently exists.

Simultaneous to the introduction of the 30 hours was the inception of the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF), a new method of calculating funding for providers to ensure that levels were consistent across different parts of the country and different types of providers (Department for Education, 2015). The EYNFF was initiated to resolve inconsistencies in funding between the maintained sector and the private sector, with nursery schools and classes receiving a higher rate than private nurseries (Noden & West, 2016). The government, recognising that most of the 30 hours provision would be supplied by the private sector, sought to 'level the playing field' through the establishment of the EYNFF (Noden & West, 2016).

### *The Rhetoric of the New Deserving and Undeserving Poor*

Announcements regarding the introduction of ECEC policies aimed only at parents who were in employment worked to discursively position these families as the new deserving poor, hard-working families who were responsible and therefore deserving of financial support. In a speech presenting the Tax Free Childcare scheme, which has the same eligibility criteria as the 30 hours, then Prime Minister David Cameron stated "This is a boost direct to the pockets of hard-working families in what will be one of the biggest measures ever introduced to help parents with childcare costs" (Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, 2013). 'Working people' and 'hardworking families' were central to messaging surrounding the roll out of the policy, as seen in this later speech from Cameron (Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street et al., 2015) regarding the 30 hours:

> My message is clear. This government is on the side of working people – helping them get on and supporting them at every stage of life. That is exactly why we are pressing ahead with these reforms - so that not a moment is lost in getting on with the task - going further than ever before to help with childcare costs, helping hardworking families and giving people the opportunity to get into work.

The discourse of the deserving poor, the hard working people entitled to support due to their responsible lifestyle, was made even clearer in the election manifesto speech from Cameron (Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, 2015) in the same year:

> A good life is there for everyone willing to work for it…our party offers a good life to those who work hard and do the right thing. If you want to know who I'm in it for, I'm in it for the people who live within the rules, who do the right thing…who set the alarm early in the morning, do the school run, clock in at work.

'A good life', it is made clear, is only available to those who deserve it, who work hard and 'do the right thing'. Thus the 30 funded hours, established to support families in leading 'a good life' through saving on ECEC fees, should only be accessible to the deserving, those who are 'eligible'.

For the undeserving poor, those who were unemployed or had just one parent in a two-parent family earning the minimum required income, being ineligible for the 30 government funded hours formed a small part of an assemblage of policies aimed at

encouraging work amongst parents through a combination of rewards and penalties. 2017 also saw the introduction of the two-child limit which restricted Universal Credit and tax credit payments to the first two children in any family (with exceptions for children subject to special guardianships, adoption and born following coercion) (Sefton et al., 2019). The government reasoned that the policy would make families receiving benefit payments "face the same financial choices about having children as those supporting themselves solely through work" (Kennedy et al., 2017, p. 3).

The policy has had a disproportionate impact upon mothers, demonstrating how this biopolitical action operates predominantly to modify the behaviours of women. Single parent families are disproportionately affected by the two child cap, making up less than 15% of families in England but 44% of the households impacted by the two child cap (Department for Work and Pensions & HM Revenue & Customs, 2021). As women head 86% of single parent households (Office for National Statistics, 2019), the two child cap has subjected an unequal number of women to poverty (Andersen, 2023; Campbell, 2021a, 2021b). Furthermore, the policy portrays the fertility of women, particularly of poor women, as an area of public concern, an issue to be managed and controlled (Andersen, 2023; Campbell, 2021b). The two child cap epitomises Foucault's (1998) biopolitics, with its concern for birthrate and control of the population.

I propose that the 30 hours policy functions in a similar way, as one of an assemblage of policies that position families receiving benefit payments as being morally deficient, the new undeserving poor, unworthy of additional government funded ECEC or benefit payments to support more than two children. Those who work, who 'do the right thing' and are deserving, are rightly rewarded with 15 extra funded hours of ECEC. These policies do discursive work to vilify benefit recipients (Andersen, 2023), maintaining a division between 'them' and 'us' (Hills, 2017). The way in which the 15- and 30-hours policies work to maintain such splits is the subject of this thesis.

This chapter has presented a genealogy of the undeserving and deserving, tracing continuities such as notions of the intergenerational cycle of poverty, the brain as a site for intervention and mothers' work as a driver of ECEC. The roots of the early intervention agenda can, resultingly, be uncovered in the stated desires of factory

owners during the industrial revolution to ‘save’ children from their parents, via the nursery school movement of the early 1900s, to the First 1001 Days campaign. Alongside this is a clear view of children as Human Capital, seen first in the liberalism of the 18th century, and now in neoliberalism, with ECEC a tool to enhance that Human Capital. Categorisation, as seen with the 15 and 30 hours, can be traced back to labels that enabled the distribution of the poor in 18th century workhouses, via enrolment in different types of school in the mid 1800s.

However, far from being a smooth path from the 17th century to the present day, there are also a number of ruptures along the journey from the deserving and undeserving poor of the Poor Laws to the new undeserving and deserving poor of the 15 and 30 hours. Biopolitics, with its concern regarding the birth rate, primarily amongst the poor, was particularly evident in Malthus’ proposal to distribute resources including food to ‘manage’ the population. With the association to the eugenics movement, this view was absent (from policy, at least) until the introduction of the two-child cap, with its explicit aims to encourage lower birth rates amongst families receiving benefit payments. Women’s participation in the labour market has shifted alongside societal attitudes towards it (and the economy’s need for it), with a resulting change in the aims of ECEC, which must now also provide flexible childcare for working parents. With the 30 hours policy, the primary motivator for the provision of ECEC has changed from supporting child development, particularly that of some of the most vulnerable children, to encouraging maternal employment. It is women who bear the brunt of policies around responsibilising those in poverty into work, with the two child benefit cap disproportionately placing women in poverty and women’s bodies being subject to control.

Whereas this chapter considers the discursive work that policy has done and continues to do to create ‘splits’ between the most vulnerable families in society and other families, the next chapter details the research into the impacts of the 30 hours to date, examining the affects on children, parents, settings and the sector as a whole.

# Chapter 4 – The Effects of the ECEC Funding Reforms in England

This thesis contemplates the question: what does this ‘split’ in the provision of ECEC for three- and four-year-olds mean for the discursive construction of these young children? Before considering how labels such as ’15 hour and ’30 hour’ may result in children being constructed in particular ways, similar to the impact that terms ‘Free school meals’ and ‘Pupil Premium’ have had in schools, I explain how this split in provision may be counter to the aims of the policies. This literature review presents the research to date around the effects of the funding reforms as a whole, but the introduction of the 30 hours policy in particular. This discussion will frame the findings, which explore how the FEEE policies are being enacted in settings and how they are shaping the sector.

I begin by exploring the impacts of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA), which, I argue, the FEEE policies have replicated. The way in which the underfunding of the 30 hours policy has resulted in increased competition between settings and further privatisation of the maintained sector, akin to the outcomes of the 1988 ERA, are discussed. The effects of the FEEE policies upon the sector as a whole are then considered, including how maintained nursery schools have been particularly affected, and how the underfunding of the policies have resulted in setting closures, with large nursery chains favoured by the policies as they can withstand the low government funding rates thanks to economies of scale (Lewis & West, 2017). The chapter continues with examination of how the FEEE policies are being enacted in practice by settings, delineating the ‘dividing practices’ (Foucault, 1980) including a possible reduction in two-year-old and 15 hour places, as well as the loss of additional, discretionary hours for the most vulnerable children due to the 30 hours policy in particular (Archer & Merrick, 2020). Increased costs of ECEC beyond the funded hours are also examined, with consideration of the way in which, combined, these issues have the potential to exclude the poorest families from ECEC.

## The 1988 Education Reform Act- Changing Education Through Shifts in Funding

The 1988 ERA was a fundamental policy shift which reinvented the purpose and provision of education in the UK. It achieved the commodification, marketisation and privatisation of schooling through the amalgamation of the following strands:

1) A move to per pupil funding, resulting in schools competing for pupils to attract income.
2) A National Curriculum, allowing for standardised assessment (eg SATs and GCSEs) and the publication of results, leading to school league tables and, a few years later, Ofsted.
3) Parents as consumers who utilised the assessment data available to guide decisions surrounding school choice (Hughes, 2005).

As Hughes (2005, p. 314) states, the "explicit market philosophy which underlies these reforms assumes that education is to be regarded as a commodity, that schools and teachers are the 'providers' of this commodity, and that parents are the 'customers' or 'consumers'."

For children and families, these reforms resulted in increasing inequalities. Middle class families emerged as 'skilled choosers' (Ball, 2002) utilising all forms of capital to identify the best performing schools (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Vincent et al., 2010) and using their financial advantage to purchase a (typically more expensive) home in a locality within the catchment area of such a school (Ball, 2002; Ball et al., 1996). Parents were positioned as 'good' (or not) in relation to the decisions that they made when choosing a school for their child(ren) (Ball et al., 1996). Given the limitations that families on low incomes had placed upon them, it is unsurprising that it was these parents who were deemed 'poor' when their child did not receive places at the most popular schools (Gewirtz et al., 1994). School choice, therefore, led to the reproduction of inequalities between social classes (Ball et al., 1996).

However, there were also school-based reasons for fewer working class children gaining places in popular or Ofsted ‘Outstanding’ rated schools. Oversubscribed schools were able to engage in ‘cream skimming’, selecting the highest attaining children, often from middle class families thanks to their material advantages (Bartlett, 1993), maintaining their position as high performing schools due to the test results such pupils achieved. Less popular schools, which were often so because of poorer Ofsted rating and examination results, were forced to fill places with any children applying, meaning that working class parents who were less skilled at ‘choosing’ (Ball, 2002; Ball et al., 1996) found their child(ren) attending such schools. These schools also had to engage in more marketing (such as open days and evenings and banners outside advertising empty spaces as these now signified lost income) (Bowe et al., 1992). For all schools, the reforms meant less collaboration and co-operation, as more popular schools sought to preserve their position as market leaders (Bowe et al., 1992).

The work of teachers and school leaders also underwent a transformation. The new National Curriculum dictated what teachers needed to teach, stifling creativity and discouraging innovation (Chitty, 1989). Some argue that this resulted in teachers becoming technicians, simply delivering information, and made them more compliant (Leaton Gray, 2007). For school leaders, their role became managerial and increasingly removed from teaching, as they sought to balance the budget of the school, lead marketing and recruitment to ensure income linked to pupil enrolment, and line manage staff (Bowe et al., 1992). With regards to the latter, the language and practices of the private sector became increasingly prevalent, with protocols such as targets making their way into teaching (Bowe et al., 1992) to ensure that the schools examination results, Ofsted rating and position in league tables were maximised. For teachers, now with performance targets to meet and a National Curriculum to adhere, their work was more constrained and subject to surveillance than it ever had been previously (Dow et al., 2000).

In this thesis, I seek to explore whether the funding reforms within ECEC are having a similar impact to that of the 1988 ERA, considering in particular the equivalence with per pupil funding that the EYNFF has created. I recognise the differences

between mainstream education and the early years sector, with the latter having been a ‘mixed market’ with a range of maintained and private providers for more than 50 years (Lloyd, 2020). Furthermore, the greater resources of the middle classes in choosing early education and childcare is long established (Vincent et al., 2008, 2010; Vincent & Ball, 2001). However, what is of interest to me is the way in which the funding reforms may be exacerbating the commodification, marketisation and privatisation of ECEC. Below, I explore the evidence of this to date.

## The Impact of the FEEE Policies on the Sector- Privatisation, Underfunding, Competition and Closures

### Privatisation and the FEEE Policies

As stated above, whilst there are some similarities between the 1988 ERA and the FEEE policies, one of the main components of the 1988 ERA was per pupil funding, which introduced competition between schools as they vied for the ‘custom’ of children and families to receive the funding that was attached to each pupil. I argue that the EYNFF and FEEE policies have introduced this into the maintained sector, with nursery schools and classes having previously received funding according to the size of the setting rather than the number of children attending, whereas provision in the PVI faction had become accustomed to receiving government funding for some hours (12.5 a week for three- and four-year-olds from 2004) (Akhal, 2019a), whilst relying predominantly upon fees paid by parents. I propose that the FEEE policies have worked to privatise the maintained faction of the early years sector in England and bring it into line with private settings, partially through the introduction of what is essentially per child funding, and the associated competition for custom (children and families).

Far from being an unintended consequence of the policies, establishing consistency between maintained and private settings was an aim of the FEEE and EYNFF policies (West & Noden, 2019), with the universal base rate paid to providers regardless of type designed to end previous variations in payments to settings based on whether they were a private nursery, nursery class, childminder and so on, at the

discretion of individual local authorities (Pre-School Learning Alliance, 2017). This 'levelling of the playing field' does not seek to establish the principles and practices of the maintained branch of the sector, however; rather, the emphasis is firmly on embedding the values and operations of private business throughout the early years sector. This quote from Sam Gyimah (Department for Education & Gyimah, 2015), then Childcare Minister, discussing the 'golden age' of childcare, demonstrates the private sector values associated with it

> the 2015 LaingBuisson nursery market report estimated that the UK children's daycare market was worth £4.9 billion in the 2013 to 2014 financial year - a year-on-year, real-terms increase of 4.1%.

A later section of the speech was titled 'Supporting parents as consumers', and Lewis and West (2017, p. 335) observe how policy documents since 2015 present "the desire to promote a growing market sector as a policy goal *in and of itself* figured more prominently" (original emphasis). This focus on the market and privatisation, I posit, is supported by the underfunding of the 'free' hours, which has led to an increase in closures throughout the sector as providers jostle for their position in the marketplace. Rather than being an unintended consequence, the underfunding of the 30 hours policy in particular was known about by government ministers, with civil servants informing them that the average funding rate paid to providers (£4.89) is just two thirds of the estimated average cost of delivery (£7.49) (Lawler, 2021). The implications of this for the cost of additional hours, adult to child ratios and 'quality' is discussed later in the chapter, but here I wish to emphasise how the underfunding of the policy was a political choice aimed at reforming the sector rather than a miscalculation. The effects of the underfunding are explained below.

## The Underfunding of the FEEE Policies

Even prior to the introduction of the 30 hours policy, setting managers and early years organisations warned that the scheme was underfunded and would mean that providers stood to make a loss (eg Ferguson, 2017a). A shortfall of 20% between costs for providers and payment from the government for the funded hours was

predicted by the Pre-School Learning Alliance (Ferguson, 2017a). The hourly funding shortfall discussed above is the equivalent to a loss of £2,964 per child per year (Lawler, 2021). A survey of providers conducted in early 2023 by the National Day Nurseries Associated found that the government funding rate covered costs for just 2% of settings and that the average shortfall for 15 hours places was £32,359 per year, with the loss resulting from 30 hours places double that (Priestley, 2023). This gap is significant for a range of reasons discussed in more detail below (the impact on quality, closures of settings as they become unviable and increased competition). It is worth noting that the funding rate for the 15 hours and 30 hours is the same (except in the case of nursery schools, as detailed below). However, the introduction of the 30 hours policy may have had a more significant impact upon settings as, whereas when a child attended for 15 hours and parents purchased additional hours at the setting's usual hourly rate, there is now less demand for additional hours as more families are entitled to 30 funded hours.

Maintained nursery schools were placed in a particularly financially precarious position through the introduction of the 30 hours. Nursery schools are unique, providing ECEC for children up to the age of five years in a standalone school. Resultingly, nursery schools must employ a headteacher and senior leadership team, a SENDCo and at least one qualified teacher (Foster, 2022), meaning that staffing costs are considerably greater than those of day nurseries which typically employ staff qualified to levels 2 and 3, perhaps with a graduate leader, and nursery classes, which whilst led by a qualified teacher, benefit from economies of scale thanks to being part of a larger school. In recognition of this, nursery schools receive supplementary funding for 15 hour places- but not for 30 hours or two-year-old provision (Archer & Merrick, 2020). ~~Given that~~ Nursery schools are disproportionately located in some of the most deprived areas of England (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019) and regarded as the highest quality form of ECEC provision (Early Education, 2015), earning them the nickname of the 'jewel in the social mobility crown' (Cass & Barbour, 2019). The disincentive to support the most vulnerable families through the two-year-old policy in particular runs counter to its aims.

### *How Underfunding is Shaping the Market*

The approach to affordability, particularly the adequacy of government funding, has been important in shaping the nature of the childcare market. As Gyimah (2015) implied in a speech to the National Day Nurseries Association, small-scale private providers were unlikely to be as well-placed as big childcare chains to cope with the tight margins imposed by the government's funding regime. Indeed, many single nurseries and small chains have been acquired by large chains such as Busy Bees, Bright Horizons and Kids Planet (Gaunt, 2023). Private equity funding has become more prominent in the childcare market, with investors funding this growth through acquisitions, and nursery chains continually in debt and paying large dividends (Simon et al., 2022). This is a risky strategy which places nursery chains at risk of financial collapse, as seen in Australia, when nursery chain ABC, which operated over 1,000 settings, went into receivership and then liquidation in 2008 (Penn, 2010). The collapse of a similarly-sized childcare chain in England could have a catastrophic impact upon ECEC availability (Simon et al., 2022).

However, the emphasis upon large nursery chains in policy is problematic for another reason. Private settings tend to open up in wealthier areas, as these are the areas where parents can pay for ECEC and private settings stand to make the most profit, whereas more economically deprived areas can be left with scant provision (Penn, 2013; Simon et al., 2022). This is demonstrated by the fact that 17% of ECEC providers are located within the most deprived quintile of IDACI areas, compared to 22% in the least deprived (Simon et al., 2022). The impact that the funding reforms are having upon settings in the most deprived areas is discussed in more depth below.

## Competition and Closures

This underfunding of the FEEE policies, and the 30 hours policy in particular, is thought to have contributed to a significant increase in the number of ECEC settings in England permanently closing. As predicted  the years immediately following the launch of the funded 30 hours saw an increase in nursery closures, with 121 closing between September 2017 and August 2018, representing a 66% increase on the 73

closures in the previous year (Nursery World, 2018). This was followed by a 53% increase in permanent closures between September 2018 and August 2019 (National Day Nurseries Association, 2021). Closures occurred disproportionately in deprived areas. Almost half (46%) of settings that closed were situated in local authorities which received the lowest government funding rate of £4.30 per hour per child, and 87% of those which ceased operations had received less than £5 per child per hour (Albert, 2019). This suggests that many of the closures were attributable to the low government funding rate, with settings in the most deprived areas receiving less income directly from parents and being more reliant on government funding.

Such permanent closure of settings may not have an impact upon the availability of places if new providers are entering the market, and if changes in population mean that fewer families require ECEC provision. The annual DfE Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers, England, shows that there were 1,820,200 places available in Spring 2016 (Department for Education, 2016a), just prior to the introduction of the funded 30 hours, compared to 1,530,000 places in 2022 (Department for Education, 2022b). This significant drop in places appears to be impacting upon availability, with only 50% of local authorities stating that there are sufficient places in all areas to meet the demand for funded two-year-old places, and just 66% having adequate 30 hours places in 2023, with both figures down 7% from the previous year (Jarvie et al., 2023). However, by 2023, other financial pressures had overtaken the insufficiency of government funding, with 69% of local authorities stating that the inability to recruit and retain staff made it difficult for nurseries to remain open, 65% citing the cost of staff, 57% stating the cost of energy and 56% citing the government funding rates (Jarvie et al., 2023).

It is worth noting that the fieldwork for this project was conducted between January and May 2020, and whilst this included the beginning of the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, the full impact was yet to be seen. Certainly, nursery closures because of the financial pressures of the pandemic and the later reduction in the number of children attending ECEC settings because parents were more likely to be working from home were yet to be identified as problems. The period from April 2020 to

March 2021 saw the number of permanent closures of ECEC settings in England increase by 35% (National Day Nurseries Association, 2021), representing a loss of 11,000 places which were, again, overrepresented in the most deprived areas. Again, the overrepresentation of permanent closures in more deprived areas, where settings rely more on government funding then parent fees, highlights the role of the low government funding rates. By 2023, other financial pressures combined with the insufficiency of government funding, with 69% of local authorities stating that the inability to recruit and retain staff made it difficult for nurseries to remain open, 65% citing the cost of staff, 57% stating the cost of energy and 56% citing the government funding rates (Jarvie et al., 2023). In practice, it is likely that the cost-of-living crisis seen from late 2021 has exacerbated the inadequacy of the government funding rate for some settings, with increased energy and food bills placing further pressure on provider's budgets.

The disproportionate number of closures in deprived areas matters as this could result in reduced availability of funded two-year-old and universal 15 hour places, meaning that children in the poorest families may not be able to access ECEC provision (Archer & Merrick, 2020) and resulting in a 'split' between the those families able to afford childcare, and those not. The way in which the enactment of the FEEE policies has resulted in 'dividing practices' is explored in more depth below.

## 'Dividing Practices' – The Enactment of FEEE Policies

Foucault's (1982) theory of 'dividing practices', the process of dividing subjects either within themselves or from one another, is helpful in conceptualising the splits that are occurring due to the FEEE policies. Having discussed the impact of the funding reforms on the early years sector in England, this section explores how the policies have been enacted by settings, and the impact this is having upon some of the most disadvantaged children and families, for whom ECEC attendance should be disproportionately advantageous (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011). It considers how the policy may be widening the attainment gap between children from the most deprived homes and their peers (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019) through reducing the number of two-year-old (Akhal, 2019a) and universal 15 hour places for

three- and four- year-olds, increasing the hourly cost of ECEC beyond the funded hours and lessening the quality of ECEC provision due to the underfunding of the policy (Archer & Merrick, 2020). Furthermore, a loss of additional hours funded through discretionary schemes to support the most vulnerable families is reported in many Local Authorities (Archer & Merrick, 2020), in addition to the simple fact that children from the poorest families are receiving half the number of funded hours compared to their luckier peers. There is consideration of the way in which the FEEE policies as a whole have impacted provision, but also the conflict between the funding policies, particularly the 30 hours policy and the way in which its aims of increasing parental employment conflict with the child development and attainment gap goals of the two-year-old policy in particular. The detrimental effect of the 30 hours policy upon the supply of funded two-year-old places is explored first.

## The Impact of the 30 Hours Policy Upon the Two-Year-Old Policy

The two-year-old policy is promoted as one of the best ways to close the attainment gap that exists between disadvantaged children and their peers upon their entry to school (Mathers et al., 2014). One of the main concerns regarding the 30 hours policy is that it may have reduced the number of spaces available for two-year-olds who require a higher staff to child ratio than three- and four-year-olds, making their care more expensive (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019). 21% of 1,662 settings surveyed by the Early Years Alliance stated that the number of two-year-old places on offer had been reduced because of the 30 hours policy (Early Years Alliance, 2018). Settings, it is argued, stand to lose less money through offering places for three- and four-year-olds, which are still underfunded, but require a staff to child ratio of one to eight, rather than the one to four for two-year-olds (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019), therefore meaning lower staffing costs for older children in ECEC. A report from the Education Select Committee argued that the “30 hours funded childcare policy is entrenching inequality rather than closing the gap” (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019, p. 17) because of the impact it is having upon disadvantaged two-year-olds. Stewart and Reader (2020) found that uptake of the two-year-old policy had steadily increased from its introduction in 2015 to 2018, when it peaked at 72%. By 2020, it had declined to 69%. Whilst the report does not state that the introduction of the 30 hours

policy is the cause of this, the timing of the implementation of the 30 hours in September 2017 does correlate with this slight fall (Pascal et al., 2021a). By 2023, however, the *proportion* of two-year-olds registered for the funded hours was at its highest (74%) whilst the *number* was at its lowest point, with some suggestion that the decreasing birth rate may be partially responsible for this drop (National Statistics, 2023a) and that the supply of places, whilst falling, is adequate to meet demand. Meanwhile, the number and proportion of three- and four-year-olds receiving the 30 funded hours was at its highest point since the introduction of the policy (National Statistics, 2023a). Whilst the percentage of two-year-olds attending funded ECEC provision is at its highest, it remains low at 74% (compared to 94% of three- and four-year-olds using the universal 15 hours), and it may be that places for three- and four-year-olds are promoted more at the expense of two-year-old provision. This would seem to be a logical response given that two-year-olds require a significantly higher adult to child ratio than three- and four-year-olds (1:5 and 1:8 respectively) (Department for Education, 2023b), increasing staffing costs for two-year-olds.

## The Conflict Between Universal 15 Hour and Extended 30 Hour Provision

In addition to the impact on two-year-old places, there is also evidence to suggest that the number of universal 15 hours places have declined to accommodate more children entitled to 30 hours (House of Commons Education Committee, 2019). 25% of settings responding to an Early Years Alliance survey (2018) stated that the number of 15 hour provision had been cut to allow for more 30 hours places, with a child entitled to 30 hours essentially filling two 15 hour spaces. Again, it is the most vulnerable children, those who are not entitled to 30 hours because the family income is very low, who stand to be most adversely affected by this reduction in the number of 15 hour places (Pascal et al., 2021a; Stewart & Waldfogel, 2017).

## FEEE Policies and the Loss of Discretionary Funding for Vulnerable Children and Families

Some of the most vulnerable families have also been affected by a loss in the number of discretionary hours available since the introduction of the EYNFF. Prior to the implementation of the 30 hours and EYNFF, some Local Authorities, particularly those in London, offered additional hours to children and families most in need of support, at no cost to parents. These bespoke offers were often paid for using a discretionary fund from the Local Authority and targeted towards families most in need of support, such as those with children with additional needs, those with a terminally ill parent, members of the travelling community, and those fleeing domestic abuse (Crown, 2018). However, the introduction of the 30 hours and the EYNFF saw many Local Authorities rescind this funding, citing the rules surrounding funding and the EYNFF, the need to fund the 30 hours policy, and funding cuts to the Local Authority more broadly as reasons for this (Crown, 2018).

## Availability and the Cost of 30 Hours Provision

Even those families entitled to the funded 30 hours, some of whom may still be on a low income have discovered that the provision is rarely ‘free’, as initial advertising of the scheme originally claimed (Ferguson, 2017a, 2017b; Maslin, 2017). The government was forced to rescind this promotion of the policies following a complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority (Ferguson, 2017b) regarding the fact that the hours are funded for only 38 weeks of the year, during school term times, and are not available to all families. Department for Education guidance for settings and Local Authorities on how to implement the policy clearly states that the funding is not intended to cover the cost of meals, outings, nappies and other consumable goods, meaning that providers can charge parents for these goods (Department for Education, 2018), although an alternative, such as allowing parents to provide these items, must be offered. Nonetheless, some settings have found creative ways to circumnavigate the rules of the 30 hours policy to allow them to remain financially sustainable. These include offering the 30 hours only at set hours, from 9 am to 3 pm for example, and charging parents for childcare outside of those times, at an increased rate (Ferguson, 2017a). As a result, the cost of a childcare place has

actually increased for some families following the introduction of the 30 hours (Ferguson, 2017a; Maslin, 2017).

Because offering a 30 funded hour place to a child means that the setting may stand to lose more money (through the underfunding and not being able to charge for those additional hours), some settings are limiting the number of 30 hour places that they offer (National Day Nurseries Association, 2018). Other settings are demanding that parents pay for additional hours to receive their funded hours (West & Noden, 2016) or place restrictions on the days and times that parents can use the 30 funded hours (Early Years Alliance, 2018) . The way in which settings enact the FEEE policies is the focus of one the research questions, and the findings around this topic are explored in chapter six.

## Quality and the FEEE Policies

The 30 hours policy, and the underfunding of it in particular, has also led to concerns being raised regarding the impact it may have upon the quality of provision, although it should be noted that ‘quality’ is a highly contested concept in ECEC (Dahlberg et al., 2013). According to Pascal et al (2021b), high quality in ECEC is linked to higher levels of qualification amongst staff in ECEC. However, with this information sometimes not easily accessible in individual settings, the Ofsted rating of a setting is often used as a proxy measure, with institutions rated ‘Outstanding’ therefore seen as being the highest quality (Stewart & Reader, 2020). The EPPSE study suggested that quality is particularly important for the most vulnerable children (Taggart et al., 2015), a finding replicated more recently by Melhuish & Gardiner (2023).

However, there are fears that, due to the underfunding of the FEEE policies and the 30 hours policy especially, quality is being compromised, primarily due to a reduction in the number of qualified staff. This would be particularly detrimental to the two-year-old policy, which aims to improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged young children and thus requires high quality ECEC. As West & Noden (2019, p. 163) note, “the government focus on increasing the availability of places via a mixed economy of providers has come at the expense of staff quality, a prerequisite for long- term

benefits for children". Furthermore, the policy prioritises the private sector as it is the largest provider of ECEC and therefore needed to deliver the FEEE policies, yet in the private sector staff qualifications are lower (Stewart & Reader, 2020). No in-depth evaluation of the impact of the 30 hours upon quality has been conducted, although 96% of 30 hours and 95% of two-year-old places are taken up in settings rated 'Good' or better by Ofsted (Archer & Merrick, 2020). Moreover, in a survey of ECEC settings offering 30 funded hours, 73% responded that they felt the policy had had no effect on quality, 13% stated that it had led to an increase in quality and 13% replied that the quality of provision had declined as a result (Pascal et al, 2021). Therefore, evidence in this area is equivocal.

## The FEEE Policies and 'Women's Work'

Whilst the universal 15 funded hours is aimed at improving child development outcomes (Paull & Valle, 2018; Paull & La Valle, 2017), one of the policy drivers of the 30 hours funding was encouraging parents to work if they did not already do so, or to work more hours if already employed (Department for Education, 2015). However, with the apparent sex-neutral term 'parent' synonymous with 'mother' in much of family policy (Clarke, 2006), it is clear that the 30 hours is aimed at promoting maternal employment (Campbell et al., 2018). Here I evaluate whether the 30 hours policy has achieved this goal, whilst exploring the impact of the FEEE policies on another aspect of 'women's work', that is, how it is affecting those in the early years workforce in England, 97% of which are women (Haux et al., 2022).

## The 30 Hours Policy – Encouraging Maternal Employment

Encouraging maternal employment through improving the availability and affordability of childcare was introduced by New Labour, who argued it was instrumental in achieving policy goals surrounding reducing child poverty (Piachaud & Sutherland, 2001; Stewart, 2009). The proportion of mothers in employment has certainly increased; the figure was just under 62% in 1996 (Carter, 2018) yet by 2002 (around the time of the introduction of New Labour's policies focused upon childcare, including Sure Start and 15 hours of ECEC for three- and four-year-olds) it had

increased to 66.5% (Murphy et al., 2022). By 2021, just over three quarters of all women were in paid employment, although mothers are significantly more likely to be engaged in part time work than childfree women (Murphy et al., 2022). For government ministers, including Liz Truss when in the role of Childcare Minister this has been useful in presenting two working parents in a family as the norm:

> "It has become the norm for both parents to work. In 60% of 2-parent families in the OECD, both parents work. And the concept of work itself is changing - becoming more flexible. People change jobs more often - and mums and dads use different combinations of work - sometimes holding down 2 or more jobs (Department for Education & Truss, 2014)

As discussed in chapter two, normalisation is at the core of disciplinary power and biopolitics (Foucault, 1977a). Through normalising families in which both parents work, Truss works to discipline families. The disciplinary power of the FEEE policies is explored more in chapter eight.

Of course, the 30 hours policy alone is not responsible for this increase in maternal employment- a range of tax credits and benefit payments to support those paying for childcare had been introduced in that time, alongside a general increase in the cost of living and societal shifts in attitudes towards working mothers (McCarthy, 2021). However, in research conducted into the first year of the 30 hours policy, Paull and LaValle (2018) reported that 15% of the mothers participating stated they would not be working if the 30 hours had not been introduced, and 27% said they would be working fewer hours. Just over a quarter of mothers had increased their hours of employment (Paull & LaValle, 2018). However, a minority (5%) had reduced their working hours, as they no longer required a higher income to fund childcare. In a more recent study, just over half of ECEC staff reported that the 30 hours entitlement was encouraging parents to work more, yet there were variabilities, with significantly more practitioners working in the least deprived areas of the country making this claim (Pascal et al., 2021a). Practitioners report that rather than incentivising parents to work, the 30 hours funding acts as a subsidy, reducing childcare costs for those parents already working (Pascal et al., 2021a). One explanation for this could be the prohibitively expensive upfront costs required to secure a childcare place (ie one month's fees) for those parents who are not already working (Mayor of London,

2019). However, Brewer et al (2020) suggest that whilst the universal 15 hours makes little difference to parent's working patterns, the 30 hours entitlement leads to significant increases in the employment rates for mothers. The same is reported for mothers of children receiving the 15 funded hours as two-year-olds (Paull & LaValle, 2018). For fathers, fewer than 1% entered the workforce and only 7% increased their working hours as a result of receiving government funded ECEC hours, reinforcing the extent to which mother's work relies upon affordable and reliable childcare (Paull & LaValle, 2018).

## The FEEE Policies and the Early Years Workforce

As stated above, the FEEE policies affect another group of women- those whom comprise 97% of the early years workforce in England (Haux et al., 2022), with working with young children being 'an almost entirely gendered career' (Penn & McQuail, 1997, p. iv). The reasons for this are too numerous and complex to explore here in any depth but they are well documented elsewhere, with low pay (Akhal, 2019b; Crown, 2019; Social Mobility Commission, 2020) and fears of being accused of child abuse (Wright & Brownhill, 2018) cited as potential reasons for the lack of men in the sector, and the 'naturalness' of women caring for young children given their roles as mothers provided as justification for their dominance (ibid). It should be noted that this is an ongoing issue, with a lack of male teachers in infant schools recorded as a concern since the 1820s, and the lack of males in the sector itself seen as a factor discouraging more from joining for fear of feeling alienated in the workplace (Burn & Pratt-Adams, 2015).

Women also dominate in primary schools, representing 86% of primary and nursery teachers, although this figure falls to 65% in secondary schools (National Statistics, 2023b). 93% of teaching assistants across education are female (ibid). Interestingly, 63% of teachers in independent schools, across primary and secondary, are women (Independent Schools Council, 2023), suggesting that men are more willing to take up roles with a perceived higher status in education. As An and Bonetti (2017) assert, "'[t]he epidemic of low teacher recruitment and high dropout that our Early

Years face is only symptomatic of a much larger problem: the low status of and insufficient regard for our Early Years practitioners". However, it could be argued that work in the early years has taken on the label of low status *because* of the dominance of women in the sector. As Dworkin (1993, p. 43) states, "In general then, women do the lowest work of the society whatever that lowest work is perceived to be; and when women are the primary workers in a field, the field itself takes on the females' low status". Mothers are significantly more likely to work in these low-status education and childcare sector (as well as other public sector roles such as those in the NHS) than women without children, presumably because these jobs can fit around their childcare needs (Carter, 2018). Paradoxically, their own childcare needs can constrain women, compelling them to work in low-paid roles which involve caring for the children of others. Childcare is a political and feminist issue due to its centrality to women's lives. Here I consider how the FEEE policies are affecting the women working in the ECEC sector, exploring their role in low pay, insecure employment, the recruitment and retention crisis and the decrease in the number of qualified practitioners working in the sector.

### *Low Pay*

Whilst the low pay in the early years sector has long been acknowledged, there is some evidence to suggest that the underfunding of the FEEE policies has exacerbated the problem. Average real wages fell from £8.59 to £8.19 an hour between 2013 and 2018 (Akhal, 2019b), and by 2020 they were estimated to be just £7.42 an hour, compared to £11.37 for women across all sectors (Akhal & Social Mobility Commission, 2020). In 2017, it was estimated that 20,000 ECEC staff were paid less than the minimum wage. Due to these factors, twice as many people working in childcare claim welfare benefits compared to the general population (Akhal, 2019b) with a third reporting using food banks and 14% living in poverty (Crown, 2019).

At the time of the introduction of the 30 hours policy, analysis suggested that for settings to remain financially viable given the government funding rates, they would

be required to pay practitioners below the minimum wage (Stephens & Levy, 2017). It was predicted that providers would lower wages across the sector, but particularly for staff with lower levels of qualifications (Stephens & Levy, 2017). Setting managers report that they are unable to pay the living wage (£13.15 in London, £12 elsewhere in England) due to the inadequate hourly rates they are receiving from the government (Herman & Johnson, 2023), yet the Department of Education have denounced this, blaming settings by stating "early years providers are responsible for setting pay and conditions for their employees" (Crown, 2019). Regardless, the low pay in ECEC is prompting many practitioners to seek employment with improved renumeration, often in retail (Akhal, 2019b).

### *The Recruitment and Retention Crisis Amid the Funding Reforms.*

The movement of staff from ECEC to the retail sector is particularly problematic now given that a larger workforce is needed to manage the supply of the 30 hours. In January 2017, 1,480,910 children were receiving 15 funded hours, either as two-, three-, or four-year-olds (Department for Education, 2017a). By 2023, this figure was 1,764,300, with over 330,000 receiving the 30 funded hours and therefore necessitating more staff (although it should be noted that much of this increase is simply due to a larger population of young children) (Department for Education, 2023d). Alongside this increase in the number of children receiving funded ECEC hours is a recruitment and retention crisis in the sector. 77% of setting leaders reported difficulties in recruiting staff by 2019 (National Day Nurseries Association, 2019) and by 2021 this had increased to 84% (Early Years Alliance, 2021a). As one participant in a survey into the early years workforce (Early Years Alliance, 2021b, p. 6) stated;

> Why would anyone go into the early years sector? The pay is poor, the terms and conditions of employment are poor, the prospect of increased pay is unlikely, the demands placed on people who work in the sector are extremely high and we are treated with a lack of respect.

Staff turnover in the sector is between 11% and 15% (Akhal & Commission, 2020). Almost half of settings report having to restrict the number of children who can attend because of a lack of staff, and over a fifth have reduced opening hours (Early Years

Alliance, 2021b). The number of practitioners leaving the sector is having a detrimental effect on the skill level.

### *Staff Qualifications and Experience*

The need to recruit more staff to facilitate the 30 hours in particular may have impacted upon the qualification levels of the workforce. In the year 2015/6, 83% of the ECEC workforce held at least a Level 3 qualification; by 2018/9, that figure had fallen to 52% (National Day Nurseries Association, 2019a). In the same period, the number of graduates and early years teachers in the sector fell from 13% to 5%, with this shortfall made up by unqualified staff, the proportion of which has increased from 10% to 26% (Department for Education, 2023d), with a large number of apprentices now employed to fill gaps and cut costs (National Day Nurseries Association, 2019a). The downskilling of the ECEC workforce matters as having a graduate employed in a setting has been found to have a small but positive effect on children's educational outcomes throughout primary school (Bonetti & Blanden, 2020). Accompanying this haemorrhaging of qualified staff is a loss of experienced practitioners. In 2016, 17% of practitioners in group settings other than schools were under 25, whilst 40% were aged 40 and over (Department for Education, 2023d). By 2022, in private group-based settings, 23% were aged under 25 and only 29% were 40+ (ibid). Whilst age does not necessarily indicate experience, the loss of older and more experienced staff is reported across qualitative data in a number of studies (National Day Nurseries Association, 2019; Pascal et al., 2021a).

The beginning of the decline of qualified practitioners in the workforce can be seen in the year 2016/7, prior to the introduction of the 30 hours policy, so bold claims surrounding the effect of the 30 hours cannot be made. Rather, the low pay in the sector is cited as the main reason for practitioners leaving the sector prior to the pandemic (Akhal, 2019b), and the stress of working through the Covid-19 pandemic and perceived lack of regard for the sector during that period given by staff leaving since (Early Years Alliance, 2021). However, one setting leader commenting in a survey stated "staff are stretched to the limits because of lack of funding and an

increase in children due to the 30 hours" (National Day Nurseries Association, 2019, p. 8). With the underfunding possibly lowering wages in ECEC further, as discussed above, there is a possibility that the FEEE policies are indirectly contributing to the retention and recruitment crisis in the sector.

### *Irregular Work*

The final way in which the FEEE policies and, again, the 30 hours policy especially, may be impacting upon the work of practitioners is through the time at which children become eligible. Children become entitled in the term following their third birthday, with 'cut off' points on three dates over the course of the year. For example, a child who turns three years on the 30th September, prior to the cut-off date of 31st December, would be able to access the 30 funded hours from 1st January. This model has led to variable numbers of children accessing provision over the course of the academic year, with providers needing to adapt their staffing to these changing numbers of children. As one leader explained in research conducted for the Sutton Trust, "The 30 hour policy had led to increased staffing demands, which was hard to maintain over the year as demand for places was not evenly dispersed across the year" (Pascal et al., 2021b, p. 57). Therefore, some staff may be required to work fewer hours in the autumn term, when the number of eligible children is lower, and more in the summer term, as more children become entitled. Ironically, this variable number of working hours may have an impact upon practitioner's own eligibility for the 30 funded hours, as mothers are overrepresented in the ECEC workforce (Carter, 2018).

### *The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic and Cost-of-Living Crisis*

This chapter would be incomplete without a brief mention of the impact the Covid-19 pandemic and more recent cost of living crisis have had upon the ECEC sector. Whilst poor pay has traditionally been the main barrier for those working in the sector or wanting to, practitioners cited the stress of the pandemic (72%) and not feeling valued by the government (77%) as reasons for leaving or planning to in the

immediate aftermath of Covid-19 (Early Years Alliance, 2021). The ECEC sector arguably faced greater pressure than schools, with settings instructed to close for all but the most vulnerable children during the first lockdown, with some staff furloughed, but told to remain open for all (unlike schools) for the second (La Valle et al., 2022). Unsurprisingly, this has been found to have negatively affected the wellbeing of practitioners (Early Years Alliance, 2021). Meanwhile, the additional costs associated with the pandemic (eg extra cleaning materials, PPE, extra resources to encourage being outdoors) (La Valle et al., 2022) and the cost of living crisis, which has meant that settings have been faced with higher utility bills and increased costs of food and resources, have been incurred whilst receiving government funding at levels that do not incorporate these rises (Pascal et al., 2021a). Whilst costs have mainly been passed on to parents, almost half of settings have also reduced the number of staff to manage this (Jarvie et al., 2023). This must be viewed in the context of the recruitment and retention crisis, but a reduction in staffing may result in more job insecurity for staff and additional stress as they take on work that would have been performed by others.

Whilst there may appear to be a split between these two groups of women- one providing childcare, the other relying on those women to participate in the wider workforce- their needs and work is interwoven. The focus in this thesis, however, is on the ECEC workforce. The research to date uncovers the ways in which the FEEE policies have altered the work of practitioners. However, it does not consider the impact of the policies upon the practitioners themselves. This thesis seeks to address this, with chapter nine exploring practitioner subjectivities. In the next chapter, I explain the methodology and data collection tools employed to answer the research questions.

# Chapter 5 – Methods and Methodology: Collecting Data to Explore the 'Splits'

The research methods selected for utilisation in this study reflect the underpinning theoretical frameworks discussed in chapter two. This chapter explores how the research methods chosen are framed by those theories, the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning the methods and theories utilised, and how they were selected to answer the research questions. There is also discussion of the methods originally planned for this research, and the way in which they were was adapted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. My positionality and reflexivity, and the way in which these were central to the research, is considered, details of participants are shared and the ongoing ethical considerations are discussed. Finally, there is an explanation of the data analysis method employed – reflexive thematic analysis- and how data was analysed. I begin by reiterating the research questions for this study.

## Research Questions

The four research questions are as follows:

1. How are the free early education entitlement (FEEE) policies enacted in practice?
2. What are the discourses that permeate the FEEE policies?
3. Do the FEEE policies function as a 'dividing practice'? If so, how?
4. How do the FEEE policies impact upon the subjectivity of ECEC practitioners?

I continue with discussion of my positionality as I consider this to be central to the ontological, epistemological, and methodological underpinnings of this research.

## Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality

My position as a mother and a feminist greatly influenced this research, although I did not recognise this when embarking upon the study, my reflexivity increasing and positionality shifting as I conducted the research as is common with such a lengthy project (Darwin Holmes, 2020). The study began when my own daughter was just two years old and I enrolled her at a day nursery, often for eight to nine hour days, to enable my part time role as a teacher and work on this PhD, despite my unease that this was not in her best interests. Such guilt is common amongst working mothers (Arendell, 2000), much more so than in working fathers (Borelli et al., 2017), due to dominant discourses surrounding 'the perfect mother' and the idealisation of motherhood (Henderson et al., 2016). This guilt was possibly exacerbated due to some of the research I had previously read surrounding the detrimental impact that long hours in group settings can have upon young children, particularly their social and emotional wellbeing (eg Sylva et al., 2004a). These fears were confounded by some of the responses from participants during interviews, who expressed views that long days in nurseries were detrimental to young children, particularly under-threes:

> You know, I think that particularly two-year-olds, I mean shouldn't they be at home with their mum and their dad? You know, learning skills with their mum and dad rather than being institutionalised? (Gemma, nursery school teacher)

> Like I say I wouldn't send *my* children for 30 hours, or you know, if I, if it had been something that was available when my kids were at nursery there's no way I would have sent them for 30 hours. (Amy, nursery class teacher)

Such comments evoked an uncomfortable response at times as I struggled to assimilate my own guilt and regret at my daughter's long days at nursery with the story being told through the research. The research often provoked an emotional

response which had not been anticipated, despite my own personal connection to some of the data. Some reassurance was gained upon discovering that this is not uncommon in research (Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000), whilst some consider an emotional connection to be not only inseparable from feminist research (eg Gray, 2008), but a “source of insight” (Letherby, 2011). Whilst reading that such responses are a typical component of feminist research, I was simultaneously frustrated that, again, more emotional labour is expected of women engaging in such work. My emotional response may have meant that a heightened level of attention was paid to participant responses which questioned the dominant discourse of nurseries as ‘the best place for young children’. It reminded me that the ECEC market is not a rational, logical marketplace as it is wrought with emotion (Vincent & Ball, 2001). It also, unquestionably, made me consider the appropriateness of the 30 hours policy, which often acts as a subsidy to make longer days in nursery more affordable for parents (eg Archer & Merrick, 2020), for children, and I attempted to be aware of this position as I analysed the data.

Nonetheless, these were uncomfortable thoughts, as the feminist part of my identity would remind myself of the fact that ECEC was necessary for women to participate in the labour market, and surely government funded ECEC to promote mother’s employment was to be celebrated. Of particular concern to me was the way in which research such as mine could be used to oppose childcare policies that support working women. Whilst not conceited enough to consider that a mere doctoral thesis could result in a U-turn in government policy, I was nonetheless uneasy to be seen as contributing to a discourse which questions a mother’s right to work, particularly given my own feelings of guilt. Alcoff (1991) stated that feminists should be conscious of the material impact of their work, whilst Letherby (2011) discusses the need to be cognizant of the way in which the knowledge produced by research may be used. Finch (1984, p. 176) went further, warning that “collective, not merely individual, interests are at stake” through research.

A different perspective was brought to the study through my employment as a part-time nursery teacher during the first two years of conducting this PhD. Indeed, the

experience narrated at the beginning of this thesis explains how my employment resulted in this study, as I witnessed a material 'split' between children attending for 15 hours and those entitled to 30. My contract during that period varied from 0.4 to 0.8 FTE and as a part time teacher, I felt exploited as the demands of full-time staff were placed upon me and I was required to work far beyond my paid days to fulfil them. Despite these feelings of exploitation, I recognised my fortunate position within ECEC provision as a teacher, as the unqualified or level 3 early years practitioners I worked alongside were paid considerably less than I and worked incredibly hard. At the same time, I had begun to read more feminist literature, some more radical, and this quote from Andrea Dworkin stayed with me; "In general then, women do the lowest work of the society whatever that lowest work is perceived to be; and when women are the primary workers in a field, the field itself takes on the females' low status" (Dworkin, 1993, p. 82). The feminist issues surrounding early childhood education and care, regarding both women's choice (or lack of) to use childcare and work, and the low levels of pay and respect for those working in the sector, became more pertinent to me.

My job as a part-time nursery teacher at the commencement of this research (I left my job as a nursery teacher in April 2020, with the final interview undertaken in May 2020) also afforded me the position of 'insider' (Drake & Heath, 2011), reducing 'social distance' (Oakley, 1981). My role, which was shared with almost all research participants, provided a shared language with which to discuss the topic, terms such as 'baseline' and 'free flow' going undefined. However, at times there was a 'taken for granted'-ness around knowledge, an assumption that both parties in the interview knew and understood a phenomenon, and so it went unexplained and unexplored. As Gobo (2008, p. 28) asserts, it is "switching from the layman's attitude inspired by an indigenous realism, which sees the scene as natural, normal, obvious and taken-for-granted, to that of a researcher who sets him or herself the task of *de-naturalizing* the social world under investigation" that is the real task of research. Furthermore, as Oakley (1981) also observes, the removal of 'social distance' exacerbates ethical concerns around power and equality. Finch (1984, p. 173) expanded on these ethical concerns, discussing the "'moral

dilemma' as the female interviewer benefits from that identity". The lack of 'social distance' made me reflect upon power relations when interviewing more deeply than perhaps I otherwise would have, and this is explored in more depth in the discussion around interviewing within a feminist methodology below.

This insider status also led to issues regarding wanting to represent (ie speak and advocate for) rather than re-present (ie talk about and describe) participants, a distinction made by Spivak (1988). This could have led to bias both when interviewing and when analysing data due to viewing early years professionals as 'just like me', a homogenous group with homogenous views. This danger was hopefully averted during the first interview, when participant 1, a primary school headteacher, discussed what she considered to be the work-avoidant strategies of her nursery class team. As a nursery teacher at that time, the interview made me reflect upon the fact that the ECEC workforce certainly do not hold homogenous views. The episode did, however, alert me to the propensity to seek similar beliefs and values amongst what one considers to be their group and reflect upon the need to avoid this. This 'split' positionality – as an ECEC teacher (and, later in the research, ex-teacher), mother, and researcher- therefore led to some conflicting views surrounding the policies being researched.

## Epistemology and Ontology

Before explaining the methodology and data collection methods utilised, it is important to discuss the salience of the epistemological, ontological and methodological framing of this study, and how these perspectives impacted upon the choice of methods and linked to the theories employed (as discussed in chapter two, Theorising Splits and Divisions) and my positionality, which is detailed above. Whilst epistemology is "a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (Crotty, 2020, p. 3), ontology ponders "whether or not there is a social reality that exists independently from human conceptions and interpretations and, closely related to this, whether there is a shared social reality or only multiple, context-specific ones" (Ormston et al, 2014, p. 4). Put simply, it is how we view reality

(O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015). The epistemological and ontological approaches taken in this study are discussed below.

## Epistemology

The epistemological stance adopted in this study is constructivist. Constructivism argues that people's behaviours are shaped by the social norms of the culture they inhabit, with the ideas, beliefs, values and identities of people amalgamating to construct a lens through which they see the world (Parsons, 2018). This aligns with the Foucauldian theory employed, which centres around the role of discourses in producing social realities. As discussed in chapter two, 'Theorising Splits and Divisions', discourses allow us to build views and opinions on a topic that are in keeping with the sanctioned perspective, the dominant discourse- and make it almost impossible to think beyond them (Ball, 2013). With the role of dominant discourses central to the exploration of power in this study, a constructivist viewpoint is embraced in recognition of how they shape how people act and think.

Through engaging with a constructivist epistemological standpoint, I aim to be transparent regarding my own role in the construction of knowledge presented in this thesis, and the role of the participants. Knowledge is inseparable from the individual who possesses it (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). My own values, beliefs and experiences are outlined above in the discussion on researcher positionality, but of course the study also concerns the participants and their own construction of knowledge. One of the aims of this research was to explore how dominant discourses, alongside these experiences, values and beliefs, in ECEC shape how practitioners construct reality, and therefore a constructivist epistemological is a logical and coherent framework in which to examine this.

However, within this constructivist stance, a materialist view is adopted, as I believe that the physical or material world is real whilst the social world is constructed (Snape & Spencer, 2003). This is important because, whilst I argue that the reality of

each participant is constructed based upon their experiences, background, views and beliefs, I believe that there is also a material reality for the participants interviewed and the families they work with. That a setting is at risk of closure due to the underfunding of policies or that a family are living in cramped temporary accommodation is not a social construction, but a material reality, and I would consider it insensitive and possibly even offensive to argue otherwise. Therefore, I do not fully subscribe to Ponterotto's (2005, p. 7) assertion that "reality is constructed in the mind of the individual, rather than it being an externally singular entity." However, I also appreciate the view articulated by Kukla (2000) which argues that even 'facts' in physical sciences are the result of researcher priorities, status, beliefs and so on.

Nonetheless, the constructivist stance adopted was evident at every stage of the research, from creation of the research questions to data analysis and writing up. The very inception of this study, the observation of the cloakroom 'split' into two sides with pictures of 15 hour children on one and 30 hour children on the other, demonstrates the constructivist perspective. It was my recent experience of completing a Masters degree, with some understanding of Foucauldian theory and the notion of 'dividing practices', that resulted in the construction of this 'split'. As discussed later in this chapter, reflexivity was central to the analysis of data, highlighting again the role of the researcher in constructing knowledge. Of course, the data analysed is first created through participants own constructions of their reality. As Tashakkori et al (2021) state, the constructivist paradigm leads a researcher to prioritise participants' unique interpretations, descriptions, and narratives of their lived realities, stressing the idea that knowledge is mutually shaped by the researcher and participants. This shared construction of knowledge is recognised in other examples of research which utilise reflexive thematic analysis (eg Byrne, 2022; Ho et al, 2017; Trainor et al, 2021). Tied to how knowledge is constructed is *what* knowledge can be acquired- ontology.

## Ontology

As Lincoln and Guba (2016, p. 39) argue, “Relativism is the basic ontological presupposition of constructivism. In the human sciences, entities are matters of definition and convention; they exist only in the minds of the persons contemplating them.” Just as constructivists argue that the knowledge of an individual or group is acquired dependent on their background, views, beliefs and so on, relativism claims that social objects are created by those experiencing them and, therefore, the same social situation is defined and experienced differently by separate people experiencing the same event. In addition to the notion that reality is shaped by those experiencing it, it also suggests that it is moulded by those interpreting it, and so again this standpoint recognises the role of both participants and the researcher in constructing reality (Lincoln et al, 2018).

This relativist stance therefore foregrounds plural perspectives and multiple social realities. Central to this is an assumption that in relativist research there is no presentation of one reality that has been uncovered (Schutz & Luckmann, 1975), and this study is no different. The aim of this research is to explore the experiences of individuals, to present the multiple realities shared and co-constructed with me. The aim is not to unearth one unified answer, but to explore the experiences of individuals, and centre how their background, experiences, values and beliefs shaped how they viewed and enacted policies. (Guba, 1992). This is in keeping with the poststructural rejection of a ‘truth’ waiting to be brought to the surface.

The co-construction of reality was explained by Schutz through much of his work (Schutz & Luckmann,1975) as intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity explains how a shared understanding of reality is created through social interactions, with spoken and written language and gesture allowing individuals not just to simply share information with one another, but to synchronise their ideas of what reality is (Schutz & Luckmann, 1975). The way in which the construction of reality is grounded in social interactions is also explored by Burr (2015), who also explains how reality is therefore constantly evolving as the importance of discourses wax and wane, with some becoming dominant. Again, intersubjectivity and the construction of reality through shared social interactions highlights how the interview process created knowledge produced by both the participants and researcher.

The epistemological and ontological foundations of this study resulted in a particular data collection method being utilised; namely, the use of semi-structured interviews. Why these were selected, how interviews had to move to online due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of this, is discussed next.

## Research Methods and Rationale

## Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Research Methods

The research was originally to be an ethnographic study over two sites, with participant observation forming the basis of the research whilst staff members from the two settings were to be interviewed at three key points during the year to discuss assessment outcomes for children attending for 15 and 30 hours, with informal discussions and documentary evidence crucial ancillary sources The views of parents were also to be included, with ethical approval given for parents are carers to be approached to participate in one-off interviews to discuss their thoughts on the 15 and 30 hours of funded ECEC, the application process, matters of equity regarding the policies and how they had selected their child's setting. Whilst there is some contestation regarding the use of ethnography within a poststructuralist framework (Clifford, 1986), the view was taken that "In poststructuralist versions, "the real" of ethnography is taken as an effect of the discourses of the real" (Britzman, 1995, p.230).

However, in common with most research conducted during the 2019-2021 period, this study was hugely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. With fieldwork planned for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years, I was contacting schools and nurseries to discuss the possibility of carrying out fieldwork when the pandemic struck and resulted in the nationwide reduction of services in early years settings and schools, whereby only children deemed 'vulnerable' and those whose parents were keyworkers were permitted to attend (Cabinet Office & Department for Education, 2022). A decision was made to alter the methodology to case studies and the research methods to focus on participant interviews, which could be conducted via telephone or video call platforms, as it was unclear how long schools and early years settings would be limiting their operations for, and whether a researcher would be

permitted to enter a setting once they were fully open to all children. Parents were to be excluded from the study as the reduced operation of schools and early years settings meant that many were working from home whilst simultaneously caring for and home educating their children. I considered it unethical to appeal for parent's time as my own circumstances meant that I understood the many challenges, such as very long working days and reduction in other supportive services such as playgroups, faced by parents during this period. Furthermore, I considered this a feminist issue, as mothers were disproportionately affected by pandemic lockdowns, taking responsibility for childcare for 10.3 hours a day on average, 2.3 hours more than the mean for fathers (Sevilla et al., 2020). This varied according to the age of children, with women supplying 78% more childcare in homes with children aged from birth to five years (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Given that it would have been parents of three- and four-year-olds interviewed, and that most participants in studies exploring childcare choices are mothers (eg Chen & Bradbury, 2020), this extra burden upon working mothers was one I considered to be unconscionable given the feminist grounding of this study. Nonetheless, prior to the Covid-19 lockdown, phase one of the study involving interviews and observation in a nursery school, had already taken place.

## Phase One: Face to Face Interviews and Observations

Between October 2018 and March 2019, phase one was conducted with three aims; to ascertain whether the subject of this study was viable, to rehearse the research skills required, familiarising myself with the process of carrying out research and to begin collecting data for the study (Glesne, 2016). During this period, a maintained nursery school was visited on average once a fortnight to observe children and practitioners and interviews with four members of staff were interviewed. Documentary evidence, such as timetables to observe children, posters advertising additional services, and displays on walls consisting of children's creative work, photographs of children at play and observations of children's activities by staff, were also considered. The data from these interviews have been included in the findings, as has limited data from fieldwork notes and observations.

Non-participant, naturalistic observations were utilised, as I considered these compatible with a Foucauldian lens as they made visible “the minutiae of everyday life and the ways in which the sinews of power are embedded in mundane practices and in social relationships” (Ball, 2013, p. 6). The paradox of observing children for a study focusing on disciplinary power is recognised, particularly given the role of child observations in maintaining dominant discourses around child development and judgements against milestones (MacNaughton, 2005; Osgood, 2023). However, the prevalence of child observations in ECEC settings may have made my presence less conspicuous (Bradbury, 2013a). Whilst these observations formed a very small part of the study due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the data collected triangulated some of that from interviews (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Although many of the issues arising from phase one (ie how involved to be as a non-participant observer) did not need to be considered for the main project as it ceased to be an ethnography, it nonetheless allowed me to practice interview skills, refine the interview protocol, and ensure that the questions asked would allow me to answer the research questions (Ismail et al., 2017; Malmqvist et al., 2019). Phase one also forced me to think deeply about the ethical implications of the study. This is explored in more depth later in this chapter. First, I outline the rationale for the selection of interviews as the main data collection method.

### *Choosing Semi-Structured Interviews*

A semi-structured approach was taken to interviews. The notion that I am a ‘miner’ (Kvale, 1996) exposing the ‘truth’ is rejected, the poststructural stance of this study refuting the possibility of such an exchange. Kvale’s concept of instead being a traveller, journeying alongside the participant as thoughts and ideas were discussed, was useful, with one participant in particular (Mary) seemingly considering some ideas and beliefs for the first time as we explored them, explaining that she had not thought about them previously. Interviews were an opportunity to explore some of the ways in which discourses moulded the views, beliefs, experiences and practices of practitioners, and the way in which disciplinary power works on and through

individuals to shape their subjectivity (Moss, 2018). This is in keeping with the subjective, constructivist ontological and epistemological stance of the research.

As generalisation and standardisation were not the aims of data collection, semi-structured interviews allowed for an interview guide approach that delineated issues to be incorporated into the discussion (Patton, 1980). Semi-structured interviews also allow for unexpected topics to be explored (Bryman, 2012), an aspect which proved to be very fruitful during data collection. Questions were open ended (see appendix 4 for the interview protocol used) and endeavoured to facilitate interviews that had a focus yet were adaptable to elicit the details and minutiae of practice rather than generalities (Kvale, 1996). Therefore, introductory questions (eg those beginning with 'Can you tell me about…') along with probing and follow up questions were included in the interview guide, with structuring ('Thank you. I will now move on to…') and ending ('Those are all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add?') also used in the interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Abstract questions regarding how participants felt about certain topics were asked after concrete questions in which they spoke about their experiences, providing them with factual events on which to base answers more concerned with affect (Knott et al, 2022).

Interviews were part of an iterative process of data collection, with each piece informing the next, with such activity regarded as key to reflexive qualitative research and the collection of high-quality, in-depth data (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Therefore adjustments were made to the initial interview protocol, with additional conversation topics added in response to the data collected. For example, four questions or topics were added to the protocol immediately following the first interview. Francesca, a primary school headteacher, went into some detail around when the school first offered the 30 funded hours to parents and the reasons behind this, which were centred around the school budget. Realising that the rationale for offering the 30 hours and when the setting first offered it provided an important insight into how the staff in a setting regarded the policy, the protocol was updated to include the questions 'When did you introduce the 30 hours?' and 'Why did you introduce the 30 hours?'. Seven topics were added to the protocol over the course of

the 19 interviews, they are indicated on the interview protocol (see appendix 4). This is in keeping with accepted practice in qualitative research, which recognises that questions may be added or removed, or the order of questions rearranged (Charmaz, 2002). Nonetheless, I recognise that interviewing as a novice researcher was one of the limitations of this study and this is explored more in chapter ten (Conclusion: The Power of Discourses in Producing Splits).

## Phase Two: Online Interviews

Realising that face-to-face interviews were not going to be possible for some time due to the Covid-19 pandemic, ethical approval was gained to utilise online video call software (including Microsoft Teams and Skype but excluding Zoom due to privacy and confidentiality concerns) and telephone to conduct interviews in April 2020. Recruitment methods were also altered to centre on the use of social media (see below for more on recruitment) as it seemed logical and congruous to adopt online recruitment routes to seek participants for online interviews (Hanna & Mwale, 2017). A new Skype ID and Microsoft Teams channel were created, allowing their deletion once interviews and transcription were completed to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of participants (Iacono et al., 2016).

The move to online and telephone interviews presented many opportunities regarding participant recruitment. It widened the geographical spread of participants, allowing access to participants in areas that would otherwise have been prohibitively expensive or time consuming to interview face-to-face. Interviews could take part at almost any time, providing participants with flexibility (Hanna & Mwale, 2017). It permitted participants who would otherwise have been unable to take part in the research with the opportunity to have their voice included, as also observed by Deakin and Wakefield (2014). One childminder, whose role means she does not have lunch breaks or time away from the children in her care, may otherwise have been precluded the research, but instead we spoke via Skype one evening as our respective children slept.

As well as enabling more early years practitioners from different parts of the country to participate, online video interviews may have provided participants with a more empowered research experience, a concern of qualitative, particularly feminist methodology (Stanley & Wise, 2013). Participants were asked to choose the platform that the interview was to take place over, although this was limited to a choice of two. All online interviews took place with the participant at home, which may have made participants feel more comfortable (Hanna, 2012). Whilst face-to-face interviews held at a participant's workplace may pose a threat to anonymity and confidentiality if colleagues interrupt an interview or witness the researcher in the building, online interviews have no such risk (although there was the chance of a family member or somebody else within the home interposing). Unlike a face-to-face interview held at the practitioner's setting, the online interviews allowed participants to control what was on view, with the obscuring of backgrounds or an artificial backdrop (such as a tropical island) possible on both Skype and Microsoft Teams. Participants had more control over their 'presentation of self' (Goffman, 1959), they could select the pictures, photographs, books etc on display to represent themselves and their lives, or choose to remove such artefacts entirely. Such control can be particularly important to more introverted participants, encouraging them to communicate more openly (Seitz, 2016).

The greater comfort and ease of participants was hoped to overcome some of the challenges of online video interviews. Building rapport was of particular concern, especially given the feminist methodology I had adopted. The foundations of rapport were built in the messages and e-mails that were exchanged prior to the interview itself (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Seitz, 2016), to discuss the timing of the interview, the platform it would take place on and so on. Whilst some researchers consider it difficult to build rapport when using online video call software (eg Cater, 2011), partially due to the lack of eye contact possible due to the positioning of cameras (Petralia, 2011), my experiences during this study were in keeping with those who found building rapport with participants during online interviews equivalent to face-to-face interviews (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Iacono et al., 2016). The video aspect of

online interviews meant that facial expressions and body language could still provide contextual clues as to a participant's thoughts and feelings on a topic, and guide me to probe further or not (Knapp et al., 2013). Nonetheless, the sometimes poor internet connection meant that questions had to be repeated or words were misheard, resulting in repetition, an avoidance of over-long questions and the need to rebuild rapport (Hanna & Mwale, 2017; Seitz, 2016). Despite this, data collected from online video interviews was as deep and rich as that gathered from face-to-face interviews, contradicting some existing research (Rowley, 2012).

## Telephone Interviews

The lack of facial expression and non-verbal cues are recognised as one of the challenges of telephone interviews (Novick, 2008), the mode of interview selected by three participants. However, as Tausig and Freeman (1988) note, the lack of obvious emotional responses to statements can be beneficial, as it forces the interviewer to verbally enquire regarding the participant's thoughts and feelings, with this discussion then evident on the transcript. Participants may also find longer interviews more tolerable via telephone. Whereas interview participants stated that the optimal length of an interview was between 15 and 20 minutes (Burke & Miller, 2001), in studies utilising telephone interviews, they have typically lasted on average between one to one and a half hours (Holt, 2010; Stephens, 2007), with participants willing to engage in the interview than originally agreed provided rapport has been built (Cachia & Millward, 2011).

## Semi Structured Interviews Within a Feminist Poststructural Methodology

Interviews were sometimes a two-way exchange of information, with participants asking questions of my own experiences of the funding policies or of teaching in the early years generally. Oakley (1981, 2016) explored the issue of reciprocal questioning in seminal papers addressing interviewing within a feminist

methodology, concluding that the researcher needs to invest some of their own identity to avoid an exploitative relationship with participants. Participants questions were answered as fully as I felt was necessary, with the aim often to express empathy with a situation they had found difficult. For example, Catherine had recently resigned from her teaching post and was interested that I had also left the profession:

> Catherine: How long ago did you leave teaching?
>
> Researcher: So July, I left in July.
>
> Catherine: Oh OK.
>
> Researcher: So it's all very recent.

Amy described in detail the timetable on Wednesdays in her class of 39 nursery children, which resonated with my own experiences of a class of 39:

> Amy: So you had to stop quite early because that was also when the children were being collected so you had to stop early then release the children who were going home whilst keeping your other ones occupied until everybody had gone so you could take, 'cause I had no extra staff so it was the same staff who had to take them to lunch, 'cause they had to take them to lunch (laughs). Erm, so that was a bit tricky as well, so…yeah, mental! That's what Wednesday was, Wednesday was insane! (laughs)
>
> Researcher: (laughs) Erm, I, I do have experience of this, it's just really useful you know, for the purpose of the research to talk to somebody else who's done exactly the same thing.
>
> Amy: Yeah, yeah. Were you in full time?
>
> Researcher: No, no. Well, not, not for the past four years actually, I was part time.
>
> Amy: Because I can't imagine doing nursery full time with that many kids. It, it's just…I've got a friend who teaches nursery, not at the last school, the one I just was at, the one before, and they do *every* combination you imagine.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for information to be shared in this reciprocal manner, with some of my own identity revealed. In turn, this fostered a more feminist approach to the interviews.

However, the power differential within research interviews is one that cannot be ignored and is at odds with a feminist methodology. As Clarke et al (2004) observe, some participants will view the researcher as an expert, with this being the most pertinent aspect of the researcher's identity, regardless of any experiences they may have in common. Furthermore, whilst Finch (1984) states that women interviewing other women share a subordinate position due to their sex, she also discusses how this poses a moral dilemma as the researcher stands to gain from her identity. Therefore, the female interviewer must pay close attention to the research she is producing and ensure it cannot be used in a way which undermines the original intentions (Finch, 1984). I hope that I have demonstrated careful consideration of this in the section on 'Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality' earlier in this chapter. The details of participants and information regarding how they were recruited to the study is now provided.

## Recruitment and Participant Information

### Sampling and Recruitment

A range of online and offline methods were employed to recruit participants to the study, with varying levels of success. Posting calls for participants on social media proved to be the most fruitful method, with all participants recruited via either Facebook or Twitter. 'Guidelines for recruitment via social media and for use of social media data' published by UCL (UCL, n.d.) were adhered to. Recruitment was passive (Gelinas et al., 2017) and regarded with the same ethical concern as offline methods, with potential participants asked to contact me by e-mail or direct/private message (a facility within social media that allows private messages to be exchanged with no other users being permitted to view them), rather than any individuals being directly approached. Nonetheless, potential participants often responded directly to the post calling for participants, meaning that their interest in the research was visible to others within the group. Such responses were followed up by asking if I could contact the individual using e-mail or private/direct message to

avoid further semi-public discussion. Closed groups (groups that are centred around a certain topic and that individuals must ask to join, with no-one outside of that group able to see the posts) for early years practitioners were used to share recruitment materials. Using closed groups ensured that, when potential participants did respond directly to posts, this was seen only by members of the group and not by their wider network of friends, family and colleagues (NHS National Health Research Institute, 2014). Membership of those groups pre-dated the recruitment process, sometimes by years, due to the researcher's position as an early years teacher. The groups had been utilised to ask for and give advice, and therefore using them to recruit participants did not feel exploitative. Offline methods included attending an MA early years lecture and placing calls for participants in newsletters for early years bodies. Convenience sampling was utilised, with all participants who responded to recruitment materials and consented to take part once further information was shared were interviewed (Patton, 2014). Sampling was also purposive with a criterion basis (Patton, 1990), with participants required to work in a setting offering both the two-year-old, 15 and 30 funded hours in order to discuss the impact of the policies. Details regarding the participants are presented below in table 3.

## Participant Information

**Table 3: Participant Information**

| Pseudonym | Role | Setting Type | Ofsted grade of setting | Number of Years in EYs | Qualifications |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Francesca<br>1 | Headteacher | Primary school | Good | 21 | PGCE |
| 2<br>Kelly | Manager | Pre-school attached to primary school site (but independent) | Outstanding | 26 | BA Early Years Education<br>Early Years Professional Status |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3<br>Emily | Deputy head and SENCo | Nursery school | Good | 31 | NNEB<br>BA (Hons) Primary Education and Teaching |
| 4<br>Gemma | Teacher | Nursery school | Good | 20 | PGCE |
| 5<br>Sally | Headteacher | Nursery school | Outstanding | 33 | BEd |
| 6<br>Leonie | Executive headteacher of three maintained nursery schools | Nursery school | Outstanding | 33 | BEd |
| 7<br>Sarah | Nursery teacher | Primary school | Good | 15 | PGCE |
| 8<br>Catherine | Nursery teacher and EYFS leader | Primary school | Good | - | BEd |
| 9<br>Lisa | Nursery director | PVI | Good | - | MA |
| 10*<br>Jane | Teacher and deputy head | Nursery school | Outstanding | 32 | BEd |
| 11*<br>Nicola | Headteacher | Nursery school | Outstanding | - | MA |
| 12*<br>Mary | Teacher | Nursery school | Outstanding | 35 | BEd |
| 13<br>Suzanna | Childminder | Outdoor childminder | Good | 12 | BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14<br>Laura | Headteacher | Nursery school | Good | - | PGCE |
| 15<br>Rachel | Teacher | Infant school | Good | 27 | BEd |
| 16<br>Amy | Teacher | Primary school | Good | - | MA |
| 17<br>Julie | Headteacher | Nursery school | Outstanding | - | PGCE |
| 18<br>Carla | Teacher and SENCo | Nursery school | Outstanding | 20 | PGCE |
| 19<br>Charlotte | Headteacher | Nursery school | Outstanding | - | PGCE |

Each participant was interviewed once, with interviews lasting for 45 minutes on average. The number of interviews conducted (19) is within the range of 12-20 interviews which, it is suggested, sees saturation point (at which no insight is gathered (Glaser & Stauss, 1967)) reached (Guest et al, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021). However, Braun & Clarke (2021) criticise discussions of saturation within qualitative research, suggesting that it reinforces notions of meaning pre-existing within the data, rather than being actively constructed by the researcher. Vasileiou et al (2018) instead urge the researcher to consider the adequacy of data in answering the research questions, and, given the ontological and epistemological foundations of this study, this was the approach taken.

Nursery teachers and, in particular, teachers working in maintained nursery schools, were overrepresented in this study. This imbalance can be explained by the disproportionate impact the funding policies are having on maintained nursery

schools, which receive additional funding in recognition of the extra costs they face due to employing qualified teachers, a leadership team and so on for children in receipt of 15 hours, but not for the 15 further hours that make up the 30 (Archer & Merrick, 2020). Therefore, nursery school teachers had more of a vested interest in the topic, and it is recognised that participants who have been keenly affected by an issue may not only be willing, but eager, to take part in research to share their experiences (Bredal et al, 2024; Perera, 2020). Furthermore, the overrepresentation of teachers as opposed to nursery practitioners may reflect more professional confidence amongst this group (Cohen et al, 2018). Given the case study approach adopted, representation was not a concern, but nonetheless it should be noted here that the participants were not typical of the early years workforce.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was given for the study (project number Z6364106/2018/05/56, issued on 11th May 2018, see appendix for ethics form). The fourth edition of the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018) was adhered to, although I recognise that this has been updated since I carried out the research (BERA, 2024), as was UCL's own Research with Children: Guidance on Data Protection Issues (University College London, 2019). Ethical issues identified include seeking fully informed consent, the right to withdraw, data protection, limits to anonymity, and, of upmost importance, safeguarding and the well-being of children being observed during phase one. These issues are discussed below. However, being ethical is an ongoing process, not simply the completion of a form, and further ethical considerations have been explored elsewhere in this chapter, including in the sections on interviewing within a feminist methodology, researcher reflexivity and positionality, data analysis and the ethical implications of switching to online methods due to the Covid-19 pandemic. That is to say, being ethical imbued the entire project.

## Informed Consent

All participants were provided with an information sheet detailing the aims of the research, duration of the interview, limits to anonymity and risks, along with a

consent form, via email, after expressing an interest in participating and prior to the interview. This allowed time for the information to be properly considered. Both the information sheet and consent form were discussed and any questions answered prior to participants being asked to sign a hard copy of the consent form immediately prior to the interview commencing, as it is widely acknowledged that the length and complexity of information sheets means that participants do not engage fully with them (O'Sullivan et al, 2021). Elements which may have been detrimental to the participant, such as the limits to anonymity, were made particularly clear (Cohen et al, 2018).

## Transparency

The aims of the research were shared with participants, as were the intentions to publish findings in journal articles following the completion of the thesis.

## Right to Withdraw

Participants were informed that they could withdraw their consent and therefore their data at any time during the interview and up to four weeks following the date of the interview. Such a limit was introduced as, with pseudonyms used and data anonymised, extracting data from the correct participant may have been difficult beyond this timeframe. No participants exercised this right, thus there was no withdrawal data to consider (Dahal, 2024).

## Incentives

No incentives were offered to participants either before or after their involvement.

## Harm Arising From Participation

The need to ensure that no harm was suffered by participants due to the research varied considerably according to the phase of the research. Whilst observing at a nursery school during phase one, my paramount concern was for the wellbeing of the young children in the setting. Informed consent was given by the parents of children observed. As previously noted, the practice of observing children for the

purpose of assessment in the early years in England makes the presence of a researcher less conspicuous (Bradbury, 2013a), however, I was vigilant to the possibility of a child being upset by the existence of a stranger in the setting. Secondary to this was my concern that my research should not place excessive demands on the time of practitioners (BERA, 2018), who were clearly extremely busy. I was careful to limit the length of interviews to one hour and tried to be useful where appropriate, helping to tidy up and stepping in if there was a potentially unsafe situation amongst the children whilst observing, for example.

This regard for time and the pressure practitioners were under was my main consideration when online methods were adopted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. I was aware that many of the participants were mothers and, as discussed elsewhere, were juggling work and caring for their children at home. Interview times were therefore requested, and offered, beyond the usual working day, and, again, the length of the interview limited. However, during this period, several participants engaged in conversation beyond the interview, possibly reflecting the enjoyment in social engagement discussed in other qualitative research at this time (Lathen & Laestadius, 2021; Keen et al, 2022).

## Privacy and Data Storage

Anonymity is defined here as the process of keeping the identities of participants hidden from all but the researcher (Saunders et al, 2015). To achieve this, the names of all participants, the settings in which they worked and the Local Authorities in which the settings were based were changed, omitted or loosely described as relevant. Participants were asked if they wished to select their own pseudonym, although most did not choose to do so. Any potentially identifying information was altered. For example, one Local Authority had utilised a unique name for the two-year-old funding policy, and thus this was omitted to avoid the Local Authority and, potentially, the setting, being identifiable. Of course, limits to anonymity still existed, and these included my physical presence in the setting for phase one of the study. Three participants were interviewed in this setting, and therefore all three

participants would be able to identify one another. As Van den Hoonaard (2003) states, absolute anonymity in qualitative research may be an unobtainable goal.

Interviews were recorded on an iPhone which was protected by password, and used only recording, being kept away when elsewhere in the setting in line with setting policies regarding the use of mobile phones (Department for Education, 2023b). Interviews were transcribed within five days of the interview, with interview recordings deleted as soon as transcriptions were complete. Following this, transcriptions were stored on UCL's Research Student Log, which is data protection compliant. Participants were made aware of how, why and how long their data would be stored for, in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and General Data Protection Regulation (2018).

## Disclosure

Participants were informed that I would disclose any concerns regarding the welfare or safeguarding of children that came to light as a result of the research. It was made clear that this was a limit to the right to anonymity.

## Data Analysis

## Transcription

Transcription is recognised as 'as a theory-laden component of qualitative analysis [that] warrants closer examination' (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). In keeping with the poststructural framework, no assertions are made that the interview transcripts are objective or accurate, representing the 'truth' of the encounter, as the notion that this is a possibility is refuted. Rather, it is accepted that it is an interpretive (Bird, 2005; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999) and political (Roberts, 1997) act, and that the transcripts are constructions of interviews that exclude intended meanings, non-verbal communications and the social elements of interactions (Denzin, 1995). Denzin (1995) discusses the way in which these constructions, these textual representations of interviews are at once less for what they are missing, whilst also more, as the

transcriber interprets what was said, adds their own voice and subjectivity and constructs the transcription. Transcription was also regarded as the first stage of data analysis (Bird, 2005; Braun & Clarke, 2006), an opportunity to be immersed in the data.

The transcription process was informed by Kvale's (1996) guiding question 'What is a useful transcription for my research purposes?'. Whilst interviews were transcribed verbatim (bearing in mind the limitations of this claim with regard to the interpretive act), with a description of paralinguistic expressions (eg 'coughs') (O'Connell & Kowal, 1999), some interviews were not transcribed to the very end where the discussion had become more informal and personal, for reasons of ethics and time. However, data that may appear superfluous to the research questions was transcribed, as I did not wish to literally delete the voice of participants (Bird, 2005).

Following phase one, interviews were transcribed with no existing key. Instead this was developed during transcription as it became apparent that there was the need to distinguish between, for example, a short pause and a longer pause, to identity emphasis on words from participants, and to record notes around paralinguistic features that were important for meaning making (for example, if a participant had said a word in a sarcastic tone or whilst rolling their eyes). Whilst some paralinguistic features were identified and recorded where this changed the meaning of what was said, they were not routinely included and thus transcripts were orthographic in nature (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Non-semantic sounds such as 'er' and 'erm' were included. Who was speaking (participant or interviewer) was indicated by 'P' or 'I' alongside the text. Whilst it is recommended that punctuation is avoided when transcribing (Clarke & Braun, 2013) as people do not speak in clearly demarcated sentences, commas were used to indicate short pauses and full stops when a participant moved on to a new topic. This decision was made to make data more readable, and recordings were carefully listened to at least three times to try to capture meaning (Kvale, 1996). For example, participant 2 discussed the impact of the 30 hours policy on the number of children on roll, stating:

> …we were already full before, so we've just got slightly less children. If anything it's made, it's slightly easier for staff…

This could have been interpreted as:

> …we were already full before, so we've just got slightly less children, if anything. It's made, it's slightly easier for staff…

The meaning would have been slightly altered. Listening carefully to timing between words and paralinguistic features such as intonation helped to distinguish between such different meanings/ interpretations.

**Table 4 : Transcription key**

| | |
|---|---|
| **,** | **Short pause.** |
| **…** | **Longer pause.** |
| ***italics*** | **Emphasis.** |
| **(brackets)** | **Researcher notes to add content, for example, to explain an acronym used by the participant.** |
| **[square brackets]** | **Researcher notes on paralinguistic features to add context, for example, if a word were said in a sarcastic tone.** |
| **[*coughs*], [*sighs*] etc** | **Non-verbal utterances.** |

Ethical considerations presented many dilemmas when transcribing interviews, in particular decisions surrounding which information should be excluded to maintain the anonymity of the participant and the 'cleaning up' of transcripts. Interviews were transcribed with the inclusion of non-semantic utterances such as 'erm' and 'hmm', and the use of non-standard English was recorded verbatim to retain meaning and represent moments in interviews when participants were considering their answer and to record the voice of participants as accurately as possible (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Transcripts were then shared with participants, asking them to read through the text and make any edits or confirm that they felt the transcript was an adequate representation of the interview. One participant requested that the transcript was

edited to eliminate some of the non-semantic expressions. The transcript was amended. As this happened early in the transcription process (interview 3), it may be that fewer non-semantic verbalisations were included in subsequent interview transcripts to avoid upsetting participants. Nonetheless, transcripts ultimately still met the criteria of fulfilling the needs of the research (Kvale, 1996).

Ethical decisions regarding the inclusion of potentially identifying information were at times more difficult to reconcile (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Some clear boundaries were established on the ethics form; participants would be given pseudonyms and the names of settings and Local Authorities would not be used. However, the assurance that any information that could compromise anonymity would not be included was occasionally difficult to ensure.

## Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis of data was selected for several reasons. As a novice researcher, using thematic analysis provides a solid foundation for employing other data analysis methods, such as grounded theory, in the future (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The theoretically flexible nature of thematic analysis allows it to be used across a number of theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019) although in this study, thematic analysis is embedded within a post-structural methodology in which I examine how the dominant discourses are constricting actions, views and behaviours. Thematic analysis is also recognised as an appropriate form of data analysis for interviews (Grbich, 2013) informed by poststructural discourse analysis (Farvid & Braun, 2006), examining how dominant discourses shape and constrain practice, thoughts, beliefs and experiences.

Foucauldian discourse analysis may appear to have been a more obvious choice of data analysis given the theoretical framing of the study. Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) is concerned with the power relations which underpin discussions, examining which claims are legitimised and which are silenced or hidden (Khan & MacEachen, 2021). It examines the way in which actions, behaviours and words

operate to constitute discourses (Graham, 2011). Rather than seeking to ascertain any 'truth' around meaning, FDA explores what statements *do*, what they allow to be said or done (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). However, whilst this would have been a useful data analysis method for answering the second research question, 'What are the discourses that permeate the FEEE policies?', it would have been inadequate in allowing me to explore how the policies were enacted, how practitioner subjectivity was shifting as a result and the possible changes to the broader ECEC marketplace happening.

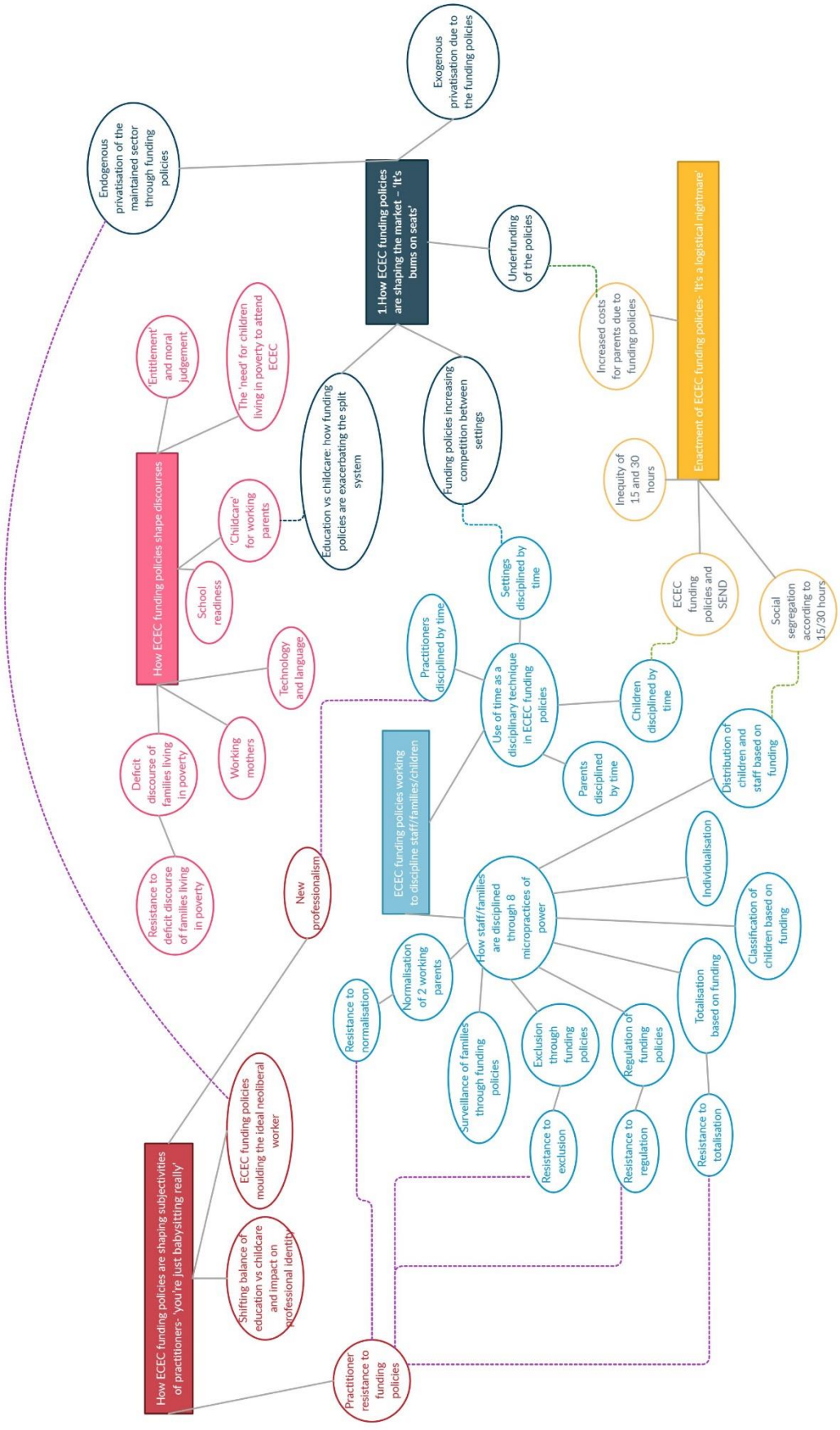
Whilst I have presented the data analysis as a linear exercise, it was a recursive process (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in which I went back and forth through the different phases. For example, once I had identified codes, I realised that some data which had been left uncoded exemplified that code, and so it was coded. Themes were identified at a latent rather than semantic level (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with analytical work involved to understand the deeper meaning of the data, particularly in relation to the theoretical frameworks employed (Clarke & Braun, 2014). This is in keeping with the post-structuralist stance of this research. Initially, seven themes were identified, this was reduced to five during phase four, reviewing themes. Table 5 presents the process. I also kept detailed notes of each stage of the analysis.

**Table 5 – How Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2019) reflexive thematic analysis was conducted**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Phase 1 – familiarising myself with the data.** | Transcribing interviews and recording my initial responses to the data which were then compiled into a list. |
| **Phase 2 – creating codes.** | Codes were created with the aim of providing "a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldana, 2016, p The. 4). Consistent codes were created and these were attached to data throughout the data set. An inductive approach was taken, with codes constructed based on the data rather than the theoretical framework (Xu & Zammit, 2020). Codes such as 'Middle class values' and 'Moral purpose of nursery |

| | |
|---|---|
| | education' were created. Data was collated within these codes. |
| **Phase 3 – themes identified.** | Codes were grouped together to form overarching themes and data was gathered for all themes. For example, 'Construction of 'disadvantaged' families as being in deficit', 'Poor language skills of disadvantaged children', and 'Working families as 'normal'' were gathered under the theme of 'Deficit discourses around 'disadvantaged' families' and all interview quotes within that theme were collated Themes aimed to encapsulate the majority of the data (Joffe, 2012) and elucidate the research questions (Charmaz, 2001). Maps were created to visualise how codes fit within themes, with figure 3 being an example of this. |
| **Phase 4 – reviewing themes.** | Ensuring that the themes 'fit' within the entire data set. At this stage, I ensured that themes were not reliant upon data from one interview, for example, and checked that themes contained data from across the data set. I discovered that there was not enough data to support 'Middle-class values' as a theme, for example, and so this was encompassed within the 'Deficit discourse around disadvantaged families' theme. This was the point at which I ensured themes all contributed to a cogent story based upon the research questions and theoretical framework (Clarke & Braun, 2014). |
| **Phase 5 – defining and naming themes.** | Themes were named and defined, with a short paragraph written explaining each theme. Quotes from participant interviews were selected to represent themes and I began to think about theme in relation to the wider story of the study and my research questions. |
| **Phase 6 – Producing the report.** | During this stage quotes from interviews that exemplified the theme were selected for inclusion in the findings chapters (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Data from across the data set was selected and the data was discussed in relation to my research questions and the material discussed in the section on the background and literature review (Tuckett, 2005). |

**Figure 3: Example of mapping themes and codes**



This chapter has examined the ontological and epistemological beliefs underlying the research, the methods used to collect data and the analysis undertaken to build a coherent story around the data. It also demonstrates the ethical concerns which were central to the research. The remaining chapters in this thesis are dedicated to discussion of the data, with four chapters outlining how the data collected answer the research questions. This begins with an exploration of how the funding polices were enacted in settings, laying out how the policies operated and the impact they had on practice. Whilst an attempt is made to present vignettes that allow for a broader picture of practitioners and their settings in the following chapter, I recognise the limitations of the methods used in allowing for this. One-off interviews, many of which were conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, cannot create a detailed or nuanced image of a practitioner or setting. However, in accordance with the poststructural framework of this study, I acknowledge that the contexts depicted here are a construction, and I reject the notion that there can be an accurate, objective truth.

# Chapter 6- Policy Enactment and Policy Actors: Creating and Responding to Splits and Divisions

> …there are *endless* questions from parents about 'How much money am I gonna get off my bill?' And the answer that gets given to them every time is, 'You've gotta ask the nursery'. Because no two nur- nurseries are going to offer it in the same way…They don't know that it's term-time only….they don't know that nurseries are allowed to charge for, erm, incidentals, and it's up to the nursery to decide what those incidentals are, so every nursery they're going to they're getting a different answer. And they then have to sift through that and I think it's really unfair on parents who want to choose the best setting for their child, to have so many variables presented to them. (Catherine, nursery class teacher)

As Catherine states in the quote above, the complexities of the ECEC funding reforms have resulted in convoluted 'choices' for parents. Whilst the reforms may have been an attempt to align funding levels between settings, they have resulted in a confusing array of options for families as settings enact the policies in different ways, with some offering the 'free' hours at any time whilst others restrict the number of funded hours that can be taken in one day and dictate that they can only be used within certain times of the day, for example. In this chapter, the ways in which different settings enact the funding policy reforms are explored. The context of each setting is considered and is used to explain why the funding reforms cannot result in a level playing field for parents, with every setting proposing a homogenous offer of ECEC. The conceptualisation of different policy actors is considered (Ball et al., 2011a), before I briefly revisit the contexts that influence policy enactment, developed by Braun, Ball and Maguire (eg Ball et al., 2012; Braun et al., 2010, 2011), explored in more detail in chapter two. How settings offer the funded hours and the restructuring of the nursery day for some providers is then discussed, followed by exploration of the decrease in the number of places available for children from economically deprived backgrounds and those with SEND and how this risks creating a further split between children. I proceed by examining the way in which settings respond when a family loses their entitlement to the 30 hours then the enactment of subsidy maximising behaviours, strategies that primary schools in particular employ to maintain an advantage in the marketplace. The increased hourly

rate outside of the funded hours in some settings is then discussed. Throughout these discussions, the role of the different contexts that settings operate within, and the importance of the role of different policy actors, will be considered simultaneously, with the interaction between the two explored.

## Policy Enactment and Policy Actors

As discussed in chapter two this thesis takes the position that policy enactment is a complex and often contradictory process that goes beyond mere implementation and is brimming with contingency (Ball et al., 2012; Braun et al., 2011; Maguire et al., 2015). None of the funding policies that combine to constitute the funding policy reforms (the 15 hours, 30 hours and two-year-old policies) are statutory; no setting is mandated to offer *any* of the government funded hours. However, as discussed in more detail in chapter seven on marketisation and privatisation, many practitioners participating in this study stated that these policies were perceived as obligatory, as failing to offer them would impact upon the financial viability of the setting. The funding policies could, therefore, be considered high stakes policies (Ball et al., 2012; Maguire et al., 2015), policies that *must* be enacted despite the lack of legal force. They are imperative/ disciplinary policies that must meet 'the requirements of performance and delivery' (Ball et al., 2011a, p. 612) as opposed to exhortative/developmental policies that provide space for settings to use their own acumen and innovation in enacting them. Consideration of the type of policies the funding reforms represent is important as different policies construct different policy actors, with disciplinary policies producing "a primarily passive policy subject, a 'technical professional'" (Ball et al., 2011a, p. 612). However, the professional subjectivities produced by the policies are complex and nuanced, as discussed in this chapter and chapter nine on practitioner subjectivity.

### *Policy Actors*

Whilst the background of the participants is discussed in more detail in chapter five, it is of relevance here in considering their role as policy actors. The majority of participants were in leadership roles, with seven headteachers, two deputy

headteachers, one childminder who employed assistants, one pre-school manager and one director of two private nurseries interviewed. This meant that many occupied the policy role of narrator, interpreting the funding reforms into policy for their setting. These participants had the power to decide upon how and when to offer the funded hours, whether to restrict the number of 30 hours places, if discretionary hours would be offered to vulnerable families at no cost and so on. Whilst Ball et al's (2011a) definition of policy critics was limited to union representatives, whose opposition to policy was difficult to find in their original research on policy enactment, for the purposes of this study I have expanded the meaning of critics to include those in any role who voiced opposition to the funding reforms. Critics were also more prevalent in this study, perhaps due to the focus upon early years practitioners, for whom opposition to policy can form part of their professional identity (Bradbury, 2019a). This is explored in more detail in chapter nine on practitioner subjectivity. Indeed, the leaders interviewed for this study sometimes occupied the positions of both policy narrator and critic. Outsiders and receivers were absent from this study, as all participants were very experienced practitioners. The way in which some participants occupied multiple roles, and the contingency of these positions, is discussed later in this chapter.

### *Policy Enactment*

First, however, is a brief reminder of the contexts that influence policy enactment.

**Table 6 – Policy enactment contexts (Braun et al, 2011)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Material | Includes the financial sustainability and income of a setting, which will impact upon the number of staff that can be employed. Material factors such as the size and condition of the buildings and other infrastructure are also included in this context. |
| Professional | The experience and qualification level of staff, as well as their values and beliefs. |
| Situated | The location, intake and history of a setting. I argue that, in the early years sector, whether a setting is a PVI or maintained is also a situated factor. |

| | |
|---|---|
| External | Factors external to the setting such as the Ofsted rating and level of support from the Local Authority/ nursery chain central management (depending on type of setting). |

I now go on to examine how the policies were enacted in the settings interviewees worked in, utilising these concepts of different policy actors, and the contexts of enactment adjusted for early years settings. I begin with perhaps the most salient; how and when exactly settings provide the funded hours.

## How the Policies Are Enacted

### How the Hours are Offered

As Catherine's quote at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, parents are faced with many variables when selecting an ECEC provider. For those parents entitled to 30 funded hours, the search for a provider may begin with identifying those that offer it, because, as stated above, it is not compulsory for settings to do so. Nonetheless, many practitioners interviewed stated that to not offer the 30 funded hours would render them uncompetitive in the ECEC market, suggesting that the policy is disciplinary. This is discussed in greater detail in chapter seven, but Gemma, a nursery school teacher, illustrated the pressure that some settings are under to provide the 30 hours when she stated "private day nurseries offer the 30 hours and they offer the 15 hours funded as well. And they will do what the parents need so we have to do exactly the same otherwise we lose children."

Alongside this are conditions that some providers place on when and how the funded hours can be taken. For example, whilst some settings may permit parents to choose any 30 hours of funded ECEC within the opening hours, others may stipulate that funded hours may only be taken between 9am and 3pm, with additional hours attended outside of those times paid for. The maintained nursery school in which Gemma worked fell firmly into the former category, and she explained "…we have some children that do, like, their 30 hours on a Monday all day, a Wednesday all day and a Friday all day." Gemma's nursery school had faced closure due to extreme

financial hardship; chapter seven details how the school had introduced a breakfast club and afterschool club to compete with other nurseries, and offered parents whatever combination of hours they wanted so that the family would not take their custom elsewhere. Material factors were key to the consideration of how to offer the 30 hours, yet Gemma stated that this was often not in the best interests of the child:

> …if they're having 30 hours, so say they're doing a Monday, Tuesday and a Wednesday, all day… they're not getting the continuity in their learning…. If they were doing 15 hours *every* morning or 15 hours *every* afternoon, that is the most perfect way to learn (laughs). And we can provide continuity and they progress a lot quicker that way…It's too much for the young children if I'm honest, erm, to be completely honest I think that, erm, it's not, it's not working in the best interests of the children (laughs). I think, yes, it's great that the parents have got childcare, but it doesn't mean that that, that's the best thing for the children.

Here, the professional context- Gemma's knowledge of child development and her pedagogy of care – is in conflict with the material factors of the setting, the need to be competitive and remain financially viable. She discusses her 'field of memory' (Foucault, 1977a), stating "I've been working in childcare since I left school and I left school 20 years ago…. and that, that's a change that I've seen", referring to the way in which parents were offered flexibility regarding the hours their child attended for, and the negative impact of this upon the children. As a result, Gemma admitted to regarding the 30 hours policy cynically. The material context of the nursery school was prioritised over Gemma's professional knowledge. Other statements from Gemma demonstrate that she is critically engaged as a policy actor, with a good awareness of the tensions underlying the 30 hours policy:

> I just think the government need to work out who they're doing it for and, erm, you know, long term, who is it impacting on? You know, yes it's great that we can get mums back to work and dads back to work, and, erm, but is that always the best thing for children? You know, I think that particularly two-year-olds, I mean shouldn't they be at home with their mum and their dad? You know, learning skills with their mum and dad rather than being institutionalised?

Gemma's professional context, her experience and the 'field of memory' (Foucault, 1977a) or "access to different discursive archives" (Ball et al., 2011b, p. 636) position her as a critic of the 30 hours policy. However, the material context of the nursery school mean that the policy must be enacted in particular ways that maintain its financial viability. The emotional cost of this enactment of a policy that Gemma is opposed to is considered in chapter nine on practitioner subjectivity.

Francesca, the headteacher of a primary school, detailed how the situated context of the school allowed her to maintain control of how the 30 hours were offered in the school, as historically the school nursery was a setting which opened only in the mornings:

> I erm, said that we would do the 15 hours in the morning, the other additional 15 hours in the afternoon…so some parents would come in and say 'Well can we do full time on a Monday, Tuesday Wednesday and we'll do' and I was like 'No!'…And because the precedent was already there that nursery's only been, you know, 8:40 to 11:40, I was, I was lucky in that sense.

In addition to the existent attendance structure, Francesca benefitted from the school being popular and oversubscribed, with the number of children in the nursery class exceeding the published admission number and a long waiting list for the reception class. Whilst Francesca later opened before and after school provision to encourage working parents to choose the school, the material context, combined with these situated factors, allowed Francesca to retain some autonomy in how the school would offer the funded hours. She acted as a policy narrator, deciding how the funding reforms would be enacted within her school, but the contexts permitted her more freedoms in doing this. As the headteacher of a primary school, Francesca benefitted from economies of scale and was unconcerned about overheads. She explained that, as the school already employed a nursery teacher and support staff, the only additional staffing costs she incurred as a result of expanding the part-time provision to 30 hours was employing lunchtime supervisors. As a result, the policy impacted positively on the school budget, with Francesca explaining "we had a substantial amount of money that came in at the end of the year that we hadn't anticipated". This positive ~~favourable~~ material context allowed Francesca to provide limited options for parents. The amalgamation of the situated and material contexts meant that Francesca was able to offer the 30 hours in a composition that was more convenient for the school, explaining Francesca's position as one of the policy narrators who were more positive about the funding reforms.

## Restrictions Surrounding the Funded Hours

One of the more perverse outcomes of the funding reforms has been a slight reduction in the number of spaces available and taken up by two-year-olds and the

universal 15 hours for three- and four-year-olds since the introduction of the 30 hours funding (Cornick et al., 2018; Early Years Alliance, 2018). A report from the Education Policy Institute (Akhal, 2019a) proposes that this is due to the variation in the cost of providing ECEC for two-year-olds and three- and four-year-olds, with lower adult to child ratios for two-year-olds increasing the price. Another cause was suggested by Amy, a nursery class teacher, who explained that the number of children in the class decreased overall because "there were just more children who were taking two places if they were part time places." In other words, one child attending for 30 hours is equivalent to two children attending for 15 hours, and may mean that there are a reduced number of universal 15-hour places or spaces for two-year-olds. The result could also be that some settings limit the number of funded 30 hour places available to ensure that they can continue to provide 15 hour and two-year-old places.

Because of the eligibility criteria for 30 funded hours (children become entitled to the government funding in the term following their third birthday) there are seasonal shifts in the number of places available. Amy discussed the changing availability of places throughout the year due to the 30 hours policy:

> Interviewer: So did you have a limit on how many 30 hours children you could have?
> Amy: *Initially* they did have a limit for us but then they took it away so then we didn't. So it was more that, so when we were at the end of the, you know, when we were going to have a new intake, we'd ask the existing parents whether they wanted to change any of their sessions…So they'd get first refusal so we'd know what we could offer to whoever was on the waiting list.
> I: Right. So would some children perhaps not get in on the 15 hours if you had more children taking up 30?
> P: (nods) Yeah. That didn't really happen in September so it was only like at, at, and usually Christmas you'd get everybody in, but sometimes it would happen at Easter.

Kelly, manager of an independent pre-school, explained further:

> Our problem is, to make us financially sort of, erm, viable, we have to be full in Sep-, well, we have to know that all our sessions will be full, you know. So in September we might have a few places kept, a few sessions back until the January. But we don't on the whole have January starters or starters later in the year because we just can't afford to keep sessions open unless they're paid for…And that's the biggest impact, I think, that the funding has had on us. So before, we might have had children starting in sort of September, January and sometimes even at Easter. We can't do that anymore. Because I think we

> worked out we lost three or four thousand pounds one, one autumn term and we just couldn't do that…
> Interviewer: So for parents starting their children, those children that might have started in January or even the Easter, are they now starting in the September?
> Kelly: Yeah, yeah. Unless they're summer birthdays, or, you know, that's usually one of the reasons, or if there are other exceptional circumstances. But yeah, they're starting earlier.

Families with children entering settings in September are more likely to be offered a place as there are more available due to children leaving as they become school age. As children become eligible for the 15 and 30 funded hours in the term following their third birthday, a lack of spaces in nurseries in January and/or April could mean that children with birthdays between September and March have more difficultly accessing provision. For Kelly, the decision to ensure that most spaces were filled in September was financial, to ensure that the pre-school had secured adequate income for the year, meaning that this form of enactment is framed by the material context. The popularity of this pre-school, its situated context, also enabled it to enact the policy in this way. However, such implementation of the 30 hours policy could exacerbate the way in which it favours wealthier families, as those parents who are able to pay for non-funded childcare places may do so to secure a funded place once their child is eligible. Parents of a child born in October, for example, may choose to pay for provision from September to December to ensure their child has a funded place from January. Of course, parents on lower incomes may not have the means to take such action.

Nonetheless, not all participants enacted the 30 hours policy in this manner.

> …because we need numbers, we take children all through the year. So it's not like it used to be when we had our list and we knew who was coming in September and it was full for the year, erm…so in September we started with…I think we had 16 in nursery at the start of the year…Erm, but that has increased over the year and it just feels like we've got new children constantly! Erm, we'll get given a form by the office and they'll say 'Oh can you call this mum about this little one starting' and it's like 'Alright' [said wearily]. Erm, and, you know, obviously that is good for numbers but it is quite disruptive, erm, 'cause you've *constantly* got new ones crying and you're trying to settle them and teach them the rules and the boundaries, erm, yeah…so that has been challenging for the last couple of years, mmm…And like I said, that probably is since the 30 hours came in because before that, we were full (Sarah, nursery class teacher)

Sarah's nursery class, which is not full, will admit children throughout the year as they "need numbers". Again, the material and situated contexts of Sarah's nursery class in a primary school interacted to determine how the funding policies were enacted, with "numbers" (of children) being synonymous with "money" here. Sarah's school did not offer wrap around care for children in the nursery class beyond the school day and was competing with day nurseries and children's centres nearby which did provide such care. These two contexts amalgamated to produce the enactment of the policy – encouraging as many children into the setting as possible, whenever possible, often with little notice for staff – to the detriment of Sarah's working practices and, potentially, the children attending the nursery class. Sarah's position as a teacher with 15 years' experience afforded her the 'field of memory' (Foucault, 1977a) of practices prior to the introduction of the funding reforms. This, along with the detrimental impact that the policies were having upon her classroom, situated her as another policy critic.

## Limiting 30 Hours Places

The underfunding of the 30 hours policy, which means that some settings do not receive adequate funding to cover the costs of providing the 30 hours (Lawler, 2021; Merrick, 2015) may also result in such settings limiting the number of 30 funded hour places available. This permits the provider to fill spaces with children from fee paying families, such as under twos, non-funded two-year-olds, or three- or four-year-olds entitled only to 15 hours whose parents paid for additional hours. Lisa, director of two private nurseries, explained in detail how she placed restrictions around the provision of funded 30 hour places:

> …when we introduced the 30 hours I had to put restrictions around how I can allocate those 30 hours…I used to do term time only places and charge more per hour for a term time only place…So that basically we can carry forwards that contribution to the holidays when we wouldn't have got an income from that child. Well because of the low rate for the 30 hours. which is way under what we need, we can't do that, I just couldn't do that, there aren't enough hours left to try to recover the situation…So I've, er, very strictly limited the erm, term time availability on 30 hours funding and we've limited to six hours of funding a day which means that if you want me to give you six, you're gonna have to give me [pay for] four

Rachel, a nursery class teacher in an infant school, explained that she had heard discussions around restricting the number of 30 hour places available during training sessions alongside colleagues from the PVI sector:

> …with, erm, private nurseries, some of them have to keep quite a, a tight limit on how many 30 hour places they can afford to provide just because they get their funding through top ups and feeding and that side of things. So I think it's not so much of a pressure for us as it would be for non LEA nurseries.

Such restrictions risk excluding children from some nurseries. Whilst families entitled to the 30 hours are financially more fortunate than those receiving only the 15 funded hours, parents earning the equivalent to 16 hours a week on the minimum wage (the requirement to receive 30 funded hours) (UK Government, n.d.) may not be able to afford an additional 20 hours of childcare per week. Requirements such as those listed by Lisa above may introduce an additional 'tier' within the 30 hours policy, a 'compulsory additional hours' layer alongside the 'free' 30 hours. This will exclude some families from settings implementing such rules, potentially leading to social segregation, with only the wealthiest families able to utilise such provision. The potential for the policy to be enacted in such a way that it divides the poorest families from others is further explored below.

## Social Segregation

In the two different nursery schools where Julie and Carla worked as a headteacher and teacher respectively, children were allocated to a class depending on their eligibility for the 30 hours, with one class dedicated to those attending for the whole day and another for 15 hour children who attended for the morning or afternoon.

> …we are in the very lucky position of being able to have a dedicated classroom for our 30 hours. Now work, I work closely with, erm, all the other nursery schools and I run a, a network for the teachers, qualified teachers within those nursery schools because some of them there's only one teacher in them so it's isolating. So this is something that so many of the other nursery schools have been to our setting to see how we do it and what we do because they have to have shared classrooms for their 15 hours and their 30 hours. Erm, so a lot, and I know it can cause lots and lots of issues and they can have lots and lots of comings and goings, erm, we, ours is very simple, erm, in that we don't have to do that and it, and it is lovely and I really don't know how I would cope, having to have one class so some were 15 hours and some over 30 hours,

> erm. It means for our children that what they put down when they go off for their lunch, they could come back to, erm, because we're not staging a room ready for a new group to come into, erm, and I know that's what a lot of the others struggle with (Carla, nursery school teacher)

Here, Carla occupies the role of policy enthusiast, sharing the school's enactment of the 30 hours policy with other practitioners and acting as a model for the best way to implement it. However, her policy position is contingent upon the way in which it is enacted in her setting, rather than upon the policy text itself, with Carla stating "I really don't know how I would cope, having to have one (mixed 15 and 30 hour) class". If the nursery school were to enact the policy differently, with mixed 15 and 30 hour classes, Carla's position may even change to that of policy critic. The nursery school's enactment is based upon a number of factors, including the situated, material and external contexts. Carla's 30 hour class was at maximum capacity, with 52 children on roll, whilst the 15 hour class was full in the mornings with another 52 children attending, and slightly fewer in the afternoons. This may have partially been because of external factors. Carla explained that not all settings local to her nursery school offered the 30 hours, "because they just didn't feel they've got the capacity or space", resulting in additional demand for 30 hours places at the nursery school. Julie explained that her nursery school found itself in a similar position, as the first provider in the Local Authority to confirm it would offer the 30 hours:

> …we were the first setting to declare (laughs) yes, we'll go for this, because the first year we did it, erm, we had 26 children straight away and then it builds up during the year, so the first year we did it we, we kind of got up to nearly 40… Because lots of other settings, I think they were kind of wondering what would happen.

The demographic of an area, a situated context, would also impact upon the number of families eligible, with the most deprived areas home to fewer families entitled to the 30 hours. However, Carla asserted that her nursery school was in "quite a needy area erm, an area, area of social deprivation", whilst Julie stated hers was based in "quite an affluent area… but we're in a, well, town centre location, so something along the lines of 30% of our children have been funded two-year-olds". Nonetheless, at both nursery schools, around one third of the three- and four-year-olds attending were entitled to 30 hours, sufficient for each school to fill a class exclusively with children attending for 30 hours. In an area with fewer families entitled to 30 hours- and more settings offering the funded provision- the nursery

schools may have been unable to enact the policy in this way. What is important to note here is that situated, external and material contexts merged to create conditions that led to the nursery school enacting the 30 hours by creating a separate class for children eligible for it, essentially enacting social segregation. This is discussed in more detail and conceptualised as a form of distribution in chapter eight on disciplinary power. In turn, this form of enactment, dividing children according to their eligibility for 30 hours, positioned Carla as an enthusiast, whereas a different interpretation of the policy in her nursery school may have resulted in Carla occupying an alternative policy role.

## Loss of Discretionary Funded Hours

One of the more perverse outcomes of the funding reforms has been a reduction in the number of discretionary funded hours available for the most vulnerable children and families, as discussed in chapter four. Nicola and Carla, a headteacher and teacher respectively working in different nursery schools, both discussed this reduction in the hours available for children from some of the most vulnerable families. They both described funding which had been available from the LA previously, to be spent on a discretionary basis to support vulnerable children and families:

> …when some of our two-year old-funded children came up to us, erm, prior to 30 hours being introduced, if we thought, erm, from a safeguarding point of view, it was safer to have some of those children in then send them home at lunchtime, we'd keep them… And there were *various* pockets of funding at that point that you could hook into erm, to get a little bit of support funding wise towards it… Once we started to fill up with the 30 hours and the 30 hours is a financial thing, like we, we said, we just didn't have that capacity to do that. And, and it almost felt like we, and we knew we were, letting down some of our local families who needed the support but we no longer had the facilities and the capacity to do. (Carla, nursery school teacher)

> …we had lots of two-year-olds, possibly with an extra level of need, in at two…over the last two or three years. But we, the funding for the full-time disadvantaged children at three went. So we, we had an imaginary pocket we could draw on, and I think the Local Authority thought there was an imaginary pocket too, which I did draw on last year, and I think I got thirteen funded places. This year, there's none at all (Nicola, nursery school headteacher)

27 Local Authority discretionary funds to support disadvantaged children and families had been cut by 2018, and this is "significantly attributable to a loss of flexibility

under the Early Years National Funding Formula" (Archer & Merrick, 2020, p. 22). This was also discussed by practitioners in a study of MNS (Hoskins et al, 2021), where practitioners stated that their role was to support the most disadvantaged families. Sarah, a nursery class teacher, remembered a previous LA policy of providing a full-time nursery place for all children:

> so up until the 30 hours came in, actually, the local authority, all the headteachers in the local authority agreed that they would fund full time nursery places so even though they only got funding for 15 hours or 12 hours for every child, that every school would give every child a full-time nursery place.

Despite this loss of discretionary funding, both Nicola and Carla, alongside other participants, explained that they continued to provided additional support for children and families who needed it, within the constraints of their material context:

> …if we *have* lower numbers in an afternoon and it doesn't require that extra staff member, we can't justify bringing a staff member in to support families that we're not going to get any money for. If we had an extra staff member in, but we still had a two, three space capacity, then we would do it. But if we are up to capacity with the staff we've got, we can't do it. (Carla, nursery school teacher)

> …we do have families who come and say, you know, 'I really need some extra time for my child 'cause I'm really struggling', and we've done little bits. But we also know that we might have offered a little bit and we might have to take it back in January because there's a thirty-hour parent knocking at the door. (Nicola, nursery school headteacher)

> …we use our funding to offer those vulnerable children, or those vulnerable families, additional funding, we have some families who are, you know, in difficult circumstances and they might have social services involvement or whatever (Catherine, nursery class teacher)

> I think, the, the biggest problem I've seen is that we used to be able to offer some full-time nursery provision for our more disadvantaged children, or children we felt…could benefit, could benefit from that, and we could use our own judgement. But now, there isn't the space to do that, and there isn't the funding to do that (Mary, nursery school teacher)

Where the material context of adult to child ratios permitted, the nursery schools and Catherine's nursery class offered unfunded additional hours to families in need of support. I propose that this form of enactment, which is discussed in chapter nine on practitioner subjectivity as a form of 'microresistance' (Archer, 2021) to the funding policy reforms and the 30 hour policy in particular, is influenced by the situated context, in particular, the type of setting involved, alongside professional and

material factors. Nursery schools, with their historic commitment to social mobility and social justice discussed earlier, are more likely to enact this policy in keeping with this ethos and dedication to children most in need. This in keeping with recent research conducted by Hoskins et al (2021), which uncovered the myriad of ways in which nursery schools are meeting the material, cultural and social needs of the families using them. The material context beyond the spaces available within the confines of ratios may also be important. Nicola mentions that an offer of additional hours may have to be rescinded if the space is required by a child entitled to 30 hours who brings in funding for the nursery school. I propose that the financial impact of the funding reforms will also affect how a setting views the policies, and thus their willingness to support the policy or not.

However, despite Sarah's 'field of memory' (Foucault, 1977a), there was no offer of additional hours for those families in need at the primary school in which she worked. This suggests the importance of the role of policy actors *alongside* the contexts of enactment. Whilst Nicola occupied the position of policy narrator as the headteacher of a nursery school, establishing rules and policies surrounding the funding policies herself, as a classroom teacher, Sarah held no such power and was at the mercy of rules instituted by the school leaders.

## Responding to a Change in a Child's Entitlement

The nature of the 30 hours policy, with the requirement for parents to reconfirm their eligibility every three months, means that some children will lose their entitlement to 30 hours if their parents' circumstances, such as employment status or working hours, change. This results in the child receiving only the 15 hours universal funding. Some practitioners interviewed discussed how this meant a change in attendance pattern for the child:

> …we have it both ways, where some children who were part time, their mum started working and they got the code so they changed to full time, and we have had some children who have gone *down* to part time from full time because their code wasn't renewed on time. Erm, yeah and we *have* got one girl who started off as part time, then her mum got the code… so she changed to full time, but now the mum has had another baby and isn't at work anymore so she's *lost* the code, the entitlement, so she's, so she is back to being part time again (Sarah, nursery class teacher)

> …it's been really detrimental to them, I really noticed a difference. So one little girl her, her mum was still in the same job, but when she reapplied for the code, something happened, … But it did affect her daughter 'cause she obviously went from being in all day everyday and being quite secure and confident in that, to them not coming until midweek for her 15 hours, had massive separation anxieties with her mum then, erm, couldn't get into the swing of things with her friends, 'cause they were already there and it yeah just caused so many complications. (Rachel, nursery class teacher)

> parent's circumstances would change so they, they lost the code basically and then they had to go down to two and a half days…It didn't happen very often, it was probably only…like two kids that I can think of, so it's hard to really say what the impact was on them. I think the impact was probably more because of family circumstances, so if parents lost their job, that's worse than going down to 15 hours. (Amy, nursery class teacher)

However, others explained that they did not always enact this change:

> …we've done it on a case by case basis so if it looks like the child is needed, you know, the space is needed for the family, then, because, as I say, we're not, we're not a profit making organisation, we haven't got to make a, we do, we don't want to run at a *loss*, but, er, we, you know I've tended to give them the, keep the, 'cause it's not good for the child, you know, they're there all day and then they're half day then they're back again, you know. It's ridiculous, so I've tended just to, er, let them stay. (Leonie, executive headteacher of three nursery schools)

> …there's particularly two families, both vulnerable families who have been supported, who, yeah, it was a bit chaotic in terms of their work, and actually it was more sensible, or where, where a child is, has moved between been, been moved between homes by children's services and one home qualified and the other, but we've just sort of said 'Keep coming, keep coming, we'll, yeah'. (Julie, nursery school headteacher)

> Child lost the 30 hours entitlement because the dad didn't know how to update the code. The child is still attending for 30 hours as it is not right for the child to change their hours, this was agreed with the governing body… Another mum with cancer could not get the 30 hours code, as both parents were not working. The school is still providing them with the 30 hours for the same reasons as above. (Sally, nursery school headteacher)

In Carla's nursery school, the change from 30 to 15 hours was further complicated by the fact that one classroom was solely for the provision of 30 hours whilst the other was for all children entitled only to 15 hours. Carla explained that, if the child was relatively new to the setting when changes to entitlement occurred, they would be moved to the 15-hour room, but if they had established relationships with the staff

and other children, “they only do their 15 hours, erm, but erm, they do stay in the room they know with the staff they know and with the children that they know.”

Participants working in nursery schools appeared more likely to continue providing 30 hours of ECEC for children who lost their entitlement. I posit that this is predominantly due to the different ethos and values, and structure and priorities, of nursery and primary schools. Thus, the situated context of a setting appears to be important in how (and whether) the provider enacts a change in status from 30 to 15 hours. As aforementioned, the history of nursery schools, established in some of the most deprived communities to support children’s development, bestows upon these schools an ethos of supporting those families most in need. Yet there are also differences in accountability measures and organisation, in particular, the absence of older children and the associated testing such as Baseline and SATs, and a leadership team comprised of experienced early years teachers. Such variations permit nursery school leaders to make decisions (within material confines) based on the best interests of the children, and with their knowledge of child development and early years pedagogy guiding them. Nicola, headteacher of a maintained nursery school, recognised the mixed fortunes of the unique position of nursery schools:

> …lots of changes during that time due to things that have been top down…Erm, and probably some responses to that which have been about making sure we don’t lose the nursery school ethos, in those top-down changes. So that’s been really important, and one of the privileges of working in a nursery school, well it’s mixed. It’s non-statutory, so we have a degree of autonomy that statutory schools may not have, but nevertheless the foundations and principles of nursery schools are so solid that we absolutely adhere to those as much as we possibly can. And I think that’s the philosophy that we all hold, we will respond in order to make, the external change is important but we will always interpret it into what we know is the very best for the children who come to the school.

The position of a headteacher of a primary school, subject to top-down pressures such as SATs results (eg Bradbury, 2019b) differs to that of a maintained nursery school headteacher, for whom concerns regarding the security of funding may be paramount (Early Education et al., 2022). Whilst this is a situated context, it is also a professional context, as the priorities of leaders of nursery and primary schools are necessarily different.

## Spaces for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Maintained nursery schools typically offer more places to children with SEND, for a variety of reasons (London Councils, 2018; Hoskins et al, 2021). First, with qualified teachers working in nursery schools, staff are more likely to have the knowledge and experience to support children with additional needs (London Councils, 2018). They also prioritise children with SEND in their admissions criteria, and, based upon these factors, gain a reputation for being inclusive, inviting more applications for children with SEND (London Councils, 2018). This was evident in interviews with practitioners working in maintained nursery schools, with one nursery school deputy headteacher, Charlotte, stating that 28% of the children on roll at her nursery school had additional needs, whilst that figure in a neighbouring nursery school in the Local Authority was 48%.

Whilst Carla and Julie discussed the way in which they offered 30-hour places to more vulnerable families irrespective of their eligibility, Charlotte discussed how she sometimes offered full-time places to children with SEND to support their development:

> …what we do is sometimes if we have identified that 15-hour children are very vulnerable, we do offer them the 30-hour place free… I had a child who, erm, very vulnerable background, erm, both SEN and safeguarding and straight away when we found out about the situation, erm, the home situation, we offered that child a full-time place.

However, Charlotte explained that her nursery school was receiving no extra funding to support children with SEND, in common with an estimated 13% of nursery schools (Early Education, 2018). Whilst she recognised the benefits to children, particularly those with SEND, that came with full-time attendance, Charlotte lamented that the price differential between funding for a child with SEND and providing for their needs was around £17,000, again, reflecting average costs for SEND support across nursery schools (Early Education, 2018). Nicola, another nursery school headteacher, told a similar story:

> …we had a little girl, erm, with *very* high levels of autism, diagnosed…Mum…single working parent, her child had to come here full time. We got fifteen hours of support for her across the week, in fact we did end up getting twenty-five for her because they, they, I think they do sometimes double fund the fifteen hours, but not to fifty, I think we got twenty-five in the end. But that still meant that she was here for twenty-five *un*supported. And it was really hard for *her.* I mean our staff are amazing and they did what they could but it was such a drain of resources on the staff so we always had to make sure that somehow we always have extra. And I do have to say that…the other children, they didn't get perhaps as much input as they needed to.

Whilst Nicola's nursery school did receive additional SEND funding to support the child, the money did not stretch to 30 hours, the funded hours the child was entitled to, let alone the additional hours paid for by the mother. Nationally, where SEND funding is available, 37% of nursery schools report that it is only available to support 15 hours of provision, even for those children entitled to 30 hours (Early Education, 2018). 6.3% of children attending an ECEC setting for the universal 15 hours are recorded as having SEND, compared with 2.8% of children entitled to 30 hours (National Statistics Office, 2022a). This contrasts to 15.9% of children in 5-18 education being registered as have an additional need or disability (National Statistics Office, 2022b). This suggests that a large proportion of children with SEND are not accessing ECEC provision, although the reasons are unclear. Parental choice and a lack of suitable local provision could contribute to this, although participants in this study certainly suggested that there is sometimes an unwillingness to offer, in particular, 30 hours places to children with SEND due to the financial strain it places on settings. Charlotte proposed that this is especially pronounced in the PVI sector. She stated:

> …a lot of private nurseries are not taking children with SEN. So that's why us state schools have got 48% or 30% of SEN, because they don't have, for them it's a financial kind of thing that they, they, they obviously get paid for their 15 hours or their 30 hours the same as us from the same, you know, from the Local Authority…But they have more freedom and you know, we have actually put complaints in to the, to the Local Authority about this, that all the private education people have maybe you know, they have no SEN, or they have 1% or they certainly don't have complex SEN. Whereas the four schools in the borough are getting, erm, up to 50% SEN within their cohorts with no funding.

Charlotte's claim that PVI settings are refusing to provide places for children with SEND is echoed in a report into nursery schools by a coalition of London councils, which states that "the majority of the interviewees had accepted children with SEND who had been turned away from other settings and told that their needs could not be

met there” (London Councils, 2018, p. 9). Another report found increasing numbers of children with SEND were transferring to maintained nursery schools from other settings, although it is unclear whether this is due to funding changes (Early Education, 2018). Charlotte’s assertion that nursery schools were providing a disproportionate number of spaces to children with SEND may not be surprising given the previously discussed advantages, yet her use of the term ‘freedom’ when discussing the PVI sector points to other external factors. Nursery schools are maintained schools, meaning that they have strong ties with the Local Authority. Local Authorities typically have SEND panels which find places for children with SEND, particularly those with complex needs. Nursery schools are often the preference of the Local Authority due to the staff skills and qualifications (London Councils, 2018). Therefore, the close relationship with the Local Authority, an external context, amalgamates with the professional context of high staff qualifications to dictate how nursery schools enact this policy with regards to spaces for children with SEND, despite the fact that it makes their position more financially precarious. Conversely, the external context of PVI settings, and private nurseries in particular, which are businesses with loose ties to the Local Authority, may indeed enable them to enact the funding reforms through limiting places for children with SEND, protecting their financial security. Again, the enactment of the funding reforms through the provision of spaces for children with SEND is framed by the underfunding of the policy.

## Subsidy Maximising Behaviours

The situated context of a setting, in particular, whether the provider is a nursery class within a primary school, determines whether that setting can engage in subsidy maximising behaviours. Following the introduction of the nursery voucher scheme in 1997, there was evidence to suggest that primary schools suggested to parents that attendance at the school nursery would secure their child a place in the reception class (Sparkes & West, 1998). Sparkes & West (1998), in their evaluation of the nursery voucher policy, termed such practices “voucher maximizing behaviour”.
In an original contribution, I propose that primary schools are now engaging in subsidy maximising behaviours as they seek to take advantage of their position as a school, tempting parents into nursery classes with the promise of a place for the

child in the reception class, and/or free provision before the child is entitled to funded hours.

In this study, primary schools were found to engage in subsidy maximising behaviours in two ways; through permitting children to join the nursery class as soon as they turned three years of age, before the government funding could be claimed (in the term after their third birthday), and through prioritising children who had attended the nursery when allocating places for the reception class (or, at least, suggesting to parents that attendance of the school nursery would increase their chances of securing a place in the reception class). Both were methods of encouraging parents to select the nursery class as their childcare provider. Nursery classes in primary schools are able to engage in these practices due to more stable staffing structures than other types of settings, as explained by Sarah and Rachel, both nursery class teachers within primary schools:

> …because I'm at school all day, every day it didn't have the same impact as it had for private nurseries who had to cover the staff and have people working that wouldn't necessarily have worked and then funding that (Rachel, nursery class teacher)

> …I'm here, and my TA is here, we're here all the time, so we can have 26 children in the nursery at any time. So it doesn't, it doesn't *really* make any difference whether we've got 26 children or 10 children, the staffing will be the same. (Sarah, nursery class teacher)

The two teachers went on to explain how this enabled them to admit children into the nursery class in which they worked at the age of three years, regardless of whether or not they were in receipt of the funding:

> …the other thing that's really good about being attached to a school, erm, is that our children can start 30 hours straight away, so the day that they start they are 30 hours even if the funding isn't entirely in place 'cause. I know with private nurseries you have to wait to the term after, or whatever, but because we're a school and I'm funded anyway as a teacher, and so are all the LSAs, we can offer 30 hours straight away. (Rachel, nursery class teacher)

> …the feeling in the school is that we'll get them in (at three, before the school receives any funding for them) and then start getting the money for them in the next term, 'cause we just need them in and that way we *know* we'll start getting money for them. But, but this way, they're in our nursery and we know they won't go to a private nursery or anywhere else, you know.' (Sarah, nursery class teacher)

For Sarah's nursery class, due to be amalgamated with the reception class in the following year due to an insufficient number of children to fund the provision, the material context of the school was central to the decision to admit children into the class before government funding could be received, as it meant the promise of income in the following term. Amy, another nursery class teacher, explained that, although this practice did not happen in the primary school in which she worked, she was aware of another school offering 30 hours to children before they were entitled to it: "they're 39 place. And they take them when they're three. *And* it's a deprived area, so they take them as they're rising three, the term before they turn three".

For settings such as day nurseries and nursery schools, the existence of nursery classes within primary school nearby is a situated factor which may shape whether they are subject to this subsidy maximising behaviour. Laura, a nursery school headteacher, had experienced families leaving her setting to attend nursery classes in primary schools that announced attendance of the school nursery would secure a place in the reception class.

> …the only thing we're seeing a lot more of now is the primary schools are saying "Well if you don't bring your child to our nursery, they won't get a place in school", which obviously they're not supposed to do, erm, but we've seen evidence of that, parents have actually bought their letters in that school have sent them to say "Register your child in nursery otherwise you won't get a place in school."

Laura went on to explain that whilst such a tactic is not in accordance with school admissions criteria, around three children each term leave her nursery school to attend the primary school and secure a reception class place. Charlotte, deputy headteacher of another nursery school, had encountered similar practices from local schools:

> I've actually lost two pupils this week, erm, who have really apologised, and it's so sad, because all of their older siblings came to our nursery school but the parents phoned and said "We're really sorry, we really want your school but to get my child into the primary school, I can't take a choice, er, a chance, I'm gonna have to put my child now into the nursery that's attached to that school."

As Rachel and Sarah explained, the staffing costs in a school nursery are relatively stable and some of the costs associated with a nursey can be incorporated into the overall school budget.

Having explored how the funding policies are being enacted by individual settings, and how the contexts in which those providers operate influence enactment, I go on to discuss what this means for the sector as a whole. The next chapter considers how the funding policies are exacerbating the privatisation and commodification of maintained ECEC provision in England.

# Chapter 7 – Funding Reforms and the Split System in ECEC in England

The 1988 Education Reform Act created fundamental, ideological changes within mainstream primary and secondary education. In this chapter, I argue that the assemblage of ECEC funding reforms in England are resulting in a similar shift in the maintained early years sector, bringing behaviours and values more in line with private providers. This shift has exacerbated competition between settings, transforming the role of ECEC and challenging the professional identity of practitioners working within it. Here I contest that, through intensifying competition and emphasising parent choice, the funding reforms are endogenously privatising the maintained sector, that is, compelling them to behave with private sector sensibilities and taking on the values and behaviours of businesses (Ball & Youdell, 2007). This endogenous privatisation of the maintained sector changes the role of ECEC, shifting the balance very much in favour of childcare as the needs of parents are prioritised to win their custom. The gap between the public and private sectors is narrowed as maintained settings are disciplined into acting with in a manner more in line with the values of private companies, yet these maintained providers can also benefit from the subsidy maximising behaviours outlined in the previous chapter. Therefore, whilst the chasm between private and public sector ideals is on the one hand reduced by the policy, these subsidy maximising behaviours continue to cultivate it.

This chapter begins with discussion of the way in which funding policies are increasing competition between providers, and how this is fuelled further by the underfunding of the policies by government. This is illustrated by the data collected from participant interviews. I go on to explore how this is driving privatisation in the maintained sector, as demonstrated by the increase in private sector-like actions such as marketing, and how, despite the aim of the policies to bring funding in line for private and maintained settings, those in the maintained sector are benefitting from subsidy-maximising behaviours. Parent choice- “the other side of the same coin” of competition (Moss, 2014, p. 50)- is then discussed, before the impact of the privatisation of the maintained sector upon values is considered, examining how the

ECEC funding reforms have led to the commodification of ECEC, with children attending settings viewed as income generators.

## Increasing Competition and Intensifying Privatisation – the Impact of ECEC Funding Reforms

### Competition and ECEC Funding Policy Reforms

Offering the funded 30 hours is one of the ways in which practitioners discussed being competitive, describing it as one way to meet the needs of families, particularly working parents. Certainly, the introduction of the 30 funded hours policy through a demand side mechanism has produced the desired effect, with 90% of PVI settings, 80% of childminders and 70% of schools offering the 30 hours (Department for Education, 2019). Interestingly, these figures are far higher than those garnered in 2016, when settings were surveyed prior to the introduction of the 30 funded hours. At that point, only 63% of PVIs, 55% of childminders and 44% of schools *planned* to offer the 30 funded hours (Panayiotou et al., 2017). The surveys do not explore the reasons behind providers offering the 30 funded hours, or for providers adopting the 30 hours policy despite initial reluctance. However, when asked when and why settings began to offer the 30 funded hours, participants in this study discussed the need to be competitive as a motivation:

> Erm, as soon as it came out, erm, we felt that we had to, yeah we had to compete with, we have lots of other nurseries in our area, many who are graded outstanding. (Emily, nursery school deputy headteacher)

> …because we weren't getting enough children through the doors, so it was bums on seats. So what happened was, erm, the nursery was going to close, erm, we didn't have enough children. So we actually lost a headteacher and our school federated with another school…so there's one headteacher, erm, across two sites now. Erm, and it's just basically about getting bums on seats. (Gemma, nursery school teacher)

The way in which providers are being disciplined into offering the 30 funded hours is explored in more detail in chapter eight, but here it is important to recognise that, for some settings, simply offering the 30 hours funded was a competitive act, a necessary manoeuvre if they were to remain open and viable.

Gemma's use of the term 'bums on seats' in the quote above is pertinent as it demonstrates an equivalence to the per capita funding introduced into mainstream 5-18 education with the 1988 Education Reform Act, which resulted in schools being funded according to how many pupils were on roll with an allocation for each pupil (Ball, 2017), hence increasing competition between schools. As maintained settings are now paid per child per hour, it is imperative that they have as many children on roll as possible to maximise their income:

> …nursery funding went from, erm, if you're a Local Authority funded nursery, going from you'll be paid for 26 children or 26 places regardless of how many children were in them, to then going no, you'll only get paid for bums on seats. So we had 26 places and, erm, we had, erm, our busiest session was about 18 and our smallest session was about 9…So obviously, you know, we were losing a huge amount of money (Catherine, nursery class teacher)

> …I'm a school in (name of Local Authority) I don't mind saying and erm, but all the schools in (name of Local Authority) do not have full schools, they do not have full pupils. So if you don't have a full intake and you have spaces, that means less money coming in per pupil and I just couldn't afford to pay the staff…it's been going on for about four years now (Charlotte, nursery school deputy headteacher)

Similarly, nursery class teacher Amy stated, "…it was all about bums on seats really, getting the, you know, getting enough children in so we were full." The term 'bums on seats', utilised by Amy, Catherine and Gemma to indicate the importance of filling spaces to maximise income for their settings, is usually a derogatory term in education, used to indicate spaces being filled by pupils or students to secure funding but with little regard to the quality of education provided (eg Busby, 2019: Department for Education & Gyimah, 2018). Here, Amy, Catherine and Gemma are using the term to express their opposition to the policy, and its emphasis on filling spaces rather than providing high quality early education.

Whilst the funding reforms represent a fundamental change for the maintained sector, private settings are more accustomed to this payment model as they have relied more heavily on fees from parents, receiving payment only for hours attended by children. Here we see how the maintained sector is being assimilated into private business structures and sensibilities through funding policies, as occurred in the 5-18 mainstream education sector following funding changes in the 1988 Education

Reform Act (Ball, 1994a; Bowe et al,1992). Just as the 1988 ERA forced schools to compete for the 'custom' of children and their families, to secure funding, similarly the ECEC funding policies compel maintained settings to contend with others to attract families, and the accompanying government funding. The comments from the three teachers in maintained settings above makes clear their disapproval of the funding reforms.

## Underfunding of the ECEC Funding Policies and the Intensification of Competition

Competition, and so privatisation, is augmented by the underfunding of the funded hours policies. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, half of providers were breaking even or were delivering ECEC at a loss, with their costs exceeding income (Paull & Wilson, 2020). Some participants explained that the government funding rate for three- and four-year-olds was significantly below the hourly rate they charged parents:

> So thirty hours funding, we get £4.91 per hour for the three-and four-year-olds. That doesn't even go anywhere near. As a nursery school you've got qualified teachers which makes us more expensive…We charge £7.80 for anything outside of the thirty hours…It's the only way we can do it, subsidisation, a little bit, somewhere else. (Nicola, nursery school headteacher)

> …more hours are taken up by children who receive funding and in this area it's only four pounds per hour…And at the moment our, our fees are four pounds twenty an hour but they *will* be going up to five pounds an hour. (Kelly, independent pre-school manager)

The way in which settings are recovering the loss created by the low hourly government funding rates by increasing charges to parents is discussed in chapter six on enactment, but what is important to note is that with settings operating within such precarious market conditions, the competition for families and children- and the attached funding- naturally intensifies.

Extreme precarity, in the form of the threat of closure, had been experienced by some practitioners interviewed, including Gemma, who is quoted above discussing the way in which the nursery school she works in began to offer 30 hours to remain

financially viable. Others expressed their concern that permanent closure in the foreseeable future was a real possibility:

> The school could potentially close soon because it cannot afford to stay open (Sally, nursery school headteacher)

> … if we had 10 children we would have to start thinking about whether the nursery would be open at all. (Sarah, nursery class teacher)

Gemma, Sally and Sarah all work in settings in the maintained sector, in nursery schools or nursery classes, yet are presented with closure due to financial insolvency. This is a further feature of the ECEC funding reforms which bears a similarity to the 1988 ERA, the possibility of "market failure, that is, that unpopular providers will be driven out of business – what Keith Joseph…talked about as importing the notion of 'bankruptcy'" (Ball, 2021, p. 134). These are financial implications that have accompanied the ECEC per capita funding policy reforms, with nursery classes and nursery schools now focusing on the number of children enrolled in the setting to ensure they will receive adequate funding to cover costs, comparable with the pecuniary focus in the PVI sector. In such market conditions, settings begin to operate with a competitive mindset to ensure survival, employing marketing techniques traditionally used by the private sector to attract families.

## Competition, Marketing and Privatisation of the Maintained Sector

### *Marketing, Privatisation and the Funding Reforms*

My argument that the maintained sector is being endogenously privatised through funding policies is further supported by the ways in which maintained settings are utilising marketing strategies as they compete for the custom of families. Marketing techniques, which include signs outside schools boasting of Ofsted ratings and adverts in the local press, became increasingly common in primary and secondary schools following the introduction of 1988 Education Reform Act (Ball, 1994). With schools forced to compete for pupils and the attached funding, such strategies became necessary to advertise the strengths of a school to parents. I argue here

that the per-pupil funding equivalence that the ECEC funding reforms have established are manifest in an expansion of marketing strategies in the maintained ECEC sector.

Several of those interviewed who worked in nursery schools and classes within primary schools discussed their use of more traditional marketing tools, such as signs and banners outside advertising available spaces. Whilst the ECEC funding policy reforms mean that settings, including those in the maintained sector as demonstrated below, have to market themselves to compete, they also provide settings with a highly marketable product in the form of the funded 30 hours. The offer of 30 hours of funded ECEC provision was central to the marketing message in many settings. Amy, a nursery class teacher within a primary school, stated "…we had a sign outside saying '30 hours'", whilst Sarah, a fellow nursery class teacher, told me "…we've got a big banner outside advertising that we've got spaces in nursery and reception and it's got the dates of our open mornings on". Catherine, another nursery class teacher, declared "…we put adverts out in the local magazine and that sort of thing." Social media was also utilised for marketing:

> …we're promoting ourself a bit more. You know, we've got Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, those pages set up as well now to promote ourselves a bit more so it could be that as well. But obviously we're promoting the 30 hours on that as well. (Gemma, nursery school teacher)

> …in general, we've got places and then we usually, we usually advertise on Facebook. Yeah, we will say something like you know, yeah, of 30 hours is, you can come here, use your 30 hours funding and there are no extra charges, we would say that, yeah. (Julie, nursery school headteacher)

Julie's assertion that her nursery school would offer 30 hours at no cost to parents was to distinguish it from other settings, often in the private sector, which applied conditions to the provision of the 30 hours and usually stipulated that there was some cost to parents (due to compulsory extra hours, meals, other consumables and so on). This highlights the role of promoting one's setting in securing custom (children attending) in order to be competitive.

The 30 hours funding policy introduces an interesting dichotomy here. As discussed above, the existence of the policy, and its underfunding, creates market conditions

which increase competition between settings. Paradoxically, the 30 funded hours also provide settings with a prime product to sell and advertise to families. Some settings and practitioners can find themselves conflicted, presented with a policy that is financially detrimental to their provision, and sometimes incongruous with their values, yet central to their marketing message. Due to falling roll numbers, some settings were forced to be more proactive with this marketing:

> …I was also going into our children's centre in the toddler groups and talking to parents generally about how you get a school place, how you get a nursery place. Absolutely not pushing ours, but because I wanted people to know what the options were, from the beginning, about how to get the information that they needed and that sort of thing. And the, the, naturally that did generate some children for us because we were on site. (Catherine, nursery class teacher)

> Erm, so, we've been putting leaflets in children's centres, in GP surgeries, I've been putting them through letterboxes in houses and flats on my way home, erm, in the church, 'cause they have a playgroup there, erm…we've got a big banner outside advertising that we've got spaces in nursery and reception and it's got the dates of our open mornings on, erm, yeah, just things like that really. (Sarah, nursery class teacher)

Catherine later explained "…my background was in marketing first before I went into teaching, which was handy", demonstrating that sales skills from the private sector are now transferable to roles within ECEC due to the increasing focus on promotion and competition. Julie also discussed the need to conduct market research before offering a 'product', stating "…we've researched holiday clubs a little bit and there's just not enough demand for it." The language of the private sector now permeates the maintained faction of ECEC in England. Both Catherine and Sarah worked as teachers in nursery classes, settings which, under previous funding policies, would have received money for the number of spaces in the class, regardless of the number of children enrolled. The funding reforms, with payments linked to 'bums on seats', have created the need to be competitive and shifted the behaviour of these two nursery teachers to be more in keeping with private sector priorities. The impact of this competition and privatisation upon practitioner identity is the focus of chapter nine.

The shift in ECEC from public good to private product is further evident in this comment from Francesca, headteacher of a primary school, who disclosed a conversation between her and a LA schools advisor:

> So I had a meeting with [name of LA] and he told me about, erm, the 30 hours and my concern, and he then alerted me to the fact that the local providers were offering deals so if parents decided to send their children to the nursery they were offering deals on the wraparound care.

The introduction of supermarket-style special offers on ECEC provision suggests that the marketisation and privatisation of the sector is accomplished, a completed objective. Yet some of the products being advertised by providers are the government funded hours, demonstrating that this is not a straightforward market, with a mix of government funded and privately paid for provision on offer. The concept of ECEC as a marketplace is further complicated when considering *who* the consumer is in the scenario- the child, who utilises the 'product', or the parent, who pays for it? (Moss, 2014). Much research into the privatisation of education has focused upon mainstream schools for children aged 5-18 years (Ball, 1994, 2008, 2009; Ball & Youdell, 2007; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1994; Lingard & Sellar, 2013), a field which, prior to 1988, was catered for exclusively by publicly funded state schools, with some private fee-paying schools outside of the system. Yet ECEC has historically been provided through a mixed market, a mix of public and private, an assemblage of self-employed childminders, publicly funded nursery schools and classes, private day nurseries, children's centres and not for profit providers. Furthermore, it is a market that is highly regulated, with all providers required to adhere to strict mandates regarding staff qualifications, adult to child ratios, room sizes and so on. The mix of public and private, and the fact that childcare decisions can be hugely emotive for parents (Chen & Bradbury, 2020; Vincent & Ball, 2001), illustrate that ECEC is not a typical marketplace with rational, detached consumers. As Ball (1994) explains, "…markets are neither natural nor neutral phenomena, they are socially and politically constructed." The ECEC market has been created by successive neoliberal governments 'steering at a distance' (Kickert, 1991, p. 21), manufacturing a marketplace through legislation such as the ECEC funding reforms.

The 15 and 30 funded hours policies can be viewed as equivalent to a voucher scheme or subsidy, with vouchers being a demand side strategy that aims to

promote choice and competition and, therefore, increase privatisation (Ball & Youdell, 2007), with families entitled to a number of funded hours and able to purchase additional hours at the rate set by the ECEC provider. Lisa, a director of two private nurseries, explained:

> …the funding there is used there by the parents, as far as I can see, as more of a subsidy…So they get cheaper childcare. So with the 15 hours for example with the three-year-olds, then the parents usually, I have very few parents there who only take up those funded hours. I'm not sure we have any at the moment. But it's not unusual for them to increase their hours once they have that funding.

Emily, deputy head and SENCo at a nursery school, stated "I know it's not free for all parents, but it is so much cheaper, erm, it's much more manageable for them having the subsidised childcare" in relation to the 15 and 30 funded hours. The funding reforms are not dissimilar to the nursery voucher scheme that existed from 1996-8, with parents provided with a voucher that they could exchange for a 'free' part time place in any setting (West, 2006); they are, in effect, a 'quasi-voucher' (Glennerster, 1996, as cited in Sparkes & West, 1998). The vouchers were established to provide parent choice through competition between settings (Sparkes & West, 1998). Whilst competition is not explicitly stated as a goal of the 15 and 30 hours funded hours policies, the 'Childcare Bill: policy statement' of 2015 (Department for Education, 2015) makes it clear that the aims of the policies are to:

> …create capacity cost-effectively and without driving up the cost of childcare; be efficient for providers to administer and not add to their costs; be at least as cost-effective to administer as the model for delivering the current entitlement and better value for money for government …ensure that as many existing childcare providers as possible are able to take part in delivery of the 30 hours; and encourage new providers

The language of 'efficiency' and 'cost-effectiveness', alongside the drive for as many new and existing providers as possible to supply the 30 hours – all terms associated with competition and choice (Ball, 2017; Moss, 2014; Penn, 2013; Plantenga, 2013)- reveal that competition between settings forms the foundation of the policy. The move towards policy in which the development of the childcare market itself, that is the expansion of the sector, is a central concern is indicative of the Conservative government's approach to ECEC since 2015 (Lewis & West, 2017). The 30 hours policy forms a significant part of this endeavour to expand the market.

### *Competition Between the Private and Maintained Sectors*

Nonetheless, many of the teachers interviewed discussed the way in which it was difficult for nursery classes and schools to compete with PVIs due to operational differences between the two types of provider, with shorter opening hours and longer closure periods in the maintained sector. Nursery schools and classes typically operate during school term times only, for 38 weeks of the year, and tend to offer hours in keeping with those of the English school day (around 9am to 3pm) (Moss, 2013), whilst PVIs are open year-round and sometimes provide ECEC from 7am to 7pm

> Erm, so I think, and I don't *know* this, but we've got a children's centre just across the road, we've got day nurseries around us, and they, erm, the children's centre is open from eight 'til six. So if, if you're a working parent, you're gonna go there, because you can still get your 30 hours for free, but you can drop your child off at eight and pick them up at six. Erm, but being a school, we don't open until nine, well it's 8:45 for nursery, erm, but still, that's too late for parents who need to drop their child off and go to work. Erm, so yeah, I do think, I think that being a school we just can't really compete with day nurseries and children's centres that are open for longer hours. (Sarah, nursery class teacher)

> I think we've kind of concluded that actually… erm, if you're a family unit that needs a lot of care, then you're probably already in day care. I don't think we, we can't compete with that, we've got holidays, we didn't, we try, we've researched holiday clubs a little bit and there's just not enough demand for it (Julie, nursery school headteacher)

Leonie, executive headteacher of three nursery schools, explained that the difference in opening hours of PVI and maintained settings meant that each was providing for a discrete set of parents:

> And we're a term time only. And they (parents), you know, tend to work, and then so they have to find, erm, childcare in the holidays. So I think, I think we're catering for two different groups of, er, parents.

Julie went on to explain why few children moved from private nurseries to her nursery school despite the fact that the prices charged by the school were significantly lower:

> I wouldn't say it was a huge quantity 'cause obviously, you know, the, the day nurseries nearby offering a kind of, seven 'til seven sometimes or certainly seven 'til six.

The above comments echo the findings of interviews conducted by Chen and Bradbury (2020) in which middle class parents discussed how they were unable to choose nursery schools or classes for their pre-school children as the opening hours did not fulfil their childcare needs.

Some participants who worked in maintained settings discussed measures that they were taking to remove these barriers to competition. Those working in nursery schools or nursery classes within primary schools talked of the need for before and after school provision to appeal to parents whose working day requires longer childcare hours. Sarah, a nursery teacher within a school, explained that early morning provision was being explored "Erm, and we do have a breakfast club and after school club but nursery children can't go to that, erm, and that is something that we've looked into". Others working in nursery schools described the changes that were made to the school day explicitly to be competitive with private nurseries:

> Gemma: …we couldn't offer what the parents needed and private daycare could. Erm, we had to open breakfast clubs and after school clubs as well, erm, to help us with that.
> Interviewer: So what time are you open now?
> Gemma: Erm, we start at half seven and we finish at four. At our other site, the school that we're federated with, they start at seven and they finish at six. So some children are coming in at seven and they're doing all day and they finish at six. (Gemma, nursery school teacher)

> Because I get it, I get it, it's for work for parents, but what I've found, erm, and it's kind of heart breaking, is I have children, we have to run a breakfast club and an afterschool club as well, erm, otherwise we wouldn't be chosen as a nursery. For our working parents, erm, for them to choose us, it has to be more, it has to be more than what we provide in forest school and things like that, it has to be what we can do to support their work life. So we have to provide breakfast club starting at eight, and we have to provide after school provision (Charlotte, nursery school deputy headteacher)

Francesca, headteacher of a primary school, explained that attracting families who were entitled to 30 funded hours to the setting was dependent upon the ability to attend provision before and after school, and that the school was struggling to keep up with demand:

> …what we have discovered is that the before and after school club has become so popular, the difficulty that we've now got is that when we've got new children starting in nursery and reception, and parents want places in the before and

> after school club, we sometimes can't meet the need for those children. And that's my worry at the moment is, are we gonna start losing some of our 30-hour children because we can't meet the need, erm, for the, erm, wraparound care at the school.

The EYNFF ensures parity of funding for maintained and private providers, purportedly enabling parents to choose any setting at which to use their 30 funded hours. However, with the 30 hours available only to families with working parents, settings must facilitate the working patterns of parents if they are to attract those families. Maintained settings are disciplined into offering longer days of ECEC to appeal to working parents and remain competitive. Maintained settings take on the operations – such as longer opening hours- and values – including competitiveness - of private companies, demonstrating endogenous privatisation of the sector.

## ECEC Funding Policy Reforms and the Endogenous Privatisation/ Commodification of the Maintained Sector

Competition between settings is one of the key mechanisms for privatising the public sector (Ball, 2017; Ball, 1994; Ball & Youdell, 2007; Moss, 2014), yet the ECEC funding policy reforms have resulted in some maintained settings behaving more like a private business in other regards. Here, the exacerbation of privatisation through the introduction of fees for ECEC in primary schools, and the fact that this can result in accrual of debt for families, is considered, followed by discussion of the way in which the bureaucracy surrounding the 30 hours policy in particular has necessitated that some settings employ an administrator. Finally, the use of terminology typically utilised in the private sector within maintained ECEC settings is explored.

### *Privatisation – Paid Provision in the Maintained Sector*

Further support for the thesis that the funding policy reforms are intensifying the privatisation of the maintained ECEC sector in England comes from the increase or introduction of paid ECEC provision in some maintained settings. As discussed above, some participants working in nursery classes or schools had extended their opening hours to attract working parents to the setting. Where longer opening hours

had been introduced, this was accompanied by a requirement for parents to pay for care and education beyond the funded hours:

> …the thirty hours children, where their parents might actually be working, and need, full day care, they can pay for breakfast, 8 to 8:40. Children start at 8:40. If they don't want breakfast they can start and pay, 8:40 to 9:30. And then they can pay 3:30 to 5:55, 6 o'clock. (Nicola, nursery school headteacher)

> We do have a breakfast club, so our 30 hours is nine til three and, erm, we have a breakfast club which starts at eight which they can pay for that hour. Erm, we have on site facility until six o'clock so they can pay for three till six or three to four, they pay by the hour for that depending on when they want to pick up. (Julie, nursery school headteacher)

> …if parents can't access the 30 hours…we let them pay for afternoons if they want to…which is, I think it's five pounds an hour (Francesca, primary school headteacher)

> …we make sure they're getting the 30 [funded hours] but then we're going to charge if they want to stay until 3:30. So it'll be free until three o'clock, but then if they want that three 'til three thirty, they'll have to, have to pay for that…I've started to ask around at other schools in the local area and, and most of them charge about three or four pounds for any extra hours, so I think, we're thinking about two pounds would be reasonable for half an hour. (Sarah, nursery class teacher)

Whilst those working in nursery schools sometimes discussed that paid provision had been available to parents prior to the funding reforms, for teachers working in nursery classes, the option of additional hours paid for by families was concomitant with the changes to funding. Sarah's market research regarding fees charged by other primary schools in the local area suggests that, if not commonplace, asking parents to pay for some ECEC provision is not rare amongst primary schools.

In Catherine's nursery class, accompanying the ability to pay for attendance beyond the funded hours was the risk of accumulating debt if the fees went unpaid. She explained what had happened after the administration of fees had been transferred from the school to the LA:

> Catherine:…it used to be that we could then say to parents 'OK, you are one hundred pounds behind, you know, your child can absolutely do their 15 hours, but we are not offering you any further additional hours until you're back on your feet', because otherwise the debt will just keep growing and that would be irresponsible of us, but now of course with the Local Authority administering that, we'll get parents running up two- or three-hundred-pound bills. There's no way they'll pay them! And then we know that they'll end up with CCJs (County

> Court Judgements) and these are families and we know, you know, we know them well, we know what their financial circumstances are and that they are *not* gonna get themselves out of that.
> Interviewer: So they can get CCJs for not paying the, the Local Authority?
> Catherine: Yeah the Local Authority will threaten to, you know, put it with whoever.

Debt recovery measures are recommended as standard in contracts between PVI settings and parents (Penn, 2013). The introduction of such proceedings into maintained settings, in this case, a primary school, is indicative of the privatisation of the sector. This can be directly attributed to funding policy reforms which resulted in the school offering paid-for sessions outside of the funding hours, in turn creating the possibility of parents accumulating debt.

Whilst the privatisation of primary schools in particular is not the focus of this study, the fact that state funded, Local Authority maintained primary schools are asking parents to pay for ECEC provision, and that those parents may then accrue arrears resulting in legal action being taken against them, may arouse consternation and surprise. Of course, asking parents to pay for ECEC provision within schools is part of a wider move to payment for services within schools, such as fines for absence, charges for extra-curricular activities, music tuition, school trips and so on (Laing et al, 2023). The ECEC funding policy reforms form part of a policy ratchet, it is a seemingly minor adjustment that makes further privatisation within the maintained education sector imaginable and possible (Ball, 2008). As Ball (2008) states, whilst policy reforms themselves may be significant and of consequence, it is what they make possible, what they pave the way for, that is of far greater concern.

### *Augmentation in Administrative Duties*

As settings administered fees, 30-hour codes and their renewal, and other operational changes associated with the funding reforms, some practitioners interviewed reported an increase in administrative tasks and the time they spent on them. For some working in nursery schools, stand-alone schools with the same administrative and legal responsibilities of primary schools, these tasks were carried out by administrative support staff, yet they reported that workload for these members of staff had increased as a result of the changes:

> I mean I only oversee it, the business support staff deal with it, the, erm, every week we get the 30 hour code checker thing come through and then they've got to chase up families and all that. (Leonie, executive headteacher of three nursery schools)

> I'm sure if our admin assistant was here, she would be quoting the hours she spends on those 30, the 30 hour process… it is very time consuming. (Carla, nursery school teacher)

For some nursery class teachers, the burden of increased workload due to funding reforms had fallen onto them:

> We have some parents who initially won't apply at all because they're scared of the form, they don't understand what they need to do with it. So for those parents we do offer the service of they can come and work with me and I will help them or the office also do the same (Rachel, nursery class teacher)

> …I did a session for parents explaining to them, erm, who was entitled to the 30 hours and how to go on to the website to get the code. Erm, and then I sat, with a couple of parents, they were struggling to get the code, even though they were entitled to it, they couldn't navigate the website to apply, so I sat with a couple of parents and went through the questions with them so they could get the code (Sarah, nursery class teacher)

The impact of this increase and shift in expectations around teachers' work is explored in depth in chapter nine around practitioner subjectivity. In Catherine's school, the increased paperwork due to the 30 hours policy resulted in an intolerable workload and an additional member of staff needed to be employed:

> When the 30 hours came in we got an administrator…When the 30 hours came in, I put my foot down (laughs). I said 'I *can't*, I can't do this as well as everything else'… So she does, I think she does two days a week now…She does nursery admin so she does all the funding, she does all the, erm, all the enquiries (Catherine, nursery class teacher)

The employment of business managers or administrators is a further indication of endogenous privatisation and New Public Management. That the 30 hours funding policy required a school to employ an administrator signifies the role of the policy in the privatisation of the maintained ECEC sector.

### *Adopting the Language of Business*

The concept of ECEC as a product to be sold is demonstrated further by the business-like language employed by some practitioners. Rachel used workplace terminology when discussing children's hours of attendance, explaining "…our shift patterns are that children can choose if they're 30 hours they come from quarter to nine 'til quarter past three everyday Monday to Friday…And where we are attached to a school…so we do the school shift patterns." The term 'unique selling points' or USP, referring to a marketplace advantage that makes a product or service more desirable to consumers, was used by two practitioners when discussing the way in which they offered the funded hours with no additional charges. Julie stated "…if you come to us for 30 hours, you can have your 30 hours and pay nothing…So that's our kind of USP", whilst Laura, a nursery school headteacher, explained:

> …it is a little bit of a USP for us. There are private providers offering it but they charge a lot of the erm sort of top up fees or whatever you want to call it, around the base, which I understand, you know, they have to do that, completely. Erm, but I think that's the difference that as a maintained nursery school we don't have to do that, we're offering the 15 or the 30 and we're not charging parents.

Charlotte, a nursery school deputy headteacher, discussed some of the other USPs of her setting, a forest school; "…if I want my school full, which I do, erm, I have to sell myself, I have to have unique selling points, because there is competition between, erm, the schools." The use of terminology more suited to a business is an indication of the privatisation of the maintained ECEC sector. Laura's assertion that the maintained sector has a competitive advantage over PVIs is discussed in more detail below.

## Subsidy Maximising Behaviours of the Maintained Sector

Despite statements expressing concern regarding the inability of the maintained sector to participate fully in the ECEC market due to the operational differences considered above, some teachers and practitioners working in maintained settings did discuss other ways in which they benefitted from the funding policies. Maintained settings can capitalise on advantages such as fixed and stable staffing costs and, in

the case of nursery classes, overheads that are covered by a larger school budget. This is discussed more below. As discussed in the previous chapter, by engaging in subsidy maximising behaviours such as providing ECEC to children not yet entitled to the funded hours due to their age or promising a place in the reception class for children attending the school nursery, thus securing future income for the school (and for many years to come in the case of primary schools with nursery classes), maintained settings can secure market advantages over the PVI sector. These are behaviours that the PVI sector cannot usually engage in as they do not have the lure of reception class places. There are also differences in cost structure which place PVI settings at a disadvantage as they need to pay rent and other overheads, employ staff according to the varying number of children on site and gain more of their income through parent fees.

Whilst the EYNFF is an attempt to ensure equal funding levels between providers, the extent to which settings rely on the 15- and 30-hours funding varies depending on the type of setting. The government funded hours account for 74% of income within a nursery class in a primary school and 69% in a nursery school, but only 41% in a private nursery, where 47% of its income is generated through fees paid by parents (this compares to only 12% and 10% respectively in nursery classes and nursery schools) (Paull & Wilson, 2020). With nursery classes relying more heavily on funded hours income, it is natural that they would prefer to enrol more children who are entitled to the 30 hours, thus bringing, in effect, double the funding to the setting. As discussed in chapter four, the situation is different for maintained nursery schools, which receive extra funding to compensate for their additional costs as a school for 15 funded hours per child, regardless of how many hours they are attending for (Archer & Merrick, 2020). This means that they stand to make a loss when providing ECEC for children entitled to 30 hours, as the additional 15 hours does not attract extra funding. Charlotte, a nursery school deputy headteacher who had previously worked in a nursery class in a primary school, stated that there was a noticeable difference, and "…now that I'm in a standalone nursery I see the cuts are significant", having been protected from some of the impact in a primary school.

Nonetheless, nursery schools and classes are more reliant on government funding (Paull & Wilson, 2020), and some participants working in maintained settings spoke positively of the financial impact of the 30 hours as it enabled them to fill spaces that previously went unfilled:

> Julie: Erm, financially I think it (the 30 funded hours) was seen… as a very viable option moving forwards. Nursery schools as they currently stand are traditionally under threat through funding, erm, and because a lot of the other early years provision within our area wasn't offering it, if it was something that we could offer a jump on board with then it, it was a little bit of financial security. (Carla, nursery school teacher)

> Interviewer: And did the 30 hours impact on you financially when it came in?
> Julie: Positively I would say (laughs), erm, because…we had so many more 30 hours children we budgeted for…we had this huge influx of 30 hours children, actually in that first year we were way, way, way over budget [laughs] (Julie, nursery school headteacher)

> One of the reasons we introduced it was because we were, we work as a sessional care. So some children access 15 hours in the morning, five mornings, and some five afternoons. It was always difficult actually for us to offer, to fill up our five afternoon spaces. So the 30 hours has been a particular, particularly successful for us in filling up those afternoon spaces. (Leonie, executive headteacher of three nursery schools)

Conversely, as private nurseries depend more on parent fees (which, as suggested above, are usually higher than the funding rate), it is logical that they may wish to limit the availability of funded hours to ensure that parents need to pay for at least some of their child's care. Rachel, a teacher in an infant school, stated that whilst the 30 hours funding policy had made little financial difference to her nursery class, she was aware that local private nurseries capped the number of 30 hours places available to ensure they continued to receive income from parents. Leonie, executive headteacher of three maintained nursery schools, explained that in some private nurseries, this meant not offering the 30 hours at all; "I know in the private sector, the, I sit on a lot of early years forums in (name of area) and they're, they generally find that they can't operate effectively on the funding that they get for the 30 hours, so not all of the, are taking it up." This contradicts the statistics offered at the beginning of this chapter which state that 90% of PVIs offer the funded 30 hours as opposed to only 70% of schools (Department for Education, 2019) and illustrates the

importance of local context as discussed in the previous chapter (which also discussed how some settings limited the availability of 30 hour places). What is important to note here is that as maintained settings rely more upon the funded hours, they benefit more from the 30 hours policy. Certainly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, PVI settings lost an average of £1,176 a week whilst school based providers lost £401, as PVIs were more reliant on parent fees whilst maintained setting benefitted more from government funding which continued to be paid (Hunnikin & Blackburn, 2020). Of course, this also means that maintained settings are affected more by the underfunding of the policy and may have to engage in more competitive behaviours as they seek to secure adequate income.

## Competitive Advantages of the Maintained Sector

Nonetheless, settings in the maintained sector have several competitive advantages. One of these is the economies of scale gained through an attachment to a school, with overheads paid for by the school as a whole. This enabled most maintained settings involved in the study to offer the funded hours with no additional 'top up' fees, which are regularly charged by PVI providers:

> Because we were in a school, we didn't pay rent, and we didn't pay lighting and heating and all that kind of thing, we, we could do it. So we still offer the 30 hours *completely* free of charge (Catherine, nursery class teacher)

> There are private providers offering it but they charge a lot of the erm sort of top up fees or whatever you want to call it, around the base, which I understand, you know, they have to do that, completely. Erm, but I think that's the difference that as a maintained nursery school we don't have to do that, we're offering the 15 or the 30 and we're not charging parents. (Laura, nursery school headteacher)

Although factors such as opening hours and practical considerations are important for parents selecting an ECEC provider (Chen & Bradbury, 2020), the cost is also imperative, particularly for families on lower incomes who find it more difficult to pay fees (Vincent et al., 2008). Some participants working in maintained settings discussed how some families would move from another provider, usually a private day nursery, to their setting to take advantage of cheaper rates and sometimes entirely 'free' funded hours without 'top-up fees', consumable fees or any other costs for parents. Julie, a headteacher at a nursery school, stated "So we *have* had, you

know, a handful of families coming to us from a day care just because we're more free." The role of parent choice, and the way in which ECEC is an unusual market is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Stable staffing and lower adult to child ratios thanks to the presence of a qualified teacher were further benefits discussed by some teachers. Nursery classes, typically staffed by a teacher and an assistant with an adult to child ratio of 1:13 and thus a maximum of 26 children permitted at any time, tend to have more fixed staffing than PVI settings, where staffing levels will change to reflect the number of children in a room. Rachel, a nursery class teacher, explained:

> …because I'm at school all day, every day it didn't have the same impact as it had for private nurseries who had to cover the staff and have people working that wouldn't necessarily have worked and then funding that.

Meanwhile, Francesca stated that stable staffing in her primary school nursery class enabled her to introduce the 30 funded hours:

> …we'd already sort of mentioned about extending it to 30 hours. And one of the reasons why I could do it was the person, even though it was a half day nursery…the people employed in the nursery were employed on a full-time contract…So we were paying full time staff. So that wasn't going to be an additional cost… so I knew that the budget wasn't gonna be affected by staffing really.

As Sarah, a nursery teacher in a primary school, stated in the previous chapter, both she and the teaching assistant were employed full time by the school meaning that costs remained stable whether there was a full class of 26 children or just 10 attending. This allowed any unfilled places to be offered to children immediately following their third birthday, before they were entitled to government funding, with the school essentially delivering ECEC for free. Such a manoeuvre, the school hoped, made it more likely that the family would decide that the child would attend the school for their primary education too. The unique position of nursery classes in primary schools – as 'feeders' to the primary school- situates them as especially competitive as they seek to secure the enrolment of children not just for the nursery, but for the school, potentially obtaining eight years of funding. This is a not a concern for either nursery schools or PVI settings.

The need to be competitive and prevent the family from using another provider is explicitly mentioned as the motivation for these subsidy maximising behaviours. Lisa, a director of two nurseries in the PVI sector, explained the extent of this competitive advantage and the impact it was having upon her settings:

> Lisa: School nurseries are our biggest threat.
> Interviewer: Really?
> Lisa: Yeah, it's a bigger threat in my [small town] nursery than in my [affluent city] one, because where they're not a threat is that they're only open during school term time, so working families, most working families work all year round. So that's *not* such a big deal in [affluent city], but in [small town] it's catastrophic.
> Interviewer: Right.
> Lisa: Our business is probably a third of what it was. Had we not had every school in the town now, certainly the ones around us, in walking distance, every one of them now has pre-school and two-year funded places.
> Interviewer: Two-year as well?
> Lisa: Yes.
> Interviewer: OK.
> Lisa: And will take them from their second birthday, not the term after.
> Interviewer: So as soon as they turn two?
> Lisa: Yep.
> Interviewer: But presumably they're not getting funding then?
> Lisa: That's right.
> Interviewer: So are they offering these places for free?
> Lisa: Yes.
> Interviewer: Just to get them through the door?
> Lisa: Yeah.

This is an example of subsidy maximising behaviours by nursery classes within schools, as discussed in the previous chapter. As stated, both Laura and Charlotte, working in maintained nursery schools, had experienced children leaving their settings due to the promise of a reception class place if they moved to a school nursery. Such strategies are consistent with the 'voucher maximising behaviours' which were witnessed following the introduction of nursery vouchers in 1997 (Sparkes & West, 1998).

These competitive behaviours from primary schools provide further evidence of the way in which policies which promote marketisation augment endogenous privatisation, and the way in which some maintained settings can utilise their competitive advantages to contend with other providers. As Ball (1993) asserts, this

is to be expected; if a marketplace is developed, those participating within it will display competitive behaviours. It cannot be demanded that maintained settings display altruistic, ethical, public-sector values whilst competing in a market. Perversely, Sparkes and West (1998) reported that the voucher scheme had resulted in the closure of some PVI settings rather than the expected expansion, leading to less choice for parents and a competitive advantage for nursery classes. Indeed, in the year following the introduction of the 30 hours policy, the number of nurseries permanently closing increased by 153% and disproportionately impacted families living in deprived communities, with 28% of the places lost situated in the 20% most deprived areas (National Day Nurseries Association, 2019). Whilst the reasons for this are not explicit from the survey data, 87% of those settings which closed received government funding of less than £5 per hour per child, and 46% received the lowest hourly funding rate of just £4.30 (National Day Nurseries Association, 2019). The combination of underfunding and subsidy maximising behaviours from the maintained sector could be detrimental to the survival of PVI settings, as supported by the discussion with Lisa above.

Susanna, the only childminder to participate in the study, discussed a further advantage for maintained nursery schools in her area during the COVID-19 pandemic, where funding of a local nursery school, which was closed, was prioritised over payments to her:

> …so during COVID our nursery school has closed and, but I have two of their children, so they're coming here for their extra hours, I *can't* claim for them because it's school funding and we're not allowed to claim for them.

Of course, the pandemic has been financially devastating for many ECEC providers in England, with the overall number of ECEC providers falling from 75,336 in September 2020 to 71,535 in May 2021, a loss of 3,501 providers, or a 4% reduction in the size of the market (with the majority of those closing being childminders) (Ofsted, 2021a). Up to one quarter of providers face closure in the following year due to a fall in the number of children attending during closure periods and an increase in the number of parents becoming unemployed or working more from home, with evidence that day nurseries are disproportionately affected (Pascal et al., 2020).

## Parent Choice and ECEC Funding Policy Reforms

On “the other side of the same coin” (Moss, 2014) of competition is parent choice. Parents are required to select an ECEC provider from those competing in the marketplace, armed with their 15 or 30 government-funded hours, which is, in effect, a subsidy. Ball and Youdell (2007, p. 8) however, warn that the privatisation of education is sometimes shrouded in the discourse of ‘choice’:

> In some instances, forms of privatisation are pursued explicitly as effective solutions to the perceived inadequacies of public service education. However, in many cases the stated goals of policy are articulated in terms of ‘choice’, ‘accountability’, ‘school improvement’ ‘devolution’, ‘contestability’ or ‘effectiveness’. Such policies often are not articulated in terms of privatisation but nonetheless draw on techniques and values from the private sector, introduce private sector participation and/or have the effect of making public education more like a business.

Here I consider the way in which parent choice is presented as motivation for offering 30 hours by some practitioners, whilst some recognise that choosing is complex and that the convoluted funding policies further complicate the process. I discuss the way in which the funding reforms, and the 30 hours funding policy in particular, risk exacerbating the social divide between children attending PVI providers and those enrolled in maintained settings.

Some participants gave providing parents with more choice as a reason for offering the 30 hours. Gemma (nursery school teacher), explained that in addition to delivering the 30 hours to be competitive, the school offered it “to give parents that, that choice.” Suzanna, a childminder, stated “I think it’s definitely helped the choices parents have, not that they know it (laughs), but it has kind of pushed them in that direction, you can choose what you want.” Nonetheless, some recognised that the funding reforms have made the process of selecting a setting difficult for parents. Each provider will enact funding policies, particularly the 30 hours, differently, with some offering any 30 hours at no cost to parents, whilst some placing restrictions on the times at which the 30 hours can be taking or stipulating that additional hours must be paid for or top up fees paid to cover other costs. The quote from Catherine at the beginning of the previous chapter, highlighting the quantity of information that parents needed to gather from settings to make an informed decision when selecting a provider, and the ambiguity surrounding the funding policies in marketing materials

aimed at parents. Suzanna, a childminder, also expressed concerns around the misrepresentation of the 30 hours policy, and a lack of clarity around the fact that it covers term time only:

> …the *other* thing I would add is the government need to change about 30 hours, 'cause there is one thing that does really change my relationship with parents, is explaining to them that they don't get 30 hours all year round. That *really* is one thing I come up a lot. They go "Oh I've got 30 hours now" and I say "You haven't, you've got 22" (laughs). And then they go "Pardon?" And then I go "30 hours is only term time only" and that is *not* very clear at all.

The ECEC funding reforms have compounded an already complex system for parents to navigate. As the above quotes highlight, the knowledge that parents are required to have in order to choose skilfully from the array of ECEC providers is manifold, meaning that parents cannot be equal choosers. Policies which place parental choice at the fore exacerbate inequalities, with middle class parents more likely to select nurseries that, for example, feed into popular and oversubscribed primary schools, maintaining their advantage in the education system (eg Ball et al., 1995, 1996; Gewirtz et al., 1995; Vincent et al., 2010).

Yet as discussed earlier, competition, and therefore choice, is constrained by operational factors such as opening hours and term times. Families of receipt of the 30 funded hours have two (or one in a single parent family) working parents, therefore, these families demand ECEC provision that enables them to work. Typical working patterns necessitate more than 30 hours a week of term time only childcare or, as Suzanna observed, "…no-one works nine 'til three, Monday to Friday term time only (laughs). No-one! No-one I know anyway!" As working parents need childcare beyond these hours, they are unable to choose settings, typically maintained nursery schools or school nurseries, which are open only for those hours. Such practical considerations mean that many working parents cannot choose a setting in the maintained sector and are driven instead towards PVI providers (Chen & Bradbury, 2020), a pattern that has long existed (Gambaro et al., 2014, 2015; Penn, 2013). This trend may be augmented by the funding reforms, as 30% of nursery classes within schools are not offering the 30 funded hours (Department for Education, 2019).

For some parents, cost is a deciding factor (Vincent et al., 2008, 2010; Vincent & Ball, 2001) when selecting a setting. As I discussed above, maintained settings often benefit from economies of scale and engage in subsidy maximising behaviours that enable them to offer provision at no additional cost to parents, whereas some in the PVI sector may need to charge top up fees or introduce other conditions to remain viable. Julie explained that some families moved to her nursery school from PVIs because it was “more free”. The underfunding of the 15- and 30-hours policy, which results in PVIs charging parents additional fees, may lead to children from the most financially most disadvantaged families being excluded from such settings due to cost. This contradicts previous research which suggests that parents are unlikely to risk unsettling their child by removing them from a setting due to cost (Plantenga, 2013), although Vincent et al (2010) suggest that there are class differences, with middle class parents feeling more confident in moving their child to another setting (and, of course, having the capital that enables them to do so).

Therefore, there are social justice issues regarding the streaming of children from different social classes into different ECEC provision. With middle-class parents eschewing maintained settings due to restricted opening hours (Chen & Bradbury, 2020; Penn, 2007), and children from lower income families less likely to attend PVI providers (Penn, 2007; Vincent et al., 2008), there is a risk of social segregation within ECEC. As Ball (1993b, p. 4) attests, “the implementation of market reforms in education is essentially a *class strategy which has as one of its major effects the reproduction of relative social class (and ethnic) advantages and* disadvantages” (original emphasis). The impact of the funding reforms on inequalities is summarised in chapter ten.

## How The Funding Reforms Alter Values in ECEC

The intensification of discourses around competition and choice through funding policy reforms work to fundamentally alter the purpose and values in ECEC, from a public good for the benefit of society to a commodity, in which childcare places are bought and sold. As Ball (1994, p. 51) states “The market is a disciplinary system and within it education is reconstructed as a consumer good. Children and their ‘performances’ are traded and exchanged as a consumption good.” This results in a

shift in how families are viewed, with parents and children seen as consumers, albeit with the former operating as the decision maker in the purchase agreement and the latter as the user buyer. Francesca, headteacher of a primary school, described her thought process as she watched nursery children being collected by a local provider at lunchtime prior to the school introducing the 30 funded hours:

> And the local nursery used to walk 30 on and off my playground in the morning and at night with high-viz jackets on. And I used to sit there and watch them and think 'That's money!...That is literally money, walking on and off. It sounds awful to think of it like that but…

Here, children are viewed not just as consumer goods, but as money itself through the attachment of funding to children in ECEC. Privatisation, intensified through the ECEC funding reforms, does neoliberalism's work, shifting our very identities, changing us into rational, self-interested individuals concerned primarily with our own successes and financial solvency, *homo economicus* (Moss, 2014; Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021).

The transformation of ECEC into a commodity was also discussed by Charlotte, a nursery school deputy headteacher, who had formulated a business plan in response to the financial difficulties her nursery school was encountering:

> …we are selling our SEN expertise. We're hoping to sell our SEN expertise to, erm, private schools, erm. We are hoping we, we're a forest school so that makes us hugely, you know…I think erm, we have a lot of expertise in special educational needs, in language development, erm, and we are going to try and position ourselves as people that we can do outreach to.

Increased competition results in a reduction in collaboration between settings or, in the words of Penn (2013, p. 27) "Expecting business competitors to pool information, or to share resources, especially in times of recession, is like asking the wolf to lie down with the lamb." Yet here Charlotte is offering to share the SEN expertise within her nursery school with others- at a cost. It is not just the provision of ECEC but expertise around it that becomes commodified in the privatisation of the sector. This is an interesting development, as the exogenous privatisation of education has included the involvement of private companies in delivering training and professional development in schools (Ball & Youdell, 2007). Yet now, Charlotte's maintained nursery school has taken on the role of a private company, selling services to other settings in an interesting combination of endogenous and exogenous privatisation.

This chapter has demonstrated how the funding reforms have worked to endogenously privatise the maintained sector of ECEC, disciplining it into displaying some of the competitive values and behaviours more typically associated with private businesses. Settings, including those in the maintained sector, are engaging in more marketing and promotion, and utilising the language of business in reference to ECEC. The underfunding of the policies, particularly the 30 hours policy, plays a pivotal role in the augmentation of privatisation, as it has resulted in fiercer competition between settings. This, in turn, has led to the subsidy maximising behaviours of some primary schools introduced in the previous chapter. Whilst the funding reforms have operated to narrow the split between the public and private sectors, bringing maintained settings more in line with those which are private, I argue that it has simultaneously emphasised the split system in England. Through exploiting the advantages that they have (being able to offer places to children before they are entitled to government funding and suggesting that children who attend the school nursery will be prioritised for a place in the reception class), school nurseries are demonstrating the unequal division between early education and childcare.

The shift in values in the sector and the transformation of ECEC- and children- into a commodity as demonstrated in this chapter, can have a profound impact on the subjectivity of practitioners, who struggle to assimilate this change in the sector with their own deeply held beliefs surrounding the moral purpose of ECEC. So how and why do practitioners with such ingrained values come to enact policies that contradict their principles? The next chapter explores how micropractices of power work upon those in ECEC to reinforce regimes of truth that are presented within the funding policies, and this is followed in chapter nine by a fuller discussion of the way in which practitioner subjectivity is governed.

# Chapter 8 - Regimes of Truth, Time and Disciplinary Power in ECEC Funding Policies

As discussed in chapter three, dominant discourses constructed through policy and the media position some families living in poverty as feckless and idle, harking back to the 18th Century Poor Laws. These laws saw the poor divided into the deserving and undeserving poor, the former being those who were destitute due to, for example, illness or disability, whilst it was assumed that all able-bodied poor were simply shirking work and fell into the latter category (Ashurst & Venn, 2014; Gillborn, 2010). I argue that the language utilised in ECEC funding policies, particularly the 30 hours 'entitlement', creates a binary of deserving and undeserving children and families, supporting the 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980) that working families are worthy of support, whilst those who are not in employment, are not, and that children living in poverty 'need' ECEC (contradicting the first statement), with a deficit discourse surrounding low-income families. As MacNaughton (2005, pp. 26-7) comments:

> Officially sanctioned truths about the social world are woven together into a discursive regime (or systems of management) that governs what are held to be the normal and desirable ways to think, act and feel in institutions

Therefore, the regimes of truth constructed through policy govern the thoughts and behaviours of practitioners. I begin this chapter with a discussion of the dominant discourses discernible within practitioner interviews. I go on to demonstrate the way in which these regimes of truth operate in practice, utilising Gore's (1995) micropractices of power. I explain how the ECEC funding policies discipline children through classification, surveillance, regulation, normalisation, exclusion, individualisation and totalisation. The micropractice of distribution, the placing of children into different spaces according to the regime of truth, is explored as a 'practice of division' (Bradbury et al., 2021), drawing upon Foucault's 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1971) in the context of the funding policies.

Alongside these regimes of truth, time, inherent within the funding policies which provide families with a specified number of hours provision each week, operates as a

disciplinary tool. Foucault (1977a, p. 137) asserts that disciplinary power "implies an uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result and it is exercised according to a codification that positions as closely as possible time, space, movements. These methods…might be called 'disciplines'". I go on to explore the way in which time disciplines practitioners, as the funding policies demand "a totally useful time" (Foucault, 1977a, p. 150), producing 'docile bodies'.

## Discourses and Regimes of Truth in ECEC Funding Policies

A number of the dominant discourses within ECEC, as discussed in chapter three, 'The Discursive Split Between the Deserving and Undeserving Poor', were apparent within participant interviews. These included the importance of early intervention and neuroscience, deficit discourses around parenting in families living in poverty and the 'wrong type of parenting', concepts of entitlement and school readiness. How these discourses appeared during interviews is explored below.

## The Early Intervention and Neuroscience Discourse

One of the dominant discourses surrounding the ECEC funding policies is the early intervention discourse, the notion that there is a *need* for children living in poverty to attend an early years setting to ensure their healthy development. Whilst, as explained below, this can be partially explained by the deficit discourses that pathologise parents on a low income, the early intervention discourse (eg Allen, 2011a, 2011b; Allen & Duncan Smith, 2008) discussed in chapter three propose that there is a fundamental difference between children living in poverty and their middle-class peers, with a 'biologising' (Canter & Turner, 2015) of poverty, locating its root causes in the brain according to a misuse of neuroscience (Edwards et al., 2015, 2016). The rise in neuroscience has had a "powerful influence on policy in recent years represent[ing[ a *reworking of discourses of determinism related to background*" (Bradbury, 2021, p. 73, original emphasis). Furthermore, there is considered to be a "cycle of deprivation and dysfunction from generation to generation" (Allen, 2011b, p.

ix). In this study, I was interested in ascertaining whether this discourse had permeated practitioners beliefs.

Nicola, headteacher of a nursery school, discussed 'children's brains' when describing the 'moral purpose' of the school and the way in which the 30 hours policy contradicts that:

> …we're actually, in terms of our sort of moral purpose, of what the nursery school is about, to make those most disadvantaged children more ready for school because you want to do it when their brains are soft, not when they're more hard wired.

Charlotte, deputy headteacher of another nursery school, stated "we absolutely love what we do and it's such a privilege to work with young developing brains, it really is, I wouldn't do anything else". Sarah, nursery class teacher in a primary school, asserted "we know that the early years is the most important time, it's when you can make the most different because children's brains are developing, erm, the synapses are being connected". The influence of neuroscience and the early intervention discourse is evident in these comments from practitioners. For these practitioners, the evidence provided by neuroscience provides more meaning, or 'moral purpose', to their work, legitimising the importance of ECEC. Sarah and Nicola illustrated their knowledge of neuroscience through language such as 'hard wired' and 'synapses'. However, both practitioners discussed neuroscience in the context of how it is proof that the most disadvantaged children should be prioritised for additional funded hours, suggesting that the discourse works against the funding policies here. This results in conflict for the practitioner, who believe that ECEC is crucial in supporting the 'developing brains' of young children whilst simultaneously deeming the 30 hours policy as contradictory to this mission. This tension is explored more in chapter nine on practitioner subjectivity.

## The 'Wrong Type of Parenting', the Cycle of Dysfunction & 'Word Gap' Discourses

The belief that parenting can determine brain development and therefore lifelong outcomes around education, employment and health results in parent blame, with

parents, and mothers in particular, held responsible for poor outcomes with structural inequalities ignored (Gillies et al., 2017). Policy documents, whilst creating a link between disadvantage and cerebral deficiencies (Allen, 2011a, 2011b), work to construct a deficit discourse surrounding parents on a low income. As discussed in chapter three, wider family and welfare policies since 2010 have cast families living in poverty as undeserving, lazy, feckless (Jensen, 2018; Rosen, 2019) and even feral (De Benedictis, 2012), with drug and alcohol abuse, violence, crime, teenage pregnancy and educational underachievement all linked to the "wrong type of parenting" (Allen, 2011b, p. xiii). Families, left destitute by austerity welfare reforms, are deemed culpable for their own adversity through the neoliberal mechanism of responsibilisation. 'Troubled families' are a policy problem that "…must be managed to reduce their impact on others in their network" (McGimpsey et al., 2017, p. 920), with ECEC provision part of the solution in this instance.

For many practitioners interviewed, the provision in their setting was viewed as preferable to the practices of some parents. This is a dominant discourse that has proliferated since the first findings of the Effective Provision of Pre-School (EPPE, later the Effective Pre-School, Primary, and Secondary Education project, EPPSE) were published and widely publicised in the early 2000s (eg Sylva et al., 2004a, 2004b), justifying the expenditure and political capital which had recently been bestowed upon ECEC. The project concluded that attendance of an ECEC setting, particularly one which was 'high quality', was advantageous to children's development, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Sylva et al., 2004), with the effects seen throughout primary and secondary school, and beyond (Taggart et al., 2015). The notion that ECEC was preferable to the home for some children was evident in many interviews:

> Generally, the children who are living in areas of greater deprivation or more disadvantage or the families aren't functioning very well, their language development is lower. And there's a lot of research to show that, you know, for children's language development to, you know, come on, they need rich language opportunities with human beings, not screens or whatever. Erm, and the nursery provides that so those children who are really struggling with language, when they come to nursery it's a natural answer because, you know, they are surrounded by confident, able adults who are very interested in them, who will model language and, you know, do narratives alongside them. We see such a difference! And you know fifteen hours helps, but they need more. They need more exposure to that (Nicola, nursery school headteacher)

> …the community that we serve and, not all, but some of the kind of chaotic home lives that they go into, they get a really good deal with us, you know in a secure environment (Laura, nursery school headteacher)

Others spoke directly about the parenting of 15 hour children, both those receiving two-year-old funding and those three-and four-year-olds not entitled to 30 hours, comparing them to families in receipt of the 30 funded hours:

> …the children who are only 15 hours, I don't know what they do in the afternoons, you know. But for *some* it's not good, and for some it'll be, for *some* of our children it'll be plonked in front of the TV for the majority of the afternoon… I'm sure some parents provide, you know, the most, the most wonderful home life for their child and the children learn a lot, you know, and, and reach the same level of development as everybody else. But there are many for whom that is not the case (Leonie, executive headteacher of three nursery schools).

> And I don't know what they do in the afternoons but when I ask, when I ask them they'll say 'Oh I watched Bing' or 'I watched Paw Patrol'. But they don't tell me 'Oh mummy took me to the park' or 'We went to feed the ducks' or, you know…It's always just about what they watched on television (Sarah, nursery class teacher).

These practitioners are echoing dominant deficit discourses from across policy and popular media. As discussed above, it was the EPPE and EPPSE projects in the 2000s and beyond (eg Sammons et al., 2015; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011; Sylva et al., 2004a, 2004b) that highlighted the importance of the 'home learning environment', stating "EPPE demonstrated a strong relationship between children's outcomes and parental factors" (Sylva et al., 2004b, p. 5) although the researchers were keen to highlight that it is what parents do, rather than their income, qualifications or background, that make the difference (Sylva et al., 2004b). Nicola, headteacher of a nursery school, even commented "if I go back to the EPPE project, the research project, which I know has been discounted in some ways, I'm not sure how, but you know I sort of grew up with that model". Jensen (2018, p. 143) explains this emphasis on "parental warmth over parental wealth" as being driven by justification for welfare and public spending cuts as part of 'permanent austerity'. By stating that a parent's background, qualifications – or income- do not matter, the material reality that parenting on a lower income and with access to fewer resources is more difficult is denied . If children's development suffers as a result of this, it must

therefore be due to poor parenting, what a parent has failed to do or done inadequately, rather than due to a lack of resources.

Simultaneously, within popular culture, a myriad of television programmes existed to highlight poor parenting practices within the working classes, with the parent blame of 'Super Nanny' drawing large audiences (Bristow, 2009) and 'poverty porn' including Channel 4's 'Benefits Street' making significant profits (Jensen, 2018). Jensen (2018) observes how this media format exploded in 2013, following the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the high profile Michael Philpott case (a man found guilty of the manslaughter of six of his 17 children, with intense media coverage of the fact he was unemployed and lived off his partner's welfare benefits, see Dodd, 2013). As Jensen (2018, p. 153) states, the media here worked to "transform precarity and poverty into a moral failure, worklessness into laziness, and social immobility and disconnection into an individual deficit of aspiration". As Skeggs and Wood (2011) assert, the role of the media, and television in particular, in conveying political messages that responsibilise the individual for living in poverty and ignore structural inequalities, should not be ignored.

The root of the focus on screen time and language development evident in practitioners' comments above can also be located in discourses surrounding parenting and the home learning environment. This is particularly interesting as the interviews were conducted in the 12-18 months following the launch of a campaign by then Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, aimed at improving young children's language and communication skills specifically through intervening in the home learning environment (Department for Education & Hinds, 2018). Despite Hinds assertion that the home learning environment remains the 'last taboo' in education (Department for Education & Hinds, 2018), a policy document titled 'Improving the Home Learning Environment' was not reticent about intervening (Department for Education & The Literacy Trust, 2018). The document explained "we need to do more – 28% of children currently leave reception without the communication and literacy skills they need to thrive. We need to support language development in all areas of a child's life, not just the hours they spend in early years settings" (Department for Education & The Literacy Trust, 2018, p. 4). The EPPE and EPPSE studies are cited heavily in the report, and clear statements are made surrounding

the increased length of time that children in low income families spend watching television compared to those in middle and high income families (Department for Education & The Literacy Trust, 2018).

What is of interest here is the way in which these discourses have imbued the values, beliefs and professional knowledge of early years practitioners, with the language of research and neuroscience permeating some interviews. Brain images in particular provide practitioners with an epistemological foundation on which to build their knowledge and their practice, a phenomenon seen across a range of disciplines and explained as 'seeing is believing' (McCabe & Castel, 2008). Such images can also have a confirmation effect, with people believing that MRI pictures prove an argument that they wish to be true (Beck, 2010). Certainly, there are numerous criticisms of the methodology employed in research conducted by Bruce Perry (eg Rose & Rose, 2016; Wastell & White, 2012) and Perry himself recognising that the claims made in his research have been overblown (Rose & Rose, 2016). Furthermore, wider claims around the importance of the first three years of life have also been challenged (Bruer, 1999, 2011). Nonetheless, these criticisms of research appear not to have reached practitioners, demonstrating the enduring impact that discourses can have upon. As discussed above, Nicola, headteacher at a nursery school, discussed the EPPE project and, whilst acknowledging that it had been "discounted", she was unclear as to why and continued to be influenced by its findings. This demonstrates the power of the discourse, making it "virtually impossible to think outside of them" (Ball, 2013, p. 20).

## 'Entitlement' and the 30 Hours Policy

The 30 hours policy in particular is often referred to in policy documents, especially those produced by Local Authorities, as an 'entitlement' (eg Redbridge Family Services Directory, 2016; Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, 2021; Westminster Family Information Service, 2021). The use of this word creates a binary of families who are entitled and those who are not, but it is also a term associated with the moral judgement of families who receive support in the form of welfare benefits (Jensen, 2018), often evident in the mainstream media. Therefore,

those families in receipt of 30 hours, those who are 'entitled', are instantly framed as hardworking, virtuous, worthy and moral, whilst those families who are not entitled, usually those who are reliant on benefit payments, are viewed as lazy, irresponsible and stupid. Entitlement is also a term that has come to be used in popular lexicon to signify privilege or special treatment (Campbell et al, 2004). Victorian notions of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor (Ashurst & Venn, 2014) are evoked through this binary. Here, Catherine displays how the stereotypes of families living in poverty permeate ECEC:

> Erm, it does feel wrong that our most vulnerable children are only eligible for 15 hours. But then where do you stop? You know if you're saying the two working parents will get 30 hours, and erm, these people who are on benefits will get 30 hours, I mean I can just imagine the press, if you said 'These families who are on benefits and are not working are eligible for nursery hours' there would be absolute outcry about, you know, 'Lazy scroungers who sit at home and do nothing and, you know, haven't even got their kids, blah blah blah'.

The influence of the media is overtly recognised here, with Catherine discussing "the press" and their coverage of "families who are on benefits" being "lazy scroungers" [3]. Again, these discourses of benefit scroungers support the notion of *entitlement* and work to maintain the view that only working parents should receive the 30 funded hours. This works as form of division, splitting society "along a vampiric axis of blame for diminishing social resources" (Tyler, 2015, p. 506). With cuts to welfare spending part of austerity measures, individuals were represented as architects of their own misfortune to justify reforms to the benefit system, with these being more palatable to the wider public if recipients are portrayed as being willingly engaged in poor lifestyle choices rather than victims of circumstance (Jensen, 2018). Crucially, what Catherine demonstrates through this comment is the way in which the views and beliefs of early years practitioners are framed by discourses that are created by politicians and disseminated through the popular media.

[3] Whilst the media coverage that Catherina discusses is imagined, it is in keeping with headlines such as 'Mother of 13 branded a 'scrounger' by her eldest daughter' (Curtis, 2016) and 'NO KIDDING I spend my child benefits on handbags and holidays, trolls call me a 'jobless scrounger' but they're just missing out' (Cliff & Einstein, 2022).

## School Readiness

That the “discourse about readiness for school is increasingly heard” was observed in Starting Strong II, a report from the OECD in 2006 (OECD, 2006, p. 219). As discussed in chapter one, A Story of Splits in Early Childhood Education and Care, preparing young children for school has become an aim of ECEC (Moss, 2012, 2014; Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021). School readiness is achieved through more formal teaching and assessment requirements of young children, and usually involves teaching phonics, reading skills and mathematical concepts, according to the dominant discourses (Bradbury, 2018; Roberts-Holmes, 2015, 2017; Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016). It is a discourse that places ECEC firmly at the bottom rung of the educational ladder, there to provide schools with Human Capital (Moss, 2012).

Some discussed how the funded ECEC, especially the 30 hours, helped prepare children for school through allowing them to stay all day, demonstrating how this discourse is firmly ingrained within the psyche of some practitioners:

> And he’s ready for reception class and he’s ready, he has all his phase one phonics…he’s ready, he’s ready to go and he will do absolutely fantastically, academically. Socially, emotionally, yes, he now knows how to play with children, and erm, and it’s just amazing, and that’s because we have the time to invest in him (Charlotte, nursery school deputy headteacher)

> …they become more resilient and by the time they go to school they’re ready to go and eat lunch in the hall and they’re ready to line up if that’s what’s required of them and sit still ‘cause we start teaching some of those skills towards the end of their time in nursery so that they’re more prepared (Laura, nursery school headteacher)

> …certainly that first year that first group [of 30 hour children] were very, very...mature even though lots of them were very young in the year, but they just seemed, by the, by the end they did seem yeah, very ready for school, very reception like.
> I: Yeah, and do you think the fact that they were there for 30 hours a week had an impact?
> P: Oh massively, yeah, and you just, you know, you just know them so much better and it was like having a class in a school much, much more than what I've been used to do in our previous nursery organisation. Yeah, so you kind of knew *exactly* where you were with them all and yeah, and we did, you know, yeah, we did lots with them, that is probably kind of, so pushed them (Julie, nursery school headteacher)

Others explained how the 30 hour policy enabled them to operate the setting more like a reception class:

> …they were trying to make nursery much more formal, much more like reception, without any kind of understanding that they were, some of them, just three. You know, so it's just not the same at all. So I think it was just part of the same package of 'We've got to get these kids doing this stuff because they've got to be doing it when they're in year six, so we have to start now!' (laughs) (Amy, nursery class teacher)

> Having been in reception in a primary school in *my* head, we were just gonna run like a primary school and we would, erm, it would be pretty much the same setup as I used to have in reception (Carla, nursery school teacher)

It is important to note that Carla's experience when she first introduced the 30 hours in her nursery school meant that she reflected and realised that she was unable to operate as if it were a reception class due to the very different needs of the children who were a year younger. However, what is interesting here is the way in which the 30 hours policy can encourage settings and practitioners to think of a group of nursery aged children in the same way as a reception class, potentially pushing the school readiness agenda further down. After all, if nursery classes become more like reception classes as a result of 30 hours attendance, pressure could be exerted upon two-year-old provision to make those children 'ready' for school-like nurseries, in line with the increasingly earlier use of standardised curricula and assessment in the early years (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012).

The discussion of 30 hours to promote school readiness amongst those working in MNS was somewhat surprising, although as Nicola, headteacher of a MNS explained "the whole purpose of nursery schools was to make all children ready for school". However, some participants discussed another source who emphasised the 30 hours as preparation for school- parents. Rachel, nursery class teacher in an infant school, stated that some parents moved children from PVI settings to attend her nursery class for 30 hours explicitly to prepare them for school. Others working in primary schools experienced the same:

> when parents said they wanted to move them from private nursery to school nursery, mostly it was to do with that, 'I want to get them ready for school'… There was a lot of that school readiness dialogue. (Amy, nursery class teacher)

> What we've found, what tends to happen is that by the end of the year, even the children who we didn't think would do full time, by the end of the year the parents have asked can they do a few, a few full days, just to get used to doing full time (Francesca, primary school headteacher)

'Full days' are good preparation for school life, and the 30 hours policy enables full day attendance. Some practitioners described how the setting that they worked in, or others that they knew of, were explicit about the purpose of 30 hours as preparation for school:

> I know that one of the nurseries who's in, who's in the town near where I live, she, erm, or the lady I work with, they, they sort of have to decide how they're going to allocate the 30 hours, so they prioritise the children who are about to start school (Rachel, nursery class teacher).

> So I think year two are the first ones who'll be doing their SATs this year, they're the first one's who will have been possibly been in school for four years rather than three. It's gonna be quite interesting this year to look at the data in line with who was doing 30 hours in that year, the 2017 cohort (Francesca, primary school headteacher)

Here, Francesca formally makes the link between the 30 hours and SATs (Standardised Assessment Tests), pondering whether increased attendance in the nursery will impact upon results in year 2. This demonstrates the impact that assessment in primary schools has had upon the school readiness discourse, demanding that children are prepared for tests from their very entrance to school (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012; Bradbury et al, 2019b). The 30 hours policy encourages ECEC settings to promote school readiness and prepare children for school, and also to become more like reception classes as it allows for a 'school day'.

## The Regimes of Truth: Contradictions and Complexities

The regimes of truth forged by dominant discourses within ECEC funding policies are complex and contradictory. For example, whilst the objective of the two-year-old funding policy is to provide early education for 'disadvantaged' children (Department

for Education, 2016b; Department for Education & Gove, 2010), including those in families on very low incomes, regardless of their employment status, the aim of the 30 hours policy is to increase parental employment rates (Paull & LaValle, 2018; Paull & La Valle, 2017). Here the early intervention discourse that proposes ECEC is of benefit to 'disadvantaged' children (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011; Sylva et al., 2004b) contradicts the concept that only working parents are deserving of government funded childcare. These conflicting aims result in a confusing picture in settings, with many disadvantaged children who are eligible for the two-year-old funding ineligible for the 30 hours when they reach three and are no longer a policy priority. It is therefore understandable that there is confusion, too, from parents and the wider public regarding the aims of government funding of ECEC.

I now go on to consider how these dominant discourses are visible within practice in settings, employing Gore's (1995) eight 'micropractices of power' discussed in chapter two.

## ECEC Funding Policies and 'Micropractices of Power'

### Classification and Normalisation

Following Gore's (1995) conceptualisations of these micropractices of power, MacNaughton (2005, p. 31) defines classification as "…using truths to differentiate between groups or individuals." The 30 hours funding policy itself creates this micropractice of power, which has resulted in the language of '15 hour children' and '30 hour children' becoming widespread, as apparent in the interviews:

> …the fifteen hours children, that's two-year-olds and three-year-olds, they start at 8:40…Then the thirty hours children which do 9:30 to 3:30 (Nicola, nursery school headteacher)
>
> the 15 hour children are supposed to be picked up at 11:45 (Sarah, nursery class teacher)
>
> …if we have identified that 15 hour children are very vulnerable, we do offer them the 30 hour place free (Charlotte, nursery school deputy headteacher)

This language allows for easy differentiation between groups as children are labelled ’15 hours’ or ’30 hours’. Those labels are saturated with the dominant discourse around ‘entitlement’, with connotations of the ‘type’ of family that the child belongs to; a home with hardworking parents, or one of fecklessness and idleness. Thus, the terms ’15 hours’ and ’30 hours’ are not merely descriptors of the attendance pattern of a child, they are imbued with the dominant discourse that the policy aims to ‘will to truth’. This results in children and families being constructed in accordance with the dominant discourse around ’15 hours’ and ’30 hours’. This is in keeping with other labels employed across education to denote poverty, such as receipt of free school meals or Pupil Premium, both have which have been associated with a ‘culture of poverty’ (Lewis, 1966) and resultingly led to deficit discourses surrounding ability. Whilst the labels may fluctuate (free school meals, Pupil Premium, 15 hours), the deficit discourse that portrays families living in poverty as lazy and irresponsible remains. The process through which 15 and 30 hour children are compared is normalisation, which involves “…comparing, invoking, requiring or conforming to a standard that expresses particular truths about, for example, the developing child” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 31). Some participants in the study discussed the ways in which 15 and 30 hours children – and their families- were different:

> …we do home visits, and one of the things that I *did* notice with those children who now, who need that support with speech and language [15 hour children], is that those were the homes where the children had iPads, or the television was on while we were talking to the parents or there were dummies. Actually, in one of the homes it was all of those things!... there was a difference [with 30 hour children]. Erm, the parents would normally turn the television or radio off while we talked to them, erm, yeah. Those children would sit and do a puzzle or a drawing with my TA while I talked to the parents instead of being stuck on an iPad. (Sarah, nursery class teacher)

> …the thirty hours, because the money is going to those parents who, on the whole, not always, are functioning better, and the children’s outcomes are likely to be better. (Nicola, nursery school headteacher)

> …so parents who don't work but also have quite, erm, low abilities themselves, they tend, their children tend not to do great because they’re 15 hours, so we can't get in there as much, and obviously doing interventions and things, there's limited opportunities to work with those children. (Rachel, nursery class teacher)

> I think sometimes with the fifteen hours, erm…I think sometimes parents are offered it and don't fully see the benefits of it (Jane, nursery school deputy headteacher)

This final comment from Jane is imbued with discourses of the 'wrong type of parenting', with parents living in poverty viewed as being incapable of making good decisions regarding the education of their children, and therefore implicated in the underachievement of their child(ren) (Jensen, 2018), further neoliberal responsibilising of parents. Rachel implies that these parents have "low abilities themselves", replicating the 'cycle of deprivation and dysfunction' discourse (Allen, 2011b) as she states that the children of these parents require "interventions". The 'low ability' of 15 hour children is therefore not simply due to poor choices and inadequate parenting, but is regarded as biological, inherited from 'low ability' parents as part of this cycle.

Simultaneously, families who are eligible for the 30 funded hours are depicted as "functioning better" by Nicola. Sarah commented on the way in which families in receipt of 30 hours would turn off the television and play with puzzles or engage in drawing with their children, EPPE sanctioned activities that promote development, work to improve the home learning environment (Sylva et al., 2004b) and, ultimately, provide evidence that the family are engaged with 'normal' middle class values.. As MacNaughton (2004) posits, discourses create a regime of truth around what it means to be a 'normal' family. This is in keeping with the assertion that "The middle class is the "human ordinary"" (Apple & Pedroni, 2005, p. 100). This is clearly seen in this comment from Lisa, a director of two nurseries, one in an affluent, university town in which most children were entitled to the 30 hours, the other in a deprived rural area which catered predominantly for families entitled to the two-year-old and 15 hour funding. When comparing the two nurseries, Lisa stated:

> You know, we can go months at the [affluent city] nursery without having any kind of challenges with families that go beyond , you know, could you help me with potty training or you know, they just, you know…They're positive, and we work together and you know that's *normal* (emphasis added)

The regime of truth has a normalising effect- the middle class is normal, and so families and children entitled to the 30 hours are normal. I now go on to how families gain the title of 15 or 30 hour, through a process involving surveillance.

## Surveillance

Surveillance, defined by Gore (1995, p. 169) as “supervising, closely observing, watching, threatening to watch or expecting to be watched”, is shown to here to operate in a multiplicity of ways. I argue that the code which is supplied to parents whom are eligible for 30 hours of funded ECEC provision functions as a surveillance tool, and that practitioners are involved in the process of surveillance through their role in obtaining the code. The code, operating as surveillance, ensures that only working parents, the ‘deserving poor’, receive the funded 30 hours, reinforcing the ‘will to truth’ that only these families are ‘entitled’. I recognise that this interpretation of surveillance differs slightly to Gore’s (1995) definition which emphasises surveillance within pedagogical practices in the classroom. The way in which eligibility for the 30 funded hours is monitored through an online government portal which collects a range of information about income and employment status could be conceived of as ‘dataveillance’ (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017b), but for this purpose, the code is termed a form of surveillance.

The 30 hours code is obtained by parents using a website, on which they declare their working status and input personal information such as income and National Insurance number to determine the family’s eligibility. If there is a change in circumstances regarding a parent’s employment or income which means the family no longer qualify for the 30 hours, the family will be given a ‘grace period’ of around three months to seek new employment, after which the 30 hours entitlement is discontinued. Parents are required to log on to a government portal to declare that they are still eligible, and intend to be for the next quarter, every three months to renew the code. The code is then entered onto a database by the setting, and the code allows the setting to be paid for the 30 funded hours by the Local Authority. The code acts as surveillance, a micropractice of power that results in some parents disciplining themselves, governing themselves into work to acquire the code needed to obtain 30 funded hours. Many practitioners in the study discussed their role as mediators with regards to the code, reminding parents that they needed to renew them and supporting parents through the process of obtaining the code:

> I did a session for parents explaining to them, erm, who was entitled to the 30 hours and how to go on to the website to get the code. Erm, and then I sat, with a couple of parents, they were struggling to get the code, even though they were entitled to it, they couldn't navigate the website to apply, so I sat with a couple of parents and went through the questions with them so they could get the code… but yeah we do have to chase parents quite a lot to remind them to renew the codes (Sarah, nursery class teacher)
>
> …we always put a reminder out on our Facebook page and our business manager is very sort of cute at chasing them up and when they come at three o'clock, the business manager will just have a quick word you know, "Oh I just need your code, make sure it's in by the end of the week"…and we can ring parents and say "Have you had a chance to?" And we also support parents to get online and to, to do it in school using the school computers 'cause it's not always easily done on the phone so if they wanna come in and sit on the laptop to do it then we'd support parents to do that. (Laura, nursery school headteacher)
>
> The system is getting better it gives us updates on which families are in the grace period and which families need reminding, erm, so we can be more on that. But origin-, initially, there was no way, you know, it was *very* difficult for us to track who had and who hadn't. (Leonie, executive headteacher of three nursery schools)

Through linking the code to payment for settings, the funding policies implicate settings and practitioners in surveillance as they seek to ensure that families are entitled to 30 hours and, therefore, the setting will receive funding for providing the 30 hours. Practitioners, business manager and administrators occupy a role in the surveillance of families through their involvement in obtaining and renewing the code. There are complex power relations at play here, with practitioners and settings being implicated in the surveillance of families.

## Regulation

To ensure that the surveillance functions effectively, and that only those children and families who are entitled to 30 funded hours receive them, settings create "rules and limiting behaviours" (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 31) surrounding children's attendance. This works to reinforce the 'will to truth' that only those with the 30 hours code are 'deserving'. For most practitioners and settings, this meant regulating the hours that children were attending for and ensuring that they did not attend for more hours than they were entitled to and funded for. Whilst practitioners interviewed described the

entitlement of families and therefore the attendance pattern of children as stable, the fact that families depended upon employment status for the 30 hours code meant that there were some examples of changes to children's eligibility for the 30 hours. Some practitioners discussed how regulation of the funding policies impacted on children's attendance at the setting:

> …some children who were part time, their mum started working and they got the code so they changed to full time, and we have had some children who have gone *down* to part time from full time because their code wasn't renewed on time. Erm, yeah and we *have* got one girl who started off as part time, then her mum got the code… so she changed to full time, but now the mum isn't at work anymore so she's *lost* the code, the entitlement, so she's, so she is back to being part time again (Sarah, nursery class teacher)

> We had a little boy who was 15 hours little boy and his mum got a job so he was entitled to 30 hours. So he started to come, erm, for some lunches, I don't think he did every day. And his behaviour changed, and made a, made a dramatic impact on him. He was very challenging, but once he started to stay for lunch, he, he started to follow the boundaries quite happily, he began to make new friendship, it really made a difference...to him. Unfortunately then his mum, erm, lost the job so he had to go *back* to 15 hours. (Mary, nursery school teacher)

Here, the link between work and ECEC entitlement is clear, with precarious employment resulting in insecure nursery provision. Regulation works here to buttress the 'will to truth' that only working parents are 'deserving' of funded ECEC, depriving them (and children) of the additional 15 hours when their employment status changes and they are no longer eligible for 30 hours. In Carla's nursery school, which operated separate classrooms for children attending for 15 hours and those entitled to 30, the regulation of children's attendance occasionally resulted in them being moved into a different classroom:

> The ones who lose it if it happens really quickly… we'll transfer that child to the 15 hours room really before they've got going, before they've made the friendships, before they've got to know the routines, so it makes no difference to them. The difficulty we found was the children who come Christmas had got themselves established with their friends, their key worker, their routines and then lost it [the 30 hours code]. Knowing there's also a grace period…that then takes them even further into the year. You then find a child potentially coming up to Easter, who's down to 15 hours (Carla, nursery school teacher)

Nonetheless, Carla was resolute that this regulation of the funding policies was not to have a detrimental impact on children, and she explained that if children were

settled in the 30 hours classroom after attending for some time, they remained in that room and reduced their hours of attendance to 15:

> …we are *not* going to disrupt this child just because of something that happened with the parents…I had two children who had lost their code, but had stayed with me, but had stayed just for the morning…So they only do their 15 hours, erm, but erm, they do stay in the room they know with the staff they know and with the children that they know (Carla, nursery school teacher).

Many other practitioners interviewed discussed the way in which those children whose parents lost their entitlement to 30 funded hours remained in the setting for 30 hours a week, with the setting itself funding the difference, thus demonstrating their resistance to regulation and classfication:

> …the cases it's happened most often we've had children, erm, from vulnerable families, erm, like sort of single mums who perhaps have had, erm, short-term jobs and they've dipped in and out of work. Erm, but those have all been families supported by our family support workers, so we've just said just keep coming for 30 hours. So however their parent dropped in and out of work, the children kept their place (Julie, nursery school headteacher)

> Well, in all honesty we've done it on a case-by-case basis so if it looks like the child is needed, you know, the space is needed for the family, then…you know I've tended to give them the, keep the, 'cause it's not good for the child, you know, they're there all day and then they're half day then they're back again, you know. It's ridiculous, so I've tended just to, er, let them stay…we have to fund that, yeah (Francesca, primary school headteacher)

Here, children and families are disciplined by the funding policies, with children losing their 30 hours eligibility as the employment status of their parent changes. In the examples above, it is the mother's employment which has shifted and resulted in the loss of entitlement, indicating again that 'parent' is often synonymous with 'mother' (Clarke, 2006) and that women's employment can be more precarious and susceptible to change, often due to childcare demands (Andrew et al., 2021).

Julie, Francesca, and many other participating practitioners demonstrated resistance to the disciplinary power operating through the funding policies through their refusal to regulate the hours that children attended on the basis of the family's eligibility. Children and/or families perceived as being 'in need' were more likely to be offered additional hours in the setting beyond those funded through the policies.

> One child lost the 30 hours entitlement because the dad didn't know how to update the code. The child is still attending for 30 hours as the head does not think it is right for the child to change their hours, this was agreed with the governing body. Another mum with cancer could not get the 30 hours code, as both parents were not working. The school is still providing them with the 30 hours for the same reasons as above, because it is in the child's best interests to provide continuity. (Sally, nursery school headteacher)

> we had two last year who didn't have the code who were staying full time we then realised they didn't have the code. One's mum had had, erm, cancer and she literally missed it due to, erm, circumstances. Another one thought she'd done it and hadn't pressed submit. So what they did do is they paid some money. We didn't ask for all of it but they paid some wraparound money until their code was activated. (Leonie, executive headteacher of three nursery schools)

> …what we do is sometimes if we have identified that 15 hour children are very vulnerable, we do offer them the 30 hour place free… I did it for four pupils this year and then, er, my SENCo was saying 'Please can we' and I said 'Absolutely not, because erm, I cannot afford it' ... Erm, and I'm, you know, I don't want to be in this position, by the way, I really don't, and it's very hard for us to sit down and think, but if it's a safeguarding issue about keeping children safe then I feel like I have a moral duty to do it quite frankly. (Charlotte, nursery school deputy headteacher)

This demonstrates resistance to the policy, and to the dominant discourse, the 'will to truth', behind the policy. Here, the practitioners are questioning the orthodoxy that families on the lowest incomes are not 'entitled' to ECEC, that these families represent the 'undeserving' poor who are not worthy of support, through their refusal to regulate children's attendance. This family-centred approach reflects the ethics of care that many ECEC practitioners adhere to, the 'moral duty' that Charlotte refers to. This ethics of care can be contradictory to the priorities of a setting which operates as a business, with a focus on the values imbued by privatisation and new public management, as discussed by Carla:

> …there was a little bit of conflict between the classroom and the business. And the business side was saying "We've got 30 hour children on the waiting list, we can have 30 hour money, erm, they [the children who had lost the 30 hour code] need to go into the 15 hour room and we can make space for a new 30 hour child for the final term" and in the classroom we were saying "We're not doing it." (Carla, nursery school teacher)

For Carla, the values of the nursery school override the business concerns. However, this comment demonstrates the need to balance the neoliberal regard for

the financial sustainability of a setting against the child-centred ethos prevalent in many ECEC providers. This 'split' in subjectivity (Pierlejewski, 2023) as a result of the funding reforms is discussed in more depth in chapter nine.

## Distribution and 'Dividing Practices'

Disciplinary power also operates through the micropractice of distribution, which "…uses specific truths to decide how to arrange and rank people in space" (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 31). Some practitioners interviewed described the way in which children would be allocated to different parts of the room or building according to whether they attended for 15 or 30 hours. This distribution was usually performed for operational reasons, with settings assigning children to spaces depending on whether they were staying for lunch, arriving at the setting later and leaving earlier than other children and so on- factors that were predominantly associated with whether a child was entitled to 15 or 30 hours of funded provision. Nicola, headteacher of a nursery school, explained the different timings of the day for families depending on their funding entitlement:

> the fifteen hours children, that's two-year-olds and three-year-olds, they start at 8:40 and they finish at 11:40, 11:30/40, we ask them to pick up no later than 11:40 but that's what they're entitled to…Then, er, the afternoon children, fifteen hours two-year-olds and er, three-year-olds, start at 12:30. Then the thirty hours children which do 9:30 to 3:30.

Whilst observing in Nicola's nursery school, I noted the impact that this had, with families of children attending for 15 hours arriving at the school separately to those entitled to 30 hours. As families stood and chatted whilst waiting to collect or drop off their child, I realised that the 15 and 30 hours funding policy was, in this setting, limiting the interactions between families from different socio-economic backgrounds, and operating as a form of social segregation. This was reinforced by two participants, Julie and Carla, a headteacher and teacher respectively, working in different nursery schools, who explained that they had formed separate 15 and 30 hour classes within their schools:

> So when we first had 30 hours because there was just this massive rush of children, erm, and we had 26 straightaway, erm, the decision was we'll put them all in a class together. Erm, kind of as an experiment, really, erm. And

> then all the 15 hours children went in the other. (Julie, nursery school headteacher)
>
> Erm, so we have a big uptake for the 15 hours provision, erm, but we have one of the rooms dedicated to thirty hours provision, which is my classroom…the other classroom has 15 hour provision in the morning and the same in the afternoon (Carla, nursery school teacher)

One consequence of the distribution of children according to their funded hours entitlement could be that children's friendship groups are determined by whether they attend for 15 or 30 hours. Observations in the nursery school suggested that most of children's interactions were between those whose attendance pattern was the same, eg children who attended in the mornings only played predominantly with others who also came in the mornings, whilst children who were entitled to 30 hours mostly played with others who also attended full time. This observation was supported by some participants in interviews:

> we used to have different children staying for lunch on different days, it used to be very much more mixed but now it's the same children every day, through the week. So, inevitably, they are a, a closer group and a more bonded group. So you do have those part-time children and it's not quite the same. They do have those friendships groups with each other (Mary, nursery school teacher)
>
> *…that* class [a class consisting only of children who attended for 30 hours] who'd been together all year, were much, much more like a reception class in terms of, erm, their relationships with one another. I'd been a reception teacher and that was where I had come from, so yeah, their relationships were very secure the way they played in large groups and they could kind of negotiate things in large groups in terms of their PSED [Personal, Social and Emotional Development] it was very significant (Julie, nursery school headteacher)
>
> I think what is quite noticeable in the 30-hour children is the friendships that they build. Because they have longer to build them. Erm, and the social interactions and the way my group of 52 work as a class is very different to the 15-hour children. The 15-hour children, and it might just be our setting, but the 15-hour children tend to, erm, work within their little key worker groups within that class and build their friendships within their key worker groups, but it still seems to be a, a class that has four groups in it. Whereas in my class, and it could be teaching styles, it could be anything, but in my class we have 52 children. And they all know each other and they all know each other very, very well. (Carla, nursery school teacher)

Carla went on to note that those friendship groups had extended beyond the classroom to families, explaining:

> …because the children fix quite good friendships, because they spend so long together, erm, we see more friendships blossoming between parents and families than they do in the other room. And again, that's been the case over the years that we've done it.

Through separating children into classes in this way a form of social segregation is being enacted, with children from the poorest families enrolled in the 15 hours class and their peers attending the full-time 30 hours class. Yet as Pring and Walford (1997, p. 3) assert "We now live in a multicultural society that is increasingly harshly divided by class and ethnicity. Social mixing [in education] gives at least some possibility for mutual understanding and greater equity". A mix of children from different socio economic backgrounds is important in education settings, as some studies suggest that children will only socialise with children from backgrounds different to their own in school (Hollingworth & Williams, 2010) and not beyond it. Of course, there is no guarantee that mixing of children and families outside of a setting will occur even if social mixing is promoted within a setting (Vincent et al., 2018). As Valentine and Sadgrove (2012, p. 2060) state, it is not simply the sharing of physical space "that overcomes social difference, but rather closeness – it is the act of knowing – or the production of intimacy which aligns different bodies in time and space". Nonetheless, through separating children into different classrooms according to their funding entitlement, these opportunities for coming to know one another, for developing 'closeness' and 'intimacy' are certainly reduced, for both children and their families. Furthermore, a mix of children from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds is thought to be advantageous for children's development, particularly in language and communication (Sylva et al., 2004b).

I argue that this distribution operates as a 'dividing practice' (Foucault, 1982), not a micropractice of power but, as discussed in chapter two, the way in which people are divided within or from one another. The actions described above separate one group (families on low incomes entitled to the universal 15 hours) from another (families with higher incomes eligible for 30). As Rabinow (1984, p. 8) asserts ""dividing practices" are modes of manipulation that combine the mediation of a science (or pseudo science) and the practice of exclusion- usually in a spatial sense, but always in a social one." He goes on to explain that these practices are "techniques of

domination" (Rabinow, 1984, p. 10) that have been used predominantly with working class and other marginalised groups.

## Totalisation and Exclusion

Totalisation is defined as "using truths to produce a will to conform", (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 31), with MacNaghton providing the example of an early years practitioner being guided by developmental milestones when establishing what children 'should' be able to do at a particular age. Totalisation works alongside exclusion, "using truths to establish the boundaries of what is normal, to include or exclude particular ways of being as desirable or undesirable and, in doing so, to define pathology." (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 31). I argue that, in the context of the funding reforms, the 'truth' has become that children should attend ECEC settings for 30 hours, with this mode of attendance becoming the norm. Through the process of excluding some families from being eligible, 30 hours becomes the norm and the universal 15 hours becomes the other.

Many participants discussed their belief that 30 funded hours should be universal, with all children eligible, with Laura, headteacher of a nursery school, stating "our only kind of bugbear about it now is that it isn't fair because it is only available to those working parents and we feel that all children would benefit from that." Sally, headteacher of another nursery school, expressed "I think it should be a universal offer but no pressure to take a full-time place". Leonie, executive headteacher of three nursery schools added "the very people who *should* have it, ***haven't*** got it".

However, the view that 30 hours of funded ECEC is optimal and should be available to all children was not unanimous. Some practitioners resisted this totalisation, discussing how they thought that 30 hours attendance of an early years setting was too long for young children:

> My own personal opinion, I mean I worked part time when my children were young and everyone's got their own views about what's right and wrong, but it does just seem a shame that, they're little for such a short time, that, you know, they're coming to nursery and they're, they're not able to do those things that you would do those things just at home with one parent. (Emily, deputy headteacher, nursery school).

> Children are here for the 30 hours and it's primarily about childcare not about their education and their needs, it's more about the childcare comes first…Yeah. I don't think that's always the best thing for the children. (Mary, nursery school teacher).

## Time, Governance and Disciplinary Power in ECEC Funding Policies

Time is fundamental to the funding reforms, with the number of hours a child is entitled to attend a setting for central to the policies. The micropractices of power discussed above demonstrate the disciplinary power that children are subjected to through the funding reforms, yet practitioners also disclosed the way in which the policies disciplined them through time. Here I explore how changes to workload that resulted from funding policy reforms govern practitioners, making them 'docile bodies'.

Some practitioners reported that the introduction of 15 and 30 hours meant that their working day had become longer. This was particularly evident in settings, particularly school nurseries, which had not offered whole day sessions before the funding reforms. Here, Charlotte discusses her experience whilst working in a nursery class prior to moving to a nursery school:

> But in nursery, the nursery teachers had to start at half past eight, erm, work through 'til half 11, take their break, erm, and then the nursery children used to actually finish at half past three, which is quite strange 'cause everybody else finished at 10 past three or quarter past three.

This experience was shared by others in schools:

> …we had to start earlier so that we could fit the 15 hours in before lunch, so they start coming in at 8:45 whereas the rest of the school start at 9. Erm, and they do leave that bit later too, so the rest of the school finished at 3:15 but we finish at 3:30 (Sarah, nursery class teacher)

This meant that the nursery teachers in these schools were working longer hours than their colleagues teaching in other year groups. In addition to longer days to provide 30 hours of ECEC, practitioners reported having shorter break times. This was often a result of needing to provide two three-hour sessions in one day, to accommodate two cohorts of 15-hour children:

> …it means that the teachers in nursery tend to work the longest days of contact time with children. So all the other teachers in school got an hour break…But

> the *nursery* teachers were only allowed half an hour (Charlotte, nursery school deputy headteacher)
>
> …the main thing was that, as a school teacher, I had an hour's lunch and in order to give the children the provision that they needed, I chose to drop that down to half an hour of which by the time the children have gone and we've got new ones in, erm, it's usually about 15, 20 minutes (Rachel, nursery class teacher)
>
> …she (the nursery teacher) had two hours dinner and I took it down to nearly half an hour (when the 30 hours was introduced) (Francesca, primary school headteacher)

Julie explained the challenge that this posed for a headteacher of a nursery school; "It *does* give us a bit of an issue with our, we're very close to directed hours for teachers, which is something that other settings don't have to deal with" (directed hours referring to the time when a teacher must be in school and available to work).

In addition to the longer working hours, some participants reported that their workload both within and beyond those hours had increased:

> …because of budget cuts over the past few years, it just means that quite frankly, the deputy headteacher and the headteacher are often cleaning toilets and doing the dinner , dinner duties and erm, and so any little bit of, you know, we have to protect out staff's workload as best we can, so basically, with the nursery when that started like that, it's us that have to run around, erm, dealing with, erm, any issues, erm, so for example if a child had a bumped head or something, it would be us who were dealing with all those issues. (Charlotte, nursery school deputy headteacher).
>
> Group sizes have increased because there are now more part-time children, meaning that teachers have responsibility for more children in total (more assessing, reporting, meeting SEN needs, social care.. etc). Significant increase in workload when Ofsted is asking about teacher wellbeing. (Sally, nursery school headteacher).

For Sally's nursery school, the funding reforms were significant as, previously, the Local Authority had provided funding that enabled the school to give full time places to many children. Without this funding, most of these children attended for just 15 hours (although Sally's setting was one that would sometimes give children 30 hours of provision even if they were not entitled if the family were in need of it). An implication of this was that there were more children in the setting in total, as one 30

hour place is equal to two 15 hour places. This meant that practitioners needed to complete the paperwork that Sally lists above for more children. This was echoed by Charlotte, nursery school deputy headteacher, who explained that she had increased the staff to child ratio from one to eight to one to thirteen in her nursery school, explaining "I can do that legally but again that's a workload increase for, for our early years educators".

Alongside this increase in contact time, some practitioners shared their frustration at the inflexibility of the funded hours, and how this resulted in 'rushing' through the day with the children:

> Erm, 'cause that is *another* thing with the part time children, you've only got the mornings to observe them, so you're running around trying to fit in interventions, and phonics, and group work, you know, erm, writing and maths and everything, and then you think 'Oh! I've got to observe such and such because they're not here this afternoon!' So it does make the mornings really, really busy. (Sarah, nursery class teacher)

> …we *used* to have two of us setting up the room but now we can only manage with the one with the way that we manage, how we've had to manage round the [funded] hours…we've got to keep rejigging, rethinking how we do things, in shorter and shorter amounts of time, so it always feels a bit rush, rush, rush, rush, rush (Mary, nursery school teacher)

Some participants spoke of the way in which the funding reforms, and the 30 hours policy in particular, had resulted in them spending more time working beyond their paid hours:

> You know, my partner will say 'Why are you doing so many hours?' And I'll say 'Well because, we've got to keep that standard up because if we don't keep our standards up we could lose funding and, you know, people will be without jobs and without childcare'. So there is a lot of pressure. (Kelly, independent pre-school manager)

Kelly chose to contact me after receiving the transcript (all participants were sent transcripts following interviews) to add that she was working many more unpaid hours due to the underfunding of the 30 hours policy, being forced to complete SEND paperwork in her own time as there was no money available to pay anyone to undertake it.

This chapter has demonstrated the role of dominant discourses in shaping practitioner's beliefs and practice and how this in turn disciplines the children and families using their settings. The interviews conducted for this study demonstrated how the regimes of truth around early intervention and the 'wrong type of parenting', neuroscience and the role of the home learning environment, dominant within the field of ECEC, helped to construct the 15 hours child as being in deficit. The media also contributed to these discourses with its selective coverage of families entitled to benefits. The discussion here has also explored how Gore's (1995) micropractices of power operate to discipline families, with the 15 and 30 hours working as labels that enable the classification and normalisation of children. I argue that entitlement to 30 hours has become the norm. Practitioners have become implicated in the surveillance and regulation of the 30 hours policy, enforcing rules around entitlement, although, as seen, some have chosen to resist. The 'dividing practices' (Foucault, 1982) and distribution of children according to their status as being in receipt of 15 or 30 hours has also been examined, with separation of children into separate rooms dependent on their funding the most extreme example of this. It is posited that this functions as a form of social segregation. Finally, the importance of time, recognised as a disciplining technology, to the policies has been discussed, demonstrating how it functions to transform practitioners into 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1977a). The impact of this disciplinary power upon the professional identity of practitioners is explored next in chapter nine on practitioner subjectivity, examining how these micropractices of power are working to shift the subjectivity of practitioners, creating ideal neoliberal workers.

# Chapter 9 - ECEC Funding Policies and 'Split' Practitioner Subjectivity

Neoliberalism is not simply about creating new markets and maximising profits for new entrepreneurial actors, it operates on individuals; "these changes are both out there, in the system, the institution; and 'in here', in our heads and in our souls" (Ball, 2016, p. 1050). Whilst chapter seven discussed competition and privatisation within the maintained ECEC sector, and the widening split between education and childcare, this chapter focuses upon the transformation of ECEC practitioners into ideal neoliberal workers, and the resulting exacerbation of the split within practitioners. This chapter explores the impact of early years funding reforms upon early years practitioners themselves – upon their professional identity, their role, and their relationships with parents and others working in the sector. I begin by restating conceptualisations of professional identity in the early years, arguing that the 30 hours policy contributes to the creation of a 'supraprofessional' in the early years, required to embody traditional 'feminine' values and pursue an 'ethics of care' whilst enacting the neoliberal, managerialist values that the funding reforms demand. I examine these neoliberal values, including managerialism, flexibility, and performativity, and explore how some practitioners, particularly those in nursery schools, found the shift to them particularly jarring as they contradict the long-held social justice aims of the nursery school movement. This is followed by an exploration of the way in which some practitioners engage in 'micro resistances' (Archer, 2021) with regards to the 30 hours policy, and how this produces a subjectivity that is congruent with a workforce identity known for opposing policies that could be detrimental to children's wellbeing (Bradbury, 2019b). I attest that this demonstrates a continued 'ethics of care' that is in keeping with traditional, 'feminine' early years values, and that embodying these whilst simultaneously attending to the need for financial viability can result in a split, or 'values schizophrenia' (Ball, 2003), as the two discourses compete.

## Early Years Funding Policies, Managerialism and the Ideal Neoliberal Worker

Following on from a wealth of literature arguing that a 'proletarianisation' (Ozga & Lawn, 1981, 1988) of teaching was taking place, Osgood (2006) asserted that this shift was also evident within the early years workforce. 'Proletarianisation' refers to an emphasis on managerialism, performativity, and technical skills, with a move away from expert knowledge, individual autonomy, and collaboration. What it means to be a professional is therefore transformed, with values and behaviours of a 'professional' harmonised with those favoured by managerialism and performativity. As Ball (2016, p. 1050) asserts "Professionalism becomes defined in terms of skills and competences, which have the potential for being measured, and rewarded. rather than a form of reflection, a relationship between principles and judgment". Whilst Ozga (1995) refers to this as a deprofessionalisation of teaching, I prefer Osgood's (2006) explanation of this change as a *re*-professionalisation. The professional identity of early years practitioners is not simply removed from them, it is discursively reconstructed, professionalism is rebuilt in the mould of neoliberal values. A new professionalism for early years practitioners is constructed through the neoliberal 30 hours policy. The power of the policy is not merely oppressive (although I will discuss below how it does constrain practitioner's autonomy), it is productive (Monrad, 2017), constructing new practitioner subjectivities that are performative and, sometimes, resistant. The requirement for practitioners to engage in traditional 'feminine' behaviours and actions remains, but the role is augmented by the demand from the funding reforms to engage in competitive, neoliberal behaviours. I will refer to this as 'supraprofessionalism', with skills, behaviours and values that go over and beyond (hence 'supra') what was once expected of an early years practitioner, yet demands that those traditional early years 'traits' remain. Professionalism is not simply reconstructed; the expertise, competencies and principles necessitated by the early years practitioner is expanded, their work intensified and sometimes, conflicting and contradictory.

## Managerialism and Professionalism

For some of those interviewed, the introduction of the 30 hours policy was accompanied by a change in role. This shift was around administration for many

participants, with more form filling required. Rachel, a nursery class teacher, explains: "…the paperwork side of things around nursery probably takes up as much time as the teaching of the children…I've had to become more knowledgeable than I ever was, er, paperwork wise." Catherine, another nursery class teacher, explained that the paperwork around the 30 hours was so onerous that a part time administrator had to be employed solely for the nursery as the workload had become unmanageable.

Suzanna, the only childminder to participate in the study, discussed the way in which she easily adapted to the administration requirements of the 30 hours policy because of her identity as a 'professional':

> Interviewer: And how was it setting it up (the 30 hours), for you?
> Suzanna: I thought it was quite easy because I hadn't, so I came into childminding just as it was passing over from, just as it was going into the EYFS. So when I started childminding I, I only knew it that way, so I only knew it as very professional, very, you need to know there's lots of training involved, whereas some of my colleagues, they struggled because they didn't, they didn't have that before, they didn't have the same kind of professional background before they were just you know, a childminder was very different profession then, you know, a few years back, a few years before that (laughs).

Administrative competence, a managerialist skill, is now indicative of being an early years professional for Suzanna. Interestingly, Suzanna thought that the introduction of the EYFS in 2012, with its Statutory Framework and updated curriculum guidance (Department for Education 2021a, 2012b), indicated a turning point in professionalism within the early years sector, particularly for childminders. This is despite the fact that it was accompanied by more bureaucracy, especially for childminders who had previously been a relatively unregulated aspect of the sector (Brooker, 2014), suggesting a relationship between managerialism and professionalism for Suzanna. What is of particular note here is the way in which she could adapt to the administrative requirements of the 30 hours policy because she is a professional, signalling that the funding reforms demand a new, neoliberal, managerial professional. The enthusiasm of practitioners to engage with notions of professionalism are unsurprising, given the emphasis upon it in recent policy (eg Nutbrown, 2012) and its role in training and practitioner education (Urban, 2008). It also leaves space for discourses that present those who are unable to manage the

associated paperwork as unprofessional and incompetent, unfit to carry out the role. If a practitioner is unable to complete the administrative tasks necessary to comply with the 30 hours policy, the blame lies with them for being 'unprofessional.' Ball (2016, p.1050) explains that, in relation to policy reforms, if "we hesitate or demur then they quickly position us as unprofessional or irrational or archaic".

It is possible that embracing a neoliberal, managerialist form of professionalism is particularly attractive to Suzanna because of her role as childminder. Of course, early years practitioners are not a homogenous group, and Suzanna discussed the lower status of childminding within the ECEC sector:

> I don't think the role of a childminder, I don't think many people know that childminders do the same curriculum as the EYFS, I don't think childminders are looked at with the same professional standard as nursery teachers, even though I can guarantee most us have got degrees (laughs) and erm, and are very professional but…it's just not, it's just what it is, we're just kind of looked at as just drinking tea and being looked after by an aunt (laughs), which is also lovely, I *do* drink tea, and I *do* like to be like an aunt.

Suzanna's assertion that she is "very professional" but also wants to be "like an aunt" demonstrates the need for early years practitioners to be 'supraprofessional', demonstrating an ethics of care whilst also meeting the managerial requirements. However, for Suzanna in particular, the introduction of the EYFS, with its accompanying increase in paperwork and bureaucracy, provided her with a counterargument to accusations that her role was akin to that of a family member babysitting children. Some literature on the professionalism of early years teachers is also keen to separate the group from childminders, suggesting that the role of teachers in providing childcare diminishes the status of the profession:

> If, as envisaged in the ten-year strategy, EY teachers will be providing a service in order that others can fulfil their own job requirements, then this will resurrect the childminding aspect of EY schooling, and have depressing effect on EY teachers' semantic status (Hargreaves & Hopper, 2006, p. 173).

However, the same article argues that the introduction of the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS) in 2000 enhanced the status of early years teachers as, for the first time, their specialist knowledge and skills were clearly presented to their colleagues (Hargreaves & Hopper, 2006). Therefore, the creation of the EYFS Statutory Framework in 2012 that encompassed childminders for the

first time[4], meaning that they followed the same curriculum and assessment guidance as those in other settings, may have been welcomed by Suzanna as she was finally included as an early years professional. Nonetheless, Suzanna had to prompt her Local Authority to add childminders to the list of approved providers in marketing materials for the 30 hours:

> I *do* think childminders don't get a, erm, how can I put this, so when, I know when they first advertised 30 hours I did write to my Local Authority and say, 'Why are you not including childminders in your advertising?' And they said 'Oh sorry, we'll change that.' And to be fair they did, they did change their advertising to include us, but there does seem to be a push to put children in nurseries

Being able to offer the 30 hours alongside nursery schools and classes and PVI settings further reinforces the inclusion of Suzanna and all childminders in the group of early years professionals. However, it also demonstrates that early years practitioners have relied upon neoliberal, managerialist reforms to affirm, even construct their professionalism, with the traditional, more 'feminine' professionalism that emphasised an ethics of care insufficient for them to be recognised as professionals with a specific set of skills and knowledge. Suzanna discusses the absence of childminders from policy materials, which is perceived as another threat to her professionalism (yet accurately summarises the dearth of reference to childminders in funding policy documents, despite the potential for childminders to alleviate the potential shortfall of ECEC places [Simon & Ang, 2024]). I argue that, for some practitioners, the funding reforms, with the accompanying bureaucratic requirements, provides further acknowledgement of 'professionalism', similar to the way in which school teachers construct their professional subjectivity through targets, training and meeting 'standards' (Ball, 2016; Ball & Olmedo, 2013).

The new managerialist professionalism of early years practitioners sometimes necessitates financial nous and budgeting skills. Nicola, a nursery school headteacher, lamented "most of our work now is sadly driven by balance, being able to balance the books." She explained the multiple staffing restructures she had been forced to implement due to financial pressures:

[4] I recognise that, in December 2023, two versions of the 'Early years foundation stage statutory framework' were published, one for group and school providers, and a separate version for childminders. However, at the time the interview was conducted, childminders followed the same 2017 Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework as all other ECEC settings in England.

> …we have had to save, to make savings and we have. We've done one, two, three, four restructures in the last five years because of funding pressures and it's only going to get worse after we know what's happening in 2020.

This was echoed by Jane, deputy headteacher at the same nursery school, who explained:

> …sometimes there's the whole dilemma of when a member of staff's off and it's finance over staffing and then, you know, you're purely logistically looking at numbers rather than the quality, the activities that might have been planned for the day for the children's learning, erm, so that, that can drag staff morale down as well.

For Jane and Nicola, and many of the other practitioners interviewed, there was a need to balance the financial sustainability of the setting with maintaining the 'quality' of the provision. The notion of 'quality' and its role in practitioner subjectivity is explored more below.

## Issues of 'Quality'

Charlotte, deputy headteacher at another nursery school, discussed the funding reforms, saying "An example of that is because of the budget cuts, I mean I've had to make six redundancies this year." The neoliberal early years marketplace demands that some settings are driven by the need to survive financially, an imperative reinforced by the underfunding of the 30 hours policy. Yet this runs counter to the 'quality' discourse that also permeates early years practice and policy, dictating that provision must be of a high quality to improve long term outcomes for children, particularly those living in poverty (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Moss, 2014). This is one of the many contradictions of the early years funding reforms; some of the participants interviewed spoke of the way in which the staff to child ratio in the setting had increased:

> …keyworker systems, we call them family worker, are, are usually one adult to eight children to, to give that care and that nurture. Erm, it's now having to go to one to 13 which I can do because erm, I don't have the staff and also because there's teachers in the nursery school, we've got three qualified teachers. (Charlotte, nursery school deputy headteacher).

> …it's (the staff to child ratio) obviously one to 13 with a teacher and me here, it's one to 13. Once we get past that we'd have to employ another member of staff so then it probably wouldn't work out as financially viable…I mean, we're on, we're on what I call skeletal staff anyway… Which impacts on quality. (Gemma, nursery school teacher).

> So when those morning children who have always only ever done 15 hours in the morning suddenly then want to come in the afternoon (as they have become entitled to the 30 hours), they didn't then have a key carer to go to…So you then had, they had then just had to go into somebody else's group. So again, that key carer would then have erm, more extra children, on already large groups at group time (Emily, nursery school deputy headteacher).

Of course, the quality of ECEC provision is not determined only by staff to child ratios; the qualifications of practitioners (eg Nutbrown, 2012), pedagogy, parental involvement and the strength of leadership are also important (eg Sammons et al., 2017; Taggart et al., 2015). However, higher staff to child ratios will impact on the quality of education if there are, for example, insufficient staff to lead pedagogical practices such as sustained shared thinking that support children's learning (Taggart et al., 2015). These increased staff to child ratios also have implications for practitioner's workload. Whilst this was discussed in more detail in chapter eight on disciplinary power, this comment from Jane, a nursery school deputy headteacher, illustrates how remaining staff are being forced to do more as a result of funding and, in turn, staffing cuts:

> …we used to have staff here who were just for small talk groups…That was their job. And now class teachers and staff are trying to manage that during the session, so you're to, during the session you're trying to offer interventions for speech and other needs as well… I was just discussing that with my job share this morning, we've got so many children in the afternoon who need interventions, and the afternoons just beginning to feel a bit…delicate. And the staff are beginning to feel a bit delicate whereas we're job sharing so, we're quite robust! But if you're in there *every*day and you're trying to achieve all these things…

Of course, quality in ECEC is a highly contested concept (eg Dahlberg et al, 2013). It is a discourse often imbued with notions of 'what works' (Biesta, 2007, 2010) and takes a technocratic view of ECEC, one in which policy and practice can be transferred seamlessly from one country (and therefore context) to another (Urban & Dalli, 2011; Urban, 2016). Whilst I reject the notion of quality as a series of practices

and behaviours that can secure desired outcomes, I acknowledge the impact on practice that participants described to me.

## Performativity and Professionalism

Included within this range of managerial skills required by the 'supraprofessional' in ECEC is marketing. Catherine, a nursery class teacher, discussed how the school had considered opening a classroom for two-year-olds, explaining "my background was in marketing first before I went into teaching, which was handy, so, I kind of knew the stages that we would need to go in. I did the viability study". Such are the skills now demanded of an early years practitioner that a career in marketing is now a useful precursor to that in ECEC. Sarah, a fellow nursery class teacher, did not have this experience, yet stated "we've been putting leaflets in children's centres, in GP surgeries, I've been putting them through letterboxes in houses and flats on my way home, erm, in the church, 'cause they have a playgroup there." The actions of both teachers were part of a concerted effort to increase the number of children attending the nurseries, at the request of the school leadership teams. For Catherine, this involved a conversation with the deputy headteacher upon being offered the job: "I want *you* in there to be the teacher… The only caveat is you've got to get the numbers up". Sarah's instruction had been more formal:

> Sarah: …actually that was one of my performance management targets this year, to try to get our numbers up, so, erm.
> Interviewer: That was one of your targets? To increase numbers?
> Sarah: (laughs) Yeah! I know! Erm, because our reception numbers are so low and will be really low again next year

For both Sarah and Catherine, their work as early years practitioners has been re-purposed by performativity, a neoliberal technology. The number of children on roll in the nurseries is a record of performance that is easy to measure, and their work is managed through these targets (Ball, 2016b). Of course, the need for Sarah and Catherine to increase the number of children attending the nurseries is interwoven with the themes around competition explored in chapter seven, all of which are driven by the ECEC funding reforms with nursery funding now operating on a per pupil basis. As supraprofessionals, they are accountable not only for the learning and development of children in their care, staff in their team and so on, they are also responsible for the number of children enrolled in the setting. This demonstrates the

extent of this shift; for Sarah and Catherine, marketing and enrolment had become such an established part of their role that their performance with regards to it was being measured and judged.

Despite an increase in the number of children enrolled being a performance management target (meaning that her success in achieving this goal had implications for her movement up the teacher's pay scale), Sarah questioned her involvement in providing administrative support for parents trying to obtain the 30 hours code, saying "to be honest, I don't think it's really my job to be sitting down with parents in my lunch hour to go through the website with them to help them apply for the code." By doing so, she risks being viewed, like Suzanna's childminder colleagues, as 'unprofessional'. Such 'micro resistances' against performativity, against the neoliberal ideals inherent within the policy reforms, and against the 30 hours policy in particular, are explored later in this chapter.

### *Performance, Management and the Market- the three technologies of neoliberalism*

Performance is recognised as one of "three major, highly interrelated and interdependent components or technologies" (Ball, 2016b, p. 1049), alongside the market and management, that comprise neoliberal reforms. Changes to the ECEC market place (in the form of increased competition and privatisation) as a result of the funding reforms were discussed in depth in chapter seven, Funding Reforms and the Split System in ECEC in England, result in a 'mercantile paradigm' in education (O'Sullivan, 2005) and, I argue, ECEC. Managerialism, explored earlier in this chapter, ensures that leaders implement the changes necessary. Performance can be used to discipline them into doing so, as with the example of Sarah being instructed to increase the number of children attending the nursery as one of her performance management targets.

Crucially, these technologies combine not just to reconstitute education, or in this case ECEC, but also those working in the sector, changing subjectivities (Ball, 2016b). As Shore and Wright (1999, p. 559) assert, the market, managerialism and performance combine to remould "professionals themselves as units of resource whose performance and productivity must constantly be audited so that it can be

enhanced". The values of practitioners shift to align with the values of marketisation and privatisation as they become assessed against targets created in the 'mercantile paradigm' (O'Sullivan, 2005) of neoliberal education. Ball (2016b, p. 1050) states, "these changes are both out there, in the system, the institution; and 'in here', in our heads and in our souls." They function to "re-form the subject as homo economicus" (Moss, 2014, p. 70). It is these changes to subjectivity, the construction of the subject in the cast of these neoliberal technologies, that is of interest here. The discussion of the neoliberal 'supraprofessional' continues with consideration of the way in which they are required to adapt.

## Flexibility and Professionalism

The 'supraprofessional' in the early years also needs to be flexible and adapt to change. As Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021, p. 9) state "She or he must be infinitely flexible and responsive to the changing needs of the market, in a state of constant readying, perpetually prepared for whatever turns up, for whatever new twist or turn takes place in the economy and employment." As discussed in chapter seven on competition, if settings are to be competitive, they need to be flexible, offering hours that make them attractive to parent consumers. Some participants discussed the way in which they or others in their workplace embodied this neoliberal ideal:

> So we might have children who were entitled to 30 hours and be like 'Well can I only bring them for four days?' And as staff, we were like 'It's fine with us' (Amy, nursery class teacher)

> So the last September was bumpy, and there was a little bit of storming, about people recognising what they can offer each other, but we've worked through it, and I would say it's working well actually. But that's not without a lot of effort, and, you know, the fact we've got established staff and they're able to respond to change, that's all helped. (Nicola, nursery school headteacher)

Nicola's discussion of 'storming' within her nursery school referred to the difficulties that some staff encountered when the structure of the school changed, with children from two to four years mixed in classes for the first time, and staffing rearranged to accommodate this. It was the experience of the staff, and their ability to 'respond to

change', that enabled them to emerge from the upheaval relatively unscathed, demonstrating the necessity for flexibility in the neoliberal early years practitioner. Mary's perspective countered this view of flexible as ideal, and she displayed frustration when discussing the need to be flexible in relation to the timings of the day to accommodate children attending for 30 hours:

> We, we, we *keep* having to, we're changing constantly, and talking about it constantly, trying to find the right way of doing it, and it's *so* difficult. We've got, some of the 30 hours children to finish *earlier* last year, but we found that didn't really work, children were going in the middle of the session, we couldn't really talk to parents. So we thought 'Well, we'll get them starting later'…That's got it problems (Mary, nursery school teacher)

However, there is a paradox here; whilst practitioners must be flexible, prepared to shape their day in whatever way will facilitate both 15 and 30 hours (and often longer) of education and care for children in a manner that allows all to access the curriculum, the policy itself is not. A minimum of 15 or 30 hours must be offered, and eligibility criteria must be met, leading Mary to feel that, despite her responsive and adaptability, she is constrained by the policy; "But still it feels as if we're having to, try and work ourselves around, you, you just can't be *flexible*…because these hours are so specific aren't they." Whilst Mary must be flexible, trialling how the policy is enacted in multiple ways to ensure it meets the needs of the families and the setting, the policy itself is restrictive and rigid. In particular, Mary laments the loss of funding that could be used at the discretion of the nursery school to support families and children that needed it:

> And that's the flexibility that I miss. You, you can't do it. Because I think your knowledge of the children, and what would help them would really, would really, makes the difference. That's the shame of it. (Mary, nursery school teacher)

Sally, a headteacher at another nursery school, explains of the 30 hours:

> It is not flexible enough. One of our children has just moved into the area. Their code will remain with the other school/setting. Our borough's advice was not to start the child till next term when the allocation will come to us. Families cannot operate like this. A parent could get a job in January but their code would not kick in until they have paid enough tax or the next term, meaning the parent then should pay until this happens or not start their job until then. Our parents do not generally secure jobs that can fund this.

The neoliberal 30 hours policy, which prioritises the work of parents, demands that settings and early years practitioners mould to its needs. Flexibility is entirely one sided, must function only in some circumstances (around how the hours are offered, for example, rather than how many are offered and to whom) and controls and constrains the work of practitioners. This loss of autonomy is associated with a high level of strain and job dissatisfaction for those engaged in emotional labour (eg Erickson & Ritter, 2001; Grandey et al., 2005), which is discussed later in this chapter.

## The 'Split' Practitioner: Public Servant or Private Entrepreneur?

This shift in professional identity to include a neoliberal subjectivity seemed to be felt more acutely by those working in the maintained sector, and particularly by those employed in nursery schools. This may be partially explained by the increased privatisation in the sector explored in chapter seven but the long and proud history of nursery schools in supporting families in the most deprived areas may also be a factor (Hoskins et al., 2021; Jarvis & Liebovich, 2015; Liebovich, 2018). Sally, headteacher of a nursery school at risk of closure due to underfunding, stated "I went into public service", explaining that having to charge families for consumables was strongly against her belief in publicly funded education for all.

Nicola, a nursery school headteacher, explained "in terms of our sort of moral purpose, of what the nursery school is about, to make those most disadvantaged children more ready for school… it feels wrong…it's depriving those children who need more." The idea of a moral purpose fuelling the work within nursery schools was amplified by others working in this type of setting. Leonie, an executive headteacher of three maintained nursery schools, asserted "we prioritise funded two-year-olds. Erm, we're a state nursery, you know, we're meant to be focusing on the most vulnerable." Nonetheless, some of those working in other types of settings also expressed a commitment to the social justice mission of ECEC. Kelly, manager of an independent nursery, recalled this conversation:

> …I went to our, our local MP about three years ago now to have a discussion with him about what would be the impact of 30 hours funding. And I said then I

> was really concerned about, erm, er, you know, how we would fund things, because if we were going to be on that level of funding for that many years, erm, and he, his (laughs) he said 'Well, you just have to charge everybody else more, don't you, the people who pay.' And I said 'Well some people can't afford to pay'. And he said 'Well, they'll just have to go elsewhere then won't they and find somewhere cheaper and not, you know.' You know he said 'Well if you're an outstanding setting then you can charge more'. And I said (laughs) 'But that's not what it's about'. You know, we're quite near to a very large, erm, housing association, erm, estate and so we've quite a lot of children coming from there.

This viewpoint from an MP is entirely consistent with the neoliberal marketplace, which promotes an increase in price for a popular 'product' (Ball, 1994a). Yet the moral imperative to provide good quality early education and care for children from materially deprived backgrounds is, of course, the driving force behind much work done throughout the sector. This is particularly the case in nursery schools, which were set up in the most economically deprived areas to serve this purpose (Hoskins et al, 2021; Jarvis & Liebovich, 2015; Liebovich, 2018). For those working in nursery schools, the shift in professional identity from public servant supporting the most vulnerable families to competitive entrepreneur may be particularly uncomfortable. However, I discuss below how the policy also creates a space for resistance, producing subjectivities that are congruent with accepted early years practitioner identities.

## Resistance and Subjectivity

One of the primary ways in which the 30 hour policy produces practitioner subjectivities is through providing them with a diktat to resist. Whilst Selwyn et al (2015) suggest that criticising and questioning policy forms part of the teacher identify, and Maguire et al (2018) identified a desire amongst school teachers for more resistance to policies they considered detrimental to children and the profession, resistance is firmly embedded in the professional identity of those working in the early years. As Bradbury (2019b, p. 825) states, "resistance is…demanded by their particular professional identities." Bradbury (2019b) suggests that resisting the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA), an assessment of children to be conducted within their first six weeks in reception that is deeply unpopular with early years practitioners (Bradbury et al., 2018; Turner, 2023) positioned

practitioners as ‘good’. I posit that opposition to the 30 hours policy is akin to that of the RBA, with practitioners required to denounce it as harmful or unjust to maintain or construct their subjectivity as a ‘good’ early years professional. However, I explore below how the position of ‘good’, resistant early years professional is dependant upon the level of agency afforded to practitioners.

## Micro Resistances and Compliant Resistance

Conversely, many of the leaders interviewed did discuss the ways in which they resisted the policy, taking action that was more aligned with their beliefs and values around ECEC. Much of this resistance involved providing 30 hour spaces for children whom were not entitled to it. Julie, the headteacher of a nursery school, explained “we've just said just keep coming for 30 hours. So however their parent dropped in and out of work, the children kept their place”. Leonie, executive headteacher of three nursery schools, stated “it’s not good for the child, you know, they’re there all day and then they’re half day then they’re back again, you know. It’s ridiculous, so I’ve tended just to, er, let them stay.” Charlotte, a deputy headteacher at another nursery school, shared “what we do is sometimes if we have identified that 15 hour children are very vulnerable, we do offer them the 30 hour place free.”

Such everyday opposition to the policy can be considered a ‘thin’ form of resistance rather than ‘thick’ (hooks & West, 1991), small subversive acts within settings as opposed to large-scale, organised resistance throughout the sector (Maguire et al., 2018). These acts, whilst not representing a systematic ‘great refusal’ (Foucault, 2008) of the 30 hour policy, go beyond the “‘discontents, murmurings, indifference and disengagements” identified as resistant acts in secondary schools (Maguire et al., 2018, p. 1060). Archer (2021) conceptualises this ‘thin’ resistance in early years settings as ‘micro resistances’, drawing upon Stratford’s (2002, p. 232) assertion that:

> Micro-strategies of resistance are particular confrontations with and resistances to the local impositions of dominating power. These incremental moves are not assembled from direct confrontations but rather operate as discrete traces within a plurality of resistances.

Such micro resistances are “dispersed, local and covert” (Archer, 2021, p. 9), with practitioners operating ‘under the radar’ to avoid scrutiny and the disruption, or termination, of such activities by those in authority. However, whilst Archer (2021, p. 11) argues that “‘educators enact micro resistance against the ‘ideal’ subjectivities of compliant technician and self-surveilling entrepreneur constructed in workforce policy”, I argue that such micro resistances work to construct the ‘good’ early years professional.

All of the examples of ‘thin’ resistance (Maguire et al., 2018) above are from those in leadership roles- one deputy headteacher and two headteachers in nursery schools. All were critical of the 30 hours policy in some way, although their reasons for this opposition were quite disparate. Julie objected to the £100,000 income per parent limit for eligibility, stating “you can be rich and qualify for it, that's not right. I don’t think our MPs should qualify for it”, whilst Leonie’s grievance regarded the inequity of the policies:

> if everybody got the same, you know, it would be fairer, *I* feel … … the people we *should* be prioritising, the most deprived, are the, are not gonna get the 30 hours. And it, it’s gonna be our more vulnerable families that are gonna have the 15.

Charlotte’s criticisms of the policy centred around the emphasis on education inherent within the policies, and the way in which it left practitioners with little time to nurture children:

> I feel as an early years professional that 15 hours is quite adequate for children and it’s, it gives them that time to have a rest. They are only three years old….it’s a bit of a project of mine… how I could have my 30 hours have their nursery experience but then have some form of care and a rest…So *really* I would say on a final note that, it’s about getting the balance of care correct as well. But it’s economically driven but I was just wish it was, it was, children’s mental health driven.

As discussed in chapter six on policy enactment, many participants in leadership roles occupied positions as both policy narrator, deciding on how to implement the funding reforms within their setting, and critic, voicing opposition to the 30 hours policy in particular. Their role as narrator enabled them to carry out these ‘thin’ forms of resistance (hooks & West, 1991) in response to their opposition, with their leadership positions affording them a level of agency denied to some of the teachers

interviewed. By enacting their opposition to the 30 hours policy, albeit through these acts of micro resistance (Archer, 2021), participants in leadership positions could also position themselves as 'good' early years professionals (Bradbury, 2019b).

These micro resistances (Archer, 2021) which saw children ineligible for the 30 funded hours provided with full time places to support the needs of children and/or families may, however, have enabled the 30 hours to gain traction unchecked. Much of the more vocal and public opposition to the 30 hours has centred upon the underfunding of the policy (eg Gosden & Swinsford, 2015; Lawler, 2021; Merrick, 2015), with scant attention paid to the impact on children and families who do not qualify for it. Some leaders working in the sector, such as Julie, Leonie and Charlotte above, have resisted the 30 hours policy by providing full time places to children who are not entitled to, understandably, meet needs around child development, SEND, challenging family circumstances and so on, seeking to protect children and families from the detrimental impact of the policy. As discussed in chapter six on policy enactment, their resistance is framed by the work that they do in nursery schools, as such acts work to produce a subjectivity that is in keeping with the moral purpose of ECEC (and nursery schools in particular) in providing care and education for children who need it most (Jarvis & Liebovich, 2015; Liebovich, 2018). Yet in doing so, they may have inadvertently facilitated the policy, shielding others from realising the potential negative effects. They are engaging in 'compliant resistance' (Bradbury, 2019b), allowing the policy to be implemented without full interrogation of its consequences as they shield others from viewing the negative impact. The reception teachers in Bradbury's (2019b) study unintentionally eased the way for the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA), much objected to in the sector, through selecting a version they considered to be least damaging to practice. Here, ECEC practitioners may be camouflaging the full potential impacts of the funding reforms through providing unfunded hours to vulnerable families.

## Passive Resistance

For early years professionals working in non-leadership roles, such as nursery class teachers, level 3 qualified practitioners (although none of the latter were interviewed

as part of this study and I recognise the particular issues facing regarding early years practitioners other than teachers [eg Lloyd & Hallet, 2010]) and so on, there is less opportunity for them to conduct such agential acts of resistance. Only seven of the 19 participants were in non-leadership roles, all of them nursery class teachers, and only two of them – Rachel and Carla – were not critical of the policy (with Carla's position as a 'contingent enthusiast' discussed in chapter six on policy enactment). For some, their criticism of the funding reforms centred around the focus on childcare to meet parents' needs at the perceived expense of children's wellbeing:

> I just think the government need to work out who they're doing it for and, erm, you know, long term, who is it impacting on? You know, yes it's great that we can get mums back to work and dads back to work, and, erm, but is that always the best thing for children? (Gemma, nursery school teacher)

> …the biggest problem I've seen is that we used to be able to offer some full-time nursery provision for our more disadvantaged children, or children we felt…could benefit, could benefit from that, and we could use our own judgement. But now, there isn't the space to do that, and there isn't the funding to do that, so the children are here for the 30 hours and it's primarily about childcare not about their education and their needs, it's more about the childcare comes first…. I don't think that's always the best thing for the children (Mary, nursery class teacher).

Others opposed the 30 hours on the basis that it was not available to all children, and therefore they considered it unjust:

> But I do just think it should be the same for everyone. Because what we've got at the moment, it isn't fair. It isn't fair that some of the children here, who really need to be at school, are only here for the mornings and are missing out on lunch time because they're parents aren't working as much or because their mum isn't working (Sarah, nursery class teacher)

> I can see the big big benefits, but it's not closing the gap that people are looking to close, because the people who need that gap closing are the ones and get left behind by it (Carla, nursery class teacher)

For these teachers without the authority to narrate policy, they were restricted to the 'passive resistance' identified by Osgood (2004), who found that although practitioners were often opposed to top-down managerialist policies, they cynically enacted them anyway, feeling powerless to resist, what Braun and Maguire (2020) term 'doing without believing'. There is, I contend, a dual impact of this 'passive resistance' upon the emotional wellbeing of teachers. Teachers not only have to resentfully comply with the enactment of the 30 hours policy, which is counter to their principles regarding support for the most disadvantaged children in society and

providing high quality care and education for all children, leading to the same "struggle and emotional upset" witnessed by Braun and Maguire in their study on primary teachers negotiating neoliberal accountability measures alongside their duty of care to children (Braun & Maguire, 2020, p. 445). There are, as Ball (2003, p. 221) states, "other 'costs', as indicated already - personal and psychological…a potential 'splitting' between the teachers own judgements about 'good practice' and students 'needs' and the rigours of performance." This is evident in Gemma's discussion on the 30 hours policy. Gemma's situation as a teacher within a nursery school which had faced closure as it was not financially solvent, and the way in which she had to enact the 30 hours policy against her professional judgement was considered in chapters seven and six, on privatisation and policy enactment respectively. Gemma discussed her opposition to the funding reforms and the 'bums on seats' equivalency and the prioritisation of parental demands this has created, stating. "It's funding ultimately, it comes down to money. You know, for every child we're getting in the setting, it's money for us. Which is really quite disgusting". Gemma's 'disgust' arises from the tensions between her own child-centred values and the neoliberal sensibilities of the funding policies.

Alongside such internal conflicts, these teachers are also denied the opportunity to resist the policy in any practical way, negating the possibility of occupying the position of the 'good' early years practitioner whom opposes policy in the name of children's wellbeing. If professionalism in the early years has come to encompass resisting government policies perceived by the sector as detrimental to children and families, are practitioners who fail to resist such policies positioned as unprofessional, alongside those unable to manage the administrative demands of the funding reforms? Despite their inability to resist the 30 hours policy in a day to day, functional manner, some of the teachers participating in the study utilised the interview as a conduit for resistance. As Bradbury (2019b) asserts, simply voicing one's objections in the context of a research interview is an act of resistance.

Furthermore, engaging in micro resistance did not shield leaders from the emotional cost of enacting a policy that they did not believe in, and there were still difficult choices to make regarding whether they could participate in resistant acts, or whether the cost would be too high for their setting. For example, Charlotte

explained that, due to funding, the nursery school at which she was a headteacher could only offer discretionary additional hours (at no cost to parents) for a very small number of children. She explained the difficulty of being in that situation, stating "every years it's gonna break our hearts, but we have to look at who we can make a difference to." Some families attending Sally's nursery school, having benefitted from a discretionary full-time place for older children prior to the introduction of the EYNFF and 30 hour policy, were confused and upset that the same offer was not made for younger siblings. Sally explained that the "Emotional wellbeing of school staff is affected, to no longer be in the position to help families with a full-time place and to be the bearer of the bad news." Therefore, whilst leaders can more easily occupy the position of a 'good' early years practitioner who resists inappropriate policy, there is an emotional price to being able to do so. As Ball (2016, p. 1057) states "there are also costs to be considered here, the costs of constant vigilance, the costs of a commitment to a kind of 'permanent agonism' (Burchell, 1996: 34), and the possibilities of ridicule and precarity or isolation."

It is important to note here that, of course, not all participants resisted the 30 hours policy. As discussed in chapter six, Policy Enactment and Policy Actors: Creating and Responding to Splits and Divisions, some participants were positive about the funding reforms, especially the 30 hours policy. However, those that did resist predominantly worked in nursery schools, perhaps indicating the additional financial strain that the funding policies are placing their settings are under (Archer & Merrick, 2020). Furthermore, those who resisted were mostly nursery school headteachers, again indicating that their role affords them the opportunity to resist.

This chapter has discussed the way in which the funding reforms have increased managerialism and bureaucracy, and how the heightened levels of competition between settings as a result of the underfunding requires practitioners to engage in marketing and other competitive behaviours. The funding policies therefore necessitate the ideal neoliberal worker- flexible, competitive and market-orientated. Practitioners can be torn between this subjectivity and the caring, inclusive, child-centred ECEC practitioner who prioritises the needs of the most vulnerable children and families. I posit that this produces a 'split' subjectivity, that of the supraprofessional who is required to embody both subjectivities. As Resistance is

explored as another way in which to occupy the position of ‘good’ ECEC practitioner by refusing or circumventing what are viewed as inappropriate policies. However, only policy narrators, typically leaders who could determine how the policies were enacted within their settings, held the authority to determine the extent to which they resisted. Others could voice their opposition in other ways, such as through their participation in this study. Having demonstrated how the funding reforms have produced or exacerbated splits between the most disadvantaged children and families and others, between the private and maintained sections of ECEC, and within ECEC practitioners, I go on to conclude the thesis, answering my research questions, considering the implications of the study and suggesting areas for future research.

# Chapter 10 – Conclusion: The Power of Discourses in Producing 'Splits'

As outlined in the introduction, this study is concerned with the 'dividing practices' of the 15 and 30 hour ECEC funding policies. This thesis has shown how the funding reforms have exacerbated the social segregation of children in the early years through the creation of ECEC entitlements based upon family income. Along the way, the impact of these policies upon a larger division, the 'split' between early years and childcare, has been considered. How the funding reforms may have augmented this split is complex, for whilst the competition has been intensified, the policies have also worked to increase privatisation within the maintained sector, therefore bringing the private and maintained closer together in some regards. Nonetheless, this nuance has resulted in a division *within* some of early years practitioners interviewed for this research, particularly those in the maintained sector, who discussed a tension between the need to embody the competitive, entrepreneurial neoliberal worker, and a desire to maintain an ethics of care and deeply ingrained values and beliefs regarding child-centred early education. Furthermore, the policies have exacerbated the split between children and families using ECEC. This thesis has demonstrated how, in the most extreme examples, this has resulted in children being allocated to different rooms according to their funding entitled, which I argue is a form of social segregation due to the family income differential on which the funding entitlements are based. It has also discussed the impact of the policies upon children with SEND and some of the most vulnerable families and children, highlighting how their attendance at ECEC settings may be reduced. Whilst the ECEC funding reforms may not have created these divisions, they have shone on a light upon them, revealing the ruptures within the sector.

In this concluding chapter, I begin by exploring these splits and their implications, discussing how the split between families on low incomes and those who are more materially advantaged could have a negative impact upon the development of young children living in poverty. I go on to consider how the label of '15 hours' has replaced

‘undeserving poor’, with connotations of worklessness and laziness attached to create a discourse surrounding families entitled only to the universal 15 hours, with 30 hours being normalised. The way in which the FEEE policies have widened the split in provision for children with SEND and their peers is also explored, as is the increase in fees for under-twos that some settings are enacting and the impact this may have upon affordability for families on low incomes. Next, the split *within* practitioners, who are required to be supraprofessionals, enacting the competitive, neoliberal policies whilst also maintaining a child-centred ethos, is explored, followed by discussion of the split *between* practitioners. This is proceeded by consideration of how the FEEE policies may be exacerbating the divisions within the sector as a whole, augmenting the split between early childhood, typically viewed as provided by maintained settings, and childcare in the private sector. I go on to make explicit the original contribution to knowledge this thesis offers and the gap in research it fills. Some of the limitations of this study are briefly reiterated, before recommendations for future research based upon the findings of this study are made, and implications for policy and practice are delineated.

## Research Questions

Prior to discussing how the research questions have been answered, I shall first restate them. The four research questions were:

1. How are the free early education entitlement (FEEE) policies enacted in practice?
2. What are the discourses that permeate the FEEE policies?
3. Do the FEEE policies function as a ‘dividing practice’? If so, how?
4. How do the FEEE policies impact upon the subjectivity of ECEC practitioners?

## How the FEEE Policies Are Enacted- Creating Splits Between Children and Families

It was the division of children into categories of 15 and 30 hour that first piqued my interest in this research topic. It has long been recognised that children living in more

deprived areas are more likely to be enrolled in nursery schools or classes (Gambaro et al., 2015), with children of wealthier parents more frequently attending private settings to access the longer opening hours they typically offer (Chen & Bradbury, 2020). However, the funding reforms mean that this split is now also more likely *within* settings. My analysis of the data collected suggests that the enactment of funding policies creates a multiplicity of divisions. The first is the split between 15- and 30-hour children in the most obvious sense – whilst children entitled only to the universal 15 hours attend a setting on a part time basis, their peers in receipt of the 30 funded hours attend for much longer, often for six hours a day, every day of the week, meaning that children attending for 15 hours are excluded from much of the provision. One of the ways in which some settings enacted the FEEE policies was to have two groups with separate arrival and collection times, meaning that parents of the two groups had less opportunity to interact in an informal manner at the setting. I posit that these divisions demonstrate how disciplinary power works through the funding reforms to maintain discourses of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor and to maintain divisions between the two.

This enactment could have an impact upon educational outcomes for the most disadvantaged children, who stand to gain the most from pre-school provision (Sylva et al., 2004a). Disadvantaged children who attend ECEC settings alongside children from wealthier backgrounds have improved social and cognitive development compared to those children who attend settings with predominantly disadvantaged children (Sylva et al., 2004a). If children are separated into rooms catering for 15- and 30-hour children, those advantages could be lost. Some practitioners interviewed discussed the impact of different attendance patterns upon friendships both within and outside of the setting, with children attending for 30 hours typically former closer relationships with other 30-hour attendees, thanks partially to the shared social occasion of lunch time.

The split could also have implications for social mixing outside of the setting, due to fewer opportunities for parents to form relationships with others with a different funding entitlement because of differing arrival and collection times for children depending on their attendance status. Whilst such interactions within the setting does not guarantee social mixing outside of it (Vincent et al., 2018), the way in which

parents are denied the chance to meet with all other parents at the beginning and end of their child's session makes friendships between families with different socio-economic backgrounds more difficult to establish. As Valentine and Sadgrove (2012, p. 2060) note, it is not casual greetings and shared spaces "that overcomes social difference, but rather closeness – it is the act of knowing – or the production of intimacy which aligns different bodies in time and space". Nonetheless, if initial encounters between parents and families are restricted, there are certainly fewer opportunities for this 'act of knowing' to develop, and "social mixing gives at least some possibility for mutual understanding and greater equity" (Pring & Walford, 1997, p. 3).

Two of the participants discussed a more radical form of enactment of the funding policies within the two different nursery schools they worked in, dividing children into different classes according to their entitlement status, with 15- hour children all enrolled in one classroom and those eligible for 30 hours registered in a separate classroom. I have argued that this is a form of distribution, a micropractice of power that helps to maintain the regime of truth that there is a fundamental difference between those living in poverty and those not. Whilst Julie, a MNS headteacher, had abandoned this practice, deeming it an "experiment", Carla praised this enactment and the ease that it brought, with children in the 15- and 30-hour rooms all attending for the same periods and no disruption to routines. However, whilst as stated above the EPPSE project suggests that the cognitive development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds is improved if they attend a setting alongside children from mixed backgrounds (Sylva et al., 2004a), Gambaro et al (2015) also posit that the 'quality' of provision suffers when a setting delivers ECEC *only* for children living in poverty, possibly due to the intensive resourcing supporting children and families from impoverished backgrounds requires. Besides the impact of separating 15- and 30-hour children upon their development and quality of provision is the question of morals. It is hard to imagine that a school funnelling children in receipt of free school meals into a separate classroom would not be on the receiving end of considerable criticism (although one could argue that the practice of streaming is comparable).

The division between children with SEND and their peers is another that has been exacerbated by the FEEE policies. Whilst the research question was not created with

the aim of exploring this group, it was an area that many participants discussed. The underfunding of the policy reforms, and the way in which SEND funding is typically allocated to children for the universal 15 hours but not the extended 15 to make up the 30 hours, has resulted in some settings being forced to make difficult decisions regarding the number of children with SEND they can adequately care for, as recognised in prior research (Archer & Merrick, 2020; London Councils, 2018). This has been worsened by the loss of discretionary funding that settings previously had access to, which could pay for additional hours for vulnerable children or families, particularly for those children with SEND (Archer & Merrick, 2020). The challenges described by participants explain the existing data in this area, with 6.7% of three- and four-year-olds receiving the universal 15 hours having a special needs, and only 3.3% of those entitled to the 30 hours registered as having SEND (National Statistics Office, 2022b). As children from disadvantaged backgrounds have higher than average rates of SEND (Cullen et al., 2020), the impact that the enactment of the FEEE policies is having upon children with SEND is particularly detrimental to low income families and the lack of provision for three- and four-year-olds with SEND risks compromising the progress being made by the two-year-old funding policy.

Many interviewees stated that the hourly fees in their setting had increased and/or would increase further due to the underfunding of the FEEE policies, as supported by a survey from the Early Years Alliance (Lawler, 2019). With no government funding available, even for families on low incomes, until a child is two years old, this disadvantages families living in poverty most of all, for whom the high cost of ECEC fees for children under the age of two years may preclude them from re-entering or seeking employment. This thesis supports much previously published research (Early Years Alliance, 2018; House of Commons Education Committee, 2019; Pascal et al, 2021b) which suggests that the funding reforms, and the 30 hours policy in particular, are hindering the social mobility aims of ECEC in general, and the two-year-old policy in particular. However, this ‘split’ between families entitled to only 15 hours of ECEC due to their low income and those receiving 30 is merely an extension of the existing discourses surrounding those living in poverty.

## FEEE Policies and the Discourses of Families Living in Poverty – The Split Between the Deserving and Undeserving Poor

The second research question, 'What are the discourses that permeate the FEEE policies?' was answered in depth in chapter eight, Regimes of Truth, Time and Disciplinary Power in ECEC Funding Policies. The impact of dominant discourses within ECEC, including school readiness, influence practitioners thoughts and beliefs around the funding reforms. It was shown how discourses around neuroscience, early intervention, the wrong type of parenting and the cycle of dysfunction are evident within the values and beliefs of some ECEC practitioners interviewed for this research. Children need to be 'saved' from the intergenerational cycle of poverty (Gillies & Edwards, 2017; Gillies et al, 2017), and ECEC is viewed as a way to achieve this. These discourses form a regime of truth about the disadvantaged child that the policies operate to maintain through creating a split between 15 hours and 30 hours, between entitled and not entitled.

It is argued that the very language of the policies, the "universal 15 hours entitlement…additional 15 hours entitlement…the 15 hours entitlement for disadvantaged 2-year-olds" (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2021), focusing on 'entitlement', positions families as being worthy or not of this funded provision. As 15 hours of ECEC is available to all, it is the 30 hours entitlement which creates this division, constructing a split between children and families entitled to 30 hours and those not. The eligibility criteria for the 30 hours, which demand that both parents in a two-parent family are in employment and earning a specified minimum income, work to perpetuate the long running discourse that families living in poverty are lazy and feckless through stating that they are not entitled to 30 hours of funded ECEC.

Simultaneously, the 40% most materially deprived two-year-olds in England are granted 15 funded hours per week in an attempt to improve their life chances and reduce the attainment gap that already exists between these children and their peers when they enter schooling aged five (Department for Education et al., 2013). The aims of this policy seem to contradict the 30 hours policy which seeks to increase parental employment rates. However, the two-year-old funding policy works to

maintain the discourse that families living on a low income are indolent and irresponsible by stating that children of such families are in need of this intervention at the age of two. This discourse affirms that these children must attend an ECEC setting as parents cannot adequately support their development, perpetuating the deficit discourse around families living on a low income. The deficit discourse around families in poverty has been supported by other government initiatives aiming to reduce the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers upon entry to school. The “last taboo” (Department for Education & Hinds, 2018) of the home learning environment was broached through the introduction of apps to encourage communication and reading books in the home, utilising a nudge approach (Bradbury et al., 2013), with communication between parents and their children in poor families being a particular focus (HM Government, 2019).

I argue that the ECEC funding reforms, alongside these wider welfare reforms, operate as a form of biopower (Foucault, 1998), seeking control of bodies not on individual scale as seen with disciplinary power discussed above, but at societal level. Whilst the two-child benefit cap works to limit the number of children born into families on a low income, the two-year-old funding policy seeks to ensure that these children attend ECEC settings to compensate for inadequate parenting, and the 30 hour policy encourages parents into work through the promise of additional funded childcare. The family with two working parents is normalised, as “The middle class is the “human ordinary”” (Apple & Pedroni, 2005, p. 100) and the regime of truth that there is a fundamental difference between the poor and the middle class is maintained.

The result of the deficit discourse that constitutes families living in poverty as abnormal and immoral is that it permeates the beliefs, values and practice of some of those working within the sector. To reiterate Ball (2013, p. 20), “Discourses produce the objects about which they speak….the operation of discursive practices is to make it virtually impossible to think outside of them.” When Catherine imagined the media outcry around “lazy scroungers who sit at home and do nothing” being rewarded with 30 hours of funded ECEC, the scenario is permeated by discourses surrounding families living in poverty. Conversely, the normalisation of middle class families with both parents employed was apparent. Lisa, director of two private

nurseries, compared the two settings she ran, the private nursery in a wealthy city and the children's centre she was contracted to operate in a small, deprived town, explaining "It is completely different" and describing families at the wealthy city centre nursery as "normal". Being the only participant to work across two such diverse settings, Lisa's comments were unique in illustrating this division. The 15 and 30 hour policies work to split families into two categories- normal, hardworking, deserving families entitled to 30 hours, and the idle, irresponsible and undeserving parents of children receiving the universal 15 hours. As Apple (2006, pp. 22-3) discusses, neoliberalism depends on such divisions:

> The binary opposition of we–they becomes important here. For dominant groups, "we" are law-abiding, hardworking, decent, and virtuous. "They"—usually poor people and immigrants—are very different. They are lazy, immoral, and permissive. These binary oppositions act to exclude indigenous people, women, the poor, and others from the community of worthy individuals. The people whom schools should support now are no longer those groups who have been historically oppressed but are the "real citizens" (usually people who are doing fine in these difficult economic conditions) who embody the idealised virtues of a romanticised past or who consistently act in an entrepreneurial way. "They" are undeserving. They are getting something for nothing. Policies supporting them are too expensive and are "destroying our way of life," most of our economic resources, and creating government control of our lives.

EYFS practitioners are governed by these pervasive discourses and sometimes unknowingly work to validate and permit them through the micropractices of power discussed in chapter eight. Yet enacting the neoliberal funding policy reforms results in a split beyond that between children living in poverty and their peers, it can split the early years professional themselves.

## Practitioner Subjectivity and the Split Within

The fourth research question (I shall return to the third shortly) asks 'How do the FEEE policies impact upon the subjectivity of ECEC practitioners?' This thesis posits that the FEEE policies are leading to a 'split' *within* some ECEC practitioners, with a tension between the demands to be an entrepreneurial, managerial worker in the neoliberal ECEC marketplace, and the desire to maintain an ethics of care based upon deeply held beliefs around child-centred practice. This focus upon performance, technical skills and competencies, termed 'proletarianisation' by Ozga

and Lawn (1981, 1988) has been presented as both a deprofessionalisation (Ozga, 1995), focusing upon the loss of autonomy, collaboration and expert, pedagogical knowledge with the professional consumed by neoliberal discourses, and a reprofessionalisation (Osgood, 2006), providing space to acknowledge the agency of practitioners in constructing their own identity. The micro resistances (Archer, 2021) enacted by some participants suggest that the funding reforms are reprofessionalising some practitioners, enabling them to remain faithful to some beliefs and values around high quality, child-centred pedagogy and care whilst also inhabiting the position of 'good' neoliberal worker constructed by dominant discourses.

The result of these funding policies reforms is, I argue, the supraprofessional, the practitioner capable of marketing their settings and competing with other providers to ensure financial survival under new per pupil funding equivalency, whilst maintaining their play-based, early years pedagogy and practice. As detailed in chapter nine, ECEC Funding Policies and 'Split' Practitioner Subjectivity, practitioners are, at times, embracing neoliberal ideals of flexibility, competition and performance. The funding policies have introduced a new layer of bureaucracy, and, for some, engaging in this demonstrates their professionalism. Simultaneously, they remained faithful to their child-centred beliefs and values. The supraprofessional was epitomised by Suzanna, a childminder whose setting was based outdoors. She described herself as "very professional" and held a degree in Early Childhood Studies, but at the same time compared herself to "an aunt" who liked to drink tea.

Yet there is a potential emotional cost to this split self, to 'doing without believing' (Braun & Maguire, 2020). Gemma, one of the nursery school teachers interviewed, revealed her 'disgust' at the prioritisation of 30 hour children thanks to the additional income they brought in to her setting, whilst Sarah expressed her disapproval of a policy that provides more government funded hours to more privileged children, "it's really unfair…our priorities are wrong somewhere." Practitioners can struggle to retain their authentic professional identity and simultaneously meet the demands of the market and performativity (Ball, 2003; Pierlejewski, 2023), be that through increasing the number of children on roll with the potential damage to 'quality' (as

with Sarah's performance management target and Catherine's pledge upon accepting her role), prioritising children entitled to 30 hours (as Mary and Nicola discussed happening in the MNS they both worked in), or having to refuse discretionary full time places to children with SEND because funding reforms have resulted in no additional money to support these children (as Charlotte, another MNS headteacher, found herself forced to do). Pierlejewski (2023, p. 528) discusses the emergence of new subjectivities within early years teachers and concludes that "The care of the self…depends on the acceptance of the divided subject."

However, adding complexity to this exploration of the 'split' early years professional is the positioning of the resistant practitioner as the 'good' early years professional (Bradbury, 2019b). For those professionals with the power to resist the funding policies in a manner which impacted upon operations, the policy narrators (Ball et al., 2011a) (for example, leaders who enabled children attending for 30 hours despite not being entitled to it), the policies produced the possibility to inhabit the position of 'good' professional. A further 'split' is created between those policy narrators with the agency to resist in a tangible way, typically those in leadership positions, and those who are left to passively resist (Osgood, 2004). These practitioners are not just faced with the challenge of 'doing without believing' (Braun & Maguire, 2020); they are also denied the position of the 'good' early years professional who resists policies deemed detrimental to children and families. Therefore, a further 'split' emerges – that between policy narrators able to enact resistance, and those practitioners denied such agency beyond voicing their concerns. My hope is that this study created a space for those practitioners to voice their resistance. Whilst this particular split between ECEC practitioners is a result of the funding policy reforms, I go on now to consider the impact the changes to funding have had upon the long-running split within the ECEC sector as a whole.

## Widening the Split Between Education and Childcare

The third research question asked 'Do the FEEE policies function as a 'dividing practice'?' The splits between children and families, and between and within practitioners have already been discussed. However, I have proposed that the

funding policies are also operating to maintain the split system of ECEC. One of the main purposes of the introduction of the EYNFF in 2017 was to reduce the funding gap between the private and maintained sectors and "ensure that funding is distributed fairly and transparently" (Department for Education, 2016, p. 3). It was believed that this would result in less discrepancy between funding rates according to type of setting, bringing the maintained and PVI sectors in line. I propose that the endogenous privatisation of the maintained sector is being intensified by the attempt to create parity in funding rates and a policy which is akin to the per-pupil funding introduced by the 1988 Education Reform Act. The insertion of competition to 'recruit' pupils to schools, and the corresponding parent choice, transformed primary and secondary schools following the 1988 Education Reform Act, with a loss of collaboration and co-operation (Bowe et al., 1992) and a similar effect is now being seen in the early years sector following the funding policy reforms. Many of the participants from maintained settings spoke of the need to extend opening hours through offering breakfast and after school clubs to ensure that they were competitive in this new 30 hour marketplace, or, in the neoliberal terms laid out in the '*Evaluation of the first year of the national rollout of 30 hours free childcare'* report from the Department for Education, "expand their provision…and offer more choice to parents" (Paull & Valle, 2018, p. 17). Similar to the findings of the national evaluation, participants stated that the decision to offer the 30 hours at all had been primarily based upon "business consequences" (Paull & Valle, 2018, p. 15), rather than any desire to increase provision for children and families. The funding policies disciplined maintained settings into behaving more like a private business with concerns over choice, competition, and financial sustainability.

Yet at the same time as heightening the privatisation of the maintained sector and bringing it more into line with private sensibilities, the funding reforms may simultaneously be operating to expose the fault lines between these two factions of the early years sector in England. Endogenous privatisation of the maintained sector is creating more competition within the sector, and the persistent 'split' between early education in the maintained sector and childcare from private providers (eg Moss, 2012) could widen as a result of the various ways in which the funding reforms were enacted. Several participants working in the maintained sector discussed their opposition to private nurseries charging parents additional fees, a practice that Julie,

a nursery school headteacher, labelled “obstructive”, whilst Charlotte, another nursery school headteacher, detailed the way in which private nurseries would often not accept children with SEND in the setting due to the funding reforms. Laura, headteacher at another nursery school, lamented the academisation of most primary schools in the locality, and the resulting loss of relationship with those schools, as witnessed in maintained schools following the introduction of the 1988 ERA due to competition (Bowe et al., 1992). Meanwhile, some of those nursery school leaders interviewed, in addition to the only private nursery manager who participated in the study, highlighted the subsidy maximising behaviours, predominantly offering free places to children who were not yet entitled to any government funding, that some primary schools engaged in. Indeed, Sarah and Rachel, two primary school teachers interviewed, openly discussed this practice. For primary schools, accepting children into nursery classes before they become entitled to government funding is a cost calculated alongside that child becoming a member of the wider school community and the hope that they will generate funding for future years. Children in the early years in schools can come to be viewed as a pre-school pipeline. A Human Capital perspective is taken by some school nursery classes, thinking not of the child’s eventual outputs as an adult, but about the income they will generate for the remaining years of their primary education if a small investment is made at the beginning of their time at the school.

Alongside the tensions generated by some primary schools enacting these ‘subsidy maximising behaviours’ (my original contribution to research), and some day nurseries charging top-up fees, those participants from nursery schools discussed their own unique challenges surrounding the funding reforms. With the additional funding paid to MNS in recognition of their increased costs payable only for 15 hours, regardless of a child’s eligibility, nursery schools stand to make a loss on children entitled to 30 hours (Archer & Merrick, 2020). Concurrently, this additional funding is not secured on a long term basis, with pledges typically made by government for one to two years (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2021), making long term planning and even assurance of financial viability difficult for nursery schools beyond that period.

Therefore, through seeking to “ensure that funding is distributed fairly and transparently” (Department for Education, 2016, p. 3), the policies have further exacerbated the ‘splits’ within the sector, particularly that between maintained settings that are considered to focus on early education and private providers seen to supply childcare (Moss, 2012, 2014). Whilst these divisions are long standing, their existence places the sector at risk from inappropriate, top-down policies. The range of roles within ECEC, alongside the mixed market, means that there is not a single union representing the early years, for example. The divisions within ECEC make a single, unified voice, fighting for the sector as a whole, difficult to achieve (although the publication of *Birth to 5 Matters* [Early Years Alliance, 2021], early years curriculum guidance written by organisations from across the sector, does provide hope).

Having discussed this amalgamation of splits that the ECEC funding policy reforms have created or widened, I turn now to what this thesis offers the fields of early years policy and critical policy sociology.

## Original Contributions to Knowledge

As discussed in more detail in chapter four, much of the existing research exploring the ECEC funding reforms in England has centred around take up of provision and the effect upon maternal employment (eg Paull and La Valle, 2017, 2018), financial sustainability (eg Simon, 2022) and quality of provision (Pascal et al, 2021) and the move away from discretionary funding to provide full time for the most vulnerable children and families (eg Archer & Merrick, 2020). This research addresses gaps in the literature through discussing in detail the ways in which the funding policies are enacted in practice, enactment theory itself, and the ways in which discourses shape these enactments. Furthermore, this thesis is the first exploration of the impact the policies have upon practitioner subjectivity. I go on to detail these original contributions to knowledge, and how the study builds upon previous research, below.

Consideration needed to be given to the application of enactment theory in the early years. The theory was originally generated following research conducted in secondary schools (eg Ball et al., 2011; Braun et al., 2010, 2011), and a later study

which transferred enactment theory to primary schools did so with the recognition that primary schools have a markedly different context, with pedagogy being more child-centred, strengthened relationships with parents, more visible leadership and teachers working predominantly with one class, resulting in a closer bond with pupils (Braun & Maguire, 2020). Whilst exploring early years' practitioners enactment of Baseline Assessment, Bradbury (2019) noted that the policy was neither disciplinary nor exhortative (Ball et al., 2011b) according to the binary offered by enactment theory. This is indicative of the need to take a nuanced approach to policy enactment in the early years. The focus upon relationships- between staff and parents as well as staff and children - seen in primary schools is heightened in early years settings (eg Degotardi et al., 2017; Page & Elfer, 2013), with 'positive relationships' named as one of the three elements that promotes the learning and development of young children in the current 'Birth to 5 Matters' curriculum guidance (Early Years Alliance, 2021a) and an earlier iteration of the Statutory Framework for the EYFS (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008). This, alongside a play-centred pedagogy and recognition of the 'unique child' whose learning and development will take an individual path (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008; Early Years Alliance, 2021), produces practitioners who are deeply committed to caring for young children and acting as advocates for them, promoting their best interests. This pedagogy and its impact upon practitioners it important in considering how they will enact policy, and the effect these enactments have upon their subjectivity.

The conceptualisation of enactments by primary schools which involve offering unfunded places to families as 'subsidy maximising behaviours' is an original contribution to knowledge. Whilst this builds upon 'voucher maximising behaviours', coined in the 1990s by Sparkes and West (1998) to capture similar actions of primary schools in response to the nursery voucher scheme, this study is the first to identify this enactment of the 15 and 30 hours policies. Nursery classes can exploit their advantageous position as being part of a primary school, benefiting from stable staffing, economies of scale as the nursery is incorporated into the overall school budget, and utilising the lure of a place in the reception class. Participants working in nursery classes discussed the way in which places were offered to children as soon

as they reached three years, meaning that they were providing free childcare as government funding is not supplied until the term following the child's third birthday.

A further original contribution is the finding that children are in some cases being allocated to different classrooms according to their funding entitlement (and, accordingly, by socio-economic background), and theorisation of this as a 'dividing practice' based upon dominant discourses of the deserving and undeserving poor. Whilst previous research has identified that providing double the number of funded hours for more privileged children may have implications for the learning and development of children only entitled to 15 hours (eg Archer & Merrick, 2020; Pascal et al, 2021) and questioned the morality of such an approach, this study is the first to identify such a stark division with children socially segregated due to the policies.

The concept of the 'supraprofessional', demanded by policy to simultaneously be a flexible, competitive, neoliberal worker, whilst also displaying the child-centred values of the early years pedagogue, is also an original contribution, as is the emphasis on the ways in which the funding policy reforms have altered the subjectivity of practitioners.

## Implications of Findings

This research has implications for both policy and practice. The main three; the need for funding to be universal with all children receiving the same number of government funded ECEC hours; consideration from practitioners of the potential for the 15 and 30 hours to be enacted as a form of social segregation; and the recommendation for practitioners to be mindful of the need for them to perform as a 'supraprofessional', are outlined here.

### Implication 1 – The Need for Universal Government ECEC Funding Policies

I have argued that the 15 and 30 hours funding policies allow for the social segregation of children and families, with children separated temporally as they have

different attendance patterns and sometimes, spatially, with 15 and 30 hour children allocated to different rooms according to their funding eligibility in some cases. Not only does this have a potential impact for the social mixing of families, but it also allows for the labels of 15 and 30 hours to be used as an easy shorthand for 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. Chapter Eight, Regimes of Truth, Time and Disciplinary Power in ECEC Funding Policies, demonstrated how dominant discourses around neuroscience and the young child's brain development, early intervention and the cycle of dysfunction have imbued ECEC practice, leading to the normalisation of 30 hours attendance and deficit discourses surrounding children and families entitled only to 15 hours. With the possibility for such deficit discourses to lead to low expectations for children in schools, it is important to truncate this discourse. One of the simplest ways to do this would be to provide 30 hours of funded ECEC for all children, a recommendation voiced by several participants in the study.

## Implication 2- Awareness of the Potential for the 15 and 30 Hours to Result in 'Splits' in Settings

Given that there is currently no political party suggesting that ECEC funding will become universal, another implication is for ECEC settings to be mindful of the enactment of the funding policies. It is recognised that education settings may be the only location in which there is social mixing of families (Hollingworth & Williams, 2010; Pring & Walford, 1997) and the development of children from materially deprived backgrounds, the development of language and communication in particular, benefits from attendance of a socially mixed early years setting (Sylva et al, 2004b). Therefore, settings should consider whether the separation of children into different rooms according to their funding entitlement status, and different start times for 15 hour children and 30 hour children, is detrimental to the learning and development of children in their care. Of course, there may be very good operational reasons for establishing such splits, but nonetheless, careful attention should be paid to the effects.

## Implication 3 – ECEC Practitioner Care of the Self

This thesis has emphasised the pressure for practitioners to act as the 'supraprofessional', meeting the demands of the neoliberal ECEC marketplace by engaging in competitive and marketing behaviours, whilst simultaneously remaining faithful to their child-centred beliefs and values. Practitioners interviewed for this study revealed the tensions that arose because of this, and the way in which it affected them emotionally. Pierlejewski (2023, p. 528) posits that "The care of the self…depends on the acceptance of the divided subject." One implication of this research, therefore, is the need for greater awareness of this 'split' self, and support from leaders, training providers and the sector itself in recognising and accepting this split.

## Wider Implications

Beyond these implications, the study also wishes to address the larger questions that the policies feed into. The varying objectives of the funding reforms, with the two-year-old funding aimed at narrowing the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers, the universal 15 hours for three- and four-year-olds introduced to support child development more generally and the 30 hours policy created to boost employment rates amongst mothers, ask the questions; what *is* the purpose of ECEC, who is it for, and how should it be provided? Is the primary goal to supply childcare for working parents, or to provide early education for our youngest children?

I do not wish to argue here that the aim of promoting parental employment should not be considered when designing ECEC services and policies. Through allowing parents to work, childcare can alleviate poverty if there is a sufficient emphasis on quality and other support (Jarvie & Jitendra, 2024). Childcare is necessary for mother's participation in the labour market, and societal attitudes to this are still ambivalent. Even in 2023, 21% of adults in Britain agreed that mothers working is damaging to young children, and when asked how childcare and working

arrangements should be organised, the largest proportion of respondents stated that mothers should work part time whilst fathers are employed full time (Allen & Stevenson, 2023). The fall in the number of women during the pandemic to coincide with periods when schools closed to most children also demonstrates the importance of childcare and education to women's work Given the feminist stance of this study, and my own personal experience of being a mother working full time, I have no interest in arguing that childcare should not be an aim of ECEC provision.

However, I do argue that the focus on early education to promote the development of all children has become secondary and sometimes even absent in policy discussions and manifestos. From 'More Great Childcare: Raising quality and giving parents more choice' (Department for Education, 2013b) to a 2024 general election manifesto piece titled 'Doubling free childcare for hardworking families' (conservatives.com, 2024), childcare to enable work was always central to Conservative ECEC policy. The newly incumbent Labour education secretary, Bridget Phillipson, has referred to the early years as her "number one priority" (Busby, 2024). The Labour party manifesto prior to the general election, evident on the webpage 'Labour's plan for childcare and early education' (Labour.org.uk, 2024), pledged to improve the quality of provision and "support our children to achieve and thrive". Other election promises seemed to be based on the status quo, improving access to and affordability of childcare, and expanding it to ensure it is available to families with school aged children too. The word 'childcare' is used fifteen times on the webpage, whilst the phrase 'early education' appears only three times (Labour.org.uk). Labour's commitment to promoting early education alongside providing childcare remains to be seen, although of course they are still new to government. I propose that policy must re-centre children and their early education in ECEC policy making, ensuring that this concern is not secondary to parent's ability to work.

Beyond focusing on ECEC as primarily for children, policy should also be bold in restructuring the ECEC sector. This study has demonstrated how funding policies

which advance the marketisation and privatisation of ECEC, including in the maintained sector, encourage competition, including subsidy maximising behaviours, and leads to uncertainty in the sector, with some settings risking closure. Importantly, operating ECEC as a marketplace can result in the most vulnerable children missing out on provision, as shown in this study and elsewhere. This is because profit-making providers do not open ECEC settings in the most deprived settings, resulting in provision 'cold spots', as there is little chance of operating at a profit (Lloyd, 2012). Furthermore, the additional costs involved in supporting children with SEND mean that some ECEC settings are refusing to offer them places at all (Archer & Merrick, 2020).

Instead, putting an end to the ECEC marketplace and having maintained, government supplied provision for all, just as with schools, could reduce the likelihood of the most vulnerable children and families being denied support in the form of ECEC provision (with, of course, appropriate legislation regarding access and supply of places). As Moss and Mitchell (2024, p.1) assert, we must "no longer think of early childhood services as 'childcare', as businesses and as marketised commodities, and think of them instead as education with an ethics of care, as public goods and as a universal entitlement for children." Through doing so, ECEC could become more equitable, less socially divisive and more coherent and cohesive (Moss & Mitchell, 2024).

Such reforms are particularly urgent given the proposed upcoming expansion of government funding to include infants as young as nine-months old. Under these proposals, children between the age of nine months and three years will be eligible for 30 government funded of ECEC, under the same eligibility criteria currently used for three- and four-year-olds (Department for Education & Keegan, 2024). There will be no universal 15 hours for infants and toddlers, meaning that there could not be an exact replication of the scenarios described in this study with younger children. However, there will be two-year-olds accessing 30 hours of funding because they have working parents whilst some others will be attending settings for 15 hours due to their status as being disadvantaged. This

study demonstrates the real risk that such a ‘split’ in the hours attended creates. In other words, two-year-olds could be discursively constructed based on their eligibility for 30 hours (‘good’ as they have working parents) or 15 hours (‘bad’ as their parents are in receipt of certain welfare benefits).

Labour’s plan to utilise unused classrooms in primary schools as nurseries for children as young as nine-months-old (Labour.org.uk, 2024) also requires careful consideration and planning. As has been stated elsewhere (Fazackerley, 2024), the infrastructure will need to be substantially different to accommodate much younger children, and adequately skilled and trained practitioners employed to care for them. Furthermore, locating provision for such young children in schools could risk exacerbating schoolification, particularly when combined with a 30 hour week. As both Julie, a nursery school headteacher, and Amy, a teacher in a nursery class, stated in Chapter 7, Funding Reforms and the Split System in ECEC in England, the 30 hour week in a nursery makes it easier to operate the day in the same way as a school day is run. Attention must be paid to ensure that ECEC provision on school premises and for school-length days does not become ‘schoolified’.

## Limitations

The research presented in this thesis is not the study I had planned when I embarked on a PhD in September 2017. The most obvious and influential factor impacting upon the research was the COVID-19 pandemic. The effect that this had upon the methods utilised are discussed in more detail in chapter five, but the most palpable impact was abandoning the planned ethnographic study and moving to online interviews due to the inability to visit settings as part of the process of conducting interviews. Viewing the setting proved informative during the pilot study, particularly as the physical structure of the building was instrumental to other changes that were taking place within the nursery school as a result of the funding reforms. It was whilst asking parents to sign consent forms that I realised they waited in the corridor at different times, depending on the hours their child attended for.

Some of the documentary evidence seen, pieces of paper taped to the classroom walls naming the children staff needed to observe with ‘AM’ (15 hour children attending in the morning), ‘PM’ (part-time children attending for afternoons) or ‘FT’ (30 hour children), for example, alerted me to the pressures that staff were facing to provide for three groups of children across each day. These physical markers of the implications of the funding reforms greatly informed my thinking as they pointed to the discourses that permeated the setting, and I question what I was unable to see through being prevented from conducting the ethnographic aspect of the study.

Whilst I developed my interviewing skills considerably throughout the project, the difference between interviews conducted early on in the field work period and those completed later could be considered a limitation. One pertinent example of issues early on in the process is an unexplored avenue when interviewing Catherine, a nursery teacher and EYFS leader, who discussed changing the nursery’s status from maintained to private to gain more funding, a statement that needed some investigation but that I did not follow up, its relevance to the study unclear to me at that point. Only months later, when entrenched in the task of generating themes within the data did the privatisation of the maintained sector become clear to me, yet at this point it seemed too late to return to the participant with my belated follow-on questions.

The predominance of teachers and headteachers working in MNS as participants presents a further limitation, with 11 of 19 interviewees employed in nursery schools. As discussed in the methodology chapter, the overrepresentation of this small group – only 392 nursery schools were in existence as of 2019 (Paull & Popov, 2019) – can be explained by two factors. The first is the disproportionate impact the funding reforms have had upon MNS, with supplementary money paid to cover specific costs for nursery schools, yet this additional funding guaranteed only for short periods of up to two years, framing funding and long-term viability as a great concern for those working in MNS. That those working amid such precarious conditions wished to discuss their concerns is therefore unsurprising. Resultingly, the thesis focuses upon the impact of the funding reforms in the maintained sector and considers the ongoing privatisation of this sector. Nonetheless, they offered valuable insights into the

significant funding and sustainability issues facing this often-ignored part of the sector.

Alongside this preponderance of voice from within one section of the sector is the absence of perspective from both children and parents. There is increasing recognition that children's voice should be included in education research, including early years education research (Murris, 2013; Murray, 2019; Sudarsan et al, 2022) following the establishment of children's right to express themselves and be heard in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR, 1989), with 'voice' defined as "views of children that are actively received and acknowledged as valuable contributions to decision-making affecting the children's lives" (Murray, 2019, p. 1). Whilst Tangen (2008) argues that research centring children's voice supports the view that children are 'beings' rather than 'becomings', a belief central to my work as an early years teacher for 15 years, children's views surrounding the 15 and 30 hours policies were simply beyond the scope of this study. Likewise, gathering the opinion of parents regarding these funding reforms is an important endeavour to be undertaken, but a task I was unwilling to undertake during a pandemic, with parents of nursery-aged children stretched as they juggled work and caring with significantly less external support. Practitioners were selected as the focus of this research to ascertain how the funding policies were being enacted in practice, to establish their views on the impact this was having upon children, families, and upon settings and the practitioners themselves. How the perspectives of those missing from this study may be explored in future research is considered below.

## Future Research

Perhaps the most pressing related area to research is the extension of the 30 hour policy to nine-month-olds from September 2025, as discussed above. The same eligibility criteria as the current 30 hour policy will apply, and it is gradually being rolled out, with working parents of two-year-olds currently entitled to 15 hours of funded ECEC (Foster & Foley, 2024). From September 2024, eligible families with babies from nine months old will be able to apply for 15 hours, and this will double to

30 hours the following year. As discussed above, the policies are not identical to the current 15 and 30 hours policies for three- and four-year-olds; families will be entitled to up to 30 hours if they meet the eligibility criteria, but there is to be no universal provision of 15 hours for under threes. Nonetheless, the current situation, with some two-year-olds funded to attend ECEC due to disadvantage and others entitled due to their parent's employment and income, could be a worthwhile scenario to research. Do all two-year-olds attend at the same times? Are there separate sessions for those attending due to vulnerability and those entitled due to their parents' work? Are they segregated in other ways? What are the discourses surrounding each group?

This study revealed the way in which dominant discourses such as the intergenerational cycle of poverty and the need for early intervention to 'ready' children for school are firmly entrenched within the early years. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, there are new dominant discourses emerging around the deficit in young children's development due to lockdowns. There appears to be some consensus that speech and language is an area which have been particularly affected (La Valle et al, 2022), along with children's social, emotional and behavioural development (Hobbs & Bernard, 2021; Hogg & Mayes, 2022) and physical development (Ofsted, 2022). Whilst there are undoubtedly legitimate concerns regarding the impact of lockdowns on the development and wellbeing of young children, this study shows the propensity for discourses to impact upon practice. Therefore, whether deficit discourses around children's skills and development following the pandemic are permeating practice is an area to be explored.

Given the current recruitment and retention crisis in the early years in England, the role that policies such as 30 hours funding play in influencing practitioners decisions to remain in or leave the sector is also an area ripe for exploration. Whilst low pay is often cited as the main reason for practitioners leaving early years employment (Akhal, 2019b), "feeling undervalued by government" and "job related stress" (Early Years Alliance, 2021, p. 5) appeared as the top two reasons for early years employee attrition in one study. In this study, practitioners were open at their disgust

for the way in which funding was prioritised over quality provision or supporting the most vulnerable families. Understanding the extent to which policies that conflict with practitioners' values and beliefs impact upon their likelihood to remain working in the sector may be important to supporting a more stable workforce.

Some participants in this study suggested that the divisions created by the ECEC funding reforms will have long term implications for children's outcomes, and, in particular, for the attainment gap between children living in poverty and their peers. Analysis of Key Stage Two SATs results to compare the outcomes of children who were entitled to 30 hours of funded ECEC to those only entitled to the universal 15 hours, adjusted for variables could be conducted to establish the long-term impact of the funding reforms when the first cohort of children entitled to the 30 hours funding complete primary education in 2025.

## Concluding Remarks

This thesis has outlined how the ECEC funding policies in England have produced or exacerbated splits; the split system of ECEC, the split between some of the most vulnerable families and children and others and the split *within* practitioners who face tensions between performing as a neoliberal worker and remaining loyal to their inclusive child-centred values. In some examples, this split is enacted through the separation of children into different spaces according to their eligibility, therefore producing social segregation. In other cases, the labels of 15 and 30 hours are used as shorthand for 'undeserving' and 'deserving' poor respectively, with the 15 hours entitlement linked to a deficit discourse around children and families living in poverty.

Therefore, the policies operate as a way of maintaining divisions between the most vulnerable children and their peers. There is the potential for the policies to have a longer-term impact on the divide between the most disadvantaged children and their peers, through both the unequal access to ECEC and resulting discourses (and therefore practitioner expectations), particularly given the research suggesting that a social mix in settings is important for the development of children from families on low incomes (Sylva et al, 2004b). It is recommended that ECEC funding is made

universal, with *all* children entitled to the same number of government funded hours, and that this funding is at a sustainable level to reduce the pressure on practitioners and settings.

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# Appendices

Appendix 1 – Ethics Form

# Doctoral Student Ethics Application Form

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in simple terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

***Registering your study with the UCL Data Protection Officer as part of the UCL Research Ethics Review Process**

## Section 1 Project details

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| a. | Project title | | Tantrums, Toilet Training, Targets and Tracking: Two-year-olds in English primary schools. |
| b. | Student name and ID number (e.g. ABC12345678) | | Sharon Vince |
| c. | *UCL Data Protection Registration Number | | Z6364106/2018/05/56 Issued 11th May 2018 |
| c. | Supervisor/Personal Tutor | | Dr Guy Roberts-Holmes |
| d. | Department | | Leadership and Learning |
| e. | Course category<br>(Tick one) | PhD ☒ | EdD ☐ |
| | | DEdPsy ☐ | |
| f. | **If applicable,** state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed. | | n/a |
| g. | Intended research start date | | June 2018 |
| h. | Intended research end date | | July 2021 |
| i. | Country fieldwork will be conducted in<br>*If research to be conducted abroad please check www.fco.gov.uk and submit a completed travel risk assessment form (see guidelines). If the FCO advice is against travel this will be **required** before ethical* | | England |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | *approval can be granted: http://ioe-net.inst.ioe.ac.uk/about/profservices/international/Pages/default.aspx* | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| j. | Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee? | |
| | Yes ☐ | External Committee Name: |
| | No ☒ ⇨ *go to Section 2* | Date of Approval: |

***If yes:***

- Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.
- Proceed to Section 10 Attachments**.**

**Note**: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) or Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC). In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.

If you are proposing to collect personal data i.e. data from which a living individual can be identified **you must be registered with the UCL Data Protection Office before you submit your ethics application for review**.

If the Data Protection Office advises you to make changes to the way in which you propose to collect and store the data this should be reflected in your ethics application form.

For further information see Steps 1 and 2 of our Procedures page at: https://ethics.grad.ucl.ac.uk/procedures.php

## Section 2 Research methods summary (tick all that apply)

| | |
|---|---|
| ☒ Interviews | ☐ Controlled trial/other intervention study |
| ☐ Focus groups | ☐ Use of personal records |
| ☐ Questionnaires | ☐ Systematic review ⇨ ***if only method used go to Section 5.*** |
| ☐ Action research | ☐ Secondary data analysis ⇨ ***if secondary analysis used go to Section 6.*** |
| ☒ Observation | ☐ Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups |
| ☒ Literature review | ☒ Other, give details: Use of data collected on social media, particularly Twitter and groups on Facebook. |

Please provide an overview of the project, focusing on your methodology. This should include some or all of the following: purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, data

collection (including justifications for methods chosen and description of topics/questions to be asked), reporting and dissemination. Please focus on your methodology; the theory, policy, or literary background of your work can be provided in an attached document (i.e. a full research proposal or case for support document). *Minimum 150 words required.*

Purpose of the research

There is an increasing number of two-year-olds attending primary schools in England, with 7% of 'disadvantaged' two-year-olds entitled to free early childhood education attending classes in maintained schools in 2017, compared to just 1% in 2014. Provision of early childhood education in primary schools is being touted as a way to improve social mobility. Despite this, there has been very little research carried out around two-year-olds in primary schools, with the main study to date focusing on the implications for schools in setting up such provision. This study, conducted by the Department for Education (Greene, Joshi, Street, & Wallace, 2014), found that schools often struggled to find appropriately qualified staff to work with two-year-olds, and stated that most headteachers who agreed to provide places for two-year-olds did so in the hope that it would have a beneficial impact on the test results of those children. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the experiences of children, their families and the staff working with them, looking at whether there is evidence of 'top-down' pressures on two-year-olds in primary schools and the staff working with them.

Aims

With this research conducted by the DfE in mind, I wish to explore whether top- down pressures are impacting upon practice within these two-year-old classes in primary schools. There is already much concern regarding the 'schoolification' of early childhood education, that is, how formal teaching practices have trickled down. This is seen as a response to increased accountability in early childhood education in England, with children assessed at the end of the reception year when they are aged four or five, and this data used to judge teaching and passed on to Local Authorities, where it is used to compare schools. I will explore if practices such as ability grouping and educational triage (prioritising children on the 'cusp' of meeting age related expectations at the expense of those deemed 'hopeless cases') are evident in classes for two-year-olds, as such practice has been found to be particularly detrimental to children from poorer families, to children whom speak English as an additional language and to children from some ethnic groups, with children placed into 'lower ability' groups based on stereotypes and teacher assumptions. Evidence from research in primary schools show that children in lower ability groups make less progress than children in high or middle ability groups due to different teaching practices and lower expectations (eg Parsons & Hallam, 2014). Such actions entrench differences in achievement due to social background rather than alleviating them. Therefore this research will examine whether such practices are evident in classes of two-year-olds. The study will also seek out the experiences of two-year-olds in primary schools and those of their families and the staff working with them, as this was not explored in the DfE research. The way in which 'disadvantaged' children are constructed within primary schools is of particular interest.

Main research questions

1. How are 'disadvantaged' children constructed within primary schools and other settings?
2. How do very young children, their families and staff experience early childhood education for two-year-olds, and are there differences according to socio-economic background?
3. Are there differences between schools and other early childhood education providers in how they experience governance and accountability?

4. Is there evidence of 'top down' pressures impacting on classes of two-year-olds in primary schools?

Methodology

The epistemological stance of this study is subjectivist, and an interpretivist perspective is taken as it seeks to explore and understand behaviours rather than to simply describe them (Coe, 2017). The study uses ethnography, and I will use observation and semi-structured interviews to gain an insight into both *what* happens in the settings and *why.* Interviews are a particularly useful method as they allow for more difficult questions to be asked (Oppenheim, 1992) and solicit personal experiences, thoughts and feelings around a subject (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Data collected using these methods will be analysed using grounded theory. In addition to this, policy discourse analysis of relevant education policy will be undertaken and assessment data of children in the settings and other documentary evidence (such as setting policies and other paperwork) shall be examined. Social theories including feminist theory and Foucault's theory of power shall also be drawn upon.

Participants and sampling

I will recruit two primary schools and two nurseries in the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector for this study. This will ensure that I have enough participants should there be participant attrition. Sampling will be opportunistic, as I recognise that teachers and other staff working in schools and nurseries are often extremely busy and may not want to participate due to the extra time demands that the study could place on them.

Research design

I shall aim to visit each site once a fortnight, although this will be decided in collaboration with staff working at the nurseries and schools.

**Year 1-construction of 'disadvantaged' two-year-olds**

Children and staff will be observed during their usual interactions. Staff interviews will be conducted once every term. These semi-structured interviews shall be carried out with the person responsible for carrying out the summative assessment of children, usually the class teacher. Interviews will focus on how 'disadvantaged' children are constructed, the expectations that staff hold for these children and their families, and how the assessment data for 'disadvantaged' children compares to that of their peers. Staff shall be asked about accountability, including whether children's progress is tracked, if there are targets for children, how assessment data is used and by whom etc. When observing, I shall be looking at whether children are put into groups for any activities. If this is evident, I shall also ask staff how children are allocated into these groups, eg whether children are ability grouped for any activities. I shall ask staff to sit in on meetings around assessment and planning where possible. Information around staff:child ratios, staff qualifications and experience etc shall also be gathered.

There will be one off interviews with parents and carers of children entitled to the Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) and those who are not. I aim to interview at least twenty parents regarding their experience of their two-year-old in school or nursery, looking at how they chose the setting, why they use early childhood education, whether they were placed under any pressure (and if so, by whom) to use it and how they think their child experiences early childhood education.

In addition to this, I shall be contacting nursery owners and staff through the campaign groups 'Champagne Nurseries on Lemonade Funding' and 'Keeping Early Years Unique' on social media. There have been posts

stating that parents are moving children from nurseries and childminders into primary schools due to the funding issues explained below, and I wish to explore this through interviews.

**Year 2 – 'disadvantaged' two-year-olds and the three-year-old funding policy**

Whilst two-year-old provision is only funded for 'disadvantaged' children, once children are three years old the policy becomes rather different, with 'disadvantaged' children still entitled to 15 hours of funded early childhood education, but children with two working parents, or a single parent earning more than £120 a week, entitled to 30 hours. Furthermore, once children are three years old, nurseries may charge 'top up' fees for food and consumables due to underfunding of the policy by the government. In the second year, I shall be alert to issues that arise because of this. Do any 'disadvantaged' two-year-olds leave their setting as parents are unable to afford top-up fees charged by nurseries? Do they move to primary schools where there are no top-up fees?

In the second year of the study, I shall continue to observe staff and children and carry out semi-structured interviews with staff and parents. The focus of these interviews with staff will again be the construction of 'disadvantaged' children, how these children fare when assessed and accountability regarding children's progress. I shall also ask questions around how staff feel regarding 'disadvantaged' children attending for 15 hours of funded provision, whilst their peers attend for 30 hours. With parents, the focus will be on talking to parents new to the setting about why they selected the setting and so on. If any children leave a setting, I will try to discuss with parents why they have made the decision, and what kind of setting (if any) they are transferring to.

**Year 3- follow up of 'disadvantaged' two-year-old children as they are assessed using new Baseline assessment**

Staff interviews will be conducted following Baseline assessment and following the end of year EYFS Profile assessment (or the end of Reception year assessment in use at that point). Questions will include how staff felt carrying out the tests, whether they know which children in the class were entitled to the FEEE as two-year-olds and how staff felt that 'disadvantaged' children achieved on the test compared to their peers. Again, staff constructions of 'disadvantaged' children will be considered, the focus being on how staff expected 'disadvantaged' children to perform in the test compared to their peers.

Interviews with parents will focus on their thoughts and experiences regarding the Baseline test, such as how their child experienced it, if they prepared their child for it and so on.

References

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## Section 3 Research Participants (tick all that apply)

- ☒ Early years/pre-school
- ☐ Ages 5-11
- ☐ Ages 12-16
- ☒ Young people aged 17-18

- ☒ Adults *please specify below*
- ☐ Unknown – specify below
- ☐ No participants

Semi-structured interviews will be carried out with staff working in nurseries in the PVI sector and nursery classes in schools. Additionally, staff will be observed alongside children. It is possible that young people training to work in nurseries will be observed.

**NB:** Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) or Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC).

## Section 4 Security-sensitive material (only complete if applicable)

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call; involves acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| a. | Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material? | Yes ☐ * | No ☒ |
| b. | Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations? | Yes ☐ * | No ☒ |
| c. | Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts? | Yes ☐ * | No ☒ |

* *Give further details in* ***Section 8 Ethical Issues***

## Section 5 Systematic reviews of research (only complete if applicable)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| a. | Will you be collecting any new data from participants? | Yes ☐ * | No ☐ |
| b. | Will you be analysing any secondary data? | Yes ☐ * | No ☐ |

* *Give further details in* ***Section 8 Ethical Issues***

*If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review)* ***and*** *if you have answered* ***No*** *to both questions, please go to* ***Section 8 Attachments.***

## Section 6 Secondary data analysis (only complete if applicable)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| a. | Name of dataset/s | | |
| b. | Owner of dataset/s | | |
| c. | Are the data in the public domain? | Yes ☐ | No ☐<br>***If no,*** *do you have the owner's permission/license?* Yes ☐ No* ☐ |
| d. | Are the data anonymised? | Yes ☐ | No ☐ |
| | | *Do you plan to anonymise the data?* | Yes ☐ No* ☐ |
| | | *Do you plan to use individual level data?* | Yes* ☐ No ☐ |
| | | *Will you be linking data to individuals?* | Yes* ☐ No ☐ |
| e. | Are the data sensitive (DPA 1998 definition)? | | Yes* ☐ No ☐ |
| f. | Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for? | | Yes ☐ No* ☐ |
| g. | **If no,** was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis? | | Yes ☐ No* ☐ |
| h. | **If no,** was data collected prior to ethics approval process? | | Yes ☐ No* ☐ |

* *Give further details in* ***Section 8 Ethical Issues***

*If secondary analysis is only method used* ***and*** *no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to* ***Section 9 Attachments.***

## Section 7 Data Storage and Security

*Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.*

| | |
|---|---|
| a. | **Data subjects -** Who will the data be collected from? Data will be collected from children, parents and staff. |
| b. | **What data will be collected?** Please provide details of the type of personal data to be collected Personal data inc children's ages and their assessment data will be collected. Where this is collected, it shall be presented alongside an abbreviated version of their name eg AS instead of Adam Smith. Other data- eg transcipts of interviews- will be presented the participants names anonymised. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| c. | **Disclosure** – Who will the results of your project be disclosed to? Data will only be shared with others (eg a supe to discuss findings) in anonymised form. | |
| d. | **Data storage** – Please provide details on how and where the data will be stored i.e. UCL network, encrypted USI stick*, encrypted laptop* etc. Data will be stored on the UCL graduate research log site.<br><br>*Advanced Encryption Standard 256 bit encryption which has been made a security standard within the NHS | |
| e. | **Data Safe Haven (Identifiable Data Handling Solution)** – Will the personal identifiable data collected and processed as part of this research be stored in the UCL Data Safe Haven (mainly used by SLMS divisions, institutes and departments)? | Yes ☐ No ☒ |
| f. | How long will the data and records be kept for and in what format? The data will be stored on the UCL graduat research log site until I have successfully defended my thesis and been awarded my PhD. My current submissior is 3rd June 2022, therefore I aim to have defended my thesis, completed any corrections and been awarded the degree by the end of 2023. Transcripts of interviews shall be included in the appendices of the dissertation and therefore shall remain indefinitely.<br><br>Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area? (If yes, please confirm that the are adequate levels of protections in compliance with the DPA 1998 and state what these arrangements are: No<br><br>Will data be archived for use by other researchers? (If yes, please provide details.) No | |

## Section 8 Ethical issues

Please state clearly the ethical issues which may arise in the course of this research and how will they be addressed.

**All** issues that may apply should be addressed. Some examples are given below, further information can be found in the guidelines. *Minimum 150 words required.*

- Methods
- Sampling
- Recruitment
- Gatekeepers
- Informed consent
- Potentially vulnerable participants
- Safeguarding/child protection
- Sensitive topics
- International research
- Risks to participants and/or researchers
- Confidentiality/Anonymity
- Disclosures/limits to confidentiality
- Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection)
- Reporting
- Dissemination and use of findings

Recruitment

Recruitment letters shall be sent directly to staff working in two-year-old classes in primary schools, and to headteachers of the schools. Primary schools with two-year-old classes and the staff working in them shall be found using Google. Managers of nurseries in the PVI sector shall be sent letters. The letters shall outline the research and what it would entail, stating that participant settings could choose the frequency of visits. The right to withdraw at any time, along with reassurance that all details would be kept anonymous, would be stated. Letters will be followed up with e-mails.

I shall also use social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook, to recruit participants. A recruitment information sheet will be posted asking for people to respond. If necessary, I shall use my contacts such as current and former colleagues in teaching to assist in recruiting participants.

When recruiting parents for interviews in nurseries and schools, letters shall be handed out directly to all parents. Again, the right to withdraw at any time, the reassurance that all discussions shall remain confidential and that details will be kept anonymous will be stated. No incentives shall be offered for participation and there shall be no coercion.

Informed Consent

Participants who select to take part in the study shall be given information on informed consent so that they are familiar with the study aims and design, how data shall be stored and used and confidentiality and the right to withdraw prior to participation. This shall be sent via e-mail on an information sheet. The informed consent sheet shall be signed immediately prior to participation and shall reiterate this information. For staff, this shall be on the first day of observation. For parents, it shall be immediately prior to interview.

Parents shall be asked for permission to observe their child/ren in the school or nursery. I shall ask nursery or school staff to hand out these letters to parents prior to my fieldwork starting. The letters shall inform parents of the purpose of the study, of what the study will involve for their child/ren (eg me observing the children), the fact that children's names will not be used in the study, that all information shall be confidential and anonymised and that they can withdraw consent at any time.

I am conscious of children's consent. As most children participating will be two- or three-years old, formal methods of seeking consent for observation are clearly inappropriate. However, I shall assess on a continuous basis whether children 1) are happy to be observed and 2) can express whether they are happy to be observed. If the latter is apparent, I shall seek children's informed consent in an age appropriate manner, by using a face selection chart (see attached).

Confidentiality and Limits to Confidentiality

The location of settings will be kept vague (eg a city in the South East of England) and all setting names, children, staff and parents will be anonymised, with pseudonyms used. Participants will be given the option of choosing their own pseudonym. However, there remains a risk that settings and individuals will be identifiable to those whom have participated in the study. For example, parents and staff may recognise their own setting and come across disparaging comments made about them, the children or the setting by others. The possibility of this happening will be made clear to participants when asking them for their informed consent. Nonetheless, everyone taking part in the study will be reassured that I will not make the information that I have shared with them available to others, eg I will reassure parents and carers that the information they give will not be shared with staff at the school or nursery, staff will be reassured that their data will not be shared with headteachers or other managers.

There will be one spreadsheet containing sensitive information- participant's real names, pseudonym, whethere they are a member of staff or parent etc. This spreadsheet shall only be stored on the UCL Research Student Log to ensure security. All data analysis and transcription of interviews shall be carried out myself to ensure that the data is not accessed by anyone else. When discussing the findings with others, eg supervisors, the pseudonyms for schools and nurseries, and for staff, children and parents shall be used so as not to identify any settings or individuals.

Gatekeepers

The main gatekeepers of the research will be headteachers of school and nursery managers, whom have the authority to permit my research to be undertaken in their setting, or not. I am aware that gatekeepers have the power to drive research in particular ways, for example, only permitting access to practice that they wish to be seen. I will be sensitive to the role that gatekeepers can play and will ensure that I do not share confidential information with them.

Safeguarding and Child Protection

If I witness or hear anything in a setting that leads to me being concerned for the safety or well being of a child, I shall discuss this with the designated safeguarding lead of the setting. This will be the case even if it means breaking confidentiality. For example, if I am interviewing a parent and they disclose that they are abusing their child, I would pass this on to the relevant person even though it meant breaking the confidentiality I had agreed with the parent. If it is not appropriate to discuss the situation with the safeguarding lead, eg because a member of staff disclosed concerns that the safeguarding lead was abusing children, I would pass this on to the children's safeguarding department at the relevant Local Authority. I shall make it clear to participants that confidentiality may be broken if the safety or well being of a child is at risk.

Risks to the Researcher

Whilst being observant to potential safeguarding issues, I shall also ensure that I do not put myself at risk of allegations by not being alone with the children, not changing nappies and so on. I have an enhanced DBS check certificate and all settings I visit will be given a copy of this.

Sensitive Topics

Participants may wish to discuss sensitive topics, including being critical of their workplace or policies. To ensure that participants feel that they can discuss any topic they wish, I will offer to conduct interviews in settings or in a neutral location such as a coffee shop.

Potentially Vulnerable Participants

The study will involve observing two-year-olds during their normal daily activities at nursery. These are very young children, who could become upset at the presence of an unfamiliar adult. I will discuss with practitioners if they think it is appropriate for me to be present at the beginning of the year when children are settling into their new settings and respect their wishes. I shall also be very sensitive to the moods of the children, playing if invited to do so, leaving if my presence upsets them and so on.

| **Section 9 Attachments** Please attach the following items to this form, or explain if not attached | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| a. | Information sheets, consent forms and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research *(List attachments below)* | Yes ☒ | No ☐ |

Recruitment letter to nurseries/ schools

Letter to parents re: permission to observe children

Consent form for parents re: consent to observe children

Consent form for staff/parents re: interviews/ observation

Letter to parents re: interviews

General information sheet for parents and staff

| Recruitment information sheet for social media | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | ***If applicable/appropriate:*** | | |
| b. | Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee | | Yes ☐ |
| c. | The proposal ('case for support') for the project | | Yes ☒ |
| d. | Full risk assessment | | Yes ☐ |

## Section 10 Declaration

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge the information in this form is correct and that this is a full description of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of this project.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor. | ☒ | ☐ |
| I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course. | ☒ | ☐ |

**I confirm that to the best of my knowledge:**

The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project.

| | |
|---|---|
| Name | Sharon Vince |
| Date | 20th June 2018 |

**Please submit your completed ethics forms to your supervisor for review.**

## Notes and references

**Professional code of ethics**

You should read and understand relevant ethics guidelines, for example:

British Psychological Society (2009) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*, and (2014) *Code of Human Research Ethics*

or

British Educational Research Association (2011) *Ethical Guidelines*

or

British Sociological Association (2002) *Statement of Ethical Practice*

Please see the respective websites for these or later versions; direct links to the latest versions are available on the Institute of Education http://www.ioe.ac.uk/ethics/.

**Disclosure and Barring Service checks**

If you are planning to carry out research in regulated Education environments such as Schools, or if your research will bring you into contact with children and young people (under the age of 18), you will need to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) CHECK, before you start. The DBS was previously known as the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) ). If you do not already hold a current DBS check, and have not registered with the DBS update service, you will need to obtain one through at IOE. Further information can be found at http://www.ioe.ac.uk/studentInformation/documents/DBS_Guidance_1415.pdf

Ensure that you apply for the DBS check in plenty of time as will take around 4 weeks, though can take longer depending on the circumstances.

**Further references**

The www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk website is very useful for assisting you to think through the ethical issues arising from your project.

Robson, Colin (2011). *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner researchers* (3rd edition). Oxford: Blackwell.

This text has a helpful section on ethical considerations.

Alderson, P. and Morrow, V. (2011) *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook.* London: Sage.

This text has useful suggestions if you are conducting research with children and young people.

Wiles, R. (2013) What are Qualitative Research Ethics? Bloomsbury.

A useful and short text covering areas including informed consent, approaches to research ethics including examples of ethical dilemmas.

## Departmental use

If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, the supervisor **must** refer the application to the Research Ethics and Governance Coordinator (via ioe.researchethics@ucl.ac.uk so that it can be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A departmental research ethics coordinator or representative can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the REC.

*Also see 'when to pass a student ethics review up to the Research Ethics Committee':*

*http://www.ioe.ac.uk/about/policiesProcedures/42253.html*

| | |
|---|---|
| Student name | Sharon Vince |
| Student department | Leadership and Learning |
| Course | MPhil/PhD |
| Project title | Tantrums, Toilet Training, Targets and Tracking: Two-year-olds in English primary schools. |
| **Reviewer 1** | |
| Supervisor/first reviewer name | Guy Roberts-Holmes |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research? | No | |
| Supervisor/first reviewer signature | *Guy Roberts-Holmes* | |
| Date | 21st June 2018. | |
| **Reviewer 2** | | |
| Second reviewer name | Dr Sara Bubb | |
| Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research? | No | |
| Supervisor/second reviewer signature | [redacted] | |
| Date | 27/6/18 | |
| **Decision on behalf of reviews** | | |
| Decision | Approved | ☒ |
| | Approved subject to the following additional measures | ☐ |
| | Not approved for the reasons given below | ☐ |
| | Referred to REC for review | ☐ |
| Points to be noted by other reviewers and in report to REC | | |
| Comments from reviewers for the applicant | | |

***Once approved by both reviewers students should submit the ethics application form to the Centre for Doctoral Education team*** IOE.CDE@ucl.ac.uk.

**Letter to nursery / school staff**

**Title of research project: Two-year-olds in schools and nurseries in England**

**Sharon Vince**

**PhD student**

**Department of Leadership and Learning**

**UCL Institute of Education**

**E-mail s.vince.14@ucl.ac.uk**

Dear _____

I am a PhD student at the Institute of Education, UCL, researching the learning of two-year-olds. I am currently looking for schools and nurseries to take part in my study and you are being invited to participate. Before you agree, it is important that you understand why the research is being carried out and what participating would involve. Please read the following information carefully, and feel free to discuss it with others and myself. Take time to think about whether you would like to take part.

**What is the project's purpose?**

I wish to examine how two-year-olds and their families experience early childhood education in primary schools and in nurseries in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector.

**Why have I been chosen?**

I am writing to you because you currently provide early childhood education for two-year-olds.

**Do I have to take part?**

No. Taking part is entirely voluntary. What's more, if you agree to take part and then change your mind later, that's fine.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

Taking part would involve me visiting your setting at a time and frequency (eg once a week/ fortnight/ month) of your choosing for a year. I would observe the children and staff in the setting and would also ask to interview the staff once a term.

**Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?**

When observing staff and children during their normal daily activities, I would make notes on what I see happening and what people are saying. I would make audio recordings of interviews so that I could write them down later. However, if you do not want me to record you, that's fine. The audio recordings I make will only be heard by me. No-one else will be allowed to listen to the recordings.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

You may feel uncomfortable with a research student observing children and staff in your setting. You may feel that the research takes up too much of your time when working in a nursery is a very busy job.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Some people enjoy talking to another person about their work. Whilst the research may not have immediate benefits for you, it is important as the provision for two-year-olds, particularly in primary schools, is currently an area that has not been researched much.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If you are unhappy with any part of the research, please feel free to come and talk to me in the first instance. If this is not possible or you feel that I have not resolved the issue, please contact my supervisor, Dr Guy Roberts-Holmes, at g.roberts-holmes@ucl.ac.uk. If the issue is still not resolved, please contact the UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee at researchethics@ioe.ac.uk.

**Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

Yes. I will not tell anyone else that you are taking part in the project. However, there are some limits to this that you need to be aware of, and they are discussed below.

**Limits to confidentiality**

Although I will not tell anyone that you are taking part in the research, some people may notice that you are taking part, such as other staff working within your setting. When the research is published, I will not use your real name but your colleagues may be able to guess or work out who you are.

If you say anything that makes me worried that a child is being harmed or at risk of being harmed, I will pass this on to the relevant person, such as the designated child protection person in your setting or directly to social services.

**What will happen to the results of the research project?**

I am aiming to submit my PhD thesis in June 2022. Shortly after it will available to read at http://ethos.bl.uk. Your real name will not be used in the thesis, and no information that could identify you (such as the name of your setting, the Local Authority your setting is in) will be included either. I may use the information from the project in journal articles. Again, your real name and any identifying information will not be used.

**Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been approved by the UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee.

**Contact for further information**

If you have any questions about this project or would like find out more, please contact myself (Sharon Vince) at s.vince.14@ucl.ac.uk.

You may also contact my supervisors, Dr Guy Roberts-Holmes at g.roberts-holmes@ucl.ac.uk and Dr Alice Bradbury at a.bradbury@ucl.ac.uk.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this letter.

Sharon Vince

## Data Protection Privacy Notice

**Notice:**

The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. UCL's Data Protection Officer is Lee Shailer and he can also be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk**.**

Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this notice. The legal basis that would be used to process your personal data will be the provision of your consent. You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this project by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.

Your data will be processed for as long as is necessary for the research project, this is estimated to be until June 2023. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. If you remain unsatisfied, you may wish to contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Contact details, and details of data subject rights, are available on the ICO website at: https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-reform/overview-of-the-gdpr/individuals-rights/

**Letter to parents and carers re: consent to observe children**

**Title of research project: Disadvantaged two-year-olds in schools and nurseries in England**

**Sharon Vince**

**PhD student**

**Department of Leadership and Learning**

**UCL Institute of Education**

**E-mail s.vince.14@ucl.ac.uk**

Dear parents and carers,

My name is Sharon Vince and I am a PhD student researching the learning of two-year-olds. I am also an early years teacher with 13 years' experience.

I am currently carrying out research in your child's school/nursery and I would like to observe children whilst they are at school/nursery. I am seeking your permission to observe your child whilst they are at school/nursery. Before you agree, it is important that you understand why the research is being carried out and what participating would mean for your child. Please read the following information carefully, and feel free to discuss it with others and myself. Take time to think about whether you give permission for your child to take part.

**What is the project's purpose?**

I wish to examine how two-year-olds and their families experience early childhood education in primary schools and in nurseries in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector.

**Why has my child been chosen?**

I am writing to you because your child currently attends the school/nursery where I am carrying out my research.

**Does my child have to take part?**

No. Taking part is entirely voluntary. What's more, if you agree to take part and then change your mind later, that's fine.

**What will happen to my child if s/he takes part?**

I will be observing what your child does as part of their everyday activity at school/nursery. I will make notes about what they say and do. I will not ask your child to take part in any different activity.

**Will my child be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?**

Your child will not be recorded.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of my child taking part?**

Your child may feel unsettled due to a different adult being in their presence. If this happens, I would leave. The research is taking part over a year so hopefully I will become a regular part of the nursery.

**What are the possible benefits of my child taking part?**

Whilst the research may not have immediate benefits for your child, it is important as the provision for two-year-olds, particularly in primary schools, is currently an area that has not been researched much.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If you are unhappy with any part of the research, please feel free to come and talk to me in the first instance. If this is not possible or you feel that I have not resolved the issue, please contact my supervisor, Dr Guy Roberts-Holmes, at g.roberts-holmes@ucl.ac.uk. If the issue is still not resolved, please contact the UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee at researchethics@ioe.ac.uk.

**Will my child taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

Yes. I will not tell anyone else that your child is taking part in the project. However, there are some limits to this that you need to be aware of, and they are discussed below.

**Limits to confidentiality**

Although I will not tell anyone that your child is taking part in the research, some people will know that your child is taking part, such as staff working within you're the nursery. When the research is published, I will not use your child's real name but you and other people, such as nursery staff, may be able to guess or work out who I am referring to.

If your child says anything that makes me worried that they or another child is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed, I will pass this on to someone else, such as the designated child protection person in the nursery or directly to social services.

**What will happen to the results of the research project?**

I am aiming to submit my PhD thesis in June 2022. Shortly after it will available to read at http://ethos.bl.uk. Your child's real name will not be used in the thesis, and no information that could identify your child (such as the name of the nursery, or the local authority that the nursery is in) will be included either. I may use the information from the project in journal articles. Again, your child's real name and any identifying information will not be used.

**Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been approved by the UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee.

**Contact for further information**

If you have any questions about this project or would like find out more, please contact myself (Sharon Vince) at s.vince.14@ucl.ac.uk.

You may also contact my supervisors, Dr Guy Roberts-Holmes at g.roberts-holmes@ucl.ac.uk and Dr Alice Bradbury at a.bradbury@ucl.ac.uk.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this letter.

Sharon Vince

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Your data will be processed for as long as is necessary for the research project, this is estimated to be until June 2023. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. If you remain unsatisfied, you may wish to contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Contact details, and details of data subject rights, are available on the ICO website at: https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-reform/overview-of-the-gdpr/individuals-rights/

Many thanks for taking the time to read this information.

Sharon Vince

**Consent form to be signed by parents re: permission to observe children**

**Tile of project: Two-year-olds in primary schools and nurseries in England.**

**Name of Researcher: Sharon Vince**

**Please initial box**

**I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet.** ☐

**The researcher has explained the above project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.** ☐

**I understand that participation is voluntary and I can change my mind about my child taking part at any time.** ☐

**I understand that the project is confidential and my child's name will not be used.** ☐

**I agree for the information collected during this project to be used within the PhD thesis and journal articles written by Sharon Vince.** ☐

**I give permission for my child to be observed as part of the above project.**

**Name _____ Child's Name _____**

**Signed _____ Date _____**

**Participant number/ pseudonym: _____**

**Consent form to be completed by parents**

**Tile of project: Two-year-olds in primary schools and nurseries in England.**

**Name of Researcher: Sharon Vince**

**Please initial box**

**I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet.** ☐

**The researcher has explained the above project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.** ☐

**I understand that participation is voluntary and I can change my mind about taking part at any time.** ☐

**I understand that the project is confidential and my name will not be used.** ☐

**I agree for the information collected during this project to be used within the PhD thesis and journal articles written by Sharon Vince.** ☐

☐

**I give permission to be interviewed as part of the above project.**

**Name _____**

**Signed _____ Date _____**

**Participant number/ pseudonym _____**

**Consent form for staff**

**Tile of project: Two-year-olds in primary schools and nurseries in England.**

**Name of Researcher: Sharon Vince**

**Please initial box**

**I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet.** ☐

**The researcher has explained the above project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.** ☐

**I understand that participation is voluntary and I can change my mind about taking part at any time.** ☐

**I understand that the project is confidential and my name will not be used.** ☐

**I agree for the information collected during this project to be used within the PhD thesis and journal articles written by Sharon Vince.** ☐

☐

**I give permission to be observed and interviewed as part of the above project.**

**Name _____**

**Signed _____ Date _____**

**Participant number/ pseudonym _____**

**Information sheet for parents re: interviews**

Dear parents and carers,

In case we have not already met, my name is Sharon Vince and I am a PhD student and early years teacher, I am currently visiting _____ school/ nursery once a fortnight/ month/ half term to carry out research into the learning of two-year-olds.

I am currently carrying out research in your child's school/nursery and I would like to talk to parents and carers about how you chose the nursery/school and your experiences of your child attending school/nursery. Before you decide whether you would like to talk to me about this, it is important that you understand why the research is being carried out and what participating would mean for you. Please read the following information carefully, and feel free to discuss it with others and myself. Take time to think about whether you would like to take part.

**What is the project's purpose?**

I wish to examine how two-year-olds and their families experience early childhood education in primary schools and in nurseries in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector.

**Why have I been chosen?**

I am writing to you because your child currently attends the school/nursery where I am carrying out my research and I would like to interview parents and carers.

**Do I have to take part?**

No. Taking part is entirely voluntary. What's more, if you agree to take part and then change your mind later, that's fine.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

I would like to talk to you for about 45-60 minutes, either at school/nursery, in your home or at another place such as a coffee shop, wherever you feel most comfortable. I will ask you some questions about how you chose the school/nursery and how you and your child are finding it.

**Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?**

I would like to record the interview so that I can write it up later. Recording the interview means that I can write exactly what you said, rather than trying to remember it later. It also means that I can listen to what you are saying properly when we are talking, However, if you would prefer for me not to record the interview, that's fine. I will be the only person who listens to the recording and it will be destroyed once I have written it up.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

You may feel uncomfortable answering some questions. If this happens, please feel free to state that you do not want to answer the question, or tell me that you wish to end the interview.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Whilst the research may not have immediate benefits for your child, it is important as the provision for two-year-olds, particularly in primary schools, is currently an area that has not been researched much.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If you are unhappy with any part of the research, please feel free to come and talk to me in the first instance. If this is not possible or you feel that I have not resolved the issue, please contact my supervisor, Dr Guy Roberts-Holmes, at g.roberts-holmes@ucl.ac.uk. If the issue is still not resolved, please contact the UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee at researchethics@ioe.ac.uk.

**Will me taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

Yes. I will not tell anyone else that you are taking part in the project. However, there are some limits to this that you need to be aware of, and they are discussed below.

**Limits to confidentiality**

Although I will not tell anyone that you are taking part in the research, some people may know that you are taking part, such as staff working within your child's nursery if you choose to talk to me at the school/nursery. Talking to me outside of the school/nursery means that this can be avoided. When the research is published, I will not use your real name but if anyone knows you took part they could guess or work out who you are.

If you say anything that makes me worried that a child is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed, I will pass this on to someone else, such as the designated child protection person in the nursery or directly to social services.

**What will happen to the results of the research project?**

I am aiming to submit my PhD thesis in June 2022. Shortly after it will available to read at http://ethos.bl.uk. Your real name will not be used in the thesis, and no information that could identify you (such as the name of the nursery, or the local authority that the nursery is in) will be included either. I may use the information from the project in journal articles. Again, your real name and any identifying information will not be used.

**Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been approved by the UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee.

**Contact for further information**

If you have any questions about this project or would like find out more, please contact myself (Sharon Vince) at s.vince.14@ucl.ac.uk.

You may also contact my supervisors, Dr Guy Roberts-Holmes at g.roberts-holmes@ucl.ac.uk and Dr Alice Bradbury at a.bradbury@ucl.ac.uk.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this letter.

Sharon Vince

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Many thanks for taking the time to read this information.

Sharon Vince

**Social media recruitment poster**

# Do you work with two-year-olds in a primary school?

If so, could you take part in my research?

I am a PhD student and early years teacher looking at how children who start school at the age of 2 progress compared to their peers who begin school at a later age.

The research would involve class-based observation at a time and frequency of your choice. The study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee at UCL.

If you are interested and would like to find out more please email me at s.vince.14@ucl.ac.uk

## Appendix 2 – Information Sheet

**Title of research project: The funded 30 hours policy in England.**

**Sharon Vince**

**PhD student**

**Department of Leadership and Learning**

**UCL Institute of Education**

**E-mail s.vince.14@ucl.ac.uk**

Dear ,

I am a PhD researcher at the Institute of Education, UCL, researching how children, their families and staff experience the 15- and 30-hours funding policies. Before you agree to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being carried out and what participating would involve. Please read the following information carefully, and feel free to discuss it with others and myself. Take time to think about whether you would like to take part.

**What is the project's purpose?**

I wish to examine how three- and four-year-olds benefit from the 15 and 30 funded hours policies. I am particularly interested in how settings find providing 15 hours of early education for some children and 30 hours for others, and how this impacts on the children, families, staff and the setting as a whole.

**Why have I been chosen?**

I am writing to you because you have expressed an interest in the research and currently provide early education for three- and four-year-olds.

**Do I have to take part?**

No. Taking part is entirely voluntary. What's more, if you agree to take part and then change your mind later, that's fine. If you take part in an interview and later decide that you do not want me to use the information you have shared in the research, please e-mail me within four weeks of the interview to tell me that you have changed your mind.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

We will talk for around 30 minutes, on the phone or via video conferencing software such as Skype or Microsoft Teams, depending on which you would prefer. I will ask you a range of questions and may follow up what you say with further questions.

**Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?**

The interview would be recorded using the facility within Microsoft Teams and Skype. Telephone calls will be recorded using the Call Recorder app. Recording interviews allows me to write them down later. However, if you do not want me to record you, that's fine. The recordings I make will only be heard by me. No-one else will be allowed to listen to the recordings. Recordings will be stored on my One Drive cloud storage only. Recordings of interviews will be deleted once the interview has been transcribed, I have sent you the transcription and you have told me that you are happy the transcription is accurate.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

You may feel that the research takes up too much of your time when working in a nursery or school is a very busy job. You may currently be feeling stressed or anxious due to the COVID-19 pandemic. You may worry that people may read the research and identify what you said.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Some people enjoy talking to another person about their work. Some enjoys sharing their views on the 30 and 15 hours funding policies and having someone listen to what they think. Whilst the research may not have immediate benefits for you, it is important as the impact that funding provision for three- and four-year-olds has had is currently an area that has not been researched much.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If you are unhappy with any part of the research, please feel free talk to me in the first instance. If this is not possible or you feel that I have not resolved the issue, please contact my supervisor, Dr Guy Roberts-Holmes, at g.roberts-holmes@ucl.ac.uk. If the issue is still not resolved, please contact the UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee at researchethics@ioe.ac.uk.

**Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

Yes. I will not tell anyone else that you are taking part in the project. Your real name will not be used and you will be given another name in the report (you may choose this name). However, there are some limits to this that you need to be aware of, and they are discussed below.

**Limits to confidentiality**

Although I will not tell anyone that you are taking part in the research, some people may notice that you are taking part, such as other staff working within your setting, or a member of your family if you are taking part by video from home. When the research is published, I will not use your real name but your colleagues or family may be able to guess or work out who you are. To avoid others knowing that you are taking part in the research, please try to find a quiet, private space when taking part in the interview.

If you say anything that makes me worried that a child is being harmed or at risk of being harmed, I will pass this on to the relevant person, such as the designated child protection person in your setting or directly to social services.

**What will happen to the results of the research project?**

I am aiming to submit my PhD thesis in June 2022. Shortly after it will available to read at http://ethos.bl.uk. Your real name will not be used in the thesis, and no information that could identify you (such as the name of your setting or the Local Authority your setting is in) will be included either. I may use the information from the project in journal articles. Again, your real name and any identifying information will not be used.

**Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been approved by the UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee.

**Contact for further information**

If you have any questions about this project or would like find out more, please contact myself (Sharon Vince) at s.vince.14@ucl.ac.uk.

You may also contact my supervisors, Dr Guy Roberts-Holmes at g.roberts-holmes@ucl.ac.uk and Dr Alice Bradbury at a.bradbury@ucl.ac.uk.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this letter.

Sharon Vince

**Data Protection Privacy Notice**

The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. UCL's Data Protection Officer is Lee Shailer and he can also be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk**.**

Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this notice. The legal basis that would be used to process your personal data will be the provision of your consent. You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this project by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.

Your data will be processed for as long as is necessary for the research project, this is estimated to be until June 2023. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. If you remain unsatisfied, you may wish to contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Contact details, and details of data subject rights, are available on the ICO website at: https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-reform/overview-of-the-gdpr/individuals-rights/

## Appendix 3 – Consent Form

**CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS**

**Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and asked any questions that you would like answered.**

**Title of Study:** The funded 30 hours policy in England.

**Department:** Department of Leadership and Learning

**Name and Contact Details of the Researcher:** Sharon Vince (s.vince.14@ucl.ac.uk)

**Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher:** Dr. Guy Roberts-Holmes (g.roberts-holmes@ucl.ac.uk)

**Name and Contact Details of the UCL Data Protection Officer:** Spencer Crouch (data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

**This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee:** Project ID number Z6364106 2018 05 56

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

**I confirm that I understand that by initialling each box below I am consenting to this element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that boxes that are not initialled means that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element that I may be deemed ineligible for the study.**

| | | Initial Box |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | *I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had the chance to think about the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction and I would like to take part in an interview. | |
| 2. | *I understand that the interview may take place by telephone, e-mail or using Skype or Microsoft Teams, and that I may select which of these to use. | |
| 3. | *I understand that I will be able to change my mind up to 4 weeks following the interview. If I change my mind within 4 weeks after the interview, the information given during the interview will not be used in the study. I understand that the information I have shared will be deleted if I change my mind. | |
| 4. | *I consent to my personal information being used in the way that has been explained to me. My real name will not be used and a different name will be given instead. I understand that such information will be kept in line with data protection laws. | |
| 5. | *I understand that my personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified. I understand that, in the written report, my name will not be used and I will be given a different name. The information about me will be kept alongside this different name so that my information is more secure. I understand that the information from this study will be kept on a data protection compliant website (the UCL research student log). It will not be possible to identify me in any publications. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 6. | *I understand that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the University for monitoring and audit purposes. | |
| 7. | *I understand the potential risks of taking part and the support that will be available to me should I become upset during the course of the interview. I understand that I can stop the interview at any time and/or refuse to answer questions. | |
| 8. | *I understand the possible benefits to taking part. Sometimes, taking part in research can help practitioners to reflect on their practice. The research may be useful to practitioners and families with young children in the future. | |
| 9. | *I understand that the data will not be made available to any commercial organisations but is solely the responsibility of the researcher undertaking this study. | |
| 10. | *I understand that I will not be paid for this study and will not be paid for any use of the information in the future. | |
| 11. | *I agree that my information, given alongside a false name, may be used by others for future research. No one will be able to identify you when this information is shared. | |
| 12. | *I understand that the information I have submitted will be published as a report and I wish to receive a copy of it. Yes/No | |
| 13. | *I consent to my interview being recorded and understand that the recordings will be stored alongside a false name, using password-protected software and will be used for training, quality control, audit and specific research purposes. I understand that the recording will be deleted once it has been transcribed by the researcher and I have agreed that the transcription represents what was discussed during the interview.<br><br>If you do not want your interview recorded you can still take part in the study. | |
| 14. | *I am aware of who I should contact if I wish to lodge a complaint (the research student's supervisor, Dr. Guy Roberts-Holmes, or Spencer Crouch. See contact details on the front of this sheet). | |
| 15. | *I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. | |

_____ _____ _____

Name of participant Date Signature

E-mail address (to send completed report to after June 2022) _____

_____ _____ _____

Researcher Date Signature

Participant number (to be completed by researcher) _____

# Appendix 4 – Interview Schedule

# Interview Protocol

**Remember to probe if needed eg 'Could you give me an example of a time when…'**

Tell me about your role and your setting

Include: How long have you worked in ECEC for? (added 30/1/20)

What are your qualifications for your role? (added 30/1/20)

Ofsted grading/ whether setting is full (added 12/3/20)

How has funding impacted on your settings?

When did you introduce the 30 hours? (added 21/1/20)

Why did you introduce the 30 hours? (added 21/1/20)

Include- do you charge any consumables fees?

Has it impacted on your staffing? E.g. Who you employ, how many staff you can employ?

How has funding impacted on your relationship with other local settings? Is there more competition?

How has the 30 hour policy impacted on the finances of the setting? (added 21/1/20)

Management of the day

How do you structure your day to manage some children attending for 15 hours and some for 30?

Do you ever feel that the children only attending for 15 hours miss out?

Do the children receiving only the 15 hours of funded early education stay for lunch? If no, how does that make you feel?

How has funding impacted on the children and families?

Include –

Financial – eg have any children gone to other settings that don't have top up fees?

Have any children left the setting with the explicit reason the family could no longer afford it?

Have children changed attendance from FT to PT because the code was not renewed? (added 21/1/20)

Have any children who received the funded hours as a 2 year old left due to top up fees for 3 yr olds (if relevant).

Are there differences in the kind of support you have to provide for families between those receiving the 15 hours and those receiving 30?

Do parents ever talk to you about why some children are entitled to 15 hours of funded early education whilst others receive 30?

Children's development

Do you track children's progress? What do you use to do that?

Do you see differences between children entitled to 15 hours and those entitled to 30 hours when they start?

How does the difference in the hours children attend impact on their development, e.g. Do those only attending for 15 hours make as much progress?

Are there more interventions for children who are entitled to the 15 hours?