



The
University
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**Borderland Narratives: Agency and Activism of
Early Childhood Educators**

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Abbreviations used in this thesis

BERA: British Educational Research Association

CPD: Continuing Professional Development

CWDC: Children's Workforce Development Council

DCSF: Department for Children, Schools and Families

DEY: Defending Early Years

DfE: Department for Education

ECE: Early Childhood Education

ECSDN: Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network

EYA: Early Years Alliance (formerly the Pre School Learning Alliance)

EYFS: Early Years Foundation Stage

EYFSP: Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

EYP: Early Years Professional

EYITT: Early Years Initial Teacher Training

EYT: Early Years Teacher

NDNA: National Day Nurseries Association

NEU: National Education Union

NNEB: Nursery Nurse Examining Board

NSDN: National Society for Day Nurseries

NQT: Newly Qualified Teacher

NSA: Nursery Schools Association

NUT: National Union of Teachers

NVQ: National Vocational Qualification

PPA: Pre School Playgroups Association

PVI: Private, Voluntary and Independent (provision)

QTS: Qualified Teacher Status

RECE: Reconceptualising Early Childhood Education

SEND: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SJIEC: Social Justice in Early Childhood

TACTYC: Training, Advancement and Co-operation in Teaching Young Children

TDA: Training and Development Agency

TUC: Trades Union Congress

Abstract

The professional identity construction of early childhood educators has been identified as a 'site of struggle'. Extant research investigates this struggle through analyses of structural and agentic discourses. This thesis explores the landscape in between these discourses and seeks to better understand and conceptualise the agency and activism of educators in this third space of negotiation and contestation.

Combining critical, third space (Bhabha) and border (Anzaldua) theories, this interpretive study is a critical policy analysis and narrative inquiry in the context of early childhood education in England. Critical Discourse Analysis of workforce policy (2006-17) is followed by empirical data analysis from 16 early educators' professional life story interviews and an online focus group of 14 early educators. Novel conceptualisation and analysis of borderland narratives illustrate how early educator agency and activism are enacted in interstitial spaces.

Findings show that educators are discursively positioned through workforce policy in multiple, competing and shifting ways. Institutionally shaped 'ideal' professional subjectivities are bordered by qualifications criteria, occupational standards and by intersections with broader policy reforms. Empirical data reveal educator agency manifests in numerous forms, including individual and collective activism. Whilst this activism appears constrained by policy demands it is also enabled by an educator's critical awareness, professional confidence, and self-efficacy. Different forms of activism and resistance emerged from the study. Such resistance is not always large-scale, collective or mobilised but is expressed in atomised contexts through a dispersed network of actors. Individual responses include 'micro resistances' which are often local, quiet and invisible but multiple.

Privileging participants' stories, the study offers insights into c/overt resistances revealing educators' critical agency and their complex, nuanced and subversive responses to discursive policy manoeuvres. The research contributes to an understanding of identity construction of early educators and highlights the merits of broader, deeper engagement of educators in workforce reform.

Keywords: Early childhood education, agency, activism, resistance, professional identities, policy critique, narrative

So forget, indeed, your revolutions, your turning points, your grand metamorphoses of history. Consider, instead, the slow and arduous process, the interminable and ambiguous process – the process of human siltation – of land reclamation.¹ (Swift 1983, p.10)

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Introduction

This study seeks to understand how the professional identities of early childhood educators are formed, the constraints and/or enablements on their agency and on their actions, which can be described as resistance and/or activism. Through a critical analysis of workforce reform policy texts and analysis of data from an online focus group and sixteen life story interviews, I explore how the professional identities of early childhood educators are discursively constructed in policy and how these educators act back on this.

Background

Early childhood education (ECE) has been the subject of substantial attention both nationally and internationally during the past thirty years. Unprecedented investment, significant policy directives and extensive research have resulted in far-reaching developments in practice and provision of early childhood education. With this newfound political interest, coupled with substantial financial resources (in some countries), ECE has also witnessed intensified policy interventions from a number of global institutions. Indeed, national ECE policies have increasingly been influenced and shaped by supranational organisations (Mahon 2010). Examples include Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2015), The World Bank (2018) and the International Monetary Fund (Hillman and Jenkner 2004) which, amongst other institutions, have developed policy briefings often based on international comparative data. Such policy interventions have initiated and guided international discourses including those on understandings of quality provision, standards, efficiency, school readiness and accountability (Ang 2014). Following an extensive period of neglect, such organisations have arguably colonised ECE internationally in policy terms and have explicitly promoted neoliberal discourses driven by predominantly economic objectives (Penn 2002; Moss 2014; 2019).

Against this global backdrop, the impact of these powerful institutions has influenced policy trajectories at a national level. In England, over the past thirty years, motivations and priorities for political involvement in ECE have evolved, and across and within different political administrations prevailing political agendas have steered these

trajectories. Since the late 1990s, policy intensification has manifested as significant (and continual) evolution in a number of ECE domains: the acceleration of marketisation of services (Stephen et al 2011; Penn 2012; Lloyd and Penn 2012; Moss 2015), changes to curricula (Faulkner and Coates 2013; Wood and Hedges 2016), piecemeal workforce reform (Moss 2014; Osgood et al 2017), a school readiness agenda (McDowall Clark 2016), increased summative assessment (Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury 2016) and heightened accountability demands on those working in ECE (Spencer-Woodley 2014; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury 2016).

Following the critical juncture of the first Childcare Act (Great Britain 2006) in England, a raft of policies including those on workforce reform have reshaped, and continue to reshape, the early childhood education landscape. Multiple changes to qualifications criteria, competency frameworks and occupational standards over this period have created and inculcated numerous power discourses which, I contend, have framed early childhood educators in multiple, conflicting and shifting ways. It is these discourses, which, I argue, seek to reshape the professional identities of early childhood educators.

Alongside such powerful discourses, research has considered the agency of educators (Osgood 2012; Duhn et al 2016) and their efficacy and actions in shaping their own professional identities. These tensions between structural positionings and expressions of agency represents a contested space in need of further interrogation. Described by Ball (2016) as a 'site of struggle', I consider this to be fertile ground in which to explore the framing and policy informed identity construction of early childhood educators, and in turn, their responses to these.

Economic Austerity

This study is located in an era of austerity (2007-2019) (Institute for Fiscal Studies 2019). The challenges of offering early childhood education in a neoliberal context have been exacerbated by recent economic conditions and political developments in the UK and globally. Most notably this has been the case following the financial crisis of 2007/8, the subsequent recession, and the election of a Conservative-Liberal Democrat administration in 2010 focussed on deficit reduction. Following a decade (1997-2007) dominated by Labour governments' investment in infrastructure services for young children and their families, economic policy changes resulted in significant cuts to local government, welfare, and social services, including early childhood services post-2010

(Lloyd 2015). Such developments escalated following the election of majority Conservative governments in 2015, and again in 2017 and 2019, during which this fiscal retrenchment continued. As I write this, the UK has endured several years of economic downturn, and associated austerity policies. The detrimental impact of these decisions on children's services is well documented (Torjesen 2016; Lewis and West 2017; Action for Children 2018) and forms an important, influential, and sobering backdrop to this study. In particular, the impact of investment followed by disinvestment between 2007-2019 is noted in early childhood workforce policy (Education Policy Institute 2020).

Justification

The justifications for this thesis are multiple. Firstly, my personal and professional interest in the topic is a motivation for the study. As an early childhood educator of twenty years, I have experienced the impact of many policy developments highlighted above. I am keen to explore how other early childhood educators experience and respond to these policies.

I also aim to contribute to a field of study which has evolved and grown substantially over the last thirty years. In particular, studies of professional identities of early educators have developed significantly in that time. Seminal work by Osgood (2012) underscored how nursery workers have been discursively constructed (and objectified) through policy, thereby creating instrumental versions of professional identities. Internationally, successive work (including Payler and Locke 2013; Gibson 2013; Moloney 2015; Arndt et al 2018) builds on this research and considers, from different perspectives and in a range of contexts, the dominance of discourses in shaping understandings of professionalism and professional identities. However, despite a growing body of literature exploring these policy imperatives and their impacts, there has been scant attention paid to the acts of resistance and activism of educators in response to this. Whilst there has been some exploration of resistance movements (Moss 2019) little is known from empirical studies about how resistance and activism are enacted individually and collectively in the professional lives of early years educators. This study seeks to address this gap in understanding and offers a contribution to knowledge on this subject.

Whilst this study is not explicitly intended as advocacy in itself, nor shaped by participatory action research, it is, nonetheless, a form of speaking truth to power. By 'turn[ing] up the volume' (Clough and Nutbrown 2012) on practitioners' voices and

uncovering counter narratives, the work has an unashamedly political imperative. In its own way, this thesis is a form of 'going beyond' the incursion of policy imperatives and highlights the ways in which early childhood educators respond to policy including their resistance and engagement in forms of activism. In doing so, the research itself has activist intentions by drawing attention to alternative narratives and subversive actions. Yet this position is not without complexity and challenges and I continue to navigate a scholar-activist terrain living with the tensions between political and academic vocations (Weber and Dreijmanis 2008). I have approached the study mindful of slippage into naiveté and romanticism about the impact of such work and I reflect further on the scholar-activist orientation in the thesis conclusion.

Contribution/Significance

The contribution to the field is to illuminate the agency of early childhood educators and thereby to better understand how resistance and activism play out in multiple contexts. This study contributes to a small body of work on resistance studies in early childhood education and offers implications for both research and practice.

In terms of the field of research, the contribution of this study responds to calls to hear the voices of practitioners (Osgood 2012). It builds on an established body of work on the professional identities of early childhood educators (examined in the literature review), addresses a gap in activism studies and contributes to the field by:

- 1) Applying critical theory, third space theory and border theory to the topic offering new perspectives on professional identity formation in the context of ongoing policy interventions.
- 2) Developing Ball's (2016) concept of 'the site of struggle' by further interrogating what happens within this site in the form of educator agency, resistance and activism.
- 3) Building a new theoretical and conceptual framework to look at the nature of professional identity formation as a contested space and to understand features of educator agency therein.

The research also has significance to practice. Attending to this topic is significant because, I believe better understanding will provide insights into the professional challenges of educators and their responses. Through identifying and communicating examples of hitherto underexplored resistance and activism in early childhood education, the research shines a light on a sector, which I suggest is underfunded, and

often undervalued. Through naming and platforming activism work in early childhood education, it is hoped that educators might become aware of colleagues who have resisted dominant policy discourses, articulated alternative narratives and, in turn, further consider their own agency and resistance/activism. Notably, the online focus group and interviews included expressions of agency, community and solidarity but also, at times, a lack of opportunities for expression of these. This research indicates there is further work to be undertaken in understanding contexts in which individuals collectivise.

Research questions

My interest in this topic has also evolved from a perception of a dissonance between centralised policy intensification and lived experiences in early years settings. In particular I am keen to explore the interdependence of the institutional and the relational, from the perspectives of those who teach. This has led to an awareness of what I perceive as the interrelationships (but also the distance) between the macro level of policy and the micro level of practice. Thus, the study is firmly rooted in the ongoing sociological debate about the primacy, or otherwise, of agency and structure and seeks a third space/hybrid perspective to understand the experiences of early educators. To this end I seek to analyse both policy texts and practitioners' stories in addressing the questions:

- How are early childhood educators positioned in ECE policies and how do they respond to these positionings?
- What forms of individual and organisational policy activism exist?
- Which conditions/values enable or constrain activism and how do practitioners perceive their role in this?
- Do practitioners perpetuate or challenge prevailing thinking and how do they imagine alternatives in policy development?

Approaching these questions through both policy analysis and empirical data analysis seeks to address the current gap in understanding about how early childhood educators' resistance and activism manifests.

Approach

I approach these research questions through an interpretive paradigm. The study is founded on a critical constructivist ontology in terms of how I understand the world,

interpretivist epistemology to understand the ways that people make meanings of their lives and experiences and critical theory and narrative inquiry as lenses to view and inform the research methods and analysis (See Chapter Four Methodology).

Importantly, this research occupies in-between spaces, liminal spaces theoretically, conceptually, and methodologically. Theoretically the study resides in a space in which reconceptualised critical theory (Kincheloe and McLaren 2011), third space theory (Bhabha 2006) and border theory (Anzaldua 1999) meet, forging new perspectives on the research topic. Thus, whilst drawing on critical perspectives about power and discourse, the study also complicates this and additionally works with border and third space theories in recognising educator agency.

In conceptual terms, I consider the tensions of agency and structure on professional identity construction and I interrogate the space in between, identified as a 'site of struggle'. This conceptual framework is built up over the span of the thesis, informed by policy and empirical data analysis with the aim of offering new insights and thus an original theoretical and conceptual contribution. Methodologically, I undertook this research, working in the 'bumping place' (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) of critical theory and narrative inquiry. The challenges and affordances of this are further explored in Chapter Four.

Empirical data collection was undertaken through a single online focus group and life story interviews (n=16) with early childhood educators from across England. In terms of analysing the data, I deployed the seldom-used critical narrative analysis, combining the critical element of critical discourse analysis with an approach to the narrative form. In so doing, the study offers an original contribution to knowledge by bringing anew third space and border theories to the study of professional identities in early childhood education and by analysing and discussing the features of activism of early educators in England. Further, the insights which were generated offer new knowledge about features of agency and what enables and constrains educator activism in a twenty first century context.

Positionality

In introducing the study, I consider it important that as researcher I reflect on my positionality. As an early childhood educator, I have experienced first-hand the multiple positive and negative impacts of numerous policies on my practice and that of others. I have worked in both practice and policy roles with schools and early years settings since 1998 and my experience spans local and national work in a range of contexts. During this time, this diverse range of opportunities has informed my interest in policy evolution and its influences on practice.

My perspectives, and therefore researcher subjectivity, are influenced by personal interest and professional experiences. I also reflect on my positionality of being a man working in a highly gendered sector, early childhood education being a predominantly female work world. The various roles I have undertaken have largely been alongside women. Indeed, over twenty years in numerous early childhood environments, I have only worked in one setting in which there was (briefly) one other male early childhood educator. Currently approximately 2-3% of the ECE workforce in England are men (Department for Education 2014; Fatherhood Institute 2015). Against this backdrop I acknowledge that ultimately, I approach this research endeavour, as a man, mindful of what we might all learn by listening to these (predominantly) women's stories who advocate and are activists on behalf of young children. In addition, I offer a personal and professional history by way of locating myself as researcher in the study.

A frame story

We should tell stories; not only the life stories of various people but also the story of such and such a pattern of social relations, the story of a culture, of an institution of a social group; and also, our *own* story as research workers. (Bertaux, 1981, p.45) [emphasis in the original]

This introductory narrative aims to make visible my own positionality in the research project. It is not intended to be exhaustive – nor is it a biography, but it comprises chosen details pieced together in narrative form which reflect 'the importance of self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one's perspective.' (Patton, 2002, p.64)

I offer this personal narrative or positionality statement for a number of reasons. Firstly, I recognise and seek to make explicit my subjectivity and indeed my partisanship on

issues which shaped the research endeavour, foregrounding transparency and reflexivity in my decision making. Secondly, in keeping with critical constructivism, the recognition of partisanship also seeks to locate me as researcher-as-instrument within the study (Stewart 2010) and contextualises my professional knowledges in relation to the field. A third reason for the narrative is that it offers a mandate for my research. Reflecting on personal history, values and professional contexts enables me to share the influences, impetus and warrant for the study. In doing so, I also aim to convey both my philosophical position and a number of fundamental assumptions. Fourthly, and importantly for this narrative inquiry, this section acknowledges the power of stories to illuminate social reality, the nature of knowledge and human agency (Sikes 2004). Finally, the narrative acts as a frame story² for other narratives in the study. It is only fair and ethically responsible that in asking participants to share their stories, that as researcher, I also share mine.

My story

I come from a family who care about fairness and issues of social justice. My mother has a background in the voluntary pre-school movement of the 1970s and 80s and was actively involved in both early education and community development. She took to the stand at conferences of the (then) Pre School Playgroups Association (PPA) and joined an active group of (largely) women, in communities across the country, who were engaged in grass roots advocacy work for young children. She led the preschool I attended and has worked for forty years in early childhood centres. She has never been afraid to speak out on matters of belief. Amongst her influences were her father who was a shop steward for a local union branch. He was a vocal advocate for workers in an area and industry witnessing massive decline in the second half of the twentieth century.

My own father was a local authority manager who committed his working life to public service: a quiet, principled man who valued local democracy and held a strong belief in the power of subsidiarity. I am proud of his achievements and the respect he garnered from his colleagues. It is against this family background that I have reflected on growing up in a culture of questioning; one of a respect for democracy but also one of an unwillingness to accept abuses of power and a belief in speaking out on injustice

² I understand a frame story (also known as a frame tale or frame narrative) as an initial or introductory narrative. Such a frame story serves the purpose of setting the scene either for a second narrative or for a collection of shorter stories.

and inequity. I consider I was raised in a spirit of defiance, but also one of hope and potential.

In addition to these memories, I also look back on influences of social class in my youth and early adult life. As complex and contentious as the issue of class structure remains, I reflect on memories of feeling 'in-between' social classes. I felt that I inhabited an uncertain place between what I perceived as traditional working class and traditional middle class conventions. This was evident in my awareness of different values, attitudes and priorities between extended family members and peers, particularly during my adolescence. This sense of in-betweenness has a pertinence to this study which will be further explored in the theoretical and conceptual frameworks chapter.

On reflection, I believe that whilst I benefitted from a supportive family who encouraged both personal and academic development, this nurturing took place within a wider context of an economically deprived town. Living in this area during my school years, I perceived that education was seldom valued. Very few of my peers progressed to University. These experiences in the 1980s were set against the backdrop of my hometown experiencing industrial decline, resulting impoverishment and consequential social issues. During this time, I became acutely aware of the impact of policies and wider political ideology of a Conservative government.

Following an undergraduate degree, my professional life in early childhood education in England has been diverse. Entering the profession at a watershed time (1998) I have since had the privilege to work with many children, families, and professionals at a local, regional and national level across the public, private and voluntary sectors in the field. These roles have been formative in my understandings of the traditions, the diversity, and the complexity of the early years sector. In the intervening twenty years, I have witnessed significant policy advance followed by neglect, unprecedented investment and then disinvestment and what I believe to be ideological shifts in how children, early childhood education and the ECE workforce are framed. The political attention which has been paid to ECE has been intermittent in nature and I have experienced what Nagasawa (2019) calls 'an old fight' for recognition and resources. Through various roles I have also been offered many opportunities to respond to policy change and also engage with the responses of others.

However, it is only with the benefit of some hindsight that I now reflect on the formative influence of these experiences and in particular the way in which socio-cultural, economic and geographical factors combine to shape one's opportunities and agency

(or not), as well as one's sense of agency. It is these many, rich experiences which bring me to this point in time and have shaped this study of agency and activism in early childhood education.

Reflection

A turning point?

Some years ago, I was the Deputy head of a small Montessori nursery and primary school and the assessment lead for the centre. During an Ofsted visit I was asked to provide the inspector with cohort data (in the form of formative progress tracking) on the children by 'characteristic' (i.e. gender, children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), so called 'vulnerable' groups.) As a Montessorian committed to supporting the unique learning journeys of individual children I was unable to provide the requested cohort data. The school did not record children's progress or attainment in this way. The episode played a part in the centre being downgraded from 'Outstanding' to 'Good' in Ofsted terms.

Whilst I was in no doubt about the value and importance of the centre's ethos, the commitment of its team, and the children's enjoyment and achievements, this incident had a profound effect on me long after the inspectors had left. My inability to reconcile the school's pedagogical philosophy and my personal values with an instrumental and punitive inspection regime which prioritised data, contributed to a decision to walk away.

This action has undoubtedly influenced my perspective on the current regulatory regime and the pervasive accountability climate which schools and early years settings experience. This tension between what I now see as my agentic positioning as an early educator and the institutional discourse of accountability to regulators through a reductive data set, has provoked my interest in the ways in which early educators are positioned and position themselves within, between and beyond such discourses. Informed by my own experiences, but mindful not to seek 'collusion' with participants, I was keen to understand how other early childhood educators consider they are framed by policy and how they, in turn, frame their responses to policy.

Key Concepts

In addition to the aforementioned agency/structure debate which informs this study, other key concepts of professional identities and activism, are key to this research.

In keeping with a social/critical constructivist onto-epistemology, I understand the concept of professional identities as being 'multi-faceted' (Alsup 2006), as 'socially and culturally' shaped (Swennen, Volman, and van Essen, 2008) and as continually (re)constructed in multiple contexts. Thus, rather than fixed or static, I understand professional identities as complex, contingent and evolving in relation with others.

The study considers multiple theorisations and conceptualisations of resistance and activism including social movement theories and studies of individual activism/resistance. Whilst definitions and theories of activism vary, I begin by working on the broad understanding of activism as:

...active participation or engagement in a sphere of activity; (Oxford English Dictionary)

Similarly, the notion of resistance is much debated, including whether resistance enacted is conservative or radical and whether it is necessarily co-ordinated or not. For the purposes of this thesis I work with a perspective by Lilja and Vinthagen (2018):

...resistance might be performed by one (or a few) individuals or appear as an unorganized resistance practice that is performed by many actors in scattered places. In the latter case, dispersed resistance can have a huge impact, and change societies, communities, nations or even whole regions. (p.212)

These key concepts: agency, activism, resistance and professional identities form the structure of the literature review.

Key Terms

This research is located in England in the first quarter of the twenty first century and refers to early childhood workforce policy in England. This workforce is comprised of numerous professional roles in a range of schools and settings with differing governance arrangements and working conditions. It is a complex workforce and is understood as those providing care and education for children from birth to five (Hevey 2017). The diversity of provision is discussed later. In addition, a glossary of acronyms is included on page 10.

Given the multiplicity of professional roles and titles in the sector, and in order to adopt an inclusive term, I have chosen 'early childhood educator' to refer to all professionals

working in ECE. Where appropriate and relevant to differentiate between professional roles, specific job titles are used.

Parameters

Whilst this thesis aims to explore the agency and activism of early educators, including factors which enable and/or constrain these actions, it is necessarily limited in its scope and tentative in its conclusions. Several previous studies on professional identities of early years educators have adopted a poststructuralist feminist perspectives (Osgood 2012; Gibson 2013; Kamenarac 2019) whereas others deploy hermeneutics (Robson 2015) or posthuman theory (Fairchild 2015). Whilst acknowledging the importance and validity of these theoretical approaches, this study offers an alternative lens, combining critical theory, third space and border theories. This is further explored and justified in the methodology chapter.

This thesis does not attempt a typology of activism and nor does it seek a definitive mapping of individual and collective action. This small-scale study does not seek to generalise from this research, nor to create essentialist or normalizing categories around the agency and activism of participants. Rather, I explore the lived experiences of early childhood educators in a particular place at a specific point in time, their responses to workforce reform policy and any acts of resistance to or activism in reaction to these conditions.

Organisation of thesis

Following this introductory chapter, the second chapter offers a contextualisation of existing literature, exploring previous studies of agency and activism and mapping the discursive landscape of professional identities analysed in early childhood education research.

In Chapter Three, I explore conceptual and theoretical frameworks which have guided the study, detailing the lenses through which the research is considered.

A detailed methodology forms Chapter Four and explicates the rationale for adopting an interpretive paradigm and both critical theory and narrative inquiry approaches. This chapter also explains methodological decision-making, data collection methods and ethical implications of the study.

Data analysis and discussion are detailed across Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight. Chapter Five is a critical discourse analysis of workforce policy texts, in which I analyse and interpret discourses within chosen texts. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight detail analysis of discourses from empirical data gathered through an online focus group and interviews and discussed in light of conceptual framework and prior policy analysis.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis with a summary and evaluation of the study. Drawing on earlier analysis and discussion, I offer insights and explore both limitations of the study and possible future directions for the research topic. Additionally, I consider implications for policy and practice.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Introduction

In order to locate the thesis within the field of research, I present a review of existing literature. In doing so, I also address the aims of the research, underscore the rationale for the study and offer a context for the data analysis and discussion of findings.

The literature review is divided into three sections: namely, a presentation of extant research on activism, agency, and professional identities. The section on activism includes reference to activist pioneers from history and social movements in the field of early childhood education. This is followed by a critical review of literature on individual and collective activism, and then by a review of research on activism in relation to educator professional identities. The section concludes with an exploration of resistance studies.

The section on agency offers readings of multiple theoretical interpretations of the concept of agency (and structure) and includes analysis of literature on agency and identity and on the agency of early childhood educators. In particular, I draw on third space theories as a lens through which to view these concepts.

The third and final section is a charting and analysis of dominant discourses of professional identities identified in the literature. This section builds on earlier exploration of the agency/structure debate and an identified 'third space' and seeks to map a meta-discursive landscape based on the literature.

The review of literature concludes with reflections on the interplay of these three core concepts and identifies agency, activism, and professional identities of early educators as an underexplored space.

Activism

It is....advisable that the teachers should understand, and even be able to criticize, the general principles upon which the whole education system is formed and administered. He (*sic*) is not like a private soldier in an army, expected merely to obey, or like a cog in a wheel, expected merely to respond to and transmit external energy: but must be an intelligent medium of action. (Dewey, 1974, p.205)

I stand here before you as a teacher from Southend and the activist I never knew I was nor planned to be. Whether you see yourself as an activist or not, that is exactly what we are when we make a stand for the children, we work with each and everyday. #NUT18
(Keeping Early Years Unique 2018)

An internet search of different dictionary definitions of 'activism' present similarities but also some nuanced differences in understandings of what determines the concept:

The use of direct and *noticeable* action to achieve a result, usually a political or social one [my emphasis] (Cambridge Dictionary)

The process of campaigning *in public* or working for an organization in order to bring about political or social change. [my emphasis] (Collins Dictionary)

...active participation or engagement in a sphere of activity; spec. the use of vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change. (Oxford English Dictionary)

Whilst all three definitions highlight the active element of activism and the focus on social or political change, notably the Cambridge dictionary definition and Collins dictionary definition point to the 'noticeable' and 'public' dimension of such activity. The fact that this dimension is not included in the Oxford English dictionary definition, suggests there is space to further interrogate what constitutes activism, particularly in the context of this study. In order to explore this further, I consider the literature on activism in educational contexts.

Teacher activism studies is a relatively recent field of research. Searches of literature in academic databases using the keywords 'teacher' and 'activism' produce a modest body of work which is nonetheless wide-ranging in geographical context, theoretical perspectives and foci. Teacher activist intentions include social justice motivations, proactive advocacy for new or improved provision for children and attempts to (re)claim teacher autonomy, amongst other drivers. This breadth is reflected in the research below.

Recent literature includes Catone (2017) on a pedagogy of teacher activism. This text explores pedagogical underpinnings of teacher activism through four portraits of educators motivated by issues of social justice in the US, illustrating how activist engagement is motivated by personal beliefs and manifests as intentional ways of disrupting power relations. The study results in the development of a 'pedagogy of activism' predicated on the three 'lessons' of purpose, power and possibility from activist participants. Similarly, in a US context and from a social justice perspective, Picower (2012) explores the roles of teachers working towards equity and social justice

from grassroots teacher activist groups. This study sought understandings of how teacher activism plays out, based on how teacher activists perceive, define and undertake their activism. The authors analysis results in a framework identifying three commitments or practices: reconciling the vision, moving towards liberation and standing up to oppression. With its focus on movement building, the study offers a valuable framework on collective action rather than individual responses of activism. Such work is also taken up by Quinn and Mittenfelner Carl (2014) who study a single teacher US activist organisation through critical realism, asking 'What are the processes by which teacher activist organizations can assist in the development of teacher professional agency?' (p.747). The study, which focusses on organisational processes over individual experiences, develops an insightful framework in understanding the role of such organisations in supporting professional agency. Notably, the research also concludes that such organisations may be limited in their impact because of their 'specialised appeal', a perspective which will be valuable to reflect upon in light of empirical data in this study.

In a UK context, there would appear to be few empirical studies on teacher activism. Arshad's (2008) thesis on activist teachers in Scotland adopts a life history method to explore the engagement of Scottish teachers in pedagogies of anti-discrimination. Using interview data, the study explores factors, such as involvement with political parties or trade unions that prompted these teachers to develop an interest in activism. Conversely, in an opinion piece on teacher activism in primary schools in England, Hayes and Butterworth (2001) describes how the 'sleeping giant of teacher activism is beginning to stir again' (p.357). However, this 'stirring' is perceived not as collective resistance but in teachers walking away, leaving the profession. Such a perception of walking away as resistance speaks to literature later in this section in which Ball and Olmedo (2013) discuss self-care as resistance.

The field has been influenced by seminal writing from Sachs (1999; 2003a; 2003b) who redefines teacher professional identity as activist identity. Sachs (2003b) asserts that 'the words activism and activist have a checkered history and in some people's minds these words evoke images of chaotic demonstrations and rabbleroising' (p.3). However, Sachs adds that this is a vital perspective to 're-instate trust in the teaching profession by the community at large and to counter the de-skilling of teachers by governments who want to control teachers and the teaching profession.' (p.3). In an update to the original monograph, Sachs (2016) develops her original 'call to action' proposing a renewed focus on teacher inquiry and research literacy as features of an

activist identity, in order to counter the domination of standards-based accountability. Sachs proposes that rather than mobilizing activism,

...a new approach [which] requires that teachers collectively and individually address those in power to make it clear that a top-down approach is simply not working, nor, in principle, is it likely to work. (p.414).

Such an approach refocuses on professional development and on critical inquiry which is profession-led as means to challenge neoliberal³ policy technologies. This proposition is attributed to a 'mature teaching profession' (Sachs 2016) and it will be of relevance and value to consider whether such a theorisation is as applicable to the ECE workforce.

Whilst studies of activism in early childhood education are few, there is a growing corpus of work on the subject. A number of these studies have been written in response to the impact of recent policy frameworks (Sumsion 2006; Press and Skattebol 2007; Woodrow and Busch 2008). Notably, much of this work has been developed in Australia and is further explored below.

In order to situate this thesis alongside existing research I seek to explore:

- A brief history of social movements in ECE
- Collective activism
- Individual, relational and alternative readings of activism
- Activism, subjectivities and professional identities in ECE
- Resistance studies

A brief history of activism in ECE

This section is relatively brief, as it would seem, a history of activism or social movements in early childhood education in the UK has not been extensively researched nor documented. Whilst I draw on work about individual pioneers and early years membership bodies and communities, a comprehensive timeline is lacking. Identifying this gap also acts as the impetus for possible future work in mapping this activism. Whilst the parameters of this thesis do not afford a detailed chronicling of all activist movements in early childhood education, it is important to contextualise this study with existing literature.

³ For a broader discussion of neoliberalism and its implications for ECE, see p.193.

Activist Individuals

Existing writing on the topic largely focuses on the work of early childhood education 'pioneers', (Liebovich 2018; Giardello 2014). In considering their work and their activism, I have organised this section thematically, seeking to explore different motivations for and manifestations of activism. Whilst this review is not exhaustive, it includes an overview of some of the most prominent early childhood activists. Many of these figures were based across Europe, but their influences are notable for their impact on policy and practice in the related areas of education, health and social care in the UK and beyond.

In highlighting some of the most prominent pioneers and activists, I have also reflected on the limitations of this discussion. As a caveat, it is important to note that these pioneers worked across different time periods and geographical contexts, with differing social and political opportunities and pressures and with varying impetuses and foci to their work. Indeed, their activism included a diverse range of policy lobbying, advocacy, pedagogical development and campaigning, and broader social activism around the lived experiences of children and families. Nevertheless, what unites these individuals are actions of advocacy and activism in their work.

Several pioneers, operating in different contexts across Europe in the early twentieth century, are acknowledged both for the development of formative early years pedagogies and for their activism. Whilst this advocacy and activism was situated, reflective of geo-political context and manifested in different ways, the actions of these individuals are united by commitments to social justice. Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) has been described as a social reformer and activist (Lamb 2010). Steiner can be understood as a social, political and environmental activist challenging existing norms and conventions in education advocating for free education for boys and girls and teacher autonomy. In 1919, Steiner visited the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany at the behest of its owner. He spoke to the factory workers about the need for social renewal, following the devastation of the first World War, and the need for a new approach to political, social, and cultural life. His vision was realised when he established a school for the children of the employees of the company.

Maria Montessori's (1870-1952) pedagogy also has its roots in social justice and her vision of peace education following the turbulence, particularly across Europe, in the early years of the twentieth century. From establishing the first *Casa dei bambini* in an

impoverished area of Rome, Montessori developed a pedagogy which rapidly extended its reach across and beyond Italy. Notably, from the literature, it becomes clear that Dr. Montessori's ideological viewpoints and pacifist orientation, was in conflict with the Italian Fascist administration and her working relationship with Mussolini (who had originally been supportive of her work) became strained. This was exacerbated in the early 1930s when Montessori refused to direct her teachers to take the fascist loyalty oaths, in accordance with government demands. Diggins (2015) describes how Mussolini forced the closure of Montessori schools, and by 1934 Maria had left Italy to escape government surveillance.

Akin to Steiner's aspiration for a new pedagogy following the first World War, Montessori's book *Education and Peace* (1992) details her conference speeches and writing about education as a force for peace and social change. As an early feminist, Montessori advocated for voting rights for women, issues of equal pay and for the rights of all children.

During this period Margaret McMillan (1860-1931) with her sister Rachel (1859-1917) both educators and advocates, became renowned for their establishment of open air nursery schools to improve the education and welfare of deprived children, particularly in Bradford and London. Giardiello (2014) writes about the nursery school as 'an agent of change' (p.67) and illustrates the McMillian sisters' work, from establishing open air camps to the development of a teacher training college. Margaret is described as 'the children's champion' by Lowndes (1960) and is remembered for her tireless campaigning for nursery schools as a route to breaking the cycle of poverty (Liebovich 2018). This activism appears to have been instrumental in the initiation of the Education Act 1918 which gave powers to Local Education authorities to open nursery schools and classes. Notably, Margaret also deployed her left-wing intellectual activism by lobbying politicians for the 1906 Provision of School Meals Act and petitioned for social reforms to improve the health and welfare of young children. Jarvis and Liebovich (2015) describe how Margaret McMillan

...built a reputation as a skilled political orator, initially drawing the attention of influential people within the fledgling British socialist movement by delivering a series of powerful speeches on the benefits of socialism at Hyde Park Corner. (p.920)

I turn to two pioneers whose activism was, arguably, undertaken in less visible ways. In different locations and periods, from contrasting backgrounds, both Pestalozzi (1746-1827) and Susan Issacs (1885-1948) appear to have been motivated both by

their perceptions of a dearth of early childhood provision and by their vision for a different form of pedagogy. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, a Swiss educational reformer, advocated for the provision of education for the poor and insisted on educating girls as well as boys, something radical and controversial in his day. Inspired by Rousseau's writing, he is described as pioneering kindness in his teaching proposing a 'love, not fear' pedagogy (Issa and Hatt 2013). Pestalozzi subverted and challenged the conventions of the day agitating vigorously for a fairer education system for the unschooled local children and advocated for schools as family substitute institutions. However, his political activism seemingly unnerved local authorities, and this, combined with infighting amongst colleagues, led to the closure of his school in Yverdon in 1825.

In a different context, Issacs was a progressive psychologist whose work engaged in the lived experiences of children at The Malting House School, Cambridge (1924-7). This work led to significant educational contributions including the 'emphasis on the importance of play in children's learning' (Giardello, 2014, p.121). Andrew and Fane (2018) describe how Isaacs

sought to question taken-for-granted assumptions about child rearing and to advocate for a nursery school system which developed children's independence and critical thinking skills. (p.232)

Later, whilst at The Institute of Education, University of London, her work informed the Hadow Report which investigated (among other topics) the dearth of birth – five nursery provision in the UK. Her work, whether described as advocacy or activism, became the basis for many studies in child development and was significant in the development of teacher and nursery nurse training.

Recognising these pioneers and their work as social reformers and activists, it is also important to acknowledge those pioneers operating *within* government, whose advocacy and activism contributed to policy and practices advances for young children and families. Nancy Astor MP (1879-1964), as the first British female MP, is noted for championing women's rights and children's welfare and as a passionate advocate for nursery schooling. She led delegations of Ministers for the Nursery School Association, funded the launch of the Rachel McMillan Teacher Training College, and lobbied for the universal provision of nursery schools. Brehony (2009) argues that no elected politician has 'identified themselves more closely with the cause of nursery schooling in Britain' (p.196). Her legacy can be seen in the work of Tessa Jowell MP (1947-2018) who, as a Minister in the Blair-Brown Labour governments, was similarly motivated by

a social justice agenda and championed the Sure Start programme in the UK. Inspired by the US forerunner Head Start, Sure Start began as sixty trailblazer local programmes in the late 1990s and morphed into a national infrastructure of children's centres providing a range of service for young children and families. Jowell is described as the 'driving force' (Eisenstadt, 2011, p.69) behind a philosophy that Sure Start was built on the wishes desires and strengths of children and parents in poor areas. As an advocate and activist, Jowell backed the Sure Start agenda throughout her time in the House of Commons and House of Lords.

Examples of parents and/or community representatives acting as grassroots activists, in different contexts, form a key element of the history of activism in early childhood education. Such activism appears to share the feature of practical action in the face of a dearth of provision for young children. For the mothers of Reggio Emilia, Italy (1940s), in the aftermath of World War II, the absence of early childhood centres or schools for young children, a desire for peace building and a sense of social co-operatives motivated their action (Barazzoni 2005). Following the Nazi occupation of Italy, the citizens in the northern Italian region wanted to ensure their children had an early education based on peace and community. In 1945, the inhabitants of Villa Cella, a small village in Emilia Romagna, began to sell tanks and other armaments abandoned by the Germans to build and finance a new school. The founders (and activists) took possession of an empty building where they stayed until the municipality agreed to allow them to establish a preschool. As Barazzoni (2005) notes, 'mothers and fathers built it themselves, brick by brick' (p.7).

In a different context, but with similar motivations, the birth of the parent-led pre-school movement in the UK has its roots in the shortage of maintained sector provision in some areas and the desire of (predominantly) mothers for involvement in young children's education. Belle Tutaev (1929-2019) is widely acknowledged as the founder of the UK Pre School Playgroups Association (PPA), now the Early Years Alliance. Her letter published in The Manchester Guardian's women's page in 1961 under the headline 'Do-it-yourself nurseries' had two aims: to gather names for a large-scale national petition to the Education Minister asking for more nursery schools, which achieved 3,500 signatures; and to propose that groups of mothers could start their own 'schools'. Tutaev's influence and activist work was instrumental in the development and growth of the PPA which Bruce (2011) describes as amongst 'Britain's most extensive exercise[s] in social co-operation since World War Two' (p.1). Further examples of community based grassroots activism in the UK, such as the National Child Care campaign are detailed in Penn's (2019) memoir and further discussed below.

The dearth of such pioneer figures from working class communities, from more diverse backgrounds and from the Global South in this history, speaks to the social and educational capital which many of those mentioned possessed and to the geographical inequalities in terms of whose voices are heard in a US/Euro-centric world. In many cases the social status and locale in which these pioneers worked, enabled their voices to be heard. Thus, without diminishing the formative work of these individuals in developing pedagogy, influencing legislation and advocating for children's rights and needs, I consider that the list is inevitably partial. Coupled with this, the nature of a historically female-dominated profession operating within a patriarchal system may help to explain why activism has not been foregrounded in research. Behind these now iconic innovators and campaigners, I believe innumerable unknown individuals and groups have not been heard or celebrated in the same way. Untold acts of resistance and activism have inevitably been instrumental in multiple contexts and remain important counterpoints to the work of these famous activists. Listening to hitherto untold stories is one of the rationales for this study.

Organisations and Movements

In addition to the work of individual advocates and activists, a rich and complex history of multiple early childhood membership organisations, lobbying bodies and unions exists. A multitude of early years membership organisations, in various iterations, have developed in England (and the wider UK) over the twentieth century and represent the diversity of early childhood provision. It is valuable to consider this history in contextualising current collective activism.

An early example of such an organisation is the Nursery School Association (NSA) (now British Association for Early Childhood Education) founded in 1923. The organisation originated following the aforementioned lobbying of (amongst others) Margaret McMillan for the Education Act 1921, which made provision for grants to organise nursery schools for children aged two -five by local education authorities. From its early days as an advocacy and campaigning organisation, records reflect (as identified in Jarvis and Liebovich (2015)) differences in opinion on the focus of the organisation's work. Papers analysed by Jarvis and Liebovich (2015) suggest that two of the organisation's leading figures: Margaret McMillan, inaugural president and Grace Owen, honorary secretary, articulated different priorities. According to the authors, Owen's priorities of nursery education in classes within infants schools and McMillan's concept of nurture within the nursery environment emerge from the records:

McMillan's Christian socialist mission had focused her sights primarily upon the nursery as a remedy for social disadvantage, and this agenda became increasingly at odds with the professionalised, pedagogy-driven policy direction emanating from the NSA. (p.929)

Such tensions in advocacy and campaigning are also reflected between organisations, notably between the NSA and the National Society for Day Nurseries (NSDN) founded in 1906 with the aim described as 'the only voluntary body specifically devoted to the problem of the care of young children whose mothers go out to work' (Penn, 2019, p.112). Penn (2019) describes how the nursery school movement had an uneasy relationship with the NSDN reflecting different priorities in a care/education dichotomy which arguably divided rather than united activist intentions for the provision of services for young children. Such difference between these organisations in rationale and activist intention has arguably echoed through the intervening decades (see below).

The second half of the twentieth century saw developments in various women's liberation movements, which pushed for (among other things) the development of early education and care services to enable female participation in the workforce (Penn 2019; Press 2015). The National Child Care campaign of the 1970s is detailed by Penn (2019) in which she revisits how the movement was born of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) Under Fives Charter (1979). Penn was the first secretary of the campaign with the objective of 'the demand for comprehensive, flexible, free and democratically controlled childcare facilities funded by the state' (Penn, 2019, p.49). Notably, the aforementioned debate between the need of care for children of working parents and the traditions of the nursery education movement continue. The tensions between the campaigning for community-led childcare (in an era when this was largely confined to childminding and social services nurseries) and the aims of the nursery school movement, which Penn describes as having a 'powerful education lobby behind them', (p.46) played out locally and nationally. Whilst the National Child Care campaign is described as having a 'troubled history' with further tensions between national campaigning and grassroots activism, it was evidently instrumental in the development of greater political awareness of the status of early education and care. This campaign continued to highlight unease between advocacy and activism for increased childcare places to enable parental employment and the early education of young children prior to concerted national attempts at integration of services in the late twentieth century. This period of political movements and social activism of the 1960s-70s appears influential in the work of a number of contemporary early childhood pioneers as highlighted by Singer and Wong (2018). Whilst their research project focusses on

individual experiences, the work of interviewees was clearly shaped by broader socio-political groups who shared common interest in addressing the dearth of early childhood education provision for children and also readdressing associated 'inequality, sexism and discrimination' (p.4).

More recently, early childhood organisations in the UK have reflected the evolution of provision in response to significant social and cultural change. An increase in parental employment, particularly mothers in the workplace, gaps in statutory provision, and increased involvement of private and voluntary sector provision over the last four decades have shaped the evolution of these representative bodies. In terms of advocacy and activism work in the voluntary sector, Henderson (2011) offers an overview in *Insights from the Playgroup Movement*. In this collection of papers, Williamson (2011) discusses the Pre-School Playgroups Association as a social movement and the then seemingly radical belief that 'parents should be responsible and take part in their children's pre-school learning' (p.121). Williamson details the tensions between this perspective and more conservative positions at the time. Nonetheless, by the early 1970s PPA members created an 'institutional framework' (Sutherland, 1972, p.22) aimed at not only the development of its members and members' children, but the arrangement for national infrastructure which held them together. The Pre School Playgroups Association evolved from a grassroots movement in 1962 to what is now the Early Years Alliance, with membership numbering 14,000 groups and individuals from across the sector (Early Years Alliance 2019). Similarly, the national charity Early Education (British Association for Early Childhood Education) has its roots in the Nursery Schools Association founded in 1923 but has grown to support all provision and 'early years practitioners with training, resources and professional networks, and campaigning for quality education for the youngest children' (Early Education 2019). Such organisations, whilst differing in sub-sectoral membership (although now increasingly seeking membership from across the sector), have, to varying degrees, undertaken (and continue to undertake) advocacy and lobbying work. However, a review of websites of a number of membership organisations reveals few detailed references to lobbying or campaigning work explicitly, and only one mention of the word 'advocacy'. This leads me to consider the limited explicit discussion (whether there is action or not) on this subject within some of these organisations.

More recently, movements in the UK, beyond the boundaries of individual membership organisations, have seen activism *for* policy intervention and activism *against* policy and its effects. Activism in the form of lobbying and campaigning work *for* policy

intervention has included campaigning for increased funding for schools (National Union of Teachers; National Education Union) and for a graduate-led profession in early childhood (BERA/TACTYC 2014; Early Childhood Studies Network 2019). Conversely, recent years have seen cross-organisation activism *against* the policy effects of numerous early childhood policies in the form of:

- Opposition to baseline assessment testing for Reception year children (galvanised by the 'More than a Score' consortium (2015 – present))
- Lobbying against closure and reduction in funding for children's centres (Action for Children 2018;)
- Opposition to proposed changes to the EYFS framework (led by the Early Years Coalition)
- Underfunding of free entitlements (multiple early years organisations including Early Years Alliance, National Day Nurseries Association, Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years.)

In addition to the actions of membership bodies and campaigning groups, the late twentieth century onwards has seen numerous examples of scholar activism. Rooted in different disciplines, from multiple perspectives and with numerous intentions and interests this diverse group of academics/practitioners have expressed forms of activism in many forums. An example of such academic community activism can be seen in the ECE field of practice and teacher education in which some value developmental psychology as the foundational knowledge base for ECE. Meanwhile there are others who argue against hegemonic discourses of developmental psychology from alternative perspectives including critical theory (Cannella 2000) poststructuralism (Mac Naughton 2005) and posthumanism (Taylor 2013). Commentary on the diversity of perspectives informing academic activism is further alluded to below in the section on early childhood education and resistance.

Additionally, activism for and within specific communities, including indigenous and marginalised communities have histories within early childhood education. An example is the anti-bias movement, borne out of the Social Justice in Early Childhood (SJIEC) group in Australia (see below), illustrates how academic writing as activism is enacted on a number of topics related to anti-discriminatory policies and practices such as

The arts, industrial contexts, infants, trans and gender diversities, leadership, imaginative 'act'ivisms, everyday equity, historical encounters, anti-bias with adults, effects of government policy in the everyday lives of children such as asylum seekers and refugee families...(Scarlet, 2016, p. xxxiii)

Bloch and Bailey (2016) detail how their work in this arena, with colleagues from across the globe, seeks to move 'beyond teaching and scholarly writing towards a stance that 'lives matter' and a movement towards 'an everyday politics of action' (p.343). Rooted in taking actions towards equity and social justice in early childhood contexts, the authors detail the activist orientation of the Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education (RECE) movement and its diversity of theoretical, pedagogical and political positions. Such actions as petitioning, letter writing, and demonstrations are detailed on their website in this international example of working across geographical boundaries, disciplines and theories in order to challenge inequalities and oppressions affecting children, families and early educators in multiple contexts.

Unions

Consideration of unionisation in the field is important in contextualising formal and public opportunities for early childhood educators to collectivise. However, there would appear to be a lack of literature which details a timeline of engagement between the early childhood workforce and union membership. In addition, the diversity of a 'mixed market' of early years provision appears to have resulted in different sub sectors of the workforce having differing levels of union membership making analysis of this difficult. However, a search does reveal a number of documents from various unions engaged in policy debate and lobbying, which in recent years has included focus on issues such as facilities for under fives (TUC 1979), advocating the importance of play (National Union of Teachers 2007), reduction in qualification levels (Voice Union in *Nursery World* magazine 2018) and baseline assessment (National Education Union 2018). Thus, education unions in the UK have played and continue to play a role in activism on issues of early childhood education despite diminished membership and eroded influence (Hoque et al 2017).

Whilst this history of pioneers and organisations is brief and partial, it serves to contextualise the study and identifies the potential for further exploration of this topic. Notably, the steady efforts of many early educators have not been chronicled in recorded history. In response, this study aims to explore the social activism work of these educators and offers an analysis of their contexts in England in the first quarter of the twenty first century. I now turn to exploring the academic literature focussing on collective and individual activism.

Collective activism

Social activism has been a subject of academic research across numerous disciplines for many years. Saunders (2013) describes activism as ‘the action that movements undertake in order to challenge some existing element of the social or political system and so help fulfil movements’ aims.’ (p.44) Such a definition emphasises the collective nature of activist activity, a notion which forms a substantial part of existing research. Literature suggests that the most effective and visible activism often comes in the form of organized, unified protest, or other forms of collective action. However, research into such collective activism in education and care is limited. This section draws on the small number of studies found.

The notion of a need for ‘critical collectivism’ in ECE is explored by Mac Naughton (2000) writing from the perspective of activism for social justice. She asserts that it is not possible for individuals educators to gain traction to see the scale of change needed. Notably, she proposes that individual early educators have little chance of:

- ‘Convincing others to break with early childhood tradition
- Effectively challenge colleagues about their social visions and educational practices
- Going against or reassembling knowledge learned in preservice training
- Discussing and negotiating their educational vision and practices with others committed to social change.’ (p.75)

Mac Naughton advocates for rejecting the current ethics of individualism and seeking a collective vision early childhood. This concept of critical collectivism is an important perspective, although I also contend that it is important not to diminish the actions of individuals; the small deeds of resistance and contestation in the school or setting which are also acts of advocacy and activism. Such a perspective is explored later in this chapter.

A small number of studies, drawing on critical traditions, highlight power imbalances both between ECE and policy makers and within the ECE sector itself, as the basis for activist responses. The aforementioned traditions of care and education for young children and the historical divides in governance, funding, and workforce between these, informs this research. The idea that collective activism may be inhibited by sectoral divisions is an argument expressed by MacFarlane and Lewis (2012). In an Australian context, the study deploys Foucauldian ideas to explore the diversity of the ECE sector, with educators framed as ‘categorised and governed’ (p.67). As a country

which has embraced a 'mixed market' approach of public, private, and voluntary governance arrangements of provision, the research suggests that differing disciplinary and philosophical approaches result in fragmentation which can limit collective advocacy and activism. The researchers detail a care/education divide discerned in services and the tensions which some perceive resulting from the colonization of the former by the latter. MacFarlane and Lewis assert that this fragmentation within the sector and the erosion of a specific ECE experience and knowledge base (as it becomes dominated by compulsory school aged curricular influences) may result in incoherence which hampers moves to collective activism. They cite Popkewitz (2008):

This unity is all the more vital as governments seek to privilege some parts of the sector over others, for the inclusion of some approaches from a fragmented community will always occur at the exclusion of other (McFarlane and Lewis, 2012, p.71).

Conversely, Bown and Sumsion (2016) trouble this notion of fragmentation proposing an 'agnostic reconfiguring' (p.206) which acknowledges the diversity and complexity of the early childhood sector. Drawing on the post-structural, democratic politics of Chantal Mouffe, their findings suggest that such a reconfiguring is formed by creating generative spaces not only for collaborative challenges to hegemonic agendas but also for imagining new policy possibilities. Such an idea also reflects earlier work by Press and Skattebol (2007) who explore such spaces as 'intersections' which combine both local responses and broader social justice drivers. Such intersections are perceived as spaces for activism where local knowledges meet broader policy understanding. Thus, the authors theorize for spaces of critical engagement in which counter narratives can flourish. In doing so Press and Skattebol advocate for going beyond policy critique to envisaging alternatives:

We need to articulate alternatives to hegemonic power relations more strongly in order to shape power relations in ways that create more democratic possibilities. (p.182).

Such a perspective offers a positive and hopeful alternative to reiterating arguments of division and atomisation in the ECE sector. The concept of seeing spaces for collective (and individual) counter narratives is an important consideration in analysis of educators' stories.

Social justice motivations for collective activism are evident in edited work by Bloch, Swadener and Canella (2014). In this collection, Bailey (2014) details how members of

the Reconceptualising Early Childhood Education (RECE) group believe that the building of networks of activists in response to policies or initiatives is a critical direction. Such work has been initiated internationally including the RECE movement joining forces with Australian based Social Justice in Early Childhood (SJIEC) group to form an online community of activist scholars named 'Receactivism' (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1048016898589068/>) with the aim of forging new alliances of support beyond country borders. However, Bloch and Bailey (2016) challenge the assumption that activism is solely a macro level event and turn attention to micro political actions or 'everyday counter-insurgencies' (p.344).

In earlier work, Sumsion (2006), in an Australian context, calls for a more politicised and activist profession. In terms of barriers to such activism, she highlights perceptions of a 'collective impotence' within the ECE sector:

When collectively we consider that we lack the agency to bring about change, we risk sinking into a state of indignant resignation that exacerbates our state of impotence...perceptions of lack of agency can become entrenched in the cultural narrative that we tell ourselves as early childhood professionals. (p2)

Critiquing the reification of market forces, Sumsion advocates for a sector approach to activism based on a conceptual framework of critical imagination, critical literacy and critical action. Critical imagination in the context of ECE might be seen in terms of possibility thinking in a projective sense; envisaging alternative ways of being and working or as Moss (2014) describes 'transformative potential'. Sumsion's version of critical literacy is described in terms of discerning the power of dominant discourses and the mechanisms for how these influence policy trajectories. Such critical literacy is also alluded to by Jones (2016) who encourages the reader not only to critique normative assumptions presented as common sense in policy, but also to consider our own biases. In turn, Sumsion's models predicated critical action on critical imagination and critical literacy and is manifested in what she calls 'manoeuvring strategically' (p.6). Such manoeuvring is manifested as educators' forging new allegiances, acting on community concerns and with critical engagement with government agendas and with policy makers. This framework has similarities to that of Anderson and Cohen (2015) who propose three educator resistance strategies: critical vigilance, counter discourses and counter conduct and reappropriation. (See Fig. 2.1). In this model Anderson and Cohen propose that these actions move along an individual to collective continuum. These models provide important conceptual tools through which to consider empirical

data given my exploration of both individual and collective acts of activism in an English early childhood context.

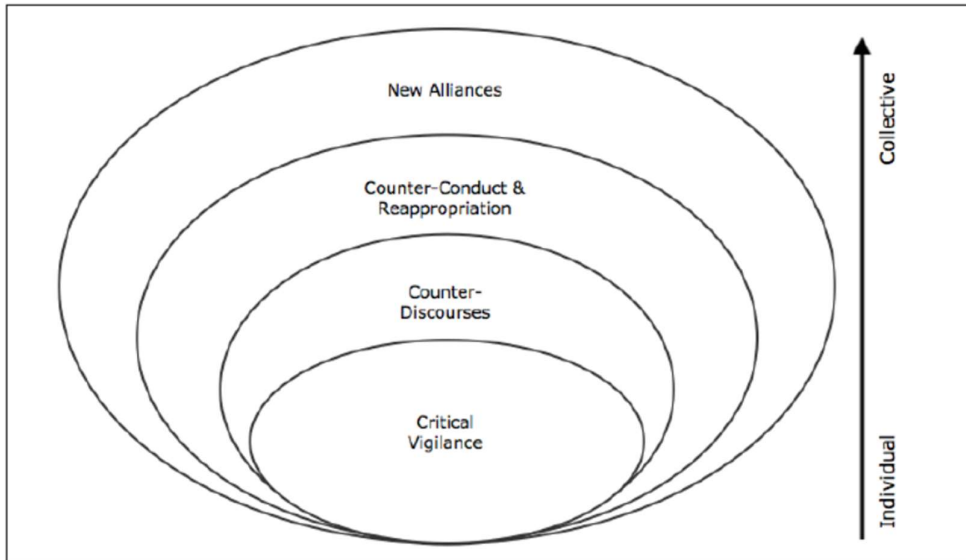


Fig. 2. 1 Anderson and Cohen (2015) resistance strategies

These multiple readings, from different theoretical perspectives, share a perception of power inequalities across ECE and social justice as a driver for change. Whilst analysis across a range of research contexts offers different interpretations of sectoral division or unity, understandings of the potential of collective activism as democratic expression of agency are evident. Whilst this field is comprised of international studies, my research explores how such ideas play out in an English context.

In addition, the models developed by Sumsion (2006) and Anderson and Cohen (2015) offer conceptual tools which prove valuable in considering research questions on enablers and constraints of activism in the context of my study.

Individual, relational and alternative readings of activism

In addition to understandings of activism as collaborative endeavours, there are readings of activism that also entail individuals taking action and understandings of the power of relational activism.

Beyond the field of education, I am drawn to Martin et al's (2007) feminist theory of activism which is rooted in the actions of individuals *and* communities. Martin et al. draw on scholarship by feminist geographers in asking 'what counts as activism?' and conclude that there is a need to widen the definition to encompass individual actions. In

particular, the notion of *embeddedness* (as in individuals embedded within communities) is prominent in the theory and they propose that action, which is private, personal, and often informal as well as local in its geographical reach be included in definitions of activism. They suggest that this in turn affords theorization of how small acts of activism can transform social relations with potential for wider social change. Individuals embedded in communities might undertake small acts of social change ‘actions that may not in themselves create direct political action but that foster the social relationships that may enable [this]’ (p.78)⁴

The notion of embedded activism has important links to broader social movement theories which focus on co-ordinated and sustained collective action. Thus, whilst the scale and scope of activist activity may remain individual or local and possibly evolve into something broader, it may have wider implications because it is embedded in social networks. Fullan (1993) asserts

The individual educator is a critical starting point because the leverage of change can be greater through the efforts of individuals and each educator has some control (more than is exercised) over what he or she does, because it is one’s own motives and skills that are at question... (p.12)

This is a reading which does not elevate an individualistic or atomised understanding of activism, but which understands that small acts have the potential to transform social relations and thereby broader political change. Similarly, the idea of ‘implicit activism’ (Horton and Kraftl 2009) is a concept taken up by Albin-Clark (2018) who suggests implicit activism ‘could enable small acts of social justice, leading to the prospect of larger acts of social justice to come’ (p.11). Such implicit activism may be borne out of limited opportunities to collectivise. In a study of 52 US activist educators Marshall and Anderson (2008) found little space for acting publicly and often felt isolated from peers. In response, they kept it ‘on the low down...devising strategies to enact activism quietly (p.143).

⁴ This may be particularly true in a digital era, in which so-called cyber activism might be perceived as both an individual as well as a collective endeavour. Internet technologies afford opportunities for both individual expression and are deployed for cause-related lobbying and organising. However, Roberts (2014) frames this as an individualism vs collectivism debate and highlights that despite signifying a democratic renewal in grassroots activism there is evidence to suggest such online activism does not translate into attendance at public events around an issue or campaign.

The concept of relational activism is introduced by O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy (2010) who identify three distinctions between relational activism and conventional activism;

relational [activism] conceives of the individual as a member of a community; relational [activism] uses daily practices to change norms, and relational [activism] uses the private sphere for public purposes (p.566).

This emphasis on relationships, on person to person connections, is a thesis also supported in a blog by Dove and Fisher (2019) who are proponents of compassionately changing 'the bit of the world we can touch'. Notably, and with relevance for this study, Dove and Fisher (2019) propose that a key tactic of the relational activist is a willingness to *share* stories. Distinct from storytelling, they advocate the shared element of this idea, the reciprocity in the process:

We believe that if you want to connect with someone, you have to be open to sharing a part of yourself as well. Making sense of each other by showing vulnerability helps us build compassion and break down barriers, rather than creating new ones.

In associated scholarship, Sowards and Renegar (2006) reconceptualize rhetorical activism and refocus attention on individual authentic responses which reflect the complexity of our world, 'redefining activism through personal exigence' (p70). They suggest that rhetorical activism has conventionally been defined as public (and often collective) protest. This alternative perspective might also include actions such as creating grassroots leadership, sharing stories, building feminist identity, and resisting stereotypes. This illustrates a move away from traditional interpretations of social movements, thinking beyond established expressions of protest and offers important and expansive, alternative definitions.

This literature is based on theorising and conceptualising activism in a range of domains, but rarely in the field of early childhood education. This absence offers an opportunity to further consider this topic. My research seeks to address this gap and offers insights into the agency and activism of early educators in England.

To step back, momentarily, from education focussed research, I acknowledge the work of social movement theorist Tilly (1995) who conceptualised 'repertoires of contention' in which he proposes that each group or community has different techniques or repertoires of protest or contention that members deploy. Whilst I argue that Tilly's initial work on repertoires focusses only on public displays of disruptive action, in more

recent work Tilly (2008) has explored broader examples of activist activity which are framed as 'contentious performances'. Such a conceptual tool is also useful in broadening definitions of collective activism.

Activism and professional identities

A small body of research has explored conceptualisations of activism and the professional identities of educators. Included in this, a number of academics (re)consider structural discourses shaping professional identity (and responses to these) in relation to a prevailing neoliberal economic dominance (Gibson 2013; Moss 2014; Anderson and Cohen 2015). Anderson and Cohen (2015) consider an understanding of teacher identity in the context of neoliberalism and its subsequent new public management (see discussion p.70). This study indicates that such a pervasive socio-economic regime shapes the ways in which educators perceive themselves as professionals concluding that there has been a decrease in professional autonomy of individuals and an increase in control by organisation managers. Such a culture in early education is exemplified by an intensification of external accountability (Spencer-Woodley 2014; Archer 2017) increased marketisation (Moss 2012; Lloyd and Penn 2012) and the datafication of children's learning (Roberts-Holmes 2015), all resulting in increased competition between schools and settings.

However, little research appears to move beyond policy critique by considering empirical data to theorise early educator resistance. An exception is Fenech et al (2010) whose Australian study counters technicist definitions of professionalism in ECE policy with a study evidencing forms of resistance-based professionalism. This work deploys the theoretical frames of resistance (Foucault 1980) and activist teacher professionals (Sachs 2003a). Fenech et al conclude that a resistance based version of professionalism needs to be grounded in a commitment to interrogating and contesting any dominant truths which constrain professional practice. Within this framework, I am drawn to the work of identifying and deconstructing dominant discourses of professional identity in policy texts, and in particular for this current study, workforce reform policy texts. Following Fenech et al's theoretical consideration of resistance, I now explore this further.

Conceptualising resistance

Within the field of resistance studies (Scott 1985; Duncombe 2002; Vinthagen 2006; Vinthagen and Lilja 2007; Lilja and Vingathen 2018) there exists numerous definitions of resistance. Routledge (1997) offers a broad, inclusive definition of resistance as a starting point:

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. (p.361)

Duncombe (2002) conveys a history of resistance detailing origins of the concept in Edmund Burke's resistance to revolutionary progress. Latterly, the second half of the twentieth century saw the emergence of numerous movements in resistance to the hegemony of mass media and capitalism indicative of modern Western societies (Matheson 2013). At this time, it is argued, studies of resistance focussed on highly visible acts of collective action against oppression, often manifesting as mass protests (Ortner 1995). In more recent work, Scott (1985) has developed a typology of dominance and resistance (see Table 2.1). This work moved the field on from a focus on resistance as visible and public resistance to the inclusion of low profile and often unnoticed acts of 'everyday resistance'.

	Material Domination	Status Domination	Ideological Domination
Practices of Domination	Appropriation of grain, taxes, labor etc.	Humiliation, disprivilege, insults, assaults on dignity	Justification by ruling groups for subjugation
Forms of public declared resistant	Petitions, demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, land invasions and open revolts	Public assertion of worth by gesture, dress, speech and/or open desecration of status symbols of the dominant	Public counter-ideologies propagating equality, revolution, or negating the ruling ideology
Forms of disguised, low profile, undisclosed resistance, INFRAPOLITICS	Everyday forms of resistance, e.g. poaching, squatting, desertion, evasion, foot-dragging	Hidden transcripts of anger, aggression, and disguised discourses of dignity, eg. rituals of aggression, tales of revenge, use of carnival symbolism, gossip, rumor, creation of autonomous social space for assertion of dignity	Development of dissident subcultures, e.g. prevalence millennial religions

Table.2.1 Scott (1985) Typology of domination and resistance

In this, and later work, Scott challenged the reductive idea of resistance as consisting of only highly visible, coordinated collective action. Rather he proposed an understanding of resistance as including everyday acts, often covert and indirect strategies of subversion 'that often exist under the radar of the dominant group' (Kastrinou-Theodoropoulou, 2009, p. 3). Indeed, Scott (1990) goes on to argue that such low profile strategies of resistance that go unnoticed by dominant groups, are termed as 'infrapolitics' (see Table 2.1). Scott names the public interactions between those who dominate and the oppressed as a 'public transcript' whereas the subversions of power that happen under the radar are a 'hidden transcript'.

Raby (2005) critiques Scott's interpretation as modernist, offering the oppositional binaries of public transcript to the dominant group with hidden transcripts in private. Raby contrasts this modernist understanding with postmodernists' interpretations of resistance suggesting the concept is read as much more complex, transitory, and fragmented, focussing on localized, contextualized analyses. Thus, it appears that much resistance literature is organised around two kinds of resistance: small scale and contextualised resistance or organized resistance. Whilst these ideas are helpful in conceptualising resistance and postmodern ideas of complexity and transience are insightful, I consider they underplay the power and potential of the multiplicity of resistances.

A multiplicity of resistances and alternative conceptualisations

According to Foucault (1978), 'there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case.' (p.96) Following Foucault, Lilja and Vinthagen (2018) propose that this plurality is more complex and richer than Scott's conceptualisation of everyday resistances. They suggest that multiple, small-scale actions constitute 'dispersed resistance', whether it be 'everyday', visible, loud or covert. They propose:

This resistance might be performed by one (or a few) individuals or appear as an unorganized resistance practice that is performed by many actors in scattered places. In the latter case, dispersed resistance can have a huge impact, and change societies, communities, nations or even whole regions. (p.212)

Importantly, Lilja and Vinthagen (2018) trouble historical categories of resistance and assert that in their theory of dispersed resistance, small-scale resistance is not always less visible and public resistance is not only discerned as collective and prolonged action.

Williams (2009) also moves the field of resistance beyond typology and proposes three overlapping continua (rather than binaries) along which resistance might be mapped: overt-covert, passive-active and micro-macro. Through this model, the passive-active continuum focusses on intentionality and therefore agency involved in the resistance. The micro-macro scale considers where and how the resistance is enacted and directed from individual to institution. The overt-covert continuum highlights the (in)visibility of the resistance. Ultimately, Williams concludes that these ideas are sensitizing concepts and that resistance is multidimensional and might be mapped across these multiple continua simultaneously.

Competing perspectives on resistance

In relation to the power of dominant discourses of in early childhood education, Moss (2017) asks:

What are the possibilities that such transformation might be achieved, especially given the apparent unassailability of the current dominant discourse, and the force of the power relations that have enabled this discourse, local in origin and parochial in outlook, to aspire to global hegemony? (p.20)

Here, Moss questions the power of dominant discourses but also presents the 'resistance movement' as a powerful force:

it serves the valuable function of sustaining those who want to refuse the identity or subjectivity that the dominant discourse...seeks to impose on early childhood education and those who work in it (p.20)

He argues that a combination of critique and hope are prerequisites to specifying conditions for future potentiality and building alliances.

However, Srnicek and Williams (2015) caution against overly romanticising resistance and recommend it be read as a conservative or even futile response. They attest that an emphasis on resistance is a 'defensive stance' (p.35) and that by groups or individuals positioning themselves in resistance to forces, for example a neoliberal economy, they exhibit a conservative reaction. The authors propose that resistance is defined as an oppositional act in relation to power and oppression rather than more fundamental re-visioning. Srnicek and Williams (2015) suggest that while resistance 'can be important in some circumstances, in the task of building a new world, resistance is futile.... Resistance is seen to be all that is possible, while constructive projects are nothing but a dream.' (p.35)

This perspective frames resistance as a moderate reaction and the authors advocate for more radical action. I understand that the power of dominant discourses is such that resistance can be a first response, but perhaps not the only response. Indeed, Kindred (1999) analyses the concept of resistance as not only a contest of authority ‘...but ultimately it is a move toward authorship. It is an act along the path of appropriation and empowerment...(p.213)

Ball and Olmedo (2013) further contribute to perspectives on resistance contributing an analysis of *self-care* as resistance amongst educators. Drawing on Foucault’s notion of ‘the care of the self’ and analysing email exchanges with teachers in England, the authors consider responses in light of neoliberal constructions of educator subjectivities. In differing ways, in multiple contexts, participants wrote about what they did not want to be or become and through these acts, and writing about them, expressed a care for themselves. These processes ‘mark[ed] out an ethical space’ (Burchell, 1996, p.34) in which the teachers explored the implications and also the tensions of resistance. Such a perspective offers fresh insights, not only into the demands of contemporary, neoliberal constructed subjects, but how, through forms of mundane, quotidian transgressions, both resistances and self-care were enacted.

These theorisations broaden understandings of resistance and the degrees of scale, visibility and co-ordination with which it might be demonstrated. Using these expansive definitions and notions of resistance as creative as well as oppositional, I explore how such actions manifest in early childhood education contexts.

Early childhood education and resistance

Dahlberg and Moss (2005) explore the concept of practising with an ‘ethic of resistance’. Such a perspective is interrogated by Fenech et al (2010):

...resistance is grounded in ethical practice that is driven by an intentional commitment to continually deconstruct taken-for-granted truths and reconstruct practices (p.92).

More recently, Moss (2019) invites us to ‘meet the [early childhood education] resistance movement’ (p.23). He argues that such a movement is comprised of multiple individuals adopting a range of perspectives, theories and narratives and that it ‘occupies many different spaces finding expression in many different forums’ (p.23). Moss characterises the resistance movement as those who choose to adopt alternative

paradigmatic positions to challenge the dominant neoliberal discourses which, he argues, proliferate. Such a movement, whilst not formally co-ordinated, is united in its challenge to the status quo, in its rejection of multiple assumptions about children and the work of early childhood education. However, I consider it important not to overly romanticise the notion of resistance nor present it as normatively positive.

Jipson (2001) asserts that resistance in ECE involves individuals 'considering the historical and situatedness of the discourses that frame and colonize their experiences and serve to position and represent them in particular ways.' (p.7) She suggests that resistance manifests when critically informed educators transform and reshape their world through their actions and disrupt singular notions of the educator's identity.

Looking beyond academic literature, Jones (2018), in a US context, who blogs on behalf of the organisation *Defending Early Years* (DEY) seeks to galvanize early childhood educators in practical ways:

Building on the work of DEY and other education justice allies, I will build relationships, identify knowledge and skills, and recruit early childhood educators to share stories of resistance and offer support to help build their resistance efforts....What we need is the time to come together, learn, organize, and support each other as we build a movement of resistance.

Such a 'call to arms' in early childhood education appears rare, as is academic literature which investigates resistance in practice. Whilst Moss (2019) highlights the diversity of resistance and Jipson (2001) contends that discursive colonisation of identities precedes resistance, there appears little literature which draws on empirical data in analysing and interrogating how this resistance manifests in an early childhood context. Such a gap in understanding highlighted a space, an opportunity, to further explore this topic through the analysis of data gathered through this study.

These constructions of resistance, alongside earlier conceptualisations of activism, would appear to necessitate individual and/or collective agency in some form. In order to explore this further I now turn to theorisations and conceptualisations of agency.

Agency

The concept of agency remains complex and contested. Dictionary definitions indicate agency can be defined as the capacity or capability of individuals to make free choices and to act. Human agency is also often described in relation to social structures or the social, political and economic context which may determine or limit agency. However, the degree to which the agency of individuals is more or less important and the extent to which it can be exercised continues to be an ongoing discussion and is inherent in much literature on power relationships (Dowding 2008). Indeed, the relationship between structure and agency is one of the defining and enduring debates of sociological inquiry. McAnulla (2002) offers a concise interpretation of the discussion:

Fundamentally the debate concerns the issue of to what extent we as actors have the ability to shape our destiny as against the extent to which our lives are structured in ways out of our control; the degree to which our fate is determined by external forces. (p.271)

In an attempt to situate this study and my perspective within broader and ongoing debates about the relationship between structure and agency (and the primacy of either or otherwise), I offer an overview of dominant theories in the field of agency/structure inquiry most relevant to this study. I organise this section into the following subsections:

- Structuralism and Intentionalism
- Dialectical theories
- Collaborative agency
- Relational agency
- Critical agency
- Agency and (Professional Identities)
- Agency, identity and third space

Structuralism and Intentionalism

Structuralist theories focus on exploring the institutional and material conditions which shape the opportunities open to individuals. According to McAnulla (2002), theorists aligned to this view include Saussure, Levi-Strauss and Lacan who sought to 'look below the surface meaning of events to discover hidden systems at work' (p.275).

Marxist Louis Althusser, writing within the structuralist movement, framed agents as without autonomous power and as 'bearers' of structures. Additionally, he perceived economic and ideological structures (Ideological State Apparatuses) acting in complex and interacting ways (e.g. a glass ceiling in employment) (Althusser 2001). A key

feature of Althusser's theory (and of relevance to this study) is *interpellation* – social processes during which individuals experience the values of their culture and internalize them. In this theory, ideologies 'call to' individuals and offer them an identity which they are persuaded to accept. It is a constitutive process in which individuals recognise, perceive, and respond to ideologies, thereby acknowledging themselves as subjects.

In this theory these identities are seen as pervasive or even assigned to individuals. They are presented in such a way and normalised so that people are encouraged to accept them. This is often an invisible, but consensual process and can result in individuals believing these values are their own, becoming taken for granted assumptions (Nguyen 2019). However, structuralism has been critiqued for denying the agency of actors and overplaying the domination of political and cultural structures in shaping the lives of individuals. This critique of reifying deterministic structures has been led by academics from numerous schools of thought including poststructuralists, critical theorists, and critical realists (see below).

Conversely, intentionalist perspectives give primacy to agentive actions. An example includes rational choice theory which contends that social behaviour is comprised from the behaviour of individual actors, each making their own decisions. Hewson (2010) conceptualises agency in this tradition, offering three main bases for agentic behaviours: 1) intentionality, 2) power, 3) rationality. Like structuralism, intentionalism can be seen as equally problematic, as in this tradition the notion of structure is given diminished status. This is a perspective which would appear to have received criticism from social theorists as questions are posed over the multiple possible motivations and external influences on individual behaviour not accounted for in intentionalism.

Dialectical Theories

Several dialectical theories have emerged from contemporary social theorists which seek to understand how structure and agency are irreducible to each other, yet necessarily interdependent. Giddens' (1984) structuration theory responded to a stale mate in social theory in which agency and structure theories remained polarised. Giddens proposed that agency and structure are mutually constitutive, that neither is, in principle, more important than the other. Indeed, he suggests that structure and agency are not, as previously posited, two separate and opposed concepts, but form a single process of structuration in which both are involved in the ongoing production of further

structures and agents. Important concepts of *enablements* and *constraints* emerge from Giddens' (1984) work and have been deployed in this study in developing questions to understand factors which might support or hinder the agency of participants.

Archer (1995) developed a morphogenetic approach theorizing 'conflation' as the phenomena by which, in much social theory, the power of either causal autonomy or social phenomena is denied. In so doing, Archer critiques Giddens' approach, where agency and structure are co-constitutive, as 'central conflation'. Alternatively, Archer, whilst accepting the interdependence of the two phenomena, proposes that by isolating them, it is possible to further analyse the relationship between them.

Critical realists Hay (1996) and Jessop (1990) have contributed to the debate, developing a strategic-relational approach. In this model, structure is the starting point. They propose the notions of strategic selectivity and discursive selectivity. The former suggests that action takes place within pre-existing structures, i.e. it favours certain strategies over others. For example, in the realm of school choice, if a 'desirable' school is located in a geographical location and has a catchment area with expensive housing, this may make access to the school to those on lower incomes more difficult. In this way, the structure both enables and constrains. Discursive selectivity is defined as action which takes place within discursively constructed contexts. Jessop and Hay propose that dominant discourses are highly influential in the strategy of agents alongside material factors.

Bhaskar's (1979) theory, rooted in critical realism, frames the active subject undertaking choices to varying degrees of resistance or acquiescence: choices which are bounded by the possibilities offered by a culture or society which 'provides necessary conditions for intentional human action' (p.46). Bhaskar suggests that the subject is an active participant making decision about their life and in the process of considering options in the face of social obligations and pressures (Francis and le Roux 2011).

More recently, various developments in agency theory have expanded the field. Given that educators (and other professionals) work within specific conditions, I draw on a number of theoretical perspectives which explore the agency of educators and in some cases early childhood educators in context. I now look to a number of these which are most pertinent to this study.

Collaborative agency

Sometimes individuals act together, and sometimes they act independently of one another. It's a distinction that matters. You are likely to make more headway in a difficult task working with others; and even if little progress is made, there's at least the comfort and solidarity that comes with a collective undertaking. (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy 2017)

Perspectives in terms of shared and collaborative agency are present in the literature. Approaching agency through sociocultural theory, Melasalmi and Husu (2019) view agency as a relational phenomenon facilitated through dialogue and situated both in geographically local and temporal terms. Drawing on Wenger's (1998) work on 'communities of practice' in which agency is expressed and meaning-making formed in relation to others, the authors emphasise contextual need and interpersonal communication as key features of shared agency. This conceptualisation informs the theoretical basis for this study in which shared agency is constructed through dispositions, relationality, and temporality. Akin to Kögler (2012), the authors emphasise agency in terms of intersubjectivity and conclude that high levels of shared agency are predicated on abilities to negotiate professional spaces through awareness of taken-for granted practices. However, an important question about this conceptualisation of agency is whether shared and collective agency can be reduced to the agency of the individuals or whether they are greater than this: more than the sum of their parts? (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy 2017)

Stuart's (2014; 2018) work advances understandings of the effects of a number of structures in shaping professional identities, empowerment, and collaborative agency in integrated children's services. Building on Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological model which considers micro, meso and macro level structures, Stuart also considers beneficiaries (of the care offered to participants by the children's workforce) as a structure in terms of how they were positioned or positioned themselves as open, dependent or resistant to support. Notably Stuart advocates that these four structures are both mutually constitutive and also act in both constraining and enabling ways. She represents the complexity of this dynamic through a Celtic knot:

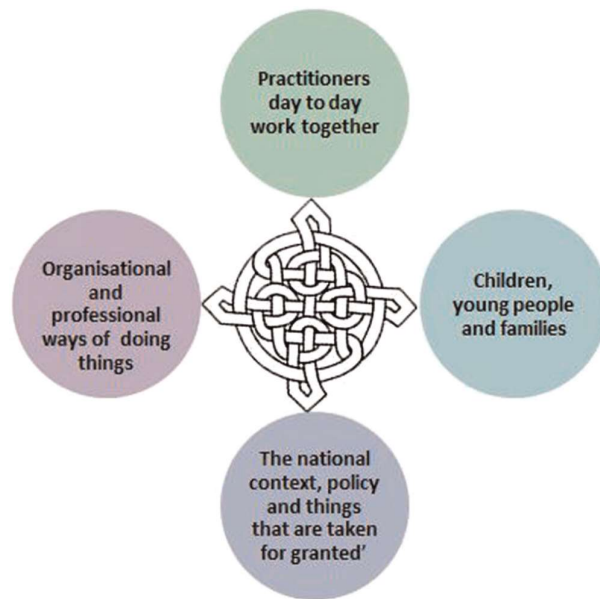


Fig 2. 2 (Stuart 2014) 'Structure at Multiple Levels' in the collaborative agency for integrated care model.

Stuart moves thinking on from models of agency as an individual act (Giddens and Archer). Instead, she analyses collaborative advantage in terms of effective dialogue, sound awareness, a strong collective identity, effective decision making, and collaborative actions based on trust (Stuart 2014). Notwithstanding the complexity of Stuart's models (which she acknowledges) she offers conceptualisations which aid our understandings of collaborative agency in new ways and its potential for reclaiming professional identities and challenging dominant and negative discourses about the children's workforce.

Drawing on Stuart's work, Georgeson (2019) proposes that the early childhood sector has, in recent years, experienced policies which have enhanced professional development and helped to reduce power differentials and promote collective professional identity. However, Georgeson also notes that austerity has negatively impacted on this collaborative agency resulting in increased competition for resources, a focus on targeted rather than universal provision, a slowdown in professionalisation of the workforce, increased surveillance of early educators and a retrenching of power imbalances.

Collaborative agency as theory offers a valuable perspective on the dynamics both within a profession and its interactions with wider structures. Such collaborations can also be read in social/interpersonal terms through theories of relational agency.

Relational Agency

The 'relational turn' in sociological studies is also reflected in research on agency. Founded on the ontology of relational realism, Tilly (2002) explains this development as 'the doctrine that transactions, interactions, social ties and conversations constitute the central stuff of social life.'(p.72) Such theoretical development shifts the focus from individual agency to engagement and capacity for action with others, the dynamism between entities or 'meshes of mutual responsibility' (Edwards, 2007, p.6). Whilst earlier conceptualisations of agency focussed on the autonomous individual exerting power (or not), more recent work frames such power as relation rather than a possession. Additionally, researchers acknowledge that in contemporary society with high mobility, fluidity of employment and expansive personal networks enhanced by modes of digital communication, individuals are simultaneously atomised and disconnected and yet also more interconnected than ever.

Burkitt's (2016) theorisation of relational agency critiques the thinking of critical realists Archer (2000) and Giddens (1984). Acknowledging the disparities between these theorists in their conception of structure and agency, Burkitt points to their shared perception of agency as an individual capacity. However, Burkitt (2016) contends that 'being a unique individual with real agentive powers is not antithetical to social being' (p.327). In his view, individuals are seen less as agents and more as interactants:

we act in multiple webs of interdependence in which no one is ever completely independent or dependent but always somewhere on the continuum between these two abstractions. (p.335)

The work of Edwards (2005; 2010; 2011) has been formative in moving forward concepts of relational agency in the education research field. Edwards developed 'gardening tools' of *relational expertise*, *common knowledge* and *relational agency* to consider motives and expertise in the professional practices of educators. Edwards' framings of relational agency are: i) expanding understandings of a problem by recognising and interpreting the motivations of others and ii) aligning one's own response to the problem in light of this. Edwards (2005) situates this work alongside Cultural Historic Activity Theory (CHAT) to explore relational agency as the capacity to work with others in relation to 'the object' being worked upon by utilising the resources of others. She proposes that working in this way results in an enhanced form of professional agency. However, notably, Engeström (2009) critiques this model of Cultural Historic Activity Theory for its primary focus on individual actors over relational

or collaborative agency, suggesting there is an ongoing debate about the role of relationality in this theory.

An example of relational agency in early childhood education research can be found in Duhn et al (2016) who deploy a Relational Agency Framework (RAF) in their research on the work on multidisciplinary networks in early childhood education. This study utilised both the RAF and Edwards' tools of *relational expertise*, *building common knowledge* and *relational agency* to analyse the work of early childhood professionals in an Australian context. The study concluded that the collective capabilities of such a network were enhanced through relationality and a focus on belonging. Arguably, relational agency moves the focus away from structural conventions and expectations towards the potency of joint action and the impact on those who engage in it. Duhn et al (2016) propose that this engenders a sense of belonging which shifts focus to the changing relation between self and others, and that it involves both an ethic of care and responsiveness in being open and receptiveness to multiple perspectives. Such a 'sense of belonging' (Tillett and Wong 2018) and 'ethic of care' (Taggart 2016) are well documented features of early childhood educator communities and thus the notion of relational agency offers an apposite lens through which to consider agentic actions in the field. Additionally, the Duhn et al study suggests relational agency requires a degree of criticality, a perspective to which I now turn.

Critical agency

Given the critical theory lens adopted for this study it is important to reflect on the notion of critical agency. The idea of critical agency is a contested concept. Poveda and Roberts (2018) draw on theorisation by Sen (capability approach) and Freire (critical consciousness) to offer an explanation of critical agency in which individuals consider 'both their critical analysis of the root causes of the disadvantage that they experience, as well as their agency to act on those structures to transform their situation.' (p.121)

Additionally, Naidoo (2017) details Gramsci's (1971) thoughts on critical agency as 'purposeful, deliberate or designed action that resists hegemonic practices' (p.100). In Gramsci's theory on agency the subaltern's agentic actions begin with resistance to hegemonic conditions which in turn lead to initiative and concerted action. Naidoo (2017) further explores how critical approaches redefine agency as 'actions that are possible *within* the context of social constraints (Baez, 2000, p.99) [my emphasis]. This

interpretation focuses on actions seemingly limited by structures rather than actions beyond current conditions.

However, critical agency has also been read as both negation *and* creation (Rebughini 2018) where action is oriented both against and beyond the oppressive situation. In terms of negation, Rebughini puts forward the notion that critical agency 'stems from a refusal to adapt oneself' (p.7). Drawing on Foucault's concept of *parrhesia*, understood as truth telling and a resistance to acquiescence, Rebughini develops the notion that critical agency is also simultaneously read in an affirmative sense, of looking beyond current situations and creating transformative alternatives:

In this regard, the negation of reality is not a refusal, a pure act of resistance, but a search for an alternative way to know and to act. (Rebughini, 2018, p.7)

Thus, critical agency is seen as operating beyond a critique of a given social order and is future oriented and generative in its outlook and potential. This 'possibility thinking' also features in work by Postma (2015) who suggests that the critical agent in an educational context is not only aware of regimes of power but is future oriented and can envisage alternative modes of being.

Bignall (2010) reframes this negation-creation idea as critical agency and constructive agency. She argues that 'while critical agency is aimed at the existing, problematic structure, constructive agency is aimed at producing a preferred structure, which does not yet actually exist.' (p.13) I contend that these two distinct but complementary factors of critique – that of negation and imagination – need to be considered and enacted together. Notably Richmond (2011) considers the perspective that critical agency can be forward looking and constructive and more than critique carries legitimacy which has not yet been comprehensively explored in empirical studies.

Rebughini (2018) also suggests that an individual's capacity to critique a situation, challenge domination and thereby enact critical agency is also predicated on the knowledge necessary to recognise such power. Such a prerequisite of knowledge and alertness is also seen in Sumsion's model of critical literacy (2006) (see p.41).

The case for critical agency also includes a discussion about the hidden and discursive nature of the ways in which it manifests. This conceptualization speaks to earlier discussion about 'everyday resistance' (Scott 1985) and 'implicit activism' (Horton and Kraftl 2009) highlighting the often quiet or hidden nature of acts of critical agency. Richmond (2011), in the context of international relations, considers how such critical agency is not conventionally large scale, collective or mobilized but is expressed in

atomised contexts through a dispersed network of actors. Notably, he suggests that such critical agency is undertaken on a discursive plane, in which agency is demonstrated (in Foucauldian terms) through resistance to power in localised contexts.

Importantly, studies (Naidoo 2017; Poveda and Roberts 2018) offer examples of where such critical agency is situated and contextual. Beyond theorisations of critical agency these studies illustrate the concept of critical agency as social practice. These studies explore the notion that rather than centralised conflicts, there would appear to be (again reflecting Foucault's work) a plurality of resistances: that of daily ethico-political choices and struggles, interrupting conventions, disrupting norms, contesting power. Such a perspective adds a dimension to earlier discussions of collaborative and relational agency, enhancing these theories with notions of hegemonic resistance and future orientation.

Combining these theories of collaborative, relational and critical theorisations of agency offers valuable lenses through which to consider how professional identities as a 'site of struggle' play out. Whilst collaborative and relational agency reflect the interpersonal dimensions of agentic actions, critical agency is expressed in literature as enacted in hidden, discursive ways but also as social practice. Applying these multiple theories of agency acknowledges both individual and collective actions, but also the negation-creation dynamic of agency's expression. Together, these theories inform developments of the theoretical and conceptual framework (see Chapter Three).

Agency and (Professional) Identities

At the centre of studies of identity are questions of human agency. Notably, the concept of agency in relation to identity formation has traditionally reflected the agency/structure debate with two opposing poles. Identity has been read as a 'subject position' that is shaped by dominant discourses or, alternatively that it reflects subject agency and autonomy to develop the self. From the first perspective (which reflects a structure > subject dynamic), the subject's identities are presented as shaped by cultural forces and determining their actions. From the second viewpoint (which reflects a subject > world dynamic), the subject is agentic, capable of making decisions, and engaged in self-identity development. What these alternatives fail to capture is the complex dynamic between the two. Sociocultural theories acknowledge the negotiated, contextual, dynamic and emergent nature of identity construction. Third space theories

including Bhabha (1994), (discussed later) offer a lens to acknowledge both agentic forces and the master narratives of structural forces.

In terms of *professional* identity and agency, Eteläpelto et al. (2014) propose that agency is necessary for the renegotiation of work identities. Agency is framed as a prerequisite for professionals' (as individuals and communities) influence, making choices and taking stances at work.

Deploying Giddens' structuration theory (see agency/structure section, p.52) Buchanan (2015) investigates how US teachers develop and express their professional identities in a period of significant education reform. Notably, Buchanan highlights the tensions between teachers' agency and the dominant structures of accountability policies. In the study, agency is identified as participants' 'stepping up' or 'pushing back'. Stepping up is described as going 'over and above the perceived expectations of the role' (p.710) whereas pushing back is noted as forms of resistance in which teachers navigated or contested certain policies. This analysis is arguably reduced to a simple binary and perhaps fails to reflect the complexity of multiple, complex, concurrent, and possibly contradictory responses at any given time.

Whilst applications of structuralist and intentionalist theories to the subject of agency and identity proliferate, I propose that these binary approaches are incomplete in their explanatory power. Thus, I turn to the adopted third space theory to consider this topic.

Agency, identity and third space

In post-colonial theory, the formation and assertion of agency is read within a web of power relations and the ways in which subjects respond to colonial powers. Bhabha's (1994) seminal work on postcolonial theory *The location of culture* includes an essay on third space proposing that between the first space (of the colonised) and the second space of (coloniser) resides a third space wherein cultures meet, a space of

communication, negotiation and, by implication, translation. A third space of contestation is thereby contingent on two existing spaces. It is in this indeterminate zone...where anti-colonial politics first begins to articulate its agenda' (Ghandi, 1998, pp.130-1).

Chulach and Gagnon (2015) deploy Bhabha's theory suggesting that postcolonial perspectives reject notions of static and group subjectivities, that they defy ethnocentricity that entrench power bases and that serve to 'other' some individuals

and groups. Bhabha (2000) explores the condition and emergence of agency in the liminal space of cultural discourse, describing the 'opening up, contesting, opposing, innovative 'other' grounds of subject and object formation...to assert that there is positive agential value in the whole process...' (p.370). According to Bhabha, it is during this episode of negotiation and reconstruction that conventional scripts become reformulated. At the same time, the agency of the colonised or previously dominated is visible and in the process conventional cultures, relationships and systems are altered. Operating within this third space is Bhabha's notion of *cultural hybridity* – the idea that cultural identities are formed anew of existing cultural systems and influences. He suggests that these:

'in between' spaces [which] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - _singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (Bhabha, 1994, p.1-2)

Such a cultural hybridity might also be read in terms of the third space between individual agency and structural forces in which new identities might be formed.

Whilst Bhabha's work was initiated in the context of the geo-political and the cultural politics of 'the migrant', it can offer insights into *hybrid identity* formation in different contexts. For example, Chulach and Gagmon (2015) deploy Bhabha's notions of hybridity to consider the professional identities of nurse practitioners. In this study, researchers view a bio-medical model applied to the profession as a 'colonial entity' (p.54) maintaining the status quo and subordinating the status of nurse practitioners as they seek to assert their own professional identities. Behari-Leak and le Roux (2018) analyse the narratives of new academic practitioners demonstrating agency in forming hybrid identities in the third space through contesting traditional roles at the university. In the context of changing identities and roles and emerging responsibilities, the authors conclude that HE professionals are grappling with a disconnect between job descriptions and the realities of work life at universities. They are seemingly caught 'between a rock and a hard place' (p.31), a space of interaction, contestation, tension, and transformation between two systems (Chulach and Gagnon 2015).

Several education studies have also deployed this theory to consider, agency and hybrid identities in a number of contexts – on adult educators (English 2003; 2005), second language learning and identity (Yoshimoto 2008), in-service learning for teacher education students (Schurman 2013) and mature part-time undergraduates (Thomas 2016). However, there would not yet appear to be studies which consider a

hybrid space (between agency and structure) in the identity construction of early educators, something I seek to address. I now turn to the concept of professional identities and how discourses on this subject are explicated in existing research.

Professional Identities

This section seeks to review the discourses of professional identities of early childhood educators which are analysed and theorised in previous international research literature. Following a search in academic literature databases using keywords of 'professional identity' and 'early childhood education', this review synthesizes and summarises key texts. In doing so, I seek to map the meta-discursive landscape. Deploying the conceptual framework (see Chapter Three) which utilises the structure/agency debate, I organise the discourses identified in the literature by structural dominance, agentic features and by discourses which might be positioned in between the two.

Prior to this, I offer an understanding of professional identities, from the literature which informs this study. In keeping with a social/critical constructivist onto-epistemology, I understand the concept of professional identities as being 'multi-faceted' (Alsup 2006), as 'socially and culturally' shaped (Swennen, Volman, and van Essen, 2008) and as continually (re)constructed in multiple contexts. Thus, rather than fixed or static, my understanding of professional identities is they are complex, contingent, and evolving in relation with others. Additionally, from a critical perspective, I draw on the concept of subjectivities which Ball (2016) describes as 'the point of contact between self and power...the subject is then governed by others and at the same time governor of him/herself.' (p.1131). In this way, I understand subjectivities to be influenced by cultural forces determining individuals' actions and the ways they are not only situated and situate themselves but are 'subjected' to external forces of societies, economies, and histories.

This review focuses on dominant discourses which are identified through ideologies and practice and which prevail in the literature. I understand the idea of dominant discourses as 'ideological assumptions embedded in particular conventions' (Fairclough, 1989, p.2) in which ideologies influence social practices. Through the lens of critical theory, I perceive dominance as detectable when discourses affirm and reproduce power relations in social practise, give legitimacy to, or exclude certain values and interests (McLaren 2003). Building on my earlier understandings of

hegemony I read dominant discourses as hegemonic practices which reproduce knowledge, norms, and ideologies (Gramsci 1971).

Foucault (1980) argued that the subject is produced from the ways in which discourses compete and collide. In the case of this inquiry, I argue such discursive moves influence the professional identities of the early childhood educator. I also recognise that discourses are dynamic and that their boundaries shift and change. As alluded to earlier, I acknowledge the complexity of the early childhood education workforce comprised of various professional roles which differ by initial training, status, remuneration and governance arrangements. I have sought to reflect discourses in the literature which refer to the range of professional roles across the sector.

This section reflects dominant discourses in the literature over recent history, predominantly the last twenty years reflecting a period of policy intensification in ECE, both within the UK and internationally. Firstly, I consider those discourses which might be deemed as institutional or structural as identified in the literature, followed by a review of literature which identifies agentic discourses of professional identities. I conclude this section by considering those discourses located between agency and structure.

Institutional Discourses

A substantial body of research exists which acknowledges the influence of institutional discourses on the professional identity construction of early childhood educators. In policy critique, professional identity formation has been seen as a set of centrally defined competencies and attributes that are imposed upon educators (Sachs 2010, p. 4). Additionally, in much international policy analysis, early childhood educators are often defined in relation to numerous stakeholders and by multiple, often conflicting accountabilities placed upon them. The literature which identifies institutional discourses in the professional identity construction of early childhood educators is organised under the following themes:

- Substitute Mothering
- Lacking
- Passive/Victimhood
- Divided
- Technician
- Neoliberal compliance

Substitute Mothering

Early childhood educators, as an historically highly gendered workforce, have been subjected to a pervasive and dominant policy discourse of their role as 'substitute mother' (Moss 2006; Bown et al 2011). Discourses of maternalism, including the ways in which the skills and knowledge of the early childhood educator are attributed to maternal instincts, have become embedded, hegemonic constructs (Ailwood 2007; Osgood 2012). The maternalism discourse has been identified by Walkerdine (1992) as a 'quasi-maternal nurturance'. Ailwood (2007) finds that the discourses of 'motherhood and teacherhood' are interwoven, 'thus enabling and legitimising the place of women in the education of young children'. (p.159). However, unlike Ailwood's assertion, Osgood (2010, p.160) argues that such a perspective contributes to 'the lack of symbolic value attached to the work that they [childcare workers] undertake, and hence their public image and status'. Rather, Osgood advocates for the early childhood educator as a critically reflective emotional professional, negotiating these subjectivities. Similarly, Sumsion (2005) proposes that maternalist discourses might create challenges for early childhood educators wishing to assert subjectivities based on their agency and relational ethics, as opposed to women undertaking roles which have been viewed as stereotypical and low-status. This is a view echoed by McGillivray (2008) who considers this maternalism discourse under tension: a conflict between a workforce that is framed as maternal and caring rather than professional and agentic.

Exploration of both structural and discursive factors, in the construction of gendered identities, is present in the research. In structural terms, Reay (1998) offers a definition of gendered habitus:

the concept of gendered habitus holds powerful structural influences within its frame. Gendered habitus includes a set of complex, diverse predispositions. It involves understandings of identity premised on familial legacy and early childhood socialization. As such it is primarily a dynamic concept, a rich interfacing of past and present, interiorized and permeating both body and psyche. (p. 141)

Osgood (2012) takes a post-structural feminist perspective and explores the nature of subjectification through which identity is formed by discourse. Through this lens, identities are viewed as fluid, negotiated and re(constituted) in multiple ways at various times and locations. Additionally, through deploying a Foucauldian perspective such identities are shaped by the hegemonic power and pervasiveness of certain discourses and the suppression of others. Gibson (2013) asserts that the extent to which early childhood educators are positioned as more or less powerful:

is dependent on how they are shaped by discursive practices and how s/he allows this effect to take place. The subjects' agency [also] produces discourses including a 'gendered truth' (Hatcher, 2003, p.391) discourse which both enables and constrains the performance of becoming and being a professional. (p.81)

The convergences of Foucauldian discourse theory and feminist perspectives are put to work in Osgood's research which considers the role of discourse in producing and sustaining hegemonic power against marginalised discourses. However, Osgood (2012) highlights the tension between feminist theory and poststructuralism and troubles the Foucauldian notion of 'docile bodies' through subjectification as an 'overly deterministic assumption' (p.29). In turn she draws on post-structural feminists who advocate for more agentic readings of subjectivity construction (Robinson and Jones-Diaz 1999). Such agency in (gender) identity formation is also alluded to by Gibson (2013) who draws on Wallkerdine (1992) noting how female teachers are

'not unitary subjects uniquely positioned, but are produced as a nexus of subjectivities, in relations of power, which are constantly shifting, rendering them at one moment powerful and the other powerless' (p.3).

Much recent literature deploys theory which considers the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) of gendered, classed, and raced (amongst other) effects on agency. In light of this, Ahearn (2001) describes agency, as 'the socioculturally mediated capacity to act' (p.112). Additionally, Mac Naughton (2001) explores the intersectionality of gender with other multiple identities (classed and raced amongst others) in the process of subjectification:

In redefining identity as multiple, contradictory and dynamic, feminist post structuralists have politicised identity formation. They have argued that identity is constituted in and by social relations of gender, sexuality, class, and race...in and through the power relations that constitute our daily lives (p.122)

This is further evidenced by Colley (2006) whose empirical data demonstrates childcare student participants who 'brought with them more collective or social predispositions, in particular classed and gendered expectations of a destiny caring for children' (p.26).

Thus, maternalism discourses around professional identities found in the literature are situated within complex and various theoretical interpretations. Whilst debates around structural and discursive influences and the power of agency on identity construction continue, I contend that naming and exposing these dominant discourses are important steps in understanding their power in identity construction.

Associated with maternalist discourses, and linked to perceptions of wider societal obligations, are critiques of 'a redemptive workforce offering protection and safety' (Cohen et al, 2004, p.24) and the early childhood educator as 'guardian of the nation's children' (Osgood, 2009. p.42). Such perspectives critique these structural discourses of redemption and guardianship as essentialising and contradictory in the way they produce identities based on both the maternal and on caring but also on the economic necessity of the care provided which enables parental employment.

Lacking

Several policy analyses consider the ways in which the early childhood education professional has been depicted as deficient. Osgood (2006; 2009; 2012) identifies a discourse of a 'childcare crisis' which necessitates government reform. This manifests – through a policy analysis (Osgood 2012) – as a workforce 'neglected' (p.3), 'lagging behind' (p.10), 'underqualified' (p.11) and 'failing to meet the needs of many children and parents as society has changed' (p.10).

Two further papers (Osgood 2004; Jones and Osgood 2007) focus on childminders in England in which policy is interrogated and finds the legitimacy and efficacy of the childminding workforce being questioned. Osgood (2004) reflects on 'childminders as a Cinderella service' further marginalised within the early years sector. Jones and Osgood (2007) develop this work using a Foucauldian analysis of policy text to consider the fabrications of childminders' identities. This policy analysis, using a post-colonial critique, considers the 'othering' of childminders, marginalized and unqualified to speak. Indeed, the authors draw on Maguire and Ball (1994) who note 'policy discourses work to define not only what can be said and thought but also about who can speak, where, when and with what authority' (p.6). The research also foregrounds a discursive construction of childminders as in need of professionalisation. This is a discourse also identified in a study of UK and Australian teacher standards as 'non-experts...the last in a line of management hierarchy' (Ryan and Bourke, 2013. p.412).

This discourse of a workforce 'lacking and in need of transformation' (Osgood 2009) is one which constructs early educators by their incompleteness, their ineffectiveness and requiring governmental intervention. Yet at the same time, the early childhood workforce is presented as economically necessary, primarily to offer the childcare that is fit for enabling parental employment. Such policy discourses expediently frame early educators as at once inadequate and yet also as important and potentially the 'saviour

of the economy, children and working mothers' (Osgood 2012). Indeed Osgood, through a critical discourse analysis of policy, traces the ways in which 'the ECEC workforce has been constructed in contradictory ways: as the salvation of society *and* as shambolic/disordered' (p.41) or simultaneously 'valorised and demonised' (Jones and Osgood, 2007, p.289). In a more recent study, Payler and Locke (2013) propose that workforce reform policy in England suggest the 'implications [are] of [a] workforce inadequate to the task and in need of top-down direction' (p.127). Through such discourses, a deficit model is established in policy and, I would argue, one which diminishes the agency, autonomy, and status of the ECE workforce.

It has been proposed, however, that such a deficit model provides the basis for a policy vision of 'improved trainability' (Bernstein 2000) and the rationale for redemptive workforce reform policies. That is to say, such discursive constructions of professional identities as 'lacking' might be read as 'necessary' pre-cursors, from a policy-making perspective, which then legitimates government-led interventions.

Passive victims

Allied with this discourse of a deficient profession are readings of the workforce as passive victims of policy evolution, typified as a 'discourse of powerlessness' (McMahon and Dyer 2014). In a study of infant teachers in England regarding Key Stage One reform, Campbell and Neill (1994) propose that these educators were too conscientious and both malleable and exploited. More recently, in an Australian context, a similar discourse is reflected by Woodrow (2008) who analyses interview data to read the professional identities of early childhood educators as 'vulnerable, ambiguous, and buffeted by competing policy discourses' (p.240). Such competing and colliding policy discourses are also reflected in work by Gibson (2015) who highlights the discursive construction of victimhood of pre-service early childhood teachers. Utilising an ironic reading of data, Gibson sees preservice teachers to be discursively constituted as heroic victims; heroines as in 'rescuing' and meeting the needs of children, whilst simultaneously also victims: 'not understood, not valued, and perhaps, not even necessary' (p.152). This passiveness is echoed by Simpson (2010) who goes as far as to assert that in some literature early childhood educators are depicted as 'cultural dupes.' In his study of Early Years Professionals (EYPs) he asserts 'that the dominant government discourse of professionalism is inappropriately privileged above any other discursive and social forms...in shaping EYPs orientations' (p.7).

Whilst these are critiques of victimhood discourses, it might be argued that they underplay the agency of early childhood educators and serve to reinforce the notion of professional identities at the mercy of policy imperatives.

A divided workforce?

In addition to concepts of professionalism being divided, and arguably contradictory (see above), a further dominant discourse is that of a divided workforce: 'bifurcated' (OECD 2001) and a 'fragmented profession' (Beck 2008). These divisions are explicated in terms of governance arrangements of provision: private, voluntary, and state maintained provision, but also in relation to the difference in group and childminding provision and to a care/education divide. Whilst limitations of this study do not afford a comprehensive evaluation of all these fragmentations, it is important to reflect on the origins of such divisions within the sector, and the implications of these divisions as a dominant discourse. Differences in the structural conditions, training, regulatory requirements and lived experiences of these groups in the early childhood sector are rooted in long-standing policy trajectories and deep-seated cultural traditions surrounding professional roles. Such developments have been borne of particular political conditions, and thus an understanding of the influences of neoliberalism (see p.193) which further shape this landscape, are central to these readings of a divided workforce.

Such fragmentation has been deemed by some (Press 2007; Woodrow 2008) to be problematic, 'hamper[ing] the system' (Press, 2007, p.183) and working 'against a comprehensive re-evaluation of policy across all levels of government' (p.190). Yet this fragmentation, which is often perceived as negative in the professional identity construction of early childhood educators, is viewed by Bown and Sumsion (2016) not as a positive/negative binary but through the concept of agonism. The authors utilise the political theory of agonism in terms of an approach which 'allows a suspension of multiple voices moving in tension, where tension is not necessarily negative or positive, but productive.' (p.204) The Brown and Sumsion (2016) study goes further, suggesting that the notion of fragmentation be viewed with more criticality. They argue

This characterization [of fragmentation] has a totalizing and disciplining effect on a sector that could instead be reconfigured in agonistic terms. The widely held belief that the ECEC sector was 'fragmented', led the early childhood participants to feel that the extent to which they could influence politicians/policy was somewhat restricted. (p.206)

Through an agonistic reconfiguring, however, the perceived workforce fragmentation is framed in terms of diversity and complexity, and that this is conducive to conditions for contestation. Such contestation is seen as a pre-cursor to the generation of visionary policy. This is a perspective echoed by Moss (2014) who advocates for agonism in the democratic politics of early childhood education, one that is 'open to the prospect that something new, previously unknown can emerge from an encounter with difference' (p.119). These differing perspectives, which exemplify the eclecticism of an early childhood sector variously as positive diversity or ambiguity of purpose, warrant further exploration in light of the data in this study.

Neoliberalism⁵

A growing corpus of international research critiques the ways in which early childhood educators have been positioned in relation to the dominance of a neoliberal paradigm (Dahlberg and Moss 2005; Beck 2008; Moss 2014; Sims and Waniganayake 2017; Wood 2017; Sims 2017; Roberts-Holmes 2019; Kamenac 2019). Neoliberal thinking has been described as focussing on marketisation, efficiency, increased accountability and globalisation (Baltodana 2012; Waugh 2014) privileging the power of the market over issues of citizenship, equity and social justice. In such a regime, early childhood education is framed by an investment narrative (Heckman 2011; 2018) and as an economic imperative as the 'foundation for tomorrow's workforce' (World Bank 2017). Giroux (2015) argues that schools (and I suggest early childhood settings also) are now less about education and more about preparation for the world of work. As a result, he asserts that education is now an 'adjunct of corporate control' (p.123).

Existing literature (Osgood 2012; Hall and McGinty 2015) considers the impact of neoliberalism as an economic and cultural orthodoxy on educator professional identities. Notably, Hall and McGinty (2015), drawing from data collected in secondary English schools, assert that the regulation and increased and centralised demands of a new public management ⁶ regime act to restrict professional identity formation. Indeed Gewirtz et al. (2009) and Kay et al (2019) propose that new public management (see

⁵ For a wider discussion of neo-liberal theory and impacts, see p.193.

⁶ Hall and McGinty (2015) describe how in education New Public Management (NPM) 'has been a central feature of reform efforts in this context since the Thatcher led administrations of 1979-1990 created a newly legible education system organized around a National Curriculum with national testing as part of the creation of a so-called 'Standards Agenda' alongside the creation of local educational quasi-markets in which schools ranked through league tables were expected to compete with one another for 'customers.' (p.3).

p.70) and its resultant strategies in education have diminished individual and collective teacher autonomy. In early childhood education researchers have considered how this manifests in performance related pay, standardization of curriculum, intensified assessment, and managerialism (Evetts, 2009) and has resulted in restricted occupational professionalism. Roberts-Holmes (2019) and Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) detail how processes of datafication (in which assessments as data generation shape pedagogy, govern workload and are driven by accountability) powerfully impact on educator professional identities. Through the production of digital data

early years local and contextualised professionalism is shifted towards producing objective numerical data for comparison within a highly centralised national system (Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016, p.124).

The authors also assert that such data-driven subjectivities are indicative of what Ball and Olmedo (2013, p.38) call 'a new type of teacher...forming in the logic of competition.'

Additional literature maps the discursive construction of the educator as a marketized professional (Beck and Young 2005). Hursh and Henderson (2011) highlight how Bill Gates (founder of the Microsoft Corporation) argues 'we can identify good teachers by their students' high-test scores' and that the best way to develop good teachers is for them to be 'controlled rather than consulted' (p.180). Such discourses of marketisation and business are further reflected in a New Zealand early childhood context in a thesis by Kamenac (2019) who concludes that tensions exist between 'divergent and opposing discursive windows' (p.i) including discourses of business and economic investment which have resulted in competition, entrepreneurship and social-intervention at the expense of discourses of collegiality and collectivism in which professionalism and democratic education can be enacted. Such an analysis also speaks to explorations of the notion of *fragmentation* in the sector, explored later.

However, literature also proposes that such discourses are being met with challenge. Notably, Ball and Olmedo (2013) propose that neoliberalism is forming new kinds of teacher subjectivities and that this, in turn is forming 'the terrain of struggle, the terrain of resistance' (p.85) in which teachers' responses form a 'struggle against mundane, quotidian forms of neoliberalisations' (p.85). Such an analysis is formative for the perspective of this thesis.

Further literature details the pervasive influence of neoliberalism and its effects on professional identity formation through discourses of technicity, performativity and accountability, which I now explore in further detail.

Technicist

Early childhood educators have also been described as subject to technicist expectations. Critiques highlight dominant discourses of early educators framed as technicians delivering outcomes-led pedagogy (Solway 2000; Moss 2006; 2014). Such a dominant discourse positions the role of early childhood educators as one applying a predefined set of technologies which are highly governed and regulated processes with the aim of producing pre-defined and measurable outcomes for children. In early childhood education, these technologies and practices also include narrow, detailed, and instrumental curricula, and accountability-based assessment to measure performance against standardised outcome criteria. Indeed Wood (2017) attests that practitioners' work is increasingly shaped by data-driven priorities, regulatory systems of governance and centrally imposed targets, and there are apprehensions about professional agency being compromised by technical and audit demands.

Such technologies and resulting 'technicisation' of the educator have been described by Smyth (2001) as resulting in framing teachers as compliant operatives engaging in 'deliverology' (Barber et al 2010) and 'matters of classroom competence' (Sachs 2016 p.418).

This technicisation can be read as the consequences of a human capital justification for investment in early childhood education. This justification (See Heckman 2011; 2018 discussed above) is linked to economic discourses of investment and cost-effectiveness, and government imperatives for educational effectiveness.

The work of the technician is also inscribed with certain values. Certainty, through outcomes that are known and measurable and prescribed methods to achieve them, is important, as is objectivity – a belief in the possibility of applying processes in a detached and replicable way that excludes personal interpretation and feeling. (Moss, 2006, p.35)

This framing of early childhood educator as technician also values technical proficiency and constructs professionalism as the individual required to meet competency-based occupational standards through predominantly work-based assessment (Moss 2006). It might, therefore, be argued that educators are governed and regulated by

technologies which dictate both *practice* (what) and *professional identities* (who);
technologies which value conformity in both domains.

Performativity

The notion of performativity in education has been brought to the fore by Ball (2003; 2008; 2012). Ball (2003) attests, that performativity:

[I]s a technology, a culture and mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays a means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organisations) ...encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation within a field of judgement. The issue of who controls the field of judgement is crucial (p. 216).

Such a performative regime in relation to early childhood education has been critiqued internationally and from a range of theoretical perspectives in different contexts. A body of work from Australian academics considers the processes and effects of such performativity including from a Foucauldian perspective. Hunkin (2016) adopts a genealogical approach to consider the way in which 'performing' accredited quality [in early childhood education] has become the basis for a performativity structure' (p.40) concluding that government initiation and control of discourse resulted in the development of learning outcomes for children which are used as technologies of performativity. Similar regimes of truth are drawn upon by Macfarlane and Lakhani (2015) in their policy analysis which identifies 'truths' about success and propriety and 'proper child development' (p.188) in an Australian strategy document for early childhood. Kilderry (2015), also in an Australian context deploys critical theory to consider performativity intensified through three phases of emerging, consolidating and being normalised in the curriculum and teaching. Responses from educators are framed as performative anxiety, performative confidence through teacher self -efficacy in individual educator abilities.

Performativity in an UK early childhood context is analysed as 'increased demands to demonstrate competence' (Osgood, 2006, p.5) resulting in 'demised professionalism' (Spencer-Woodley 2014, p. 68). Tellingly, such eroded professionalism is seen by Spencer-Woodley to jeopardise the educator's opportunities to flourish, particularly notable since the international financial downturn. Thus, whilst policy technologies may

differ between contexts, it would appear that such performativity discourses, as indicative of a broader neoliberal model, travel globally⁷.

A more recent evolution of this idea appears in what Wilkins (2011) describes as the 'post-performative' teacher who is conscious of the potential conflicts between accountability performativity and the desire for autonomy, but in practice finds balance between these. Such a perspective speaks to discourses 'in-between' agency and structure as discussed later.

Accountability

A natural corollary of such a performativity culture, is a 'routine of constant reporting and recording of our practice' (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p.90), educators required to comply with a pervasive regime of accountability (Ozga 2013; Bradbury 2014; Spencer-Woodley 2014; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury 2016; Archer 2017). Such a regime (including high stakes assessment for accountability purposes) has been critiqued in a number of quarters for its impact on the professional identities of early childhood educators. Notably, Spencer-Woodley discusses the dominant discourses of intensifying managerialism and Archer (2017) suggests that such accountability impacts on relationships between educators and children.

This increased accountability is demonstrated by Sims and Waniganayake (2015) in the following:

- 'Hierarchical management structures aimed to ensure every employee is accountable via specified outputs, to someone else higher in the chain;
- Increased specificity of workloads to make accountability easier. Teachers/academics are no longer trusted to work autonomously: this is a commodification of teaching and research (Olssen and Peters, 2005);
- Increased outside imposition of curriculum against which performance (student outcomes) can be measured. Teachers/academics are no longer trusted to use their professional expertise to determine what (and how) they teach;
- Standardisation "in the name of accountability" (Baltodana, 2012, p.495)

⁷ It is notable that most of the literature cited in this section is located New Zealand, Australia and England. These are countries that have both invested in ECE but have also seen pervasive interventions, including constructing what it means to be an ECE professional. Further insights into resistances and activism to the neoliberal paradigm across these nations could be gleaned in future work (see conclusion – future research)

In particular, such accountability positions educators as 'implementers of a competency-based, outcome-oriented pedagogy' (Ryan and Bourke 2013). This is perceived to be achieved through the production of a proliferation of evidence, paper trails and visibility (Grant et al 2016). Such intensification of external accountability is perceived to result in a diminished agency of educators through 'reduced autonomy as a result of the regulatory gaze' (Osgood, 2010, p.124) and for identities to be shaped by regulation (Fenech et al. 2006). Impact on the identities of educators is further evident in the literature through discourses of surveillance (Mac Naughton 2005), de-professionalisation (Sims et al. 2014), and 'uniformity and normalisation of thought and practice' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p vi).

Through mechanisms of performativity and accountability the neoliberal ideology can be perceived to produce 'docile subjects' who are closely governed, but who, simultaneously consider themselves to have freedoms (Rose 1999). Foucault (1980) defines this as governmentality – 'the process by which governments work to produce citizens who help them enact their policies' (Blum and Ullman, 2012 p.370). However, such a position is critiqued by Osgood (2006) who suggests that the notion of docile bodies negates the agency of (in this case) educators and how they actively challenge, negotiate and reform the discourses through which they are positioned. This idea is further explored in the section on agentic discourses below.

Early childhood educators have been variously deployed and manipulated to enact policies such as preparing children for school, facilitating parental employment and ultimately enabling the nation's participation 'in the global race' (DfE 2012). Such policy flux, and the resulting redefinitions of purpose of early educators, is reflected by Gooch and Powell (2017). The authors reflect on numerous changing discourses: 'politicians and policy makers who [are] constantly... treating the practitioners as 'palimpsests' inscribing, cleaning, and re-inscribing those who work with babies and young children.' (p.2) This notion of a palimpsest is a powerful heuristic and brings a sharp focus to the way in which educators are subject to and accountable for the expectations of ever-evolving policy priorities. Taking this idea, I propose that neoliberal demands, such as increased performativity and accountability, are inscribed on top of additional discourses of feminised care and mothering resulting in complex and intensified demands upon the workforce.

This section has sought to convey and interrogate the multiple and conflicting institutional discourses which circulate around the professional identity construction of early childhood educators. Such structural discourses dominate the research literature

and whilst few studies diminish the agency of early childhood educators to act or act back on such policy constructs, much analysis is firmly rooted in critique of dominance and the reproduction of unequal power relations. I now turn to an exploration of agentic discourses which prevail in the literature.

Agentic Discourses

Conversely, a number of studies can be categorised as acknowledging the agentic dispositions and behaviours of early childhood educators. Whilst these are far from numerous, important theorising regarding agentic and activist identities provides a powerful counterbalance to the institutional discourse dominance in the literature. I have grouped these discourses under the following headings:

- Agentic
- Activist/Resistance
- Agentic responses to performativity

Agentic

Agency, defined as, 'one's ability to pursue the goals that one values' (Archer 1995; 2000), can be perceived as a concern with the realisation of identities, their (re)construction where necessary; and responding to circumstances which may challenge or erode them. Lewis and Moje (2003) assert that:

Power does not reside only in macro-structures; but rather it is produced in and through individuals as they are constituted in larger systems of power (p.1980)

Agentic discourses *can* be found in the literature, but they are often discussed in reaction to, or subordinate to structural/institutional discourses. Miller (2008) explores the concept of early childhood educators as 'active agents' as an alternative perspective on professionalism. Miller discusses the importance of autonomous professionals including training providers 'with the power to enable early years practitioners to harness their own agency and thus develop a sense of professional identity' (p.260). More explicit discourses of agency can be found in terms of activism/resistance and agentic responses to performativity.

Activist/Resistant

This section seeks to highlight where activist and resistant discourses appear in research literature. For a detailed discussion of the conceptual relationships between resistance and activism see Activism section (p.45).

Osgood (2006) explores the notion of agency as 'passive resistance' by early childhood educators in the face of 'the power of certain discourses to become convincing and oppressive discursive truths' (p.7). The author considers that such passive resistance speaks to Foucauldian ideas about 'technicians of behaviour' (Foucault, 1978, p.294) who become 'bodies that are docile and capable' (Foucault, 1980, p.138). Whilst Osgood critiques the oppression, she does not detail how such resistance manifests. However, she acknowledges the power of subversive action and advocates for practitioners to 'develop critical consciousness and to challenge current self-understandings' (p.7).

Lenz-Taguchi's work (2008) also considers an 'ethics of resistance' in relation to the 'growing technology of developmentality' (p.271). Based on a three-year action research project, the study sought to challenge taken for granted assumptions and instrumentalism which implies 'the existence of a single best and most efficient theory of learning and development or a universal tool to evaluate developmental outcomes or quality of services for children and families' (p.271). This was undertaken through a process of 'deconstructive talks' and resistance which is described as 'not about opposing or simply replacing one understanding with another. Rather, it is about a continuous process of displacement and transformation from within what we already think and do' (p.272). Such resistance can be seen as indicative of agentive action in the face of dominant discourses which construct who the early educator should be and what they should do. Thus, this thesis takes the gap in understanding about how resistance by early childhood educators plays out in response to dominant discursive constructions of their professional identities.

Feneche et al (2010) build on the work of Lenz-Taguchi (2008), and Dahlberg and Moss (2005), to advocate for a resistance-based professionalism in early childhood education. Drawing on Foucauldian concepts of power, the authors explore resistance to the technical, deprofessionalising constraints of policy reform proposing 'compliance is one response, resistance another. Should the subject choose resistance, then this can be exercised at multiple points and in a myriad of ways.' (p.92). Importantly the authors, whilst acknowledging an asymmetry of power between policy makers and practitioners, also look to the idea of multiplicity in resistance to power:

According to Foucault: these points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case. (Foucault, 1978, pp. 95-96 in Fenech et al, 2010, p.92)

This notion of resistance is a discourse predicated on educator agency. As such, it speaks to conceptual models of teacher resistance in terms of agentic strategies of 'critical vigilance, counter discourses and counter conduct' (Anderson and Cohen, 2015, p.9).

Beyond resistance, the literature offers some, although I argue a limited, exploration of discourses of activism in early childhood education identity formation. Leafgren's (2018) US study imagines teachers' 'nomadic and radical non-compliance' as a response to forms of professionalism rooted in acquiescence to policy constraints. Advocating for the resistance to idealised and normalised forms of practice, Leafgren proposes that for educators '[n]omadism is a way of life that exists outside of the organizational "state"...movement across space, which exists in sharp contrast to the rigid and static boundaries of the state. (p.187). Such a contravention of boundaries through a nomadic existence, offers a powerful heuristic through which to consider an activist identity.

Meyerson (2004) discusses the notion of educator as 'tempered radical': one who accepts that any organisation is dynamic and evolving and, as such, finds it possible to walk the line between remaining 'corporate' and being a catalyst for change. These individuals 'are not heroic leaders of revolutionary action; rather they are cautious and committed catalysts that keep going and who slowly make a difference'.(p.16) This concept is taken up by Carlone et al (2010) who recognise such individuals as both insiders and outsiders in an organization:

tempered radicals are people who operate on a fault line. They are organizational insiders who contribute and succeed in their jobs. At the same time, they are treated as outsiders because they represent ideals or agendas that are somehow at odds with the dominant culture. (p.5)

In this conceptualisation the tempered radical makes decisions on when to acquiesce and when to challenge, offering a measured and strategic version of dissent. Such a reading acknowledges structural constraints and locates the tempered radical in a space of tension between their agency and structural demands.

Writing in which the discourse of an activist identity is more explicit can be found in Sachs (2003a; 2010) who details the notion of educator as 'activist professional'. Sachs (2003a) suggests

Redefining teacher professional identity as an activist identity involves...a sustained effort to shed the shackles of the past, thereby permitting a transformative attitude to the future...and overcoming the legitimate or illegitimate domination of some individuals or groups (p.131).

Sachs offers a summary of a teacher activist identity as

- 'based on democratic principles
- negotiated
- collaborative
- socially critical
- future oriented
- strategic and tactical' (p.134).

Sachs (2003a) argues that educators should directly challenge or balance managerial discourses with democratic discourses that have emancipatory aims and are rooted in 'principles of equity and social justice'. (p.157) This notion of a principled driven approach to an activist identity is also highlighted by Catone (2017) whose participant teacher activists identified their purpose as 'confront[ing] oppression by disrupting the prevailing patterns of power and privilege' (p.137).

Agentic responses to performativity

In contrast to previously discussed studies in the context of the neoliberal paradigm which focus on institutional discourses, work in Australia by Kilderry (2015) analyses agentic behaviours of practitioners within this regime. Acknowledging performative anxiety as a consequence of neoliberal reform in education, Kilderry also identifies agentic behaviours of confidence and disregard in participants. The idea of *performative confidence* is considered in relation to teacher self-belief and self-assurance. whereas '*disregard as a performative accountability*' is perceived when 'the participant teachers disrespect or ignore policy or leadership expectations, predominantly through holding enough confidence to do so' (p.640).

These readings which acknowledge a range of both structural and agentic discourses, including multiple forms of activism and resistance are complicated by intentions and actions of educators which might be perceived between these discourses. Examples are evident from the literature of where institutional discourses are negotiated or mediated by individuals and where agency is expressed but is tempered or limited. These 'in-between' third spaces, the sites of struggle explored in the theoretical framework chapter, acknowledge the power of practitioner agency even within a realm

of dominant institutional and economic discourses. Such spaces appear key to understanding the multiple ways in which sites of struggle manifest and how resistance and activism play out.

The space in-between agency and structure

Jones and Osgood (2007) propose that 'how we acquire and how we exercise agency are inextricably linked to the regulatory practices in which agency is both scripted and practised' (p.298). This assertion situates potential agency as shaped and lived under the influences of institutional policies and discourses and serves to underscore the pervasive effects of the latter on the former.

A number of discourses pertaining to the professional identities of early educators which are analysed or theorised in the literature, can be located in a space in-between institutional discourses (structures) and agentic behaviours (agency). Reflecting the tensions between institutionally created and sanctioned discourses and the agency of educators, might be read as a 'site of struggle,' (Ball 2013). These discourses can be divided into a number of categories: agency with limits, policy entrepreneurialism, mediating policy and the conflicted professional. For Alsup (2006), in her study of US pre-service teacher such 'borderland discourses' (p.36) are perceived as a discourse 'where there is evidence of contact between disparate personal and professional subjectivities ...leading to the integration of multiple senses of self' (p.36).

Notwithstanding the value of such a perspective, I adopt a slightly different position in which 'in-between' discourses, within this study, reflect those in which participants respond to officially produced, structural discourses of professional identities and early educators own agentic positionings of self. I now look to the literature which considers these positionings.

Agency within limits

Some notions of early childhood educators exhibiting agency within limits are borne of a critical realist school of thought. Simpson (2010), in a study on the then newly initiated Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) in England, considers the concept of 'bounded agency'. This perspective views agency as something that individuals possess, but which is 'bounded' by society, which places restrictions on the formation of an individual's identity. Notably, Simpson critiques two theories of professionalisation which are mediated by government-produced policy. The first is an activist oriented

theory of agency by Miller (2008) in which she represents early educators as agentic and reflexive in their construction of professionalism, and the second is a post-structural feminist perspective (Osgood 2006) which Simpson reads as focusing on the socially constructed and determined versions of professional identity. Simpson asserts that the agency of EYPs is 'more sophisticated than previous activist models of early years professionalism suggest.' (2010, p.12)

Simpson (2010) further critiques the post-structuralist perspective of Osgood which, he suggests, 'inappropriately privileges external contexts at the expense of agency' (p.12) and 'overstates the influence of the 'disempowering regulatory gaze' of central government and its 'technicist' discourse of professionalisation.' (Simpson 2010 p. 278). However, the majority of the literature in this field identifies and critiques the power of institutional discourses, many predicated on neoliberal foundations and makes a compelling critique of the disciplinary and regulatory power of governmentality. Simpson's argument also minimises Osgood's acknowledgment of agentic power. However, Osgood's paper is explicit on this issue:

the role personal agency can play is central to my argument in that the regulatory gaze can be, if not entirely resisted, at least negotiated/challenged. (Osgood 2006, p.6).

Simpson's critical realist perspective highlights participants' 'self-talk' drawing on Archer's notion (2000) of 'internal conversations' as a reconciliation of the powers of structure and agency. However, such a perspective, I contend, does not adequately acknowledge the asymmetry of power between structures and individual agency in this dynamic and underplays educator agentic actions. This concept is explored in further detail in the theoretical framework section of the thesis.

Entrepreneurialism

A number of studies frame the early educator as an entrepreneur – not in the conventional sense of establishing a new business venture – but through entrepreneurial behaviours such as risk taking, embracing ambiguity, and valuing innovation (Knight 2005). As such, early educators navigating the policy terrain are depicted as 'policy entrepreneur[s]' (Lipsky in Lea 2014) 'ethical entrepreneur[s]' (Fasoli, Scrivens and Woodrow 2007) and 'entrepreneurial professional[s]' (Sachs 2003).

Lea draws on Lipsky (2010) to offer a conception of the early childhood educator as a 'policy entrepreneur'. This idea positions the early educator as one who challenges the various politico-economic influences on policy, whilst also developing local (often micro level) responses informed by personal values and the best interests of children and families.

Understanding roles in this way not only validates the agentic and decision-making power of the professional working at the local level but also calls on professionals to recognise their potential power to reproduce or challenge dominance. (Lea, 2014, p.24)

Such a role reveals the criticality involved in such responses. Whilst the label of 'entrepreneur' brings with it economic connotations, it also points to creativity in the educator positioning themselves, navigating and negotiating policy discourses, illustrative of the aforementioned 'site of struggle' (Ball 2016).

Mediating policy

In a similar conceptualisation, Lea (2014) draws on ideas from social work communities of practice to further consider the relationship between the early childhood educator and (inter)national policy agendas. Lea utilises Lipsky's (1980) notion of the early years practitioner as a 'street level bureaucrat'. Street-level bureaucrats are identified as

...people 'employed' by government who: 1) are constantly called upon to interact with citizens in the regular course of their jobs; 2) have significant independence in job decision-making; and 3) potentially have extensive impact on the lives of their clients.

...are relatively strongly affected by three conditions: 1) relative unavailability of resources both personal and organizational; 2) existence of clear physical and/or psychological threat; and 3) ambiguous, contradictory and in some ways unattainable role expectations. (Lipsky, 1980, p.1)

Lipsky argued that 'policy implementation in the end comes down to the people who actually implement it' (p.25). The concept of 'street level bureaucrat' suggests something of a 'go-between' role between families and policy makers with a focus on policy compliance or enactment. However, Lea (2014) also questions this notion, by acknowledging the agency of the early years educator in negotiating multiple policy developments and identifies the importance of professional judgements made on the basis of values. This tension between personal values and multiple, evolving policies is also explored by McBlain et al (2017). Reviewing the idea of tempered radicals, discussed earlier, the authors consider how such educators

challenge assumptions and modify boundaries of inclusion and can do so because they are able to differentiate among views that they are willing to compromise on and those that are non-negotiable; they have positioned themselves (p.161).

Conversely Tuval (2014) noted how some educators developed a range of 'camouflage strategies' in order to cope with perceived incompatibilities between structural discourses and personal beliefs. These strategies involved educators adopting a veneer or façade without explicitly choosing one position or another. In this study of teachers in Israeli schools, participants grappled with ideals of inclusion and realities of the stratification of students in practice. To cope with these incompatibilities the teachers developed camouflage strategies including self-delusion (If I don't admit it, it is not there) and 'fictive mobility' (p.14) (imaginary equal opportunity). These findings appear to reflect discourses which not only mediate policy but result in the educator as feeling conflicted. Such a study contributes to broader understandings about the power effects of (in the case of this research) ECE policy reach into all areas of practitioners' lives, from the standards they have to reach and demonstrate, to the scrutiny of OFSTED, to the regulatory gaze of managers/school leaders. Such a sense of educators feeling conflicted is prevalent in the literature.

Conflicted

A further conceptualisation of the 'inbetween-ness' of an early educators' professional identity is as one who is conflicted. Whitehead (1989) discusses the idea of educators as a 'living contradiction' when they experience cognitive dissonance as a result of their educational value(s) being compromised or denied. Such a typology is akin to the notion of 'cynical compliance' (Ball 2003) and positions the educator not only in a diminished role but one of negotiating, conceding or conforming. This may take multiple forms and has variously been described: 'masquerade as conforming' (Hall 2007 in Goouch, 2010, p.97), and 'ventriloquate the discourse, whatever that might be' (Goouch 2010, p.2).

Carlone et al (2010) further illustrate the conflicted nature of educators in a study of a group of US elementary educators as reluctant dissenters. The authors typify these individuals as hesitant radicals who do not conventionally speak up or challenge authority but nevertheless find occasion where they felt compelled to do just this. Teaching an inquiry-based approach in schools, which prioritised testing and tested subjects, the participants in the study articulated creative subversions of lateral thinking

they initiated to contest or navigate the demands and constraints they experienced. Carlone et al (2010) describe how these teachers 'walked that line by enacting 'tempered radical' (Meyerson 2001) identities' (p.959).

From this review of discourses 'in between', what emerges is a complex empirical terrain in which the numerous conflicting policy discourses collide in a space with multiple values, beliefs and motivations of individuals. In turn these discourses are analysed using various theoretical frameworks resulting in a body of knowledge which complicates the simple agency/structure binary.

Summary

Having considered existing literature on the professional identities of early educators, it appears that the discourses within this 'in-between' space are limited in number and, I would argue, under-theorised. Whilst post-structural feminist and critical realist perspectives explore structure/agency tensions in professional identity formation, few studies analyse empirical data illustrating these tensions. In particular post-structuralist theories have featured prominently in these understandings over the past fifteen years forging new ways of revealing, deconstructing, and critiquing dominant discourses. However, a review of the literature reveals some, but not numerous empirical studies in early childhood studying the relationship between policy-sanctioned subjectivities and educator responses. Further, there would appear to be limited understandings of how resistances and activism play out in spaces between agency and structures.

Additionally, this study responds to a call from Hall and McGinty (2015):

there is not enough empirical evidence being made available to those who are engaging in activism as a means to challenge the dominant discourses embodied within the neoliberal approaches to educational policy (p.13).

This thesis responds to governmentality literature, which Ball (2016) finds maintains a 'theoretical silence around contestation' (p.1130), and explores both individual and collective resistance and activism, and the enablements and restrictions on these in a contemporary context.

This review has illustrated how such policy contexts create complex, formative, and limiting discourses of professional identities and this perspective informs the following policy analysis of this study. I intend, through this study, to gain insight into the discursive constructions of professional identity which are both created in and

sanctioned through policy texts but also made, circulated, negotiated or resisted by early childhood educators

The thesis now explores and justifies the chosen theoretical and conceptual frameworks before detailing the study methodology.

Chapter 3 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Introduction

Having considered key concepts of agency, activism, and professional identities in the previous literature review chapter, I now turn to selecting and justifying the chosen theories and building a conceptual framework for this study. This chapter explores critical theory, third space theory and border theory to form a novel theoretical framework with which to consider this research endeavour. This involves an approach drawing on multiple theories combined in a new way to address the research questions.

This section also includes a personal reflection which explains the impetus for the selection of theories and development of the conceptual framework: a sensitising concept formed in the early stages of the study.

The chapter concludes with a diagrammatic representation of the initial conceptual framework which forms the basis of the study and which is developed through the course of the thesis.

Reconceptualised Critical Theory

...the roots of critical studies lie in connecting the everyday to larger political and economic questions. (Mumby, 2004, p.252)

This study aims at a critical reconceptualisation of the discursive constructs about early childhood educators in workforce reform policies. In turn, I seek to explore the actions of educators in response to these reforms.

Critical theory originated in the early-mid twentieth century with the Frankfurt School. Early advocates revisited Marx's critique of capitalism and emphasised the importance of liberating individuals from 'the circumstances that enslave them' (Horkheimer 1982). Principally, what unites critical theorists are beliefs that the actions of individuals are invariably shaped to some degree by structures and processes of domination. Such domination, through ideology, is seen by critical theorists as the principle obstacle to human liberation (Budd 2008). Whilst iterations of the theory have evolved and continue to evolve through various 'turns', critical theory continues to be influential, often taken up or advanced in relation with other theories aligned to ideology critique.

Critical theory offers a lens through which to approach this study into the power of ideology and discourse. Critical theory also enables the researcher to interpret and analyse of acts of domination and resistance. I draw on work by Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) which evolves previous iterations of critical theory. In particular I put to work ideas from reconceptualised critical theory which critique notions of instrumental or technical rationality. Such critique suggests this instrumentality is preoccupied with efficiency over values, ethics or purpose. According to Kincheloe and McLaren (2000, p. 289) such a perspective 'delimits its questions to 'how to' rather than 'why should'. I propose that in early childhood education, this can be seen to manifest as a preoccupation with already known outcomes both for children's learning and in the professional standard-forming for educators. This technical rationality is deemed to have the intention to 'tame, predict, supervise, control or evaluate according to already determined standards' (Olsson, 2009, p.185).

Three concepts which are key to reconceptualised critical theory and thus to understandings of the intersections between the social production of knowledge and the perpetuation of power relations, are hegemony, ideology and discursive power. Understandings of cultural hegemony (see Gramsci 1971) have evolved from the idea that ruling classes propagate sets of values as 'common sense' by consent seeking or coercion through education, religious institutions, and media outlets. A reconceptualised reading considers such actions as constantly in flux being both contested and contestable.

In terms of ideology, Kincheloe and McClaren (2000) attest that 'ideological hegemony involves the cultural forms, the meanings, the rituals that produce consent to the status quo and individuals' particular places within it.' (p.283) This understanding is predicated on the idea that ideology informs dominant discourses which shape our realities. From a critical perspective, the power of such discourses, is not simply through their linguistic descriptions about the world but rather the ways in which they shape its construction. In educational contexts, legitimated discourses of power, deployed through, it is argued, stealth and coercion, express to educators desirable pedagogical choices on teaching approaches, views of success and perspectives on professional identities. In this way, ideology presents 'ideal', sanctioned iterations of who educators should be and what they should do. Thus, this notion of discursive closure would appear important to this analysis of workforce reform policy and professional identities formation in early childhood education.

Critical theory has been criticized for its emphasis on critique but with limited focus on political action or praxis. Whilst this praxeological dimension is explored by Fuchs (2016) who suggests that critical theorists do attend to actual social struggles of oppressed groups, there would appear to be a lack of empirical attention on how these struggles play out in multiple contexts. Such a shortcoming is addressed through consideration of additional theories below but firstly I consider the use of critical theory in studies on early childhood education.

Critical theory in ECEC

Critical theory has a history, albeit a relatively short history, in the field of early childhood. Over the past thirty years, various forms of critical theories have been deployed in ECE scholarship to consider issues of status, power, equity and social justice for children, families, and educators. During this period, a reconceptualizing group in ECE has emerged. This international group of practitioners and academics draw from an array of critical, feminist and post-structural perspectives in their work (see <http://www.receinternational.org/>) to champion perspectives which disrupt dominant 'truths' (Urban 2016). As a movement RECE is rooted in social justice and equity agendas and draws on critical traditions which have emancipatory aspirations (Cannella 1997; Soto 2000; Ryan and Grieshaber 2004; Blaise and Ryan 2012). For many of these critical researchers the broader policy arena, the curriculum and the classroom have all become sites of struggle, where inequitable power relations are troubled and where research is undertaken to explore how educators and children respond to these power imbalances in local contexts. This thesis looks to this rich tradition of critical theorists in the field, but also transgresses conventional disciplinary boundaries in seeking to work with multiple theories. I explore this work with and beyond critical theory below.

Working with and beyond critical theory

Literature reviewed on theories of agency (notably relational and collaborative agency) lead me to conclude that whilst a reconceptualised version of critical theory is formative as a lens through which to consider notions of power in identity formation, it is incomplete. Acknowledging and employing this overarching theory recognises the power discourses prevalent in the formation of professional identity construction. However, important as this perspective is, such a theory underplays the agentic

potential of individuals in this process and, as a critical social scientist, I believe that it is necessary to also understand the lived experiences of people in context.

It is at this point that I seek an approach which draws on critical theory as an overarching and guiding theory coupled with both third space theory as a post-colonial perspective and border theory taking inspirations from geo-spatial and cultural politics. Coupling these theories in this study affords opportunities to both reveal *and* consider the potential challenge or other responses to power structures.

Following initial exploration of the formation of professional identities in ECE (see literature review) I question the binary of such identities constructed either through institutional discourses in policy or by the personal motivations, beliefs and values of practitioners. Given the inherent and ongoing complexity of early educators positioning themselves and being 'positioned' by government-sanctioned policy in professional terms, I am keen to explore the zone in-between these two spaces. I want to consider the notion that where these two spaces meet might be a complex, fluid and constantly evolving space. Reflecting on existing literature which frames the places of construction of professional identities or subjectivities as 'sites of struggle', I wanted to reconsider and reconceptualise this space.

In order to further explore and develop the concept of spaces in which professional identities are formed (where institutional discourses meet personal experiences) I utilise third space theory and elements of border theory in the development of a conceptual framework (see Fig. 3.2). Employing these multiple theories opens this approach to critique of epistemological incongruence. However, I contend that ontologically, they are compatible based on their shared understandings of the socially constructed nature of realities. In epistemological terms, I consider that these theories are predicated on the perception that these realities and knowledges are both socially constructed and shaped by relations of power. This is further explored in methodological discussions in Chapter Four.

By way of justifying and illustrating the appropriateness of these theories to this research, I draw on several studies from multiple disciplines. Firstly, I share a personal reflection which informed these decisions.

Reflection: Living and Working in the Borderlands



Fig 3. 1 Map of Lincolnshire Coast

(Imagery ©2018 Inforterra Ltd and BlueSky, Google Data SIO, NOAA US Navy, NGA, GEBCO, Map Data 2018 Google.)

One year into this study, I went home. Home for me is the east coast of Lincolnshire, an area in which I spent most of my school years. Whilst I grew up in the suburbs of a large town, as a family we enjoyed the nearby beaches of the county's coastline all year round. I decided to take a drive, to create some headspace and think about the research journey ahead.

Reflecting on many happy childhood days with family, I was struck by what a formative place the beach had been. Whilst trying to resist temptations to romanticise memories of days by the sea, it was difficult not to feel nostalgic for the long, wide, sandy beaches, big skies and an associated sense of freedom. It continues to draw me back. Heading to the coast, down the ancient drove roads flanked by narrow dykes, a distinct and familiar landscape came into view: the salt marsh, coastal dunes and wetlands. This part of the county is marked by wide, wind-blown coastal plains, tidal creeks and reclaimed outmarsh where land meets sea (see Fig.3.1). I describe it as peaceful, remote, and in some ways, forgotten.

This is also a place where a line of my ancestors lived for over 500 years. As settlers in the sixteenth century they were members of communities who drained and reclaimed the land from the sea, establishing coastal salterns and repossessing the

land to create rich pasture fields for livestock. Their livelihoods and identities were shaped on and by this place.

It is an area which, over the centuries, has seen land reclamation by human hands, but also tidal flooding: a place of erosion, sedimentation and accretion, of incremental loss and gain⁸. As such, the shifting sands of this coastline act as a powerful metaphor for instability, of the tenuous and dynamic, defying permanence. The landscape in motion also represents a fragile site, suggesting struggles over issues of ownership and belonging. It speaks of unpredictability, but also of possibility and transformation. It is the idea of this terrain as a borderland, which has fascinated me, and which resonates for this study.

This coastline metaphor acts as a sensitising concept as I further consider appropriate theory, research design and data analysis. In order to develop this metaphor and conceptualisation further I consider firstly the applicability of both third space theory and borderland theory to the study. This is followed by an exploration of how the idea of borderlands offer both a theoretical lens and conceptual heuristic in making sense of this research.

Third Space theory

Reflecting on the limitations which critical theory brings to exploring the agency of individuals, whilst acknowledging the power and potential oppression of structures, leads me to consider theory which looks beyond structuralism/intentionalism. Third space theory commonly rejects modernist binaries, including conventional agency/structure dualisms and explores hybrid spaces between such binaries (see literature review on dialectical theories). Third space theory also offers an alternative

⁸ The Lincolnshire coastal marshes were originally salt marsh, regularly flooded by the sea. Land reclamation is the process of (re)claiming this salt marsh from the sea for farmland. 'Along much of Lincolnshire Marsh there appears to be an intimate association between medieval seabanks and salterns (places where sea salt was manufactured). This is because the salt was extracted from salt-encrusted sand gathered off the foreshore, which, following treatment, was dumped in large mounds. As new salterns were created to seaward to minimise the distance fresh sand had to be brought, so the coastline advanced, and in many cases short lengths of bank were constructed linking up abandoned salterns, thereby reclaiming the land behind for pasture.' Historic England (2018 p.4) <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/iha-roman-medieval-sea-river-flood-defences/heag229-roman-medieval-sea-river-flood-defences/>

and hitherto seldom explored lens through which to consider my research aims and questions. A dictionary of critical theory defines third space as:

A creative space between the discourse or position of the ruling subject and the discourse or position of the subaltern subject. (Buchanan, 2010, p.468)

Third space theory is formed of a reconceptualisation of the first and second spaces of human interaction (Moje et al. in Pane 2007). First and second spaces are framed as binary, often oppositional categories – sometimes spaces where people meet physically and/or virtually. Third spaces are the in-between, or hybrid spaces where first and second spaces come together or overlap. As a space it may be marked by conflict but also the generation of new forms of knowledges, understandings, and discourses (Pane 2007).

Third space theory proposes that every person is a cultural hybrid influenced by unique sets of affinities or identity factors. As such, border spaces are active sites of intersection and overlap, which support the creation of 'in-between' identities. Amongst the most seminal researchers in this field are post-colonial cultural theorist Bhabha whose work is explored further.

Bhabha

Homi Bhabha, developed a theory of third spaces as:

'in between' spaces [which] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (Bhabha, 1994, p.1-2)

Bhabha's (1994) seminal work on postcolonial theory *The location of culture* includes an essay on third space proposing that between the first space (of the colonised) and the second space of (coloniser) resides a third space wherein cultures meet (see Literature Review - Agency, identity and third space). Bhabha's approach to third space and hybridity is predicated on cultural knowledge and the notion of coloniser and colonised. For Bhabha 'first space' constitutes indigenous culture and second space is represented as coloniser's imposed structures and cultures. Having established this dichotomy, he develops a hybrid third space as a 'way of understanding the in-between experience of cultural difference' (Kreiwaldt et al 2017 p.36). Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridisation explains third space as combination of the cultural home and the

imposed culture in a given situation. Also described as an 'interruptive, interrogative and enunciative' space (Bhabha 1994), third space can be read as a location where cultural meaning has no 'primordial unity or fixity' (p.37). As a metaphor to describe such an interstitial space, Bhabha cites Renee Green's site-specific installation *Sites of Genealogy* in which the artist uses

the stairwell to make associations between certain binary divisions such as higher and lower and heaven and hell. The stairwell became a liminal space, a pathway between the upper and lower areas...(Bhabha, 1994, p.4).

Such a transition space between fixed locations represents a cultural hybridity that acknowledges difference without hierarchy.

But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (Bhabha, 1990, p.211)

Importantly, the third space represents a space of 'enunciation'. Bhabha's concept of enunciation is the act of utterance or expression of a culture as a linguistic metaphor demonstrating how cultural differences are articulated through dominant discourse and how such differences are discursively produced and circulated. Such enunciation can also, conversely, be seen to interrupt and dislocate dominant discursive constructions. Thus, according to Bhabha, an enunciative act is seen to disrupt stable systems, question the certitude of dominant discourse and act as a practice of resistance. The place of enunciation is, according to Bhabha where 'the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew.' (Bhabha, 2006, p.157) Such an understanding, in the context of this study, echoes the notion of the third space as a 'site of struggle'.

A Third Space 'site of struggle'.

Previous research (see literature review) recognises the formation of professional identities in education as a site of struggle (Ball 2013). This struggle has variously been framed as (at times) debilitating (Day 2017) but also as one of hope (Catone 2017).

Wang (2004) perceives third space in generative terms, one of 'infinite possibilities' (p.ix) and such transformational potential certainly offers an affirmative perspective on

this hybridity. Indeed, third space would appear to be often described in terms of its productive power. However, I contend that third space is also potentially a space of conflict, of 'disruptive in-betweenness' (Bhabha, 1994, p.37). Given the asymmetrical power relations between actors in this study, I suggest that third space is conceived as a site of struggle with multiple dimensions, motivations, and consequences. Such a space might be seen as conflictual and antagonistic as well as (and possibly as a precursor to being) generative and transformative. Thus, I approach third space as a site of (discursive) struggle and also of meaning-making, a site from which identities can be contested as well as re-imagined and re-visioned. Whilst Langlois (2015) theorises antagonism as third space, there would appear to be limited literature which explores third space as a space of resistance and activism. Through this study, I contribute to the debate.

In educational research, third space theory has been utilised to explore constructions of children's reading (Levy 2008), play as a third space between home and school (Yahya and Wood 2016), initial teacher training (Lewis 2012) to illuminate where ECE meets compulsory education (Carr 2013) and children's centre practitioners' cultures (Messenger 2013). However, there would appear to be a dearth of research applying such a theory to the professional identity construction of early childhood educators.

I apply third space, not in a physical spatial sense but theoretically, with personal narratives as first space and institutional discourse through policy text as second space. Third space is interpreted theoretically and conceptually as a space in which professional identities are (re) formed when institutional discourses meet personal narratives.

The concept of a third space is particularly pertinent for this study in a number of ways. I consider that the research:

- Is located at the intersection or in the borderlands of orientations (critical theory, third space theory, border theory and narrative inquiry) (see Methodology p.106)
- Reflects a diverse participant set (some of whom may occupy professional third space)
- Reflects my positionality (my professional history in the third space of differing professional roles)
- Creates a conceptual 'in-between' space within the study to explore the relationships between agency and structure (i.e. individual agency and

structural/institutional discourses in early educator professional identity construction).

Border Theory

Informed by both personal and professional experience (see positionality, p.19) I look anew, through theoretical lenses from different disciplines, at the processes of professional identity formation. I consider workforce policies as attempts to define and delimit versions of professional identities, and as such I look upon these policies as forming discursive and conceptual borders. This perspective has informed my turn to literature within border studies.

The emergence of border studies over the past three decades has seen the development of an interdisciplinary field that critically examines borders and border identities. Through the Journal of Border Studies and more recently the Critical Border Studies network the discipline has evolved from a geographically bounded theory to the 'study of borders at diverse socio-spatial and geographical scales, ranging from the local and the municipal, to the global, regional and supra-state level' (Kolossoff and Scott, 2016, p1.) Whilst the initial focus of border studies might be read in terms of state building, geographical territories and the associated identities within these spaces, border studies has further developed to provide opportunities to consider borders in theoretical, conceptual, epistemological and methodological terms (Brambilla 2015; Nail 2016).

In education research and practice such borders have multiple interpretations. In conceptual and discursive terms in education, borders, boundaries, and frontiers may be taken to refer to demarcations of curricular, assessment practices, governance arrangements and professional roles, amongst other features, within early years settings, schools, universities and other institutions.

In terms of this study, I propose that, to a degree, the professional identities of early childhood educators are shaped, discursively created, and promoted through policy texts. In doing so, it can be argued that policy texts establish, enforce, and articulate discursive borders around the professional identities of early educators: defining what early educators should *be* and should *do*. It could be argued that this can be seen as an act of colonisation in which different policy makers, (e.g. different political administrations) (re) inscribe evolving constructions of professional identities through policy text.

The policy intensification of an arguably previously neglected sector (explored in the literature review) over the past thirty years, can be read as manifesting in a process of professional acculturation. That is to say, workforce reform policy texts seek to establish borders around the professional identities of early educators in a process of assimilation. This leads me to further explore such policies as acts of bordering.

Bordering

In border studies, the early 2000s saw a 'processual turn' in which the activity of *bordering* became a greater focus.

The process through which borders are demarcated and managed are central to the notion of border as process and border as institution. [...] Demarcation is not simply the drawing of a line on a map or the construction of a fence in the physical landscape. It is the process through which borders are constructed and the categories of difference or separation created. (Newman, 2007, p.35)

Building on the premise that professional identities are partially shaped through policy text, I question the extent to which the production and circulation of workforce reform policies are an act of bordering which define and attempt to 'contain' the ideal professional identities of early educators. Through the policy analysis which follows, I explore how identity construction through policy- such as regulating views and setting normative professional standards – is an attempt at a disciplinary process of bordering. Such a process of bordering (whether it is acknowledged as such or not) might be justified in the quest for improved standards or quality outcomes for children. However, informed by critical theory, I investigate whether this process might be read as a process of governmentality. That is to say, I consider whether through the bordering of professional identities by means of policy, educators are classified, ordered, controlled, and coerced into willing participation in this governmentality. However, it could be argued that as convincing an argument as this is, such a description does not acknowledge the agency of educators to resist or negotiate these professional identities.

A more dynamic perspective of the bordering process allows a space for representations and interpretations of agency. This can be illustrated drawing on Sanguinetti's 'micro practices of resistance' (1999) and Bhabha's concept of minor narratives of day-to-day border crossing, or in this study the personal narratives of agency and activism.

The concept of borders, whilst reinforcing the 'containment' of first and second spaces (in third space theory) is inadequate in explaining the complexity and fluidity of this issue. Arguably, in acknowledging the agentic behaviours of early educators, such professional identity 'borders' can be seen as contestable. I contend that discussing this identity construction in terms of borders as demarcating lines around first and second spaces (albeit metaphorically) obfuscates the existence of spaces around such borders.

To study borders as dynamic institutions, it is therefore important to study the "bottom up" process of change, emanating from the daily practices of ordinary people living in the borderland region, as much as the traditional "top down" approach which focuses solely on the role of institutional actors, notably—but not only—governments (Kaplan and Häkli, 2002, p.14).

Recent research (Abes 2009; Allen 2017) has turned to the concept of *borderlands* – a blurring of the limitations of existing boundaries and a focus on the spaces or zones around frontiers and boundaries. I now explore this concept and associated literature further.

Borderlands

A boundary is not that at which something stops, but as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding. (Heidegger, 1971, p.154)

Such alternative border imaginaries move 'beyond the border line' and develop the idea of *zones* or *lands* around a border. The work of the Association of Borderlands Studies has led this theoretical development, initially premised on the study of the United States-Mexico borderlands region. This work has been advanced by the Border Culture/Border Poetics Research Group Collective based at the Arctic University of Norway which has developed a number of definitions for the field, including this definition of borderlands:

Within the field of border studies, the concept of borderlands or border zones have been described as areas around borders, less definitively delineated spaces than a border line. Such spaces can be seen as places of transition and negotiation in which identity may appear uncertain 'where different social agents act and move within the same spaces, inscribing their activities onto them. (Border Poetics Research Group Collective website)

Such in-between spaces that are created at intersections— (whether material, metaphoric, or discursive) act as powerful conceptual heuristics which illustrate not either/or but *both/and*. Borderlands or border zones can be described as spaces around borders which affect people on either side of the border. These places are zones where ownership and belonging remain unclear. Batchelor (2012) describes such a space as ‘undefined’ and ‘marginal’ and whilst a border demarcates spaces either side of a line there is a ‘a quality of indeterminacy and indefiniteness about the borderline territory’ (p.598). In perceiving the space thus Batchelor asserts that rather than demarcating practices of formation this is a generative space of becoming and transformation.

Much of this work has its origins in the writing of Anzaldua (1987) whose prose and poetry reflect her life at the US-Mexico border as a woman of colour: a *mestiza consciousness*. This can be described as a marginal, in-between culture in which an individual is aware of her conflicting and meshing identities and has learned to be part of both worlds. Anzaldua proposes that living in marginalised, interstitial spaces are new locations ‘where individuals fluctuate between two discrete worlds, participating in both and wholly belonging to neither’ (Abes, 2009, p.528). Such a perspective, which draws on the roots of critical theory and on post-colonial feminism to consider power, oppression, and identity, offers a valuable and novel theoretical lens through which to consider the research topic. Notably, Anzaldua also draws attention to the borderland as a space both of oppression and resistance which has further resonance for this study.

The notion of borderland discourses in education research was initiated by Gee (1999) and taken up by Alsup (2006) in her study of US teachers, which concentrates on teacher identity development in the midst of ‘disparate personal and professional subjectivities...’(p.10). Adapting this theory, I seek to explore discourses of agency, structure and those described as ‘in the borderlands’ which emerge from the narratives of early childhood educators in the UK. Additionally inspired by the work of Licona (2005), Yoshimoto (2008), Abes (2009) and Schimanski and Wolfe (2017), I utilise the idea of borderlands as a metaphor and conceptual framework to illustrate my interpretation of the dynamic and also of the space of potential for resistance between policy texts and lived experiences in the formation of professional identities. I perceive ‘first space’ as the individual identities of practitioners informed by their personal and professional histories, motivations, values, and beliefs in the construction of professional identities. Second space is read as the discourses produced and circulated by policy texts. I suggest that these two spaces meet, but rather than collide

at a hard border, there is fluid third space, a *borderland* where these converge in the de/reconstruction of professional identities. It is here, Anzaldua's borderlands and Bhabha's third space (1990), 'which enable other positions to emerge' (p.211) and here where I suggest that negotiation, resistance and potentially activism happen. This is a borderland where cultural assumptions might be challenged by educators' subjectivities. Through revealing third space and making visible and audible the narratives of early educators within such a space, I envisage complicating sanctioned and perceived notions of professional identities and exploring the space in which resistance and activism may be manifest.

Borderlands as a site of struggle

Personal reflection about initially perceiving the binaries of policy/practice has led to a more complex, nuanced reading of the spaces in which professional identities are constructed and contested. Moving on from previously perceived dualisms, the 'politics of polarity' (Bhabha, 1994, p.39) and an arguably modernist perspectives of structure versus agency, borderlands as in-between spaces acknowledge these first and second spaces but envisages that there is an evolving and fertile place where they meet.

However, I consider that interrogations of these in-between *spaces* of professional identity construction and associated struggles have remained largely unarticulated. Whilst resistance amongst educators, (both individual and collective) has been researched, it is this intersection of policy discourses and personal narratives which appear underexplored. Indeed, I would suggest that there has been an invisibility of such spaces for reflection and explicit articulation of how this range of influences shape the professional identities of early childhood educators and how educators act back.

Spivak (1990) considers the enactment of resistance in a third space as a 'productive crisis'. By considering the role of borders (conceptual or otherwise) as sites of struggle, where the 'right to become' is contested and negotiated, the borderlands concept opens 'a new space of political possibilities, a space which new kinds of political subjectivities become possible' (Brambilla 2015, p.29).

Conclusion

This chapter articulates and justifies the theoretical frameworks and key concepts which inform this study. Understandings of professional identity construction, through the lenses of third space theory and border theory are illustrated at Fig. 3.2. This version of a conceptual model acts as an initial iteration on which to build. Through the processes of policy and empirical data analyses, this model will evolve and ultimately illustrate insights gained from the study.

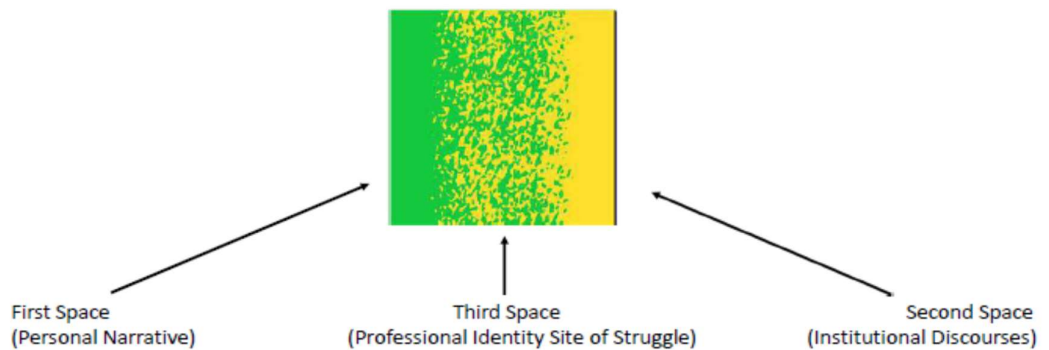


Fig 3. 2 Conceptual Map A – Third Space as a 'site of struggle'

Adopting these multiple theoretical frameworks affords opportunities to combine knowledges, practices, and assumptions from different fields to create new tools and methods and offer novel perspectives. I now turn to operationalising these theoretical and conceptual framework in the methodology chapter including the challenges and opportunities of combining theories and the affordances of working in theoretical and methodological borderlands.

Chapter 4 Methodology

Stories can entertain, sometimes teach or argue a point. But for me the essential thing is that they communicate feelings. That they appeal to what we share as human beings across our borders and divides...But in the end, stories are about one person saying to another: This is the way it feels to me. Can you understand what I'm saying? Does it also feel this way to you? (Ishiguro 2017)⁹

The purpose of this research is to understand the agency and activism of early childhood educators in the construction and expression of their professional identities. In order to explore this broader research topic, I developed the following research questions:

- How are early childhood educators positioned in ECE policies and how do they respond to these positionings?
- What forms of individual and organisational policy activism exist?
- Which conditions/values enable or constrain activism?
- To what extent do practitioners perpetuate or challenge prevailing thinking and how do they imagine alternatives in policy development?

This chapter explains and justifies the methodological framework used to consider these questions. It includes:

- Justification for the methodological framework and reflexivity
- Overview of the research design
- Data collection methods
- Details of participants, recruitment and sampling
- The process of data collection
- Ethical considerations and trustworthiness
- Details of analytical frameworks and process of analysis

⁹ Ishiguro, K. (2017) Nobel Lecture. Permission to reproduce the text from the Nobel Lecture has been granted by Penguin Random House 7/6/19. See Appendix 11.

Justification for the methodological framework and reflexivity

Reflexivity

During this research process, I have been reflecting on my personal and professional life (see positionality and frame story p.19) and the ways in which these influences have, I believe, shaped my world view. That is to say, my ontological approach to this study is based on an understanding that the world and what can be known as socially constructed, understood and experienced by individuals. As Guba and Lincoln (1994) attest, constructivism's approach to ontology includes 'multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based' (p.110). Additionally, an awareness of and sensitivity to the formative influences of various power dynamics have influenced a critical ontology for this study: 'a way of being that is aware of the ways power shapes us' (Kincheloe, 2003, p.53).

As a result, these perspectives have informed my approach to a particular form of reflexivity. Whilst understandings of reflexivity are various and often elusive, I consider such an idea important in locating the researcher, the research process, and the production of knowledge. It is with this in mind that my approach is predicated on two main principles: social construction of knowledge and critical reflexivity. Firstly, based on the assumption that social constructionism is itself a 'social construction' (Burr, 1995), it is important to look to the ways in which my production of knowledge is rooted in certain social and cultural contexts. Secondly, adopting a critically reflexive approach to the research topic, participants' context and the data, means ongoing examination of the political and social issues that inform the research project (Koch and Harrington, 1998 in Dowling, 2006, p. 12). Such reflexivity in research is important and is predicated on an understanding of the ideological influence that dominant modes of inquiry can exert over the research endeavour. It is such ongoing critical reflexivity that I believe is 'active rebellious practice that drives individuals into action as they identify the exercise of power that pins them into place and the fault lines for the production of spaces of resistance' (Parker, 1999, p.31). I revisit this notion and reflections on reflexivity in Chapter Nine.

Justification for the methodological framework

The following section explores the potential and the challenges of engaging with two distinct, and seemingly incompatible, orientations: narrative inquiry and critical theory.

I am a Child of Books. I come from a world of stories¹⁰
(Jeffers and Winston 2014)

This reflexivity has drawn me to two distinct orientations. Firstly, the influence of overtly political family members in a socio-economically disadvantaged place and era has certainly shaped my perspectives on notions of power, knowledge and agency. Secondly, my understanding of the power of narrative is shaped by my love and study of literature, and my perceptions of the formative nature of story-making and telling. In considering these orientations together, I continue to reflect on the power of different narratives and think about whose stories are listened to and whose are suppressed.

Narrative Inquiry

...telling stories is the primary way we express what we know and who we are....letting the story become larger than an individual experience or an individual life. (Jeeong-Hee, 2016, p.9).

The narrative turn(s) in the social sciences and specifically education research challenged traditional positivist paradigms that perceived the nature of knowledge as objective, based on universal laws and verifiable through reason and logic. Narrative inquiry as an expression of constructivism and interpretivism emphasizes the importance of particularity of narratives (Bruner 1990; Clandinin and Connelly 2000), narratives rooted in specific contexts, socially constructed and within a specific socio-cultural and historical moment. In pursuing this approach to the research endeavour, I looked to the epistemological importance of stories:

Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience...To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p.477)

A body of literature draws on the lived experiences of teachers and students (Goodson 1999; Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Clandinin et al 2007) and more specifically early educators (including Greishaber and Canella 2001; Gooch 2010; Osgood 2012). Following Osgood's call for further space to 'hear the stories' (2012, p.154) of early educators, this research seeks to respond to that call and contribute to this field.

¹⁰ Copyright © 2014 Oliver Jeffers & Sam Winston
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Personal and public

Keep your eyes open to the varieties of individuality, and to the modes of epochal change. (Mills, 1959, p.225)

Research literature includes many explorations of the links between personal lives and public issues, a concept C. Wright Mills (1959) termed the 'sociological imagination' – the 'the problems of social structure in which biography and history intersect' (p.225). Hannah Arendt, it has been argued (Jackson 2002), proposed that storytelling is the bridge by which we transform that which is private and individual into that which is public. Similarly, Munro (1998) discusses life stories as the dialectal relationship between the self and society. In looking at narratives in this way, researchers are encouraged to focus as much on the personal, the individual as the wider setting. Indeed, Wolkowitz (2004) cautions against the privileging of personal narrative while paying insufficient attention to the context in which those stories are formed. As Andrews (2017) suggests, 'we want the forest and the trees' (p.275). In doing so, I consider it is equally important not to overly valorise individual narrative at the expense of inquiry and to hold contextual awareness and criticality central in the research endeavour.

What interested me in approaching this research question was not necessarily expressions of explicitly political perspectives (although these may, of course, have been present) but how individual narratives can reveal power dynamics which 'often function as the unsaid ligaments that hold stories together.' (Andrews, 2017, p.277). This perspective of the interplay of power, agency and subjectivities guided the research.

Central to this study was an exploration of agency, and I reflect on whether the act of telling a certain kind of story augments a sense of agency, whereby the content of the narrative acts as something which can potentially bind an individual with a community of others, transforming political consciousness. I ask: 'Does storytelling as an act have a potency and capacity-building potential?' I explore this idea further in the Discussion and Conclusion chapters (Six, Seven, Eight and Nine).

Many stories

Stories are multiple, and although there is always more than one story, certain stories come to dominate. The power of dominant stories or dominant discourses (Foucault 1991) means certain stories wield great influence and become known as master

narratives or power discourses. Presented as natural, unquestionable, and inevitable, these dominant discourses seek to impose what Unger (2005) terms the 'dictatorship of no alternatives'.

Bruner cautions against the 'tyranny of a single story' (2002, p.103). This sentiment is echoed by Adichie in her talk at TED.com (2009) 'The danger of a single story' in which she suggests:

The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.

In contemporary early childhood, Moss (2017; 2019) points to the dominance of certain stories or master narratives in (namely the story of markets and the story of quality and high returns). This concept of story dominance is further developed in later work (Moss 2019) in which he points to the power of dominant discourses through 'privileged channels of communication' (p.6) and 'in this way, through such reinforcement, a story gathers momentum and influence, becoming *the* story...' (p. 6-7). Inspired by such writing, this narrative inquiry intended to respect the multiple narratives of a number of early educators as a counterbalance to the singular (if seemingly shifting) story of identities formed through policy.

Link between narratives and social change

Additionally, I approached the inquiry with an openness to links between narratives and the potential for social change. Whilst this study was not primarily driven by advocacy, I believe in the possibility that narratives of lives lived may also speak truth to power and may call into question the power of dominant discourses (and potentially oppressive meta-narratives) and their relationships to lived experiences. Bamberg and Andrews (2004) explore narratives both as links between private and public issues but also as counter narratives. Their work studies how the personal stories of individuals also serve as contestation, to undermine or resist dominant master narratives.

Stories, then, can be viewed as 'a process of deconstructing the discursive practices through which one's subjectivity has been constituted'. (Middleton, 1992, p.20), a perspective which links narrative inquiry to a critical orientation.

Critical orientation

Reflecting earlier writing on the theoretical and conceptual framework, I now turn to exploration and justification of the critical orientation of the study and the relationship between this and a narrative approach. Jeong-Hee Kim (2016) notes:

Scholars view critical theory as a method of understanding forms of power and domination. However, the premise of critical theory is its moral imperative and its emphasis on the need for both individual empowerment and social transformation. (p.36)

The reconceptualised version of critical theory, which informs the study, illuminates issues of dominance and oppressive structures. I draw on work by Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) who explore critical theory in terms of hegemony, ideology, and perhaps more importantly for this study, discursive power:

criticalists begin to study the way that language in the form of discourses serves as a form of regulation and domination...in this context power discourses undermine the multiple meanings of language establishing one correct reading that implants a particular hegemonic/ideological message...This is a process often referred to as discursive closure. (p.284)

It is this risk of discursive closure that shapes the policy analysis and analytical frameworks selected for considering empirical data. Such a critical perspective enables a critique of the ideology of policy texts and offers a lens to consider the stories of individuals in terms of relations of power. I am particularly interested in these narratives and the ways in which they may or may not be influenced by such discursive closure. Bruner (2002) posits 'great narrative is an invitation to problem finding, not a lesson in problem solving. It is deeply about plight, about the road rather than about the inn to which it leads.' (p.20).

Critical theory also affords opportunities to consider participant agency and resistance to such discursive construction of professional identities and the struggle for identity. This space as a site of struggle is recognised by Hardin (2001), who described the location of agency of individuals as somewhere 'between free will and discursive marionettes' (p.11). Recalling earlier explorations of narrative inquiry's capacity to consider private concerns in light of structural issues, it can be argued that critical qualitative methodologies also provide opportunities for 'connecting the everyday to larger political and economic questions' (Mumby, 2014, p.252). Recognising this reading of agency and its relationship to structural concerns, I now turn to traversing the borderlands where narrative inquiry meets critical theory, exploring the tensions and the potential of this methodological meeting place.

Exploring Methodological Borderlands

Abes (2009) proposes that all theoretical lenses through which we view the research endeavour are incomplete. A narrative inquiry shaped by interpretivism alone might provide rich insight into the stories of educators but not necessarily afford an analysis of deeper power structures at play. Alternatively, critical theory offers a lens to consider issues of power and oppression but might not centre the perspectives of participants.

Abes (2009) suggests:

Rather than being paralyzed by theoretical limitations or confined by rigid ideological allegiances, interdisciplinary experimentation of this nature can lead to rich new research results and possibilities. (p.142)

Such experimentation is also alluded to by Clandinin and Rosiek (2012) who describe this as traversing methodological borderlands (p.26).

Whilst critical theory and narrative inquiry initially appeared as distinct and arguably conflicting orientations, I became increasingly aware of points of complementarity and productivity between these two approaches. Inspired by the work of Clandinin and Rosiek (2012), I ventured into a landscape of challenge and potential at the methodological borders between narrative inquiry and critical theory. In keeping with a third space theoretical perspective, I have found it helpful to think less in terms of disciplinary or methodological borders and more in terms of borderlands where the researcher may sit with the frictions, inconsistencies, and generative potential of multiple perspectives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have termed the places in which narrative inquiry meets with other approaches as methodological 'bumping places' (p.27), where different research traditions come together.

Clandinin and Rosiek (2012) attest that critical theorists and narrative inquirers share an interest in the influence and power of structures and their effects on human agency. However, they also refer to the ontological differences between these approaches. Marxist-influenced critiques of narrative inquirers allude to the fact that the individual is shaped by inherited ideologies and that a narrative focus on the individual occludes the larger social structures and conditions at play.

Scholarship grounded in Marxism privileges the macrosocial material conditions of life as the primary influence on human life and thinking. The relational texture of everyday life, including the personal, religious, historical, and cultural narratives that provide meaning to that life, are treated as derivative of the macrosocial conditions of life. (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007, p.49)

Thus, Marxist-inspired critical theory privileges structural material conditions as a primary influence on individuals. Through this lens, interpretations of individual circumstances are seen as consequences of such macrosocial conditions and thus individual experience is rejected as a valid source of insight. In contrast, the narrative inquirer considers, reflects, and honours lived experiences as a source of knowledge into both the individual and wider social phenomena, thereby considering the potential oppressive effects of macro-level conditions.

Borderland spaces between critical theory and narrative inquiry are often inspired by a researcher's desire to bring Marxist-influenced perspectives of sources of oppression into relation with individual experience. For example, Stone-Mediatore (2003) highlights formative material conditions but she also acknowledges the lives of individuals and marginal experiences shaped by structural discourses. Ultimately, this critical narrative inquiry seeks to:

...question how narratives or stories are imbricated within relational plays of power, and how subjects re-authorize their own positions...They are embraced as the site and evidence of agency, while avoiding reducing persons to individualistic agents. (Allen and Hardin, 2001, p. 176)

I sought to draw upon this and other studies (Souto-Manning 2014; 2016; Jeeong-Hee 2016) and build an approach to critical narrative inquiry which makes visible the enablers that facilitate and the constraints that limit the possibilities to accept, reject, modify and otherwise respond to subject positions idealised within contemporary workforce reform discourses. Living with these tensions in the borderland required not only grappling with theories that appeared incomplete in their explanatory power, but also acknowledging contradictory perspectives that reflect the multiplicity of practitioner experiences. Embracing such perspectives has meant rejecting binaries, working with uncertainty, and researching within constantly shifting landscapes. In both planning and undertaking the study, I have sought to acknowledge the ongoing tensions between structure and agency in professional identity formation. At the same time, I have sought to recognise both the validity and incompleteness of these theoretical perspectives and methodological decisions.

As a counterbalance to the dominant discourses of policy, the empirical evidence for the research project takes the form of data gathered through interviews and via an online focus group. I detail these methods further below. As a result of exploring methodological borderlands, I based the study on a constructivist ontology in terms of how I understand the world, an interpretivist epistemology to understand the ways that

people make meanings of their lives and experiences, and critical theory and narrative inquiry as lenses to view and inform the research methods and analysis. I now detail further the study design decisions.

Overview of the research design

Research design

situates the researcher in the empirical world and connects him or her to specific sites, groups, institutions, and bodies of relevant interpretive material, including documents and archives. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.5)

From the beginning of the study, I knew that in considering ideas of professional identities and resistance and activism, I wanted to explore the relationships between policy texts (as instruments of structure) and the agency of early childhood practitioners. I sought to explore how early educators are positioned in policy and how they form or maintain their own professional identities in response to, or despite, such policy. Informed by my own experiences (see positionality, p.19) and by surveying the discursive landscape analysed in research literature, I have attempted 'radical looking' (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012, p.178) in making the familiar territory of professional identities strange and in developing new perspectives. As discussed in Chapter Three, the lenses of critical theory and third space theory were formative and, as such, this study was 'theoretically driven rather than determined by technical consideration' (Silverman, 2009, p. 29).

Importantly, the research design was not primarily shaped as an advocacy study (although I acknowledge the overtly political nature of presenting educators' stories) and neither did I seek an 'appropriate' or 'ideal' professional identity for early childhood educators. Rather, I sought to problematise current dominant discourses which influence professional identity construction and consider practitioners' perspectives on the issue.

To achieve the study's aims and aspire to theoretical, methodological, and analytical coherence, I worked through a number of decisions in shaping the methodology. This coherence is conveyed through Fig 4.1. which draws on Crotty (1998) and Scotland (2012). Firstly, in order to consider how educators were positioned in policy (and thereby consider the influence of power relations), I took a critical perspective and deployed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Secondly, as a qualitative study which

acknowledged multiple realities created by individuals, I adopted both critical and interpretive paradigms (see borderlands discussion at p.102) in considering participants' perspectives. This decision was based on the idea 'that methodological monism is no basis for the study of the social world' (Seale, 1999, p. 21). This is predicated on the assumptions that I perceive reality to be both socially constructed and shaped by power relations, but also that it is open to interpretation. As such, the methodological decision to adopt interpretivism (and to combine critical theory with a narrative inquiry) is compatible with the research aims because of my intention to take account of participants' positions through their stories and the need for such realities to be interpreted.

Paradigm	Ontology	Epistemology	Theoretical Perspective	Methodology	Method
Constructivism/ Interpretivism	Reality is created by individuals/ groups.	Reality is interpreted. and used to consider underlying meaning in phenomena.	Interpretivism Critical Inquiry	Qualitative Approach Narrative. Discourse Analysis	Life story interviews and focus group
Critical	Realities are socially constructed entities under constant influence.	Reality and knowledge are socially constructed and influenced by relations of power.	Critical Theory / Border theory	Critical Discourse Analysis / Ideology Critique	CDA of policy texts

Table 4.1 Constructivist/Interpretivist Paradigm Table

In exploring both the discourses within policy texts and the narratives of educators, I also knew several methods would need to be deployed in gathering data. In keeping with critical theory, I sought to understand structural influences through an analysis of workforce reform policy texts. At the same time, a constructivist approach rooted in a subjectivist epistemology necessitated a methodology and method/s that enabled a search for meaning in the subjective experiences of individual participants. This led to a research design for empirical data collection based on a focus group and interviews, which resulted in the formation of professional life stories.

As idiographic research, I was keen to explore and present these stories in ways that acknowledged the contingent, unique, and subjective nature of participants' experiences. As Jeeong-Lee (2012) writes:

...a life story can reveal the constraining effects of structural relationships...any life story is not just a personal story that is isolated or independent from societal influence. (p.132)

As such, these dialogic data collection methods in the form of the spoken or written word do not exist in a vacuum. The life story may also allude to macro level policy effects and meso level influences such as local authorities, school management and other institutions, which Ferrarotti (1981) refers to as 'layers of mediation' between macro and micro level influences.

There were several reasons for adopting both interviews and focus group data collection methods. I chose to deploy both methods because they were methodologically compatible with a constructivist/interpretivist ontology and epistemology. They also provided participants with more than a single opportunity to engage with the project, arguably reaching a potentially wider group. Additionally, these methods offered opportunity for both individual storytelling and group dialogue. The format of data from both methods was also compatible in terms of synthesising for analysis.

I chose to undertake the focus group first, followed by interviews. Whilst some participants opted to be involved in one data collection method, I wanted to offer opportunities for participants who could not or chose not to be involved in both. For example, where a teacher found it difficult to have time for an interview, they were enabled to engage in the study through the online focus group (see p.118). In addition, I considered that where participants chose to be involved in both methods, undertaking the focus group first would improve rapport with participants and possibly better introduce the topic prior to a 1:1 interview.

Other methods were considered in this decision-making process. Consideration was given to deploying a form of critical ethnography (Lee 2019). I understand such an approach to involve the researcher being fundamentally linked to those individuals or communities being studied and thus becoming both participant and observer (Thomas 1993). Whilst acknowledging my professional heritage as an early educator, I did not seek to become immersed in an early childhood environment. Rather, I sought to explore the space between policy and practice from the responses of multiple early educators from across the sector.

Similarly, in a reflection of the critical tradition adopted, I reflected on the power of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a possible methodological approach (Ang 2015). This was set aside given the tensions I perceived between the desired or intended outcomes for participants (through a PAR approach) and the outcomes for me as a doctoral researcher. In addition, the logistical implications of engaging long term with participants and the potentially onerous commitment required by them were a rationale for not adopting such an approach. Whilst these methodologies were not chosen for this study, I believe there is value in pursuing a critical ethnographic approach to this subject for further investigation.

I have been mindful that these choices were informed by my positionality, as well as shaped by my own personal and professional experiences (Denscombe 2013) and my learning. Additionally, in responding to the criticisms of 'bias' of Critical Discourse Analysis (Widdowson 1995) I have constructed a research design which counterbalances policy analysis with empirical data collection, and which acknowledges the voices of practitioners on the subject. In doing so I have sought the 'complexities, nuances and contradictions' (Kamerilis and Dimitriadis 2013, p.52) voiced by participants. Thus, a research design which acknowledges and respects the multiplicity of responses, other than the official discourses, was important. Below is a diagram representing how the research methods were deployed in relation to the research questions¹¹.

¹¹ For links between the research questions and field questions, please see Appendix 3.

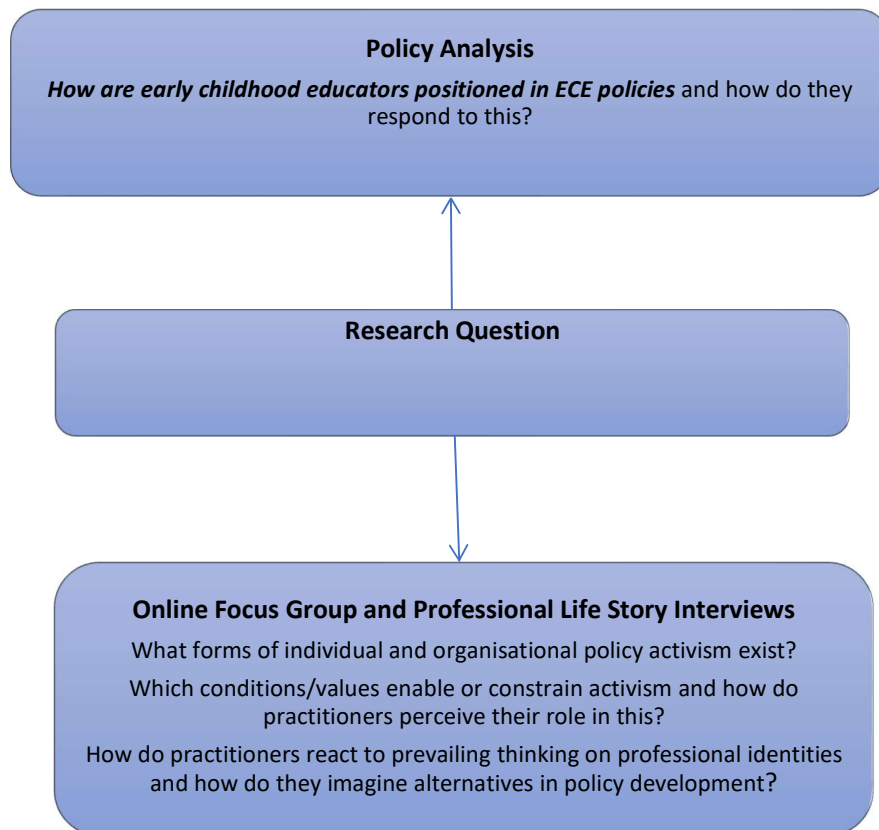


Fig.4.1 Links between research questions and methods

A further justification of data collection methods selected is below.

Data collection methods

This section details the data collection methods, namely policy analysis, focus group and individual interviews, including justification of these methods.

Data set one: Policy Texts

The first data set is made up of nine key UK government policy texts on early childhood workforce reform in the period 2006-2017, an era which saw significant evolution of broader early childhood policy in England. This starting date was selected as The Childcare Act (Great Britain 2006), being watershed legislation, which overhauled the legislative and operational landscape of early education and childcare. At a critical juncture in policy development this was the first ever Act to be exclusively concerned with early childhood services in England. The then Minister for Children, Beverley

Hughes MP, called it ‘an historic and radical piece of legislation – the first solely dedicated to early years and childcare – that redraws the boundaries of the welfare state’ (Griffin, 2006, p.30). A number of policies (including those selected on workforce reform) were a result of this landmark legislative development. Notably, developments in initial teacher/educator education and continuing professional development were recognised under section 13 of the Act, which placed a legal duty on local authorities to secure information, advice, and training to childcare providers (McAuliffe et al 2006). The legislation also bolstered the remit of the then Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) (2005-2012), a sector skills council ‘responsible for ensuring that people working with children had the appropriate skills’ (gov.uk 2019). CWDC was a key body in the co-ordination and delivery of much early childhood workforce reform in this period.

Documents other than government policy were instrumental in influencing workforce reform trajectories – including the Tickell Review of the Early Years Foundations Stage (2011) and the Nutbrown Review of early education and childcare qualifications (2012) (both government-commissioned). However, I have adhered to criteria of analysing only government-produced workforce reform policies as sites of institutional/structural discourses (however they may have been shaped, influenced or originated). Alongside these, the new statutory framework in 2008 – the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and accompanying guidance documents were produced. Initially I also considered analysing curricular policies during this period. Implicit and explicit in these curricula texts are expectations of early childhood educators in terms of who they *should be* and what they *should do*. The initial aim was to discern and analyse discourses of professional identities of early educators through these documents. However, inclusion of curricula documents in the corpus risked adding an additional layer of complexity and creating a very large additional data set (given numerous iterations of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and its antecedents during the period). As a result, I decided to focus on workforce reform policies as the most explicit examples of government-constructed frameworks on professional standards and qualifications. I perceived these to be the clearest and most instrumental policy vehicles for discerning institutional discourses of professional identity. Whilst this decision necessarily excludes discourses of professional identities constructed in curricula and other official policy texts, it was necessary to establish manageable parameters. Nonetheless, intersections between workforce reform policies and the Early Years Foundation Stage will be explored through the policy analysis. Analysis of

such curricular and other documents would provide alternative and additional data on which to build from this study.

The policies during this period were also shaped by different political administrations (Labour Government 1997-2010, Conservative-Liberal Coalition 2010-15, Conservative Government 2015-present) and reflect a period of economic affluence followed by austerity seen in years of investment followed by disinvestment in early childhood education.

These milestone documents begin with the advent of the new Early Years Professional status (CWDC 2006) and end with the most recent workforce reform strategy (DfE 2017), see Table 4.2.

Policy	Summary
Early Years Professional Standards (2006)	'The EYP Standards set out the national expectations for anyone wishing to gain EYPS and work as an Early Years Professional. They are outcome statements that set out what Early Years Professionals need to know, understand and be able to do. They cover working safely with babies and children from birth to the end of the new EYFS.' (CWDC, 2006, p. 5)
Teacher Standards 2007	Professional standards are statements of a teacher's professional attributes, professional knowledge and understanding, and professional skills. They provide clarity of the expectations at each career stage.... The framework of standards below is arranged in three interrelated sections covering: a. professional attribute b. professional knowledge and understanding c. professional skills. (TDA, 2007, p.2)
2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy (2008)	'This 2020 Children and Young People's 3. Workforce Strategy...sets out the vision of the Government and the Expert Group that everyone who works with children and young people's should be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ambitious for every child and young person; • excellent in their practice; • committed to partnership and integrated working; • respected and valued as professionals.' (DCSF, 2008, p.5)
Teacher Standards (2011)	'The standards define the minimum level of practice expected of trainees and teachers from the point of being awarded qualified teacher status (QTS)... The standards set out clearly the key areas in which a teacher should be able to assess his or her own practice, and receive feedback from colleagues. As their careers progress, teachers will be expected to extend the depth and breadth of knowledge, skill and understanding that they demonstrate in meeting the standards, as is judged

	to be appropriate to the role they are fulfilling and the context in which they are working.’ (DFE, 2011, pp.3-7)
Early Years Professional Standards (2012)	‘Early Years Professional Status is the accreditation awarded to graduates who are leading practice from birth to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The standards cover essential aspects of high quality practice and leadership. They promote mentoring, reflection and working in partnership with parents/carers and professionals to ensure effective early education and care of all children.’ Teaching Agency (2012, p.5)
More Great Childcare (2013)	A government plan to ‘build a stronger, more capable workforce, with more rigorous training and qualifications, led by a growing group of Early Years Teachers; to drive up quality, with rigorous Ofsted inspection and incentives for providers to improve the skills and knowledge of their staff; attract more, high quality providers with new childminder agencies, which will recruit new people, train and guide them and lever up quality in an area of the sector that has lagged behind; - free providers to offer more high quality places, with greater flexibility to invest in high-calibre staff and more choice for parents.’ (Department for Education, 2013, p.5).
Level 3 Standards (2013a)	‘The qualification criteria lay out the minimum requirements for what an Early Years Educator should know, understand and be able to do to be considered qualified to support young children age birth to five in the Early Years Foundation Stage.’ (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2013a, p.2)
Early Years Teachers Standards (2013b)	‘Early Years Teachers make the education and care of babies and children their first concern. They are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in their professional practice and conduct. Early Years Teacher Status is awarded to graduates who are leading education and care and who have been judged to have met all of the standards in practice from birth to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).’ (National College of Teaching and Leadership, 2013b, p.2)
Early Years Workforce Strategy (2017)	‘This document sets out how the department plans to support the early years sector to remove barriers to attracting, retaining and developing the early years workforce.’ (Department for Education, 2017a, p.3)

Table 4.2 Summary of Policies for Policy Analysis

CDA as method and analytical framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) serves as both method and analytical framework. In this section, I discuss CDA in terms of the former. At the end of the chapter, I consider and justify the use of a specific CDA analytical tool for this study.

CDA is an approach to the study and analysis of discourse, through talk and text, that views language as a mode of social practice. Developed by Norman Fairclough (1989) and further advanced by others, including Van Dijk (1998) and Wodak (2001), various iterations are united by the intention to investigate the ways in which societal power relations are formed, circulated and reinforced through language. A definition offered by Luke (2002) is:

CDA involves a principled and transparent shunting backwards and forth between the microanalysis of texts using varied tools of linguistic, semiotic and literary analysis, and the macro analysis of social formations, institutions and power relations that these texts index and construct. (p.100)

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) offer an interpretation of discourse from one school of CDA, which sees discourse as a form of social practice. As such, the authors propose a relationship between the discourse and the social structures and situations that frame it. This suggests that such discursive practices have ideological effects in creating and sustaining unequal power relations (p.258).

However, there is some contention over whether CDA can be viewed a single method. Van Dijk (n.d) contests the notion that CDA is one method describing it as 'Discourse analysis "with an attitude" ...and hence CDA is rather a social or political movement than a method.' Rather, CDA may be seen as an approach predicated on critical goals from which specific methods are developed. CDA is a valuable means to uncover dominant and naturalised structural discourses, and thereby ideology. As a method it has notably been applied in critical policy analysis, of which Kiersey (2009) notes its affordances in exposing political agendas, loci of power and the expression of particular values.

A review of literature suggests that CDA is not a widely utilised method in the field of early childhood education research. A small number of studies include critiques of early childhood policy using the approach, namely in Ireland (Kiersey 2009), New Zealand (Stuart 2009), Canada (Richardson 2011) and Australia (Kilderry 2015). In the UK, CDA would appear limited to a handful of studies including Osgood's (2009) work on

the discourse of early childhood workforce reform, Wild et al's study (2015) on childcare policy, and Kay's (2018) research on school readiness.

There are a number of critiques of partiality expressed about the ways in which CDA is deployed and it is important to consider these. Widdowson (1995) argues that the approach is incomplete and selective:

It [CDA] presents a partial interpretation of text from a particular point of view... [It] is not impartial in that it is ideologically committed...and it is partial in that it selects those features of the text which supports its preferred interpretation. (p.159)

Indeed, it could be argued that given that CDA is interpretive and subjective, a researcher's discourse analysis is as biased and as oppressive as the ideology that it seeks to reveal. In contrast, Fairclough (1996) suggests that such a position demonstrates naivety in underestimating the social construction of interpretation is a view which erroneously views participants and analysts outside the construction of the discourse.

As with any method, there is a degree of contestability and it was important to approach this process reflexively, through subjecting my own analysis of policy documents to critical scrutiny and maintaining an awareness of the ways in which my personal and professional life experiences shaped my interpretation and analysis.

Wodak and Meyer (2001) note:

Unlike much other scholarship, CDA does not deny but explicitly defines and defends its own socio-political position. That is CDA, biased – and proud of it! (p.96)

In addition, I sought to balance any issues of bias by also listening to the experiences and perspectives of early educators in the field.

Data Set Two and Three: Focus Group and Interviews

The research strategy entailed two stages of empirical data gathering. I facilitated one online focus group of educators (n=14) then undertook individual interviews (n=16) to gain more depth and detail. I sought both individual and group-based methods of data collection for a number of reasons. Firstly, I wanted to make the study open to participants irrespective of their availability to engage face to face or not. Thus, whilst

some participants were free to join an interview others had less availability but could join an online focus group. Secondly, I also wanted the opportunity for participants to engage with others on the topic should they wish to, as well as a private space for them to discuss any matters they wanted to share confidentially and anonymously. Providing both opportunities increased access to the study.

An explanation and justification of the methods of data collection follows. In addition, I consider the ethical implications, the benefits, and limitations of these approaches.

Focus Groups

In choosing to work with a focus group, I draw on the work of Kamarillas and Dimitriadis (2013) who establish the affordances of the method. The authors suggest that allowing participants to 'take over or own the interview space' (p.47) and the 'levelling of power relations' (p.47) are qualities of the method which are important in establishing rapport (Bryman, 2012, p.218) with participants and in reducing researcher influence.

This research acknowledges the power of policy production and circulation and its formative role in shaping views. To counterbalance this, the research also created a space for stories which are often unheard in such policy formulation; the 'inhibited voices.... depressed or inaudible voice[s]' (Clough and Nutbrown 2012, p. 69). However, this intention to counter the power of institutional discourses of policy with the views of practitioners did not aim to 'give voice' to participants. Such an aspiration to 'give voice' is critiqued by Osgood (2010, p.14) as 'unethical, arrogant....' Indeed, the ethics of representing the voices of others has also been questioned and critiqued on the grounds of the selection and presentation of views as data being partial (Guba and Lincoln 2005). Rather, I consider that granting the power to be heard is not within my gift and resides with participants. Rather, this research was grounded in hearing stories, *making space* for personal narratives, through both focus group and life story interviews. In creating such a space, I sought to acknowledge marginalised discourses and seek out interrelationships between discourses as well as silences, resistances, and counter discourses.

Online Focus Groups

It was logistically challenging to access and secure the consent of the number and range of participants that was originally intended. It also proved prohibitive to convene

a face-to-face group in terms of time, logistics, and travel costs. In order to mitigate these issues and ensure maximum participation I decided to look to online focus groups as a mode of data collection. This method of data collection through social media platforms is a relatively recent methodological development. The use of emergent communication technologies to facilitate virtual focus groups or computer-mediated discussions has attracted some, if not extensive study. Ljadi and Schalkwyk (2015) and MacLeod et al (2016) have undertaken research that explores the benefits and limitations of using the social networking site Facebook™ for social research. These are detailed below.

Benefits

Bloor et al (2011) concisely summarise some of the benefits of such online data collection:

Virtual focus groups offer speedy, convenient, and low-cost options for gathering rich qualitative data from dispersed, immobile or difficult to convene populations. (p.12)

In research by Ljadi and Schalwyk (2015) an online focus group was convened using a facility on Facebook™ to host private groups. The highlighted a number of benefits to the method:

Being text based allowed greater time flexibility allowed participants and researchers to read the prompts and have more time for reflection before responding to the discussion (p.3)

Basford (2014) utilised online focus groups with early childhood educators and also identifies as benefits:

- [affords] connections with a diverse range of participants across England
- It affords maximum privacy and confidentiality
- it allows participants to join in at any time from any location
- it allows participants to post, reply and comment on other posts.
- it allows to conduct multiple focus group simultaneously in the same time
- it allows for time limiting the group. E.g., one month
- Private message to participants in response to requests or if a sensitive issue arises.
- it allows to revisit and re-connect to my participant as a form of member checking.(p.72)

In addition, I believed this method would enable me to better understand members' perspectives on certain issues and enable exploration of consensus and dissensus within the group and create the opportunity to raise follow up questions. However, it was also important to be aware of the limitations of this method.

Limitations

Bloor et al (2011) assert that such a data collection method requires a level of technical competence, and familiarity with the discussion medium used. Whilst this assertion is valid, recent research (We Are Flint 2018) suggests that 61% of UK adults are daily Facebook™ users, meaning a large majority of potential participants would be familiar with use of the platform. I was mindful that the facilitator's role could be complicated by the initial decision to facilitate multiple groups simultaneously, albeit asynchronously. Facilitating numerous conversations between participants and maintaining the flow of concurrent online conversations might have proved difficult. As it was, insufficient participants came forward to convene multiple groups, and I decided to facilitate one online focus group.

Further possible issues with this method are the authenticity and confidentiality of participants. The creation of a profile page online affords user anonymity so that whoever has constructed the profile has free reign as an avatar or 'a public or semi-public image of him or herself' (Wilson, Gosling and Graham, 2012, p.213). In practice, it was not possible to detect any impersonation, but it was important to be aware of the possibility of this occurring.

I also reflected on the potential challenge of establishing rapport with participants online. The loss of immediacy of interaction within a face-to face focus group, might arguably have limited the flow of discussion or led to misunderstanding. Additionally, I reflected on how I might detect and acknowledge complexity or irony without tone of voice and non-verbal cues. Taken together, I considered that the benefits above outweighed these limitations in reaching a group of participants dispersed across the country and engaging them in focus group discussions.

Designing the process

I identified a number of principles, which I bore in mind in the design and implementation of data collection via online focus group. I aspired that the method provided:

- A safe space
- A bounded space
- A democratic space
- A dialogic space

A safe space

Viewed with an ethic of responsibility (discussed on p.130) I considered it crucial for participant wellbeing, for ethical integrity, and as the foundations for openness and honesty in discussion, that the online focus group was a safe space. In order to ensure the safeguarding of participant, I ensured introductory guidance was available and that participants could email me with any concerns or message me directly (and privately) via Facebook™. As a 'secret group', access to information shared was limited to participants only, and as such offered a 'safety' which more public platforms would not have afforded. I issued information sheets and opened the focus group with an agreed code of conduct to establish a conversational space based on mutual respect where participants could speak freely and safely to whatever degree they chose. I emailed consent forms and received signed versions back.

A boundaried space

The focus group space was boundaried by time constraints. By establishing a time limit to the focus group, I secured the involvement of participants and this resulted in a degree of momentum. Establishing a time frame of four weeks for the group enabled participants to decide whether to commit to the project, to plan this around any other family or work commitments but not feel unduly obliged or overwhelmed by the process. The group was also demarcated by the content we agreed, as a group, to discuss. Whilst participants were free to contribute as they chose, the guiding questions offered a degree of structure to the discussion.

A democratic space

The information sheet sent to participants included my aim for the focus group to be a space and a process that (as far as possible) were non-hierarchical. I had initially intended to convene several focus groups, each with different membership (e.g. one for teachers, one for lecturers). This design was intended to mitigate any perceptions of difference in qualifications or professional role and thereby help develop a sense of 'communitas' (Kamerelis and Dimitriadis, 2013, p. 72). Challenges with recruiting significant numbers of participants hindered this approach and I amended the method to a single group with heterogeneous membership of different professional roles. It was incumbent on me as researcher to ensure that no single participant dominated the discussions.

Lincoln and Guba (2003) note, for research informed by critical theories, researchers need to be aware of the opportunities for participants to find solutions to the issues that may occur. Whilst this study was not framed as action research, it was important to me that a democratic space afforded the opportunity for participants to explore and discuss possible solutions and courses of action to the challenges and dilemmas raised.

A dialogic space

I perceived a focus group as a dialogic space, and I continue to acknowledge the dynamic, relational nature of such an endeavour. As such, a dialogic focus group can be characterised by its collegial, co-operative approach, which is communicative, exploratory but also interrogative of the topic. Importantly, I also consider that such a dialogic approach is exemplified by the introduction of new perspectives (including by the nature of the questions posed to the group), possibility thinking and an openness to change (Wegerif 2016). This is expressed by Liamputtong (2011) as to:

...critically examine (dialogically) problematic aspects of professional lives, participants gain [or increase] critical understanding necessary to identify viable alternatives to existing social or political arrangements to take actions to improve their own lives. (p.24)

Why asynchronous?

Asynchronous focus groups in which participants contribute at different times as opposed to in 'real' time offer further opportunities in the data gathering process. Bloor et al (2002) consider the way in which the approach overcomes the 'temporal inconveniences' (p.80) of a synchronous group and thereby allows participants to contribute at a time appropriate to them. Mindful of the busy lives of participants and their access to social media, this approach appeared to offer maximum flexibility for participants to contribute. I judged that this approach would:

- Be easier to moderate.
- Create time, and hopefully avoid undue obligation, for both participants and researcher to consider and compose contributions.
- Offer opportunities for participants to contact the researcher/moderator privately for clarification before contributing.

Having designed the focus groups with the aforementioned principles, it was then I turned to the design for the third data set: individual interviews.

Professional life story interviews

Jeeong-Hee (2016) suggests:

The purpose of the interview in narrative inquiry is to let stories be told, particularly the stories of those who might have been marginalised or alienated from the mainstream, and those whose valuable insights and reflections would not otherwise come to light. (p.166)

To complement data gathered from the focus group, and to provide a space for more in depth discussion, I convened interviews with sixteen early childhood educators. I was particularly keen to understand the influences of policy on careers, decision-making and perceptions of professional identities. These aims brought me to the notion of life story interviews with an emphasis on participants' professional lives to elicit their thoughts on their professional identities and agency. Many introductions to life story work discuss the methodology in terms of the power of stories in our lives. This compelling idea, coupled with my own belief in the importance of individuals storying their lives, was my starting point.

Firstly, I elucidate a perceived difference between life story and life history approaches. Goodson and Sikes (2001) convey this difference as interpretive layers, with an initial layer as the composition of lived experience into a life story and a possible second layer where a life history is shaped from a range of possible contextual sources such as interviews and archival data to take account of historical context. Alternatively, the difference between life story and life history is summarised by Stenhouse (1975), in terms of developing 'a story of action within a theory of context'. That is to say, life history is the story we tell about our lives seen in a socio-historical frame.

Taking this premise, and in the context of this study, I initially thought that a life history approach would bring a further dimension to understandings of the political. Equally, personal narratives which are not situated in the political context in which a life is lived, can limit scope and interpretation. I contemplated this approach for the study but concluded that the logistics of constructing histories for sixteen interviewees would be a lengthy process. In addition, this method was likely to make synthesizing the data with focus group data very difficult. I was keen that interviews should indeed have a 'theory of context' given that the study intended to look at discursive constructions of professional identities in both policy and lived experience. I resolved to consider narratives as life stories and that they would be contextualized by the policy analysis, rather than undertaking an individual in-depth life history process.

Life stories provide narratives of micro level experiences contextualised by meso and macro level events. In so doing, the personal and political, which I believe are so inextricably intertwined and constitutive, are reflected. Andrews (2017) writes:

Life (hi)story and narrative have much to bring to our understanding of the political; equally, personal narratives which ignore the political context in which a life is lived are unnecessarily limited in their scope. We want the forest and the trees. (p. 275)

Whilst there would appear to be research undertaken into teachers' lives using life hi/story methodology (including Goodson and Numan 2002, Goodson 2008), literature searches produce few papers on the professional life stories of early childhood educators in contemporary England in particular. Given the diversity of roles in England in early childhood education, and the changing nature of discursively constructed professional identities in this sector over time, working with the life stories of participants suggested many opportunities to consider the influence of institutional discourses alongside personal narratives. This approach offered a rich, informative and deeply personal (and political) method to complement policy analysis and focus group research.

The rationale for using the narrative method was that participants could (re)construct subjective experience through personal narrative, which might provide insights into their location within power structures and social contexts (Andrews, 2000). Benefits of this approach include:

- Uninterrupted time for individuals to speak freely.
- An anonymous space, whereas participants may have felt more inhibited discussing their lives in a focus group.
- The benefits of a topic guide over detailed questions (as in the Focus Group) meant that participants were free to respond openly and to whatever extent they wished.

Whilst none of the questions specifically alluded to personal lives, for many participants these were inextricably intertwined with their professional lives, and many offered various details of family life, and relationships which influenced them, or that they had influenced.

Limitations

Limitations of the approach included the logistics of limited time to collect data and the expectations of educator participants. Multiple interviews with the same participants may have yielded more detail and arguably richer life stories, but I was mindful of the practicalities of this and the onerous nature of further data collection for participants. Notwithstanding the inevitable and complex interplay of personal and professional lives, the focus of the data collection was on *professional life* stories with specific focus on working lives as the primary basis for professional identity construction.

Participants, recruitment and sampling

In England, the early childhood education and care sector and its workforce is diverse and complex. As discussed in the introduction and literature review, a rich but complex history of traditions, delivered by the state and by charities and private companies has shaped the topography of current provision. A number of differences and divisions can be perceived within the sector through initial training, professional development, remuneration, and regulation and inspection (Moss 2014). Notably, UK government communications refer to the early childhood sector as a ‘thriving childcare market’ (DfE 2015), yet the reality is a landscape influenced by deep historical and ideological roots. On one level, uniformity across the phase is seen through a shared statutory framework for learning and development: the Early Years Foundation Stage (Department for Education 2017b). However, numerous issues of differing governance arrangements, workforce standards, funding, regulation, and inspection serve to divide the sector in terms of priorities and accountabilities. The traces of these structural differences result in stratification within the workforce. Having worked across the public, private and voluntary sectors in a number of roles, I am mindful of the sub-sectoral politics within ECE and conscious of the influences on professional identities construction. Mindful of this experience and interpretations of perceived status, but not wanting to perpetuate these divides within the research, it was crucial to ensure representation of participants from across the early childhood sub-sectors.

Few previous studies appear to draw on participants from across this breadth of the sector. Unlike statutory age education where types of professional roles (e.g. teacher and support staff) are relatively small in number and commonly understood, early childhood educators exist (certainly in England) in a complex professional landscape in

which roles are numerous, historically distinct and continue to evolve. In an attempt to reflect this diversity and 'turn up the volume on... muted voices' (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012, p. 70) I looked to recruit participants from a range of roles.

Therefore, to minimise perceptions of power and aim for breadth of participant representation I initially planned to host several focus groups (with membership of each group defined by subsector). I proposed convening five online groups with representatives defined by sub sector, i.e.

- Childminders
- Early Years Teachers
- Early Years Educators/Nursery Nurses
- Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) Leaders/Managers
- Advisors/Trainers/Consultants

However, despite best efforts, I was unable to recruit sufficient participants to convene separate groups. Instead, I organised one online focus group, with membership which reflected the breadth and diversity of professional roles.

Recruitment and sampling

By approaching professional and personal contacts both through sector membership organisations (see Appendix 1), and via open calls for participation on social media groups (e.g. Facebook™ and Twitter™), I aimed to attract sufficient participants for the groups. Participation in the research was sought through a combination of an online snowballing sampling technique (O'Connor et al., 2014) informed by stratified purposive sampling. This sampling approach enabled me to identify and access subgroups of educators (by professional roles) within early childhood education, ensuring breadth of representation. The online snowballing technique where colleagues shared the call for participants on social media enabled me to reach a wider section of potential participants who would be willing to participate.

On reflection, the original sampling strategy was overly ambitious in terms of recruitment. I had intended to recruit 6- 8 participants for each of the initial five groups. Whilst interest in the call for participants was strong, I did not secure the numbers of returned consent forms I had originally anticipated. I amended the approach and rather than convene multiple online groups organised by sub sector (e.g. one group for teachers, one group for childminders), I convened a single focus group comprised of 14 participants from across the early years sector. It was anticipated that the

heterogeneous makeup of the group provided for a diverse range of views, new understandings of discursive constructions of different professional roles within the sector and a rich data set in terms of multiple understandings of professional identities.

Given the small sample size, the gender balance was close to that of the wider early childhood sector in England with 12.5% of participants in the study identifying as male, against an industry average of 3% (Fatherhood Institute 2019). Unfortunately, ethnic diversity was not represented in the sample.

Because of several late responses (expressions of interest sent to me after a deadline) some participants opted to participate in focus the group only, others interview only, and some participants agreed to engage with both methods. See Table 4.3

Pseudonym	Professional Role	Focus Group Participant	Interview Participant
Natalie	HE Lecturer	✓	✓
Vicky	Nursery Principal	✓	
Sheila	Pre School Manager	✓	
Hilary	Childminder	✓	
Hazel	Local Authority Advisor	✓	✓
Ellen	Nursery Practitioner	✓	
Georgia	Reception Teacher	✓	
Chris	Nursery Area Manager	✓	✓
Heather	Local Authority Advisor	✓	✓
Mark	Foundation Unit Leader	✓	✓
Martha	Nursery Director	✓	
Sally	Independent Consultant	✓	✓
Amy	Nursery Practitioner	✓	✓
Briony	Early Years Researcher	✓	
Alice	Independent Consultant		✓
Kate	Independent Consultant		✓
Sarah	HE Lecturer		✓
Karen	Nursery Manager		✓
Sophie	Reception Teacher		✓
Fran	Year One Teacher		✓
Sylvia	Retired Early Years provider		✓
Mike	Teaching Assistant		✓
Theresa	Nursery Teacher/Doctoral Student		✓

Table 4.3 Participants and methods of data collection

Whilst attempting to draw from a wide cross section of professional roles within the sector, I was mindful that participants were likely to be, by the nature of the study, those interested in or engaged in some form of activism. Thus, those with opinions on

or predisposed to the concept of activism in early childhood education might be disproportionately represented, as a percentage of the overall early childhood educator sector. Whilst the study does not seek a representative sample, nor aim to be reflective of a wider early childhood educator population, it is important to acknowledge that the richness of data is shaped, in part, by predispositions of participants to engage with the subject.

Process of data collection

Following due process of securing consent from participants (see ethics section, p.132), empirical data gathering took place between February – June 2018.

Online Focus Group

The online Focus Group was set up and hosted in February- March 2018 over the course of five weeks. Mindful of participants' personal and professional commitments I sought an approach which would not be onerous and was as flexible as possible in gathering contributions. Participants were sent an email link to the secret Facebook™ page and asked to register with the group. As moderator I confirmed membership of each participant over the course of three days. Once all participants were confirmed as group members, I posted an introductory message attaching the participant guide (Appendix 7) and encouraging participants to introduce themselves. Following this, I posed one question to the forum on each of the five Mondays of the duration of the group, allowing a full seven days before moving on to a new question (see Appendix 3). In this way, participants had the opportunity to contribute at a time convenient to them and to a degree that suited them, given other commitments. Some questions garnered more responses and interaction between participants than others, and all but two participants contributed and gave generously of their time. Notably, at the end of the process, a number of participants thanked me for facilitating the group and one noted how she was appreciative of the 'constructive and collegial' dialogue.

Based on feedback from participants, I consider that the process was successful in meeting the aims of being a space which was safe, boundaried, dialogic and democratic. A limitation of the process is the nature of the relatively short period of data collection with a small number of participants wanting to have continued the conversation beyond the agreed timescale.

Interviews

Interview participants (n=16) were recruited both from the online focus group and from individuals who contacted me after the focus group had commenced but were keen to be involved in the study.

Sixteen participants were interviewed face-to-face, at a location convenient for them. This involved travel to multiple venues such as schools, nurseries, and individuals' homes across the country. In addition, some interviews were conducted in 'neutral' territory, at the request of participants, including in a hotel bar, a garden centre café, and a care home. One participant was interviewed via the online communication platform Skype. Prior to interview, participants had been provided with an information sheet and a topic guide. They all completed and signed a consent form.

Interviews lasted between 40 – 150 minutes. A topic guide (see Appendix 4) was formulated which afforded the opportunity for interviews to be open ended enough to hear about professional life stories, whilst ensuring key field questions were covered. This topic guide was sent to participants in advance and steered the interviews which remained semi-structured in style.

The interviews were audio recorded digitally and audio files securely filed. Data from interviews were then transcribed, and participants were asked to check the transcripts for accuracy and to ensure they were satisfied with the level of anonymity in the transcript. Of the five transcripts which were returned, minor amendments for accuracy and further anonymity were made.

On reflection, some of my questions around concepts of professional identity were not, perhaps, as accessible as they might have been. Finding alternative ways to understand and explore the notion of professional identities may have provided further data during this element of the data collection process.

Ethical considerations and trustworthiness

This section details the ethical considerations and implications of the study, with my reflections on the process from inception of the study through to presentation of findings. Firstly, I describe my approach to rigour, authenticity, integrity, and trustworthiness.

Lincoln and Guba (2000, p.21) outline four criteria for establishing the trustworthiness of a qualitative research endeavour which have guided the design, implementation and reporting of this study:

1. *Credibility*: the researcher makes transparent evidence of accurate representation of what was studied.
2. *Transferability*: the researcher offers sufficient information to enable others to decide whether the results are applicable elsewhere.
3. *Dependability*: the researcher explains and justifies the research processes in sufficient detail so that the study is replicable.
4. *Confirmability*: the researcher confirms that the results are a true reflection of the information gathered from the participants.

I have attempted to articulate the credibility of the study through both the comprehensiveness of methodological reporting and in making transparent the analytical process and findings. Similarly, the detailed discussion of methodological decision-making and analytical frameworks offer information on the dependability of the study and potential transferability of the research approach. Research process details such as consistent use of a topic guide in interviews, participant validation through member checking of transcripts and analytical themes triangulated in reference to existing literature support this claim of dependability.

The analysis and discussion chapters Six, Seven and Eight of this thesis address issues of confirmability by making transparent the data collected as honestly and as fully as possible, aiming for a high degree of trustworthiness in the analysis and the conclusions I have drawn from them.

Ethical considerations

I have approached this research aspiring to an ethic of responsibility and an 'ethic of care' (Tronto 1993; Sevenhuijsen 2003). In this research, an ethic of care was applied as a practice rather than a set of procedures, such as through the adoption of a non-intrusive interview manner, the sensitivity of follow-up questions, being aware of any nuances of language, including body language and accepting the silences of the participant and respect for individual voice in all its complexity. I also draw on Sikes (2010, p.14) who proposes the value of adopting Buberian relational ethics which acknowledges interpersonal relationships and a sense of connectedness between researcher and participant. As such, I have also aspired to an approach which not only

respected and carefully reflected the individual stories of participants but addressed the research question with a sense of social responsibility to a wider community of early educators.

I have aspired to take an approach which acknowledged and honoured the agency of individuals, in its multiple, contextual, and contingent forms. Acknowledging the theoretical perspectives adopted, I have also sought a method which simultaneously acknowledges that an individual is influenced by various macro level influences (of which she or he may or may not be aware) and that, at the same time, their life is more than socially determined.

In securing ethical approval for this study, a number of ethical issues were anticipated, and actions devised to mitigate these. A principle of non-maleficence was applied in designing and implementing the research, informed by University of Sheffield Ethical Review process, supplementary policy notes and the British Educational Research Association (BERA) 2018 ethical research guidelines. The process was also devised and implemented using additional ethics guidance from the University of Sheffield on handling social media data (The University of Sheffield Research 2018 Ethics Policy Note no. 14). Additionally, I looked to the work of Townsend and Wallace (2016) to inform an ethical approach to social media research.

Approval was granted by the University of Sheffield Ethics Committee (see Approval Letter at Appendix 2). Beyond such codes of ethics, justified and important as they may be, I believed it was important to make explicit my position as researcher within the research and convey the ethical dilemmas and considerations as they emerge. This includes reflections on the ethical implications of

- Research design
- Consent for data collection
- Confidentiality
- Privacy
- Avoidance of harm
- Data storage
- Analysis and Reporting

Research Design

This research was informed by my professional experiences and I make this transparent in the section on positionality (p.19). This in turn has shaped the research questions, theoretical framework, methodological decisions, and analytical choices. In terms of research design, I wanted the voices of participants to be heard; an analysis of policy texts alone would have been a partial study. Similarly, to consider educators' perspectives alone would neglect the broader structural influences which, I argue, shape dominant discourse of professional identities in the field. Thus, by designing a study which comprised both policy analysis and a narrative inquiry, I sought not only to reflect the policy/practice dynamic but to explore the impact of policy on the lived experiences of early childhood educators. Empirical data collection methods were designed to be respectful of respondents' capacity and willingness to participate with the choice of participating in either or both focus group and/or interviews.

Consent

Consent for Policy Use

In many cases the producers of publicly accessible data may not have considered the fact that it might be used for research purposes, and it should not be assumed that such data is available for researchers to use without consent. (BERA, 2018, p.10)

Access to policy documents for analysis was through pdf. files on a variety of websites. The public nature of these policy texts and their online availability has meant that consent to use these was deemed unnecessary.

Consent for empirical data collection

I needed to ensure that data collected through life story interviews was undertaken carefully and with an ethically reflexive approach. I was mindful that given that the method might prove intimate and potentially probing with the potential to uncover problematic issues, a responsive and thoughtful approach was needed. I subscribed to what Clandinin (2013) calls an ethics of 'negotiation, respect, mutuality and openness to multiple voices' (p.52).

I was also aware that the study provided privileged access to personal information, beliefs and views. I was mindful of the possibility that discussions might highlight previously unexamined influences and, as a result, was aware of the need to be

sensitive to not causing any undue anxiety or emotional distress as a result of this. During the interviews, participants initiated reflections on personal circumstances and events which were emotional. Details of family bereavements, divorce, illness and redundancy surfaced, and I was mindful to respect the participant's choice to discuss these issues without probing on these points. At no point was a participant visibly distressed. Whilst humbled to be party to this personal information, I was equally mindful that my responses did not encourage anything resembling a therapeutic element of the interview relationship to develop.

Information

Prior to their involvement in the research, all potential participants were provided by email with an information sheet (see Appendix 5) containing information pertaining to:

- the nature and purpose of the project;
- the research methods to be employed by the project;
- full explanation of any technical terms used;
- the conditions under which the project will be conducted;
- who is undertaking and who is sponsoring the project;
- the potential risks and inconveniences that may arise;
- the potential benefits that may result;
- what participation in the research will require in practice;
- how participant confidentiality will be safeguarded;
- what will happen to the data and how it will be stored;
- how to raise concerns, or to complain, about the research, and to whom; and
- the consequences of non-participation

This information sheet was also intended to clarify the process, put participants at their ease and make clear that I would avoid making excessive demands upon them.

In terms of securing voluntary informed consent for involvement in interviews and the focus group, approved consent forms (See Appendix 6) were sent out to and received back from all participants whether they agreed to participate in interviews, online focus group or both.

As the initial stage involved the recruitment of online focus group members, I emailed information sheets and consent forms to potential participants who had expressed an interest in involvement. These individuals were asked to review the document, sign, and return it to me by email or post. The information sheet informed participants about their right to choose not to be involved and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

In terms of accessing the focus group, as Facebook™ users, participants registered on the website (if they were not already members) and accepted the terms of use. Participants were informed about the procedures as well as the risks and benefits of the study (e.g. Facebook™ archives all user data). They were also reassured about the privacy of the group. In addition, all participants were signposted to the Statement of Rights and Responsibilities, Data Policy and Community Standards for the Facebook™ platform prior to commencing the focus group interactions. Additionally, I sought consent from participants of the online focus group to keep the secret group 'live' until the end of the study, enabling me to feedback findings of the study and afford a space for any subsequent conversations about these findings. All participants agreed to this.

Confidentiality and Privacy

The commitment to maintaining the confidentiality of participants was central to the study. Such a commitment was established at the outset in early communication with potential participants and was explicit in the processes of providing information and securing consent. The principle of privacy is particularly applicable to the online data element of this study.

When assessing the public/private nature of online spaces it's important to take into account that people's perceptions vary, and not all social media users have a good understanding of how accessible their content is to others.
(University of Sheffield, 2018, p.4)

This note guided my approach to ensuring and conveying the private nature of the data in the online focus group. As such, I made it clear to participants that the group was convened and set up as a 'secret' group on Facebook™ and that any comments were only, and would only ever be, visible to members of that group. The online accounts which participants used were in their real names online but all were anonymised before being reported. Three participants had not participated in a secret Facebook™ group before. They sought and were given written reassurance of the private nature of the discussions.

Anonymity

All participants, irrespective of the method through which data was gathered, were assured of anonymity. Creating pseudonyms for each participant was the primary method of anonymising the data. Pseudonyms for participants were used in the transcribing, storage and analysis of this data, and in the writing of this thesis. Personal

data gathered included gender and ethnicity. In terms of participants' job role, this was gathered to illustrate the diversity of roles and experience of participants.

Mindful of the possible consequences to participants, should they be identifiable by association or inference, I sought to remove or replace participants' mentions of specific locations, institutions, colleagues and roles where I felt that these may identify them. These deletions and alternatives were shared in the transcribed data. All participants were sent these and further minor amendments for accuracy were made in five cases.

In terms of the online focus group I requested in a guide document (see Appendix 7) that participants change names of any children, parents, staff and outside agencies referred to, in order to ensure anonymity.

Avoidance of Harm

As with all research, risks to participants, potential vulnerability and avoidance of harm were key to my decision-making. Whilst the topic was not considered particularly controversial, I needed to ensure minimal risks to participants irrespective of the data collection method.

In terms of the online focus group, I was mindful that interaction may differ from a face-to-face situation and that social media has, in numerous instances, been a site of inflammatory and offensive comments. Additionally, the 'live' (albeit asynchronous) nature of data collection arguably increased a risk of provocative or aggressive comments. Whilst I entered into the data collection process not expecting such comments, I sought to mitigate any risks of difficult interactions through establishing and agreeing ground rules with participants and through my respectful moderation. There were no offensive or inflammatory remarks to report.

I also made participants aware, through a participant information sheet (see Appendix 5) of their right to withdraw, without consequence, at any stage of the process. On this basis, I considered risk to participants was low and risks had been mitigated as far as possible.

Data collection

Following the facilitation of the focus groups I reflect on methodological and ethical implications of this data collection method. An issue I considered after data collection was the notion of internal confidentiality (Tollich 2009), as in information disclosed amongst the group members. Such internal confidentiality evidently relies on participants' adherence to ground rules and observance of elements of the consent process, over both of which I had more limited control. Whilst the consent form assured confidentiality on my part, I could only encourage such internal confidentiality through the participant guide and introductory focus group posts.

As anticipated, unlike a face to face group, it proved impossible to capture non-verbal data through this method. However, I consider that the increased access of participants to the study through this online and asynchronous method outweighed this limitation.

A further reflection in writing up the focus group data (as with the interview data) was that I needed to minimise the contextual details of each participant. This was to avoid their possible identification through deductive disclosure. In order to reduce this risk, I sought to reflect only the aspects of the data which were necessary and appropriate to establishing the context of participants.

Security of Data Storage

On 25 May 2018, during the process of data gathering, new data protection legislation (General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (EU)(European Union 2016)) came into effect across the EU, including the UK. As a result, amendments were made to protocols, information to participants and record keeping for the study to ensure compliance. Following guidance from university ethics committee administrators, an email was sent to participants on 1/6/18 (see Appendix 8) clarifying that in order to comply with legislation it was necessary to make them aware that I was collecting, handling and storing personal data as 'a task in the public interest'. All participants acknowledged receipt of this. Data from interviews were audio recorded in situ on a mobile 'phone. Digital audio files were emailed from the 'phone to my email address, deleted from the mobile phone and secured on a password-protected laptop and password-protected cloud storage. Data from the online focus group were stored on the password protected Facebook™ platform. Once the data had been 'harvested' from the platform into manageable Word documents, these, and subsequent analysis spreadsheets, were also stored on a password-protected laptop and password-protected cloud storage.

Analysis and Reporting

Narrativizing like all intentional behaviour...is a site of moral responsibility (Richardson, 1990, p.131)

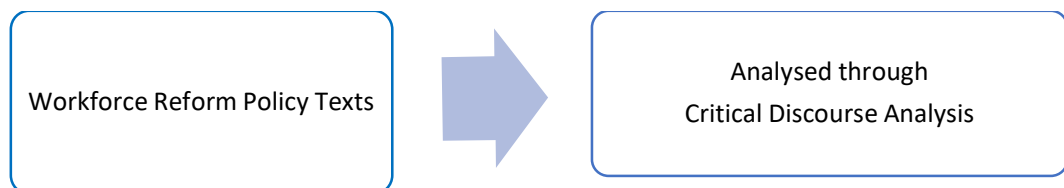
Throughout the analytical process and writing up the research, I was mindful to avoid the exploitation and misrepresentation of any participants. Through careful transcription, multiple iterations of analysis and careful reporting and discussion of data, I have sought (and will continue to seek through future publication) to reflect openly and honestly the stories of participants.

Sikes (2010) cites Bergin and Westwood (2003), who advocate the need to minimise the risk of taming 'unruly data in order to present and privilege a version that serves the writer's/researcher's purpose' (Sikes, 2010, p.18). Mindful of narrative privilege, of degrees of possible slippage and of the potential to 'tidy' the data, I have worked to reflect the untidiness and complexity of the narratives.

I have also been mindful of minimising the risk of identification of the participants (for example by reducing the details of participants and creating pseudonyms for anonymity). It is hoped that these strategies, combined with faithful reporting and careful analysis, will reduce any possibility of anxiety and distress created by the study.

Analytical frameworks and process of analysis

In exploring potential analytical frameworks, I have sought tools which are theoretically congruent and methodologically coherent and appropriate. In this section I detail and justify the choice of frameworks, namely a CDA framework for policy analysis and a Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) framework to analyse the data from interviews and focus group.



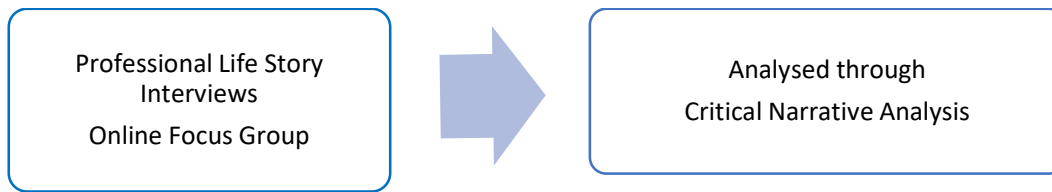


Fig.4.2 Analytical frameworks of datasets

Critical Discourse Analysis

Building on earlier justification for the choice of CDA as method, I detail the chosen analytical framework below. Having reviewed a number of CDA approaches including Wodak's discourse-historical approach (Wodak and Meyer 2009) and Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach (Van Dijk 2009), I chose to analyse texts utilising Hyatt's (2013) critical discourse analysis frame. This frame has been developed to support the critical discourse analysis of policy texts (and particularly to support doctoral students in this process) and as such is appropriate for the task. Hyatt (2013) details the framework of analysis thus:

'A. Contextualising the text

1. Considering policy levers and drivers
2. Considering warrant (justification or authority for an action)
 - i. Evidentiary (credibility established by empirical evidence)
 - ii. Accountability (grounds for actions based on outcomes)
 - iii. Political (justification in the public/national interest)

B. Deconstructing the text

1. Modes of legitimation (justification of policy through authorisation, rationalisation, moral evaluation and/or myth creation)
2. Interdiscursivity and intertextuality (relationships between discourses and texts)
3. Evaluation (inscribed with attitudinal judgement of text producer and/or evoked leaving the judgement to the reader)
4. Presupposition/implication (lexical devices such as closed questions, factive verbs)
5. Lexico-grammatical construction (e.g. pronouns to include or exclude)' (p.839)

Hyatt 2013 proposes that this CDA frame is not intended to be an 'all encompassing, universal tool', and that users should select 'aspects of the frame that are useful' (p. 837). Consequently, I utilise this flexibility to meet the needs of this research project. The policy texts can be divided into a) strategic documents b) policy technologies or policy levers.

The first tier of strategic policy texts constitutes government-produced policy on education and/or early childhood education workforce reform. The second tier of texts

represent various professional standards and do not all contain contextual information, thereby making the application of the contextualisation elements of the CDA frame difficult. I suggest that these texts essentially ‘fall out’ of the higher level strategic policy texts. Thus, the second tier texts are analysed as policy technologies/levers using elements of the frame (see below Table. 4.4).

Type of policy	Texts	Application of CDA frame
Strategic Policy texts	CYP Workforce Strategy 2008 More Great Childcare 2013 Early Years Workforce Strategy 2017	Contextualizing the text <i>Considering policy levers and drivers</i> <i>Considering warrant</i> Deconstructing the text <i>Modes of legitimation</i> <i>Interdiscursivity and intertextuality</i> <i>Evaluation</i> <i>Presupposition</i> <i>Lexico-Grammatical structures</i>
Policy technologies/levers	EYP Standards 2006 Teacher Standards 2007 Teacher Standards 2011 EYP standards 2012 Early Years Teachers Standards 2013 Level 3 Standards 2013	Deconstructing the text <i>Modes of legitimation</i> <i>Interdiscursivity and intertextuality</i> <i>Evaluation</i> <i>Presupposition</i> <i>Lexico-Grammatical structures</i>

Table 4.4 Application of Hyatt’s CDA doctoral frame to chosen policies

In particular, I considered that the policy drivers, warrant, legitimation, and evaluation elements of the tool would enable me to consider motivations, rationale and attitudinal judgements in policy which discursively created professional identities of early educators. Since its inception, a number of studies in the field of education have utilised this framework, including Kay (2018) and Traunter (2017).

The process of analysis involved developing an MS Excel spreadsheet in which the guiding analytical heading from the Hyatt frame formed columns and the nine policy texts formed rows, allowing me to code data and for this to be read by frame heading and/or policy text. (See Chapter Five for Policy Analysis).

Critical Narrative Analysis

In keeping with the study's interweaving of critical orientation and narrative inquiry, I have sought an appropriate analytical lens through which to view the empirical data from the focus group and life story interviews. Seeking a third space analytical approach led me away from initial consideration of a thematic analysis towards a process which reconciled the power analyses in critical discourse analysis with my respect for a narrative tradition. Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA), as an approach, is a relatively recent development, and thus, not widely found in the literature. It can be described as a hybrid analytical approach that is consistent with third space theory.

Hardin (2003) offers a poststructuralist account of 'unwinding individual stories alongside of master discourses' (p.25) which entails considering truths in the historical moment, looking at how power discourses developed over time and exploring how individuals negotiate, mediate, resist and position themselves within and between structural discourses. The further development of critical narrative analysis, in the past few years, owes much to Souto-Manning (2010; 2013; 2014). The author offers a detailed and concise exploration of deploying the macro level analytical device of critical discourse analysis to everyday narratives:

the connections between macro-level power inequities and micro-level interactional positionings, thereby establishing critical narrative analysis (CNA). (2010 p.159)

Souto-Manning (2014) explores CNA as a tool to analyse ways in which structural discourses are recycled in individual narratives. Additionally, she describes how CNA highlights the ways in which individuals appropriate, resist or subvert the discourses of the system. This approach challenges the single direction analysis adopted by some critical discourse analysts when they predominantly analyse structural discourses. Souto-Manning's development of CNA, advocates that 'conversational narratives are a complex weave of individuals' unique concerns and recycled institutional discourses' (p.174) and addresses the theoretical and methodological challenges of the single direction focus of CDA.

Theoretically, critical language researchers need to carefully consider not only how the system linguistically colonizes everyday lives through institutional discourses, but also how human beings leading everyday lives can appropriate the system – or at least the language it uses – to their varied concerns and objectives. (Souto-Manning, 2014, p.160)

This is also explored by Mutua and Swadener (2004), who describe how critical personal narratives can act as 'counter narratives which disrupt and disturb discourse by exposing the complexities and contradictions that exist under official history':

As a creative analytic practice, it [critical personal narrative] is used to reveal 'prevailing structures and relationships of power and inequity in a relational context' (Mutua and Swadener, 2004, p.16)

This analytical approach acknowledges that individual narratives are located in social-cultural contexts (including institutions) but that they are often considered in ways which do not take account of power issues or institutional discourses. Thus, the space between discourse and narrative avoids the:

binary of seeing the person as either the autonomous origin of his or her experience or the ideological pawn of social determination (Allen and Hardin, 2001, p.163)

In adopting this approach to analysis, I draw on work by Chase (2011), Souto-Manning (2014; 2016), Laliberte-Rudman (2015), Hickson (2016 and Laliberte-Rudman and Aldrich (2017). CNA is an ideal approach in meeting the study's aims: combining a narrative analysis and critical discourse analysis and affording opportunities to see how personal meaning is located in a broader cultural context. O'Toole (2018) describes this as the complex interplay between 'institutional storytelling' (p.175) and personal narratives. From this perspective, I was able to examine the pervasive power of structural or institutional discourses by analysing the life stories told by individuals.

'Analytically identifying the often multiple institutional discourses threaded through these counter-narratives affords us valuable insights into the social construction of realities and can serve to reframe social interactions as places for norms to be challenged and changed.' (Souto-Manning, 2014, p.163).

It would seem only a few studies have deployed an explicitly critical narrative analytical approach. Dodds (2018) - informed by Souto Manning's work (2014; 2016) - analysed the personal narratives of retirement village residents against societal discourses of ageing and 'considers the socially constructed nature of loss narratives' (p.ii) in a New Zealand context. Hibbert et al (2014) adopt a CNA perspective in analysing graduate supervision by considering the meta-narratives as 'overarching stories told', the cover stories as 'tellers' interpretations of what should happen and the private stories of individual experience.' (p.95)

Detail of frameworks

Despite a shared perspective and rationale for deploying CNA amongst researchers, there are differences in specific frameworks. Souto-Manning's (2013) approach to CNA deploys analysis of grammatical and framing agency of participants' narratives. In addition, the framework considers agentive positioning suggested through turning points in the narratives. This approach draws on the linguistics traditions of CDA affording opportunities to 'verify the presence of recycled institutional discourses intertextually woven into their fabric' (Kristeva 1986 in Souto-Manning, 2014, p.163).

However, given the focus of this study on resistance and activism, I chose to build on an approach which explicitly analyses narratives for points of tension, contradiction and resistance between institutional discourses and personal narratives. An alternative framework for Critical Narrative Analysis has been developed by Laliberte-Rudman and Aldrich (2017) drawing on earlier work by Laliberte-Rudman (2015). This framework was selected because of the applicability of its guiding questions which focus on subjectivities, ideal subject positions and the relationships between perceptions of these by individuals and those constructed through policy.

As Laliberte-Rudman and Aldrich (2017) attest, there are methodological challenges in linking discourses with narratives. They describe wanting to attend to the transactional space 'in between' discourse and narrative (Allen and Hardin, 2001) by 'mov[ing] data from individuals beyond the level of the individual and into historical, social and cultural realms, thus making critical analysis possible on a social level' (Hardin, 2003, p. 544). This framework deploys an analytical process to interlink discourses and narratives.

The authors devised the questions:

- In what ways does the participant position her/himself within the narrative?
- What subject positions does s/he attempt to lay claim to and how?
- How do these ways of positioning relate to subjectivities (affirm, negotiate fracture) constructed through policy?
- What normalizing truths are brought into the narrative and/or contested to monitor, position and present the self? (Laliberte-Rudman and Aldrich, 2017, p. 475)

In addition to these analytical questions, a number of linkages between discourses and narratives, form elements of the framework.

I utilised this analytical framework to analyse the focus group and interview data (see Table 4.5).

Type or point of linkage	Description
Points of resistance/subversion	When a narrator explicitly articulates that she or he is doing or saying something “against the grain” or as not fitting with meso/macro expectations. This may also include examples of activism.
Points of contradiction	When a narrator positions him or herself at different points in the narrative in ways that appear contradictory.
Points of fracture	When a narrator refers to engaging in ideal practices and activities promoted within dominant discourses, but finds that such engagement does not materialize into idealized subject positions or expanded occupational possibilities.
Points of tension	When a narrator positions her or himself and occupations in ways that set up differences that result in marginalizing or blaming others, or points where informants express being positioned by others as having not taken up idealized subject positions.
Linkages between “life lived” and resources and constraints (Chase, 2011)	When a narrator provides a rationale, often as a cause/effect link, to make sense of, and explain, his/her situation or identity. (Laliberte-Rudman, 2017, p.475)

Table 4.5 Laliberte-Rudman and Aldrich CNA Frame

Application/Process

Informed by the ongoing debate over the dominance of agency or structure, and my selected lenses of critical theory and third space theory, I sought analytical frameworks which were appropriate for the study. I reflected on this approach in the context of the well-established inductive/deductive binary of research. Whilst this study was not framed in a hypothetico-deductive manner nor involved a list of apriori analytical codes, I was mindful that the proposed guiding analytical questions of the CNA frame were used to code, analyse and organise data. However, a second stage of open coding adopted an inductive approach. The process of analysis involved searching for ideas and links within transcripts, informed by the guiding questions and discourses relating

to professional identities and resistance and/or activism. I concluded that an approach which, to some degree, was both deductive and inductive was congruent theoretically and methodologically with the study. Thus, my method of CNA analysis might be seen as a hybrid approach (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006) of deductive and inductive reasoning which was 'organic and iterative' (Swain, 2018, p.2).

Following transcription of interviews, and conversion of focus group data into an MS Word document I emailed participants and asked them to check these stories for accuracy and levels of anonymity. This process enabled participants to add to or clarify any content. I then analysed these data utilising a critical narrative analysis framework.

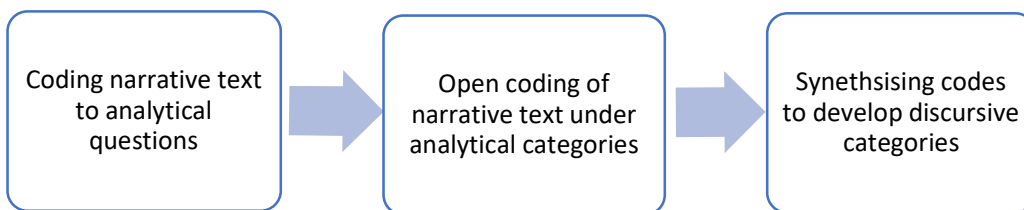


Fig.4.3 The process of Critical Narrative Analysis

Both focus group and interview data were coded in two ways. Firstly, I coded and analysed both data sets using the Laliberte-Rudman questions. A second layer of analysis involved open coding (within analytical categories) of the individual narrative transcripts. See Fig 4.3.

Using MS Excel spreadsheets (See Fig. 4.4 for a screenshot of an analytical workbook) to organise the data enabled readings of the data by participant (row) which kept the integrity of the narrative intact to some degree, and by analytical question (column). This assisted in reporting analysis by participant but also in response to the overarching research questions. For example, in considering the research question, 'Which conditions/values enable or constrain activism and how do practitioners perceive their role in this?' I was able to draw on participant data organised under the analytical point: 'narrative linkages between life lived and resources/constraints'. Throughout this process I sought to avoid 'narrative smoothing' by working with and acknowledging the 'messiness and contradiction of participants' stories.' (Wright and Blair, 2016, p.228). Findings from the analyses and detailed discussion are presented in the next four chapters.

Pseudonym	In what ways does the participant position her/himself within the narrative ?	What subject positions does s/he attempt to lay claim to and how?	How do these ways of positioning relate to subjectivities (affirm, negotiate fracture) constructed through policy?	What normalizing truths are brought into the narrative and/or contested to monitor, position and present the self?
Natalie	My thinking has always been in tension with policy developments (in opposition to policy) as I find myself fighting against the dominant notion of 'what works' because I am left thinking for who? and who is left out? (questioning authority and dominant discourses) ... It was getting so performative I thought 'I can't do it'. (resistance to performativity) And I was working probably ten-hour days – it was not good psychologically for me and I thought I'm not on top form when I'm meeting people. And one of	I have very strong feminist principles (feminist) with regards to empowerment, regardless of the gender breakdown in the workforce ECEC work is a gendered job and this has resulted in the deficit discourse that we struggle to overcome...I am happy to engage in activism and will do so even if this means I am the only or the first voice (prepared to be lone voice) ...They are doing so in challenging times with policy drivers and some outward views of the profession. The biggest challenge is policy makers and	My thinking has always been in tension with policy developments as I find myself fighting against the dominant notion of 'what works' because I am left thinking for who? and who is left out? (fractures compliance what works narrative) ...I felt as the standards moves from EYPS to EYTS to EYITT they lost some of the democratic social pedagogic roots that were the foundations of EYPS . There was also less focus on working with the under 2's in my reading... I also noticed a shift from leadership of	My thinking has always been in tension with policy developments as I find myself fighting against the dominant notion of 'what works' (contested normalised truth of what works) because I am left thinking for who? and who is left out? (contested exclusionary approach as normalised truth) ...The government need to move away from the human capital view of education as a way to promote social mobility... And it feels more about instruction for me (rejects normalised truth of teaching as instruction) ...and I'm

Fig. 4.4 Screenshot of Critical Narrative Analysis Excel Workbook

Summary

This chapter has sought to make transparent decision-making about the methodological choices of this study. Considerations of methodological framework, research design, data collection methods, participants recruitment, data collection, ethical considerations, data management and analytical frameworks have been reported. These and aforementioned theoretical decisions are summarised in Fig. 4.5 which forms an overview map of the research study.

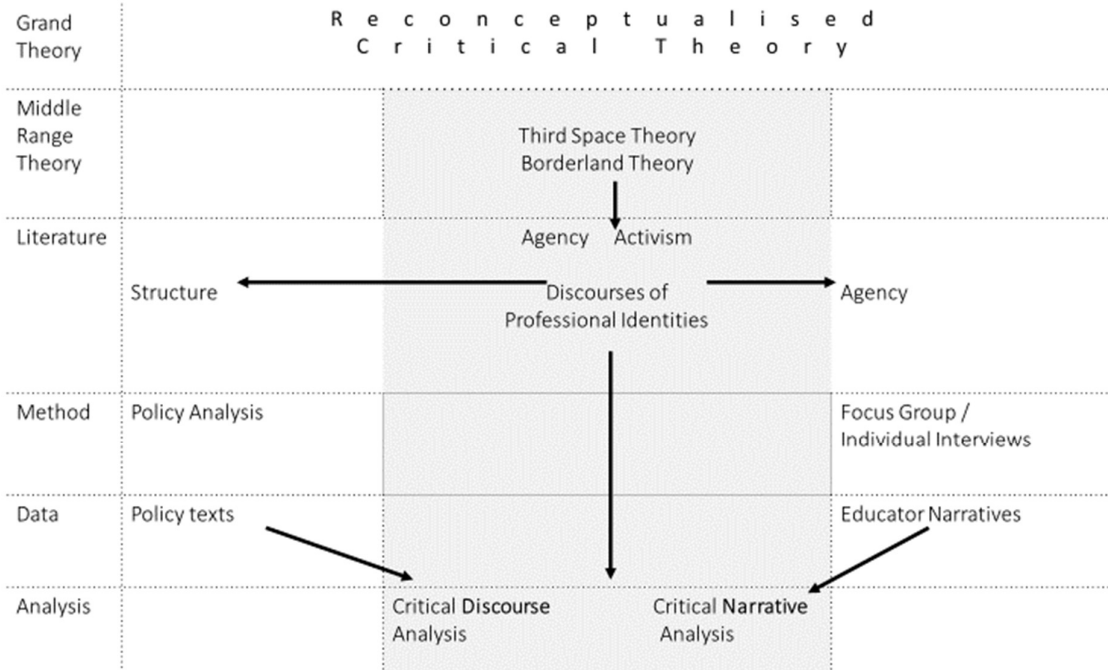


Fig. 4.5 Thesis Map

Chapter 5 Policy Analysis

Introduction

This policy analysis chapter seeks to address the research questions and in particular the question: 'how are early childhood educators positioned in ECE policies?' In doing so I identify the structural discourses at work through policy texts which are formative in the positioning of the 'ideal' early childhood educator.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the justification for selection of these workforce reform policies is that, as government produced texts, they are deemed to be the most instrumental artefacts of state authority which, I contend, attempt to shape and influence ideal professional identity construction. As such, they are a public sites of power discourses. I analyse nine policies (see Table 4.2) divided into three 'top level' strategic policies and six policy texts: predominantly occupational standards and qualifications criteria for those responsible for the care and learning of children from birth to five.

As justified in Chapter Four, this analysis has deployed Hyatt's (2013) CDA doctoral frame using the two overarching elements of the frame. I analyse the three top level policies using 'contextualising the text' and 'deconstructing the text' categories and 'deconstructing the text' only for the six policy texts, as these did not include contextualising data.

Such a process combined a deductive and inductive approach. Using deduction, I was mindful of discourses identified in policy research literature (outlined in the literature review), but I also undertook the analysis inductively, being open to previously unidentified discourses. These analyses have been synthesised under the following discourses identified across the data set:

- governmentality
- responsibilisation
- performativity and accountability
- surveillance
- marketisation and commodification

These discourses are discussed, and illustrated with analysis, in turn, below.

Governmentality

Analysing the context of these policies highlighted discourses of governmentality across a number of the texts. I understand this notion of governmentality in a Foucauldian sense as methods attempting to 'shape human conduct by calculated means' (Li, 2007, p.275). In particular, analysis leads me to Foucault's notion of disciplinary power as it is exerted in a neoliberal education context. Such disciplinary power concerns the circulation of desires by authorities to individuals through techniques of the self, engendering certain expectations in educators. In the strategic policies, such governmentality is expressed through policy levers and drivers to justify the policy:

The affordability and availability of childcare are growing concerns...the quality of provision could be improved (Department for Education, 2013, p.4)

Settings which gained a graduate leader with EYPS (the precursor to Early Years Teacher status) made significant improvements in quality for pre-school children compared with settings which did not. (Department for Education, 2017a, p.15)

These quotes position the possibility of quality improvement and links between EYT status and quality as decisions to be taken by schools or settings. The fear of 'growing concerns' and appealing to local leaders on EYT deployment for 'significant improvements' inculcates government expectations through moral evaluation and persuasion. Akin to Osgood's (2011) work, in which discourses of educators defined both by their deficit and as potential saviours are deployed, these texts discursively construct the early educator as both cause for unease and as a redemptive force. A notable discursive absence is the role of government in *enabling* such quality improvement through mechanisms of funding or support. Thus, modes of governmentality are discernible and frame the early educator as both 'in need of improvement' and an EYT as driver of quality improvement but with limited government intervention. In a similar way, deficit discourses are utilised 'where more needs to be done':

[there are] concerns about the quality of initial training...the clarity of purpose of some professions, the quality of management and leadership...where quality or capacity means there is more that needs to be done (Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2008, p. 17)

Governmentality discourses intended to shape, guide and influence the conduct of early childhood educators are further evidenced in the occupational standards texts. I contend that the texts attempt to discursively frame and discipline educators in acquiring the skills and habits to perform in 'appropriate' ways, thereby reducing the need for coercive power to ensure this. In deconstructing these texts, I identify modes of authorisation deployed to present these standards as non-negotiable. In teacher standards (2007):

Professional standards are statements of a teacher's professional attributes, professional knowledge and understanding and professional skills. (Training and Development Agency for Schools, 2007, p.2)

Such standard setting of required attributes, knowledge, understanding and skills creates detailed and instrumental 'ways of being' and acts to shape desirable conduct. Notably, in a further evolution of Teacher Standards (2011):

The following statements define the *behaviour* and *attitudes* [my emphasis] ... Teachers must have an understanding of and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities (Department for Education, 2011, p.1)

These standards move beyond knowledge and skills, and further define and inscribe in detail the *behaviours* and *attitudes* required of a teacher. Given the complex, situated nature of education, attempts to prescribe such attitudes and behaviours reflect a disciplinary power and a reductionist perspective in attempts at centralised control. Such efforts to prescribe and govern behaviours are also evident and explicated in more detail in early years educator standards (level 3) wherein these professionals are expected to:

Engage in continuing professional development and reflective practice to improve their own...subject knowledge (for example in English, mathematics, music, history or modern foreign languages) (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2013a, p.7)

These standards create a discourse of the self-improving early educator, seemingly responsabilised for their own development (in an era when resources are lacking). It is also notable that the continuing professional development expected is in relation to 'subject knowledge' evoking a sense that educators are lacking in this arena and that this would enable them to improve as early educators. This also speaks to discourses of 'lacking' as identified in previous research (p.66).

Discourses of governmentality are also deployed through authorisation to guide operational decisions on staffing ratios (through reducing the number of adults to children despite well documented resistance to this):

Settings that employ an early years teacher *can choose* to operate a 1:13 staff: child ratio for three and four year olds in recognition of the additional training and expertise these graduates have in leading the learning and development of young children. (Department for Education, 2017a, p.14)

The government-sanctioned 'choice' to deploy the qualified early years teacher working with more children, which is 'in recognition' of their qualification is, I suggest, a cost saving measure (see analysis of *More Great Childcare* p.156) steering the conduct of setting leaders to reduce staffing costs whilst adding to the day to day responsibilities and workload of early years teachers. This seemingly benevolent 'choice' acts as a form of governmentality through both disciplinary power/coercion and operational demands of cost-savings in an era of austerity. Within this policy the educator is positioned as someone able to provide care and education for more children as a result of their qualification (i.e. they are underutilised) and simultaneously the source of cost savings for the setting.

Governmentality as a discourse pervades these texts. Through this analysis various mechanisms are at work which seek to frame the educator in particular ways and steer their conduct. Both strategic level documents and professional standards are used to detail desirable attitudes and behaviours and to shape decisions on staff deployment for greater efficiency. In deconstructing these texts, particularly analysing modes of legitimation and evaluation of text producers, I discern attempts to secure the willing participation of early educators and their active consent to adopt the sanctioned, ideal version of their professional identities. I now look to other modes of governmentality as analysed in these policies.

Responsibilisation

One technology of governmentality which was notable in the analysis was the discourse of responsibilisation. This concept is perceived as the shifting of responsibility from higher authorities to individuals in order that they take responsibility for their own problems or issues. As MacfarLane and Likhani (2015) attest:

mutual responsibility and reciprocal obligation [are] crucial to civil societies. Consequently, the civic minded citizen self regulates and becomes responsabilised, that is, comes to understand this process as the proper way to function. (p.184)

Such a concept of responsabilisation is particularly evident in policy texts from 2013 onwards. Most significantly, in *More Great Childcare* (2013), a number of modes of legitimation for the policy (authorisation, rationalisation and moral evaluation through inscribed or evoked attitudinal judgment) are deployed:

Increasing the freedom for professionals to exercise their judgement...it is right to place more power in the hands of professionals to do what is best...so the onus for developing and maintaining professional standards in settings will increasingly shift to providers themselves. (Department for Education, 2013, p. 34)

Despite some recent improvements, the early years profession has not broken out of the cycle of low pay and perceived low status relative to other professions. Although the evidence suggests that the best outcomes are achieved by high quality staff, current regulations limit the number of children each member of staff can look after constraining salary levels. Moreover, many providers often fail to use this flexibility... (Department for Education, 2013, p. 17)

The government's role is that of facilitator...(Department for Education, 2017a, p. 27)

I contend that the proposed freedoms (p.34) frame the ideal early childhood professional as autonomous and self-improving. However, such aspirations, when placed alongside numerous occupational standards and regulatory frameworks are contestable. Additionally, the 'power in the hands of professionals' (p.34) is, I suggest, curtailed through parallel policy technologies including a highly regulated system of standards. The idea that such standards will 'increasingly shift to providers' has not materialised in the intervening period.

The second paragraph cited offers an example of moral evaluation and, I argue, myth creation in the construction of the early childhood professional. By conflating research on the impact of higher staff qualifications (used as a proxy for 'high quality staff') with regulations around staffing ratios, this policy text has created an alternative conception of the early educator as insufficiently entrepreneurial. Despite government interventions (such as changes to staff:child ratios), it is, according to the text, the early years *profession* which has not '*broken out of the cycle of low pay and perceived low status*' [my emphasis] (p17). I propose that this acts to de-responsibilise authorities and

responsibilise a profession into reducing staffing ratios with the aim of reducing costs for parents.

Coupled with the disingenuous self-description of government as 'facilitator', the text seemingly absolves government and policy makers of any responsibility for structural constraints (such as limited funding), and proposes that the profession itself is responsible for low pay and fails to take advantage of a process of deregulation. The policy text frames the early childhood profession by utilising deficit and failure discourses which, I suggest, attempt to further responsibilise the workforce. In an era of austerity and reduced investment from government, this text positions the early childhood educator as responsible for their own diminished salary. This discourse also speaks to other discourses of commodification and marketisation discussed later.

Through the discourses of responsibilisation in these texts, the educator is positioned as having professional freedoms and discretion over issues which I propose are in fact structural constraints. The idea of sector-led professional standards is, in fact, a charade of autonomy. This echoes analysis by Kay et al (2019) who describe the EYT policy as 'the illusion of devolution versus the realities of surveillance and responsibilisation.' (p.2)

Coupled with this, the lack of educator appetite for deregulation is seen as a cause of inefficiency. This is read as a myth creation that the early childhood sector is being responsibilised for its own development and efficiency, but is choosing not to, or is incapable of using this responsibility 'correctly'.

Performativity and Accountability

A further tool of governmentality can be seen in discourses of performativity and intensified accountability across the policy texts. In considering the context of these texts, whilst examples of these discourses are not large in number, they do pervade the texts in terms of the policy levers, drivers and warrants for the policies. For example, the CYP Workforce Strategy (2008) details how:

' a new accountability framework around the new Report Card can drive improvements in outcomes for children and young people.' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008, p.8)

This refers to proposals to publish, annually, a school 'Report Card' for each school detailing

- 'Pupil progress;
- Pupil attainment;
- Pupil wellbeing;
- Pupils' perceptions;
- Parents' perceptions; and
- Narrowing gaps in pupil performance.

There will be both a score and a rating for each performance category (e.g. a score of A and a rating of 8/10)' (House of Commons, 2010, p.84)

Such a proposal arguably both intensifies accountability measures and uses transparency through the publication of such results to improve performance. In a further example, *More Great Childcare* (Department for Education 2013) refers to bringing in 'tougher entry requirements' (p.6) which will 'raise the quality of the workforce' (p.6). Both of these texts frame educators as needing further scrutiny or benchmarks to improve performance. Additionally, outcomes of regulation are cited linking promoted qualifications with desirable inspection outcomes:

'Evidence clearly shows that settings which employ more high qualified staff are more likely to attract a Good or Outstanding rating from Ofsted' (Department for Education, 2017a, p.6)

In deconstructing the range of policy texts, various modes of legitimation to justify policies are deployed which reflect a performative/accountability agenda. Notably the occupational standards of graduate professionals (EYP, EYT and QTS) are permeated with multiple discourses of performance. The EYP standards of 2006 required professionals to act as 'an agent of change' (p.5) within settings. Such a requirement is not featured in EYP standards of 2012 instead, they are expected to 'Lead practice and foster a culture of continuous improvement' (p.4). This expectation morphs further in the EYT standards 2013 which states that Early Years Teachers 'are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in their professional practice and conduct' (Department for Education, 2013b, p.2) thereby shifting the focus from practitioner agency to practitioner accountability. The detail of to whom early years teachers are accountable is absent. Perhaps most explicitly, discourses of performativity and accountability appear in Teacher Standards (QTS) 2007:

Performance Management provides the context for regular discussion about teacher aspirations...[Teachers need to] *know how to use local and national statistical information to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching.*' (Training and Development Agency, 2007, p.3) [my emphasis]

This deployment of performance management serves as a 'measurable, linear, and systematized structure regarding the knowledge and values expected of early childhood professionals.' (Lash and Castner, 2018, p.94). What emerges from this data set is the teacher discursively constructed as a performative data analyst responsabilised into measuring their own effectiveness against local and national data and adapting their performance accordingly. This reading echoes work on analysis of datafication as performativity, described by Bradbury et al (2017) as hyper-governance through datafication and 'dataveillance' - the constant surveillance of comparative data. These standards further deploy discourses of performativity through modes of evaluation (attitudinal judgement in the text) and presupposition. Evaluation is clear in the text:

The framework of standards is progressive, reflecting the progression *expected* of teachers as their professional attributes, knowledge and understanding and skills develop, and they demonstrate increasing effectiveness in their roles. (Training and Development Agency, 2007, p.4) [my emphasis]

Such performativity is linked to credentialising so that eligibility for progression within the profession is demonstrated through the performance of approved attributes, knowledge and skills. Such a performative discourse of progression is echoed in the *Early Years Workforce Strategy* (Department for Education 2017a) which proposes that:

The sector can inspire people to specialise further...and become inspectors, training providers, quality advisers and academics...' (Department for Education 2017a, p.17)

Notably, the idea that progression to more expert educator roles is absent with a focus instead on the careers 'around' the educator building the idea of educator qualifications as a 'stepping stone' performance to associated work (see Careers Map, Appendix Nine.)

A further performative discourse is in relation to literacy and numeracy outcomes for children which pervades the standards post-2013. In both Level 3 early years educator standards (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2013a. p.4) and early years teacher standards (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2013b, p.3), candidates are expected to 'demonstrate a clear understanding of the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics.' Notwithstanding the debate on the efficacy of focussing on systematic synthetic phonics teaching alone, I assert the idea that this discourse forecloses opportunities for students to engage in this debate and explore alternative and complimentary approaches to early literacy teaching. These standards make a government-sanctioned approach explicit as they are a means to optimise learner outputs through a prescribed method. Thus, the candidate becomes not a teacher of early literacy, but a teacher of early phonics.

Within these texts discourses of performativity and accountability are evident. Across the professional roles within early childhood education and embedded within policy texts throughout the era, various modes of intensified accountability and measurement of performativity are analysed. Through these discourses I perceive early educator professional identities increasingly constructed by expectations through which educator autonomy and decision making are subservient to standards compliance and increased accountability for performance. As Moss and Roberts-Holmes (forthcoming) write:

Professional identity is corroded by this performative culture, de-professionalising practitioners and steering them away from the pedagogical values and principles that may have brought them into the work in the first place or which they learnt during their education. ...the teacher's subjectivity becomes 'made up' by performance data...

Surveillance

I also argue that such performativity and accountability are policed through surveillance, itself made explicit in these texts. The justification of policies through authorisation is a mode of legitimation in Hyatt's frame and can be evidenced in the text below. Drawing on Page's (2017) conceptualisation of surveillance, I identify both vertical (by regulators) and horizontal (by peers) modes of surveillance:

The framework of professional standards will provide a backdrop to discussions about how a teacher's performance should be viewed in relation to their current career stage. (Teacher Standards, 2007 p.2)

This text makes explicit the notion of teacher performance. Through a process of authorisation, these standards normalise horizontal surveillance by peers/managers. A result of such a performativity regime, according to Ball (2003 p.215) is that

It requires individual practitioners to organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations. To set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation.

Lash and Castner (2018) concisely critique how such ‘...hegemonic monologues of reductionist evaluative frameworks routinely appraise and manage the daily lives of practitioners.’ (p.93)

In terms of vertical surveillance, policy texts make it explicit that regulation is a key apparatus both for ‘delivery’ of childcare and oversight of educators:

Key to delivering great childcare is a rigorous regulatory and inspection regime...[with] Ofsted as the sole arbiter of quality. (Department for Education, 2013, p.10)

Through these policies, the notion of quality is centrally defined and regulated, with Ofsted framed as the ultimate authority on the matter. Quality of early education or childcare is reduced to surveillance by inspection and a resultant grading. There is an absence of educator conceptualisations and interpretations of quality and a dearth of discussion about the contextual nature of quality provision and practice. As such, a regulator-sanctioned version of quality is the only version presented. Educators are, by inference, surveilled as to their performance of quality according to centrally constructed and applied frameworks. This reading also echoes the technicist discourses of professional identity discussed in the literature review, notably Smyth’s (2001) compliant operatives engaged in ‘deliverology’ (Barber et al 2010).

In summary, these discourses of surveillance are woven through workforce reform policy texts. Directives in the form of professional standards are enacted through both regulatory regimes and the required horizontal scrutiny of peers/managers. As a result, I suggest spaces for trust, autonomy and agency are diminished and the early educator performance is observed, assessed, and monitored through various policy technologies. The interdiscursivity between performance, accountability and surveillance is discernible, and I propose, also nested in a marketised system, which I explore below.

Marketisation and commodification

Marketisation is an additional dominant discourse in the policy texts and a further governmentality technology. Through explicit reference to competition between 'providers' of early education and care and the prevalence of a choice agenda for parents in accessing such provision, marketisation becomes normalised. Whilst such a discourse is predominantly found in policies pertaining to the private, voluntary, and independent sectors of early childhood provision, increasingly colleagues in maintained sector provision are expected to operate within this 'diverse market' (Archer 2008).

I analyse marketisation as a discourse in the policy drivers and levers for the *More Great Childcare* (2013)¹² policy:

More great childcare is vital to ensuring that we can compete in the global race ...by helping parents back to work and readying children for school...(Department for Education, 2103, p.6)

This policy positions the early educator as enabler of parental employment and preparer of children for primary school. In this scenario, the childcare offered to the parent-consumer is purchased as a commodity and the school readiness agenda defines early education by its preparatory nature for the next phase of learning. By consequence, the early educator is positioned and responsabilised as needing to enable UK competition 'in the global race', both through the childcare which enables parents to work and the foundational learning for children (as future workers).

Silberfeld et al (2015) analyse that in *More Great Childcare* 'quality learning is a social *investment* which facilitates specific learning outcomes that are the 'foundation for their future success at school' (p.241). Following this premise, Gibson et al (2015) propose (from an Australian context) that early childhood educators are framed as 'brokers' responsible for 'watching over the investment' (the child) (p.323). In what Moss (2019) calls the 'story of the markets' (p.8) he concludes that early childhood education is presented as 'provid[ing] an effective and relatively cheap technical fix for both social and economic failings, often expressed in terms of a high rate of return on 'social investment' in this field.' (p.227). In order to undertake this with maximum efficiency, a

¹² For a comprehensive critical discourse analysis of this policy text see Wild et al (2015) *More? Great? Childcare? A discourse analysis of two recent social policy documents relating to the care and education of young children in England. International Journal of Early Years Education, 23* (3), 230-244.

form of deregulation attempts to shift market conditions. This discourse plays out in the *More Great Childcare* text with the proposal to change staffing ratios of adults to children, affording the flexibility for educators to care for more children to reduce costs to parents:

[current staffing ratios] means providers employ staff in numbers which force a choice between paying low wages and charging parents excessively high fees. (Department for Education, 2013, p.19)

The deregulation through proposed changes to staffing ratios is shaped by a desire for greater economic efficiency. The policy positions the early educator as accountable either for accepting low wages or working within an organisation charging 'excessively high fees'. The discourse of marketisation in which the frame of wages and fees is used to warrant the policy proposal, is explicit. Additionally, this text positions the educator solely in relation to the numbers of children they might care for/educate, further commodifying their role and children in the process.

The political justification for the policy is offered as the need for childcare to enable economic development:

Delivering more for the investment currently made by tax-payers ...more great childcare is vital to ensuring we can compete...our reforms seek to benefit both society and the economy by delivering high quality early education and at the same time helping parents back to work. (Department for Education, 2013, p.13)

Such discourses are later echoed in the *Early Years Workforce Strategy* (2017a):

An effective workforce is...important to parents making childcare choices. We must invest and value those who are shaping [children's] early development. The early years workforce is both the biggest asset and the biggest overhead for early years providers operating in a competitive jobs market. ...opportunities for budding entrepreneurs to start their own childcare business. (Department for Education, 2017a, p.19)

I suggest that a discourse of commodification is present in this policy text, normalised both through the rationalisation of the policy and the attitudinal judgment of the text producers. That is to say, the justification for the policy and the perspectives of the policy authors is made explicit in discourses commodifying both the provision of childcare and early years educators as professionals. Nutbrown (1998) noted:

In recent years a language of battle, managerialism and competition has been composed for education, with terms such as 'orders', 'standards', 'levels', 'stages', 'targets', 'outcomes' and so on. (p.17)

Following analysis, I suggest that in the intervening years, the language in policies along this trajectory has accelerated and the discourse of business: 'invest', 'compete', 'asset' 'overhead' and 'entrepreneurs' (see above) now proliferates.

I contend that these discourses draw on meta-narratives of new public management (see p.70) and Human Capital Theory (see p.178) in framing the early childhood educator. Echoing previous work by Kamenac (2019) and Beck and Young (2005) on the discursive creation of the marketized professional, this analysis finds multiple discourses in which the educator is situated in relation to parental choice of service, as a commodity to reduce costs of staffing and as instrumental in enabling competition 'in the global race'. These texts frame policy solutions in fiscal terms, and in turn the early childhood educator as economic solution.

Taken together, the discourses analysed in these policy texts, which consider how early childhood educators are positioned, coalesce to create a perspective of the early childhood educator constructed through technologies of governmentality such as responsabilisation but also subjected to regimes of performativity, accountability, surveillance and commodification. I now look to put this analysis to work in discussing the implications of these policy technologies and discourses and their contribution to the evolving conceptual framework.

Reflective Discussion - From borders to borderlands

This reflective discussion builds on the critical analysis of discourses within policy texts and considers this in light of chosen theories. This section utilises the border theory explored in Chapter Three to further develop the analysis of the purposes of and effects of policy on professional identity construction. This, in turn, lays the groundwork for empirical data analysis and discussion which follows.

The structural discourses analysed in the policies and in associated policy texts in this chapter point to the pervasiveness of a neoliberal regime. The prevalence of discourses of governmentality, responsabilisation, marketisation, performativity and surveillance within these texts leads me to find that neoliberal ideas are reaching into early childhood policy in attempts to shape notions of the 'good' early childhood

professional identity. Through these policies, concepts about ideal professional identity through desirable knowledges, skills, behaviours, and attitudes become normalised. As Laliberte-Rudman (2015) asserts, such 'dominant discourses progressively come to be viewed as normal, natural, ethical, and ideal, thereby bounding identity.' (p.29). I contend that, based on this critical discourse analysis, one of the ways in which such neoliberal forms of governmentality and responsabilisation are formalised, engendered, and inculcated is through setting standards. The strategic workforce policies coupled with associated qualifications criteria, competency frameworks and occupational standards serve as policy technologies and act as a form of hegemony. Fraser (1992) describes hegemony as 'the discursive face of power':

It is the power to establish the 'common sense' or 'doxa' of a society, the fund of self-evident descriptions of social reality that normally go without saying. This includes the power to establish authoritative definitions of social situations and social needs, the power to define the universe of legitimate disagreement, and the power to shape the political agenda. (p.179).

I contend that these standards are presented as logical and desirable and are deployed (through credentialising, incentivising and surveillance) to manufacture the acceptance and consent of an early childhood workforce. I propose that such standards are discursively coercive and through their establishment, maintenance and regulation, 'inhibit professional autonomy and promote a model of technical practice' (Miller, 2008, p.260).

However, it is important to be open to alternative perspectives. It could be argued that such standards might be viewed as the result of aspirations for the standardisation and professionalisation of the sector (Department for Education 2013) with the goal of higher status for a workforce. However, when the content of standards becomes increasingly prescriptive, informed by tenets of responsabilisation and surveillance, and shaped by centrally prescribed perspectives on professionalisation, such aspirations appear contestable.

Analysis also leads me to consider that setting standards acts as a form of stratification and professional demarcation or, indeed, occupational closure, preventing entry to the profession (or a particular stratum of the profession) to all but those 'suitably' qualified. Through this technology, professionals who do not fit these categories (e.g. teacher trained in different pedagogies/philosophies or with different qualifications) are othered. From a personal perspective, as a Montessori trained teacher, such policies do not

reflect the content of qualifications I studied, nor the pedagogical relationships between Montessori educator and child.

What is evident from this policy analysis is that over the last ten years English early childhood workforce reform policy has sought a specific form of professionalism (and thereby professional identity) shaped by neoliberal thought, which is centrally prescribed and leaves little space for diversity or experimentalism. This underscores Osgood's (2006) work in that regulatory frameworks can result in practitioners who 'conform to dominant constructions of professionalism' and that the 'regulatory gaze' inhibits agency (p.7).

Credentialising across professional roles (and different political administrations)

The critical discourse analysis of policy suggests the essentialist nature of workforce reform policy and the ways in which qualifications and associated technologies act as processes of credentialising across professional roles. Whilst these reforms and qualifications shifted according to ideologies of different political administrations in the period considered, such credentialism is presented as a solution to a deficit workforce. Notably, dominant discourses analysed in these policy texts positioned educators through multiple and often conflicting discourses (Archer 2019). As I have attested, these workforce policies and external accountability demands reflected in the policies require 'that practitioners 'face' different directions at the same time, notably as:

- 'enablers of school readiness (National College of Teaching and Leadership, 2013a, p.2)
- facilitators of social mobility (Department for Education (DfE), 2017, p.27)
- carers to enable parental employment (DfE, 2013, p.3)
- delivering 'more' for taxpayer investment' (DfE 2013 p.13)' (Archer 2019, p.7)

In addition to these numerous and disparate discursive demands, policy discourses changed over time. Constructions of the early childhood workforce are discerned as shifting with political priorities and different party political administrations during this period. The language of 'agent of change' (Children's Workforce Development Council, 2006, p. 5) 'narrowing the gap' (Department for Education 2014), 'accountable for achieving the highest possible standards' (Department for Education, 2013b, p.2) illustrate these ever-changing emphases and ideologies which, I argue, seek to shape professional identities. Notably such shifting demands become embedded (albeit for

the short term) within qualifications standards indicating the ideologically constructed nature of the ideal professional identity for early childhood educators.

In further developments seen as credentialisation, the recent trajectory of qualifications and the manner in which they are explicitly linked to professional roles (see Appendix Nine) can be seen as an additional technology which minimises space for diversity and forecloses opportunities for experimentalism. The Early Years progression map purports to ‘...signposts *the* roles within the Early Years workforce and beyond... this map helps to get the right people on *the right path* to do the job well’ (CACHE 2018) [my emphasis]. I suggest such a linear and instrumental tool constrains possibility to diverge from prescribed pathways and conceive of alternative ways to forge professional identities beyond those shaped through sanctioned qualifications. Indeed, such cartography can be seen as a key strategy of governmentality. These policies and associated qualifications criteria, occupational standards and competency frameworks arguably act as normative and essentialist mechanisms in the formation of the early childhood ‘professional’.

Ideal subject positions formed within professional roles

Through the analysis of policy levers and drivers, warrant and modes of legitimation, I have identified a series of discursively constructed ideal (although often multiple and conflicting) subject positions in the policy texts. I understand ideal subject positions to be the manner in which, in this case, official texts frame the educator and invite preferred readings of the model early childhood professional. The discursive construction of categories including ‘early years teacher’, ‘early years educator’, defined by prescriptive standards, presents ideal subjectivities to shape who early educators should strive to become, and ‘what occupations they view as possible and not possible’ (Laliberte-Rudman, 2010, p.55). I propose that institutional discourses are mobilized to align early educators’ thinking and acting with the values and intentions of dominant ideology, thereby delineating

what is, and is not, socially, politically, and economically acceptable behaviour and/or feasible action, transmitting favoured assumptions and values whilst obscuring vested interests and constraining opportunities for contestation. (Wiggan, 2012, p. 384).

This positioning is linked to Althusser’s concept of interpellation or ‘being hailed’ in which the individual, called to or hailed by an authority is thereby positioned by that authority as a subject. However, given explorations of multiple, fluid and evolving

identities and individuals having complex histories and multiple cultural affiliations, I argue that such attempts at subject positioning through workforce policy can only ever be partial.

Demarcation as an act of bordering

Through workforce reform policy asserting ideal subject positions, I contend that this process constitutes an act of demarcation. That is to say, instrumental and essentialist discourses in policy texts act to delineate professional identity 'territory'. I read this demarcation as an attempt at prescriptive professional identity bordering through the identification of desirable or ideal subject positions. Beyond the identification of skills, such policies stray into explicating desired behaviours. Such a perspective echoes findings from Warren (2014a), who suggests, in a New Zealand context, that there is an 'emphasis on qualifications and professional standards [which] has constrained possible ways of being early childhood teachers.' (p.185)

Through the policies analysed (and associated policy technologies) ideal subjects are discursively constructed, regulated and bordered. As Green (2012) states 'borders always involve a form of classification and categorization of the world, because otherwise, they would not be recognized as borders' (p.575). See Fig. 5.1.

Conceptualising the *borderland* of professional identities

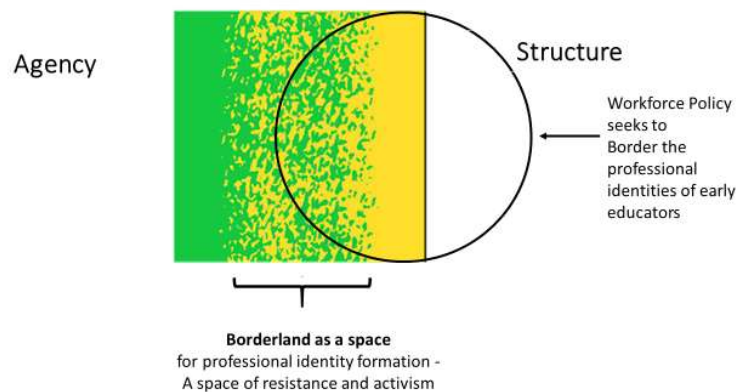


Fig. 5. 1 Conceptual Map B – Workforce policy as border

Bordering as inclusion/exclusion

The act of bordering also represents a process of inclusion and exclusion and begs the question 'Who is served and who loses from being enclosed by or enclosing others?' In

terms of policy, an example of this from DfE (2013) sees the erasure of the EYP and the introduction of the EYE and EYT qualifications, effectively classifying, separating, and bordering professional identities to the exclusion of some.

Whilst a case can be made for policy text as bordering process, generating both inclusion and exclusion of individuals through the generation of ideal subject positions, there are also counter arguments. The setting of standards for professional roles and/or qualifications might also be read in terms of creating a trajectory of professional development, offering clarity of expectations for different roles and providing universality of entitlements for children and families with whom these professionals work. Indeed, Westcott (2004) posits that professional standards contribute to a sense of professional identity in that they 'assure a common baseline of practice that can underpin professional registration, and which can then be monitored and regulated.'

(p.14)

Conversely, it is argued that such policy discourses, presented as natural and inevitable, are not without implications. Fenech and Sumsion (2007) in exploring power relations within early childhood education, highlight how such processes risk 'othering' less qualified or non-accredited staff. I contend that such bordering results in forms of complexity reduction and diversity reduction thereby opening a space for some professional identities and closing down others. The notion of borders is important in that they have effects and they constrain how individuals think about and act on the world. Whilst physical borders mark land territories and restrict the movement of people, conceptual and discursive borders arguably limit capacity to imagine and act beyond such boundaries.

The notion of shifting boundaries

Thus, borders are seen as artefacts of dominant discursive processes. However, it is important to question whether this theory of bordering might imbue the border with a power it does not possess. Modernist perspectives arguably reify the inevitability and power of the border (in this case in the form of workforce reform and qualifications), whereas other views perceive such borders as less powerful. Borders are often ascribed the capacity to alter the reality that they apparently mark; they can *appear* to facilitate the making of worlds.

As discussed, such discursive (and regulatory) borders shift over time (illustrated by the changes in standards of EYP and EYT) as a result of changes in political

administration and associated ideologies. As Del Sarto (2010) writes, 'borders are historically contingent' (p.151). Different political administrations, informed by differing ideologies, enact bordering to meet different political ends. For example, the advent of both Early Years Professional and then Early Years Teachers (with their respective and different standards) are illustrative of the ideological expectations of different political administrations.

In addition to the multiplicity and shifting nature of these policies, I read these discursive borders as 'permeable' (see Fig. 5.2 illustrated by perforated circle). Despite essentialist standards and regimes of accountability and surveillance, I perceive space for educators to exert agency 'through' these borders. This critical discourse analysis of policies, whilst identifying the pervasiveness of dominant discourses of neoliberalism also perceives opportunities for the expression of individual agency in practice. Work by Gallagher (2000) returns us to the notion of hegemony, and how within any hegemony there are cracks, gaps or spaces and thus 'the potential exists for people to exploit those fissures, disrupt hegemony, and create spaces to exercise power' (p. 504). In conceptual terms, through overlaying this permeable border onto the agency/structure dynamic, I seek to convey the possibilities and opportunities for educators to respond in multiple agentic ways despite the bordering process. Agnew (2013) asserts that 'the border is not merely a place of separation where differences are asserted; it can also be a place of exchange and enrichment where pluralist identities can flourish.' (p.316)

Revisiting the conceptual framework

Approaching the issue of policy as border through a critical theory lens, means attending to the power dynamics and effects of border formation and maintenance. In the context of workforce policy and standards for early childhood, I have analysed how such borders seek to construct 'ideal' professional subjectivities.

As asserted, to conceptualise such structurally informed professional identity borders as fixed, arguably denies the assertion of agency by educators and their capacities to reject, negotiate, reform or otherwise respond to these borders which create ideal subject positions. Rather, I reconceptualise these ideal professional identity borders as 'permeable' and acknowledge their shifting nature (see Fig. 5.2). In doing so, I seek to recognise both the ideological influences on them but also the spaces 'in between' the borders and the opportunities for educators to exert their agency in a border/and space

between agency and structures. This a concept that becomes key as I look to analyse and further discuss the discourses which emerge from the interview narratives by participants.

Conceptualising the *borderland* of professional identities

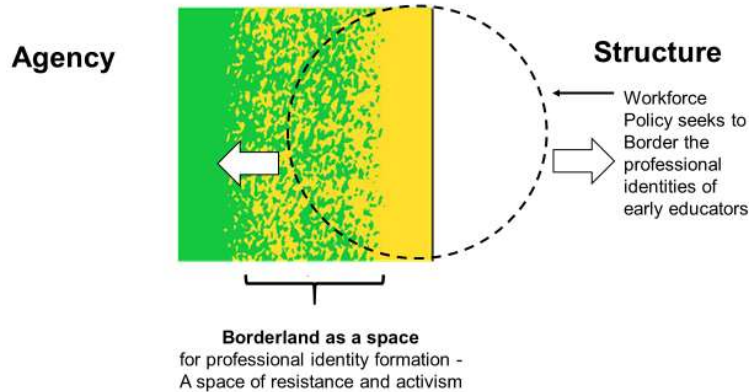


Fig. 5. 2 Conceptual Map C – Borderland of professional identities

Conclusion

Tucker (2004) proposes that any framework for considering professional identity construction must be able to:

...explore the impact of 'ideological effects' on the socio-political terrain and the conditions of existence for those working with young people; assist analysis of those forms of discourse that are used to define particular forms of work; show how ideas are struggled over and contested at various levels of experience; demonstrate how such matters directly impact upon the professional identities which individuals and groups adopt in their everyday work.
(Tucker, 2004, p. 84).

The process of critical discourse analysis of workforce reform policies and qualification standards has illuminated the dominant discourses prevalent in policy texts. These discourses have been explored as borders and latterly as permeable borders operating in a borderland space between agency and structures.

In order to consider effects of these policies, the agency (or otherwise) of educators and acts of resistance and/or activism, I look to situate these policies texts and discussion alongside empirical data. In order to investigate the perceptions of the

power of borders, I engaged in empirical data collection to explore and analyse the extent of agency and activism within this space.

At this point I draw on Maxine Greene's (1995) perspective of seeing things big and seeing things small. From this perspective, Greene proposes that to see things small entails a view of a system, (as if through a telescope) of existing policies and ideologies. She writes that to see things big (as if through a microscope) is to perceive the particularities and details of context. Through the analysis on this chapter I have 'seen things small'. I now look to the empirical data gathered through the online focus group and interviews in attempt to 'see things big'. An explanation of the organisation of this empirical analysis and discussions follows.

Chapter 6 Structural Discourses

Introduction

Consistent with the structure of the section of the literature review chapter on professional identity discourses (Chapter Two), I have organised this analysis and discussion in a format which acknowledges ideas of structure/agency using these as sensitising concepts and organising heuristics. Additionally, I report my exploration of the borderlands between the two. Thus, the forthcoming chapters analyse and discuss the empirical data gathered in relation to:

Chapter Six - Structures through institutional discourses in participants talk

Chapter Seven - Agentic discourses in participants talk

Chapter Eight - Discourses in the borderlands between agency and structure in participants' narratives.

Data drawn from interviews and focus group are synthesised, analysed and discussed. Inevitably, data from individual participants do not fit neatly into single categories or themes, nor is it my intention to underscore binary concepts. The multiplicity and complexity of themes and discourses within and across individual narratives means that data from individuals is drawn upon in several sections.

Whilst the following three chapters are organised according to readings of the discourses in the data, there is much overlap and many interlinkages between them. Findings from Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight inform insights and conclusions in Chapter Nine:

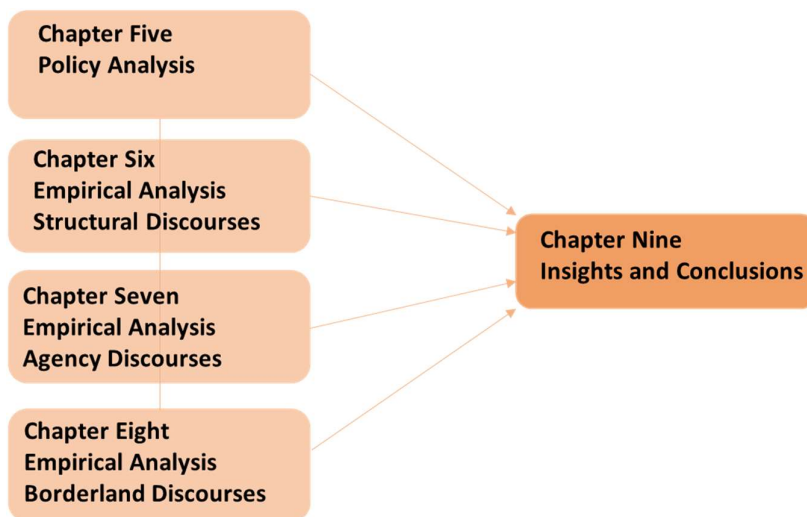


Fig. 6. 1 Links between data analysis, discussion, insights and conclusion

Illustrative Narratives

The following three analysis and discussion chapters draw on excerpts of data and also a collection of extended narratives, as exemplifications, based on interviews from study participants. These narratives serve to illustrate the varied constructions of each individual's professional identities and demonstrate their agency within and without various structures. Inspired by *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer's medieval pilgrimage stories, I present the tales of participant early childhood educators from the first quarter of the 21st century in England.

The Canterbury Tales is a 14th century collection of stories held together by a framing device (the story of the pilgrimage). In this way, two narratives are operating at the same time within the work: the individual and the collective journey. Additionally, Chaucer's tales were based on the narratives of a disparate group of characters who share the pilgrimage but have different backgrounds and professions. This offers an appropriate framework through which to convey the diverse stories of the early childhood educators in the study. Whilst participants in this study did not meet on a physical journey, they share careers in early childhood education and a willingness to tell their individual stories.

These educator tales include multiple responses, including resistance, to the institutional narratives of professional identities identified in existing literature and in the policy analysis.

In keeping with the critical tradition, I present these tales in language as close as possible to participants' original speech, combining reported speech and words quoted verbatim. They are presented with minimal author intrusion, editing and interpretation (See Methodology Chapter Four). In addition, I have taken participants' language, their description of themselves, to form the titles of these tales. As such, these tales are not intended to represent any form of typology of characteristics but are examples of varied manifestations of agency and resistance.

The tales selected are those of Fran, Mark, Theresa, Stella, Sylvia, Mike, Hilary and Amy and can be found in Chapters Seven and Eight to illustrate agentic (pp. 197-204) and borderland discourses (pp.245-250) respectively. There were no data which reflected extended examples of structural discourses which formed narratives. These examples were chosen to illustrate different and multiple examples of agentic and borderland discourses but not in any attempt to extrapolate or generalise from them. They also reflect the diversity of professional roles across the sector.

Structural Discourses

Chapter Six Structural Discourses

Focus Group and
Interview data
synthesised

Whose language is being spoken when early education is discussed? Is it a language which has developed through many decades of thought and debate and which is understood by parents and professionals who work with children, or an imposed 'standard speak' with which educators collude because they see no alternative - or (worse) because they have not noticed the change? (Nutbrown, 1998, p.19)

It is argued that societal power relations are established and reinforced through language use. Thus, discourse is understood as embedded in and emerging out of relations of power. As such, discourse, power, and knowledge are intimately connected, with some discourses dominating as assumed truths while others are marginalised.

I work with the term 'structural discourses' (also called institutional discourses in the literature) to reflect their origins in societal structures. Not only are these discourses discerned in policy texts, but I reflect those structural discourses identified in previous literature as dominant in their interpretations of the identities of early childhood educators. In order to explore discourses which were present across the whole data set, I draw on guiding questions from the analytical framework:

- **What subject positions does s/he attempt to lay claim to and how?**
- **How do these ways of positioning relate to subjectivities (affirm, negotiate, fracture) constructed through policy?**
- **What normalizing truths are brought into the narrative and/or contested to monitor, position and present the self?**

(Laliberte-Rudman and Aldrich 2017, p.475).

I analyse and discuss structural or institutional discourses which feature whether they are adopted, recycled, negotiated, or contested. These discourses have been categorised as: babysitting, feeling othered, fragmentation/division, status, pay, competition, responsabilisation, policy compliance, accountability, surveillance, and autonomy. The links between these discourses and those in the existing literature and

policy can be seen in the discussion which follows later in the chapter. The chapter concludes with more detailed discussion of the neoliberal paradigm, exploration of this in existing literature and implications derived from analysis of this study's data to reflect on the research questions.

Babysitting

Discourses of babysitting feature in the narratives of several participants:

Hilary: 'I started childminding 18 years ago when childminding was considered to be merely babysitting. Unfortunately, many still see it as that.'

Chris: '...early years is seen as 'just looking after kids, just babysitting, just playing'

Amy: 'Parents see me as a babysitter, or as someone who, having three teenagers, they ask advice from, because I am a parent.'

These multiple references to babysitting underscore, amongst participants, concerns of wider societal perceptions about early childhood education. Babysitting is presented here as a low status activity in which children are 'just looked after'. Such a discourse is articulated by Amy who describes public perceptions of early childhood education as '*baby sitting with a "school readiness" agenda*', acknowledging the multiple (and arguably conflicting) discourses of care as 'babysitting' to enable parental employment coupled with an imperative to prepare children for school. Amy identifies the dominant discourses of the diminished status of care (Ailwood 2017) and the intensification of school readiness.

Whilst it might be argued that in a curricular sense, the Early Years Foundation Stage originally sought to bring together learning and development (although notably not the concept of care explicitly) into a single framework, much other national policy on funding, regulation and qualifications has not supported this integration. Ortlipp et al (2011) discuss the 'reification of schooling...and marginalisation of care' (p.58) and this reflects Amy's view of childcare to support parental employment '*with a school readiness agenda*'.

These discourses of 'sitting' and 'preparing' illustrate the pervasiveness of the status issues (or lack of status) for educators, as perceived by participants. Such low status and perceived lack of power are seen across the dataset, irrespective of the

professional roles of participants. Amy's narrative also conveys her feelings about the power of institutional discourses and perceptions of others about her professional role:

Amy (in a mock voice of another): 'oh you just play with babies', 'it's not that important, you are preparing them for school'.

Despite this, Amy describes herself as '*having a vocation*'. However, in doing so, she also recognises that in fulfilling that vocation she '*accept[s] the low wages and the attitude other people have towards me.*' Here Amy's thoughts signal a note of resignation about low pay in the sector. Importantly, Amy also references her decision in terms of a vocation, an occupation to which she is drawn. Notably, this sense of vocation appears both to explain a moral call and validate the low pay, suggesting an understanding that early childhood education cannot be a calling *and* appropriately remunerated in the current regime. This would appear to recycle an institutional discourse of the early years educator 'calling' and the normalisation of the physical, emotional and intellectual labour of early childhood education as a vocation (Pacey 2013). These thoughts from Amy highlight what Moloney (2015) identifies as the 'pervasive tension between the potential of ECEC to be a rewarding and satisfying career, and the reality of employment conditions within the sector' (p.325). The discourses around status and remuneration are also linked to a broader neoliberal paradigm (see Marketisation and Commodification, p.188).

Associated with these discourses of babysitting (and competing discourses of the rationale intended for ECE) in the data, are institutional discourses related to educators feeling othered, marginalised and diminished.

Lacking/Deficit

Earlier policy analysis (Chapter Five) identified common discourses of educators lacking or framed by deficit ideas (see p.148). Additionally, in research literature, discourses of passiveness and victimhood were highlighted in prior studies (Woodrow 2008; McMahon and Dyer 2014; Gibson 2015). However, data from this study finds that whilst participants identified a societal narrative which often positioned them as lacking, they did not *always* perceive themselves as victims of such institutional discourses (see Sheila's and Mark's words below).

Examples of where participants felt positioned as 'less than' include:

*Mark: ...I'm **just** a teacher who is passionate. I don't have influence. [my emphasis] ...Many other teachers see early years as 'not real teaching'*

*Sarah: 'I was always perceived at home as 'she's **only** an early years teacher', and I didn't have a very different view of myself'. [my emphasis]*

Theresa: 'I could tell you the number of times my headteacher has been in my classroom this year. Because it was when he was showing a parent around. So, I am left to it. Nobody comes into the nursery. Nobody cares.'

Sheila: 'We are not given the recognition we deserve...Outside agencies just see us as childcarers even tho [sic] some of us have the same level of education as them if that makes sense and have also had parents thinking [the] same.'

Mark: 'The truth is, no Early Years educator, from level 3 practitioners up to graduates and post-graduates, regardless of experience or training, are trusted, by the government to be professional enough to be able to make that kind of assessment without the guidance of the DM' [Development Matters].

These feelings of 'lacking' are notable considering the pervasive attitudes by 'other teachers', school management and government suggesting a powerful institutional discourse at play. However, Sheila notes that early educators are not given *'the recognition we deserve'* and Karen talks of being *'undervalued'* both highlighting awareness of and rejection of a structural discourse of early educators' deficiency.

Such examples, in which early educators are framed with a diminished status by others are also linked to feelings of being 'othered'.

Feeling Othered

Feelings of *being* disempowered are distinct from feelings of powerlessness. In these narratives, several participants positioned themselves as othered and diminished by policy demands, but not necessarily as feeling without personal power. In the review of literature (Chapter Two), I proposed that the critiques of victimhood discourses underplay the agency of early childhood educators and serve to reinforce the notion of professional identities at the mercy of policy imperatives. The data in this study find that participants did indeed feel othered and subject to policy expectations, but they were not without critical awareness and agency. Amy conveys her perception of the status of early educators by policymakers:

Amy: 'The government, I think, sees me as a useful body in the classroom, who should be just educated enough to comply with the EYFS but not question it...I think there is a general sense of not being able to make a difference, and practitioners being voiceless...we are seen as baby-sitting dimwits who have a highly inflated view of the importance of our work...'

Similarly, Mike and Natalie demonstrate a critical awareness of systemic 'othering':

Mike: 'Remember Martin Luther King at the sanitation workers strike and all these demonstrators holding signs saying 'I am a Man', but they were saying they are men, human, worthy of respect but there is a whole system around them that says they are not ...'

Mike: 'You can't not be affected by the implicit messages that what you do actually doesn't matter...'

Natalie: 'I find myself fighting against the dominant notion of 'what works' because I am left thinking for who? and who is left out?...

Such insights point to the power of dominant discourses in framing the positionings of early childhood educators and consequent feelings of marginalisation. This is also clear in Karen's narrative in which she suggests that the impact of such othering is significant on educators' identity and self-esteem:

Karen: I think the idea of self-worth is so poor in the early years - it is the reason we haven't been able to nationwide co-ordinate something to challenge the policies we don't agree with, challenge the fact that we are being short changed on what we are able to provide for children. Practitioners don't feel empowered and they don't feel empowered because the government doesn't value early years.

Notably, the initial EYP/EYT policies (CWDC 2006; NCTL 2013b) (see pp.114-115) which sought to increase the graduate workforce leading PVI settings, is a significant point of contention in the data. The brevity and transience of the EYP policy, superseded by the advent of Early Years Teachers (EYTs) but never remunerated at QTS level, was critiqued:

Amy: 'I did think about doing the EYP. But then I realised I didn't have science GCSE. But now it just seems to have become valueless...'

Kate: 'It was the EYPs I felt sorriest for because they were sold something, and it was supposed to make a difference and they were supposed to be given the equivalent of teachers and it's a very thorny mess...'

Interestingly, Chris's feelings of being othered came not from the EYP initiative but from colleagues within a nursery in which she was employed. She suggests that policy makers had not thought through 'how the EYPs member would fit into a team'.

Chris: 'So I see myself as someone who embraces change and embraces progress and that can be challenging if you are working sometimes with the older generation who have done things one way for a long time and the tension

between you coming in highly qualified but they have thirty years' experience... I don't think they considered how the EYPS member would fit into a team ... 'they don't want me, they don't want to know what I've got, they don't want to hear my ideas, they are responding badly, there is resistance' and I think having spoken with practitioners in groups, it has been the same across the country ...'

Arguably, the diverse nature of provision and piecemeal workforce reform has resulted in a complex landscape and fragmentation in the structures and cultures within the early years sector. Data in the study illustrate that such division is perceived:

Theresa: 'And being an early years teacher specifically is a big part of my professional identity because it does set you apart from other primary teachers.'

Fragmentation/division

Discourses of sectoral fragmentation and intersectoral division were pronounced in the narratives. As alluded to in Chapter One, the last twenty five years have seen the complex evolution of national care and education policy and associated development of professional roles. The various professional backgrounds of participants in this study appear to have informed a range of perspectives on this notion of fragmentation. Current differences in governance arrangements, funding regimes, regulatory demands, qualifications, remuneration, staff ratios and a multiplicity of other factors appear to divide rather than unite the early childhood workforce in England (Education Policy Institute 2018).

Heather: '...so an EYT in school can't lead practice so they are effectively a Teaching Assistant or an NNEB role which is a shame. But that will only come with investment and realisation that childcare is still education'

Natalie: 'The expectations that settings have about the support they will receive from outside agencies has been disappointed...I think there is fragmentation in the sector. The disjointedness, within settings, from the lack of other professionals.'

The experiences and perceptions of these participants reflect wider perceptions of early childhood educators as a 'bifurcated workforce' (OECD 2011) and 'a fragmented profession' (Beck 2008) and, indeed, wider work internationally which details the complexities and limitations of such fragmentation (Press 2007; Woodrow 2008). This notion of division has been alluded to by Moss (2019) and Penn (2012) in the current context of the marketisation of childcare and early education, although the impact of this on professional identities of educators remains relatively underexplored.

However, as discussed in the literature review (Chapter Two), this fragmentation narrative is problematized by Bown and Sumison (2016) as a totalizing discourse. The authors utilise the political theory of agonism as an approach which ‘allows a suspension of multiple voices moving in tension, where tension is not necessarily negative or positive, but productive.’ (p.204). Bown and Sumsion (2016) go further, suggesting that the notion of fragmentation be viewed with more criticality. They argue:

This characterization [of fragmentation] has a totalizing and disciplining effect on a sector that could instead be reconfigured in agonistic terms. The widely held belief that the ECEC sector was ‘fragmented’, led the early childhood participants to feel that the extent to which they could influence politicians/policy was somewhat restricted. (p. 206).

Whilst data in the current study affirms perceptions of a divided workforce, the perspective taken by Bown and Sumsion (2016) rejects this particular framing and offers an alternative conceptualisation of agonism: accepting that differences and even conflict can be channelled positively.

Linked to issues of status and fragmentation are perceptions of different statuses *within* the early childhood community. Reflections on hierarchy are referenced by Sophie and Karen:

Sophie: ‘I think that if you work in early years before Reception you don’t always have the same power as a Reception teacher in a school does.....because teachers have to have had a degree in state schools to teach, because they have been to university and have a certain level of criticality maybe, teachers tend to be, from what I have seen are taken more seriously, more respected . And even in some nurseries I’ve worked in, the nurseries look up to the Reception teachers as well. So there is a power there, but I think it is misplaced...’

Karen: ‘...so the sector NVQs are looked down upon whereas BTECs are seen as being better and NNEBs, for some reason are the gold standard, although they are not delivered any more... I’m guilty of that myself.’

Additionally, Hazel considers that child-minding is positioned as low status within this hierarchy, confirming the idea of ‘childminding as a Cinderella service’ (Osgood 2004). Notably Sylvia articulates how she resisted this institutional discursive positioning:

Sylvia: ‘Remember Wilshaw¹³? He wanted to take childminders out of the EYFS because ‘they only provide care’...And we said ‘you can’t divide care and education’.

¹³ Michael Wilshaw served as Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector for Schools and lead for Ofsted 2012-16. During this time the Ofsted annual report (2011/12) proposed ‘Government may also wish to consider whether it is appropriate to expect childminders to deliver all the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.’ (p.12) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/482883/The_report_of_Her_Majesty_s_Chief_Inspector_of_Education_Children_s_Services_and_Skills_Early_years.pdf

In this example, Sylvia contests the proposed care/education divide and the suggested diminished status of childminders and reasserts the role of childminders in offering early education alongside other settings.

Two participants, Fran and Sophie (who, notably, had both worked in various roles across the sector) were advocates of greater collaboration:

Sophie: 'I think the more opportunities for Reception teachers, nurseries, PVI's to work together the better...'

Fran: 'So I think that has led me to be passionate about this cross sector working and not just being schools ...because I have worked across them.....'

It would appear that such divisions, despite a common statutory framework, are perceived by participants. A key feature of such division is the perception of a hierarchy of status linked to the range of professional roles, qualifications, and differences in remuneration levels. Institutional discourses of a care/education divide and of a school/pre-school split, as noted by Moss (2013), appear to entrench this fragmentation. Such divisions are arguably also the result of a wider marketized culture of competition - a potential significant influence on the construction of professional identities. This, along with other features of a broader neoliberal paradigm, are explored below.

Status, Pay and Competition

Issues of status (see also section on babysitting, lacking/deficit) and pay of early educators emerged as themes across the data.

Ellen: 'I have seen passionate people feel undervalued and consequently leave early years...the staff are getting paid poorly, working all hours, continually doing paperwork..'

Amy: 'We are encouraged to become "more professional" by gaining educational qualifications yet are still earning minimum wage.... I would say half of the workforce have early years degrees and they are still on £7.80 per hour ...Its ridiculous isn't it that I could get on an MA on the basis of my experience and it was a huge learning curve. But they still say I can't be a room supervisor because I don't have a level 3.'

Karen: '...people are packing in their jobs to go and work in Waitrose because it pays more per hour, so you have all these fantastic practitioners who have such a profound impact on children who go and work in a supermarket!'

It is argued that such lived experiences lay bare the reality and impact of a marketized early childhood education sector on individuals. Feelings of being undervalued, underpaid and overworked are explicit. This is coupled with the need for specific early years qualifications (and for Amy different to her current Masters Degree) for roles earning around National Minimum Wage. The frustration expressed by these educators is evident.

The economising of education and the introduction of market principles have been described by Lloyd and Penn (2012) as responsible for low remuneration, which much of the sector experiences. With the exception of qualified teachers, who have benefitted from national pay scales (although arguably this has been eroded by academisation of schools and their freedoms to operate outside the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document) early educators in England are poorly paid (Education Policy Institute 2018). This is a complex dynamic which sees an ongoing debate about the role and ethics of the market. Critical policy analysts in the field include Moss (2014; 2019) who critiques 'the story of markets' and Lloyd and Penn (2012) who ask whether marketisation delivers an equitable service and remunerates professionals appropriately. Conversely, educator membership organisations (such as the Early Years Alliance 2019 and National Day Nurseries Association 2019) detail the underfunding of 'free' entitlement places by central government as the cause of constrained salaries. Nonetheless, the reality for many is low wage employment and recruitment challenges for early years settings (Education Policy Institute 2019; National Day Nurseries Association 2019).

The trajectory of facilitating the early education market has intensified since the late 1990s in England and was formalised through legislation in the Childcare Act (Great Britain 2006) which framed local authorities for the first time as 'market managers' of the provision of early education and childcare. Some participants in this study were acutely aware of the ramifications for children, parents, and educators of a marketized model and several alluded to its effects on them and their professional identities, including:

Briony: 'I am seeing new childminders starting the profession with it being primarily business focused to save people money - that's not what it should be about.'

Stella [recalling an interview with a nursery manager]: 'One said 'You can train as many graduates as you want, if they've only got this amount of money they will still be paying the minimum wage. And that's immoral I shouldn't be recruiting graduates to pay them the minimum wage...'

Such enterprise discourses were also critiqued and rejected by participants in Osgood's study (2004), in which the author concludes:

that the top-down application of a specific policy designed to emphasize and promote new managerialist entrepreneurialism was unwelcome to an overwhelmingly resistant, almost exclusively female, group of practitioners. (p.5)

These data illustrate the implications of lived experiences and professional identities for early educators and reflect what Sandel (2012, p.3) calls the 'moral limits of the market'. Such a marketized approach is described by Campbell Barr (2012, p.423) as 'value for money folklore' and the author critiques the value for money for governments being at the expense of the economic position of those providing early years education services. This further illustrates the aforementioned tensions between economic and educational effectiveness discourses.

Marketisation is promoted through the commodification of care and education (Haslip and Gullo 2018) and is illustrative of a broader Human Capital Theory (HCT). HCT is explored by Campbell-Barr and Nygård (2014) in the context of early childhood education. The authors draw on a definition by Keely (2007, p.3) understanding HCT as '[t]he knowledge, skills, competences and attributes that allow people to contribute to their personal and social well-being, as well as that of their countries'. Human capital provides a powerful global discourse justifying national government investment in early childhood education. Notably, HCT was referred to indirectly by one participant but also explicitly by two others:

Natalie: 'The government need to move away from the human capital view of education as a way to promote social mobility... And it feels more about instruction for me...not respecting people's experience or humanness. It's all economic.'

Amy: 'We are framed as homo economicus – our value is absolutely about our economic capital, not about experience or cultural capital.'

Reflecting on these participants' thoughts, I assert that such HCT (and its hegemonic implementation through discourse) commodifies the care and education of young children as 'intervention' both for school readiness and to enable parental employment. HCT positions the child as an investment in the future, and at the same time frames their care outside the home as facilitating parental contributions to the economy. This

perspective views early education and care as commodity and was clear in the perspectives of at least two participants:

Kate: ‘...they [government] should be running Tesco not education, you know they are in the wrong job. It’s all about pounds, shillings and pence and yes the books should balance but you have to think about the whole of society and how it is funded from birth to the end.’

Amy: ‘Parents are encouraged to view themselves as consumers - therefore, their attitude can be that they chose this setting and we, the employees therefore should be providing the service they want.’

This commodification is also writ large in international studies by Kamenac (2019) who highlights the prevalence of marketisation and business discourses in a New Zealand early childhood context and by Gibson et al (2015) who propose that policy frames ‘children as economic units and early childhood educators as investment brokers’ (p.322). However, the words from Kate and Amy (above) illustrate how they are aware of the socio-political and policy discourses at play, which suggests they are not passive recipients of such policy.

Competition

A natural corollary of marketisation is that early childhood provision then operates in competition with other provision. Participants Kate and Fran note the competition between schools and settings, or ‘providers’ of early education, and the detrimental effects of this. Kate reflected on the changes to policy during the 1990s with the introduction of nursery education vouchers¹⁴ enabling in parents to ‘purchase’ the provision at their setting of choice:

Kate: ‘I then began to realise that early years was a commodity, bottoms on seats counted as money... You could see the fracturing starting to happen – the little cracks which began to separate settings from settings and schools from schools and the competitive, the business elements of attaching money to small children and the people wanted the children with money attached, Primary schools in particular all of a sudden wanted three-year olds because they came with a little price tag. The thirty hours is another attempt at it, but another mistaken attempt at it ...’

¹⁴ In 1996 a voucher scheme for four-year-olds was introduced in four local authorities in England. Parents of eligible children were able to exchange a voucher for a place offered by a provider in a maintained nursery school or a nursery class or reception class in a primary school, or in the PVI sector. This scheme was rolled out nationally thereafter.

<https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/Nuffield%20Final%20Report%20historical%2027%20September%202016.pdf>

Kate alludes to the implication of this competition as ‘cracks’ separating settings and schools, a resulting atomisation or ‘stratifying impact’ (Press et al 2018) on provision. This also speaks to the fragmentation discourse discussed earlier. Similarly, Fran describes a current climate of competition rather than collaboration between schools and the consequences of this in terms of pressure on individual educators:

Fran: For headteachers, a lot of pressure of what is happening in nearby schools. An example here, xxx who you met, a KS2 teacher, went to visit a school, really impressed, they got ‘outstanding’, let’s have a meeting ‘what are we going to do? I’ve seen this school which does this..’

These narratives bring to life discourses of marketisation and commodification which pervade the policy landscape in early childhood education and impact on the professional identity construction of early educators. As a structural discourse, the market and competition between ‘providers’ would appear to be firmly embedded, but also one which is resisted.

Responsibilities/Responsibilisation

A further common theme in the data was the ideas of responsibilities and responsibilisation. Responsibilisation, a term developed in governmentality literature, and discussed in Chapter Five, highlights the mechanism adopted by government so that social risks and desirable outcomes are framed as the responsibility of individuals rather than the state. As Macfarlane and Lakhani (2015) note, this idea has become the means ‘by which particular values, beliefs and ethics are promoted to the population as desirable qualities.’ (p.9).

One example of responsibilisation in the early childhood education field, which featured prominently in the narratives, is the ‘school readiness’ agenda. Whilst a detailed discussion of definitions and interpretations of school readiness is beyond the scope of this study, work in this field by Kay (2018) and McDowall Clark (2016) point to the increasing pervasiveness of the discourse and its effects for practitioners and children. Many, although not all, participants reflected on this concept in their narratives:

Hazel: ‘...this pressure for children to succeed in itself can stifle creativity in the delivery of the EYFS and early years educators can get lost amongst the red tape and political agendas.’

Stella: ‘how do we keep our sense of values around early years and vision and how do we not compromise that in training people to go and work in the sector

at this moment in time? So how do we send them [newly qualified educators] out wide eyed into a sector which is more and more about performativity and data and school readiness...?’

Mike: ‘it’s now training kids to do whatever crap is in the National Curriculum sooner, quicker...’

Briony: When I qualified as an EYT I went for a school reception class job and quickly realised during the interview process that it was not EYFS at all, but preparation for KS1.

Conversely, Hilary’s narrative appears to affirm, embrace, and recycle the institutional discourse around school readiness in an example which might be read as responsabilisation:

Hilary: ‘I am able to demonstrate to Ofsted, parents, schools and anyone else who is interested, that children are making progress, they have a broad curriculum, they are safe and happy, and yes, they are being prepared for school.’

Some participant talk (see Hilary’s comments below) illustrates a complex dynamic. On the one hand, there are commitments to professional responsibilities, and on the other, educators assume wider responsibilities which might arguably be a more distributed obligation in conjunction with families, communities, and the state. Notably Hilary presented herself as the ideal subject, assuming responsibility for a child’s preparedness for the next stage of their education:

Hilary: ‘I see myself as an early educator who is able to be flexible and spontaneous enough to provide children with that kind of childhood, and at the same time able to demonstrate to Ofsted, parents, schools and anyone else who is interested, that children are making progress, they have a broad curriculum, they are safe and happy, and yes, they are being prepared for school.’

Additionally,

Hazel: ‘I feel it is our responsibility to meet the requirements of the EYFS through an appropriate pedagogy...ensure that children make progress and achieve their potential whilst fostering their wellbeing.’

These narratives demonstrate not only professional commitment but also the hegemonic power of responsabilisation. Through regulation (Ofsted) and the normalised expectations of statutory frameworks (EYFS), these practitioners have, arguably, been responsabilised into adopting the school readiness obligation and ensuring the child’s preparedness for the next stage of their education. They self-regulate against this idea and align themselves with the idealised subject positions of enabling school readiness.

Similarly, it could be argued Sophie takes up a 'responsibilised' position accepting responsibility for the foundations of future learning:

*Sophie: I think early childhood educators have a responsibility to do a good job now because **this is where it all happens...***

However, not all participants demonstrate susceptibility to such responsibilisation, and Amy perceived and critiqued the framing of practitioners as working hard with a diminished professional identity:

Amy: 'A Level 3 [qualified educator] does not have a professional identity in the way that people used to. They are a worker bee...'

In terms of professional identity, a discourse of preparedness (under the logic of linear progression inspired by developmentalism) further positions early educators as laying groundwork for the child's future educators and contributes to the notion of the responsibilised early educator. This school readiness discourse and the mechanism of responsibilisation also link to notions of policy compliance and accountability which appear in the data and are explored below.

Policy Compliance, Accountability and Regulation and Inspection

Several participants were aware of, but positioned themselves as fracturing, the discourse around various contemporary early childhood policies. The following narratives recognise the normalizing truths of accountability via assessment data and performance management, but some participants rejected and positioned themselves at odds with these truths:

Mark: '...the existing agenda is based on the view that children need to be nothing more than numbers on a spreadsheet and this is beginning to bleed into Reception and given time will make its way into nursery... We are in danger of breeding a generation of teachers and leaders who know little other than factory schooling...which is always my problem with the data thing – its always about looking forward. What comes next ? Now that is a pressure, a pressure of starting from the data ...'

Fran: 'I will not do things to get data and that is the problem I am going to have. I won't cram with children. I will not send stuff home. Other schools do. Our results are below national. Some will say I am not teaching well enough....'

Sophie: [referring to performance management] '...then we are looking at accountability from a four year old to an 11 year old. I don't know how useful that is for a teacher's accountability and pay to be linked to that level of scrutiny and data... I am already accountable to my children, their families, to SLT [senior leadership team] and all the other teachers in the school... I personally

am not going to be motivated by money because a particular number or percentage of children have got somewhere. But I worry that there could be instances where that could happen.'

These reflections demonstrate the power of institutional discourses to frame the work of early educators, but equally, in these cases, critical awareness and rejection of the discourses.

Accountability

In addition to performance management measures, participants also identify external accountability discourses as particularly formative and referred to the dominance of regulation and inspection as negative forms of accountability:

Amy: 'Development Matters statements are presented as a holistic and all-encompassing set of developmental guidelines. To me, the two are mutually exclusive. It is not a child's developmental mission to become school ready...we are caught between opposing viewpoints that have little to do with each other...the Ofsted inspector said I want to see every child with a graph like this (indicates a line graph rising upwards diagonally left to right) and we said 'but it doesn't go like that, it zig zags up and down with plateaus and dips.'

This recollection of interaction with an Ofsted inspector conveys the power of a dominant discourse in prescribing and holding an educator to account for normative development and outcome accountability through disciplinary means. Indeed, running through some of these narratives are concepts of 'datafication' and dataveillance'¹⁵ (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes 2017) in which the intensification of a data-driven educational culture is apparent:

Mark: 'There are definitely moves afoot to shape a 'How-ness' on Early Years ...We have a current educational landscape which is dominated by data.'

Fran: 'I worry about Ofsted, they may think 'Oh that person is at that school, she's says all this stuff and look at her data'...This is what worries me about Ofsted. If I get the wrong person through the door, I will have the fight of my career on my hands. But I still won't change what I do. But it could cost me my career.'

Fran's words highlight her concern that she is increasingly vocal as an activist and critical of policy around data dominance, but as a practising teacher she is fearful of

¹⁵ Dataveillance is defined by Bradbury and Roberts Holmes (2017) as the coalescing of data and surveillance. They cite Kitchin (2014 p.168): 'dataveillance is a mode of surveillance enacted through sorting and sifting datasets in order to identify, monitor, track, regulate, predict and prescribe...and is a key component of modern forms of governance and governmentality'.

regulatory implications as a result of her (self-identified) ethical practice. This comment highlights real concerns, not only of a punitive (data driven) accountability regime, but that critiquing this approach may have personal and professional consequences.

For less resistant educators, such a regime may result in 'identity shaped by regulation' (Fenech et al 2006) and reflects Ryan and Bourke's (2013) perception of educators framed as 'implementers of a competency based, outcome oriented pedagogy' (p.412).

Heteronomy/Autonomy

A notable consequence of such accountability and surveillance as experienced by participants, were feelings of not being trusted, of an erosion of autonomy. This is evident in local authority advisor Hazel's story as she articulates the effects on autonomy and decision-making of educators at a micro/meso level. She critiques the impact of the government's academy agenda on the agency and authority of individual teachers:

Hazel: 'At the moment the government appears to be wanting to dictate how children are taught rather than respecting early educators as professionals who can decide what the most appropriate way is to deliver the EYFS based on research and sound evidence.... I think it is more SLT and Headteachers who are often trying to dictate how children are educated without necessarily the understanding of appropriate and effective EY pedagogy. I think this is happening more with academy agenda where often an executive head is responsible for several schools and is looking at trying to control how the EYFS is being delivered...practitioners are feeling very anxious about whether or not they are doing the right thing... There is a culture of having to conform to progress and this is taking away the creativity and 'personality' of professionals which is so important...

I think we have people saying 'we are having to nod and smile' and do it because if your face doesn't fit your life may be miserable and they will try to get rid of you – which I know shouldn't be happening but I think is happening. Some people can keep hold of their values and almost, not compromise, but think: 'I do believe this but I'm employed here and I'm gonna have to do this', and for some people, that is too much of a clash and either they end up making people poorly with it or decide this isn't the place for me.'

A similar perspective is reflected in Mark's perception of the 'how-ness' of early education being increasingly prescribed by DfE and Ofsted. In a different context, but articulating similar frustration about a reduced autonomy, Amy says:

'We are not given the freedom to use all that understanding and knowledge that we develop, nor trusted to support each other in implementing it...bombarded with opposing expectations even within government documentation...'

The notion of numerous, competing policy aims for early childhood education, and increased prescription of implementation which influence the professional identity construction of early educators, is also evident in Briony's narrative. The pervasive nature of multiple accountabilities, in particular those shaped by marketisation and regulation, is manifest:

Briony: 'In the settings where I have worked, I can see that staff get anxious with impending Ofsted [inspection] and deliberately do things they wouldn't normally do in order to make a good impression...Equally, I wonder if sometimes management do not realise the amount of pressure they're putting on staff to maintain these high levels of appeasement in all directions.'

Briony demonstrates an awareness and understanding of these many demands and their effects on colleagues. The concept of 'appeasement in all directions' reiterates the thoughts of other participants about multiple accountabilities in various directions and earlier policy analysis highlighting these competing obligations. Indeed, from this perspective, the data point to the power of regulatory and market discourses to engender a form of heteronomy rather than autonomy in early education environments.

Demonstrating a perspective about the power of institutional discourses to shape decision-making and thereby professional identities, Kate articulates: '*One criticism I have of early years is that we have become almost indoctrinated to run along straight lines*'. Kate's insight speaks to the power of dominant discourses to shape experiences and associated feelings of lacking agency.

Highlighting an erosion of autonomy, these structural discourses are acknowledged and critiqued by participants. However, they are not always accompanied by articulations of the converse feelings of agency. This suggests the power of the institutional discourses to erode autonomy, or indeed ongoing tension between agentic and structural discourses (see Chapter Eight for further exploration of this).

These categories of status/pay and the impact of competition, heteronomy/autonomy, responsibilities and school readiness, policy compliance, accountability and regulation, and inspection can be read as the products of a policy assemblage united by a neoliberal paradigm. The following discussion explores this theory further in light of all the institutional discourses explored in this chapter, literature in the field, policy analysis and further reflection.

Discussion

...subjectivity is 'a key site of political struggle in the context of neoliberalisation and neoliberal governmentality (Ball, 2016, p.1130).

Analysis and discussion of the institutional discourses in participant narratives point to the pervasiveness of neoliberalism and its resultant effects in the working lives and professional identities of practitioners. I argue that this totalising discourse has specific effects in ECE contexts.

Whilst the focus of the CDA was workforce policy texts, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which these texts 'act with' other early childhood policies. The interrelationships between workforce reform agendas and curricular, assessment, and regulation policies (amongst others) are formative in shaping ECE conduct and professional identities. Indeed, neoliberal discourses permeate the narratives, with participants articulating and contesting these in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage, Ofsted, inspection, and summative assessments.

This discussion section seeks to further consider these neoliberal discourses in the context of policy and existing literature, and to explore the relationship between these discourses and professional identity construction. Figure 6.3 illustrates the relationship between the data and theory, with themes used as headings to organise this discussion.

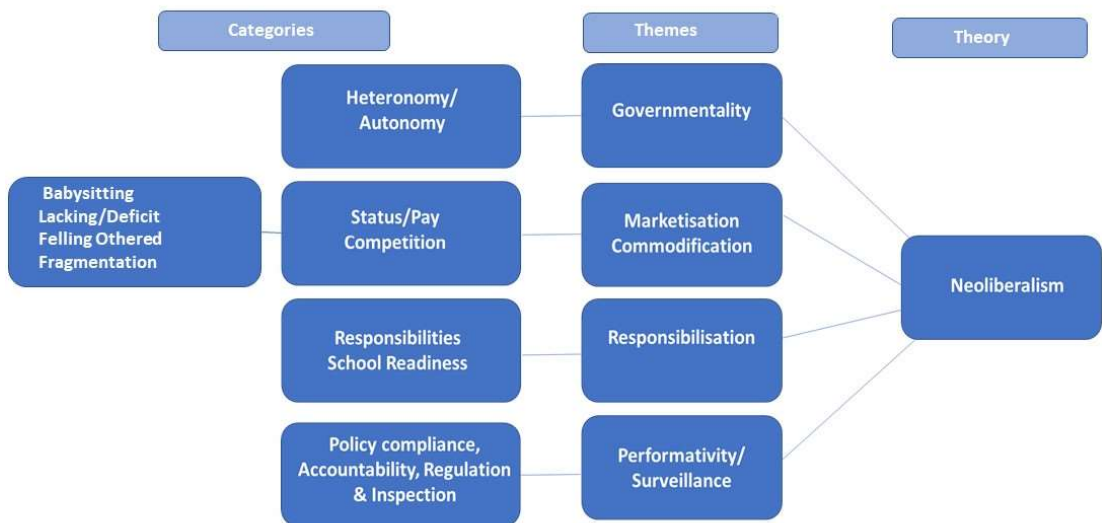


Fig. 6.2 Categories, themes and theory from structural discourses

Status, Pay, Competition

I suggest that the first four discourses identified in this chapter (namely babysitting, lacking/deficit, feeling othered and fragmentation) are linked by perceptions of status. Feelings of low status and perceived lack of power are seen across the dataset from a number of participants, irrespective of their professional roles. Amy's views that parents see her role as '*babysitting with a school readiness agenda*' and Sarah's perceptions that others see her as '*only an early years teacher*'*[my emphasis]* are indicative of low status. Similarly, feelings of 'lacking' or being undervalued are notable and considered to be the result of pervasive attitudes by '*other teachers*', school management and wider society suggesting a powerful institutional discourse at play.

In an associated discourse, the narratives included examples of participants feeling othered in their roles:

Mike: 'You can't not be affected by the implicit messages that what you do actually doesn't matter.'

This analysis echoes earlier work on discourses pertaining to status highlighted by Woodrow (2007), Osgood (2010), McMahon and Dyer (2014) and Gibson (2015). Osgood (2010, p. 160) describes this problem as a result of '...the lack of symbolic value attached to the work that they [childcare workers] undertake, and hence their public image and status'.

From the policy analysis presented in Chapter Five it is evident that across the policies, multiple, competing and shifting expectations are placed upon early educators (e.g. that they should be enablers of school readiness, facilitators of social mobility, carers to enable parental employment). Across both strategic policies and policy technologies, complex and demanding obligations (e.g. being an 'agent of change') are made. In the empirical data, narratives included examples whereby educators recycled the structural discourses. Hilary signals how she is able to perform multiple accountabilities to '*Ofsted, parents, schools and anyone else who is interested, that children are making progress, they have a broad curriculum, they are safe and happy, and yes, they are being prepared for school.*' Conversely, there were many examples in which participants acknowledge the structural discourses around status, pay and competition and critique the disconnection between policy rhetoric and their lived experiences. For example, on the issue of remuneration, Amy's asserts: '*We are encouraged to become "more professional" by gaining educational qualifications yet are still earning minimum wage....*'.

Issues of status and pay are also situated in a landscape of competition: one of a 'mixed market' of early years provision. Participants Kate and Fran note the competition between schools and settings, or 'providers' of early education and the detrimental effects:

Kate: 'I then began to realise that early years was a commodity, bottoms on seats counted as money...You could see the fracturing starting to happen – the little cracks which began to separate settings from settings and schools from schools and the competitive, the business elements of attaching money to small children...'

These discourses of status and pay within a competitive environment speak to the policy analysis which discerned a discourse of marketisation in policy texts. Through explicit reference to competition between 'providers' of early education and care and the prevalence of choice for parents in accessing such provision, marketisation becomes normalised.

Within this context, early childhood educators are positioned (notably through cost reduction and global competition aspirations in *More Great Childcare*) as a marketized professional (Beck and Young 2005). A structural discourse of commodification of early childhood educators is explicit in policy texts: 'The early years workforce is both the biggest asset and the biggest overhead for early years' (DfE 2013). Such commodification (reflected in international studies by Kamenac 2019 and Gibson 2015) is felt, articulated and rejected in the narrative of Amy:

Amy: We are framed as homo economicus – our value is absolutely about our economic capital, not about experience or cultural capital.

Critiques of marketisation in early childhood education are well rehearsed (Lloyd and Penn 2012; Moss 2017; Press et al 2018). However, historically, such critique has largely been the result of policy analysis and less frequently grounded in the effects of such marketisation on the lived experiences of early childhood educators. The narratives in this study and subsequent analysis reveal structural discourses of marketisation analysed in workforce policy are acknowledged and predominantly contested by participants. In terms of the analytical framework, these participants' responses can be seen to fracture the subjectivities constructed by policy, such as the marketized professional. Educators explicitly discern the effects of diminished status, low pay, competition between 'providers' and thereby fragmentation on the sector as a result of the marketisation.

Performativity, Accountability and Surveillance

Policy and empirical data analyses reveal a complex interplay of discourses of performativity, accountability and surveillance. Notably, the occupational standards of graduate professionals (EYP, EYT and QTS) are permeated with multiple discourses of performance. Standards evolve from EYPs performing as an 'agent of change' (EYP standards 2006) to EYT standards 2013 which states that Early Years Teachers 'are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in their professional practice and conduct' (p.2). Thus, the agency of professionals is erased and replaced with performance as standards compliance. Performativity is also explicit in Teacher Standards QTS (2007) '...[Teachers need to] *know how to use local and national statistical information to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching.*' This details explicitly how the educator should use external achievement benchmarks to measure and appraise their own performance.

Whilst narratives include limited text that might be coded as performativity, there are references to expected performance in the context of external accountability and surveillance. Focus group and interview data include a prevalence of discussion around Ofsted regulation, exemplified by Amy who describes how she was held accountable for children's development during an inspection and expected to produce data on how her performance resulted in normalised and uniform trajectories of children's progress:

Amy: '...the Ofsted inspector said I want to see every child with a graph like this (indicates a line graph rising diagonally upwards left to right)'

Such 'performance of compliance' is defined by Sims and Waniganayake (2015) as 'a tightly defined, top-down approach is used to assure quality. This has the effect of limiting flexibility and de-professionalising the work of early childhood professionals' (p.333). This performativity as a regime of truth is also analysed by Macfarlane and Lakhani (2015) who identify how 'truths' about success and 'proper child development' (p.188) are propounded in Australian ECE policy texts. Performativity in an UK early childhood context has been analysed as 'increased demands to demonstrate competence' (Osgood, 2006, p.9), resulting in 'demised professionalism' (Spencer-Woodley 2014, p.68). It would appear, from the data, that this trajectory continues.

Accountability for such performance is an inextricably linked concept and discourse. Policy analysis included discourses of intensified external accountability across the texts. Teacher Standards detailed accountability frameworks and the importance of performance management to career progression, whilst the evolution of EYP into EYT

standards signalled a move from educator agency to an emphasis on educator accountability. Mechanisms of accountability through compliance with occupational standards and proposed 'school report cards' are explicit and arguably detail what Lash and Castner (2018 p.94) describe as 'measurable, linear, and systematized structure regarding the knowledge and values expected of early childhood professionals.'

Several participants were aware of, but positioned themselves as troubling or rejecting, the discourses of performativity and accountability evident in various contemporary early childhood policies. This can be seen in Mark's concern '*...that children need to be nothing more than numbers on a spreadsheet*', Fran's refusal to '*do things to get data*' and Sophie's rejection of Reception baseline as a starting point for teacher accountability. These responses reflect work by Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes on the impact of datafication (2017) on early educator subjectivities (Roberts-Holmes 2019).

Such datafication and modes through which educators are held accountable for data can be seen through discourses of surveillance or dataveillance (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes 2017) as discussed earlier. Narratives included references to surveillance of Ofsted inspections with Briony noting '*that staff get anxious with impending Ofsted [inspection] and deliberately do things they wouldn't normally do in order to make a good impression...*'

Perhaps, more troubling is the perspective of Fran who worries her outspokenness will have consequences:

'I worry about Ofsted, they may think 'Oh that person is at that school, she's says all this stuff and look at her data'...This is what worries me about Ofsted. If I get the wrong person through the door, I will have the fight of my career on my hands.'

Whilst workforce reform policy seldom makes explicit reference to regulation, discourses of accountability and performance are evident throughout and the negative effects of these perceived in the narratives of participants. It is fifteen years since Mac Naughton (2005) identified the impact of discourses of surveillance in educator identities. This study asserts that as structural discourses, performativity and surveillance continue to be perceived by participants, and in a number of instances, responded to with cynical compliance and contestation.

Responsibilisation

Drawing on aforementioned empirical data on the 'school readiness' discourse and policy analysis, I consider how responsibilisation has become a key discourse in early

childhood education. In Chapter Five, policy analysis revealed educators are positioned as having professional freedoms and discretion over issues which, I propose, are in fact structural constraints. This concept of responsabilisation is perceived as the shifting of responsibility from higher authorities to individuals in order that they take responsibility for their own problems or issues and that the self-regulating citizen understands the 'proper' way to function (MacfarLane and Likhani 2015).

I have argued that policies, particularly post-2013, frame the ideal early childhood professional as autonomous and self-improving. I suggest this is set within the neoliberal frame of significant regulation, accountability and surveillance, and that educator autonomy is in fact curtailed by compliance with the standards. Such responsabilisation is evident in the data with regard to the 'school readiness' agenda, made explicit in *More Great Childcare* as important to competing 'in the global race'. In their narratives, educators appear to feel responsabilised for the (inappropriate) preparation of children for the next stage of their learning. Hazel, Mike and Briony all expressed an awareness of (and occasionally a frustration about) how they were responsabilised for the school readiness of the children they worked with. Notably, the use of the 'good level of development' (GLD) in the early years foundation stage profile as a measure of school readiness (Kay 2018) was cited as a method of responsabilising reception teachers for children's readiness. However, Sophie appears to accept this responsabilisation:

*I think early childhood educators have a responsibility to do a good job now because **this is where it all happens...**[my emphasis]*

I argue that whilst there were differences in whether such responsabilisation was adopted by participants and recycled in narratives or whether it was identified and rejected (see data from Amy, Fran, Mike, Stella), its presence in empirical data signals a pervasive discourse as an element of a wider neoliberal paradigm. Coupled with such responsabilisation, the broader discourse of governmentality is key to this study.

Governmentality

In the literature review, I drew on a definition of governmentality by Blum and Ullman, (2012 p.370) as 'the process by which governments work to produce citizens who help them enact their policies.' In ECE, Moss (2019 p.94) describes governmentality as 'how we come to embody the dominant discourse so that we govern ourselves according to its beliefs and assumptions, its desires and practices'.

Policy Analysis detected governmentality in the fear of 'growing concerns' on childcare affordability and appealing to local leaders on EYT deployment for 'significant improvements' inculcating government expectations through moral evaluation and persuasion. Akin to Osgood's (2011) study, in which discourses of educators both as lacking skills and as potential saviours are deployed, these policy texts discursively construct the early educator as both cause for concern and as a redemptive force. Such a position and policy tension (whilst acknowledged), are contested in the narratives.

Governmentality discourses which were intended to shape and influence the conduct of early childhood educators are further evidenced in the occupational standards texts. Through prescription of skills, knowledges, abilities and latterly behaviours and attitudes, I discern attempts to secure the participation of early educators and their active consent to adopt the sanctioned, ideal version of their professional identities through these standards.

Interview and focus group data suggest participants are not only not only aware of being governed but cognisant of this concept of governmentality:

Ellen: 'much of the policy set by government doesn't consider the child's needs and interests but instead what society needs them to become.'

Amy: 'The government, I think, sees me as a useful body in the classroom, who should be just educated enough to comply with the EYFS but not question it.'

Amy's critique of the 'useful body' professional identity she sees constructed for her by policy, acknowledges and challenges structural discourses of governmentality. Such an insight recognises the power of such a discourse but also represents the struggle of subjectivity to which Ball (2016) alludes. Similarly, Kate alludes to governmentality and a desire for autonomy in her words: '*One criticism I have of early years is that we have become almost indoctrinated to run along straight lines*'. Kate's insight speaks to the tensions of dominant discourse of responsabilisation and resultant feelings of a lack of autonomy.

I contend that these core themes of marketisation, performativity, surveillance, responsabilisation and governmentality which emerged from policy and interview data are unified by the enactment of neoliberal theories in the context of ECE, which I now discuss further.

The Impact of Neoliberalism on the lived experiences of early childhood educators

In this concluding section I position the institutional discourses identified in the data (both policy analysis and empirical data) within the broader literature on neoliberalism. I then consider the impact of neoliberalism on the lived experiences of early childhood educators.

Neoliberalism has been defined as a project which is:

... in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. (Harvey 2007, p.2)

Recent debates on the relationships between neoliberalism and neo-conservatism reveal complex dynamics between the two political modes of thought. Whilst both arguably reify the power and dominance of the market, neoconservatism can be seen to exert greater authority and influence over what it perceives as 'the chaos of individual interests...and the moral permissiveness of individualism' (Harvey 2007, p.82-3). Such a command and control principle rooted in more authoritarian, traditionalist thought, is in some tension with neoliberalism's laissez faire economic liberal thought. In a UK context, such tensions have conventionally played out in Conservative rather than (New) Labour policies (see below).

However, a great deal of writing interrogates the influence of neoliberalism beyond political doctrine and articulates its reach and power effects into many areas of contemporary life:

[Neoliberalism] casts all dimensions of life in terms of market rationality, constructs profit-making as the arbiter and essence of democracy...and upholds the irrational belief that the market can both solve all problems and serve as a model for structuring all social relations. (Giroux 2015 p. 170)

In education policy and practice, it is argued that such an orthodoxy is implemented through tenets of new public management (Gunter et al 2016). New public management can be defined as the adoption of business paradigms into the delivery of public services to improve efficiency by using private sector management models. This manifests in ways which include quasi-market structures of private and public service competition to deliver 'better' and more cost efficient services. In addition to this market orientation, Hood (1991) identifies features of this regime including an ethic of

entrepreneurialism, human resource deregulation, increased performance management and high accountability measures.

In education, such a perspective also manifests as the privileging of economic solutions to 'problems' of quality and effectiveness, curriculum, and professionalism. Children and educators are subject to disciplinary power and technologies in preparation for the future, where success is measured as children's academic achievement and their financial productivity as future citizens. In addition, high accountability is aligned with regulation and surveillance across all phases of education. Such a perspective has reached a dominant ideological consensus across much of the northern hemisphere and Australasia and is increasing its reach beyond those regions. Based on the underpinning literature and empirical evidence in this thesis, I suggest that neoliberalism goes beyond an economic paradigm - it is a pervasive cultural orthodoxy, which, via an assemblage of discourses, reaches into the professional lives of educators.

In England, the relatively recent policy attention afforded to ECE, began under New Labour administrations, during which neoliberalism was enthusiastically embraced with, as Giddens (1998, p99) argues, a 'new mixed economy' with the welfare state recast in terms of social investment. The effects of this attention have been analysed in the intervening years. Whilst there is a growing body of international research (Moss 2014; Wood 2017; Sims 2017; Kamenarac 2018; Sims et al 2018; Moloney et al 2019) which critiques the impact of neoliberalism on early childhood, much of this is macro level policy analysis and there would not appear to be a significant proportion of literature informed by empirical data from the UK. This study contributes to this discussion through exploring the impact of neoliberalism on the lived experiences of early childhood educators.

Manifestations of neoliberalism are explicit in the human capital approach (identified in policy analysis), shaping discourses around both children and educators. Under this mode of thought, children are framed by the investment discourse (Heckman 2011; 2018) and educators become subject to being positioned as technicians subjected to performance management and surveillance in a marketized landscape. In early childhood education research, the literature recognises the prevalence of intensified accountability (Spencer-Woodley 2014), performativity (Kilderry 2015), marketisation (Lloyd and Penn 2015; Moss 2017), responsabilisation (Macfarlane and Likhani 2015) and surveillance (Mac Naughton 2005). This study provides empirical data to further support these claims.

Further, I argue that these tenets of neoliberalism are explicit in workforce reform policy, evident through the bordering processes (identified in the policy analysis chapter) which seek to demarcate and delimit prescriptive professional identities and create ideal subject positions. In so doing, the bordering through setting standards opens a space for certain compliant identities and closes down others. Participants' narratives allude to ways in which such ideal subject positions are often in tension with personal values and pedagogical beliefs. As Moss and Roberts-Holmes (forthcoming) write:

Professional identity is corroded by this performative culture, de-professionalising practitioners and steering them away from the pedagogical values and principles that may have brought them into the work in the first place or which they learnt during their education.

Additionally, I argue, that based on my analysis, I discern that policy discourses have conscripted some of these values and principles and recast them through modes of responsabilisation. However, data from this study also highlight the tensions participants articulate between the coercive power of neoliberal shaped discourses and agentic expressions of their own values and principles.

Summary

This chapter has introduced the analysis and discussion of the study. This section has also analysed and discussed data in relation to institutional discourses, both those identified in the literature and via policy analysis. Through a discussion of discourses that converge around governmentality, marketisations, responsabilisation, performativity and surveillance, I contribute to a body of work which highlights the pervasiveness of neoliberalism, how this is enacted in ECE and its effects. I have illustrated where the data confirm or diverge from existing studies and offered new insights into the impact of a neoliberal paradigm on the formation of professional identities of early educators. However, if, as Ball (2016) attests, subjectivity is a site of struggle, it is necessary to consider educator agency in this struggle. I now turn to considering agentic discourses in participants' narratives.

Chapter 7 Agentic Discourses

Chapter Seven Agentic Discourses

The accidental
activist's tale

The
campaigner's
tale

The children's
rights advocate's
tale

The passionate
outlier's tale

Focus Group and
Interview data
synthesised

This findings and discussion chapter highlights discourses relating to the agency of participants which were analysed in the data. As a narrative inquiry, I have privileged the stories of participants. However, the study is also rooted in the critical tradition and I considered imbrications of discourses of power through critical narrative analysis.

I open this section with four extended narratives from the early educators in the study, formed from interview data, which illustrate agentic discourses. The four professional life stories have been selected as they most explicitly convey agentive discourses, albeit in different ways in diverse contexts. In addition, these narratives reflect multiple forms of resistance and activism. These are enacted in various forms in a range of contexts in response to dominant discourses and practices of power through which educators' professional identities are bordered. As such, they illustrate the multiple, varying ways in which agency is exerted by early childhood educators.

The chapter then draws on the full data set (interviews and online focus group) to further analyse and discuss the discourses of agency which emerged. The reflective discussion which concludes the chapter considers the experiences of participants and these discourses in light of previous research and offers some insights in response to the research questions:

- How are ECE practitioners positioned in workforce policy and *how do they respond to these positionings?*
- To what extent do practitioners perpetuate or challenge prevailing thinking about their professional identities and do they imagine policy alternatives?
- What forms of individual and collective activism exist?
- Which conditions/values enable and/or constrain activism and how do practitioners see their roles in this?

Individual Narratives

The accidental activist's tale

Fran is a teacher in a Primary School in the East of England.

Fran describes her childhood as being raised in a one parent family and attending a school from the 'wrong side of the tracks'. Whilst at secondary school, Fran was offered a work placement at a pre prep school; a 'posh private school' and describes this experience as something she really loved. Following GCSEs Fran applied to complete an NNEB Diploma, a process which she says was competitive and difficult to secure a place. The formative experience of this course of study is explained:

'So I did that for two years and the placements included Nursery, Reception, Years One and Two, a home placement as a nanny, a new baby and toddlers, a social services nursery, a special school, Portage training. Basically, birth to seven years eight months, across the sector, all different. So I think that has led me to be passionate about this cross sector working and not just being schools...because I have worked across them.'

Fran then chose to pursue teacher training. She retook a maths qualification, studied two A levels at evening class and then completed a Bachelor of Education degree (BEd).

Her first teaching role was in a small, rural school but she felt her energy was suppressed by a school culture summarised in being told 'you can't do that, that's not this school's way'. Her second role in another school was as a Reception Teacher followed by an Early Years Co-ordinator role in an environment with a headteacher 'a bit like Miss Jean Brodie...who shaped us and cared about us'. Following a difficult Ofsted inspection, the head teacher retired and was replaced by a 'new guy...a young whippersnapper, been teaching seven years comes in, wants everything changed.' Fran identifies that as the point at which she became an activist because she didn't agree with many management decisions, and because she 'wouldn't just roll over'. Fran was then asked by the local authority to look at moving to a school in need of support with their early provision and decided to move for one year. She says she has since found out that her previous 'Headteacher offered me to come here. I think it was his way of getting me out of the door. Although we get on really well, I was the resistance.'

She describes the influence upon her as a series of strong women, including her mum:

'So for me its the women who have shaped me, again going back in history it is women...the pioneers'.

In recent years Fran set up a social media page to support other early years practitioners and has become more engaged in activism:

Fran: 'So the activist stuff is because of policy and how fundamentally flawed a lot of the policy is. I just think a lot of what is being asked of us is not right and its not fair on children. And that's why I take the stand that I take... I will not do things to get data and that is the problem I am going to have. I won't cram with children. I will not send stuff home. Other schools do. Our results are below national. Some will say I am not teaching well enough.'

Interviewer: 'So what are the repercussions, the consequences of that?'

Fran: 'The phonics were up on last year...I worry about Ofsted, they may think, 'Oh that Fran is at that school, she's says all this stuff and look at her data' So its ethical practice...I do like the phrase in the old profile handbook...responsible pedagogy. I love that quote, because our pedagogy has to be responsible, ethical, principled...'

Fran believes that activism starts with individuals in a setting but with the chances she is having to get out makes her realise this is a national picture.

In addition to resistance at a local level, Fran is also involved in national activism. She has spoken at national union meetings, contributed to parliamentary lobbying against baseline assessment and is working closely with the unions on policy. She says 'I was just trying to rally people and say 'we haven't got to sit and take this...'

Fran is acutely aware of the pressures on herself and on headteachers and teachers in the current policy regime but she states: 'I can't stand by while this stuff is going on. They are getting the data, but at what cost?'

The campaigner's tale

Stella is a lecturer in higher education in an institution in the North of England.

She began a career in early childhood education in 1998 although it was never an intended career path. Following a sociology degree, Stella took a role with the benefits office. During this time, she became a trade union official and involved activist. She describes herself as very active as a campaigner for about seven years, to such an extent that she ended up having a lot of issues at work around the role and was demoted and transferred.

Following the birth of her two children Stella qualified as a Primary teacher. She initially found it difficult to secure a job share role as an NQT but was approached by a neighbour, a nursery teacher, to help cover nursery provision. Despite some initial reservations about her abilities with young children Stella took the role and comments

'I saw this nursery teacher operating...and the reason she wanted me to come in was that she was doing work with parents – it was about Basic Skills, supporting their children and she just had fantastic relationships in the community and I just thought, this is the way we should be working with children and families, not shutting the door and the parents are shut out.'

Soon after this the nursery had applied for funding from Europe to develop early years services in the community. A job as a community development worker arose and Stella secured the job setting up early years services. She became involved in setting up a playgroup and then a Women's health group, and courses for women. This morphed into being a fourth wave Sure Start programme and evolved from services in nursery into a family centre. She stayed there almost until its demise. Stella describes this work as a 'lightbulb moment':

'I hadn't really questioned it before but schools don't really belong to the school, they belong to the communities they serve and it's that collaboration and partnership which resonated with my earlier experiences as a trade union representative...about the fact that we are in this together... I could work in a way which was ethical, right and bring about bigger changes.'

Stella talks about her role as including campaigning. Working in a disadvantaged community and supporting parents she explains:

'...it felt as if we had the power to do something different and in some ways it was about harnessing that. A lot of it was battling because the local authority didn't want us to be the next Sure Start, they had already decided where it

was going to be. But the women in the parents' group and me made a film where they talked about why they needed this. It was so powerful, we went and showed it to the council and they changed their minds and the area became the next wave of Sure Start so I think its something to do with challenging the status quo and trying to make things different for people.'

Following a period of development of services, austerity measures impacted on local authorities and the centre was soon threatened with closure:

'...we campaigned hard for that and managed to overturn decisions a couple of times. We took the local authority to judicial review and held protests and demonstrations and with hindsight that felt like the right thing to do. Fight back and push back...

*...we organised a march which was quite well attended on a Saturday. We managed to get 10,000 signatures for a debate in the council chamber and that was great actually....So we had parents turning up everyday from about 8am until about 4pm outside the town hall with tables to collect signatures. The council had produced leaflets which basically said 'would you rather the money was given to a handful of providers or shared fairly among...' so we produced a leaflet which looked identical to theirs which gave the opposite arguments so were being quite disruptive...Then various debates in the council chambers, scrutiny boards that we attended with members of the management committee and parents. We had protests by parents outside...
...we asked parents whether anyone was willing to take the local authority to judicial review. And we had three parents and through their circumstances they could get legal aid then. So went through a Law Centre who were excellent and found a very high quality QC who was willing to take the case. It was a three-day hearing in but unfortunately we didn't win.'*

Stella eventually moved into a role in higher education and has remained very active in the sector in professional roles and through volunteering. She remains uneasy about the trajectory of early years policy but hopeful about the 'quite inspirational trainees' she works with:

'And sometimes it feels as if we are just fighting to stay alive really, the principle and the ethos about the way children are best supported for their learning and development against what feel like an assault on it really... I think there is also a pushback by the sector as well, a vigorous defence mounted in the last year against what has seemed like a mounting assault from outside, against the play based, evidence based pedagogy of early years. But I do look around the age range of those mounting the defence and I do wonder whether we are bringing through the next generation to be vocal.'

The children's rights advocate's tale

Sylvia is a retired childminder based in London.

In retirement she continues to volunteer for early years organisations and campaign on a number of issues related to services for children.

Sylvia began her career in early years in 1992 when she registered as a childminder to care for her friend's baby. Registration of childminders in 1992 was undertaken by local authorities. As part of her registration [she was advised by a social worker to gain some experience. She contacted a local day nursery and secured some work experience:

'There was very little outdoor play [at the nursery]. On a Wednesday afternoon we used to go to a local hall for the children to run around. It was basically empty. And one of the girls said, 'oh this would make a lovely nursery'.

Sylvia secured a lease on the community hall and developed a nursery school in the centre from 1993-2001. She recalls her relationship with the registration and inspection unit of the local authority:

'When I opened the nursery, you have to understand this because it is important, the social worker who advised me, was the same social worker who trained me. She then registered my nursery. And when I was running the nursery, she had a colleague who used to do the inspections – this was before the Ofsted inspections. She used to do an inspection once a year and sit there saying absolutely nothing and we think 'oh my God!'. When the children had gone and the inspection was finished she would say 'I enjoyed that!'. And then she registered me for childminding. So what I am trying to say is that there was a network there, always there. If there was anything I needed, I would call her and she would be there the next day with the information we wanted. The continuity was of having two people who I knew and trusted and were very knowledgeable. A professional relationship based on trust.'

The landlords sold the community hall in 2001 meaning the nursery had to close. Sylvia then registered as a childminder with an assistant and continued caring for some of the children from her own home.

'The parents said to me if you do more or less what you were doing at the nursery, we are happy.'

In 1994 Sylvia completed an NVQ and in 2010 she undertook a Foundation Degree at a local university. When she retired in 2015, she worked as supply cover for two preschools and a day nursery in the area. She also began to volunteer for a

national charity. In that time, Sylvia has worked with numerous iterations of the Early Years Foundation Stage documents and comments on the differences:

'It was the year Gove [Michael Gove, formerly Secretary of State for Education] was reviewing the EYFS in 2012. And I thought I am not going to do this, because by the time I am finished the EYFS will look so different... I will leave it. I was absolutely right. He basically chopped the EYFS and it became just a document – whereas the old one, you remember, it carried weight...photographs of children...all theory. You try to find the theory in the EYFS now. It's all compliance – you must do this, you must do that. Standards. And when it comes to childminders you have one paragraph.'

Sylvia also laments the lack of joint working in the sector:

'Shared care is another issue when the nurseries didn't want to work with you....Remember Wilshaw? [Michael Wilshaw, formerly Her Majesty Chief Inspector]. He wanted to take childminders out of the EYFS because they only provide care. He said 'I would suggest to all parents to put their 2-year olds children in school nurseries'. He wanted to take childminders out of the EYFS and only inspect them for care. And we said, 'you can't divide care and education'. That rattled me...The system is broken. Very fractured. There are few links anymore.'

At heart, Sylvia is a children's rights advocate and speaks passionately about this:

'I can't just sit back. I think if you want to be an activist, you can't just speak, you have to act. Because I care about children. You have to do something meaningful.

And also, I think it is important for children to see that you are speaking up for them. It's also how you instil in them the right of expression. Because its one of the articles in the United Nations Rights of the Child... I've just written to my MP about the children forcibly separated from their parents in the US. We need to do something. That's my activism. If I had children here, I would talk to them about it and explain.

This has to be about children's rights. One of the most important thing children should be told about is that they have rights. You have rights. When I did my degree – I researched Reggio Emilia, and for the research I interviewed children. I explained to them why I was asking information, seek consent.

*"Do I have rights?" said one of them
"Oh yes" I said.*

Have you ever seen a nursery put the United Nations rights poster up? Why do we not tell children this? And that's why when some people talk about Reggio Emilia, they don't understand what's underneath it. In Reggio, children are seen at citizens. Can we say that in the UK?

The passionate outlier's tale

Mike is an early years practitioner in a children's centre in the North of England.

Following completion of a degree in his home country, Mike thought he would work for a non-governmental organisation (NGO). He reflects: *In the meantime I thought 'I need to get a job, I like kids, I'll go find a job with kids and at the time in xxx you didn't need to have any qualifications... so I got an interview [in an early childhood centre] and they threw me in the room with the kids and because I know how to talk to kids and I was on the floor looking interested, they were like 'Oh let's hire him'.*

Mike stayed at the nursery for five years and reflects openly and honestly about his learning on that time:

'I've felt levels of anger and frustration I didn't know I was capable of, but somehow through all of that I learned how to survive at that place and do a good job in the context of that place...so I could do a good circle time, fill in a calendar of days, organise some dumb theme, the kids would 'obey' me, yeah, I somehow just got through that and I became good in that context.'

Following a family move abroad, Mike secured a new job in an early childhood centre for two years. Mike now works at a children's centre in the mornings and as learning support assistant with Reception aged children in the linked Primary school in the afternoons. In a discussion about professional identities Mike questions the use of the word 'professional' and how it is often used as an 'empty' word:

'This may be a tangent, but have you seen those pictures of Martin Luther King at the sanitation workers strike and all these demonstrators holding signs saying 'I am a Man', but they are saying they are men, human, worthy of respect but there is a whole system around them that says they are not. Words are important but...we could probably get Nick Gibb to say 'yes you are all early years professionals' but 'What should we really expect of people who work with kids?' that's what's important.'

In terms of activism and resistance Mike believes that it doesn't have to be 'a big flashy thing', but that resistance can start in the setting:

'I started off on an 18 hour contract. I didn't refuse to do observations while the kids were there but I made it my absolute last priority. The kids are here for three hours, they don't need my head in an iPad. Let's make the most of these three hours. There are times when they don't need me, but I kept saying to my room leader 'If I had one more hour, just an extra fifteen minutes a day would make a difference'. They never really jumped down my neck but I did end up getting that extra hour. And I never said 'no I take a stand' but I just wasn't going to do it. So that was resistance.'

This is the most important stuff in the world and I get that I'm an outlier who is personally passionate about this stuff. And I'm a man from a middle-class background, my wife has a professional job, before this role I was involved in radical politics, I'm not afraid to question things if I think things need to change.'

I draw on these tales and additional data from interviews and the focus group to further analyse and discuss discourses of agency which illuminate the intentions and actions of participants. Deploying the CNA framework to analyse the data involved considering, in particular, the following analytical points in the narratives (see p.139):

- Points of resistance
- Points of tension
- Linkages between life lived and resources or constraints

This analytical process revealed categories of:

- Attitudes/capacities: critical awareness, professional confidence, self and collective efficacy
- Modes of resistance: ethical practice as resistance, contesting dominant narratives, micro resistances, developing alternative discourses, walking away as self-care
- Modes of activism in the data: examples of speaking truth to power, individual and collective action

These categories are used to organise the following analysis and discussion. The reflective discussion considers this empirical data in light of policy analysis and previous research literature.

Attitudes and Capacities

Agentive attitudes and capacities are evident, to varying degrees, across the narratives. Following coding using the Laliberte-Rudman and Aldrich (2017) critical narrative analytical framework (p.139), I categorised these agentic discourses as critical awareness, professional confidence, and self and collective efficacy.

Critical Awareness

The notion of critical awareness is prominent in the narratives of many participants, albeit manifested in different ways. I understand such critical awareness to take the form of the active alertness to beliefs or supposed forms of knowledge which (in this case) inform policy trajectories in early childhood education. This ability to recognise and interpret a prevailing ethos and policy drivers appears as a core capacity amongst participants, as they reflect on influences on the formation of their professional identities.

Kate, a retired headteacher and independent consultant, considers her identities to be in constant evolution. She perceives her background in life sciences and her early teaching experiences abroad to be formative in her world view and in this ongoing identity development. Kate describes how these life experiences shaped both her critical awareness and agency in the construction of her identity and described herself as

'Somebody who learns through doing, through playing with ideas and concepts and theories and ways of being.'

This evocative description situates learning and playing at the heart of Kate's professional identity development and an awareness, not only of tools to explore 'ways of being' but importantly of her capacity and power to do so. Kate's critical awareness is also evident in her mindfulness and critique of the societal undervaluing of early childhood:

'it is also that passion to help people realise we have something [childhood] incredibly precious, incredibly real and important. Its not plasticated, its not something to be tucked away and forgotten about or pulled out when its convenient, it is something which should really be 'up there' politically and yet it isn't.'

Similarly, Mike, a children's centre practitioner (see the passionate outlier's tale pp.203-4) also demonstrates awareness of the ongoing development of professional identities influenced by his critical awareness and reading of theorists:

...the Janet Lansbury reading and other podcasts where people were blowing up all these early childhood sacred cows means that I now look at the job 180 degrees differently

Indeed, professional development features prominently as a driver to developing critical awareness in a number of narratives with Briony citing the formative nature of her EYT

studies and Stella reflecting on the EYP programme in developing 'agents of change'. Sophie, an EYFS lead in a Primary school, explicitly links higher education study to a degree of criticality she believed this enabled:

...because they [teachers with QTS] have been to university and have a certain level of criticality...

Karen, a manager in a local authority nursery, exhibits this critical awareness and questioning of policy:

I think sometimes people are not critical enough of policy and you get that very narrow thinking of 'so and so says we must' and it creates a difficult situation where staff are spending too much time on paperwork. Policy is not always as rigid as people think. Its phrased in quite a loose way, people hear a myth and suddenly it becomes a thing that they have to do.

A number of participants demonstrate critical awareness in their vigilance and analysis of various current early childhood policies. Several instances highlight critical alertness to pervasive power discourses identified in the previous chapter. Natalie's critique of the 'what works' agenda, Stella's concern about the dominance of school readiness in policy and Fran's troubling of the datafication discourse all illustrate how participants are alert to and critical of various policies which impacted on professional identity construction.

I suggest that such critical awareness is an important agentic discourse in considering how participants develop subject positions and how professional identities are formed. Recalling Sumsion's (2006) model of critical imagination, which informs critical literacy which in turn shapes critical action (see Literature Review, p.41) the author notes:

Central to critical imagination is the capacity to envisage a more equitable and just world. Critical imagination involves thinking differently in order to act differently (Giroux, 2000). It requires openness to new ways of framing problems; a willingness to conceive better solutions; and optimism about change being possible. (pp.4-5)

In Sumsion's model critical literacy (or in my term critical awareness) is positioned as a second stage after initial critical imagination. However, reflecting on the study data, I propose that a stage of 'critical awareness' precedes this initial phase of critical imagination in Sumsion's model. In order to engage in an imagination of what else might be (as a precursor to acting differently) I suggest that such critical attentiveness to the way in which political and economic discourses shape policy is a necessary

characteristic or skill which underpins resistance and activism. Thus, my proposed model is:

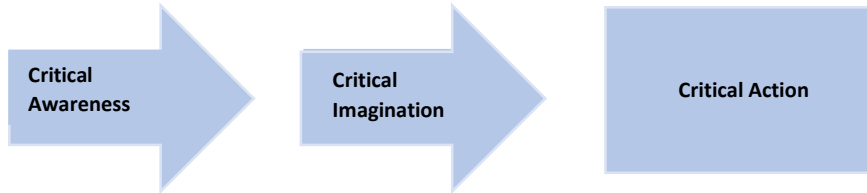


Fig. 7. 1 A model of critical awareness, imagination and action

In the instances above, participants identify underlying values and beliefs that made an issue *an issue*, looking beyond policy ‘face value’ at levers and drivers. They examine and critique received knowledges, institutional understandings and hegemonic constructions of professional identities via policy. This, in turn, lead to examples of critical imagination (envisaging other ways of being and doing) and critical action (see modes of resistance and activism). Amy’s narrative offers an example of this. Amy, an early educator in a day nursery, demonstrates critical awareness, critical imagination and critical literacy through her commentary on the EYFS and the implications for her in terms of what she is expected to ‘implement’:

*I think if you look back on how it [initial 2008 version of the EYFS framework] was approached, who was involved in it, the writing of it, and it was pretty transparent and what kind of philosophies were at play and now you look at the most recent version – 2017 – **and you can’t find out who was involved, what theories are involved. So, it makes you think it is very much a Conservative, neoliberal economic agenda and that actually children are not being seen as developing human beings but as potential economic units that will get exam results and take their place in the workforce.***

Example of critical awareness

*I think the EYFS is very much caught up in the ‘stages’. And however much you take it at face value where it says children develop at different paces, it still says the EYFS is a preparation for school and children need to fulfil the Early Learning Goals by the end of Reception **so it isn’t really about children developing at their own rate because actually you could extend that through to eight** which in most places is early childhood, so we’ve cut it off almost half way.*

Example of critical imagination

*I struggle with our observation and tracking system... So, **I resist that on a daily basis** – I will write an observation but perhaps assess it in a different area such as PSED. Or if it’s a language thing I may assess it on Knowledge and Understanding of the World. Because otherwise we get so obsessed with ‘Can they use a three word sentence?’ rather than what they actually just said to me!*

Example of critical action

Here Amy's critical awareness informs an imaginary alternative of extending the early years curriculum to age eight and the current reality of her resisting the associated policy technology of a limited tracking system. This critical awareness appears as an important, agentic, counter discourse to the bordering process of policy, proposed earlier. Thus, whilst professional standards might seek to border professional identities through qualification criteria (such as those set by NCTL in Fig 7.2), Amy's critical alertness to the limitations of such structural discourses are an important precursor and prerequisite to her resistance.

*'3.1 Understand how to assess within the current early education curriculum framework using a range of assessment techniques.
3.2 Carry out and record observational assessment accurately.
3.3 Identify the needs, interests and stages of development of individual children.
3.4 Make use of formative and summative assessment, tracking children's progress to plan next steps and shape learning opportunities.'*

National College for Teaching and Leadership (2013, p.7)

Fig. 7. 1 NCTL Early Years Educator standards

Professional Confidence and Bravery

Several instances relayed by participants indicated brave and bold actions from macro through to micro levels. In a range of contexts, in multiple ways, practitioners demonstrated confident and courageous intentions and actions.

Kate drew on an extensive career in early years and her readings of the early childhood 'pioneers' to make explicit references to the characteristic of bravery:

'So I think it is about going back to the pioneers and taking their guts, their courage, their bravery, and I often talk about being brave. They didn't have it easy in many, many ways but using that as a starting point ...'

Here, I understand Kate's views on the characteristics of 'guts' and 'courage' as borne from adversity. Referring to pioneers such as Fredrich Froebel, Rachel and Margaret McMillan and Maria Montessori who, in different and challenging contexts, were advocates and social activists for early childhood education, Kate proposes that this hardship can be a motivator or 'starting point'.

Foundation Unit Leader Mark (see the play champion's tale Chapter Eight) also alluded to the need for bravery or as Giroux (1989) calls it 'civic courage' but in the context of

'protecting' play in a political climate which he saw as jeopardising opportunities for this in school:

'What I want to be saying is 'y'know play is under threat here' You can achieve all this stuff [literacy and numeracy outcomes] in this way through playful opportunities, if you are brave enough. For me it comes down to faith. Faith in children. We shouldn't just tow the line because that is what we have been told we must do. We must challenge what we see.'

However, Mark also concluded that such an attitude was not widespread, and he believed that *'bravery seems to be out of fashion ...'* and Stella pondered *'whether we are bringing through the next generation to be vocal.'* Similarly, Mike expressed the view: *'I feel like I wish people could take some more pride and confidence and say 'this is what we need and this is what kids need more ...'.*

Sophie's narrative shared similar features as she described the potential pressure on teachers of the *Bold Beginnings* report (OFSTED 2017) and the capacity of educators to push back on this:

'Bold Beginnings came out recently and if looked at in isolation away from other documents could be used by some to beat Y1 and Reception with a stick but that hasn't been the case in my school and other schools locally. I think we have strong early years practitioners who will push back and will make their voices heard.'

In addition to explicit references to bravery and confidence, narratives also offered examples of actions by participants which might be described as brave. Sophie joined a school in the South of England as a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) to lead the Reception class:

'...when I arrived I was brought in to change my classroom, to bring play into the class, it wasn't revolutionary but EYFS has been around long time. I didn't think my ideas were different from many other practitioners are doing but in my school it was not understood. So I had to teach my TAs [teaching assistants] who were on board. The teacher that had been working in Reception felt extremely uncomfortable and I took lots of advice from the Early years team at the local authority and they said 'just keep focussing on what good early years practice is'. But then I received this feedback from the teacher: 'If that is good early years practice, what was I doing?!' I brought I tyres and drainpipes and was told to take them away by the office staff and it was a real challenge. But actually, there were times when I was taken into the head's office and was told 'you are doing a great job, don't worry about this person, that person'. TAs who weren't even in my class had an opinion on what I was doing and that the children wouldn't learn as well...'

Sophie described finding her pedagogical decisions criticised by some colleagues within the school. Her plans for prioritising loose parts play outdoors were met with disapproval, but nonetheless these views remained important to her. However, whilst Sophie's actions to argue for these resources demonstrate her agency, tenacity and bravery in her convictions, she also identified the repercussions of this, in terms of feeling isolated:

'It was an emotional time as well because I knew I was doing the right thing, but it can be very lonely in a one form entry school. The tyres and drainpipes are back though!'

In a different context, Sarah (now an Independent Consultant but a one-time Reception teacher) described how, as a class teacher in the 1990s, the introduction of national strategies for literacy and numeracy were influential on macro/meso level demands:

'The following September the Literacy Strategy hit, the following September the Numeracy Strategy, and I was told I couldn't do my thing anymore. Now bearing in mind that none of this nonsense was statutory, I was told I couldn't teach my way anymore, but I kept trying to do it. That's when the rot set in and I began to feel more empowered by the learning I was doing....And there was a classic moment when I had a fabulous teaching practice student. And we knew that the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy Advisors were coming in, and we were asked 'could they visit Reception and could we be doing a Numeracy session?' I said: 'Errr...No !' This is part of my problem – I can be a bit incalcitrant.'

Notably, Sarah linked her perceptions of being incalcitrant (which might equally be perceived as bravery) to her learning and feeling empowered by further study. This refusal to engage with the expectations of external advisors might also be read in terms of Sarah's critical awareness that the national strategies were non-statutory and how this critical awareness informed her bravery to resist these expectations. Additionally, this narrative also exemplifies pushing back on a dominant discourse as a mode of resistance (see p. 217).

Some participants considered that their brave actions were inhibited or curtailed at a meso level within their school or setting. Hazel, a local authority advisor, made observations about bravery being constrained in the context of institutional demands within schools:

'...I think it is more SLT [Senior Leadership Team] and Headteachers who are often trying to dictate how children are educated without necessarily the understanding of appropriate and effective EY pedagogy. I think this is happening more with academy agenda where often an executive head is responsible for several schools and is looking at trying to control how the EYFS

is being delivered...practitioners are feeling very anxious about whether or not they are doing the right thing...'

However, despite this picture, Hazel acknowledges 'Some people can keep hold of their values whilst for others it *'is too much of a clash and either they end up making people poorly with it or decide this isn't the place for me.'* This idea of being brave and holding on to values is further exemplified by Fran in the accidental activist's tale (see above pp.197-8) in which she continues to engage in activism (by her own definition) despite perceived ramifications from regulators:

I worry about Ofsted, they may think, 'Oh that Fran is at that school, she's says all this stuff and look at her data' So its ethical practice...I do like the phrase in the old profile handbook...responsible pedagogy. I love that quote, because our pedagogy has to be responsible, ethical, principled...

Similarly, Theresa, a Nursery Teacher in a primary school, recalls an episode when the Reception teacher and EYFS lead in the school she was working in:

'[she] came to me and said 'OK your older children need to be doing phonics' so they'll miss PE on a Friday and come to me for phonics, I thought 'ummm...ok..' and the Nursery Nurse [who worked with Theresa] would back me up and say 'well no, obviously young children need to be developing their physical skills before they are learning about letter sounds', so she was incredibly helpful and influential and that was really, really fortunate...There were lots of times when I clashed with the headteacher because my principles were not in alignment with hers and were out of sync with what was going on in the rest of the school'

In this example, Theresa is also compromised by meso/micro level demands from school colleagues and she identifies a clash of principles with these demands.

Theresa's bravery in resisting some of these demands also appears to be bolstered by other colleagues who share her values. This, in turn, speaks to the power and potential of collective efficacy (see p.212).

Karen (a local authority nursery manager) offers a different perspective about the underpinnings of brave actions:

If people don't feel valued they feel subservient to a system...If people feel their sense of professional worth and secure in their knowledge they are more willing to challenge things.

Whilst the source of 'feeling valued' is not identified in Karen's life story interview, she believes that when such a sense is present, educators may operate from a place of security and professional confidence, leading to greater agency.

Narratives drawn on in this section illustrate the agentic discourse and bravery in the words and actions of participant educators. Personal and professional confidence appear key to this bravery. Indeed, Theresa suggests that such confidence grows with experience:

'So this year has been a real test of what I can get away with...It gets an awful lot easier as you get more experienced and left to do it without too much senior leadership involvement'

The section drawn on earlier (p.211) from Theresa's narrative also points to the importance of support and solidarity from colleagues in times of challenge. The following section explores the role of self, and self and collective efficacy in the stories of participants.

Self and Collective efficacy

In analysing and discussing concepts of self and collective efficacy as coded in the narratives, I draw on the work of Bandura (1997; 2000). The concept of self-efficacy is described by Bandura (1982, p.122) as:

how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations.

Collective efficacy is understood as:

a group's shared belief in its conjoint capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment. (Bandura, 1997, p. 477).

Following analysis of the data in relation to these concepts, a further exploration is detailed in the reflective discussion section below.

Stella (former children's centre manager) illustrates her self-efficacy and collective efficacy when she worked with families and campaigned collectively to prevent the closure of a children's centre (see the campaigner's tale, pp.199-200). Faced with the prospect of the loss of services due to local authority financial cuts from central government, Stella describes her response and that of colleagues and the local community:

'...and seeing the services not as your services but as part of the community that was big shift for me...it may sound grand, but these decisions [to act] are about social justice...'

I felt most comfortable when we were trying to build that collective action in terms of the belonging around that so that for me felt like more natural territory...'

The priority which Stella gave to connectedness and co-operation are also apparent in her words *'I guess there was still an element of the trade union organiser there, building networks, building support...'*

This form of collective efficacy, of working with local families and colleagues is prominent in Stella's narrative and signals her commitment to collaboration. She locates the origins of this in her trade union experiences. Her words *'we are fighting to survive'* and *'pushback by **the sector**'* [my emphasis] evidence Stella situating her agency relationally, or as Bandura (2000 p.75) notes: 'the exercise of collective agency through shared beliefs in the power to produce effects by collective action'.

Fran's activism work outside the classroom was also illustrative of her perspective on the importance of self- and collective efficacy. In addition to her role as a Primary teacher, Fran has become increasingly engaged in lobbying and campaigning with a self-organised grassroots group, but also in conjunction with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and education unions. Her narrative exemplifies how her self-efficacy in challenging the status quo was the impetus for wider collective efficacy:

'So I think that has led me to be passionate about this cross-sector working and it not just being schools'

'So the activism thing starts with you in your setting but with the chances I have to get out makes me realise this is a national picture...I was just trying to rally people and say 'we haven't got to sit and take this'.

Fran's words exemplify a belief in collective efficacy, as a prerequisite to collective action. Her words and intentions are strategic and optimistic. Through rallying others Fran demonstrates agentic discourses of collective efficacy and of coalition for action. This model of self-efficacy as a springboard for collective efficacy is also echoed by Karen who notes: *'...but then I wanted to do something a little bit bigger, I wanted to have bit more systemic influence.'*

Awareness of and commitment to forms of collective efficacy appear in narratives and participants often articulated this as a means of negotiating the discursive landscape:

Hazel: 'we are getting quite a strong group together in our area of people who are of a similar mindset and that's really helpful – a lot of people who are active members of the Keeping Early Years Unique movement and who are standing up and saying 'actually we are doing something different for the children in our

school' and its good to hear that and other people are starting to take heed of that ...this little group of people who are saying 'actually we don't necessarily agree with this for early years, we are going to take this risk and stick our head above the parapet'...there is strength in feeling part of something that is bigger, that thinks in a similar way to you'

Briony: 'I think the togetherness of the sector defines how I feel as a professional...working with other passionate advocates'

Kate: 'And I think one of my greatest strengths in connecting – actually we are stronger together.'

These attitudes and capacities of critical awareness, professional confidence and both individual and collective efficacy are viewed as enablers of or conditions for action. This action manifests in diverse ways and is analysed in the next section as modes of resistance and modes of activism. These concepts are then explored further in the reflective discussion at the end of the chapter.

Modes of Resistance

there is no single locus of great refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case. (Foucault, 1978, pp. 95-96)

Whilst I began this study in search of activism, a substantive category which emerged from the interviews and focus group was that of various modes of resistance. A more detailed exploration of the interrelationships between the two concepts of resistance and activism can be found in the reflective discussion section at the end of the chapter.

When asked about individual and collective resistance and activism, multiple anecdotes and perspectives were shared by participants. These were considered as 'points of resistance' and 'points of tension' using the analytical framework.

Subcategories of modes of resistance are presented as:

- Ethical practice as resistance
- Contesting dominant narratives
- Micro Resistances
- Developing alternative discourses
- Walking Away as Self care

Ethical Practice as resistance

Fran framed her work as a Primary teacher in terms of ethical practice.

'So its practice which is ethical...I do like the phrase in the old profile handbook... I'll have to see if it is still in there...responsible pedagogy. I love that quote, because our pedagogy has to be responsible, ethical, principled...and I know around the country it is not. And I feel as if the people who are doing what I am trying to do are in the minority.'

In this section of her narrative Fran positions herself both as a responsible pedagogue and by being so, in the minority. Fran elicited a phrase from the EYFSP Handbook, citing 'responsible pedagogy' as a personal driver, and went on to suggest that she has witnessed many examples where she felt this has not been the case. She described her ethical practice in terms of as being '*passionate about changing things*' and how this played out in her school: '*I started to put my foot down- when things became so far removed from anything we had done before.*'

Sophie's narrative in which she contested the school culture on what was deemed appropriate resources, is a further example of ethical practice as a resistance. Sophie's beliefs in the loose parts provision outdoors, and her insistence on the pedagogical affordances of these resources, were met with disapproval by colleagues. Despite these micro level pressures, Sophie retained a sense of ethical practice

Interviewer: 'So advocating for play sounds as if it has been a big part of your story here. So where did the motivation for that come from?'

Sophie: 'I knew I was right! All of my training, experience, belief system is about play. Children not sitting at tables with identical books....Everything I changed, the office staff had something to say about it, the TAs had something to say about it. And that was wearing, it was hard, but I had to stick to my guns because that was what I had been brought in to do.'

Interviewer: 'So what sustained you through that period?'

Sophie: 'I'm quite stubborn! I think just in my beliefs. I really believe in play and outdoor learning. I know I'm not perfect, but I am always learning...'

Through maintaining her belief in the benefits of this provision and resisting the critique, Sophie expresses this ethical practice both as resistance and as agentic discourse.

Heather, a local authority advisor, talks broadly and hopefully about ethical practice as resistance:

'What gives me hope is that there are groups of people out there who are still working really hard, turning around and saying 'No. I'm doing it like this' and its

working. Schools with experienced staff who have a good understanding of pedagogy and put a lot of time into CPD.'

However, it is important to consider the implications of such practice and whether resistance is always productive or appropriate. Importantly, Stella reflected on the consequences of ethical practice as resistance. Recalling the resistance which she and others engaged in taking a local authority to judicial review over a children's centre closure, she ponders whether this ethical practice as resistance was counter-productive:

'sometimes I reflect in my quieter moments and think 'could we have worked with them?''

This reflection highlights the tension felt between ethical practice as resistance and the possibility that, in this case, a more collaborative approach, which Stella considered might have been productive.

These examples differ in context, intention, motivation and multiple other ways but are united by participants' commitment to working ethically. These educators made decisions based on personal and pedagogical values and importantly, they explicitly acknowledged this. In doing so, participants also articulate a passive resistance, whether to macro level policy demands for Fran or meso/micro level policy implementation for Sophie and Stella. The narratives demonstrate the power of 'no', of a 'resistance-based professionalism' (Fenech et al, 2010, p.89) when participants challenged demands on their practice. Tucker (2004) asserts that these decisions 'demonstrate how such matters directly impact upon the professional identities which individuals and groups adopt in their everyday work.' (p.84)

Contesting dominant narratives/Pushing Back

Such ethical practice as resistance might also be read as educators pushing back on dominant narratives. This category links to various modes of individual and collective activism (as discussed pp.39-45). The section below analyses data in which participants identified and acted back on such power discourses.

Mark's narrative is strongly shaped by his contestation of the current dominant discourses around centralised curriculum control, datafication and the over formalisation of early school experiences for children. As a self-described 'play

champion' (see pp.245-6) he conveys a professional identity shaped by pushing back on the marginalisation of play and by prioritising free play experiences whenever possible. Mark's views concur with this idea of a 'struggle' (See Kate on bravery p.208) as a starting point for agency and action. He describes his perception of an oppressive system as the impetus for change:

'We are in a system now where everything is about control...Its about fear of falling behind. That's why we end up having handwriting books for five year olds.'

'But perhaps you need that kind of system to create creative people. To resist. Its like punk -it couldn't have existed without glam rock and what went before. Punk needed to react to something. You need the struggle.'

Mark's push back involves a conceptualisation of what he called 'play' and 'not play' which enables him to meet his professional obligations whilst still resisting:

'As I see it – there is play and not play, its about establishing how you are going to meet outcomes...so for not-play its about phonics teaching. I have never met anyone who can teach that through play. We don't live in Sweden, we can't delay it. I have to, by law, teach phonics – I have to teach synthetic phonics every day. You can make it playful but it's not play. Similarly, I have to do a maths input based on a maths scheme –I have to do it, because it is the expectation in a school. They have to be trained in a certain way. But it's so divorced from play...

I have got an adult world saying, 'they have to write a sentence'. So, I have a choice, I can use their play as a tool, or do I stop their play? And bring them to a table to do something controlled and disconnected...

But I do have to recognise I work in a school and a system but for at the same time I have to do it and then get back to the richness, to what children do best.'

Mark's creation of a binary play/not play position his philosophy as at odds with dominant discourses of 'not play' expectations such as phonics teaching. His responses include 'using' children's play 'as a tool' and delivering an intervention and then letting children 'get back...to what they do best'. Mark's contestation of the dominant discourses is a passionate rejection of the expectations upon him as an early educator. Whilst he attempts to reconcile these daily expectations with his personal values (see borderland discourses in Chapter Eight) Mark spoke frankly about the need for greater push back on power discourses:

'There is an audience that is building...what worries me is that policy is being decided without all those people with a wealth of understanding...

The people making decisions have an agenda and something to sell. We are literally making a hash of it. We should hang our heads in shame. I passionately believe we can support the next generation who can correct the mistakes that we are making now. We have got to wake up... We shouldn't just tow the line because that is what we have been told we must do. We must challenge what we see.'

Mark's advocacy for play and the actions he took to prioritise this in his practice, signal both a resistant and a generative space (see discussion of critical agency pp.57-9). He grapples with, and to some extent withstands managerial demands whilst he also articulates his championing of play. Further discussion of the spaces and responses between compliance and resistance are explored in Chapter Eight.

Discussion within the focus group revealed participants further contesting dominant narratives:

Natalie: 'My thinking has always been in tension with policy developments as I find myself fighting against the dominant notion of 'what works' ¹⁶ because I am left thinking for who? and who is left out?'

Natalie demonstrates critical awareness in questioning the dominant ideology behind and the implications of this approach to policy making. She contrasts this with a personal philosophy and approach: *'the holistic well-being of children and families is core to my teaching'*. Natalie offers an example of her perception of dominant narratives of policy making:

'And I think education policy today is influenced by people who have been through a very specific kind of education. And they probably came from some aspect of privilege... They have got very fixed ideas about what education should be based on their own experiences. But also PISA... And they are also coloured by edu-businesses. So edu-business is playing a huge part on government policy. So there are all these vested interests at play in policy formulation but not necessarily the vested interest of the child, the voice of the child or the family's voice. '

¹⁶ 'What works' is an approach to evidence-based policy making described on the UK government websites as an 'initiative [which] aims to improve the way government and other organisations create, share and use (or 'generate, transmit and adopt') high quality evidence for decision-making. It supports more effective and efficient services across the public sector at national and local levels... What Works is based on the principle that good decision-making should be informed by the best available evidence. If evidence is not available, decision-makers should use high quality methods to find out what works'. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-works-network>

The form of contestation featured in Natalie's narrative was in her support for student practitioners to 'question and justify' the identity positions they chose to adopt. She describes this as her offering:

'loads of different options of windows and you look through them and decide from there. But knowing you can come back and go through another one and back in a different direction, because we live in a changing world and stuff is moving backwards and forwards all the time.'

Advisor Heather appears to be an advocate of pushing back on policy demands when appropriate, but perhaps due to her professional role within a local authority, which brings perceived limitations (see p.221) she offered an alternative take on what this might look like:

Heather: *'...maybe we need more quiet activism or under-the-radar activism so when that when inspectors come in or Ministerial visits people, we say 'Oh we're not doing what you say you want us to do!''*

This proposal for *'quiet activism'* is an important concept, suggesting that (at least for Heather) professional restrictions do not always limit resistance, but that resistance may occur in more covert ways in order to achieve intended aims particularly when professional restrictions are amplified by statutory measures regarding accountability. This is further explored in the borderland discourses of Chapter Eight.

Disruption/Micro-Resistances

A micro-resistance has been described as

incremental daily efforts to challenge white privilege as well as other kinds of privilege based on gender, sexuality, class, etc. They help targeted people cope with micro-aggressions. (Ohio State University 2020)

Whilst the concept of a micro-resistance is more commonly found in the literature as a response to micro-aggressions, I seek a more expansive definition and application of the concept. The data from this study leads me to consider that such micro-resistances are multiple and often undertaken in response to macro-level policy demands and meso-level policy implementation. Stratford (2002 p.223) perceives the concept as:

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.

Examples of such micro-resistances were found in many of the narratives of participants in the study. These often inconspicuous forms of resistance in quotidian contexts provide important examples of educators acting back, and in doing so exhibiting agentic behaviours. In Theresa's story, the headteacher's expectation of her ability grouping nursery children for phonics teaching (discussed on p.247) is an instance in which Theresa responds to a meso-level policy implementation with creative resistance or 'strategic subordination' (Souto-Manning et al 2008). Whilst Theresa's response might be described as covert and 'under the radar', other examples were more explicit challenges and resistances.

Mike (see the passionate outlier's tale) offers an example of micro-resistance describing an episode when his pedagogical decision-making on appropriate risk for children was challenged:

'... last year, kids were going up the slide and my room leader was like 'go down, go down' and I replied 'I said they could go up' and she said 'I thought they might get hurt' and I said 'I'm standing here'. And I let them continue up the slide. And I have run-ins with her about the risks of children getting hurt, I haven't won all of them...'

In this vignette, the room leader contests Mike's decision to let children climb up the slide, but he justifies his decision to enable this. Mike's words 'I let them continue up the slide' signal a micro-resistance to the expectations of his line manager. He goes on to describe how the threat and subsequent presence of a 'health and safety guy' was intended to inhibit the risk/benefits he offered children. This micro strategy of resistance is underscored with a further example in which Mike resists, although he concedes that this is not always effective:

'There's this climber next to a fence with posts that you can stand on and hold onto the fence. Of course I watch and check out the kids' skills, and there was a few kids after a week or two I said 'Oh they know what they are doing I wouldn't worry' and she came over to say something. And I said 'I've been watching them I'm not gonna let them fall. Trust me.' But she went off to the Health and Safety guy and got me shut down completely.'

Mike expresses how his pedagogical judgements (informed by a belief in valuing children's exposure to 'appropriate' risk) are threatened by managerial demands which themselves are arguably shaped by wider structural discourses of limiting risk. His

story also acts as a wider metaphor for resistance, such that 'going up the slide' becomes emblematic of defiance of rules; a disposition of resistance.

Lecturer Natalie reflects on the concept of micro-resistances:

'it's the little movements that probably practitioners do without realising. Perhaps differentiating for a child or taking a child outside, perhaps different ways of being a resistor, actions which don't involve grand gestures. Yes it might be that some of those acts are more private, just digging your heel in you know? I probably do that too'

However, such resistances were not always deemed possible or appropriate. Heather and Hazel, both local authority advisers, suggested micro-resistance was, in their cases, inhibited by professional obligations. Hazel talked about being '*constrained in this type of job*', having to '*put on a united front*' and said '*there are certain policies which we have to look at, messages we have to give out*'. This tension is further explored in Chapter Eight on borderland discourses. Heather also acknowledges that an independent consultant would have fewer institutional restrictions and thereby greater freedom of expression: '*it is a lot easier to be true to yourself.*' Conversely, she believes:

'When you are working in the role that I am, sometimes, just sometimes you say to yourself 'Has what I have said, stopped any of my colleagues or schools being part of questions, discussions or pilots.'

This comment implies that any form of micro-resistance to policy in these roles has wider consequences for self and others, and that the degree of autonomy and independence within different roles afford varying degrees of freedoms to enact micro resistances.

The reflective discussion at the end of the chapter further considers the debates about the implications and impact of such resistances.

Developing alternative discourses

The idea of creating alternative narratives links back to literature on critical agency and to Sumsion's notion of critical imagination (2006), of envisaging something other than that in its current form and of thinking differently in order to act differently (Giroux, 2000).

In articulating alternative discourses, participants both resisted and moved beyond resistance:

Amy: 'To me activism can mean signing petitions etc., but actually, mostly, I feel that I challenge people's accepted wisdoms and suggest alternatives.'

Mark : 'I don't claim to be right. I'm opinionated and passionate and we should debate. But it should not be about, if you play and value play you are devalued. So you have to have this subversive curriculum underneath.'

Amy's and Mark's comments signal two different approaches to offering alternative discourses. For Amy, challenging accepted norms by proposing other perspectives and possibilities to colleagues within and without the setting she worked in, is an important part of her philosophy and professional identity. Amy's contributions to the focus group featured examples of challenging received wisdoms during professional development sessions on parent partnership, and questioning work colleagues on the instrumentalism of using Development Matters for assessment tracking. Amy's personal and pedagogical convictions are inspired by her studying and she used this new learning to '*get people interested in thinking beyond what their first thought is.*'

Mark's ideas about alternative discourses are rooted in his convictions about the power of play for children (see the play champion's tale, pp.245-6). He believes that children's play in a school environment was under threat and his response was to develop a '*subversive curriculum*'. As a Foundation Unit Leader, Mark talks passionately about having '*play at the heart of it*' and '*I knew there was a different way to what I was being presented with.*' Mark approaches this by complying with external obligations on phonics and maths teaching but then '*getting back to play*'. His commitment to this alternative discourse also includes aspirations beyond the subversive curriculum for a wider reclamation of the concept of play in early childhood education:

'We need to reclaim the vocabulary of play. Call it play, that's what it is, let's celebrate it for what it truly is. I think this is part of the problem, as adults we don't value play, we see it but can't interpret it.'

I further explore the tensions Mark experienced in the chapter on borderland discourses.

In Sylvia's story (see the children's rights advocate's tale pp.201-2), as the title suggests, the rights of children are foregrounded. Sylvia's engagement with and active support for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, offers a powerful counter narrative to what she sees as power discourses of over formalisation of schooling at an increasingly young age and the devaluing of care by regulators. Sylvia

articulates the children's rights discourse recalling her work with children as a former childminder and student:

'This has to be about children's rights. One of the most important thing children should be told about is that they have rights. You have rights. When I did my course – I researched Reggio Emilia, and when we did the proper research where you have to interview children you had to explain to them why I was asking information, seek consent.

'Do I have rights?' Said one of them

'Oh yes', I said.'

Sylvia's narrative provides a powerful alternative and agentic discourse centring on children's rights. These are evidently important to Sylvia's sense of professional identity and she describes how visibility of acting as a champion for children motivates her:

'I can't just sit back. I think if you want to be an activist, you can't just speak, you have to act. Because I care about children. You have to do something meaningful. And also I think it is important for children to see that you are speaking up for them.'

Developing and articulating such alternative and 'compelling stories' (Moss, 2019, p.175) arguably demonstrates the critical awareness, professional confidence and self-efficacy explored earlier. Moreover, these examples of agency and statements of resistance, move beyond 'pushing back', and are, I contend, an expression of possibility that early childhood education can be thought of and enacted differently.

Walking Away as Self care

Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare. (Lorde, 2017, p.130)

Participants gave examples of when they removed themselves from environments and refused to engage with demands (whether they were macro, meso or micro in nature) with which they disagreed. In some instances, this refusal was framed as a form of self-preservation. This idea of walking away from an overly challenging situation as an act of self-care might also be seen in terms of resistance. The action itself indicates a refusal, an opposition, and an act of defiance.

Educators Amy, Mike, and Sophie all left employment in nurseries in which they felt their values were compromised by the nursery practices:

Amy: *'I think...what's interesting is I worked in another nursery for four months and I just couldn't bear it. The influence that the EYFS had on practice that was not mediated by Montessori or anything else that was separated from it, it was so clear how destructive it could be and how if its applied, how the government want it to be applied, absolutely, it became a tick list for children'* [my emphasis]

Mike: *'I saw this kid playing with the coloured rods, just playing with them and totally with a voice that said 'I'm gonna show him how to do Montessori' this adult said 'No you're doing that wrong, let me show you how to do it ' and I said 'I'm out of here '* [my emphasis]

In all these instances, participants considered that pedagogical practices in the settings were so at odds with their personal values, they decided to leave, withdrawing their labour.

Higher Education lecturer Natalie responded to a situation she described as *'not good for me psychologically,'* by leaving a role:

'It was getting so performative I thought 'I can't do it '. And I was working probably ten-hour days – it was not good psychologically for me and I thought I'm not on top form when I'm meeting people. And one of my colleagues sad to me, you are like a swan, you are calm on the outside, but I can see your feet pedalling away in the water. And I thought 'Yes I'm giving this impression that everything is fine but it's not'

I stopped leading a programme when it aligned more closely to teacher education as I felt I was no longer the best person to take this forward...One of the things I felt very strongly about was the change of programme, it moved away from what I felt it should be, there were some positives but the delivery and narrower focus, skills tests and Ofsted inspections made it harder for me to carry on leading. This was coupled with no recognition for educator's with regards to pay, terms and conditions. I had to practice an aspect of self care here so I moved away from the programme as I felt I could no longer lead it.'

Natalie's story demonstrates both ethical practice (in leaving the leadership of the programme she no longer felt she could lead) and the self-care involved in managing intellectual, physical and emotional reserves and ultimately walking away. Self-care as an act of resistance can be seen as both agentic behaviour and a radical act. In a climate which, it is argued, values control (see Mark's comment p.217) and performativity, such acts of resistance demonstrate a rejection of these demands and a disavowal of certain policy constructs of professional identities. Walking away can be read not only as negation, as non-compliance but a refusal to be complicit in broader cultural or systemic expectations.

Modes of Activism

Fran: *'So the activism just sort of happened – I didn't set out to do it. It happened because it needed to happen....'*

This section analyses narratives in terms of the modes of activism shared by participants. Responses to questions on activism in both focus group and interviews generated categories of: speaking truth to power, individual activism and collective activism.

Speaking Truth to Power

Sarah: *'For me, activism is simply saying as I see things.'*

Sarah's understanding of activism acknowledges both the simplicity and challenge involved in speaking truth to power. Sarah's narrative included examples of her *'saying things as [she] see[s] things'*, and at the same time she recognised the difficulties and possible implications of such a stance. Nonetheless, she recognised truth telling as a key element of her professional identity.

A recurring example of where participants considered they had spoken truth to power was over the proposed changes to adult: child ratios in 2012. In the policy text *More Great Childcare* (DfE 2013) it was proposed:

...to offer more places by allowing greater flexibility. That flexibility for nurseries should go hand in hand with higher quality, so providers will only be able to operate with more children per adult if they employ high quality staff. This will give providers extra income to pay staff more, and it will give more parents the choice of a great childcare place for their child. (p.8)

This translated as a proposal to change the staffing ratios (i.e. more children per adult) in nurseries:

Provider	Nurseries			
Age	Under 1	1	2	3+
England (current ratios)	1:3	1:3	1:4	1:8 or 1:13
England (proposed ratios where there are high quality staff)	1:4	1:4	1:6	1:8 or 1:13

Table 7.1 Proposal on changes to staffing ratios in More Great Childcare (Department for Education 2012)

Recalling this proposed policy development (which did not reach implementation following significant opposition from the sector and parents) participants describe their speaking truth to power as activism in opposing these policy proposals:

Briony : 'I got really angry and blogged, tweeted Liz Truss [then Early Years Minister] (got blocked by her on twitter!) and joined with another childminder activist who was interviewed on the radio. She started a petition online and I helped with the wording of the call to action. It was signed by thousands and the ratios were never changed.'

Sylvia: 'I can't just sit back. I think if you want to be an activist, you can't just speak, you have to act. Because I care about children. You have to do something meaningful.... I did meet Truss [Elizabeth Truss MP, then Minister for Early Years]– we were chatting on Twitter and she said 'come and meet me' so I went up to Portcullis House. This was about the time of the ratios – remember that?'

Sylvia's description of her need 'to act' conveys not only an agentic discourse but a broader disposition. Her critical awareness and professional confidence play out in her desire to and ability to speak truth to power. In her words '*because I care about children*'. Sylvia explained the rationale, the motivation behind her actions. She evidently saw this activism as a responsibility integral to her role and her professional identity. Sylvia shared examples of her political engagement and her significant campaigning and lobbying experience. Indeed, Sylvia articulates multiple and extensive examples of speaking truth to power including lobbying the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families over the funding of early education at a hustings event.

She also describes using social media as an important tool to contact politicians and campaign on early years issues.

Participants Sheila (a pre-school manager) and Alice (a retired adviser) also describe speaking truth to power in terms of their lobbying of local members of parliament and senior government representatives:

Sheila: 'I have spoken out to a local MP about cuts to our early years services due to the local government deciding to cut vital services to the children in our area.'

Alice: 'I am more experienced, but no less passionate. In fact, more impatient. I really am outraged. It is difficult to accept the unacceptable. But I have had a lot of experience of lobbying politicians over the years.'

Whilst Sheila's 'speaking truth to power' happened locally and Alice's extensive experience was at a national level, both educators exercised their rights and used their voices to hold elected officials to account. Notably, several participants engage in this form of 'speaking truth to power', and utilises formal and informal opportunities to raise local and national sector concerns with influencers and policy makers. This might reflect the fact that a number of participants are disposed towards the study's subject of activism rather than a reflection of wider engagement across the sector in political advocacy and activism. (See sampling strategy p.126 and study limitations p.286). Manifestations of activism were evident on both an individual and collaborative basis. In the following sections I analyse these accounts from the narratives.

Individual Activism

Acts of activism on an individual basis were numerous across the narratives. Karen, a local authority day nursery manager works in an area of high deprivation. Having been employed in a Sure Start local programme and voluntary run pre-schools, Karen demonstrates a deep understanding and commitment to her local community. Karen's story details a number of examples of individual activism as she tackles issues at a setting and a local level. As a nursery manager, Karen positions her responsibilities both to children and families and also to the wider professional community of early educators.

In terms of her work with children, Karen's advocacy on their behalf also manifests as activism as she described her approach to supporting the needs of children, several of

whom experienced disadvantage on multiple levels. When asked about the resources for her service, she describes her approach to lobbying:

Karen: 'But I'm quite good at convincing other people at the council that we are quite important... and quite often I provide examples...so we have looked after children, we have children who have been adopted so I tend to give the headlines of 'this is a life we have changed and how we have changed it' I'm sure you can find some more money!'

Karen offers many examples of going 'over and above' for local families, ('we give children new shoes, we have a chef on site, so we have hot meals twice a day') predominantly as acts of advocacy. Beyond the setting, Karen is involved in a community of early years graduates and she describes how policy changes have affected qualifications and a sense of status amongst this community. The removal of the Early Years Professional Status from the local learning landscape is a key issue for Karen. Whilst it appeared that these perspectives were shared among the community of practitioners, Karen exhibits drive and leadership in her activism on an individual basis:

'I was involved in a campaign to save the Early Years Professional Status...So that was back in 2013. It got very politically motivated, I contacted MPs, I got them out to look at settings, I talked to them about case studies and what would happen if we didn't have them... the whole idea of graduate leaders was put forward as a way to improve outcomes for children and I was very very angry that they were cancelling the programme in quite a deprived [area].'

Karen also articulated broader views on individual activism (or lack thereof as she saw it) in the sector. She explained her perception of a wider reluctance of others to engage in individual activism as a result of systemic disregard for the profession:

'Practitioners don't feel empowered and they don't feel empowered because the government doesn't value early years – a cycle where a lot of where people don't feel important and so not empowered to fight for children. Quite often people need to feel strongly about something to show up to talk, write to their MP or show up to a march... but because we are not valued professionally its as if our voices don't matter.'

Karen's insightful analysis identifies practitioners not feeling 'important' and that 'our voices don't matter'. In turn, she perceives these feelings of a sector not being valued as a key constraint to greater engagement in activism: the perception that the lack of empowerment results in early educators not fighting for children. This cyclical problem speaks to earlier policy analysis in which workforce policy (including occupational

standards and wider reform texts) effectively border the professional identities of educators thereby arguably disempowering individuals.

Whilst Karen's actions demonstrate the key elements of agency identified earlier (critical awareness, professional confidence and self-efficacy) in her activism, she perceives a situation in which such characteristics are not widely felt or manifested. Such perceptions are also articulated by Amy (Early Educator) who describes activism in the sector as *'not very visible'* and defines herself as *'the only activist in my setting.'* She says:

'A sense of helplessness has held me back in the past. There's not much activism around me... I think there is a general sense of not being able to make a difference, and practitioners being voiceless...'

However, despite Amy's feelings of voicelessness, she had engaged in acts of individual activism. As a practitioner-researcher, Amy communicates her learning and engaged parents and other professionals in campaigns. She deployed her critical awareness and professional confidence in challenging policy developments on baseline assessment:

'So when information about baseline came out, I asked our Manager and Director whether they minded if I wrote a little article for parents, because they would be taking their children from our setting into baseline assessment and they don't know about it. And may be they would just think, well this is what happens at school. But actually, its not inevitable, you don't have to put your child through it.'

Notably, Amy simultaneously articulates feelings of powerlessness and at the same time demonstrates personal power in her setting-based activism, as in the example above. Her words imply a conflicted subjectivity in which she sees herself as an activist-scholar: *'I would like to go on and do more research and really get in the government's face'*. At the same time, she also appears to be held back by feelings of isolation within her setting and a lack of activist solidarity. Amy's status is perhaps more accurately reflected as a borderland position (see Chapter Eight).

In contrast to the perceptions of Karen and Amy of a sector not engaged or empowered, other participants in the study demonstrate acts of individual activism. Examples include:

Mark (Foundation Unit Leader)	<i>'Locally I have questioned the LA Early Years and SCITT course to check that they aren't advocating Bold Beginnings in their training.'</i>
Natalie (Lecturer)	<i>'I have written letters to MPs and Ministers, wider dissemination to colleagues and advocating for students to engage in similar pursuits'</i>
Sheila (Pre School leader)	<i>'I have spoken out to a local MP about cuts to our early years services due to the local government deciding to cut vital services to the children in our area.... The outcome was that the MP met with these services and also took it to the early years minister at Westminster and this contributed to local government changing the service a little bit to help children in need not to fall through system and to get help they need.'</i>
Hilary (Local Authority Adviser)	<i>'I have signed petitions and things which I haven't done I the past, but I am probably not the type of person who would stand up and talk at a union rally.'</i>

These examples illustrate acts undertaken by individuals to challenge prevailing thinking. Whether the cause was funding cuts to services or curriculum content for teacher training, participants demonstrated their agency and willingness to engage in individual activism. As with the examples of Karen and Amy, these participants also demonstrate critical awareness, professional confidence, and degrees of self-efficacy in their actions. In addition to individual activism, examples of collective action were also identified in narratives.

Collaboration/Collective Action

This analysis includes categories of strength and solidarity, the power of social media and unionisation.

Strength and solidarity

Many narratives allude to the strength participants gained and the impact made from collaborative action. Feelings of solidarity and *'making a difference'* as a collective are powerfully expressed:

Hazel: 'I'm beginning to think actually we can make a difference, because you are one of a larger group that think in a particular way about what is right for children.'

Natalie: 'So I do think it is about solidarity and the collectives which is important... The networks I belong to again give me emotional and collective support to carry on campaigning. A lone voice is a start but there is great strength and solidarity with likeminded others.'

Kate: 'And I think one of my greatest strengths in connecting – actually we are stronger together.'

Mark: 'I think a collective response has more weight but also helps you at times when you might feel 'alone'...'

Across the range of professional roles (respectively local authority adviser, lecturer, retired headteacher and foundation unit leader) perceptions of the power of a larger group emerge. Sophie articulately expresses these feelings of connection and camaraderie:

Sophie: 'But I do think that once you realise you do have power and that there is power in numbers to get behind things, I think then we can start to engage with ideas of activism, start to formulate your own thoughts. And when it gets on Twitter it very quickly escalates and you get a much broader view of what is happening in early years. And a lot of that is anecdotal but that is powerful because you are then exposed to ideas that you may not have thought about before. You may not have realised what is going on elsewhere and solidarity wise it is good.'

Sophie talks about the collective 'power' of being exposed to ideas one might not have thought of individually. Additionally, she perceives this as a potential impetus for action as she recognises having power and there being '*power in numbers*'. This recalls Sophie's previously described feelings of exclusion as the sole early years teacher in a single form entry Primary school. Following an episode in which she was criticised and isolated for pedagogical decisions (see p.210) Sophie describes both the support and the sense of solidarity she gained from colleagues:

'I think going to the xxx conference gave me hope – that and social media made me realise there are lots of people out there who do now what they are talking about and are trying to make a difference....I think once you are sucked in to engaging in activism it is very hard to step away from it. Once you realise your responsibility...'

Perhaps the most explicit example of collective action which emerges from the narratives is that of Stella and her work campaigning with families against the closure of a children's centre. Stella describes how local authority budget cuts jeopardised the

future of a children's centre which she managed, but how she galvanised a community into activism on the issue:

'We took the local authority to judicial review and held protests and demonstrations and with hindsight that felt like the right thing to do...we organised a march through xxx which was quite well attended on a Saturday. We managed to get 10,000 signatures for a debate in the council chamber and that was great actually. This does take me back because not feeling powerful was really important for us and our families and communities and we felt we were doing something...'

This narrative, which highlights points of tension and resistance, also details narrative linkages between a life lived, and resources and constraints. Stella details both the constraints of budget cuts and *'not feeling powerful'* but also the resources/enablers of mutual support and collaborative action in *'doing something'*. Despite the lack of success of the campaign, Stella reflects on the power of bringing people together and building trust between families and a range of professionals in their campaigning. In another example, Stella defines working with Roma families and the range of projects the centre initiated to engage with the community and improve access to services. She explains this as *'working with inequity and asking 'what can we do as a group?'* Stella described how such collective action was natural territory for her, as she positioned herself as an activist:

'I guess I had already nailed my colours to the mast in a previous life so I've quite often been a spokesperson for a number of community events. I was seen as an activist so I suppose that makes you see yourself as an activist.'

Notably, Stella sees both the campaigning against the centre closure and the advocacy work on behalf of a community as activism. She perceived both examples in terms of resistance and lobbying *against* as well as advocacy *for* as different versions of collective activism.

Social Media

The power of social media as a tool for collective action emerged as formative and important to participants. As a forum for professional debate and a means to galvanise other early educators, platforms such as Facebook™ and Twitter™ (see Sophie's narrative above) were quoted as sites of collective action:

Fran: 'I am, a big connector with people, I think. I didn't really realise that before. I'm a person who will reach out to people quite a lot...'

'What gives me hope is things like social media. Its powerful. People are coming together now.'

Amy identifies a dearth of face-to face networking, a reduction in local authority training, and feelings of isolation being partially addressed by interaction with others via social media. She describes the support she gained from joining a Facebook™ group (which she had been signposted to via the study's secret data collection group). Like Hazel, she appreciates linking up with *'like-minded colleagues'*. Indeed, the secret online focus group of the study, beyond a method of data collection, was perceived by several participants as a means of moral support and a safe space to share views and seek solidarity. Participants conveyed how they had made new contacts and intended to continue online relationships with each other beyond the life of the research.

Whilst the potential of social media for collective action was acknowledged by some, Heather recognises that such social media engagement had drawbacks. During the course of the study (between her engagement in the focus group and interview), Heather's views of social media changed, and she reflects on the risks she saw inherent in engaging with others on these platforms. Heather had openly shared her opinions whilst engaging in the focus group, but later reflects:

'when you look at other social media there are people who weigh in without any understanding, jump on the bandwagon and things can get a little bit tricky... And it is really scary, so much so that I have removed myself from that. You just don't know who is looking. It can be antagonistic. I find myself thinking no, read it, step back, calm down. If you said this as a professional – what are the implications?'

Heather's concerns that she 'did not know who was is looking' underscore both the public nature of social media, but also suggests the implications of surveillance of social media engagement by others. Heather's cautious tone, coupled with her awareness of the particular political obligations of her role as a local authority adviser, (analysed earlier) indicate a reticence to engage in collective action via this medium because of the potential impact on her professional role.

Unionisation

Reflections on unionisation appeared in the narratives of participants. Both Stella (Lecturer) and Mike (Early Educator) had been involved in political organisations prior to their current roles in early education and both reported this shaped their belief in the

power of collaborative action. Mike describes his involvement as: *'I was involved in radical politics, I'm not afraid to question things if I think things need to change.'*

Stella's background as a union organiser clearly shaped her perspective in her early years work:

Stella: 'I think my previous experiences enabled it [galvanising others] – that time as a trade union organiser. I felt most comfortable when we were trying to build that collective action in terms of the belonging around that so that for me felt like more natural territory.'

Stella's description of 'belonging' and 'natural territory' offers a potent portrayal of her belief in the power of collective action.

Fran's narrative also focusses on the potential of union power. She had engaged with education unions at a local and national level including speaking to delegates at congress. She was actively engaged with senior union officials over early childhood policy issues including curriculum, assessment and regulation. She also recognised the that such action might not be popular with colleagues:

Fran: 'I'm trying to bring early years back into the unions, because we are a massive sector. I upset a few people, but hey!'

For others, the power of the unions was diminished, or they articulated a lack of awareness. Natalie (Lecturer) reflects on what she saw as a weakened union power in comparison with Australia:

Natalie: 'I am actually up for unionisation but only if the unions are meaningful. I'm a member of a union. If you look at Australia they have a strong union movement in early years – a national strike recently. Now we have been so beaten down over the last twenty or more years, since the three day week that unions are now a dirty word, union membership is really low, so we have no collective power. Many people speak just with their own voice.'

Natalie's perception of '*no collective power*' arguably speaks both to a reduction in bargaining power of the unions in recent years but also to earlier analyses about fragmentation within a complex and diverse early childhood sector. However, understanding and awareness of collective representation and action was not universal amongst participants. Amy (Early Educator) conveyed her lack of knowledge about entitlement to unionise. It appeared that discussion within the focus group opened up the opportunity of formalised collective action to her:

'I had no idea there were unions we could join. How is this possible?! I would definitely be interested in local movements for issues that might have a chance of being addressed...'

Notably, Amy's employment context, in the private sector, may have contributed to her lack of awareness of eligibility for union membership.¹⁷ Additionally, she suggests '*I cannot think of anyone in my setting who would be interested in joining me*' and that for most of her colleagues '*work stays at work*', alluding to a lack of appetite for union membership amongst her immediate co-workers.

Levels of engagement in activism predictably varied between narratives and appeared to be shaped by both personal predisposition to engage and the demands and responsibilities of professional roles. As highlighted above (p.231) many participants believed in the power of collective action to affect change. As an example, Heather (local authority adviser) articulates this in focus group discussions:

Heather: 'I have started petitions. Signed petitions. Joined groups. Muscled way into the round table events. Demonstrated. Spoken to MPs. Rallied support. But I do believe the most effective is a collective response.'

Discussion

This discussion draws on the analysis of agentic discourses from the empirical data sets and previous research to offer insights into the research questions highlighted at the beginning of the chapter.

Attitudes and capacities of critical awareness, professional confidence, self and collective efficacy were analysed in the data. I discuss each of these in turn.

It is partly a matter of introducing a critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present day experience as if they are timeless, natural, unquestionable...It is a matter of introducing a kind of awkwardness into the fabric of one's experience, of interrupting the fluency of narratives that encode that experience and make them stutter. (Rose, 1999, p.20)

Data from online focus group and interviews highlighted the critical awareness of participants in their responses to how they were positioned in ECE policies. Critical

¹⁷ In 2017, union membership was 51.8% in the public sector and 13.5% in the private sector according to the Office for National Statistics (February 2019)
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/labourmarketeconomiccommentary/february2019>

awareness manifested as the capacity to recognise and interpret a prevailing ethos, such as increasing accountability expectations on educators through assessment (see Amy's story). Such awareness appeared to be a pre-requisite to challenging dominant discourses about their professional identities and imagining policy alternatives. Alertness and perceptions of wider policy discourses can be seen in Amy's discussion on the 'neoliberal agenda', in Natalie's critique of the 'what works' agenda and in Stella's concern about the dominance of school readiness in policy.

Through analysing these narratives, I develop Sumsion's critical literacy model (see p.41) and suggest that critical awareness precedes critical imagination. That is to say, from this study I discern a criticality which is a precursor to envisioning policy alternatives. An example of this can be seen on pp. 207-8 in which I analyse Amy's critique of the current English early childhood curriculum before she imagines an alternative.

Additionally, critical awareness is perceived as a value which arguably enabled resistance and activism. Amy's awareness of the wider policy landscape around what she perceives as an ideologically informed curriculum and assessment practices, informs her criticality and her decision '*to resist that on a daily basis*'. This discourse of critical awareness echoes work in New Zealand (Warren 2014a) who proposes that early childhood teachers 'need to be critically aware of how networks of power relations operate throughout the professional system' (p.134)

Such data recalls Freire's (1973) critical consciousness or *conscientization*: 'developing consciousness, but consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality' (p.52). Akin to this idea of critical awareness, or critical consciousness and a concept that resonates, is Maxine Greene's idea of living with 'wide awakesness'- 'awareness of what it is to be in the world' (Greene, 1995, p.35). Originally conceived by the Australian phenomenologist, Alfred Schutz (1967; as cited in Greene, 1977) Greene (2005) articulates:

The... educator must be awake, critical, open to the world. It is an honour and a responsibility to be a teacher in such dark times—and to imagine, and to act on what we imagine, what we believe ought to at last be... Consciousness doesn't come automatically; it comes through being alive, awake, curious, and often furious. (p.80)

I find that data from this study demonstrate such a notion of wide awakesness amongst participants: a deep engagement and a critical perspective on policy constructions of professional identities. Albeit articulated in different ways, the idea of 'living wide

awake' by participants, is illustrated by critical reflection, openness to dialogue, and in multiple cases, a commitment to social justice in their practice.

Participants also articulated a further agentic discourse as they expressed degrees of professional confidence in the construction of their professional identities.

Theresa: 'There were lots of times when I clashed with the headteacher because my principles were not in alignment with hers.'

Sophie: '...I knew I was doing the right thing but it can be very lonely in a one form entry school.'

Theresa's and Sophie's narratives are examples of when personal principles or 'doing the right thing' were motivators for professional confidence amongst participants. Often borne of tensions at a practice level and expressed in the face of pedagogical challenge (i.e. macro- or meso-level expectations about practice) these educators nonetheless asserted professional confidence. Notably this confidence was tempered by frustrations of the 'clash' with leaders (Theresa) or feelings of loneliness (Sophie). This confidence reflects findings from a study by Kilderry (2015) in an Australian context which identifies agentic behaviours of confidence coupled with feelings of anxiety and disregard by participants. However, as with Kilderry's study, such professional confidence is arguably developed through educator self-belief and self-assurance as they engaged in resistance strategies.

On occasion, the articulation of this confidence might be more accurately described as bravery or courage and was articulated as a wider aspiration:

Mark: 'We shouldn't just tow the line because that is what we have been told we must do. We must challenge what we see.'

However, Mark also concluded that such an attitude was not widespread, and he believed that '*bravery seems to be out of fashion ...*' and Stella pondered '*whether we are bringing through the next generation to be vocal.*'

Local authority nursery manager Karen considered that '*If people feel their sense of professional worth and secure in their knowledge, they are more willing to challenge things*', suggesting self-efficacy was an important element of a sense of agency.

In terms of understanding the conditions/values which enable and/or constrain activism and the extent to which educators perpetuate or challenge prevailing thinking, the notions of self- and collective efficacy appeared key. The interrelationships between self- and collective efficacy are apparent in the narratives of participants with each idea

self-reinforcing the other. Several participants identified self-efficacy as a precursor to collective efficacy - in terms of the shared belief in capability of a group and the potential to unite with others - motivating their actions:

Stella: 'I felt most comfortable when we were trying to build that collective action.'

Fran: 'the chances I have to get out makes me realise this is a national picture...I was just trying to rally people and say 'we haven't got to sit and take this'.

Karen: '...but then I wanted to do something a little bit bigger, I wanted to have bit more systemic influence.'

Such a finding resonates with an earlier study of early childhood educators in New Zealand (Warren 2014b) which concludes that 'critical professionalism and a critical ecology depend on teachers' self-efficacy to assert social justice values and beliefs beyond their immediate professional settings.'(p.134)

Modes of resistance took the form of ethical practice as resistance, contesting dominant narratives, micro resistances, developing alternative discourses, and walking away as self-care. Fran explicitly referred to her practice as 'ethical' and 'principled' in the face of policy demands which she felt were at odds with this. Similarly, Sophie and Amy made decisions based on their beliefs and values, decision which they felt were at odds with dominant discourses and policy constructions what it meant to be early educator. Their resistance to over-formalisation of Reception Year (Sophie) and essentialising tracking assessments (Amy) took the form of decisions to act against these. The narratives demonstrate the power of 'no', as a 'resistance-based professionalism' (Fenech et al, 2010, p.89) when participants challenged demands on their practice with ethical responses. As Fenech et al (2010) comment:

...resistance is grounded in ethical practice that is driven by an intentional commitment to continually deconstruct taken-for-granted truths and reconstruct practices (p. 92).

Such resistance based in ethical practice operating beyond borders, reflects analysis by Leafgren (2018) whose 'disobedient' professionals engaging in 'radical non-compliance' are framed as nomads: "Nomadism' is a way of life that exists outside of the organizational state. The nomadic way of life is characterized by movement across space, which exists in sharp contrast to the rigid and static boundaries of the state.' (p.190)

Participants' narratives also offered examples of contesting dominant narratives and developing alternative discourses around practice and professional identities. Notions of contesting structural discourses proliferated in the narratives. Challenges to issues of pedagogy, funding, staffing ratios, inspection, assessment as well as to other core issues pertaining to professional identities were analysed. Mark offered a perspective on the struggle, suggesting challenge to systemic oppression:

'But perhaps you need that kind of system to create creative people. To resist. Its like punk -it couldn't have existed without glam rock and what went before. Punk needed to react to something. You need the struggle.'

Mark's perspective points to Bhabha (2000) who explores the condition and emergence of agency in the liminal space of cultural discourse, describing the 'opening up, contesting, opposing, innovative 'other' grounds of subject and object formation...to assert that there is positive agential value in the whole process...' (p. 370). For further discussion of borderland spaces see Chapter Eight.

The idea of developing alternative stories, moving beyond contestation, was also discernible in the data. This took different forms and ranged from Amy seeking to persuade others publicly of alternative ways of being an early educator to Mark's 'subversive curriculum'. Whether visible or 'under the radar', the tactics deployed to articulate or enact alternative stories demonstrate moves beyond negating power discourses to envisaging other ways of being and doing. These examples return us to the notion of critical agency:

In this regard, the negation of reality is not a refusal, a pure act of resistance, but a search for an alternative way to know and to act. (Rebughini, 2018, p. 7)

Moss (2019) characterises the 'resistance movement' as those who choose to adopt alternative paradigmatic positions to challenge the dominant neoliberal discourses which, he argues, proliferate. This recalls earlier work by Jipson (2001) who proposes that resistance manifests when critically informed educators transform and reshape their world through their actions and disrupt singular notions of the educator's identity. The narratives allude to multiples forms and modes of resistance recalling Foucault (1990 p.96) 'there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case.'

From the narratives, I also note examples of micro-resistances (see the passionate outlier's tale pp.203-4 and the policy subverter's tale pp.246-8.). I explored these as push back actions on local impositions of power (whether originated at national, or local levels) or, as lecturer Natalie described them, 'little movements'.

There is a limited body of literature on social action in education which refers to such micro resistances and they are variously described as ‘countless tiny fissures’ (Hales 2015), ‘everyday counter-insurgencies’ (Bloch and Bailey 2016) and ‘implicit activism’ (Horton and Kraftl 2009). Despite these useful conceptualisations, there has been little attention paid to these micro-resistances particularly in a UK ECE context. This underexplored area offers opportunity for further research. I contend that these micro-resistances, these small but concerted challenges to the status quo which are often hidden or unarticulated, form powerful elements of the agency and activism of early childhood educators.

A number of participants had left professional roles citing self-preservation as the rationale for their decision. Educators Amy, Mike, and Sophie all left employment in nurseries in which they felt their values were compromised by the nursery practices. This idea of walking away as self-care also speaks to literature on care of the self, resistance, and subjectivity (Ball and Olmedo 2013). In their study the authors identified, through email exchanges with educators, how the principles and values of educators were tested by neoliberal demands (including intensified performativity and accountability). Responses were agentic but suggested teachers were troubled by neoliberal demands, opening spaces for doubt, critique, and struggles. A commonality between the Ball and Olmedo (2013) study and mine was that the various acts of self-care by participants (both writing about or acting on this) were founded on what they did not want to be or become. Where the data in my study differs is that there were numerous examples of participants explicitly rejecting macro policy level and meso implementation level constructions of who they should be and what they should do. For some, the act of walking away was an act of self-care. I read these as a radical, agentic acts.

In responding to the question ‘what kinds of individual and collective policy activism exists?’ the modes of activism which emerged from the data were: speaking truth to power, individual (usually operating in isolation) and collective activism in multiple ways. Analysis of data revealed incidents where participants spoke out against received wisdoms or essentialising practices. Examples included Sylvia and Briony lobbying local and national politicians and taking to social media against proposed changes to staffing ratios. Sarah, in a reflection of professional confidence (discussed earlier) stated: ‘*For me, activism is simply saying as I see things.*’ Such a sentiment and action is read as truth telling (or *parrhesia* to draw on Foucault) and resonated with Rebughini (2018) who suggests that this is a form of critical agency which ‘stems from a refusal to adapt oneself’ (p.7).

There are multiple examples of individual activism within the data including:

- Karen (local authority day nursery manager) lobbying local politicians for funds for children with SEND and against the abolition of the EYP programme.
- Sheila (pre-school leader) met with her MP to campaign against cut to local early years services.
- Amy (Early Educator) writing to parents about proposals to introduce baseline assessment in Reception Year.

These, and other examples in the data of individual activism, demonstrate previously identified characteristics of critical awareness, professional confidence and degrees of self-efficacy amongst participants. Whilst there were feelings of voicelessness and helplessness, participants nonetheless undertook activist activity. These data present a very different perspective to the Hall and McGinty (2015) study (albeit of secondary schools) in which participants articulated a sense of autonomy, but at the same time national policy interventions pervaded teachers' work and identity indicating the discursive power of compliance and control. Rather, in my study, the critical awareness, professional confidence and self-efficacy of participants informed their activism. Such a conclusion resonates with findings from Anderson and Cohen (2015) whose framework for resistance proposes educators deploy critical vigilance, counter discourses and counter conduct.

There were numerous references to collective activism in the data but fewer tangible examples of where participants had engaged in this. Data revealed awareness and support for 'connecting', 'solidarity', 'collective responses', 'networks of support' and 'being stronger together'. Whilst Sylvia had engaged in street protests and Stella had galvanised a community into petitions and demonstrations, there were few other examples of activism as a collective endeavour. Rather, narratives revealed a connectedness, but not necessarily visible collective action. Thus, a more appropriate description may be 'relational activism', proposed by O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy (2010) who write:

relational [activism] conceives of the individual as a member of a community; relational [activism] uses daily practices to change norms, and relational [activism] uses the private sphere for public purposes. (p566)

Previous (Australian) studies have found that divisions (McFarlane and Lewis 2012) or fragmentation in the ECE sector (Press 2007; Woodrow 2008) can result in collective impotence (Sumsion 2006). This speaks to discourses of marketisation and competition as highlighted in Chapter Six. Notably, although I analyse in the narratives of this study, discourses of commodification and competition, such concepts were not explicitly alluded to by participants as barriers to collective activism.

Discussions about unionisation in the data were few. Whilst Stella, Fran and Natalie had been or continued to be active members of unions, they were the exception. Whilst the power of collectivising was acknowledged in several narratives, unions did not appear prominently in relation to this. It is possible that a highly divided and marketized sector plays a role in this low level of union membership and engagement, but this was not interrogated during data collection. Further research to understand marketisation of the sector as a possible constraint on collectivism in a UK context would be valuable.

Conversely, use of social media as a platform for collectivising was articulated more frequently in the data. Many of the narratives alluded to the power and potential of social media both to contact policy makers publicly and to collectivise. The medium was considered a forum for professional debate and a means to galvanise other early educators. Indeed, to return to Bhabha's Third Space, I theorise social media as a third space of collective activism. Jenkins (2018) blogs describing Bhabha's thinking on such a third space as 'a space where the oppressed plot their liberation: the whispering corners of the tavern or the bazaar'. Thus, it is possible to consider social media as virtual tavern in providing a space for educators to 'whisper'.

Summary

This analysis of attitudes and capacities, modes of resistance and modes of activism has highlighted numerous examples of agentic discourses articulated by participants. Through considering points of tension, points of resistance and narrative linkages between life lived and resources/constraints, I have attempted to illuminate the lived experiences of participants and their attitudes and actions in response to recent policy positionings of early educators.

However, the data also revealed discourses within the narratives which were situated between structural and agentic discourses, often illustrating the tension between these

as experienced by participants. The next chapter explores these as borderland discourses.

Chapter 8 Borderland Discourses – A space in between

Chapter Eight Borderland Discourses

The play
champion's
tale

The policy
subverter's
tale

The disrupter's
tale

Focus Group and
Interview data
synthesised

We are not without agency as positioned subjects, but neither do we have free reign over which positions we occupy, as those positions are always dependent upon available and circulated historical and cultural discourses.
(Hardin, 2001, p.16)

Interview and focus group data coded according to the guiding questions in the analytical framework (Laliberte-Rudman and Aldrich 2017) reveal a number of responses from participants which might be described as discourses 'in between' structure and agency: borderland discourses. These narratives contain expressions of multiple subject positions, both subject positions constructed through policy and those experienced and claimed by participants.

As with the analysis and discussion of structural and agentic discourses in the data, I refer back to the literature analysed in Chapter Two to highlight synergy, tensions and contradiction with previous research. This section, as with previous agency and structure chapters, also concludes with a more in-depth discussion of this data analysis in relation to existing literature, theory and recent policy.

The borderland themes analysed, using the Laliberte-Rudman and Aldrich framework were: feeling conflicted, finding compromise, negotiating/qualifying/mediating and subverting/disrupting.

Firstly, I offer participants' narratives which depict the tensions of living and working with borderland discourses. Previous data from which narratives are drawn have demonstrated events and practices in which agentic and/or structural discourses have been more prominent. Whilst all stories depict varying degrees of third space 'struggles', these four narratives most acutely illustrate the tensions, compromises, negotiations and non-compliance which are the lived experiences of early educators. They serve to exemplify educators' complex, nuanced and often subversive responses to discursive policy manoeuvres.

Illustrative Narratives

The play champion's tale

Mark is 46 and a Foundation Unit Leader in a Primary School in the South of England.

During previous work in a scrap store, Mark delivered workshops and development projects in schools in the area. A colleague asked Mark if we would like to attend a conference on the 'Hundred Languages of Children' in Reggio Emilia, Italy. He visited the city and describes the conference and exhibition as a turning point:

'I was gobsmacked... My daughter at the time was three or four and it was everything I saw in her. It was her play and not my adult concept of play.... Of course, it was different to my own education, culturally specific but it really intrigued me.'

Returning to the UK, Mark decided to retrain as a primary teacher. His first post in school was as a Year 4 teacher but he felt that *'something wasn't right'*.

'It was too much of me telling them what to do – to fill them with knowledge. I felt uncomfortable and confined. So, I started doing Maths outside, physical maths and SLT [Senior Leadership Team] at the time started raising their eyebrows. And my mentor said, 'the children come first, have the belief if you know what they need'.

Following a period of disillusionment, Mark was offered a role in the EYFS to *'manage a difficult cohort'* and immediately felt more at home. His ethos was to follow the children and their interests, and he became aware of increased levels of engagement of the whole class of children. Whilst acknowledging the positives of this approach Mark was mindful of *'the adult world, and by that, I mean the Bold Beginnings brigade, they will want an outcome that they can define and say 'this has been learned'*.

Mark describes this tension *'As a leader on SLT one can get all the data pressure, but in my team I'm fortunate to have colleagues who say 'don't forget this, we know it works'*.

He articulates the tension he experiences between the curricular demands and his personal ethos as a play champion: *'I have to, by law, teach phonics – I have to teach synthetic phonics every day. You can make it playful but it's not play. Similarly,*

I have to do a maths input based on a maths scheme –I have to do it, because it is the expectation in a school. They have to be trained in a certain way. But it's so divorced from play... So you are stuck in this arbitrary world but I would rather achieve that adult imposed data through play rather than giving them a massive chunk of not-play'.

Mark's experiences of the tension between accountability and his passionate commitment to children's play – *'I burn with a sense of 'children need to play''*- are further articulated in his fears about baseline assessment and the implications of the Ofsted *Bold Beginnings* report. He sees these as examples of further downward pressure of the primary curriculum on children in their early years. Mark describes resistance to the current policy regime as *'a battle'*. He sees a system of control in operation where the fear of falling behind has brought us to a place where we have hand-writing books for five year olds.

'But perhaps you need that kind of system to create creative people. To resist. Its like punk -it couldn't have existed without glam rock and what went before. Punk needed to react to something. You need the struggle.'

He believes he is both subversive and evangelical and talks about both resisting and *'opening people's eyes'* to another way of doing things. Mark believes teachers should not just toe the line but begin to challenge what they see:

'We need to reclaim the vocabulary of play. Call it play, that's what it is, let's celebrate it for what it truly is. I think this is part of the problem, as adults we don't value play, we see it but can't interpret it. I firmly believe that if you don't believe in the magic of children, get out. I feel that passionately.'

The policy subverter's tale

Theresa is a 37-year-old Nursery teacher based in London.

She currently teaches a nursery class in a primary school. Having qualified in 2003 Theresa's NQT role was as a nursery teacher. She credits the nursery nurse who worked with her that year *for 'a lot of what I did and what I know now.'* She supported Theresa in her early resistance when the EYFS lead said *'OK your older children need to be doing phonics', so they'll miss PE on a Friday and come to me for phonics'*. The nursery nurse encouraged Theresa saying, *'well no, obviously young children need to be developing their physical skills before they are learning about letter sounds.'*

During her early years of teaching Theresa describes several times when she clashed with the headteacher because the head's principles were not in alignment with hers and were out of sync with what was going on in the rest of the school.

Following some time out after the birth of her daughter, Theresa has recently returned to teaching in a nursery class and currently funds the school culture challenging:

'So, this year, for example, my nursery children...three year olds...were supposed to be ability grouped for phonics, writing and maths. Now, there are a few pieces of paper up somewhere in my classroom which have got some names on arbitrarily, so that's up, it's up. I pay no heed to it. It's a tricky balance. So, I could go to management and say 'look this is not in keeping with what I believe, this is not in keeping with apparent good practice' but they think they are a child-centred creative school. They already believe that. So, I'm not sure what use it would be me going to them and arguing that, when they think they are already doing the right thing. They don't see that there is scope for them to improve in that way...'

'So, what I decided to do was just go against what I had been told to do in terms of ability grouping so they just come and do whatever they want whenever they want to. So, no writing books. Its really free and there are no groups. We do mark making in an age appropriate way, drawing in the sand, painting, making pictures and yes sometimes writing on paper with pencils if they choose to.'

Theresa also remains sceptical and critical of current summative assessment regimes in early childhood, particularly the Early Learning Goals:

I wouldn't have end of Reception goals. They just immediately label children as failing if they are not reaching those at the age of four or five. I think they need to go. I don't see what is wrong with saying 'This child is working at... I think there are different ways to do it. Such as this child is here, this is where they are. The horrible 1,2, 3 system – this child is emerging, expected, exceeding...so I would get rid of that...

Broadly, Theresa identifies herself as a resistor rather than activist: *to me 'resistance' is about going against something...in this instance, against something you are being told to do.* She believes that operating 'a little bit underground' can be a more productive approach, maintaining the status quo. She feels as if she has done 'the fighting thing' and now prefers to be more subversive.

'So that is my understanding of resistance and what I have had to come to terms with this year, so it can be just you standing up for what you believe in without making it known, because if I made it known I would be drawing attention to it and there be lots more involvement, so sometimes doing it a little bit underground, appearing to maintain the status quo is an easier way to go about it.'

The disruptor's tale

Amy is 42 and works as a nursery practitioner in a day nursery in the East of England.

She has worked in the sector for twelve years, is Montessori qualified and has recently completed an MA in Early Childhood Education. She is planning to study for a doctorate shortly.

Amy's first role was as a musician. She realised that that didn't really work with having a family which she started at *'quite a young age'*. She took time out and had three children and chose for her second child to attend a Montessori nursery. On visiting she says she thought *'Oh this looks really interesting'* and started doing the Montessori training and volunteered at the nursery. Following the opening of an associated Montessori Primary school, she completed her Primary Montessori training took on the role of deputy and covered every year from Reception through to year 6. Family circumstances have meant Amy has had to reduce her working hours – she continues to work one day per week in the nursery.

Prior to her Montessori role, Amy worked in another nursery

'...for four months and I just couldn't bear it. The influence that the EYFS had on practice that was not mediated by Montessori or anything else that was separated from it, it was so clear how destructive it could be and how if its applied, how the government want it to be applied, absolutely, it became a tick list for children – you know, the child has achieved this, what is the next target that we need to get them to and that informed the planning and the activities that were out. For me, there wasn't a beautiful continuous provision that was geared around what the children needed at the time. It was 'where are they and what are we going to push them into next?'

Amy believes studying for an MA opened her eyes to different discourses and understandings of the child and what *'as a group of professionals we are doing and what we accept'*. She believes that working in early education is not necessarily a vocation for everyone, but believes it is for her. That said, Amy acknowledges issues with the status of nursery work:

'...I earn the minimum wage....and there's a way that people talk to you when you say you work in a nursery 'oh you just play with babies', 'it's not that important, you are preparing them for school,' ...and I also think the typical nursery uniform, you know, the polo shirt, and everybody's in the same colour, and it's a bit childlike, so I think, visually, we don't look very professional. So, the uniform we are given has an influence, I think. And I can

see people in the city wearing the same colour polo shirt as mine, but they work in a shop. All low pay, there's a status thing there definitely.'

In terms of qualifications and professional roles, Amy highlights the instrumental nature of the current system:

'I think the emphasis on qualifications over experience needs changing. Its ridiculous isn't it that I could get on an MA based on my experience and it was a huge learning curve. But they still say I can't be a room supervisor because I don't have a level 3, but an eighteen-year-old can come out with a Level 3 with no ability to reflect on their practice whatsoever.'

She has concerns about what she describes as 'box-ticking' and the limitations of current formative and summative assessments:

'I think I have resisted from the second I went into it. Actively resisted it in terms of the two-year-old check. So every parent I met I would say 'we have to do this and we are supposed to use this criteria, so I have written a report which reflects where they are in the prime areas, but actually I want you to understand that this is not your child and that this is a very narrow way of assessing who your child is and can and cannot do and where they are in their life journey. And for everything I write you will undoubtedly say 'but my child can do this at home' or the do it differently.' Because otherwise parents might go along with the labelling. So, in a way I am a disruptor. I was disrupting certain views by parents of their children – the views that education tell them about their children. I want them to have confidence that they know their children because there is all this guff about parents being children's first educators but that is absolutely undermined at every level of education.'

Interviewer: 'So, a degree of compliance because the two year check is statutory...'

Amy: 'But subverting it with what I say alongside it. Its really difficult and I said to my manager 'can you say no we are not going to do this?' And I've looked into this and you don't have to use the development matters criteria – we could use Montessori criteria or something else... So, I resist that on a daily basis.'

Amy believes that activism within the sector is not very visible. Additionally, she believes the sector is fragmented and atomised with settings often now working in isolation and communication limited to is *'the structural, the pragmatic like the transition forms...'*

The following analysis and discussion draws on data from the wider data set (including the narratives above) taken from both the online focus group and life story interviews.

Feeling Conflicted

A sense of feeling conflicted, at odds with policy expectations, featured prominently in the data. Heather and Hazel (both local authority advisers) describe their roles and professional identities in terms which suggest degrees of tension were experienced:

Hazel: [previously as a teacher] ‘...although I had a professional identity, I suppose I went a little bit more with what people asked me to do or what documents said I should be doing. Whereas now I think I have a stronger belief in what I think is right for children and I think that drives more of what I am doing...But I am also aware that, being in the local authority, there are certain policies which we have to look at, messages we have to give out ...And usually I can get the two to sort of marry up ...in the current climate, politically, we have to be very careful and question what we are given rather than blindly following because it’s the ‘in thing’.

Hazel’s description of a perceived evolution of her professional identity alludes to the complexity of the struggle. She asserts her belief in *‘what is right for children’* but also acknowledges *‘there are certain policies we have to look at, messages we have to give out’*. This exemplifies deeply held beliefs about appropriate provision and practice in early education but also expectations linked to her professional role, that of disseminating policy directives, or as Ball (2003) describes it ‘a form of ventriloquism’. The idea that Hazel *‘can usually get the two to marry up’* is indicative of the contradictions she appears to experience between institutional discourses and personal views and beliefs. Whilst seemingly complying with obligations of the role to implement government policy, Hazel also asserts that *‘in the current climate, politically, we have to be very careful and question what we are given rather than blindly following...’*

This is a complex narrative in which Hazel’s borderland role ‘in between’ government policy and grassroots practice obliges her to act as a ‘policy filter’ (see also below on mediating policy); a role in which she finds that she both questions *‘what we are given’* but manages to reconcile this with what she believes is right for children. This might be read as an example of ‘living contradiction’ and ‘the experience of holding educational values and the experience of their negation’ (Whitehead, 1989, p.44). However, I suggest Hazel’s efforts to *‘get the two to marry up’* highlight not only signal the conflict but also agentic strategies in which she questions the social, economic and political influences on policy development, whilst developing local responses which are rooted in the best interests of children.

Heather also articulates a struggle over subject positions:

Heather: 'So, I see my professional identity as someone who is there to support and disseminate and help other people understand the importance of early childhood education and how best to do that...you've got to be really sound in your knowledge and passion. But you've also got to be measured. You've got to know when to go and when to step back – in other words, professionalism can sometimes slide... So for me it is about finding that balance, because you have a passion but that passion can also be your downfall.'

'...Well as I said, probably to my detriment there are times I do resist... but I think over the last year or, so I must have had to think a little bit about that in terms of my role'

Heather's narrative conveys caution as she acknowledges the need to be 'measured' and that 'passion can be your downfall'. She appears to have reflected on her role in disseminating policy and supporting early years practitioners and articulated a carefulness of approach. In the words 'They talk about autonomy but then they never really give it', she vividly and succinctly highlights the discursive rhetoric around autonomy and the reality of no such autonomy. In doing so Heather indicates her agency is curtailed by structural powers (seen in the pronoun 'they') rather than asserting an agentic position herself.

Heather's narrative demonstrates similar complexity to Hazel's, finding that their role of local authority advisors means facing multiple stakeholders and reconciling policy and practice challenges. Heather offers an example of how she responded to this conflict in accord with her own beliefs:

Heather: 'I started working on a professional development course for teachers on Bold Beginnings¹⁸...I had conversations with teachers who said 'my head wants to see my children sitting at tables' so I delivered training on early physical development and why that particular thing shouldn't be happening and the importance of movement. On the back of that I had about 20% of the heads saying, 'I really need my year 4,5,6 teachers to hear this'. So I thought let's do some CPD on Prime Areas because headteachers are all about the GLD.[Good Level of Development¹⁹] And in order to get that it's all about maths and literacy. So, we decided to focus on physical development because of Bold

¹⁸ *Bold Beginnings: The Reception curriculum in a sample of good and outstanding primary schools was a report published by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in 2017. The report included the recommendation that all Primary schools should 'ensure that when children are learning to write, resources are suitable for their stage of development and that they are taught correct pencil grip and how to sit correctly at a table' (p.7)*

¹⁹ The Good Level of Development (GLD) is a summative measure of children at the end of their Reception Year in school, defined by the Department for Education as 'Children achieving a good level of development are those achieving at least the expected level within the following areas of learning: communication and language; physical development; personal, social and emotional development; literacy and mathematics.'
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/748814/EYFSP_2018_Main_Text.pdf

Beginnings... So, I suppose that is a form of activism although I had never thought of it in that way...'

In this anecdote, Heather unsettles the dominant discourse of *Bold Beginnings* (and in particular the recommendations on approved children's postures for writing at tables). Developed from her knowledge and understanding of child development, Heather sought to counter the dominant narrative around early writing by offering training for teachers on children's physical development. In so doing, she can be seen to have exploited her role and worked in an interstitial space which she identified to resist the institutional discourses in *Bold Beginnings*. She offers an alternative discourse rooted in what she considers to be more appropriate practice. Thus, Heather countered the policy without direct critique of it.

Considering the complexity of Heather's narrative, I reflect on how, whilst she articulates the conflict which she believes is inherent in the role and its impact on her professional identity, her actions demonstrate agentic positioning and responses to this conflict. Gee (1996) describes such individuals as: 'bi-discoursal people (people who are mastering two contesting or conflicting discourses are the ultimate source of change' (p.136). Heather's story is a powerful example of choices which are shaped by structural demands which can delimit possibilities, but that spaces can be sought, found and actively negotiated agentially.

Finding Compromise

Linked to these responses of feeling conflicted are examples where educators sought compromise. When looking for 'points of tension' using the analytical framework, a number of participants illustrated degrees of negotiation and concession in their practice.

Mark (see the play champion's tale) a Foundation Unit Leader, shares his frustration and also his ingenuity in finding a compromise between regulatory expectation, school culture and his advocacy of play. In an example of 'bounded agency' (Simpson 2010), Mark offers a vivid illustration of his attempts to meet his statutory obligations as a Unit Leader with a heartfelt passion for affording children free play. He concedes that current policy expects significant teacher-led formal instruction, but he prioritises children's free choices and play in the school day. However, he describes the struggle to achieve this as '*incredibly hard*' and faced the pressures '*pretty much each week in my own setting*'. Mark summarised the impact of the decision as:

Mark: '... I would rather be judged and have them play than me try to control every moment of their time here.'

'...I have to, by law, teach phonics – I have to teach synthetic phonics every day. Similarly, I have to do a maths input based on a maths scheme – I have to do it, because it is the expectation in a school. They have to be trained in a certain way. But it's so divorced from play...Someone in government, arbitrarily said 'we believe that all children by the age of five should be able to write a simple sentence', but it could have been age six ...A real play purist would disagree with what I do because they would believe that children should play freely and by going in as an adult you are changing the play. But I have got an adult world saying, 'they have to write a sentence'. So, I have a choice, I can use their play as a tool, or do I stop their play? And bring them to a table to do something controlled and disconnected...But I do have to recognise I work in a school and a system so at the same time I have to do it and then get back to the richness, to what children do best, so you have to have this subversive curriculum underneath...'

As with Heather's example, Mark seeks a space to exert his agency and challenge the institutional discourses of formalised learning, and the teaching of phonics and mathematics as a priority. He attempts, despite cultural expectations, to maximise the space in the timetable for children *'to get back to the richness of what children do best'*. Mark found a compromise reconciling school expectations and personal values but acknowledged that this was not without challenge and *'pressure from data'*.

These feelings of conflict were also read in the data through reference to the analytical question on contradiction/facture. These are described by Laliberte-Rudman and Aldrich (2017) as

When a narrator refers to engaging in ideal practices and activities promoted within dominant discourses, but finds that such engagement does not materialize into idealized subject positions... (p. 475)

Examples of self-assertion and self-questioning within individual narratives illustrate occasions where a narrator has positioned her/himself in ways which appear contradictory. Amy's narrative includes indications of agentic behaviours as she describes qualifying as a Montessori teacher and undertaking a Masters Degree and a range of continuing professional development. She has undertaken 'ideal practices' in terms of completing qualifications but also describes some of her practices as disruptive (see the disruptor's tale). However, Amy also poignantly states:

Amy: 'my words to describe how I feel as a professional are: diminished, misunderstood, supported, frustrated and inspired by the children and families I work with!....I feel voiceless, powerless and sometimes pointless...'

This contradiction between Amy having undertaken ideal practices and her feelings of dismay and disempowerment at working conditions and societal views of her role, convey a disheartened and frustrated narrative. Despite these feelings, Amy describes herself thus: *'I see myself as having a vocation, and therefore I accept the low wages and the attitude other people have towards me.'* Amy has acknowledged and appears to have found compromise or a degree of acceptance that her 'vocation' comes with the reality of low wages and certain attitudes of others to her role. She appeared to reconcile this with her disruptive actions.

In considering the contradiction/fracture in Amy's story, I argue this this narrative highlights the 'oppressive and inequitable implications of the boundaries and contradictions inherent in institutional discourses' (Canella and Lincoln, 2009 in Laliberte- Rudman 2017).

Agency with limits

Similar to Mark's example of 'bounded agency', Heather shared reflections on how her attitude to use of social media for activism had changed:

Heather: I find myself thinking 'no', read it, step back, calm down. If you said this as a professional – what are the implications?...I now realise having been on social media for a year quite how much things have changed, that potentially we need to be careful because if we do want our voice to be heard we've almost not got to go 'Raaaaa!' You want to be asked and then say it...

Heather's agency is expressed here, but it is moderated by the perceived implications of being outspoken. She acknowledges the possible ramifications of not being 'careful' and qualifies how her professional role and its obligations limit her agency:

Heather: 'I think my view has changed so it is not that I would never resist or be part of activism but in my role, going back to professional identity, I think you need to be measured.'

This perspective reflects an interpretation by Carlone et al (2010) who highlight how educators struggle with 'the many biases, contradictions and unintended consequences prevalent in education policy today' (p.941) and operate as 'tempered radicals' (Meyerson 2004) who 'work the system' in order to reconcile their beliefs with

professional demands'. I suggest that Heather's reflections position her a 'tempered radical'. Such individuals are described by Nicolaidis (2014) as:

organizational insiders who have regular jobs in an organization and want to contribute and succeed but, at the same time, are treated as outsiders because they represent ideals, agendas, values or even identities that are somehow at odds with the dominant culture. (p.773)

Negotiating/Qualifying/Mediating

Analysing the data for the subject positions which participants laid claim to included examples of individuals negotiating and/or mediating policy expectations and institutional discourses. Hazel describes navigating a terrain of external accountability and perceived freedoms:

Hazel: 'I think you are sort of constrained in this type of job because there are statutory obligations of the local authority... I think you are also influenced by colleagues and as representatives we have to put on a united front...'

I believe that all EY practitioners want the best for the children who we care for and educate in our schools and settings... This has to be done within the Statutory Framework. Often schools and settings feel restricted by Ofsted, DfE and pressure which is imposed by Managers and Headteachers. There is freedom in the way which we work with children as long as ways in which we work them have a positive impact but this pressure for children to succeed in itself can stifle creativity in the delivery of the EYFS and Early Years Educators can get lost amongst the red tape and political agendas'

Such a narrative suggests that on the one hand Hazel considers that there is little room for dissent, and she is obliged to put on 'a united front', but on the other she concedes there are freedoms in implementation of the curriculum. This is an intricate navigation of policy-constructed subjectivities. Hazel's narrative acknowledges the tensions between assumed freedoms 'in the ways we work with children' but also the limitations on her professional discretion to 'deviate' from statutory messages. In this way she might be seen to be negotiating personal pathways through structural constraints (Jeffrey and Woods 1998) and qualifying the perceived boundaries of her agency and autonomy.

A further example of negotiating policy was offered by nursery practitioner Amy. She describes her frustrations with a 'tick box' assessment process based on *Development Matters*²⁰ which was used in her nursery:

'I would love to do the Finnish system which is a series of questions about the practitioner and the child. 'Is the child engaged?' 'How are you going to take it forward?' A dance between the two. Rather than which boxes are being ticked. So I resist that on a daily basis – I will write an observation but perhaps assess it in a different area such as PSED (personal, social, emotional development). Or if it's a language thing I may assess it on Knowledge and Understanding of the World. Because otherwise we get so obsessed with 'Can they use a three word sentence?' rather than what they just said to me.'

In this example, Amy's actions can be read as a form of mediation. Whilst she describes resisting the mandated assessment regime, her approach is both meeting the demands of observation requirements and modifying the assessment beyond the tick boxes. She is simultaneously limited by and refusing to be limited by the policy technology, in an expression of creative compliance. Lea (2014) proposes that such actions are indicative of a 'policy entrepreneur'. Amy's actions as - I would argue - an informed, critically reflective practitioner, illustrate a recognition of her power and agency to challenge the dominant discourse and in doing so (re)form her professional identity.

The notion of teachers displaying post-performative tendencies proposes that teachers, as agentic people, have capacity to adapt and imagine alternative ways to operate, rather than merely reacting to neoliberal informed performative demands. Amy's vignette might also be read in terms of disruption or troubling the institutional discourses. Further data exemplifies these ideas of disruption and subversion below.

²⁰ *Development Matters* is non-statutory guidance which supports all those working in early childhood education settings to implement the requirements of the Statutory Framework for the EYFS. *Development Matters* demonstrates how the four themes of the EYFS Framework and the principles that inform them work together to support the development of babies, toddlers and young children within the context of the EYFS framework. <https://www.early-education.org.uk/development-matters>

Subverting/Disrupting

Whilst notions of subverting or disrupting policy expectations may be perceived as agentic, data reveals that such responses were, in reality, constrained by macro and/or meso level demands. As such, some participants actions represented forms of agency, through covert means rather than explicit and overt resistance or activism.

Amy (see the disruptor's tale) described herself in terms of being a disruptor - unsettling dominant views of children formed by statutory assessment processes. As a keyperson working with toddlers, she describes how she begins discussions with parents of young children about the 'Two Year Progress Check'²¹ which she is obliged to undertake. Prefacing discussions with parents about the content of the check she says:

'...I want you to understand that this is not your child and that this is a very narrow way of assessing who your child is and what they can and cannot do and where they are in their life journey'

In this way, Amy can be seen to be disrupting the policy. She is meeting her statutory obligations, both to her employer, to parents and to children, but is undermining the validity of the process by critiquing its limitations to parents. This might be seen to go beyond 'cynical compliance' (Ball 2003) and be read as a form of strategic manoeuvring. Indeed, Amy is 'playing the assessment game' (Basford and Bath 2014). In the Basford and Bath study, conflicting demands from policy resulted in practitioner participants 'undertak[ing] strategic rather than authentic manoeuvres' (p.119) in their assessment practices. However, I argue that in Amy's case, she maintains an authentic response through challenging the soundness of the progress check. Amy's disruption and subversion are rooted in her objections to the linear and instrumental nature of using 'Development Matters' milestones as a form of summative assessment for two year olds. She also describes how she has actively challenged this:

Amy: 'It's really difficult and I said to my manager 'can you say, 'no we are not going to do this?' And I've looked into this and you don't have to use the development matters criteria – we could use Montessori criteria or something else...'

²¹ The Two Year Progress Check is a statutory summative assessment which forms part of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

Having trained in the Montessori pedagogy, Amy appears to be struggling to reconcile her training in this educational approach with the instrumental demands of mandated assessments. As a Montessori trained teacher myself, I can empathise with this tension and the creativity needed to 'square the circle' over two seemingly distinct pedagogical approaches and perspectives on assessment (see reflection in positionality section, p.19).

Subversion can also be determined in Theresa's narrative (see the policy subverter's tale). Theresa describes how, as a Nursery Teacher in a Primary school, she was expected by senior managers to group the young children in her class by ability:

Theresa: 'So this year, for example, my nursery children...three year olds.. were supposed to be ability grouped for phonics, writing and maths. Now, there are a few pieces of paper up somewhere in my classroom which have got some names on arbitrarily, so that's up, its up. I pay no heed to it....'

Theresa's response of putting up a 'few pieces of paper' describes a charade of compliance in which she appeared to be grouping the children by ability in the eyes of senior managers, adopting a sleight of hand response to the policy:

Theresa: 'So, what I decided to do was just go against what I had been told to do in terms of ability grouping so they just come and do whatever they want whenever they want to. So no writing books. Its really free and there are no groups. We do mark making in an age appropriate way, drawing in the sand, painting, making pictures and yes sometimes writing on paper with pencils if they choose to.'

This creative response, or 'constructive subversion' (Ollin 2005) might also be read in terms of a veneer or façade of acquiescing; a 'masquerade as conforming' (Hall 2007 p.97 in Goouch 2010). Ollin (2005) explores such teacher resistance drawing on De Certeau's concept of 'le perruque': the wig. De Certeau's (1984) thoughts on resistance take the form of 'subtle, resistant activity' and include 'innumerable ways of playing and foiling the other's game' (p.18). He suggests that this takes the form of individuals adopting la perruque (the wig) which is 'the worker's own work disguised as work for his employer'. De Certeau (1984) asserts that this practice is prevalent and that by doing this, the worker actually 'diverts time ... for work that is free, creative and precisely not directed for profit' (p.25). In this way, he proposes that when individuals (such as Theresa) take action to evolve and transform existing spaces, they demonstrate agency and take ownership of such space, affirming their sense of self. In

doing so, they deploy their own stories or discourses, refusing to legitimate dominant discourses and affirming an alternative worldview.

Ollin (2005) posits the idea that de Certeau's concept of *le perruque*:

might be adapted to include the possibility that an individual's notion of their own professional identity might cause a particular type of 'poaching' from the employer's time. This poaching would involve the worker taking time to engage in the types of practices which satisfy them that they are behaving in accordance with their own notions of personal and professional identity. (p.158)

It could be argued that Theresa's values and beliefs which inform her professional identity are at odds with structural expectations and meso-level demands. Her response is to appropriate her employer's time to engage in activity which she believes is right, albeit '*a little bit underground*'. Theresa's acknowledges her strategic and constructive subversion:

Theresa: '...so it can be just you standing up for what you believe in without making it known, because if I made it known I would be drawing attention to it and there be lots more involvement, so sometimes doing it a little bit underground, appearing to maintain the status quo is an easier way to go about it.'

Such actions also link back to analysis of mediating policy in terms of 'camouflage strategies' as identified by Tuval (2014) and notions of policy entrepreneurialism, operating as an 'ethical entrepreneur' (Fasoli et al 2007). In so doing, Theresa's response undermines the policy and might be read as an example of resistance and everyday activism.

Discussion

The analysis and discussion of data in this chapter has sought to complicate the binary portrayal of early childhood educators as willing facilitators of workforce reform or as visible activists. Rather I have analysed and discussed borderland discourses as identified in empirical data. In the following section I undertake a discussion linking these borderland discourses as analytical categories back to earlier policy analysis and key theoretical concepts.

Whilst existing research literature has identified the influence and dominance of structural discourses upon, and to some extent agentic actions of early educators,

there is little empirical research which considers the third space navigated between the two. This study has sought to acknowledge the intricacy and multiplicity of responses by educators in various roles across the ECE sector. From data analysis, I find the prevalence of third space discourses in narratives indicate a complex interplay of external influences and agentic behaviours on the professional identity construction of early educators.

This discussion section seeks to revisit the initial conceptualisation of a bordering process and review its appropriateness as a means of interpreting the narratives presented.

Reconceptualising: from Borders to Ecotones

The question of institutionalisation...is eminently a question of power to take place, to define and to delimit a space, within which certain functions and operations can be performed. The power of the institution is the power to lay down borders, to impose limits, to enforce demarcations. (Weber, 1986, p. 310)

Through the policy analysis process, the idea of workforce reform policy creating borders around professional identities was conceptualised. Critical Discourse Analysis of workforce reform policies also identified in these policy texts a *process* of bordering. Informed by the initial conceptual framework, I questioned the extent to which the production and circulation of workforce reform policies are an act of bordering which define and attempt to 'contain' the professional identities of early educators. I explored the perspective that identity construction formation through policy - such as regulating views and setting normative professional standards - are attempts at a disciplinary and repressive process of bordering (See Fig. 8.1).

Considering the narratives of participants, and in particular the agentic and borderland discourses analysed in these stories, this perception has evolved. The border, as a political imaginary, serves to include/exclude. In the context of policy reform and professional identities, such a conceptual border can be seen to define, demarcate, separate, and create an 'Other'. I argue that this concept of the border serves to reinforce binaries of, for example, structure/agency, policy/practice, teacher/non-teacher.

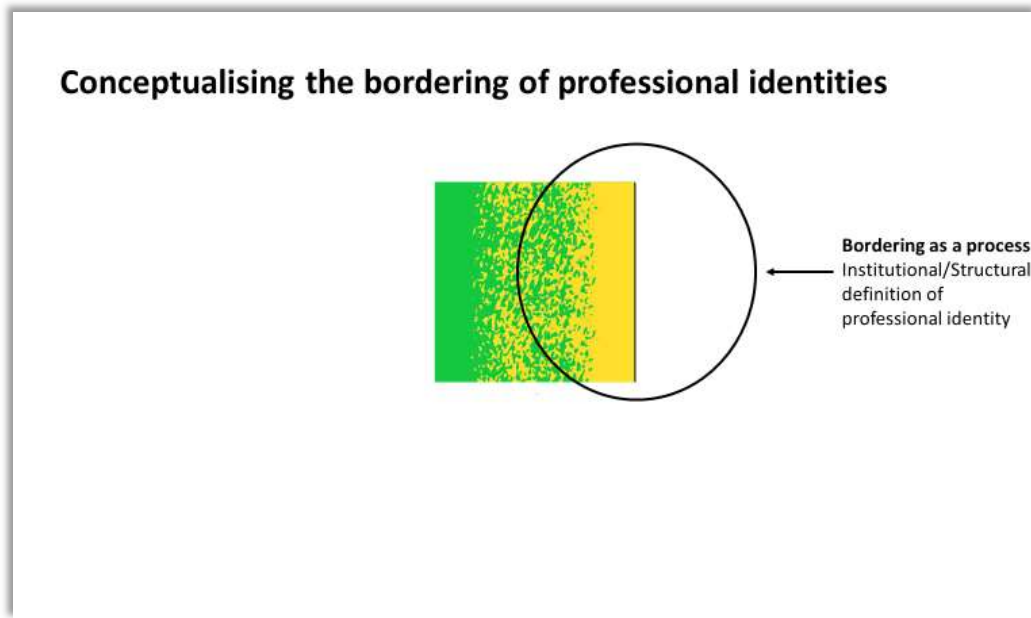


Fig. 8.1 Conceptual Map D - Institutional discourses and bordering as a process

However, this conceptualisation, as informative as I believe it to be, arguably diminishes the agency of practitioners in the identity formation and maintenance process. Reflecting on the extent of the agency of participants in this study leads me to reconfigure my perspective of the border/s around professional identities which, I propose, are formed by workforce reform policy to demarcate ideal subjectivities.

Analysing the data and reconsidering the categories generated leads me to see the ways in which participant educators challenged assumptions and modified policy boundaries of identity construction, as they differentiated between those expectations they were prepared to compromise on and those they were not. In short, they positioned themselves. I therefore seek to acknowledge this practitioner agency as tangible and embodied in their lived experiences. Rather than solely critiquing (and to some extent therefore) affirming the power of the border, I seek to reconceptualise the professional identity constructions of practitioners in terms of *borderlands*.

Borderlands

A boundary is not that at which something stops, but as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding.
(Heidegger, 1971, p.154)

Such alternative border imaginaries move 'beyond the border line' and develop the idea of *zones* or *lands* around a border. Although a border serves to demarcate space, there is a quality of indeterminacy and indefiniteness about the space around the line: an 'undefined, unprescribed and marginal place' (Batchelor, 2012, p.600).

Seminal border theorist Gloria Anzaldua describes such a borderland as a space where individuals

...fluctuate between two discrete worlds, participating in both and wholly belonging to neither...none of them 'home,' yet none of them 'not home'...a third space between two others ... a new space that is a both/and location ... where individuals participate in both but do not wholly belong. (Anzaldua, 1999, p. 528).

In emphasising the rich territory of 'space in between' and the capacity of individuals to occupy it, Anzaldua accentuates and problematises the power relationships which define the space. Her pioneering work in this area has established ground for further academic endeavour. This work has been advanced by the *Border Culture/Border Poetics Research Group* based at the Arctic University of Norway which has developed a number of definitions for the field, including this definition of borderlands:

Within the field of border studies, the concept of borderlands or border zones have been described as areas around borders, less definitively delineated spaces than a border line. Such spaces can be seen as places of transition and negotiation in which identity may appear uncertain 'where different social agents act and move within the same spaces, inscribing their activities onto them. (Border Poetics Research Group Collective website)

Such in-between spaces that are created and perceived at intersections— (whether material, metaphoric, or discursive) act as powerful conceptual heuristics which illustrate not either/or but *both/and*. Borderlands or border zones can be described as spaces around borders which affect people on either side of the border. These places are zones where ownership and belonging remain unclear. Drawing on work by Licona (2005), Yoshimoto (2008), Abes (2009), and Schimanski and Wolfe (2017), I consider the idea of borderlands as a metaphor and conceptual framework to illustrate my interpretation of the dynamic and of the space of potential for resistance between policy texts and lived experiences in the formation of professional identities.

What I had initially perceived as distinct borders between policy makers and practitioners (and the subsequent transgressing of borders), might be seen to create binaries and overly valorise the validity of professional identity construction through policy text. As Licona (2005) attests, [such] 'arbitrary demarcations of borders have

served to devalue third-space being and knowing'. (p.6). Rather, in acknowledging the agency of educators in the formation of their own professional identity (and perceiving the borders of policy constructed identity as permeable) a space is opened up for the negotiation of identities. (see Fig 8.2).

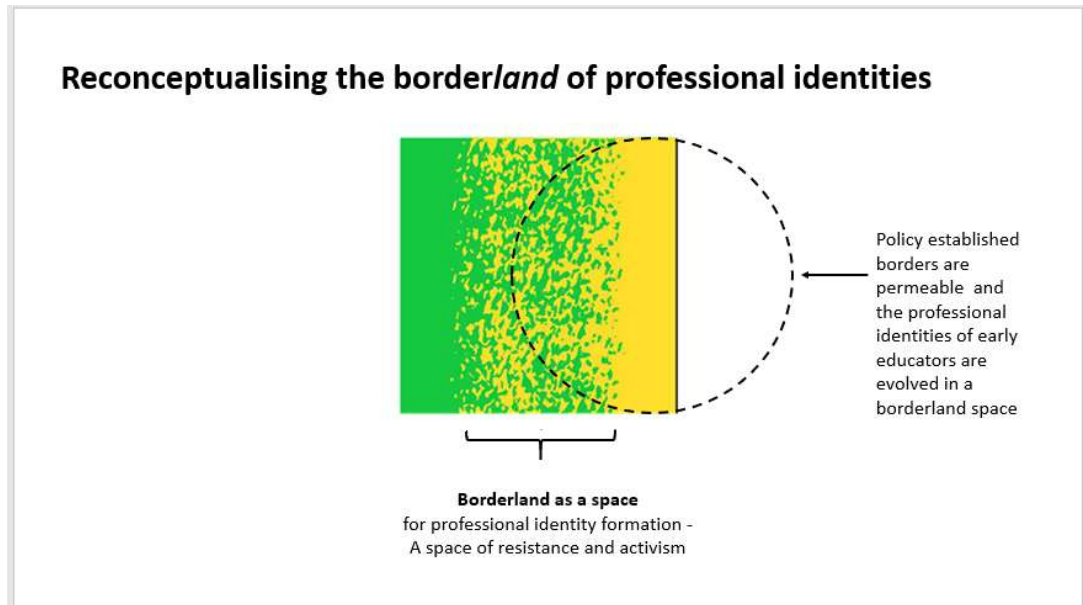


Fig. 8. 2 Conceptual Map E – Permeable borders and a borderland space

Professional identities may in fact be (re)formed and enacted in a third space, an in-between space in which the structural (institutional discourses of policy) meet the agentic, (seen in the narratives of individual motivations, values and beliefs). I contend there are spaces between what institutional discourses dictate early educators are *supposed* to be and do and the actuality of who they are and what they do. Data indicate that these are borderlands where cultural assumptions might be challenged by educators' identities.

Through revealing third space and making visible and audible the narratives of early educators within such a space, I complicate the sanctioned and perceived notions of professional identity and explore the space in which resistance and activism may be manifest. This idea is further developed with the notion of an ecological borderland as metaphor.

Ecotones as Ecological Borderlands

Wind tugging at my sleeve
feet sinking into the sand
I stand at the edge where earth touches ocean
where the two overlap
a gentle coming together
at other times and places a violent clash...
(Anzaldua, 1987, p.1)

...[t]he edge of the sea is a strange and beautiful place. All through the long history of Earth it has been an area of unrest where waves have broken heavily against the land, where the tides have pressed forward over the continents, receded and then returned. For no two successive days is the shoreline precisely the same. Not only do the tides advance and retreat in their eternal rhythms, but the level of the sea itself is never at rest [...] Today a little more land may belong to the sea, tomorrow a little less. Always the edge of the sea remains an elusive and indefinable boundary.
(Carson, 1955, p.1)

Returning to reflections from my road trip, I continue to seek to understand these identity border zones in the context of the natural world. Allan (2017) notes that such ecological borderlands constitute ecotones. Ecotones are considered areas of environmental significance and have been described as

...the border area where two patches meet that have different ecological composition [and that] contain elements of both bordering communities as well as organisms which are characteristic and restricted to the ecotone. (Graves, 2011, p.9).

This 'transitional phase between two or more ecological communities' (Terrel-Neild, 1986, p.407) is where two distinct biomes or ecosystems meet and force adaptation and evolution.

In exploring such junction zones and boundary concepts between two or more communities I consider this evolving landscape as a metaphor within the study. Reflecting on the data, such spaces in a metaphor landscape appear as places which are not always tranquil and comfortable. It seems appropriate then, to deploy the word ecotone which comes from *eco*– and the Greek word *tonos*, meaning tension. The theory of third space and its physical manifestation as an ecotone provide an apposite lens through which to view the experiences of participants in the study: their being and working in early childhood education.

Additionally, I reflect on how I have inhabited spaces in a professional capacity which have entailed flux in professional identity, feelings of instability, and living in times of

transition and in liminal spaces. Indeed, I have come to view the notion of in between spaces as emblematic of many areas of my life. Such space might be seen in the in-betweenness I felt of the social classes of my childhood, and indeed, a career trajectory in which I have found workspaces in between practice, policy and research.

Dynamic Bordering practices

Borders mark the location of stories so far, which carries the axiomatic implication of historical change, that does not say anything about the pace at which such change might occur, and nor does it imply that change is ongoing, or constant (Green, 2012, p.574).

These physical ecotones or borderlands serve as an apposite metaphor for the discursively constructed borderlands of professional identities. That is to say, the border zone or ecotone (where, for example, land meets sea) can be read as a space in flux in which institutional discourses meet personal narratives in the re/de/construction of professional identities and the resulting agency and activism of early educators in that space. As a metaphor it moves the debate on from the structure/agency binary and acknowledges the complexity, instability, and potency of such a space. I consider this instability and dynamism below.

Edge Effect

An edge effect, in relation to an ecotone, describes the tendency of such an area to have a greater diversity of species than exist in either of its bordering communities. In a borderland or ecotone, this interstitial space where two biomes meet, is a rich, fertile place and includes species of either biome but also those particular to the ecotone: edge species.

...margins in social and cultural contexts are not necessarily areas of isolation where we balance between two worlds, looking out or looking in, without legitimacy or equality. Although they can become boundaries that separate – chasms that block our movement toward fulfilment and joy in living, or frontiers where we wage power battles – they may also be dwelling places that connect rather than separate. (Krall, 1994, p.4)

Applying this concept of an edge effect to the data in this study affords a perspective in which participants are not the unwitting or even 'heroic victims' identified in Gibson's (2015) discursive analysis. Rather, this idea of 'dwelling places' offers a more

generative reading. Regardless of titles and roles, the (varying and evolving) professional identities of educators may be seen to share the connection of inhabiting borderlands rather than the separation of being included/excluded by workforce policy. By perceiving educator identities constructed in an ecotone, it is possible to consider how individuals, irrespective of professional roles might be seen as 'edge species' who are shaped by two biomes (i.e. agency/structure) but represent not either/or but both/and.

Erosion/Accretion/Sedimentation/Reclamation

To continue the ecological metaphor of an ecotone, and in particular that of the coastline, I further explore the dynamic of such a space. In doing so, I seek to refocus attention on the agentic positionings of the educators in the study and make a case for an interpretation of more fluid, situated and active constructions of identities in a third space.

Erosion

Inspired by the ecotone of the shoreline I reflect on how structural powers can be seen to erode the professional identity construction of educators. Data from interviews with Amy (p.170) and Natalie (p.218) can be read as narratives in which their professional identities have, to some extent, been eroded by structural forces. In both cases, policy expectations, ranging from teacher education curricula to assessment technologies were perceived as repressive and undermining professional autonomy and decision-making. This is also evidenced in Mark's attempts to 'protect' play in a culture (at both macro and meso levels) which seemingly prioritised more formal learning. His agency and discretion to prioritise play were seemingly being 'worn away' by increased formalisation of the curriculum.

However, such a dynamic is not necessarily a one-way, or a malevolent process. The sea (or structures) has both corrosive and constructive powers.

Accretion/Sedimentation

This metaphor affords a perspective which dispenses with the first space/second space binary, and instead, depicts a dynamic. Going beyond perceptions of erosion,

conversely structures (in terms of global and national influences on policy, and thereby on identities) also 'deposit' in policy terms. That is to say, structural influences (through a policy tide) may be read as forces which sediment and form through accumulative processes.

Reflecting on Chris's experiences (p.173), she describes the advent of EYP status as: *'I see things like the EYPS coming in and I think 'yes' and great a move in the right direction'*. Chris also embraced the policy-inscribed term of an EYP being an 'agent of change' and perceived herself as undertaking such a role. However, her narrative also points to the complexity of an accretion/erosion dynamic. Once Chris had secured EYP status, she recalls:

'I remember speaking to the other people on the training course and they were like 'what do you say when other people ask you what you do?' and I would say 'I'm an EYP' and they would be like 'what?' and the shame is if you working primary or secondary education people go 'oh right' I see things like the EYPS coming in and I think 'yes' and great - a move in the right direction and then it gets forgotten.'

This example of the arrival and departure of the EYP status in a relatively short period is indicative of a policy cycle of attention followed by neglect. Such policy processes can be seen to attempt to evolve or 'reform' qualifications and thereby, to some extent, the professional identities of educators. However, the reality and impact of short term policy intervention which is then 'forgotten' is vividly conveyed in this narrative and underscores the impermanence, the immutability of structural interventions. To follow the metaphor further, I ask, to what extent do these structural influences (i.e. the sea) leave discursive residue and metaphorical tidemarks?

Tidemarks

As a metaphor, the word tidemarks implies the existence of a discernible difference, generated through activities that are usually expected to occur again, either replacing the previous mark with an altered one or adding another mark...the word tidemarks implies an ongoing reworking of differences, back and forth...(Green, 2011, p.585)

In terms of professional identity construction, if the second space of structure in this model, is discerned as 'the sea', it might be argued that workforce reform policy (tide) which evolves under the influence of international and national political administrations, fluctuates with political and ideological influence. Workforce reform policy (see policy

analysis section) has been seen to evolve with different political administrations, sometimes eroding sometimes accreting in terms of attempts at professional identity construction. This perpetual state of flux (also described as a 'pendulum' by participant Stella) nonetheless leaves traces.

An example of this can be seen in HE Lecturer Natalie's narrative as she notes the evolution of Early Years Professional Status to Early years Teacher Status:

'..I felt as the standards moved from EYPS to EYTS to EYITT they lost some of the democratic social pedagogic roots that were the foundations of EYPS. I also noticed a shift from leadership of pedagogical practice to teaching which I could have conceptualised in the delivery of the sessions but the Ofsted priorities of phonics, maths...I was unhappy with the Teacher Standards (Early Years) because I thought they signalled a pedagogical shift towards much more around teaching and formal teaching and there were less of that holistic, family centred pedagogy...'

This narrative can be read in terms of the legacy of EYPS and aspirations for a graduate-led PVI workforce, but also the perceived 'erosion' of a holistic pedagogy. This can be discerned as tidemarks in which some traces of the preceding policy are retained, whilst others are lost. As Green (2011) notes:

...tidemarks are traces of movement, which can be repetitive or suddenly change, may generate long-term effects or disappear the next day, but nevertheless continue to mark, or make, a difference that makes a difference. (p. 585)

The metaphor of the tidemark might also be read in relation to earlier concepts of the palimpsest (see Gooch and Powell 2017) who suggest: that policy makers constantly 'reinscribe' expectations on those who work with babies and young children. Deploying a tidemark metaphor through ideas of a policy tide and associated detritus, acknowledges the lasting influence of institutional discourses on professional identity construction. Data indicate that long after policies have evolved, such discourses continue to have influence and are, to some extent recycled in narratives. Hurd et al. (2017) note:

Tides...pattern the landscape's contours; and leave behind layers of embodied memories ...Even after border regimes are gone and their political and administrative aspects have vanished, the memories and practices of the borders can still exercise cultural, social and legal power. (p.3)

Readings of the data through this metaphor have thus far focussed on structural influences. I now turn to consider perceptions of human agency in this imagery.

Reclamation

In further exploring this metaphor, the accumulative and erosive power of the sea should be balanced with the agency of humans in their attempts to counter and harness this power. Land reclamation by humans is centuries-old activity (see p.90) and is described by OECD as

the gain of land from the sea, or wetlands, or other water bodies, and restoration of productivity or use to lands that have been degraded by human activities or impaired by natural phenomena. (OECD website)

Such reclamation work has often been accomplished slowly, with great effort, skill and persistence and usually with some considerable risk to the people involved. Applying this metaphor to the data provides insights where participants asserted their agency in (re)forming professional identities and in specific examples of self-authorship:

Chris: 'I think I see myself as very much an advocate of children, this has always been my driving force and very much connected to my ethos as Reggio-inspired practitioner. I'm not afraid to say I'm a passionate practitioner and proud of that...'

Sarah: 'And when I came back from the MA weekends, I started really working on what I was doing because I knew that the stuff I had been trying actually had a foundation. And you know how empowering it is to talk to people who get what you are talking about?... I was always perceived at home as 'she's only an early years teacher', and I didn't have a very different view of myself so whilst I was empowered on one front, I was digging my own grave professionally then. They couldn't handle the me I had become...'

Kate: 'I describe myself as ...somebody who learns through doing, through playing with ideas and concepts and theories and ways of being so, I think that what I said about training, consultancy, writing is about legacy but it also that passion to help people realise that as educators we have something incredibly precious, incredibly real and very important.'

Whilst these stories differ in context and content, what unites them is a professional confidence, often despite structural expectations. I read these and other narratives from the data as examples of early educators (re)claiming their stories and their professional identities through speaking up and speaking out. Viewing the dynamic in this way acknowledges the agency of educators as they push back and (re)form

professional identities informed by personal and professional values, beliefs and commitments. Notably, the Latin root of the word reclamation (*reclame*) means 'to cry out against', which in the context of a study of resistance and activism, makes the metaphor all the more appropriate.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the analysis and discussion of those borderland discourses analysed in participant narratives. Following previous chapters in which structural and agentic discourses featured more prominently in narratives, this chapter has explored a third space, a 'site of struggle' between the two.

Having identified and categorised 'in between' discourses, I have sought to discuss these in relation to existing literature and policy analysis. The chapter concluded with a section which was informed by theoretical frameworks and which (re)conceptualised these narratives in a terrain characterised as an ecotone. Applying a conceptual and metaphorical framework to the data enabled a new and more dynamic reading of the narratives which acknowledged both structural factors and the agency of participants in the ongoing constructions of their professional identities.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

In this final chapter, I consider the analysis and discussion of participants' narratives and review the extent to which I have achieved my aims set out at the beginning of this thesis. This conclusion summarises key findings, looks back on the research and identifies original contributions to knowledge. It offers reflections on the review of literature, methodology and analysis and considers the significance and implications of the study. The chapter draws the thesis to a close with limitations of the study, possible future research trajectories and considers the potential impact of the study on me as researcher.

This conclusion is shaped by the following questions:

- What are my answers to the research questions and how have I approached these?
- What contribution has the study made?
- What are the significance and implications of the findings?
- What are the limitations of the study and questions for future research?
- What has been the impact of undertaking the research on me as researcher?

What are my answers to the research questions and how have I approached these?

The original justifications for this thesis were multiple. Based on my personal and professional experiences and interest in the topic, I was keen to explore how early childhood educators experienced and responded to policy constructions of their professional identities.

I acknowledged readings of these professional identities from an international body of work which has evolved significantly in recent years. However, I was aware that whilst this previous research included both policy critique and empirical analyses of educators' responses, limited attention had been paid to the acts of resistance and activism of educators in reaction to policy demands. Consequently, this study has sought to address this gap in understanding and offers contributions to knowledge on this subject. In order to explore this topic, the following research questions were developed:

1. How are early childhood educators positioned in ECE policies and how do they respond to these positionings?
2. What forms of individual and organisational policy activism exist?
3. Which conditions/values enable or constrain activism and how do practitioners perceive their role in this?
4. Do practitioners perpetuate or challenge prevailing thinking and how do they imagine alternatives in policy development?

I approached these questions through a critical discourse analysis of early childhood workforce reform policies (2006-2017) and analysis of empirical data gathered through an online focus group and life story interviews.

The narratives which were formed from these data reflect how Holland and Lave's (2009, p.3) ideas of 'locally contested practice, are also always part of larger historical, cultural, and political-economic struggles but in particular, local ways worked out in practice'. It was always my intention to consider unique stories in the context of broader policy reforms to consider power effects and resistances. I now reflect on how these individual narratives reveal power dynamics which 'often function as the 'unsaid ligaments that hold stories together.' (Andrews, 2017, p.277). Thus, I offer these insights at a particular time, place and in relation to national and global policy drivers.

My analysis of data from the study has created the following four insights in response to the research questions (see Fig 9.1)

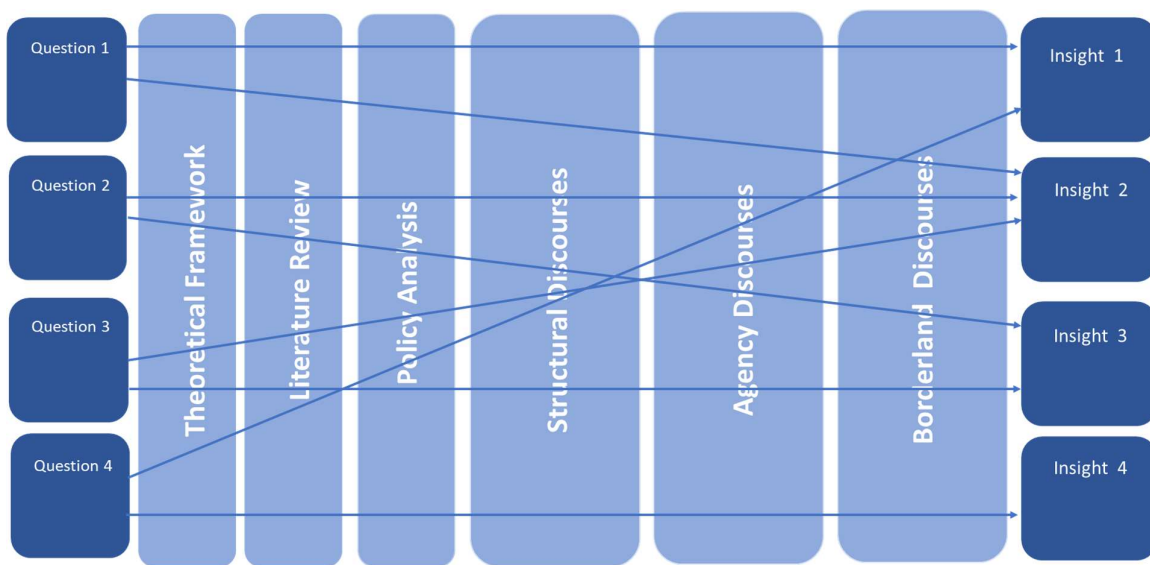


Fig. 9. 1 Relationship between research questions and insights.

Insight 1

Policy analysis reveals how, through workforce policy texts, the 'ideal' early childhood educator is positioned in multiple ways. In addition, ideal professional identities are discursively constructed by policies in ways which are also competing and shifting.

In turn, participants' responses to these ideal identities (whilst sometimes limited) were often powerful and agentic.

A review of the literature and policy analysis undertaken revealed numerous, competing structural discourses shaping 'official' professional identities of early educators. These institutional discourses also changed over time. Critical analysis of workforce policy texts between 2006-2017 suggests that early educators are variously positioned as enablers of school readiness ((National College of Teaching and Leadership 2013a p.2), facilitators of social mobility (Department for Education, 2017, p.27), and carers to enable parental employment (Department for Education 2013). I argue that early educators, through workforce policy texts, are coerced into accepting and adopting these numerous, changing, and conflicting discourses. Additionally, workforce reform policies, occupational standards, and qualifications criteria act as processes of bordering through which educators are classified, ordered, and expected to comply with these policy demands.

Through previous research and my analysis of policy, it is evident that the identities of early educators are often presented in deficit ways: othered, diminished and framed as technicians. However, according to Osgood (2012) they are also discursively presented as an economic solution to societal problems in a move which both valorises and demonises these professionals (Jones and Osgood 2007). The policy analysis undertaken in this thesis confirms these economic and social saviour discourses, which are informed by the marketisation and commodification of the ECE sector. These discourses were reflected in a number of ideal subjectivities formed through policy texts.

I assert that policy demands are produced and circulated through (among other mechanisms) credentialisation of different professional roles. This is undertaken with multiple, shifting aims by different political administrations. Through this credentialising, ideal subject positions are formed for different professional roles. In turn, these ideal

subject positions are read as forms of demarcation and bordering which serve to include/exclude particular early childhood professionals. In response to this analysis the study proposes that we might think about occupational standards, qualifications criteria and regulation frameworks as mere starting points rather than end points. I propose a need to problematise the certainty, finality, and assumed objectivity of such policy technologies and view them as the start of discussion, negotiation, and contestation. Additionally, I argue for identifying and valuing the professional knowledge from educators' perspectives, beyond the command and control perspective of policy.

Empirical data indicate that responses to these officially sanctioned versions of ideal subjectivities are often powerful and agentic. Chapter Seven in particular, details agentic discourses in the narratives of participants (see Insight Two). That said, there are limitations on educator agency (due to pervasive and limiting structural discourses) which are explored in empirical data in Chapter Six and in Insight Four.

Nonetheless, acts of agency (and indeed activism) amongst early educators are evident and numerous (see Insight Three).

Insight 2

Data from participants' narratives offered examples of structural discourses being recycled and of educator compliance. Data also revealed agentic discourses manifested as educators contesting and resisting these discourses.

Borderland theory offered a lens to name and acknowledge educators' responses between agency/structure in this 'site of struggle'.

Building on work in the UK by Moss (2014; 2017; 2019) and Roberts-Holmes (2019), in Australia by Sims (2017) and in New Zealand by Kamenarac (2018), on neoliberal effects on early childhood education policy, I propose that my critique of setting standards in workforce reform contributes to this scholarship. The policy analysis undertaken underpins conclusions made from empirical data which reflect the dominance of policies informed by neoliberalism and implemented via new public management.

Empirical data from the study inform this second insight. I draw on Chapter Six to conclude that data reveal examples of powerful structural discourses which are occasionally absorbed and recycled in educator narratives. One example is Hilary's narrative in which she appeared to affirm, embrace and recycle the institutional discourse around school readiness. Such examples point to the pervasive power of governmentality and responsabilisation in circulating dominant discourses which are (un)wittingly adopted.

Conversely, several participants were aware of these discourses but positioned themselves as fracturing the discourses around various contemporary early childhood policies. For example, a number of participants reflected recognition of the normalizing truths of accountability via assessment data and performance management but rejected these and positioned themselves at odds with such 'truths'. In some instances, participants' experiences reflected discourses identified in previous studies, namely, feeling othered, feeling framed by ideas of educators lacking or in deficit but also degrees of compliance with demands of accountability. However, educator narratives also offered many examples of agentic discourses exemplifying resistance and contestation. These themes were analysed:

- Enacting ethical practice as resistance (see p.215)
- Contesting dominant narratives (see p.216)
- Micro resistances (see p.219)
- Developing alternative discourses (see p.221)
- Walking away as self-care (see p.223)

These examples of resistance and activism were numerous in the data (see Chapter Six).

Unlike a UK study of secondary teachers (Hall and McGinty 2015) in which spaces for resistance seem all but eradicated, analysis of data from my study identifies and acknowledges educators acting in numerous interstitial spaces of resistance. The shape of these resistances is further explored in Insight Three.

The second element of this insight offers a theoretical lens of borderland theory through which to consider actions which are located between forces of agency and structure and which manifest in this site of struggle. Informed by third space theory (Bhabha) and borderland theory (Anzaldúa) I have developed a theoretical perspective which acknowledges and interrogates the space 'in between' the

structural discourses of policy and the agency of educators. Batchelor's work (2012) has been formative in this theorisation and she asserts that third spaces:

are spaces conducive to processes of experiment and becoming rather than to projects of production and formation. They are potentially creative spaces. (p.599)

Developing this idea, I drew on the ecological concept of the ecotone. An ecotone is a 'transitional phase between two or more ecological communities' (Terrel-Neild, 1986, p.407) where two distinct biomes or ecosystems meet. I used this concept as a heuristic to illustrate the dynamics of structure meeting agency in the realm of professional identity formation. In particular, in Chapter Eight, I used experiences and understanding of the coastline dynamic between land and sea to illustrate agency/structure interactions. In deploying this concept, I acknowledged both the impermanence of structural influence, the power of agentic individuals and the fluid, shifting symbiosis between these. To frame the dynamic in this way was not to accept an inevitability of policy demands, but rather to give greater prominence to the agency of educators in the process of 'land reclamation'. Thus, the notion of borderlands provides a theoretical lens applied anew and the coastline ecotone is deployed as a novel heuristic with which to view this phenomenon.

Insight 3

Collective activism was enacted by participants but often played out online.

Individual activism took many forms including micro resistances which appeared hitherto unacknowledged.

My third key insight draws upon research questions two and three and discussion in Chapter Seven. I identify readings of forms of collective and individual activism in the narratives.

There were references to collective activism in the data but fewer tangible examples of where participants had engaged in this. Data revealed awareness and support for '*connecting*', '*solidarity*', '*networks of support*' and '*collective responses*'. Whilst children's centre manager Stella had galvanised a community

into signing petitions and attending demonstrations, and childminder Sylvia had engaged in street protests, there were few other examples of face-to-face activism as a collective endeavour. Union membership was not frequently explored in narratives, but social media activism featured prominently with participants often engaging in online collectivising. This suggests a form of 'relational activism' (O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy 2010) is at play, with individuals developing community and enacting forms of their activism from their private spheres.

Much previous literature draws on social movement theory and empirical examples of collectivism in exploring resistance and activism. In addition to cases of this within the study's data, multiple individual acts of activism were recorded, these being often nuanced, complex and varied in scale and visibility. The narratives revealed multiple examples of resistance and activism which I analysed as manifesting, to varying degrees, as dispersed, local and covert. Such findings reflect a previous study by Marshall and Anderson (2008), whose research with educator activists found activism to be 'mostly micropolitical, mostly at sites' (p.48). Below I conclude with discussions identifying such resistances from the narratives as often local, quiet, invisible and multiple.

Local

A number of educator narratives included examples of what I described as local or 'micro resistances'. Theresa's non-compliance with ability grouping children in her class, Amy's 'disruption' of summative assessment and Mike's creation of a 'subversive curriculum' for his Foundation Unit all illustrate the power of resistances on this level. Echoing the earlier reference, I note how Holland and Lave's (2009, p.3) ideas of 'enduring struggles and locally contested practice', were reflected in the various micropolitical strategies adopted by participants and were key elements of resistance in these narratives. Mathison (2013) finds that localised efforts to disrupt prevailing narratives can be viewed as being in addition to large scale direct actions. Such analysis offers an important and alternative contribution to the field of resistance studies, which has historically focussed on macro level action.

Quiet

In addition to these resistances being local or micro in scale, some might be described as quiet, discreet or 'on the low down' (Marshall and Anderson 2008). References to resisting 'under the radar' and 'off the record' were present in the narratives and point

to alternative forms of subversion. In Heather's narrative her proposal for the need of more '*quiet activism*' is an important concept, suggesting that (at least for Heather) professional restrictions do not always limit resistance, but these may occur in more covert ways in order to achieve intended aims. Such quiet or 'closeted activism' (Marshall 2009) moves beyond conventional understandings of activism as public, visible and 'loud' and extends the 'repertoire of contention' (Scott 1985). An acknowledgement of this alternative reading of resistances and activism is expressed in a blog by Watkins (2020):

The 21st century's problems require a re-understanding of what activism is and has been, a new mythology of social movements that includes the stories of the silent heroes (and better understands the quiet ones who spoke anyway). We need a new activism, one that exists as a collaboration between the urgency, commotion, contemplation, and quiet permanence of a pluralistic movement for justice... In glorifying the spot-lit moments of a few key players, we not only ignore the talents and accomplishments of those who prefer to work in the wings but alienate introverts from the notion of an activist path... We need to tell those stories too and bring quiet justice-seekers to activism.

(In)visible

Such resistances can also be conceptualised in terms of their (in)visibility. In exploring what counts as activism, Martin et al (2007) recognise these 'often-invisible forms of activism in embeddedness and social relations' (p.91). Previously I discussed, in relation to findings, individual, relational activism and expansive readings of rhetorical activism as conceptualisations of resistance in education as 'everyday resistance' (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013) and 'micropolitics' (Hales 2015). Such resistance is typically hidden, often individual and not necessarily articulated. These conceptualisations explain a different kind of resistance; one that is less dramatic and less obvious than many collective expressions of resistance. This perspective, as discussed in relation to findings in Chapter Seven, has also been described, in relation to various fields, as 'implicit activism...characterized by 'small acts, kind words and 'not too much fuss' (Horton and Kraftl, 2009, p.14). However, I reflect on this framing of a highly gendered workforce engaged in activism undertaken with 'not too much fuss'. Such a reading indicates compliance and reluctance to dissent, which I suggest underplays the diversity and power of various resistance and activism strategies deployed. This interpretation of (predominantly female) educators seen not to act without 'fuss' might result in a sector (inaccurately) perceived as undisruptive. Conversely, participants from this study articulated numerous 'alternative', albeit less visible forms of resistance and activism.

It is also important to look outward, beyond ECE to the broader education landscape. My analysis, coupled with previous studies, also leads me to reflect on how and why these understandings of activism might differ from that in 'other' age phases of education. Whilst the professional identities of primary and secondary educators may be partly shaped and negotiated through union membership, such an analysis is less applicable to ECE. The aforementioned fragmentation of the ECE sector, with diverse governance arrangements, has resulted in a largely non-unionised community. Such a diverse and complex sector (notwithstanding debates about the impact of this fragmentation) appear to have fewer opportunities to collectivise publicly and formally. Thus, I argue, resistances and activism manifest differently. Whilst actions may be less visible compared to the resistance and activism of other educators, in short, I propose that early childhood educators are differently activist. The actions explored *are* activism and are worthy of attention. Importantly, I consider such a reading to broaden interpretations of activism and this forms an important and alternative contribution to the field of resistance and activism studies.

Multiple

The study finds that whilst these examples of resistance and activism can be described as local, and often low-key, they are also multiple and cumulative. Drawing on Foucault's idea of 'a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case' (1978, pp. 95-96) the collection of narratives served to illustrate such a multiplicity of resistances. Similar conclusions are drawn in other studies including:

- 'thousands upon thousands of petty acts of insubordination and evasion create a political and economic barrier reef of their own.' (Scott, 1989, p.49)
- 'social change may be carried by a thousand wedges—small but determined challenges to neoliberalism's ideological and tactical grip, until its centre can no longer hold'. (Hales, 2015, p.60)

According to my study, such everyday resistances are not a universal approach nor an expression of multiple similar actions but approaches which are heterogenic, situated and evolving. Such resistances respond to numerous power relations and manifestations at micro, meso and macro levels. In line with readings by Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) these resistances are demonstrated as multiple practices rather than outcomes. Such an analysis of multiple, local, quiet, and often invisible resistances offers a new perspective on activism in the field.

A number of research findings propose that collective action is a prerequisite to challenging policy demands. Indeed, social movement theory proliferates in this field. However, insights drawn from this analysis suggests there is evidence of this public, visible and collective activism but also that which might be categorised as covert, small scale or local. I argue that this range of resistances are necessary and important in developing alternatives narratives which move readings of early childhood educators away from the deficit discourses which I (and they) identified.

Insight 4

Constraints on educator professional identities were shaped by and dominated by policy demands (inculcated through neoliberal mechanisms) and meso level implementation of policies.

Enablers to resistance and activism were critical awareness, professional confidence, and self/collective efficacy resulting in courageous action.

My research has demonstrated (see Insight One) that the professional identities of early educators are constrained by policy demands and the power effects of policy discourses. Such constraints are, in turn, predominantly shaped by neoliberal economic policy and tenets of new public management practices. Conversely, there are several enabling factors which appear to expediate the agency, resistance and activism of participants. Educators in the study demonstrated critical awareness, professional confidence, and self/collective efficacy. These appeared to be precursors and, arguably, prerequisites to their courageous actions.

Critical awareness is a concept informed by Freire's 'concientization' and Greene's 'wide awakeness'. I understand such critical awareness to take the form of the active alertness to assumptions, 'truths' and forms of knowledge which (in this case) inform policy trajectories in early childhood education. This ability to recognise and interpret a prevailing ethos and policy drivers appeared as a core capacity amongst participants, as they reflected on influences on the formation of their professional identities. Several instances highlighted their critical alertness to pervasive power discourses. Natalie's critique of the 'what works' research and practice agenda, Stella's concern about the dominance of school readiness in policy and Fran's troubling of the 'datafication' discourse all illustrate how participants were alert to and critical of various policies which impacted on professional identity construction.

Professional confidence was evident in many of the narratives. Several examples relayed by participants indicated brave and bold actions from macro through to micro levels. Examples included Kate's turn to the pioneers '*taking their guts, their courage, their bravery...*' and Mark's faith in '*following children's lead... You can achieve all this stuff [literacy and numeracy outcomes] in this way through playful opportunities, if you are brave enough.*' Further to these assertions of professional confidence, action demonstrating agency and confidence were discernible. Sarah's refusal to comply with the demands of the Numeracy Advisor and Sophie's insistence on the provision of loose parts play for the children in her class, illustrate this action.

Drawing on Bandura's theorisations, examples of self and collective efficacy were also analysed in the data. Notably, the interrelationships between self- and collective efficacy are apparent in the narratives of participants with each idea reinforcing the other. Several participants identified self-efficacy as a precursor to collective efficacy - in terms of the shared belief in capability of a group and the potential to unite with others - motivating their actions. These examples of critical awareness, professional confidence and self/collective efficacy featured prominently as enablers of resistance and activism in the narratives.

The tensions between these constraints and enablers were exemplified in many of the tales from participants. Their stories offered numerous instances of educators grappling with and responding to policy and practice dilemmas on multiple levels. Chapter Eight detailed these tensions, contradictions and dilemmas through borderland discourses and thus proposes that many of the stories emerge as borderland narratives. Such a conceptualisation of borderlands and the factors in these sites of struggle are shown in diagrammatic form as Fig. 9.2. This reconceptualisation of the landscape of professional identity construction offers new understandings of the dynamics at play in such spaces. This forms an element of the original contribution, which I discuss below.

Reconceptualising the *borderland* of professional identities

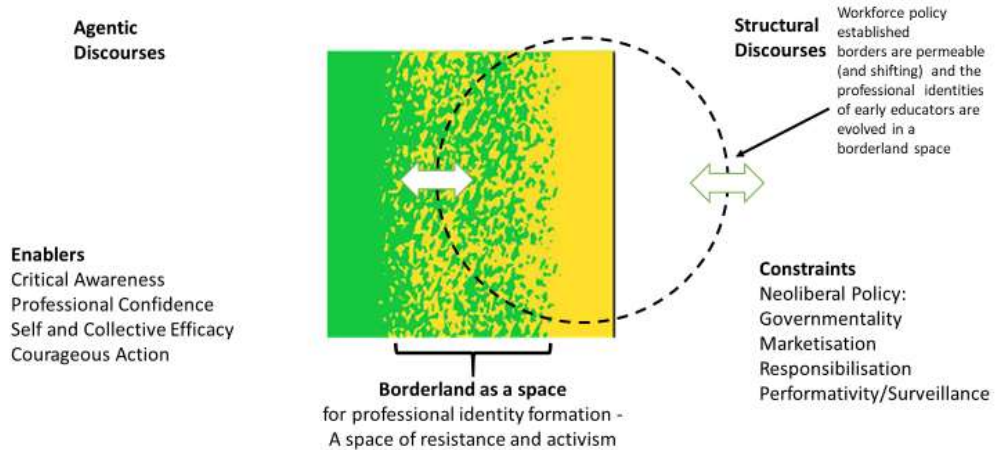


Fig. 9. 2 Conceptual Map F – Enablers and constraints mapped to the borderlands of professional identity construction

What contribution has the study made?

My original contributions to knowledge are evident theoretically, methodologically, empirically and analytically.

Having mapped the discursive landscape of professional identities of early educators from existing research, I presented this literature in a new way (pp.62-83). Through identifying the structural, agential and borderland discourses in previous studies, this enabled me to organise the review accordingly. I considered existing theoretical interpretations of professional identity formation and identified a limited number of studies which focussed on the space between agency and structure on this topic. Furthermore, the mapping of what I term 'borderland discourses' in previous studies enabled me to discern a dearth of literature that explored the resistance and activism of early educators in a UK context.

Theoretically, the study combined conceptual and theoretical resources in a new way. This research adopted an approach which brought together the postcolonial sociolinguistic third space theory of identity (Bhabha) and borderlands theory (Anzaldúa) which is based on identity deconstruction and reconstruction in the hybrid space of the US/Mexico borders. Beyond the geo-political and cultural dimensions which informed these theories originally, I applied them to the socio-politically produced conceptual border/lands of professional identities in ECE. I combined these theoretical

lenses in order to shed new light on the spaces in which professional identities are formed and the actions which take place in this 'site of struggle'.

This new theoretical approach provided insights into professional identities as multiple, complex, situated and contested; a space where binaries do not apply. In addition, this hybrid theoretical approach created perspectives into how educator struggles manifested. It offered new understandings of 'hows' and 'whys' of resistance and activism in contemporary early childhood education.

Methodologically, the study offers a novel contribution to the ECE field in working with both a critical perspective and narrative inquiry in an English context. Drawing on work by Clandinin and Rosiek (2012) who advocate for methodological 'bumping places' (p.27), this study moves beyond disciplinary and methodological borders to work in conceptual spaces where different research traditions meet. The research works in borderland spaces between critical theory and narrative inquiry, acknowledging onto-epistemological tensions within this approach. Working with these tensions in the borderlands required not only grappling with theories which appeared incomplete in their explanatory power, but also acknowledging contradictory perspectives that reflect the multiplicity of practitioners' experiences. Embracing such perspectives has meant rejecting binaries, working with uncertainty and researching within constantly shifting landscapes.

In terms of data collection methods, the synthesis of data from policy analysis and both face-to-face and online empirical data offered a unique opportunity to develop an analysis of workforce policy and contemporary socio-economic conditions and participants' responses to these. As a result, I reflect on the collection of these data as more than a series of questions through interviews and a focus group, but as a powerful way of developing narratives of experience.

My selection of Critical Narrative Analysis as the analytic framework for the research also offers an original contribution to the field. Such a framework has been deployed in the fields of retirement experiences (Dodds 2018) and occupational science (Laliberte-Rudman and Aldrich 2017) but seldom in early childhood education. Whilst Souto-Manning's works (2014; 2016) deploy a version of this framework in an ECE environment in the US, such an approach has not been utilised to analyse data on early childhood education topics in an English context.

In utilising this analytical frame (Laliberte-Rudman and Aldrich 2017) and its guiding questions, I have developed new understanding of this field. Based on the rich accounts of lived experiences of educators, the study has created novel insights about

the agency and activism of early childhood educators in twenty first century England. In empirical terms, the study has offered a new account of a phenomenon previously undocumented (Ågerfalk 2014). Whilst the thesis builds on resistance literature, it moves to consider forms of activism in its multiple manifestations. In this regard, I propose that, in empirical terms, this study works at a frontier, 'a border between what is known and not known' (Cambridge Dictionary 2020). This new empirical knowledge offers significance and implications, both for policy and practice, which I now explore further.

What are the significance and implications of the findings?

If what falls outside the borders of the familiar – the unusual, the awkward, the different – is marginalised, there is a risk for policy-makers of losing new and challenging insights. (Batchelor, 2012, p.122)

The research has significance for both policy and practice. In terms of implications for policy, my analysis and discussion of data contests rather than accepts policy formations of professional identities. The rigour of critical discourse analysis coupled with a critical approach to narrative analysis provides alternative readings of policy texts and lived experiences of educators in response to these policy formations. Deconstruction and critique of policy, and the degrees of resistance and activism evident in empirical data, speak back to early childhood workforce policy reforms.

The nature of responses in participants' narratives reveal educators' professional identities are often at odds with official ideal subjectivities in policy. As a result, policy makers might consider both broader and more comprehensive stakeholder consultation, and impact assessment of workforce reform policies before qualifications and workforce reforms are implemented. Indeed, engagement of educators in workforce policy design and implementation and a commitment from all stakeholders for conversations 'facing outward' (Urban, 2016, p.116) would result in more open dialogue, mutual respect, and sector ownership, leading to collaborative action on workforce reform.

The research also has significance to practice. Attending to this topic has proved important, providing insights into the micro-level professional challenges of educators and their responses to policy. Through identifying and communicating examples of hitherto underexplored resistance and activism in early childhood education, the research shines a light on a sector, which I suggest is underfunded, and undervalued.

Through naming and platforming activism work in early childhood education, it is hoped that educators might develop greater awareness of colleagues who have resisted dominant policy discourses, articulated alternative narratives and, as a result, further consider their own agency and resistance/activism. Notably, the online focus group and interviews included expressions of agency, community, and solidarity but also, at times, a lack of opportunities for collective expression of these. In addition to individual acts of resistance and activism, this research proposes that there is further work to be undertaken in understanding contexts in which individuals collectivise.

A further implication for practice is the possible impact of a broader awareness of the contestability of workforce reform policies. In particular, I propose, by adopting borderland policies as a lens to view such policy, the supposed objectivity, certainty, and finality of these policies can be questioned. Thus, I contend, that if borders (as in ideal subject positions created by policy) are perceived as contingent, porous, and constantly in flux, and viewed in light of the zones around a border, individuals are better positioned to exert agency to critique, deconstruct, dismantle and work through/beyond such borders. As Batchelor (2012) asserts:

Radical perceptions from the margin have the latent power to overturn existing configurations and realign the borders of what is considered to be valid knowledge. The borderline space of the margin has the potential to become the nucleus of the space, a centre of influence. (pp.601-2)

Additionally, this study offers insight for both educators and organisations representing educators working in ECE about the way in which resistance and activism manifests on multiple levels, in numerous contexts and in response to different macro-, meso- and micro- level demands. Such knowledge contributes to understandings and debates on what enables and inhibits educators' agency and activism, thereby supporting moves to amplify educators' voices in workforce policy development. This knowledge might be of interest to membership organisations, lobbying groups and activist collectives assisting the development of resources in support of educator activism.

Much previous research on professional identities and the neoliberal project focuses on 'restricted professional identities where affordances for professional practices lying outside of neoliberal subjectivities have been dramatically reduced' (Hall and McGinty, 2015, p.2). Whilst acknowledging and critiquing the pervasiveness of neoliberalism and associated NPM, this study speaks back to these structural conditions. It recognises the power of institutional discourses but seeks understandings of educator agency and explores the dynamic between these.

Through theoretical frameworks of critical theory, third space and borderlands theory, the study has significance in reflecting a nuanced reading of the site of professional identity construction. Such a reading has importance for the field diverging from previous post-structural feminist readings and recognises the tensions between structural conditions and agentic actions:

When teachers personalize the lived implications of institutionally-mandated fiscal and labour policy, they insert a palpable wedge into what has proven formidably intractable neoliberal discourse. (Hales, 2015, p.59)

What are the limitations of the study and questions for future research?

Limitations

The study invariably has a number of limitations. In terms of the review of existing literature, there were few studies focussed on early childhood education activism on which to draw. Whilst a number of papers, notably from Australia and New Zealand, explored concepts of resistance and activism theoretically and empirically, such research was minimal in a UK context. This meant drawing on a wider body of research on agency, activism and resistance studies from other disciplines. Nonetheless, these informed the research and as a result it is hoped that this small-scale study contributes to this literature and encourages further work in this field.

In terms of research design and participant recruitment, I initially designed five focus groups, with membership of the groups divided by professional roles. Difficulties in recruiting this number of participants to multiple groups led to an amended research design comprising one online focus group with diverse membership. This development invariably resulted in a reduction in the volume of data collected. However, the method chosen did lead to rich, cross-sectoral discussions between individuals from different professional backgrounds in a way that would not have been captured under the original design.

More broadly, I also reflect on the necessity of collecting two sets of empirical data. Conducting interviews and facilitating an online focus group were different experiences and I considered whether both were necessary in addressing the research questions. Arguably, the research questions might have been answered by data from one rather than both. However, there were advantages of collecting these two data sets. Firstly, some participants preferred to be involved in one form of data collection over another,

whether interview or focus group. Secondly, offering two different opportunities for involvement in the project may have increased access to participation (i.e. focus group involvement was asynchronous and arguably more accessible for those working full time). Thirdly, focus group participants expressed their appreciation for a format predicated on interaction and discussion. This leads me to think that despite my reservations, the benefits of two methods and sets of data outweighed the limitations.

As the study evolved and I was drawn to narrative inquiry and narrative analysis, I have reflected on the challenges of drawing the narrative structure from online focus group data. Synthesising the data from two methods proved challenging in working with the narrative form. The focus group method, whilst offering rich data did not offer opportunities to develop extended narratives. This meant that the boxed narratives in Chapters Seven and Eight are largely drawn from interviews only. In addition, it was not possible to develop narratives which include institutional discourses which reflects the messiness of the data and findings.

The limitation which remains most prominent in my mind is that the participants all expressed an interest or inclination for the topic of activism (see p.127). Whilst this might be viewed as a prerequisite, it can also be viewed as something of a drawback. Those early childhood educators who volunteered to be involved in the study held opinions on or were predisposed to the concept of activism in early childhood education and might be disproportionately represented, as a percentage of the overall early childhood education sector. Whilst the study did not seek a representative sample, nor aim to be reflective of a wider early childhood educator population, it is important to acknowledge that the richness of data is shaped by the experiences of participants and their inclination to engage with the subject. Taken together these limitations offer valuable lessons for future studies.

Future Research

This study has necessitated working in an underexplored space, with limited literature and new theoretical perspectives, and these have opened up multiple, new avenues for further exploration. A growing body of literature reflects the effects of neoliberalism on the lives of early educators and this study further considers such effects. Additionally, I have sought to respond to such literature by reflecting the voices of educators who speak back to such neoliberal shaped policy. There are further opportunities to extend this work. Building on the collaborative autoethnography of members of the EECERA Professionalisation Special Interest Group (P-SIG) from six countries, would offer a prospect not only to consider professional identity formation in various neoliberal

contexts, but to explore the ways in which educators may (or may not) enact resistance and activism in response to this.

The study also offers a springboard to further apply third space and borderland theories to other elements of 'struggle' in ECE, beyond professional identities. Given the interplay between workforce reform and curriculum, assessment and regulation, such theories might be applied to consider tensions and dilemmas experienced by educators on these topics. Recent policy proposals in England on baseline assessment, changes to curricular outcomes and the role of Ofsted, coupled with educator responses to these, suggests that this is fertile ground to explore further through these theoretical lenses.

What has been the impact of undertaking the research on me as researcher?

This inquiry has been shaped by my experiences of living and working in the borderlands. Within early childhood education, I have worked across the boundaries of governance arrangements (between public, private, and voluntary sectors), in employment, linking spaces of local, regional and national experience and in the borderlands of research, policy and practice. These 'in-between' spaces invariably influenced the study and my being drawn to third space and borderland theories. Through these experiences and theoretical explorations, I have developed a greater awareness of and, arguably, ability to live with uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. The sensitising concept of borderlands has permeated my thinking beyond the study and now offers a lens with which to complicate and problematise concepts I had previously perceived in binary terms.

The study has also prompted reflections on the dynamic and the challenges of scholar-activism:

What is it to live in the borderlands of "scholar educator-activism," and how does one effectively navigate spaces and institutions that are already "structured in dominance"...(Suzuki and Mayorga, 2014, p.17)

The research has required a reflexivity on my own structural location(s), my overt and covert political orientations and actions in all their contradictions and complexities. As a result of this study, I continue to trouble the historical separation between scholarship and activism. I consider to what extent these orientations might be read as a symbiotic relationship, one in which the two orientations are inextricably intertwined. It is also a

contentious space. Acting in a borderland space between scholar and activist work involves being marginal(ised), taking risks and being in a politically and possibly economically vulnerable position. I conclude that such work involves accepting that such a challenge can be both controversial and unpalatable to policy makers and, nonetheless, means the researcher working undeterred.

Undertaking the study has been a remarkable opportunity and privilege. It has been, and continues to be, important to recognise my responsibilities both to participants and to the wider ECE community. I seek to use the platforms to which I have had access to open up spaces for others. As such I see this scholar-activist role as an intrinsic responsibility of a public intellectual.

Conclusion

These analyses, discussions and the four insights I offer serve to complicate the agency/structure dynamic and reflect the third space lived experiences of early childhood educators. Additionally, I believe this work contributes to making multiple voices audible in a field where, and an era in which, policy constructions of ideal subjectivities dominate.

This thesis illustrates the power of narratives to illuminate both individual experiences and spaces in which the legitimacy of the existing status quo are questioned and challenged. As Apple (2015, p.15) writes:

Spaces for counter-hegemonic work are constantly being created at the very same moment as dominant groups seek to close other spaces. Recognizing and filling these spaces is as crucial as it has even been.

Whilst there is much scholar-activism work to be done, storying the resistance and activism of early educators (however these manifest) is an important mode of filling these spaces. Such a perspective offers both challenge and hope.

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Appendix 1: Organisations contacted who distributed the ‘Call for participants’ notice.

Early Education (The British Association for Early Childhood Education)

National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)

National Early Years Trainers and Consultants’ Organization (NEYTCO)

Association for Professional Development in Early Years (TACTYC)

Pre School Learning Alliance (now the Early Years Alliance)

Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY)

Appendix 2: University of Sheffield Ethics Approval



Downloaded: 03/09/2017
Approved: 30/08/2017

Nathan Archer
Registration number: 160102590
School of Education
Programme: PhD

Dear Nathan

PROJECT TITLE: Agency, Advocacy and Activism: Exploring Professional Identities in Early Childhood Education

APPLICATION: Reference Number 015941

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 30/08/2017 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 015941 (dated 04/08/2017).
- Participant information sheet 1034860 version 1 (04/08/2017).
- Participant consent form 1034861 version 1 (04/08/2017).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

David Hyatt
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Appendix 3: Focus Group Questions Overview

Working definitions of key terms are provided in the Focus Group Guidance Sheet.

Focus	Overarching Research Question	Questions I seek to answer	Focus Group Questions for Participants
Professional Identity Construction	<p>How are ECE practitioners positioned in government policies and how do they respond to this?</p> <p><i>(This question will also be addressed through policy analysis).</i></p>	<p>How would you describe your professional identity as an early childhood educator?</p> <p>Over your professional life, to what extent do you think your personal motivations, values and beliefs have influenced your professional identity?</p> <p>Thinking back over the time you have worked in early childhood education, to what extent have government policies influenced your professional identity?</p> <p>Over your professional life, to what extent have professional standards and curricular frameworks (such as the EYFS) influenced your professional identity?</p>	<p>What does it mean to you to 'be' an early years educator?</p> <p>How do you see yourself as an early educator? <i>Prompt if needed: professionally, ethically, politically?</i></p> <p>How do you think others see you? <i>Prompt: Other educators, children, families</i></p> <p>What influenced your decision to be an early years educator?</p> <p>What are your views about changes in early years during your career? (eg qualifications, curricula) <i>Possible follow on question: 'How have changes made you feel about your job/career/role you play?'</i></p>
Professional Identity Construction	To what extent do practitioners perpetuate or challenge prevailing thinking about their professional identities and do they	Thinking about current early childhood education policy, to what extent do you think these policies are appropriate in shaping who early	<p>What words would you use to describe your role?</p> <p>What do you see as current benefits and challenges of working in early years?</p>

	imagine policy alternatives?	educators are and what they do?	<p>To what extent do you resist changes/new policies if you don't agree with them?</p> <p>If you were planning early years policy, what would be your priority actions/policy changes?</p>
Agency/Activism	What forms of individual and collective activism exist?	<p>Over your time working in early childhood education, do you consider yourself to have been involved in any resistance to early childhood policy or practice? If so, what happened?</p> <p>Over your time working in early childhood education, do you consider yourself to have been involved in any activism in relation to early childhood policy or practice? If so, what happened?</p>	<p>What frustrates you about your work in early childhood education?</p> <p>Have you ever disagreed with a policy or development in early childhood education?</p> <p>Have you ever spoken out or acted on this?</p>
Agency/Activism	Which conditions/values enable and/or constrain activism and how do practitioners see their roles in this?	What, if anything, has enabled and/or constrained your involvement in resistance or activism in early childhood education?	If you have spoken out or acted on this, did anything support you or hold you back in doing this?

Appendix 4: Interview Topic Guide

The study: Agency and Activism in Early Childhood Education

Thank you for kindly agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above study. The Information Sheet and Consent form have provided some background to the study and to ethical considerations of the research.

I would like to undertake a 'Professional Life History interview': a face-to-face interview which is semi structured (a few questions but with the freedom for you to tell *your* story)

- Professional identity
- Career choices
- Role of EY policy
- Resistance and Activism

Questions

Can you tell me about your career in early childhood and what influenced the choices you have made?

Can you tell me about any incidents or phases in your professional life which might be described as significant or as turning points which influenced you?

Professional Identities

What were the influences on/motivations for your decisions/choices at the time?

How do you view your identity as an early educator?

Policy

Can you tell me about what you see as important changes in the sector during your professional life?

What about workforce changes?

Would you change anything in national early years policy and if so, what?

Activism

In that time have you been involved in any resistance/activism – can you tell me about it?

Has anything enabled/constrained your responses to activism in these roles?

What does activism look like in the sector?

Future

When you think about the future- what makes you uneasy and what gives you hope?

Is there anything else you would like to share on this topic?

Appendix 5: Participant Information Sheet

1. Research Project Title: Agency, Advocacy and Activism in Early Childhood Education: Exploring Constructions of Professional Identities

Researcher: Nathan Archer, Doctoral Student, School of Education, University of Sheffield, UK.

2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for your time and consideration to participate.

3. What is the project's purpose?

This research project forms part of a doctoral study which includes an analysis of national policy and interviews with early childhood educators in England.

The project aims to explore how early childhood educators understand, interpret and build their professional identities. It seeks to investigate the influences of policy and of individual's motivations, values and beliefs in constructing their roles as early educators and the extent to which they may be involved in activism on this issue.

A two-stage approach is planned. Firstly, a number of Online Focus Groups using closed, private Facebook groups (by invite only) will be organised. Secondly, individual 1:1 interviews will be arranged and participants will be asked to share their life stories and influences on them as early childhood educators.

The project will run between September 2017 – August 2019 with online Focus Groups and Interviews held between January – May 2018. It will culminate in the production of a doctoral thesis and the publications of articles based on the findings of the research.

4. Why have I been invited?

You have been invited as you are actively involved in early childhood education in England and have expressed an interest in being involved in the project via a call for interest through a number of national sector bodies and websites. It is anticipated that six participants will take part in each online focus group. This will be followed by individual 1:1 interviews, face to face or by Skype for those participants who choose to be involved at this second stage.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and

you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.

6. What will happen to me if I take part?

Phase 1: Online Focus Groups

These Focus Groups will be hosted as closed, invite-only groups on the social media platform Facebook. Participants will be invited to join one group. Each group will be open for four weeks and consist of the researcher/facilitator and six early childhood educators by subsector, e.g. six Nursery teachers, six childminders, six setting managers. One open question will be posted each week for four weeks and participants will be encouraged to share their views on the subject. Clarification and follow up questions may be provided by the researcher/facilitator. Participation at all times is voluntary and you are free to read, write, make announcements, update your status, ask questions and give feedback at any time. Any members and the facilitator are free to start a new chat, to post and respond to any parts of the post within the group. You will be invited to join the group once you have given your written consent to participate in this phase of the study. You are also free to leave and re-join the group at any time. Please be assured that should you choose to leave the group, and the study, your contribution will not be used in the research. The text from this group alongside interviews will be analysed to form the findings of the research. All information will be confidential and anonymised in the thesis and publications (See Q. 12).

Phase 2: Individual Interviews

Focus group participants will be invited to take part in individual interviews on the same topic.

There will be one interview per participant lasting 60 -90 minutes. It can be held face to face at a time and location to suit you or via Skype, again at a convenient time for you. This interview will also be on the topic of professional identities and the opportunity for you to discuss a personal and professional history should you wish to. The interviews will be semi-structured in style with a series of open questions. The interviews will be audio recorded.

7. What are the possible risks of taking part?

Whilst there is no anticipated physical harm, participating in this research could cause minimal stress if any sensitive issues you might face in your professional life were to be raised. You might possibly feel discomfort within the online Focus Group if the discussion become heated or controversial. However, if at any time you feel distressed or uncomfortable, please inform me and we can discuss adjustment or further arrangements. You can also withdraw from any part of the study without having to state your reasons. Please be assured that should you choose to leave the group, and the study, your contribution will not be used in the research.

9. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for you participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will contribute to a better understanding of how professional identities are developed and lived in early childhood education in England.

10. What if something goes wrong?

If you wish to make a complaint about your experiences associated with participating in this research, either regarding treatment by the researcher or if something serious occurs during or following your participation in the research (e.g. a reportable serious adverse event). You should inform the researcher as soon as possible. In the first instance, you should inform me (Nathan Archer), alternatively you can contact the Supervisors directly. All contact details are given at the end of this information sheet.

12. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that is collected about you during the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. Your consent for this will be collected on the Consent form. The Focus Group will be an invite-only Facebook group meaning your comments will only be viewable at the time and afterwards by invited members of the group and not by any other Facebook users.

14. What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of this research will form part of my doctoral thesis, which it is hoped will be completed in 2019. Electronic access to the final thesis will be available via <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/>

Due to the nature of this research it is very likely that other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. I will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way and if you agree, we will ensure that the data collected about you is untraceable back to you before allowing others to use it.

16. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the School of Education, University of Education ethics review procedure. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

17. Contact for further information

If you have further questions and are interested in taking part in the study, please contact me via email to discuss next steps and to sign a consent form. My contact details and those of my supervisor are below.

Researcher: Nathan Archer Tel: 07967 077015 Email: njarcher1@sheffield.ac.uk

Supervisor: Professor Liz Wood, School of Education, University of Sheffield
Tel: 0114 222 8172 Email: e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk

Co-Supervisor : Dr Liz Chesworth, School of Education, University of Sheffield
Tel: 0114 222 3626 Email: e.a.chesworth@sheffield.ac.uk

Thank you

You will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed consent form to keep. Many thanks for your interest and involvement in the research – it is much appreciated

Appendix 6: Participant Consent Form

University of Sheffield

Participant Consent Form

First & Last Name:

Facebook Name/Address:

Email:

Sex:

Age:

Ethnicity:

Region:

Job title:

Length of time working in early childhood education:

Title of Research Project: Agency, Advocacy and Activism in: Exploring Professional Identities in Early Childhood Education

Name of Researcher: Nathan Archer

**Participant Identification Number for this project:
initial box**

Please

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. The researcher has explained the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. The Researcher, Nathan Archer can be contacted at n.j.archer1@sheffield.ac.uk | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I agree to participate in a closed, private Facebook group on the above Topic. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I agree to be interviewed and I understand that the audio recordings made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without my written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. I agree to take part in the above research project. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name of Participant
(or legal representative)

Date

Signature

Lead Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix 7: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Agency and Activism in early childhood education

Introduction

This research seeks to hear the stories and experiences of early childhood educators in England.

Aims of the research are to:

- Explore how the professional identities of early childhood educators are constructed
- Better understand the influences on individual's sense of agency* and of any involvement in activism* in early childhood education contexts.
- Consider what enables and/or constraints early childhood educators in advocating/activism.

To this end, I would be grateful if you would share your thoughts, beliefs and experiences.

*Working Definitions

Agency - For the purposes of this research I understand **agency** to mean the capacity of an individual or individuals to act in particular circumstances.

Activism – For the purposes of this research I understand **activism** to consist of efforts to promote, impede, or direct reform or change with the aim to make improvements in our current situation. Forms of activism range from social media activity, petitions, writing letters to newspapers or to politicians, to rallies, street marches and strikes. Daily acts of resistance or objection at a school/setting level are other forms of activism.

Guidance

- The Focus Group Discussion will be held on a private, 'secret' Facebook group with membership by invite only. Your comments will only be visible to group members.
- I encourage dialogue between members and you are welcome to engage in multiple discussion threads simultaneously.
- As the Focus Group will be open for 4-5 weeks you are welcome to contribute as much or as little as you like at a time convenient to you.
- There are no right or wrong answers. Everyone's responses, including repeated and contradictory ideas are of value.
- Please change names of any children; parents; staff and outside agencies referred to, in order to ensure confidentiality. Your name will be anonymised in any quotation of your comments.
- Should you feel uncomfortable or unable to continue with the research, you are free to leave without consequence at any point. Should you choose to do so, your data will not be used in the study. (Please see study information sheet).
- I will send an invite to the private Facebook group w/c 26/2/18 and also further details by email.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research, please contact Nathan Archer. E: njarcher1@sheffield.ac.uk

Many thanks for your support and involvement with this research.

Appendix 8: GDPR Email



Nathan J Archer <njarcher1@sheffield.ac.uk>

GDPR information and research study

Nathan J Archer <njarcher1@sheffield.ac.uk>
To: Nathan J Archer <njarcher1@sheffield.ac.uk>
Bcc:

1 June 2018 at 14:07

Dear colleagues,

As participants in my research study who have kindly agreed to be interviewed, please find below some information with regard to GDPR. The data will obviously now be collected after 25 May. This information is provided, based on guidance from the University of Sheffield.

Kind Regards,

Nathan

New data protection legislation came into effect across the EU, including the UK on 25 May; this means that I need to provide you with some further information relating to how your personal information will be used and managed within this research project. This is in addition to the details provided within the information sheet that has already been given to you.

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

In order to collect and use your personal information as part of this research project, we must have a basis in law to do so. The basis that we are using is that the research is 'a task in the public interest'.

Further information, including details about how and why the University processes your personal information, how we keep your information secure, and your legal rights (including how to complain if you feel that your personal information has not been handled correctly), can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

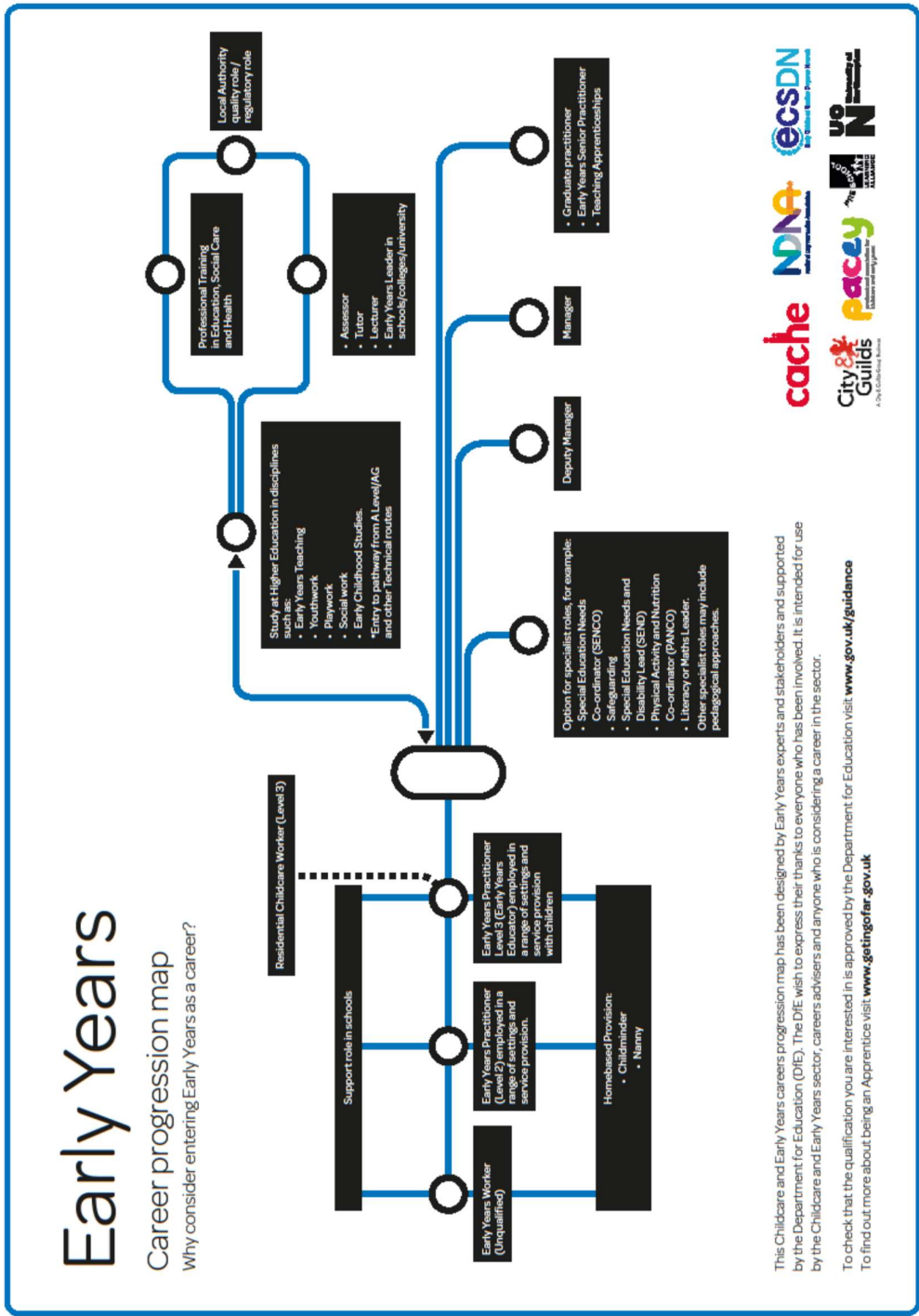
--

Nathan Archer
Doctoral Researcher
School of Education
University of Sheffield

T: @NathanArcher1

Archer, N. (2017) [Where is the ethic of care in early childhood summative assessment?](#) *Global Studies of Childhood* Volume: 7 issue: 4, page(s): 357-368
Issue published: December 1, 2017
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610617747983>

Appendix 9: Career Progression map



Appendix 10: Publisher Permission Pan Macmillan



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June 07, 2019

Nathan Archer
241 Glossop Rd
Sheffield, S10 2GW

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