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**Tensions between policy and practice:
preschool managers' priorities for practice
in areas of disadvantage in England.**

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Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of six preschool managers based in areas of mixed socioeconomic communities in a city on the south coast of England. The research study was formed of analysis of Coalition Government policy and interviews with the preschool managers. A social constructionist approach to the research study examined the ways in which the Coalition Government, and the media, shared deficit discourses of families living in poverty and disadvantage. The use of Fairclough's (2010) Dialectical Relational Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis presented as a social wrong the absence of a formal definition of disadvantage, and suggested that a reliance on an assumed shared understanding of disadvantage across society is impeded by the subjective nature of knowledge. The interdiscursive analysis of five policy texts, between 2010 and 2015, demonstrates a shift in the framing of disadvantage aligned to the policy intentions across the Coalition Government. In contrast, the rich descriptions of the preschool managers reinforce their experience and understanding of the structural factors of poverty that impact on children and their families. A Reflexive Thematic Analysis of the managers' interviews led to five themes covering the constructions of disadvantage and the priorities of their preschool practice. The challenge of enacting Coalition policy that may be counter to the best interests of the preschool highlights the priorities of the preschool managers as sustainability, longevity and resilience. To conclude the study the priorities of the preschool managers were used as a framework to consider the tensions between policy and practice that arose during the two stages of interviews. The complexity and contradictions of their position as members of a marketised ECEC sector were compounded by their moral responsibility to support the families and children attending their preschool settings. The researcher's insider role as a preschool manager contributed to understanding the gap in knowledge about the non-profit preschool sector.

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Acronyms

BERA	British Educational Research Association
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Family (2007- 2010)
DfE	Department for Education (2010- present day)
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment (1997- 2007)
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (2001- 2007)
DLA	Disability Living Allowance
DoH	Department of Health
DRA	Dialectical Relational Approach
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EYA	Early Years Alliance
EPPE	The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project
EU	European Union
HMRC	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
HMT	Her Majesty's Treasury
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LAC	Looked after child
NDNA	National Day Nurseries Association
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PHE	Public Health England
PVI	Private, Voluntary and Independent
WHO	World Health Organisation

Chapter One: The Context of Poverty and Disadvantage

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the impact of the Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition Government (2010-2015) policy on the practice of preschools based in areas of disadvantage. The Coalition Government continued the marketisation of the Early Childhood Education and Care sector with the goal of quality provision at a low-cost for parents (Department for Education 2013a; Department for Education 2013b). The provision of parttime funded education for two-year-old children considered disadvantaged will be used as a starting point for an inductive study of the tensions that exist between policy initiatives and the priorities for practice shared by the preschool managers. A consideration of the preschool managers' constructions of disadvantage will provide insight into their practice-related decisions. This research study will demonstrate that a market approach is difficult to reconcile to the demands of children and families in a deprived socio-economic location.

A social constructionist approach involves a broad theoretical framework which rejects a single ultimate truth, instead seeing the world as constructed through language, representation and other social processes (Burr 2015). Social constructionism views knowledge as more than a reflection of reality (Gergen 2018), and involves acknowledging that socio-cultural and historical contexts shape each individual's construction of knowledge. A social constructionist framework will follow a view of the potential for language and words to shape discourse which can be used to normalise ways of being.

Prior to considering the context of poverty and disadvantage it is necessary to define the use of the term discourse. Discourse is used extensively in social and political theory, but Bacchi (2000) argues that discourse is not just language but also the meaning behind language. Fischer (2003) suggests that the words used as part of an argument for action depends upon the social context, and for this reason analysis of language in isolation will only provide partial understanding of a situation. At a wider level Thrift (2005: p.24) describes discourses as 'meta languages that instruct people how to live as people', for example the need to be a good parent but also a good worker to contribute to the global competitive race. Numerous discourses surround any event and Burr (2015) contends that each discourse offers an alternate view and possibility for action. The term dominant discourse, was first used by the

French philosopher Michel Foucault (1981) to depict the strategic power to reinforce a discourse as dominant, that can be used to govern how we understand and construct the world. Dahlberg and Moss (2005: p.17) suggest that dominant discourses cause subjective understanding to be presented as objective truths, to 'determine that some things are selfevident and realistic while others are dubious and impractical'. Fairclough (1992) contends that the way that discourse can be used to construct reality through an introduction of a hegemonic conception of reality that is repeated and reinforced over time. The additional use of technical language can emphasise a tone and style to support a particular way of thinking (Moss and Vandebroek 2016), an approach that is particularly evident in policy texts. Each dominant discourse is then identifiable through particular words or phrases. In this way, Bacchi (2000) argues problems are constructed and shaped within the policy proposals that offer a considered approach. This will form the basis of the analysis of argumentation across the policy texts of the Coalition Government.

Exploring how people talk about poverty and disadvantage is critical to understanding the value judgements involved, and the basis of their viewpoints. This introductory chapter will present a brief exploration of conceptualisations of poverty and disadvantage, situating the discourses shared within the political, economic and social context. The concepts of poverty and disadvantage will be addressed separately to reinforce their difference.

1.1 Poverty

A consideration of the concept of poverty incorporates historical, cultural and political perspectives to form a breadth of perspectives of the prevalence of poverty. Alcock contends that 'a disputed range of concepts leads to disagreement about what it is and how it should be addressed' (2006: p.4). Resulting at the extreme level as a binary position situating poverty as either a monetary problem or as a wider conceptualisation that encompasses the impact of the structure and organisation of society. At its simplest form a monetary view of poverty will present the problem as low-income and highlight the need for employment to overcome the problem. In contrast a socio-economic approach considers the impact of structural factors and the experiences of those living in poverty (Lister 2004: p.3). It is important to note that attempts to equate poverty with inequality overlook the extent to which all societies are unequal. To reflect this poverty is widely constructed as too few resources to live within

society. Lister (2004) argues that the breadth of the concepts of poverty culminate in a range of attempts to define and measure the situation. The challenge for government is to provide a definitive definition of poverty that can also be used to quantify and measure a situation (Alcock 2006:4). This leads to further considerations of whether a definition should be broad or narrow, be linked to a stated level of income or to a lack of resources to live or participate in society.

Social welfare organisations construct poverty with a recognition of the experiences of those living in poverty, and place structural effects at the centre of the problem (Hawkins 2018). For example, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Child Poverty Action Group and Shelter share a view that the causes of poverty are economic, structural and political. The sociologist Peter Townsend (1979), a founder of the Child Poverty Action Group, explains further:

Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies in which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns and activities.

A modern twist on the above definition is used by Child Poverty Action Group and the Social Metrics Commission who suggest that poverty is the situation of an individual going without the necessities of life, struggling to pay for essentials and the inability to participate in society (Marsh et al 2017; Social Metrics Commission 2018). Walker (2014) argues that a multidimensional approach to measuring poverty provides a more accurate description of the reality for people living in poverty. Nevertheless, the possibility of differing expectations of what is a necessity or essential is further compounded by the variety of views about acceptable levels of participation, thus reinforcing the difficulty of forming an agreed definition.

In direct contrast political parties and successive governments have been reluctant to define poverty, as a definition details the problem and thus translates into the requirement for a solution to be found. The considered approach across political parties has been to use a measure of income to describe poverty, to reinforce the idea that an increase in income through employment will solve the monetary problems that are faced by families. The positioning of employment as a solution to poverty overlooks the reality of low paid work and

the inability to consistently guarantee an adequate level of income. The introduction of measures of poverty is designed to produce statistics that can provide a snapshot of a particular point in time but does not include the experiences of those living in poverty or provide solutions.

The final months of the New Labour Government included the Child Poverty Act 2010, and the introduction of four measures of poverty to be used depending upon the intention of the statistics: relative income, absolute income, persistent poverty, and combined low income and maternal deprivation (Great Britain 2010). The statistics are used to produce different interpretations of the same situation, resulting in an absolute -relative dichotomy (Shildrick and Rucell 2015). Furthermore Clarke and Hulme (2010) argue the inclusion of persistent poverty represents an indication of the scale of the problem. Most cited by social welfare organisations is the relative low-income measure which deems a family to be living in poverty if the household income falls below 60% of national median income (Marsh et al 2017). An arbitrary measure of 60% of national median income reflects a poverty line that is unstable and insufficient for daily needs. Bourquin, Joyce and Keiller (2020) suggest that the measure of relative poverty relates to the standards of living of a particular society and highlights injustice within society. In contrast the measure of absolute poverty is used in response by government to reduce the numbers of the population involved and only focus on poverty at the most extreme level.

In Britain, the Institute of Fiscal Studies published statistics of living standards in 2018-19 to demonstrate the scale of the problem, with 21.6% of the population considered to be living in relative poverty, including 4.6 million children (Bourquin et al 2020). Many families are vulnerable to poverty and may be temporarily struggling due to ill health, unemployment or family breakdown. However other families are far below the poverty line and live in persistent poverty. The Social Metrics Commission (2018) estimates that 49% of those in poverty are classified as in persistent poverty, living under the poverty line for at least two of the last three years. The relationship between the length of time living in poverty and the extension of the negative effects later into children's lives, presents a greater challenge to overcome (Ackerman et al 2004; Bradbury et al 2001; Children's Society 2020; Lai et al 2019). Research demonstrates that poverty impacts on every area of a child's life and affects their material, educational, social and psychological development (Goghlan et al 2009; Ridge 2011). Some

types of families are more likely to face longer-term poverty for example, data demonstrates that 47% of lone parents in the UK are living in poverty due to the high incidence of women as lone parents and the limitations on their work opportunities due to family responsibilities (Alston 2018; Millar and Ridge 2013). Additionally, the impact of geographic location, unemployment, low pay and educational attainment results in a high incidence of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups living in poverty (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2017).

1.2 Disadvantage

Linking disadvantage to poverty presents a narrow view that overlooks a range of characteristics that affects lives (Shildrick and Rucell 2015). Disadvantage as a broad concept introduces the importance of structure and agency, on an individual's ability to improve their situation. In addition to access to education and training, factors include domestic difficulties, including the impact of stress of supporting a family on a low income that can lead to problems that deprive people of the chance to play a full part in society (Brook 2019). For this reason, a focus on agency in isolation is not sufficient to overcome the structural difficulties that may be faced, for example access to employment, an adequate level of income or suitable housing.

Since 1997 contradictory responses from successive governments and the social welfare sector detail the diverging views of disadvantage. The foreword to the State of the Nation Report 2018-19 (Social Mobility Commission 2019: p.v) states:

Being born privileged in Britain means that you are likely to remain privileged. Being born disadvantaged means that you will have to overcome a series of barriers to ensure that you and your children are not stuck in the same trap.

In direct contradiction, the use of the term 'disadvantage' within ECEC is defined in material terms related to the income of their family (Gov.uk 2020) rather than on the considered impact of disadvantage on young children. To decide eligibility for disadvantage status solely on income reflects the disconnect of government policy towards the 'series of barriers' described in the State of the Nation quote above. The lack of a common understanding of the term disadvantage was highlighted by The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) who called for an agreed definition to encompass economic,

health and social indicators (OFSTED 2016). However, the absence of a formal definition continues in 2020 and reinforces the problem of the subjective nature of disadvantage. Braun and Clarke (2013) describe subjectivity as the determination of an individual's identities and experiences. Examining the use of words and language provides clues to the theoretical foundations of an individual's conceptualisations. This research study does not treat this subjectivity as bias to be eliminated from the research, but will include all perspectives in order to present a contextualised analysis of poverty and disadvantage.

This brief consideration of the concepts of poverty and disadvantage demonstrates the shifting definitions and meanings that encompass social, cultural, historical and political perspectives. The continuing reliance on economic measures to construct poverty and disadvantage underlines the dichotomy that exists between the approaches of Government and social welfare organisations, and reinforced through language in the media. While a variety of understandings of disadvantage have been presented, this thesis will follow the ideas of Ruth Lister, Emeritus Professor of Social Policy at Loughborough University. Lister (2004: p.13) shares a recognition that disadvantage combines material and non-material aspects of poverty but also acknowledges the social relations characterised by 'a lack of voice, disrespect, humiliation and reduced dignity, self-esteem and powerlessness'. In an effort to separate the contextual discussion from the analysis of data, I will use the term poverty and disadvantage during the consideration of the political, social and economic factors that contribute to form the context within which views are held by the public.

The next section presents an overview of recent government approaches to poverty and disadvantage and is followed by the strategies that were used by the Coalition Government (2010-15) to normalise poverty and disadvantage within society. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the research questions and an outline of each of the thesis chapters.

1.3 Political approaches to combating child poverty

In 1999 the New Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair announced a surprise commitment to halve the levels of child poverty by 2010 and to further reduce to a level of just 10% by 2020. The New Labour government followed a redistributionist approach, providing a range of income

related benefits and public services to families living in poverty with the specific aim of lifting the financial position of families over the poverty line (Cribb et al 2012: p.5). Alongside financial redistribution, the New Labour Government placed 'good parenting' at the heart of their efforts to combat disadvantage and unlock aspiration (Jensen 2010: p.1). For example, Lansley and Mack (2015) cite large increases in spending on services designed to support children under five years of age.

The New Labour Government was criticised by Gillies (2005: p.840) for the construction of working-class parents as 'destined to reproduce their poverty', and the subsequent framing of poverty in families around 'issues of welfare dependency, poor parenting, psycho-social problems and family dysfunction'. Furthermore, Edwards et al (2015) highlight the additional influence of neuroscience to depict parents damaging their children's development through a lack of positive nurturing and care within their first years of life. The New Labour Government increasingly prioritised 'regulating and controlling child rearing practices' (Gillies 2008: p.1079). The focus on parents and children was seen as a strategy to shift attention away from the structural effects and power relations that create poverty and inequality. By 2010/11 child poverty levels had fallen from 3.4 million to 2.3 million, but still missed the overarching target to reduce the levels of child poverty by half by 2010 (Main and Bradshaw 2014: p.193).

The election of the Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition Government in May 2010, after thirteen years of a New Labour Government, invoked a sharp return to a neo-liberal economic approach to tackling the economy (Britton et al 2019). The Spending Review (Her Majesty's Treasury 2010) set out the plans for the new Coalition Government and reiterated the available choice of either to continue spending or reduce the deficit. The policies implemented during the early stages of the Coalition Government focused on an individualistic approach to improving education and employment with the goal of increasing the human capital of the country (Field 2010; Allen 2011). This approach signalled a shift away from the redistributionist policies of New Labour and towards targeted support for working families (Her Majesty's Treasury 2010; Department for Education 2013a; Department for Education 2013b).

The mandate of the Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition Government was to reduce the budget deficit through a decrease in welfare support, and to help disadvantaged people improve their prospects by encouraging everyone into the workplace. The Department for Work and Pensions (2010: p.1) introduced a White Paper entitled 'Welfare that Works' that reiterated the government rhetoric:

... the benefits system has shaped the poorest in a way that has trapped generation after generation in a spiral of dependency and poverty. This has cost the country billions of pounds in cash payments and billions more in meeting the social costs of failure.

Wiggan (2012) argues that the White Paper marginalises the structural effects of long-term unemployment, and instead highlights a link to symptoms of benefit dependency and worklessness. Implicit within the Coalition Government's explanation of poverty is a neoliberal individualistic perspective that frames poverty as the responsibility of the family. The strategy of placing the blame on both families and the previous New Labour Government was used to emphasise the need for a new approach to combat high welfare budgets. The Coalition Government consistently reiterates that poverty was far more than just low income and detailed the 'Five Pathways to Poverty': family breakdown, educational failure, addiction, debt and worklessness leading to economic dependency (Duncan Smith 2010: p.1). A viewpoint also demonstrated in the Field Review (2010: p.17) as 'something more fundamental than the scarcity of money is adversely dominating the lives of these children'.

The introduction of Universal Credit in 2013 was designed to tackle 'poverty, worklessness and welfare dependency' and streamline all welfare benefits into one payment (Department for Work and Pensions 2010: p.2). The subsequent move towards measures to penalise parents for extended periods of unemployment was presented as a way to encourage employment, to move beyond the perceived broken welfare system and re-focus the country on international economic competitiveness. The Child Poverty Action Group (2017) argues that the move towards the universal credit system has been particularly difficult for lone parents and parents with young children and has resulted in a less generous system than the one it had replaced.

However, the focus on overcoming poverty was short-lived and the Child Poverty Act 2010, and the accompanying measures of poverty were abolished by the Conservative Government in 2015. A new formal measure of poverty was discussed (Department of Work and Pensions 2019), and the Social Metrics Commission produced a Poverty Measure in 2018 in conjunction with a variety of multiple sector stakeholders. In 2020 there remains no official or consistent way of measuring and talking about poverty. Thus, the use of statistics becomes a site for dispute between politicians and social welfare organizations, and allows the statistics of income levels to lead the story rather than the experiences and concerns of those living in poverty. For example, the British Social Attitudes Study of 2019 highlights that 62% of those interviewed considered that poverty in Britain had increased since 2010, whereas the figures have remained similar to 2006-7 levels (Curtice et al 2019). This disparity demonstrates the difficulty of navigating the discourse of poverty and disadvantage to determine a realistic picture of the situation, and reinforces the need for a clearly defined measure.

The strategy of the Coalition policies is contextualised by Vincent (2017) as shifting blame onto individuals at the same time as reducing spending on benefits and public services, thereby deflecting from the responsibility of the state to provide a solution. The perceived lack of support for families is criticised by Moss and Vandebroek (2016), who cited the burden placed on the 'poorest people' to find a solution to their lack of education, employment and welfare. Liasidou and Symeou (2018: p.152) argue that the focus on a 'new global economy' overshadows issues of equity and social justice. This leads to an alternative view of neoliberalism that highlights an unequal and impoverished society reinforced by the expectation that individuals living in poverty will be able to take responsibility for their lack of education, training and employment.

To summarise, there is a recognition that extended periods of poverty are more detrimental to a family's wellbeing. However, this is not reflected in the way that those living in poverty are positioned by the government-led discourses, including the judgements on their way of life or by the corresponding availability of support. By presenting disadvantage as the fault of a small minority of families, the Coalition and subsequent Conservative Governments have been able to prioritise improving outcomes within all stages of education, at the expense of targeting efforts to overcome the poverty and disadvantage felt by a growing section of society. The Coalition Government in 2010 insists that efforts to increase social mobility

requires a shift towards a greater emphasis on public services and less on financial support to families. Over the term of the five-year Coalition Government low-income families were widely affected by cuts to unemployment benefit, disability benefits, income support, housing benefit, tax credits, and a growing wage inequality (Hastings et al 2015; Wiggan 2012). At the same time a wide range of public services suffered substantial budget reductions, particularly affecting families with young children, limiting financial support and funding for early education and children's centres (Stewart and Obolenskaya 2015).

The next section will highlight the increased use of rhetoric and discourse between 2008 and 2012, coinciding with the general election of 2010, that continues to be reflected in the perspectives of the public up to a decade later (Looney 2017). Analysis of the rhetorical discourse shared by successive governments, and supported by the media, will demonstrate the strategies used to normalise poverty and disadvantage within society. This will provide the contextual basis for considering preschool managers constructions of disadvantage which forms the basis of this research study.

1.4 The normalisation of poverty and disadvantage

In 2020, the Department for Work and Pensions published statistics that detailed a total of two million children living in poverty, including 53% of all children aged under five. While the statistics detail the scale of the problem this section will demonstrate how government policy rhetoric leads to the acceptance of the normality of the situation. Societal norms set out the way that individuals should act within their families, communities and wider society. While the norms of everyday life remain relatively stable, the norms related to socio-economic traits have evolved in conjunction with global political and economic changes (Munn and Lloyd 2005).

In the words of Dorling 'a homogenising myth of our time is that people fall to the bottom because they are undeserving' (2010: p.155). The acceptance of poverty within society relied on normalising the situation, through the positioning of poverty as the fault of parents (Dermott and Pomati 2016). Over time certain perspectives come to seem normal while others become marginal (Gee 1999). Fairclough (2015: p.113) uses the term 'naturalization'

to describe the unconscious acceptance of a particular discourse and highlighted the way that naturalization allows social and political inequalities to be positioned and reinforced within society. The priority awarded to particular discourses by government is acknowledged by Burr (2015) as a powerful means to control viewpoints of the public, without the inclusion of the ideological significance of the discourse. The consistent use of rhetoric to reinforce particular societal norms allows for the discourses to shift and retain control of the 'true depiction' of the situation, as driven by the ideology of the government in power. In this way Wodak (2009) contends that discourses are strengthened and become dominant. While anyone can share their personal view, it is only those in a position of relative power that can consistently share a discourse until it becomes dominant.

A consideration of the way language is used in politics is key to understanding implicit bias in the choice of language. A range of strategies are involved in forming a discourse, Bacchi (2000) highlights repetition, simplicity and rhetorical sophistication as strategies that are used to ensure that discourses gain and maintain credibility. Furthermore, the involvement of the media is crucial to share the approved discourse on a regular basis. According to Trowler (2003), the continual repetition and acceptance of the discourse works to deny alternative views, and the dominant groups become more powerful and the cycle of domination continues (van Dijk 1993).

The use of rhetorical devices had also been evident during the previous New Labour Government and led Gewirtz (2001) to stress the danger of relying on a 'culture of poverty' discourse to represent socially disadvantaged parents and deficit models of working class parents. A deficit discourse of parenting increased during the lead up to the 2010 general election and has been further entrenched by the Coalition Government 2010-15. Jensen and Tyler (2015) demonstrate how the deficit discourse uses a variety of strategies to construct and entrench hostilities towards members of society, including Othering, labelling, shame and stigmatisation. Each of these strategies will now be addressed in turn.

Othering

'Othering' is a discursive practice that depicts the social positioning of the public within a dichotomy of 'them' and 'us', in effect between the more and less powerful (Apple 2006; Lister 2004; Looney 2017). The simple comparison of relative inferiority results in 'them' being

blamed for their own problems as well as societal problems. The alternative position of 'us' reinforces our moral choices and importantly distances us from the undesirable behaviours. Othering represents a value-laden approach to attempt to simplify a complex situation to a binary. The philosopher Jacques Derrida (1976) suggests that a binary opposition is often unequal and contrasts a privileged position over another, reducing the options for the other side to respond and defend themselves. In effect fuelling hostility towards other members of community.

In the lead up to the 2010 election 'Othering' was a key strategy in the reinforcement of the deficit discourse of parenting, intergenerational poverty and worklessness. The recurring Othering binaries, while small in number, were shared so consistently during the period 2008-2012 that they continue to be a major part of poverty discourse. Looney (2017) suggests that the aim in the run-up to the 2010 election was to alienate and dehumanise entire groups in order to divert attention to the policy discourse of the political parties competing to lead Government. The Conservative Party used opposing descriptions to describe members of society, for example the choice of deserving or undeserving poor, and workers versus shirkers, to polarise the position of those who were working and those who were not working and relying on benefits to support their family. Tyler (2013) reflects that the deserving and undeserving poor binary was apparent in government policy as a strategy to encourage the continuing support for the changes in direction implemented by the newly elected Coalition Government. Barnes (2012) contends that the approach was used so effectively that the majority of the population consider that it is only the most undeserving poor, the workless, who are living in poverty.

Furthermore, Lister (2015) suggests that 'Othering' has developed to such an extent that judgements were also made by those living in poverty, to separate themselves from those they deemed worse off. Batty and Flint (2010) list a variety of binary positions that were used to critically distance oneself from another, including working/ not working, benefits/ wages, single mum/ two parent family or smoker/ non-smoker. The research of Shildrick and MacDonald (2013) concurs that those living in poverty either denied their own poverty or reinterpreted the individualised discourse to position the poverty in other people's lives on their moral failures.

Labelling

Labelling frames and links the use of rhetoric and deficit discourse to a consistent narrative. For example, women are particularly prone to judgements and labels related to their parenting practices. The presentation of a particular sort of mother through the binary of 'good' mother or 'bad' mother in policy is an oversimplification of life and reinforces the political and gendered norms reflected in the media and society. The label of a 'bad' mother is used to portray an irresponsible parent, however Gillies (2008: p.1) concludes that it is her status as poor and marginalised that locates the depiction of the 'bad mother' at the centre of society's problem. The concept of a 'good parent' raises similar dilemmas, although research with low income families demonstrates the families' commitment to being a good parent (Daly and Kelly 2015; Dermott and Pomatti 2016). For example, Tyler (2013: p.2) suggests that the term 'the poor' objectifies and distances, while it may also imply 'poor quality' (Batty and Flint 2010; Castell and Thompson 2007). The use of negative terms is decried by Jo (2013), who argues the use of terms such as undeserving or skivers were ways of shaming members of society by implying a lack of morals or fraudulent behaviour.

Boddy et al (2016) highlight the timing of the positioning of 'troubled families' as a group that share a range of dysfunctional attributes, and that coincided with the escalation of the rhetoric in response to the English riots of August 2011. An unprecedented four days of unrest in towns and cities across England that followed the death of a man in police custody. The arson and looting widely reported in the media, and relayed on major television channels, was used as an example of the 'troubled families' who were unable to control their children. At the 2011 Conservative Party Conference a few months later David Cameron increased the level of rhetoric, through the report of 120,000 problem families that were costing the state £9 billion per year (Cameron 2011). The figure of 120,000 families had been taken from the Social Exclusion Task Force of 2007, using data provided by the Department of Work and Pensions. Secondary analysis of the data estimated that 2% of families had at least 5 characteristics of poverty (Levitas 2012), and the figure was then extrapolated to an estimate of 120,000 families across England. In addition, the statistics were also used in departmental documents (Department for Communities and Local Government 2013; Department for Work and Pensions 2012) and widely reported in the media.

The labelling of disengaged families as 'troubled families' reflects a process of Othering where political rhetoric, policy texts and the media shame and blame poor families for their own problems and ultimately the problems that exist within society (Lister 2015). Boddy et al (2016) contend that the subsequent rhetoric of the financial cost of poverty to the public was a strategic move to ensure a lack of consideration of the levels of deprivation in home life, and to place the responsibility firmly onto families.

Shame and stigmatisation

The use of populist language before the 2010 general election included the depiction of individuals as skivers or scroungers and were akin to terms of disgust espoused by the Conservative Government to overtly position the individuals as deficit (Jensen 2014a and 2014b). The early stages of the Coalition Government also coincided with an increasing level of 'poverty porn' programming on television. A range of programmes, including 'We pay your benefits', 'Benefits Britain' and 'Benefits Street' were shown across terrestrial channels.

Jensen (2014a: p.4) emphasises the Othering nature of the programmes:

It does not only play on existing shameless curiosity about poverty, it also positions the lives of the poor as a moral site for scrutiny something to be peered at, dissected and assessed. It presents the 'others' on the screen as presenting a dysfunctional welfare state which reward such 'lifestyles'.

Scott-Paul (2013) condones this approach as objectivising poverty for the gratification and entertainment of the public. Furthermore, Jensen and Tyler (2015) suggest that the stigma fueled the 'them' and us' debate further, and unsurprisingly within this context the voices of those living in poverty were rarely heard.

The consequence of the shaming and stigmatisation of those living in poverty, reinforces the existing social hierarchy. Those living in poverty were frequently talked about, but were rarely in a position to be able to share their views and feelings. The government rhetoric of the undeserving poor positioned the welfare system as responsible for encouraging welfare dependency, leading Shildrick and Rucell (2015) to argue that it was repeated so often in government soundbites and the media that it was accepted as a fact in society. Research undertaken by MacDonald et al (2013) found no evidence of a 'culture of worklessness', 'troubled families' or 'intergenerational unemployment'. MacDonald et al (2014) further

concludes that these were myths perpetuated by political parties, think tanks and government until they were accepted by the public as a true reflection of society (Department for Communities and Local Government 2013; Centre for Social Justice 2012; Department for Work and Pensions 2012). Chase and Walker (2012) explore the intersection between shame and poverty, and conclude that a sense of disempowerment is induced by shame. A study in Glasgow by Flaherty (2008) argues that instead of the terms poor and poverty the participants used terms such as struggling, nightmare or managing to normalise their day-to-day hardship. The long-term feelings of shame linked to the stigma of poverty and unemployment are analysed by Shildrick and MacDonald (2013) through life history narratives and demonstrate a prejudice against Britain's white working class. The suggestion of prejudice was reinforced by Shildrick and MacDonald (2013: p.298) to conclude that prejudice strongly influenced the changing self-classification of membership of the working class, with only 24 % of those interviewed stating themselves to be working class against 71% as middle class.

To offset Othering, MacDonald et al (2014) suggest that narratives should be amended to include a commitment to employment from people without work who were keen for their children to have better opportunities. A similar conclusion was reached by Millar and Ridge (2020: p.12) who studied lone mothers and the work ethic of their children, the young adults frequently talked of their strong work ethic and the importance of being independent. The young adults often attributed their attitudes to work to the examples of their mothers, and their wish to not place any more pressure on their mothers. These studies, although small in number, demonstrate an alternative narrative and the discontent that is felt by the families who are negatively portrayed.

In summary, the consistent portrayal of poverty as a life choice has enabled the reconstruction of child poverty as a direct consequence of the problem behaviours of those families living in poverty (Levitas 2012: p.453). The portrayal of a deficit discourse of parenting within Coalition Government policy will be demonstrated in Chapter Four, and will include analysis of the minimal consideration of structural factors of poverty. Portraying families as deficit has allowed the introduction of cuts to welfare budgets without objection from the majority of the public, particularly from those it does not directly impact on.

The remainder of the chapter will present my positionality as a researcher, and this will link with the justification for the approach that will be taken in the thesis. Finally, the research questions will be outlined and the structure of the thesis.

1.5 Positionality of the researcher

I am the lead practitioner within my own preschool situated in a disadvantaged area on the outskirts of a large south coast city. Working within a small community over a ten-year period has led to an awareness of relationships and experiences within local families, as well as the socio-economic changes that have occurred over time across the community. My area of interest is the diverse needs of children at age two and beyond, and during the initial stages of the EdD I focused on various aspects related to ECEC policy. I was interested in the often negative portrayal of the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector within policy and research studies (Department for Education 2013a; Gambaro et al 2015; Hoskins et al 2020), either in terms of the quality of practice (Melhuish 2016) or research findings that were reported in a detrimental or 'Othering' way. For example, using the term 'reluctant practitioners' or correcting participant views 'Selena seemed unaware that...' (Payler and Locke 2013; Simpson 2013) failed to recognise the subjective nature of the perspectives shared.

Therefore, in recognition of the limited opportunities for ECEC practitioners to share their views I planned to follow an inductive approach to interview six preschool managers. As presented in the literature review in Chapter Two a majority of ECEC research has been undertaken within the maintained sector and has resulted in a relatively limited understanding of the private ECEC sector (Penn 2007). The opportunity to utilise my professional identity as a preschool manager and undertake research into the experiences of managers within the PVI ECEC sector was a catalyst for the research study. While this approach does not present a voice for the preschool managers in the study, it does intend to highlight their views, concerns and priorities for practice. The approach places a demand on the need to acknowledge the influence of my experience and research-related decisions during the research process and these are detailed in section 3.2.

Throughout the thesis I will use the term Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) to stress the importance of both early education and care for young children. The generic term describes the education and care aspect of provision on offer although I will use other terms as appropriate and explain their significance to the discussion.

1.6 Justification for the approach

Eliciting preschool managers' perspectives requires undertaking research that seeks to understand how people have created their views of the world, through experiences in their daily lives and interactions with others (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Such an approach follows the assumption that an individual's knowledge is personal and subjective, rather than the view that knowledge exists waiting to be discovered (Crotty 1998). Similarly, Burr (2015: p.4) suggests the way we understand the concepts of poverty and disadvantage is historically and culturally specific. Analysis of the words and language used by individuals to talk about poverty and disadvantage highlight the value judgements that underpin their conceptualisations (Jones and Novak 1999). However, a consideration of words and language in isolation will result in an incomplete understanding, to ensure a complete analysis the research study needs to be situated within the context of the political, social, economic and cultural situation. The dominant discourse of poverty and disadvantage shared by the Coalition Government and media effectively worked to normalise poverty and disadvantage within a political climate that stressed the importance of introducing austerity budget cuts to welfare and public services. Set at the intersection of changes to political power within the UK, the rhetoric and policy introduced during the Coalition Government reflects a distinct point in political history.

The purpose of state policy is to act as a guide to drive sectors, institutions and professionals in a particular direction. A traditional definition of policy is 'whatever governments choose to do or not do' (Dye 2007: p.2), although this view simplifies the impact of the policy decisions made. To reflect the complex nature of the policy making process I will follow the definition of Edelman, '[A] policy then is a set of shifting diverse and contradictory responses to a spectrum of political interests' (1987: p.11). Maguire et al (2015) suggest that the messy and ambiguous process of interpreting policy is often overlooked in policy analysis.

Ozga (2000: p.3) defines a policy text as any 'vehicle or medium for transmitting a policy message', designed to present the circumstances for change, but does not detail the way that the change should occur in practice. Policy texts are suggested by Wiggan (2012) as a useful source for exploring the implicit ideological preferences, and the way that semiotic strategies are used to construct the values and assumptions that are shared with the public. To understand the implications of policy discourse, the research study will attend to the shifting language and rhetorical constructions of policy, and the historical assumptions that have emerged across different policy fields to form the policy under review (Ball 2013; Saarinen 2008).

Thus the intention of this research study is to think not only about how policy is made but also how professionals, in their role as policy actors, enact the policy texts and discourses. To achieve this I will undertake a Critical Discourse Analysis of Coalition Government policy texts through which I intend to analyse the preschool managers views shared in the interviews. The interviews will use the funding for two-year-old children considered disadvantaged as an entry point, and will focus on mixed socio-economic locations. The research will conclude with a consideration of the tensions between policy and practice. The preschool managers' practical experiences of the needs of children from a disadvantaged background create a tension with the dominant discourse of human capital of the Coalition Government. This dichotomy forms the basis of the tensions between policy and practice that is presented within this thesis.

1.7 Overview of the Research Questions

The four research questions are:

1. How is disadvantage framed in Coalition Government ECEC policy discourse?
2. How do preschool managers construct disadvantage?
3. How do preschool managers describe the priorities of their practice?
4. What are the tensions between Coalition Government policy and preschool practice?

Research Question One involves a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of five policy texts from across the Coalition Government. Research Questions Two and Three will be addressed through thematic analysis of narratives from interviews with six preschool managers. Finally, Research Question Four will use the preschool managers' priorities for practice as a basis for analysing the tensions between the Coalition Government policy and preschool practice.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

This section lays out the organisation of the thesis:

Chapter Two – Literature Review

Chapter Two moves the focus to ECEC within England, and focuses on the contradictions between ECEC policy, research and practice. An examination of existing research into the views of disadvantage shared by preschool managers will be discussed. Finally, the impact of a reliance on a childcare market within England will be addressed, and will consider the government priorities of choice, quality, affordability and availability.

Chapter Three – Research Design and Methodology

Chapter Three provides a rationale for the research design. Methodological considerations for the research study are detailed including the insider position of the researcher, reflexivity and the ethical processes that are adhered to throughout. The methodological considerations are linked to the intention to conduct a Critical Discourse Analysis of Coalition Government policy alongside interviews with preschool managers to explore the views, experiences and priorities of six preschool managers.

Chapter Four- A Dialectical Relational Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis

Chapter Four presents an analysis of Coalition Government ECEC policy using Fairclough's (2010) Dialectical Relational Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (DRA to CDA). The political, economic and social contexts will be incorporated to present an interdisciplinary study of the assumptions and values of the existing social orders that combine to reinforce inequality. The policy text analysis is undertaken in two parts: the discursive shift of each

policy text to provide an overview across the parliament, and an exploration of the semiotic framing of disadvantage across the policy texts. This chapter presents the response to Research Question One.

Chapter Five – Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis of the interview narratives of the preschool managers is presented in two parts: the preschool managers' constructions of disadvantage and their corresponding priorities for practice. The impact of the preschool managers' enactment of Coalition policies will be considered throughout the analysis. Chapter Five presents a response to Research Questions Two and Three, and also leads into the discussion in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six – Discussion of the Research Questions

The discussion chapter begins with an overview of Research Questions One to Three. This is followed by a critical engagement with the tensions inherent between ECEC policy and practice, which are analysed through a framework of the priorities of the preschool managers.

Chapter Seven – Conclusions

The concluding chapter brings the thesis to a close with a reflection on the research process and the limitations of the study. I outline my contribution to knowledge and the implications of the research study in relation to the preschool managers' constructions of disadvantage, the understanding of the PVI sector and future policy. Finally, I present a coda to the research study in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of this on families and PVI providers. The thesis concludes with a suggestion of future research possibilities.

To summarise, this chapter has presented an interdisciplinary consideration of poverty and disadvantage, examining the impact of shifting blame for poverty onto individuals, and the long-term effects of a deficit discourse of parenting. Awareness of the strategies to normalise poverty and disadvantage is the first step in answering Research Question One: How is disadvantage framed in ECEC policy discourse? and Research Question Two: How do preschool managers construct disadvantage?

Chapter Two: Early Childhood Education and Care

The previous chapter considered the context of poverty and disadvantage within England, including the Coalition Government approach to combating poverty and the strategies used to normalise poverty and disadvantage across society. This analysis will be used as a basis for the discussions about poverty and disadvantage that continue throughout this thesis.

This chapter will address the problematic relationship in ECEC between policy, research and practice, with particular reference to the period of the Coalition Government 2010-2015. First, the policy intensification over the last two decades will provide the context for the expansion of ECEC since 1997. This is followed by the Coalition Government expectation that ECEC providers can overcome the effects of poverty and disadvantage and is explored through a consideration of research used to provide evidence for the policy interventions. The rationales for ECEC are affected by politics (Moss 2013) and changing views of the relevance of the welfare state (Hemerijck 2012) and these will form part of the discussion.

Education through a neo-liberal lens focuses on improving engagement to promote increased outcomes and an improved workforce for the future. Nation-states are encouraged to compete against neighbouring countries and global measurement of achievements across states are made irrespective of their pedagogical focus. Rivzi and Lingard (2010: p.185) suggest that 'it is the responsible, self-capitalising individual' which neo-liberal policy reforms are expected to help produce. The intention is to promote an individual who has the necessary skills to be economically productive within the social norms presented in dominant discourse (Baltodana 2012). However, Tyler (2013) contends that neo-liberalism is an ideology of the elite furthered by those who have already utilised human capital.

The proliferation of human capital globally is highlighted by Campbell-Barr and Nygfard (2014) as evidence of a process of hegemonic globalisation, leading to a view of the learning and development of our youngest children as an investment in both the labour market and the economic success of the nation in the future (Moss 2017; Simpson et al 2015a). Bibby et al (2017) highlight the insistence in the current policy climate that despite increasing levels of income inequality and child poverty, the attainment gaps in educational performance can be narrowed, and eventually removed entirely. As Moss and Vandenbroeck (2016) argue, placing

the burden on individuals to find a solution to overcome their lack of education and employment opportunities results in swathes of the population struggling further. In this way a human capital approach places a specific focus on the readiness of all children for the next level of education and their overall outcomes.

The practical aspect of ECEC in the following sections will consider the perspectives of the practitioners who work closely with the families and are expected to combat the effects of poverty. Finally, the chapter will conclude with the Coalition Government priorities for the ECEC sector.

2.1 Early Childhood Education and Care

Within England ECEC is provided through a network of providers positioned as either members of the public or private sector. The public sector refers to nursery provision within schools, historically located in areas of urban deprivation, alongside a smaller number of stand-alone nursery schools in inner city areas. The private, voluntary and independent sector (PVI) includes daycare, private nurseries and preschools. Both sectors share a common strategy framework and inspection system but differ in relation to staff qualifications, adult to child ratios and levels of funding support provided by central and local government.

This section will detail the expansion that occurred across two decades of change within the ECEC sector. The provision of part-time funded places for four-year-olds from 1998 and three-year-olds from 2004, was further extended to include two-year-old children considered disadvantaged from 2012. As a result, ECEC provision expanded from an estimated 59,000 places in 1990 to almost 1.7 million places in 2019 (Simons 2016: p.4; Department for Education 2019b: p.1). The ECEC market is supported by central government through the provision of universal funding, tax credits for parents and opportunities for parents to purchase ECEC sessions for their children. Trowler (2003) suggests that government funding of part-time provision has provided a level of sustainability that has encouraged the PVI sector to meet growing demand through participation in the consumer focused childcare market.

The ECEC sector in England expanded in response to a policy intensification, as demonstrated in Table 2.1, covering measures to regulate and control the sector, and drive the direction of the provision offered to families.

Government	Policy Text		
1997– 2010 New Labour	1998	National Childcare Strategy: Meeting the Childcare Challenge, DfEE	
	1999	Introduction of Early Learning Goals, DfEE	
	2000	Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage, DfEE.	
	2002	Birth to Three Matters, DfES	
	2003	Every Child Matters, DfES	
	2004	Choice for Parents, The Best Start for Children: A Ten Year Strategy for Childcare, DfES.	
	2006	Childcare Act, DfES.	
	2008	The Early Years Foundation Stage, DCSF.	
	2010 -2015 Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition	2010	Spending Review, HMT.
		2010	Field Review, The Foundation Years: Preventing Poor Children Becoming Poor Adults.
2011		Allen Review, Early Intervention: The Next Steps.	
2011		Tickell Review, The Early Years: Foundations for Life, Learning and Health.	
2012		Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, DfE.	
2012		Nutbrown Review, Foundations for Quality: The Independent Review of Early Education and Childcare Qualifications.	
2013		More Great Childcare: Raising Quality and Giving Parents More Choice, DfE.	
2013		More Affordable Childcare, DfE.	

Table 2.1: ECEC related policies in England introduced 1997-2015.

The New Labour Government was elected in 1997 on a mandate of change, and pledged to support the situation of people and communities living in poverty (Stewart and Obolenskaya 2015: p.6). With three million children living in poverty the New Labour Government made a surprise commitment in 1998 to half child poverty by 2010 and further reduce to a level of 10% by 2020 (Blair 1999). Over the next five years the level of child poverty was reduced through the substantial changes to benefits (Cribb et al 2012: p.5) and supported by increased spending on services for the under-fives (Lansley and Mack 2015). Within the most deprived areas Sure Start services and Children's Centres were set up to provide information and support to ensure a holistic approach targeted the whole family. Nevertheless, by 2005 the level of child poverty began to rise again and ensured that the stated targets would be missed. Parallel to the efforts to support families was the development of a framework for learning and development for the Early Years. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was introduced in 2006, and provided the basis for provision across the ECEC sector.

The Child Poverty Act (Great Britain 2010) introduced during the final month of the New Labour Government set a target to substantially reduce child poverty by 2020. In response the newly elected Coalition Government commissioned two reviews to outline a future strategy to tackle poverty and life chances. First, the Field Review explores the nature of poverty within a child's environment and concludes that progress towards overcoming child poverty under the previous New Labour Government had been focused on the short-term reduction of child poverty rates through income transfers (Field 2010). Field argues that a significant change in approach is required to reach the goal of improving children's life chances. Second, the Allen Review (2011) was published a month later and highlights the over-reliance on costly late intervention to support families. Allen (2011) presents a view of deficit families who are characterised by a cycle of bad behaviour and suggests a system of early intervention to support the children and their families in an effort to 'break the vicious cycle of deprivation and improve children's life chances'.

The Early Intervention strategy of the Coalition Government heralded the provision of early education for two-year-old children as an approach to overcome disadvantage without providing continuing financial support to the family. Eligibility for the funding for disadvantaged two-year-old children is based on income levels of the family, with exceptions for looked after children (LAC) in the care of the local authority or for children in receipt of

Disability Living allowance (DLA) (see Appendix One for more detail). Linking eligibility to income levels overlooks the nuances and complexity of experiences of children and their families.

While the support to disadvantaged children continued through the funded sessions, the Coalition Government placed a greater emphasis on the outcomes of all children at the end of the EYFS at age five. Even though the levels of outcomes are increasing across all children, there is a continuing attainment gap of 19 % between families on low incomes and eligible for Free School Meals and their counterparts. The attainment gap has remained close to 20 % since 2007, and the Education Policy Institute (2020) equates the attainment gap to 4.6 months of development. Thus demonstrating that while improvements to the quality of early education are benefiting children, they are insufficient to reduce the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers.

The Coalition Government's dominant rationale for ECEC shifted from 2013 to support working parents. The overhaul of the welfare system, combined into a single universal credit, aligned with the intention for parents to be in a position to work once their youngest child turns three. Thus reinforcing the Government expectation of employment as a way out of poverty. However, the goal of full employment was reliant on the ECEC sector to provide childcare provision to cover the working patterns of all parents. The publication of *More Great Childcare* (Department for Education 2013a) and *More Affordable Childcare* (Department for Education 2013b) together shifted the focus onto the ECEC sector to provide low-cost and quality childcare at the times that parents need. Helping parents with the cost of living also became a pre-election pledge of the Conservative Party in 2015, offering up to 15 extended hours for working parents of three- and four-year-old children and the policy came into effect from 2017 (Lewis and West 2016: p.4).

The next section will explore the research used by the Coalition Government to support the expansion of ECEC provision, particularly for two-year-old children. This is followed by a consideration of the efforts to tackle disadvantage through early education.

2.1.1 A reliance on evidence from large scale and government backed research

The benefits of ECEC for disadvantaged children has been based on three studies undertaken in the USA between 1960 and 1980: The High Scope Perry Pre School Programme, Abecedarian and the Chicago Child-Parent Centres (Barnett 1995; Heckman et al 2010). The three US studies targeted public sector provision for deprived African American and Hispanic communities through interventions for both children and their parents (Barnett 1995; Heckman et al 2010). The studies suggest that intensive support programmes can boost the development of disadvantaged children (Barnett 1995; Heckman et al 2010), and as such are quoted within Coalition Government policy texts (Allen 2011; Department for Education 2013a). However, the intense nature of the interventions designed for both children and their parents are in direct contrast to the universally funded programmes in England, where the majority of provision is in the PVI sector and there is no accompanying support to families.

The focus of the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) study was to determine whether the preschool experience in England could reduce social inequality. EPPE, a New Labour Government funded research project, tracked the development of children aged three to seven in England, and was to become the largest longitudinal investigation into the effects of preschool education. The EPPE study found small, short-term associations between levels of quality and children's outcomes, and concludes that quality is a key factor in reducing social inequality with a secondary factor the number of months of attendance (Siraj-Blatchford 2004: p.113). The start of the EPPE study was before the introduction of funded part-time early education sessions and involved only 20% of settings rated at least good, thus impacting on the ability to generalise to the wider context of quality and outcomes.

As the level of central government funded part-time sessions expanded to two-, three- and four-year-olds the Coalition Government commissioned further research to provide evidence of the overall effectiveness of the universal funded part-time provision. Blanden et al (2014) used secondary data from the period 2002-2007 to consider the future outcomes of three-year-olds in ECEC provision and found that small positive effects at age five had disappeared by age eleven. A similar lack of positive effects emerged across international studies, and led Burger (2010) to conclude that the majority of large-scale ECEC programmes has some short-term but few long-term positive effects. Although the positive trends were

more pronounced for children from lower income families, they were unable to compensate for the effects of disadvantage within the home environment. An extension to the EPPE study to include secondary school children (EPPSE) concludes that at age 16 the long-term outcomes for lower-income children who had attended ECEC provision since the age of two were minimal (Sylva et al 2012).

Further research by Heckman et al (2010) led to a reduction of the impact of the original US research, nevertheless the three US studies continue to be widely quoted in the literature of government-funded research. Most recently in the Study of Early Education and Development (SEED) which researched outcomes and quality in ECEC (Melhuish et al 2017). Similarly, the rapid expansion in provision has limited the longitudinal impact of the EPPE and EPPSE studies although they continue to be widely cited as evidence in government-initiated research and policy but without any discussion of the limitations of the study (Taeger and Mc Bride 2018). This approach raises questions about the continuing reliance on a small number of research studies (Penn 2011: p.39), irrespective of their effectiveness or replicability to the English context. Wood (2019) describes the use of government-initiated and government-funded research studies to frame the evidence for future policy interventions as 'circular policy', and highlights the lack of research included in policy texts by academics, educational institutions or educational professionals. The lack of consideration of other perspectives leads to the continuation of tensions between policy, research and practice.

2.1.2 Part-time early education for two-year-old children

Research studies have generally focused on children aged over three, leading Mathers et al (2014) to identify lower levels of empirical evidence for children under-three than for three- and four-year-old children. The New Labour Government undertook a pilot study of part-time early education for disadvantaged two-year-olds between 2006 and 2008. The pilot study included a level of flexibility to allow Local Authorities to decide their own definition of disadvantage, and the variety of children to be included. However the flexible approach resulted in a wide range of criteria being used across the Local Authorities (Gibb et al 2010). In 2008 a further thirty one Local Authorities brought into the pilot study were directed to use a 'more targeted and data-driven approach' to identify disadvantaged families (Gibb et al 2010: p.12) with a particular focus on economic deprivation. The resulting measurement of a family's income to determine eligibility for the two-year-old funding replicates the approach

used to measure Free School Meals (FSM) at school (Sylva et al 2012), and continues to be used in 2020.

The initial findings of the pilot study concluded that the positive effect of attending high quality ECEC resulted in a slight increase in language ability and improved parent-child relationships (Smith et al 2009). Although the low percentage of high quality settings involved in the study limited the opportunities to generalise to the wider context of ECEC. Methodological difficulties in the follow-up study at age five, involved the matching of the initial and follow-up participants, and led to a further reduction of possible comparisons of development over the period (Maisey et al 2013). Nevertheless, the lack of clear evidence of improved outcomes from an earlier start in ECEC did not halt the planned expansion of the funded provision to 40% of disadvantaged two year-old children in September 2014.

Since 2014 the take-up of the two-year-old funding provision has risen nationally from 58% in 2015 to a high of 72% in 2018 (Department for Education 2019a), although there are diverse regional variations particularly with the lowest levels in major metropolitan areas. London had average rates of just 61% of eligible children taking up a place in 2018, and this led to a small number of research studies undertaken to explore the possible reasons for a lack of interest in ECEC for two-year-olds. The research studies attribute a variety of reasons, Albakiri et al (2018) conclude that areas with a higher proportion of children with EAL equate to lower interest levels. In contrast, Taeger and McBride (2018) cite the impact of cultural differences but conclude overall that high levels of white British children had also not take up a place and thus culture did not fully explain the variations.

In summary, a lack of robust evidence for the role of ECEC in combating disadvantage or raising outcomes has not deterred successive governments from extending the funded provision. After a decade of universal provision for three- and four-year-olds researchers have responded to the increasing calls for confirmation of the effectiveness of early education policies (Gambaro et al 2013; Brewer et al 2014). Despite large funds invested into early education, Blanden et al (2014) conclude that little is known about its effects and therefore an evaluation of the funded provision for two-, three- and four-year-olds was not able to meet the expected value for money criteria. Paull and Xu (2017) in the government-commissioned

SEED study criticise the focus on value for money, highlighting the expectation that in addition to improvements to educational outcomes there should also be a reduction in costs related to remedial public services and welfare benefits.

Over the last two decades longitudinal research has been affected by a continually evolving policy context within ECEC, with research studies unable to keep pace with changes. This is compounded further by methodological problems within the longitudinal studies that have reduced the possible impact of the conclusions made, although policy makers continue to make generalisations about the positive benefits of all ECEC attendance. Thus, the introduction of top-down policy without the inclusion of wider empirical studies and practical experiences from a range of stakeholders has resulted in policy that does not reflect the complexities of ECEC practice (Maisey et al 2013; Smith et al 2009).

2.1.3 Tackling disadvantage through early education

The concept of Early Intervention as presented in the Allen Review (2011: p.5) details small investments in the early years to offset 'the intergenerational cycle of dysfunction and underachievement' and positions early intervention as a necessary response to poor parenting. A growing consideration of neurobiology, acknowledged by the New Labour and Coalition Governments, provides academic support to the deficit discourse of parents. Gillies et al (2017: p.48) highlight that for 'disadvantaged parents already marked out as failing their children it was a short step towards viewing this in terms of biological inferiority.' In response the ECEC sector was directed to support the efforts to tackle disadvantage by providing sessions for part-time funded early education for the eligible two-year-old children.

The rationale of solving social and economic problems through early intervention emphasised the expectation that ECEC can encourage improved outcomes by formalising the ECEC system to deliver 'children into primary school ready to conform to classroom procedures and even able to perform basic reading and writing skills' (Whitebread and Bingham 2012: p.1). The revised EYFS legally set out that 'providers must ensure (children) are ready for school' (Department for Education 2012a: p.4). A position further enforced by OFSTED, tasked with inspecting and regulating all organisations who provide education, care or training to young persons, and reporting to parents and directly to parliament. OFSTED (2015a) emphasises the importance of preparing children for school, and the influence of the inspection process is a

key factor in shifting the direction of ECEC provision. Alongside the deficit discourse of parenting there was also a parallel effort to maintain that children's outcomes should be the same regardless of their family background. The Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove in 2012 stated:

There need be no difference in performance – none whatsoever - between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from wealthier homes.

Moss (2017) argues the early intervention and school readiness agenda together increased the government's commitment to steer towards further replication and consistency at the earliest stage of a child's education.

The extension of the two-year-old funding provision was hailed as an opportunity to reduce the gap between children considered disadvantaged and their peers in the early years (Field 2010). However, in reality the take-up of the provision has been low and a national average of 58% in 2015, rising to 68% in 2019 demonstrates the number of families who choose not to use the funded sessions (OFSTED 2020: p.1). The increase in the OFSTED rating of ECEC provision to 96% rated as good or outstanding (OFSTED 2020) has led to a mixed picture: a higher level of attainment of all children but a relatively stable attainment gap at entry to formal education since 2007 (OFSTED 2015b; OFSTED 2019). The National Audit Office (2020) demonstrated a gap of 17% in children aged five achieving a 'Good Level of Development' between those children living in the 10% most and 10% least deprived areas in 2019, representing a reduction of just 2% since 2015. Furthermore, the outcomes at the end of the EYFS published in 2015/16 and 2016/17 were the first to include the initial cohorts of funded two-year-old children who had benefited from an extra year in ECEC, but no discernible changes to the attainment gap were reported (Taeger and McBride 2018).

Urban (2010) and Lloyd and Hallet (2010) question the shift towards an emphasis on provision driven by outcomes rather than a consideration of what is best for practice. A view that is emphasised by Dahlberg and Moss (2005: p.6) to describe the hegemonic rationality of an approach that 'cannot imagine any other way to justify and evaluate preschool'. Tensions continue fifteen years later over the perceived narrow and deterministic view of children and ECEC (Lee 2019; Moss 2017; Roberts-Holmes 2015). Thus, the introduction of ECEC reforms on their own will not result in large numbers of children moved over the poverty line

(Waldfogel and Garnham 2008: p.22). Lloyd and Potter (2014) agree that the consequences of poverty require multiple approaches to address children's development levels, access to nutritional foods, housing and public services. Pascal and Bertram (2012: p.17), in a report commissioned by OFSTED, analyse a variety of government-led reviews and statistics before concluding that an early intervention strategy could make only a limited contribution to countering the social and economic inequalities that exist in communities across the country.

This section has argued that ECEC policy has been built on the foundations of large scale government-funded research, and demonstrates the lack of robust research to provide evidence of the effective role of ECEC in improving outcomes for disadvantaged children. The expectation of improved outcomes and low-cost provision for working parents places additional pressure on providers, and is extended further by the suggestion from government that ECEC providers could also counteract the difficulties faced by the families. Farquharson (2019) questions the double dividend approach, stating that international approaches have not tried to address both children's outcomes and parental employment within the same ECEC initiative. The reconfiguring of ECEC for human capital development continues to contribute to the tensions between policy and the practice of ECEC (Kay et al 2019; RobertsHolmes 2019). Nevertheless, the future of ECEC continues to be directed, a new OFSTED Education Inspection Framework in 2019 and future amendments planned by the current Conservative Government include a proposed Baseline Assessment for four-year-old children (Gov.uk 2018) and a revised Early Years Foundation Stage in 2021 (Department for Education 2020a).

This section has focused on government-initiated research and policy that emphasise the importance of ECEC for improving the attainment of young children. However, the practitioner perspective of supporting disadvantaged families is absent from the discussion. To counteract this, the final part of this section will examine two empirical studies that have explored preschool practitioners' views of poverty.

2.1.4 Preschool practitioners' perspectives on disadvantage

Attention to practitioners' perspectives has historically been related to quality (Cottle 2011; Cottle and Alexander 2014), professionalism (Brock 2013; Campbell-Barr 2018; Osgood 2004) or to practice (Aubrey and Ward 2013). To date only two academics have published research

on the views of preschool practitioners in relation to the considered acceptance of deficit discourses of poverty. Donald Simpson is based at Teesside University and focused on the perspectives of ECEC practitioners working in areas of poverty in the North of England. Sandra Lyndon at Chichester University researched practitioners' narratives of poverty in the South of England in 2016-17, citing Simpson's research as a catalyst for her focus.

Simpson (2013) undertook interviews in Teesside with preschool practitioners to determine their understanding of poverty and disadvantage. A diverse view of the term preschool practitioner was used to include private nursery managers, childminders, preschool managers and a family coach. Simpson (2013) concludes that the preschool practitioners viewed child poverty as a problem that was linked to the negative behaviors of the parents, and bore a strong resemblance to the deficit discourse presented widely by the Coalition Government and media. The explanations for child poverty offered by the practitioners were focused on the behaviour and values of parents, and detailed generational unemployment, a lack of work ethic, low aspirations for children and poor parenting (Simpson 2013). For example, a practitioner explained their view of child poverty (Simpson 2013: p.89):

For me the biggest factor, the contributory factor for child poverty is parental engagement or involvement with their children and their aspirations for their children... I think where we now see parents, we've got generational unemployment. And so we've got children now who see parents who've never worked and they don't have that sort of like ... I don't want to call it the work ethic, but it's sort of like well they're doing alright, do you need to get an education? Do you need to go out and work?

The timing of the interviews in 2011/12 followed the extended period of political rhetoric in the lead up to, and aftermath of, the 2010 general election in the UK amid moves by the Coalition Government to ensure acceptance of the impending austerity measures. Additionally, Boddy et al (2016) cite the August 2011 riots in England as a catalyst for a heightened level of government condemnation, media reports and public debate about family values and out-of-control families. The government reaction to the riots added to the context that the preschool practitioners had lived through although there was only minimal consideration of this in Simpson's study.

The practitioners highlighted a negative perception of consumer goods and services, demonstrating a discourse of a cycle of deprivation that stigmatised the parents. For example, the morality of choices that are made include the following quote from a practitioner (Simpson 2013: p.90):

When they (parents) are getting the money in, they're choosing to spend it on other things that aren't helping their children – so the Sky TV. I'm a mam and I wouldn't dream of letting my children go hungry, and not going to school with shoes on, for something that I wanted.

Thereby demonstrating an Othering of the families by some of the practitioners that was reinforced further by a 'notion of meritocracy', citing the view that parenting classes and the possible impact of improved outcomes as a direct result of the practitioners' involvement with the children (Simpson 2013: p.91). This view was also in line with Coalition Government policy and demonstrated the acceptance of a family's compliance to societal norms. However, the preschool practitioners in Simpson's research did not reflect on factors that related to the effect of living on a low income.

A year later Simpson et al (2015a) extended the research to include Northamptonshire and Worcestershire, an introduction of counties with mixed levels of wealth and deprivation that widened the profile of the preschool practitioners involved. A number of the new practitioners resisted placing blame on parents and acknowledged the difficult choices that had to be made as the families struggled to get by. Issues of unemployment and a reduction in income were acknowledged although there continued to be no suggestion of in-work poverty. Simpson et al (2015a: p.334) highlight that the responses demonstrate a raised awareness of 'poverty sensitivity', and acknowledge that the improved socio-economic status of the additional counties was a factor in the developing understanding. However, the interviews undertaken a year after the original study did not acknowledge the possible influence of the changing socio-economic situation once the Coalition measures for austerity had begun to be implemented.

A quarter of practitioners involved in Simpson's research had included the view that parents are caught in a poverty trap that was beyond their control, although there was no accompanying consideration of the needs of children living in poverty. The preschool practitioners explained their equal approach towards all children and their continued priority

of working towards the EYFS outcomes. A further article by Simpson in 2019 attributed a correlation between the practitioners who insisted on the individualised rhetoric of poverty and those who engage less with parents. Leading Simpson to conclude that a practitioners' awareness and experience of the difficulties affecting a family results in a wider understanding of the situation. In contrast, Simpson suggests a 'reductionist stance' from the practitioners who do not acknowledge the complexity of the circumstances of poverty and the impact on the child's learning and development. The research undertaken by Simpson represents a significant undertaking in ECEC related research and highlights the views and experiences of practitioners working in disadvantaged areas. The interviews undertaken in 2011-12 and 2013 have provided a snapshot of the views of society at that point in time, but are unable to determine if there is a longer-term continuation of the deficit discourse of parenting.

A similar focus was evident in research undertaken by Sandra Lyndon in two maintained settings in the South of England in 2016. Lyndon (2019b) interviewed a variety of ECEC practitioners to explore the impact of dominant discourses of poverty on the shaping of practitioner's own views of poverty. Lyndon (2019a) suggests that the majority of practitioners reverted to a parental deficit discourse to attribute negative behaviour of parents overly concerned with consumerism to the detriment of providing food and rent, however, Lyndon (2019a) suggests a minority of the practitioners shared a view that the parents used consumerism as a way of trying to fit in. Lyndon concludes that the practitioner's responses were split between narratives of Othering and concerns of the work/welfare dichotomy. In contrast to Simpson's research, the practitioners demonstrated more nuanced understandings to highlight the 'complex intersections between work, gender, social class and parenthood' (Lyndon 2019a: p.602).

Lyndon (2019a) demonstrates that a minority of practitioners challenge the welfare discourse that had been consistently shared by political parties and the Coalition Government, and reinforced that the practitioners found it easier to empathise with work-related issues rather than family issues. For example, the practitioners were able to describe parents who struggle to find work, citing the limited opportunities and precarious work available, as well as difficulties with childcare. Lyndon (2019a) suggests moral comparisons are made between families not in work, and those in low paid work, in effect reiterating the deserving/undeserving rhetoric of the Coalition Government. The absence of a discussion of in-work

poverty by the practitioners within the study suggests that the view of low income relates to just a reliance on benefits, without a consideration of the reality that 67% of child poverty occurs in a family with at least one working member (McGuinness 2018). This also raises the question that the range of practitioners may include those who suffer from in-work poverty, particularly as the ECEC sector has historically low rates of pay (CEEDA 2020a), however it is not possible to analyse further.

The reduction of public services through the austerity measures of the Coalition Government has placed more emphasis on ECEC to counteract the effects of disadvantage on a child's outcomes, and places practitioners in a difficult position between the government depiction of deficit models of parenting and the reality of the experiences of the families. The research of Simpson and Lyndon demonstrate the variety of understandings of poverty and parenting shared by practitioners who were working alongside families with complex backgrounds and experiences. The lack of discussion of the impact of structural issues on poverty raises questions about the practitioners' level of involvement with the families who attend the settings, or the extent of the consideration of the situation of the home life of the children.

Attention will now turn to the expansion of the ECEC sector since 1997, and consider the contradictions between the high expectations of ECEC and the reliance on expansion through the PVI sector. The section will begin with an overview of the expansion of PVI provision across England and compare briefly with the approach internationally. This is followed by an exploration of the government priorities for the ECEC sector, and the impact on the range of ECEC providers and families.

2.2 A Childcare Market

The neo-liberal focus on human capital across individual countries and international organisations was a driver for national governments to expand their ECEC provision. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2006: p.256) warned that careful consideration was needed to ensure a suitable ECEC sector evolved:

Without strong state investment and steering in this field, the result will be an insufficient supply of services for those who need those most, leading to increased numbers of children with special needs and learning difficulties; a lack of equity for poorer families; and overall poor quality of provision.

The expansion of ECEC services across Europe has involved a majority of countries introducing publicly funded universal preschool schemes to increase children's outcomes, although as Felfe et al (2014) reiterate with less intensive interventions and covering larger populations than the original US studies they often quote. The corresponding impact on education outcomes was reported to have positive short-term, but limited long-term, effects in Spain (Felfe et al 2014), Norway (Haynes and Mogstad 2011) and France (Dumas and Lefranc 2012). In contrast, there is a minority of countries that chose to develop a private ECEC market, the UK alongside Australia, the Netherlands, Germany, Ireland and South Korea (Kagan 2020; Lloyd 2008; Penn 2012). Lloyd (2017) compares ECEC systems in twenty OECD member states and demonstrates that national approaches to ECEC that rely on parental fees do not ensure quality of provision, children's equal access, or provide affordable ECEC for working parents.

2.2.1 The marketisation of ECEC in England

The term marketisation is used to imply a neo-liberal rationale for private companies in conjunction with the encouragement of relationships between providers and consumers, in this case parents (Brennan et al 2012). The development of the ECEC sector in England through the PVI sector had been justified by the New Labour Government, with the claim that an ECEC market of providers was the most 'efficient' means of meeting the needs of working parents (Gallagher 2018). Furthermore the reliance on an ECEC market has allowed successive governments to continue to steer from a distance but without the large overheads that would arise from public provision. A marketised approach emphasises competition as an effective way to ensure quality and choice, but moral questions arise over the potential for making profit from national education services (Campbell-Barr 2009), a particular concern as largescale investment of childcare organisations continues to grow. The next section will consider the range of providers, and their size, to provide a contextual outline of the ECEC sector.

2.2.2 The range of providers within the ECEC sector

The ECEC market includes a diverse range of providers, ranging from childminders, longstanding single settings to a growing number of large-scale childcare business chains. Department for Education (2019a) statistics show that group providers, with at least two settings, account for 42% of all PVI providers.

Type of provider	Number of providers in 2018/19
School-based providers offering nursery provision	8,662
Maintained Nursery School	389
Private	14,658
Voluntary	8,558
Independent	786
Childminders	39367

Table 2.2: Number of ECEC providers in England for children aged 0 to 4, 2018-19 (Department for Education 2019a: p.1).

The variation in the numbers of the type of provider, as highlighted in Table 2.2, depends upon the age of the child, the requirements of the parents and the location of the provision. While 86% of two-year-olds are reported to attend a PVI setting, the number reduces to 65% for three-year-olds and 22% for four-year-olds (Department for Education 2019a: p.1). The reduced number of four-year-old children in PVI settings reflects the number who are attending reception classes in school.

The comparable quality of PVI to maintained nursery settings has consistently been reported in research studies as lower, particularly within areas of disadvantage (Gambaro et al 2015; Hoskins et al 2020; Melhuish 2016; Sylva et al 2012). The level of good and outstanding OFSTED inspections rose from 74% in 2012 to 96% in 2019, suggesting that the situation has changed over the last decade (OFSTED 2017; OFSTED 2020). This view is shared by the latest SEED report, Melhuish and Gardiner (2020) conclude that a quantitative study of outcomes found a lack of noticeable differences between the effects of PVI and maintained nursery settings. The report also highlights the improved verbal ability measured at year one in school which directly linked to the amount of informal individual ECEC used, including friends, family

members and childminders. This is an interesting finding, and raises important questions about the positive involvement of informal childcare through family and friends, and the importance of the role of childminders.

The number of Maintained Nursery Schools have been adversely affected by the public spending cuts and the subsequent reduction in local authority budgets. Currently only 389 nursery schools remain open and they continue to offer places to 4% of two- and three-year-old children (OFSTED 2020). Historically higher rates of funding to maintained settings have led to inconsistencies between the different types of providers. The requirement for public sector contracts and a qualified teacher within a Maintained Nursery School, and in some cases a head teacher, have resulted in higher salary costs, counteracted to a small extent by higher child to staff ratios (West and Noden 2019). In contrast, the intention to encourage all PVI settings to employ a graduate was halted in 2015, and funding associated with the employment of graduate level practitioners has been reduced. Static government funding levels alongside increases to expenses, including leases and rents, have resulted in reduced budgets for PVI settings which have contributed negatively towards fewer opportunities for training (CEEDA 2019).

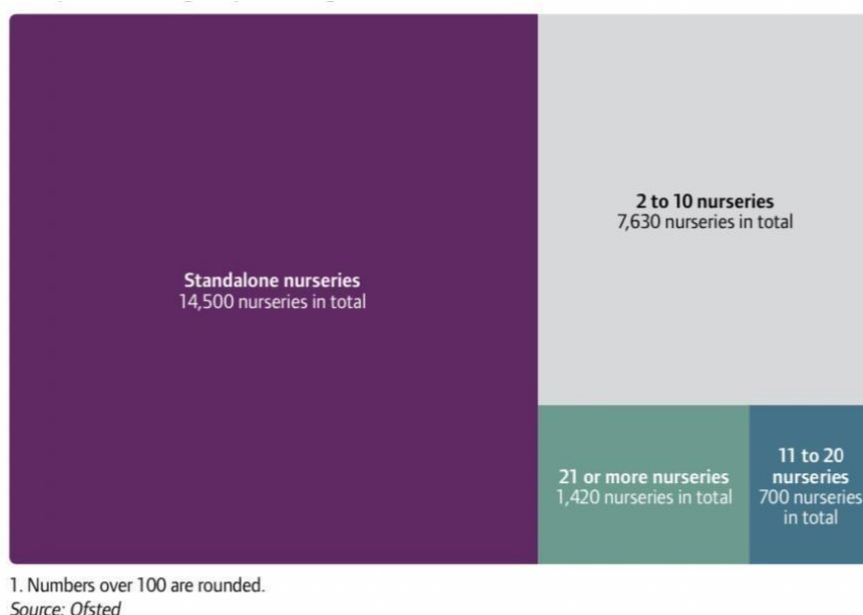


Figure 2.1: Numbers of nurseries and preschools by the size of their associated nursery and preschool group, August 2018 (OFSTED 2018: p.37).

The number of standalone settings, at 60% of providers, reinforce the size constraints that make incorporating value for money strategies a challenge. However, the breakdown of PVI providers depicted in Figure 2.1. demonstrates a significant increase in the number of childcare companies with more than 21 settings, accounting for 6% of the total PVI sector in 2018. The concept of marketisation favours large providers who are able to respond to the policy drivers of quality and low-cost childcare, through economies of scale, central administration and access to finance for the business (Paull et al 2017; Lewis and West 2016). Bradbury (2011) argues that the prioritising of ECEC as a service to support working families places the responsibility on ECEC providers to ensure low-cost childcare. The accompanying intention to reduce the sectors reliance on government funding provides a further challenge to PVI providers, particularly in light of the introduction in 2017 of up to 15 extended funded hours per week for three- and four- year-old children of working parents. Only a small number of extra spaces were provided by offering the extended funding to working parents as the majority of children had already attended with parents paying the fees. Nevertheless, the impact on providers has seen the difference in hourly income between the static funding levels offered by central government and the fee charged to parents

Coalition Government policy interventions have impacted across the ECEC sector, and the final section of this chapter will explore the priorities for provision that have been included in the Coalition policies.

2.3 Government priorities for the ECEC sector

The Coalition Government priorities for ECEC reflect the continuing reliance on the market to encourage competition and drive the sector in line with policy. Penn (2012) describes government intervention in the ECEC sector as the introduction of regulations, quality control and the collection of outcomes data. A shift in the dominant discourse for ECEC towards a system that 'delivers good value for children, parents and the taxpayer' is evidenced in the introduction of More Great Childcare (Department for Education 2013a: p.4) that reiterates the responsibility of ECEC providers to be sustainable.

The areas that are considered government priorities for ECEC: quality, choice, availability, and affordability (Lewis and West 2016; Lee 2019) will be addressed in turn, and will also consider the corresponding impact on disadvantaged families.

2.3.1 Quality

The measurement of quality in ECEC has been solely undertaken through OFSTED inspections since 2013 (Department for Education 2013a) and has resulted in the ECEC sector being directed by the interpretation of quality of successive governments and OFSTED. Improvements across the sector are reflected in the OFSTED inspection ratings (OFSTED 2020) with 96% rated as good or outstanding. However this rating may not reflect the views of other stakeholders including parents, practitioners, schools and the local authority who all hold varying views of quality depending upon their need, expectation and involvement.

The intention of a mixed economy of providers is that competition between settings will lead to an increase in quality. Stewart and Gambaro (2014) were unable to provide evidence of competition-led quality improvements but acknowledge that market dynamics require providers to adapt or close their provision. Research in Canada by Halfon and Langford (2015: p.135) explore the cost of a qualified and experienced workforce, and conclude that the ability of the market, and parents, to pay has adversely affected the training opportunities, wages and benefits available for the practitioners. This view is reinforced by Lloyd and Penn (2014), who cite the effects of an unequal market, on disadvantaged families who are not able to share the same access to quality provision as more advantaged families.

2.3.2 Choice

The Coalition Government view is that parents are encouraged to find ECEC provision that suit the needs of their child and their family situation. In reality the ability for parents to express a choice may be limited by cost, location, timing, availability and access to information (Brennan et al 2012; Plantenga 2012; Smith et al 2009). Vincent et al (2010b) conclude that the exercise of choice is socially determined, thus parents with the necessary finances and social capital are able to make considered choices, while others are limited by school timings for their older children, spare finances and the limits of travel available to them.

The publication of *More Affordable Childcare* (Department for Education 2013b: p.4) reiterates the importance for parents to be able to access information to make choices about ECEC that suit their individual needs. Local Authorities have responsibility to provide information for all families through the Family Information Service, which also provides the point of contact for gaining eligibility for two-year-old funding. However, access to information does not reduce the barriers to the parents' choice, without a complimentary consideration of cost, availability of places and the flexibility of the provider. The dilemma of cost concerns include additional top-ups and extras charged to families to attend the funded hours and travel costs (Department for Education 2018: p.10). *More Great Childcare* (Department for Education 2013a) encourages providers to add incentives and additional activities to their provision in order to attract more families, the feasibility of which adds to the cost consideration for families. Parents seek an ECEC setting within a convenient distance to their home which for some, is difficult to find. For this reason, choice cannot be discussed in isolation but in conjunction with the issues of affordability and availability that follow.

2.3.3 Affordability

There is an expectation from successive governments that education and childcare should be interchangeable within ECEC. In an effort to reduce operating costs, the Minister for Education Elizabeth Truss announced in 2013 measures that indicate a refocus to prioritise working parents and presented the case for improved availability and affordability within the ECEC sector. A key proposal within *More Great Childcare* (Department for Education 2013a) to de-regulate the legal adult to child ratio measures was intended to allow providers to reduce staffing levels each session and thus reduce costs. However, the government ministers' misreading of the ECEC sector resulted in a prompt cancellation of the proposal to ease the ratios.

The marketisation of ECEC expects that competition between providers will keep parental fees low (Penn 2012). While PVI group providers are able to prioritise economies of scale, the options for stand-alone providers to reduce their operating costs are limited. The effect of reducing labour costs and work-related benefits can also impact negatively on the quality and expertise of the workforce. A relaxation of rules since 2013 has also led to a gradual increase in the charging of top-up fees, leading Penn (2014) to express concern that providers could

potentially charge as much as was considered feasible for sessions as well as adding a charge for attendance within the universal funded entitlements hours. Statistics published by the Department for Education (2019a) demonstrate that 74% of providers make additional charges, while figures from CEEDA (2019) and the National Audit Office (2020) estimated that between 12% and 18% of private providers operate a system that also adds charges to take up the universal funded entitlement. Additionally, settings may ask for a deposit or administrative charge before a child starts at a setting. This results in provision that is not affordable or accessible to all parents due to the costs associated with attendance.

Finally, location is a key factor to finding provision that is affordable. Disadvantaged children live across all types of localities and may face diverse problems in accessing fully funded provision. Provision in the local area may be affected by an elderly population, a high number of students, city centre locations or rural areas, which all limit the variety and amount of provision available. While children living on routes into a town or city centre may have their access limited by a prevalence of higher cost day care nurseries which are situated for the ease of working parents. However, for those families that live within an area of socioeconomic deprivation there is a greater likelihood that a maintained nursery school or nonprofit preschool is available that provides funded sessions without additional charges.

2.3.4 Availability

A concern for the Department for Education was the availability of places to meet the expansion of the two-year-old funding (Blanden et al 2016; Mathers and Smees 2014). The SEED baseline study in 2015 reports only a small increase in the take-up of funded ECEC sessions for disadvantaged two-year-olds as a crowd-out of places resulted in places transferred from fee-paying sessions to government funding (Brewer et al 2016; Speight et al 2015). This also proved the case for the extension to thirty hours funding for working parents that was introduced from 2017.

CEEDA (2018: p.15) note that the average number of available childcare places in areas of disadvantage had reduced from 33 per 100 children in 2016 to just 25 per 100 in 2018. Thus highlighting the tension between a reduced availability in areas of disadvantage but a corresponding greater likelihood of affordable provision. Paradoxically, the Department for Education (2019b) continue to raise concerns that the scale of sustainability issues could put

places available for younger children at risk across the sector, but refuse to engage in debate over ways to overcome the problem of sustainability for the providers.

To summarise, while successive governments have driven the direction of ECEC, the Coalition Government placed priority on the issues of quality, choice, affordability and availability. The government policy initiatives prioritise the needs of working families, and contribute to the higher levels of inequality across families and locations in accessing ECEC provision. The relaxation of the rule over charging top-up fees has allowed settings to expand their income from parental fees in addition to the government funding. As the Department for Education is unable to monitor the level of extra fees charged this substantially reduces the effectiveness of the stated priorities of affordability and choice, and results in an unequal ECEC market. Such an approach has been detrimental to children considered disadvantage as it has led to difficulty in accessing sessions that are free, in the local community and at the time required by parents. Furthermore, limited research into the childcare market and the particular difficulties faced by disadvantaged families need to be addressed to extend awareness and develop strategies to ensure that disadvantaged families have the same choices as more advantaged families.

This chapter has focused on the contradictions between ECEC policy, research and practice. The Coalition Government was keen to develop the position of the country within international economies and ECEC was considered a key factor in developing the human capital of future generations, and supporting working families to enable the economy to grow. A reliance on circular policy to provide evidence of the benefits of an earlier formal start for ECEC for the youngest children has resulted in an increasing focus on outcomes within an ECEC environment of low funding levels.

The diverse nature of the ECEC sector makes it difficult to address problems as a homogenous group, as the challenges faced by policy are inextricably linked to the location of each setting and the cohort of families attending. Limited research and understanding of the ECEC market sector highlight the need to develop greater evidence of the motives and working styles of the different providers (Penn 2007), alongside ensuring equality of access for families considered disadvantaged. An awareness of the perspectives of practitioners in relation to disadvantage is key to the success of the approach for children considered disadvantaged. Building on the normalisation of disadvantage as the fault of a deficit parenting in Chapter

One, the views of the preschool practitioners within empirical studies by Simpson (2013, 2019) and Simpson et al (2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b) and Lyndon (2019a, 2019b) provide a basis to the interviews that will be undertaken as part of this study.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

The previous chapters explored the tensions that surround the issue of disadvantage in relation to society and ECEC. An initial consideration of the framing of the normalisation of poverty and disadvantage was followed by an overview of existing research into preschool practitioners' perspectives of disadvantage. Chapter Two concluded with a reflection on the Coalition Government's intention for the ECEC sector to provide an effective childcare market that meet the priorities of the government and working parents: quality, choice, availability and affordability.

This chapter presents an overview of an approach to undertaking research and analysis that forms an empirical study into tensions between Coalition Government policy and ECEC practice in locations of mixed socio-economic communities. The interpretive analysis utilises Critical Discourse Analysis of ECEC policy to understand interview narratives shared by preschool managers. The methodology will present a research study that accepts subjectivity and the acceptance of 'multiple realities' (Pring 2000; Cohen et al 2017) through a focus on social practices to make sense of human action. Concerns raised by Thompson and Gunter (2011) about the impact of the researcher identity on research practice and analysis will be addressed through the concepts of positionality, insider status and reflexivity to ensure that the research process is open and involves the realities that are shared by each preschool manager. Although these concepts are inter-linked they will be addressed separately for clarity. This will be followed by an outline of the overarching ethical considerations that were adhered to throughout the research study. Finally, a consideration of the potential strengths and limitations of the research study will be presented at the close of the chapter.

The four research questions are:

1. How is disadvantage framed in Coalition Government ECEC policy discourse?
2. How do preschool managers construct disadvantage?
3. How do preschool managers describe the priorities of their practice?
4. What are the tensions between Coalition Government policy and preschool practice?

3.1 The position of the researcher

This section provides an acknowledgement of the influence of my professional experience on the research-related decisions during the research process. The study recognises that an individual's subjective values and views are influenced by their race and gender, alongside personal experiences of material, social and economic conditions. As discussed in Section 2.1.1 the majority of ECEC related research has been undertaken within the maintained sector in England and thus a limited understanding of the PVI sector continues (Penn 2007). My professional role as a Preschool Manager in a disadvantaged area introduces a level of complexity to my position at the heart of the research topic. The opportunity to use my professional identity to undertake research into the experiences of managers within the notfor-profit preschool sector was a catalyst for the research study. This leads to a consideration of the notion of the insider or outsider researcher, which will be discussed prior to a more holistic approach which emphasises the responsibility of a researcher to actively consider their own reflexivity and fluidity of their position throughout the research process.

Depicting an insider or outsider position can be linked to a single status, for example gender or age. A view that Robson and Hargreaves (2007) argue results in the insider/outsider roles addressed as two distinct parts. The judgement of a single identity implies stability of the researcher's position across a variety of research locations and activities. Such a binary approach incorporates simplistic assumptions about individuals, commonly positioning outsiders as liable to overlook important phenomena and procedures, and insiders as lacking distance and perspective (Rosaldo 1989). Hammersley (2006) also rejects a distinct insider/outsider dichotomy in preference for a view that the diverse nature of researchers cannot be reduced to simple categories, and suggests that researchers respond in different ways to the particular research method and processes being used. For example, within an interview, the willingness of a participant to share views may be impacted by the relative position of the interviewer and interviewee, and ensures that generalisations cannot be made. While all of the above scenarios are possible a compromise involves moving beyond the insider/outsider binary to the use of multiple statuses to develop an insider/outsider continuum. Responses to differing situations within the research process allow movement along the continuum and result in fluidity in a researcher's position (Deutsch 1981; Eppley 2006).

Atkins and Wallace (2012) address the issue in more depth and conclude that an insider approach potentially leads to more challenges, including issues of role identity and conflict that may arise between the boundaries of the differing responsibilities and positionalities. They further suggest that the process of presenting the empirical analysis could lead to questions of impartiality towards the researcher. However, Sikes and Potts (2008) present an alternative view of insider research, offering a view of an increased likelihood of empathy due to greater understanding of the situation. Leading to the possibility of engaging positively without distrust or hostility, which could lead to more information being volunteered by the participant. Areas of the research process that may be affected by the position of the researcher are suggested by Kacen and Chaitin (2005) to include: the recruitment of participants, analysis of data and formation of conclusions. Thus highlighting that consideration to the issue of positionality will be required throughout the research process.

I consider my relative position to each preschool manager as an outsider to each preschool setting, but with insider awareness of the complexities of working within the non-profit preschool sector and the Local authority within which the study is based. Such a fluid position reveals an opportunity to develop a deeper engagement with the preschool managers and gain insight into their interpretations of disadvantage (Cooper and Rogers 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider developing trust during the interview as the foundation for insider researchers. I agree that my insider awareness may encourage trust through the ability to share work-based experiences that are relevant to the context of the preschool but not the subject of the research, so accepted as a colleague rather than an external researcher. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that my insider position relates specifically to preschool provision, the situation in a private for-profit provider would result in a different position along the insider/outsider continuum (Stephen and Brown 2004). The importance of reflexivity for the researcher will be discussed in section 3.6 after the research approach has been introduced.

The next section will discuss the methodological considerations of the study before an explanation of the research design.

3.2 Methodological Considerations

Methodological considerations present the tradition of enquiry through which the research will be viewed. Sikes (2004) identifies the polarisation between knowledge that is objective and tangible, and knowledge that is more subjective, based on personal experience and insight. Research is dependent upon an individual's own interpretation of the world, for example whether humans are predetermined or make judgements for themselves. The study of the social world requires a research process that reflects the individual nature of people and focuses on the way individuals construct their social world. Researchers within an interpretivist paradigm accept the influence of their values (Bryman 2015) and emphasise the need to provide a coherent and consistent overview of the research process.

This study will adopt a social constructionist approach, a broad theoretical framework which rejects a single ultimate truth, instead seeing the world as constructed through language, representation and other social processes (Burr 2015). Social constructionism views knowledge as more than a reflection of reality (Gergen 2018), and involves acknowledging that socio-cultural and historical contexts shape each individual's construction of knowledge. Using a social constructionist approach brings together a wide variety of realities that can result in rich data, but requires the researcher to provide opportunities to elicit the views of the participants and to clarify the multiple interpretations of knowledge that may arise across all participants. However, Guba and Lincoln (2005) contend social constructionism also requires a researcher to critically analyse their own acceptance of the view of the world as part of the process. The potential to use language to construct particular versions of reality is a key aspect of the analysis.

Within social constructionism the active role of the researcher is critical to eliciting the managers perspectives, and Brock (2013) emphasises the importance of knowledge of the field of ECEC coupled with a respect for the preschool managers and their work. My understanding of the working environment of the preschools and the Local Authority resulted in a reduction of the amount of description of the processes, allowing more depth to the discussion over the course of the two interviews held with each preschool manager.

The design of the study will outline the two components of critical discourse analysis and interviews that will be used, and highlight the process for analysing the data separately and as a final discussion to link policy and practice.

3.3 Research Design

The study was intended to be illuminative, to explore the tensions between ECEC policy and practice using the preschool managers' priorities for practice as a framework for the discussion. The organisation of the research questions in Table 3.1 highlights the approach to gathering and analysing the data to respond to each research question.

Research Question	Source of data	Analytical Approach	Location
1. How is disadvantage framed in Coalition ECEC policy discourses?	Coalition Policy Texts	Dialectical Relational Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2010), incorporating practical argumentation (Fairclough and Fairclough 2013)	Chapter Four
2. How do preschool managers construct disadvantage?	Semi-structured interviews with Preschool Managers	Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006)	Chapter Five
3. How do preschool managers describe the priorities of their practice?	Semi-structured Interviews with Preschool Managers	Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) to explore the effects of the preschool managers enactment of Coalition policy.	Chapter Five
4. What are the tensions between ECEC policy discourse and preschool practice?	Coalition policy texts and semi-structured interviews with Preschool Managers	A critical exploration of the tensions of policy and practice, using the preschool managers' priorities for practice as a framework for the discussion.	Chapter Six

Table 3.1: The source of data and approach for each research question

Analysis of the priorities for practice in isolation would provide only a limited view of the situation, and thus Research Questions One to Three combine to provide the context. Acknowledgement of the importance of language and discourse within society requires an initial analysis of the differing perspectives of disadvantage. Thus, Research Question One considers the framing of disadvantage in policy discourses to reflect the change that occurs across the period of the Coalition Government. The preschool managers' constructions of

disadvantage in Research Question Two are formed from interviews with preschool managers and presents their views situated at a stated point in time.

The research was undertaken in two distinct parts: critical discourse analysis and interviews. A reflexive decision was made to undertake the interviews first, as outlined in Table 3.2. The initial analysis of the interview narratives was undertaken before the critical discourse analysis to ensure reflexivity within the interview and thematic analysis process. In this way the interview discussion is led by the preschool managers views, experiences and priorities rather than as a reaction to my critical analysis of policy. The policy and interview analysis are presented separately in Chapters Four and Five respectively, before a discussion in Chapter Six that will critically contrast and discuss the analysis of both parts of the research process.

Date	Activity
May 2017	Contacted 10 eligible preschools – 6 agreed to participate.
June 2017 - July 2017	First round of interviews
July 2017 - August 2017	Transcribed each initial interview. Emailed interview transcript to preschool managers for comments
December 2017 - February 2018	Second round of interviews
January 2018 - March 2018	Transcribed each second interview. Emailed interview transcript to preschool managers for comments
May 2018 - July 2018	Initial coding undertaken
August 2018 - January 2019	Thematic analysis
February 2019 - April 2019	DRA to CDA policy analysis
May 2019 - October 2019	Further analysis of the themes within the context of the DRA to CDA analysis.
November 2019 - January 2021	Completing the thesis

Table 3.2: The timespan of the research study

Attention will now turn to the specific methodological considerations that need to be given to the choice and organisation of the critical discourse analysis and the interviews. First, I will discuss the analytical approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and will argue that it is not possible to analyse ECEC policy without also considering the wider socio-political and economic context. This is followed by an outline of the interview process and the way that the interview data will be analysed and organised.

3.4 Critical Discourse Analysis

This section will present an overview of CDA and the particular approach that will form the study. I suggest that a policy can be viewed as existing on a continuum, from providing a correct view of the world to dismissed as mere rhetoric. A rationalist paradigm considers that a problem exists and a policy is introduced in response to solve it. However such a positivistic outlook presents policy as a product, without preconceived values, and is difficult to align to the complex political nature of a government. An alternative perspective follows a critical paradigm that considers policies to be value-laden and designed to serve certain interests. Policy uses directional language to command and drive in a particular direction and through this lens the choice of language is not seen as neutral but rather as a powerful tool for sharing political ideology.

A view of policy as a social construction will be explored incorporating historical, societal and cultural influences on everyday life and questioning what governments do, why and with what effects (Taylor 1997). Policy documents often include implicit premises, used to explain why a particular approach makes sense, and Saarinen (2008) argues the dissection of a policy text will make the policy premises visible. In this way analysing policy change across set time frames involves consideration of the discursive processes involved and the resulting consequences of the policy.

CDA is particularly prevalent within a social and political context to study the way inequality is reinforced by language and discourse. CDA does not characterise a field or a sub-discipline of discourse analysis (Fairclough 2003; van Dijk 1993; Wodak and Weiss 2003) but rather a critical approach to studying text and talk. CDA explores the connections between language and social life, for example seeking links with power or ideology (Ball 1993; Bacchi 2000) or

to determine the changes that occur within political, economic and social contexts. In addition a critical approach deliberately intends to be transformative, seeking to change people and society.

My approach to analysis of the policy text stemmed originally from the view of Bacchi (2000) that problems are constructed and shaped within the policy proposals that offer a considered response. Fairclough (2013) suggests that CDA questions the extent that the problems presented really do exist and the way the problems are used to justify the intended solution. Fairclough and Fairclough (2012: p.1) extend this view further by stating that politics is:

... about making choices about how to act in response to circumstances and goals, it is about choosing policies and such choices and the actions that follow them are based upon practical argumentation.

In this way the construction of a policy problem involves a process of argumentation, involving the presentation of an 'argument' and a circumstantial premise to define the initial situation.

From the analysis of the practical argumentation of the policy text, it is possible to decipher choice of words and language used to position families and their children. The influence of political, economic and social contexts is key to the analysis and needs to be incorporated into the process rather just addressing the policy texts in isolation. The intention of Fairclough's Dialectical Relational Approach (DRA) to CDA is to place a social wrong at the centre of the analysis, thereby incorporating the wider political, economic and social context into the analysis. This creates the framework for a specific focus on Coalition ECEC policies in England.

In this study the social wrong is the absence of a formal definition of disadvantage, enacted through a reliance on a measurement of a family's income as eligibility for disadvantage. The measurement enables the national levels for eligibility for the twoyear-old funding to be kept at a pre-set level, as the income level for eligibility can be amended up or down. The reliance on an economic measure works to reduce the discussion of disadvantage more widely, as the absence of a formal definition removes the basis for debate, and leads to an assumed shared understanding that I argue will work to the benefit of those not willing to engage widely.

At this point it is useful to clarify the terminology used, within CDA the term discourse has a variety of definitions: the process of meaning and meaning-making through social interaction; language linked to a particular social field; or a way of constructing the world (Fairclough, Jessop and Sayer 2004). Due to the possibility of confusion across the three possible meanings the term semiosis, as used by Fairclough (2010), refers to the variety of forms of meaning-making, including visual images, verbal and body language. The term semiosis will be used in this study to differentiate meaning-making and discourse as a category.

This section has presented a brief overview of CDA and the concept of argumentation. The categories for argumentation, based on Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) will be presented as part of Chapter Four. The DRA to CDA involves moving through the five stages of analysis, all related to the social wrong, and this approach will be explained in more detail in Chapter Four.

Attention will now shift to the process of eliciting the preschool managers' perspectives. A brief overview of the interview approach taken will be followed by the process of sampling participants, initiating contact and undertaking the interview will also be discussed. Finally, I justify the use of Reflexive Thematic Analysis to organise and present the data.

3.5 The semi-structured interview

'If you want to know how people understand their work and their life, why not talk to them?'

(Kvale 1996: p.1)

At the outset of planning the research study I had intended to undertake interviews and one focus group however, Young and Colin (2004) argue that social constructionism has a social rather than an individual focus, and therefore comparison across a breadth of views would be necessary. I decided not to include a focus group as a consensual view was not the intention and would hinder the consideration of multiple realities of how disadvantage is constructed by individuals in their own contexts.

Tierney and Dilley (2001) state that interviews are widely used by educational researchers in order to gain a greater depth of understanding of the education sector, providing opportunities for participants to share their views on work practices or engage over particular issues relevant to the field of research. The Literature Review in Chapter Two demonstrates that research of ECEC practitioners' perspectives has been largely limited to issues of quality, professionalism or practical aspects of ECEC. Interviewing to gain practitioner perspectives frequently involves the reconstruction of events, implicit meanings, definitions and assumptions (Gubrium and Holstein 2012). Crotty (1998) asserts that taking a practitioners' perspective follows the assumption that an individual's knowledge is personal and subjective, and the acceptance that interviewing can result in multiple realities rather than a predetermined reality (Pring 2000; Cohen et al 2017). Qualitative research does not treat this subjectivity as bias to be eliminated from research, but will present a contextualised analysis of the constructions of the preschool managers (Braun and Clarke 2013). Furthermore, the intention was not to give 'voice' to the preschool managers involved in the research study, with a recognition that such an approach was not compatible with the active role of the researcher to select, edit and paraphrase the constructions (Fine 2002).

The choice of interview approach can impact on the outcome of the research so it is important to follow an interview path that has a close alignment to the specific intention of the research study. A recognition of particular limitations for analysis, need to be considered before the interviews are undertaken for example, interviews that are superficial or deferential are unlikely to elicit any key data. One approach might be to prepare a fully structured interview plan designed to collect data in order to make comparisons across the responses of the interviewees. At the other extreme an unstructured interview may include suggested topics for discussion but allow the participant the freedom to ramble (Foley 2012). King and Horrocks (2010) stress that too formal an approach has the danger of stalling in-depth discussion while too informal may result in a wide area of discussion but at a superficial level only. Corbin and Morse (2003) reinforce the negotiations that take place during the interview, either implicitly or more overtly to either control the direction or allow the participant to take control. Eliciting the experiences and views of preschool managers is a necessary first step towards analysing the way that they construct their understanding of disadvantage. The opportunity to undertake inductive research requires offering preschool managers time to freely share their experiences, practice and views, with a level of interaction required that also allows flexibility to explore issues in depth, to clarify points and to frame their views.

3.5.1 Selection of participants

As discussed in section 2.1.1 statistics used within academic research and government reports focus primarily on nursery schools and children's centres due to their location within areas of disadvantage and their close management by the Local Authority (Gambaro et al 2013). However, the majority of disadvantaged children receive their funded sessions within a range of PVI settings and there is a considered need to widen the reach of research studies in order to develop a greater understanding of practice related to disadvantaged two-year-old children and to create more cohesion between the range of ECEC providers. My decision to focus on preschool provision, was related to their location within areas of disadvantage but also directly linked to my own professional role as a Manager of a Preschool. The opportunity to use my knowledge of preschools is considered a potential benefit of the study.

I followed a purposive sampling approach to recruit six preschool managers, entailing the intentional recruitment of preschool settings with a minimum of five two-year-old funded children attending the setting in March 2017. The criteria of at least five children related to the considered attention needed to support the children, as a lower number of children would risk a limited impact on the setting and the possibility that the specific needs of the children were overlooked. As a manager of a preschool within the Local Authority of the study I was fortunate to receive support from the Local Authority Early Years team regarding participant recruitment. The Local Authority provided a table listing all the ECEC providers meeting the criteria for inclusion in the study, a total of 53 out of a possible 154 settings across the Local Authority (Appendix Two). Only ten preschools within the Local Authority met the criteria, and these were contacted by letter and a copy of the information sheet (Appendix Three) was attached. Six of the preschools expressed an interest and a copy of the participant consent form (Appendix Four) was emailed in preparation for the first interview. The preschool manager chose the location of the interview, with the proviso that it was quiet enough for an audio recording. An interview necessitates attention to the conversation and reinforced the requirement of an audio recording to reduce the need for making notes and to minimise the distractions from the discussion. Audio recordings were made with the consent of the participants at each interview.

3.5.2 Undertaking the interviews

Interviewing to gain the preschool managers' perspectives goes further than a simple question and answer format, and involves the reconstruction of experiences, dilemmas and decisions that have been made. Atkins and Wallace (2012) suggest the ability to encourage participants to talk freely will provide valuable insights into their value judgements and latent views. A situation that was clearly apparent after two initial pilot interviews undertaken in my own setting. The pilot interviews proved too formal and reinforced the difficulty of trying not to be too involved. On reflection the pilot interview encouraged the practitioners to reflect on issues that were not particularly part of their job role, for example the organisation of support for children, funding or staffing levels. The pilot interviews also reinforced the need for the participants to be working at management level so they had wide experience of the issues related to the research topic.

Reflecting back on the pilot interview experience I re-organised the format and decided to follow the view of Holstein and Gubrium (1995: p.4), that interviews are 'interpretively active, meaning-making occasions'. They suggest that researchers should take a more active role in the interview and acknowledge their involvement. In this way, interviewers and interviewees are able to contribute to the production of interview data. However, Gubrium and Holstein (2012) warn that an active approach to interviewing requires an awareness of the social construction of knowledge and engaging in a way that allows alternate considerations to be brought into play.

A key factor of my research ethos is accessing the views and experiences of preschool managers, allowing the opportunity for the interview to follow the preschool managers own work experiences and priorities. The multiplicity of their roles within their workplace were apparent within their constructions of disadvantage. I acknowledged the varying roles of the managers, and their multiple and complex standpoints, for example, responding as a manager, parent, practitioner or member of a community (Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Choo and Ferree 2010). The need to consider reflexivity throughout the study will be discussed in detail in section 3.6, including the measures to ensure the preschool managers share their own views and perspectives, and not being unduly led by my own views and values.

For the purposes of the research semi-structured interviews were undertaken with openended questions to ensure a balance between the freedom to share experiences and the need to address the perspectives of the managers on disadvantage and ECEC. The decision to undertake two interviews with each participant involved an interest in developing a relationship rather than a rushed attempt to access information. I prepared for the interviews by considering information that I could share about my own setting without impacting on the responses from the preschool managers. Close attention was paid to the type of questions that were asked and including open-ended invitations to share, including: tell me about..., how did..., what was ..., what helps you to manage?. The first interview was undertaken between June and July 2017 and was used to gain background information about the setting and to develop a rapport with the preschool manager. The topics for discussion used twoyearold funding as an entry point, but also included the cohort, the local community and experiences of the manager. The second interview undertaken between December 2017 and February 2018 had only one proviso: the inclusion of an example of their practice related to disadvantage, otherwise the discussion was open to an update on the setting and was led by the preschool managers. The process of conducting the interviews has been outlined and attention will now turn to the approach to data analysis.

3.5.3 Analysing the interview data

Thematic analysis is used across quantitative and qualitative paradigms, incorporating different paradigmatic and epistemological positions (Braun and Clarke 2020). It is first necessary to determine the type of analysis that is required to respond to the research questions: a rich description of the entire narrative or a more detailed analysis of one aspect of the narrative. The inductive nature of the study requires the entire narrative to be examined, in order to follow the discussion and priorities set by the preschool managers in their individual interviews. The narratives of the preschool managers were interpreted through a process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis, a method formalised by Braun and Clarke (2006), that involves the identification, analysis and presentation of themes within data. Reflexive thematic analysis is an iterative process, involving immersion and multiple engagement with the data, and places responsibility for analysis on the reflexive judgement of the researcher. The reflexive thematic analysis highlights the breadth of views of disadvantage and the priorities of the preschool practice that were shared by each preschool manager.

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data	Transcribing data (reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, and collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, and gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set. Generate a thematic 'map' of the analysis to aid the process of reviewing the themes.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells. Generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. The selection of compelling extract examples. Final analysis of selected extracts and relating the analysis back to the research question and literature.

Table 3.3: The phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006: p.87)

Charmaz (2001) describes the process of coding as the critical link between the interview data and the explanation of meaning. The phases in Table 3.3 are iterative in nature and therefore involved working through and backwards in order to reach a stage of completion. My approach involved an inductive analysis of the interview data and therefore there were no pre-set themes or codes. I used a code to capture one idea, while a theme contained lots of different codes that share a link. I identified possible codes and themes using a cyclical process of searching, organising and revising the themes. Each theme linked back to the research questions and demonstrated a distinct aspect of the data. Boyatzis (1998) outlines the differing levels at which themes may be developed: semantic and latent level. Semantic level analysis focuses on what is said, involving the choice of words and phrases, in order to explore the explicit meaning of the narrative. While the latent level analysis

includes underlying assumptions and values within the narratives. I combined the latent and semantic views to form the constructions of disadvantage.

This section provided a brief overview of the approach to reflexive thematic analysis and acknowledged that detail about how the development of the themes is a part of the analytical process. Chapter Five will begin with a reflection on the process of undertaking the reflexive thematic analysis and this will form a key part of the structure of the analysis (Taylor and Ussher 2001; Braun and Clarke 2006). The presentation of the themes in Sections 5.3 to 5.8 will involve data extracts and analytical narrative, using existing literature as appropriate. The next section will explore the role of the researcher and the need to consistently consider the decisions, interactions and analysis that are undertaken during the research study.

3.6 Reflexivity during the research process

The values of the researcher will be evident in the assumptions and interpretations of the world upon which the research topic will be based (May 2001). The process of reflexivity refers to the acknowledgement that observations made during the research are dependent upon our prior understandings of the subject. Reflexivity is particularly relevant to social constructionism, requiring researchers to consider their involvement in the research process and the construction of meaning. Sikes (2004: p.19) argues for the consideration of reflexivity:

A reflexive and reflective, and therefore, rigorous researcher ... is able to present their findings and interpretations with the confidence that they have thought about, acknowledged and been honest and explicit about their stance and the influence it had upon their work.

The quote from Sikes depicts reflexivity as a way of thinking about the range of decisions that are made in a research study and widens the scope for possible reactions to perspectives and experiences that may differ from the views of the researcher.

Willig (2001) identifies two kinds of reflexivity: epistemological and personal. Epistemological reflexivity involves the researcher reflecting on their own assumptions that have contributed to the research process, including the research questions, methods used and the process of

analysing data. Alternatively, personal reflexivity considers the possible impact of the researcher's experiences, culture and values on the analytical process. Willig (2001) further suggests that critical language awareness is a form of reflexivity involving how words are chosen to present a particular meaning. A lack of consideration of the language and labels used by a researcher during an interview may impact on the responses received.

Finally, reflexivity is not just related to engagement during the interviews but also needs to be considered while undertaking the critical discourse analysis. Rivzi and Lingard (2010) contend that critical policy discourse analysis also needs to recognise the active role of the researcher and the possibility of impartiality. The values and views of the researcher can impact on the scope of the analytical choices that are made. Thus being reflexive during the engagement, analysis and reporting stages can reduce unconscious editing due to one's own values, and lead to a greater engagement with the analytical process (Berger 2015).

The remainder of this chapter will concentrate on the ethical issues that were adhered to and also the ways of demonstrating trustworthiness to participants and also readers of the thesis.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations need to be consistently addressed throughout all stages of the research study. My research study was granted ethical approval by the University of Sheffield School of Education (Appendix Six) before I commenced any empirical research. The research adhered to the ethical standards for educational inquiry as outlined by the University of Sheffield and The British Educational Research Association (BERA 2011, 2018).

As Pring (2000) notes each research study generates its own ethical issues that require consideration. The focus on gaining the perspectives of preschool managers' required gaining informed consent from all participants and raised the question of how much prior information was needed by the preschool managers. The extent to which participants are aware of a research process can range from fully informed from the start (Powney and Watts 1987) to minimal information to avoid providing participants with information that may contaminate the study (Silverman 2013).

In accordance with my ethical responsibility to the participants of the study, it was necessary to provide an opportunity for the preschool managers to consider and negotiate the terms of their involvement (King and Horrocks 2010). I developed a 'process of negotiation' with the preschool managers that was to continue throughout the study. The participant information sheet (Appendix Three) was shared with each eligible preschool manager to allow a full consideration of whether they wished to be involved in the study. The information sheet included the purpose of the research, the reasons for selection, the data to be collected and the potential uses of the data. After initial agreement the consent form (Appendix Four) was emailed to the preschool managers to enable an opportunity to reflect on their participation prior to the interview. Although initial consent was gained at the beginning of the first interview, informed consent continued throughout the process and the preschool managers were reminded at each interview that they were able to withdraw consent at any time.

Clarifying the issue of anonymity for preschool managers was crucial to encourage a candid and free-flowing discussion. For this reason ground rules were set, including confirmation of the confidential nature of all the opinions shared and the removal of any anecdotal information that would possibly lead to a recognition of a preschool setting. Names of schools, locations and personal names were transcribed with ***. Transcriptions of the interview were sent to the preschool managers with a cut-off date arranged during the interview, which was generally two weeks later. Allowing a reflection time with a specific end date, allowed each preschool manager to reflect on their involvement in the research and decide if they preferred certain aspects of the discussion to be withheld from the study.

During the initial stages of selecting participants, each eligible preschool manager was allocated a pseudonym that related to the corresponding letter of the alphabet, for example, participant 5 was given the name Eve. This was used consistently during the process of the thematic analysis and until the end of the study. Confidentiality was provided for the safe and secure storing of data on a password protected computer and the hard copies used for coding were kept in a locked cupboard. I was careful during the writing of Chapters Five and Six to ensure that information shared would not lead to the identity of a preschool manager. However, the eventual sharing of the research findings means that in effect privacy through anonymity is offered to protect the preschool managers.

3.8 Demonstrating Trustworthiness in the Research

Throughout the research process the researcher has to ensure the integrity of the subjective nature of the personal views shared. Trustworthiness is an attempt by researchers to persuade themselves and their readers that the research findings are worthy of attention. In contrast to the conventional quantitative criteria of validity and reliability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) refined the concept of trustworthiness for qualitative research through the introduction of four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Each criterion will be briefly discussed and linked to the research undertaken.

Credibility

Tobin and Begley (2004) argue that respondent validation of the interview transcripts is a necessary part of the process to ensure consistency between the preschool managers' narratives and the representation within the research. The process of transcribing the narratives required careful consideration of the level of detail required. At the beginning of each interview I discussed with the preschool managers about the audio recording and explained that there would be gaps, pauses and utterances included in the audio transcription. I reiterated that this was due to the need for contextualisation, and confirmed that the data extracts in the analysis would be cleaned up to ensure that there were no gaps or utterances. Transcripts were checked back to the audio recording to check for consistency and accuracy, and although time-consuming it proved an effective way to become immersed into the interview narratives. The draft transcriptions were emailed to the preschool managers alongside the pre-agreed date set for comments to be returned. None of the participants requested any changes to the transcripts. The audio recording of the interview helped to ensure a thorough and high quality representation of the complete narrative.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the generalisation of the research analysis from an intensive study of a small number of cases. Although generalisations are not the intended outcome there may

be opportunities to present a consistency of views within and across the research participants. While not attempting to state that the analysis is representative of the whole ECEC sector, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest exploring the extent to which the rich narrative of the preschool managers could be transferred to other instances. The national context of government funding and issues related to socio-economic locations could be considered in relation to the wider context of the ECEC sector but could not be generalised in detail.

Dependability

Dependability involves the practice of demonstrating transparency through the provision of a clear audit trail to detail the complete process of the research. Tobin and Begley (2004) contend that an audit trail should be logical, traceable and clearly documented. The decision to use quotes from the narratives of the interviews to populate the codes and themes was a way to ensure authenticity of the research data (Denscombe 2014). Alongside the transcription of the narratives I kept a reflexive journal that continued until submission of the thesis. The reflexive journals allowed a viewpoint at distinct stages throughout the process through the documentation of my thoughts, ideas and challenges and how these changed over time. For this reason, my reflexive journals also acted as an audit trail of the study.

Confirmability

King and Horrocks (2010) suggest that difficulties may arise if there are either too many or too few themes, resulting in a chaotic or oversimplified thematic structure that does not reflect the data sufficiently. The necessity of analysing data with a regard for reflexivity was a key factor of the reason for using an analytical framework, to ensure from the outset that a clear audit trail was detailed. Denscombe (2014) reiterates the importance of the researcher providing a reflexive account of their impact on the research, and highlights the need to keep an open mind and be willing to consider alternative explanations and outcomes from the data.

The requirement to follow set stages for the DRA to CDA resulted in a wider consideration of disadvantage. To ensure consistency analysis of the policy texts involved a standardised approach, as detailed in Section 4.3.2, to determine the premises and argumentation within each policy text. Each policy text will be displayed in a separate analytical table to aid clarity. My intention within this section has been to reiterate the need for careful consideration of all

aspects of the research process, prior to outlining the final approach and subsequent analysis. Consistent across the criterion for trustworthiness is the importance of an audit trail and ensuring transparency. It is essential that reflexivity remains a consistent part of the research process to reduce any misconceptions and possible sources of bias.

3.9 Potential strengths and limitations of the study

During the interviews I focused on ensuring a relaxed conversation and building rapport with each preschool manager, aided by my professional interest in their practice. A potential strength of the research study is my awareness of the ECEC market environment, and preschools in particular. My insider position raises the prospect of a professional rapport between the preschool managers and myself, that may lead to insightful and rich descriptions of the preschool managers' views, experiences and priorities.

A further strength is my determination to look beyond the binaries presented by the Coalition Government in relation to poverty and disadvantage, and reinforced widely within the media. The framing of individuals as either deserving or undeserving, alongside the presentation of a deficit discourse of parenting is a strategy to simplify the issues, in order to limit debate of the nuances of poverty and disadvantage. In effect reducing complex issues to a simple choice of two competing views. The initial analysis of the normalisation of poverty and disadvantage, in section 1.4, demonstrates the rhetoric of the Coalition Government that continues to be in existence. Thus consideration of the semantic and latent views of disadvantage shared by the preschool managers will allow a more realistic picture to emerge.

This research study uses two-year-old funding as an entry point to a comparison of ECEC policy and practice. Two-year-old funding is offered to all children within England, with eligibility dependent upon a family income less than £16190 per year (see Appendix One). Regional variations in take-up of the funding, as discussed in section 2.1.2, produce an average of 68% across England in 2019. The Local Authority of this research study has consistent levels of 84% of eligible two-year-old children accessing their funded entitlement (Local Authority website 2019). The positive level of take-up is attributed to the marketing strategy and direct communication with families who are due to be eligible in the next term. In addition, signposting by the Family Information Service offers details of all types of ECEC providers

within each local community. For this reason, this study presents the situation within a Local Authority with a high involvement with two-year-old funded children, and may not wholly reflect the situation within other areas of the country.

A possible limitation of the study relates specifically to the interview process and analysis. The possibility of the preschool managers becoming unwilling to engage further with the interviews would impact on the potential range of analysis possible. This is a particular problem with a small sample size, however the trustworthiness factors discussed in Section 3.8 help to alleviate some of the preschool manager's concerns. The ability to analyse the data sufficiently was a concern and for this reason both parts of the research study utilised a step-by-step analytical style to ensure from the outset that a clear audit trail would be provided. Thus following the guidelines of Reflexive Thematic Analysis and Dialectical Relational Approach to CDA set the sequence of analysis that was required.

In this chapter I acknowledged the importance of reflexivity in relation to my knowledge and relative insider position towards the preschools in this research study. I presented the methodological considerations of an approach that uses a DRA to CDA of Coalition Government policy as a basis to understand the managers' views, values and priorities for practice. The methodological implications of reflexivity and ethics are not isolated to just this chapter but continue to be considered throughout the data analysis process, as well as the discussion in Chapter Six.

The four research questions are:

1. How is disadvantage framed in Coalition Government ECEC policy discourse?
2. How do preschool managers construct disadvantage?
3. How do preschool managers describe the priorities of their practice?
4. What are the tensions between Coalition Government policy and preschool practice?

The analysis of the Coalition Government policy and interview narratives will be addressed separately in Chapters Four and Five respectively. Chapter Six will respond to each Research Question and present a discussion of policy practice contradictions, with a particular focus on the enactment by each preschool manager of the policy and the considered impact on the preschool provision.

Chapter Four: A Dialectical Relational Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis

The first chapter highlighted the approach of the Coalition Government to normalise poverty and disadvantage using the strategies of Othering, labelling, shame and stigmatisation. Chapter Two shifted the focus to ECEC and presented a literature review of research, the marketisation of ECEC and the government priorities for the ECEC sector. Chapter Three outlined the methodological approach to the research study and highlighted the use of CDA of the coalition policy texts in order to understand the constructions of disadvantage shared by the preschool managers. A discussion of CDA and practical argumentation culminated in the decision to use Fairclough's DRA to CDA (2010). A DRA to CDA is interested in the ways in which social structures of inequality are presented through language and discourse (Fairclough 2010). Consideration of the language used within each discourse will inform the analysis.

This chapter will form the response to Research Question One, exploring the way that disadvantage is framed within the ECEC policies of the Coalition Government. The first section outlines the DRA to CDA (Fairclough 2010). The nature of the contextual analysis of a social wrong within DRA will be discussed and the stages of the DRA to CDA outlined. The remainder of the chapter will present the analysis of the social wrong, with particular focus on policy text analysis within Stage Two of the DRA to CDA. The policy text analysis is undertaken in two parts: the discursive shift of the argumentation of each policy text to provide an overview of the period of the parliament and an exploration of the semiotic framing of disadvantage across the policy texts. The chapter will conclude with a consideration of the possibility of overcoming the social wrong within the existing social order.

Rather than undertaking analysis of Coalition policy texts in isolation, the political, economic and social contexts will be incorporated to present an interdisciplinary analysis. The influence of capitalism, and more recently the neo-liberal version of capitalism, impacts on all aspects of social life. Fairclough (2013) argues that the absence of neo-liberalism from analysis of social issues would result in an incomplete analysis. Over the last forty years Fairclough has developed interpretations of CDA to address ways of analysing discourse and language within contemporary capitalist societies. A DRA to CDA is interested in the ways in which social structures of inequality are presented through language and discourse (Fairclough 2010). The

DRA to CDA focuses on social relations rather than on the views of individuals (Fairclough 2010: p. 3). Social relations are complex and multi-layered, involving interconnected networks of economic, political, social and cultural elements, and thus need to be analysed dialectically to explore the way that they 'internalise' each other (Harvey 1996). The result is an interdisciplinary analysis that questions the assumptions and values that combine to reinforce inequality. The DRA to CDA starts the analytical process from the position of a social wrong, an approach that places marginalised members of society at the centre of the analysis.

Fairclough (2010: p.94) argues that language use is a 'communicative event consisting of three dimensions: text, discursive practice and social practice'. Contextual analysis involves consideration across all three dimensions. The term 'text' has a complex meaning incorporating speech, written texts, visual images or a combination of these. Texts are understood as both social structuring and socially structured, and for this reason they can only ever be taken as an interpretation of reality. A focus on a single text in isolation will exclude the social context and the relationship to other texts, and thereby result in an incomplete analysis (Bacchi 2016).

In this thesis, the term text refers to policy texts introduced by a political party in parliament. Discursive practice is the way in which a discourse is acted on and circulated within society, that may impact on the levels of inequality in society (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). Taylor (2004) suggests that social practices represent a particular society at a particular time, and are influenced by the existing social order. Social practices are the aspects of society that individuals have learned and unconsciously accepted from the environment, culture and society in which they live. Thus, a consideration of the context at a particular point in time will enrich the analysis.

The term order of discourse describes accepted behaviours associated with a particular sector, organisation, location or point in time (Fairclough 2015). The order of discourse of ECEC incorporates the current normative views of ECEC and reflects the social, political and economic factors. The DRA to CDA explores the way societal groups are characterised within the orders of discourse, and the extent to which the orders of discourse can withstand change and adapt, as new ways of thinking are introduced (Jorgensen and Phillips 2011).

A DRA to CDA involves five stages of analysis, as detailed in the next section. Each stage will be addressed in turn and forms the remainder of this chapter.

4.1 Stages of the Dialectical Relational Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis.

Situating disadvantage within the orders of discourse of economics, poverty and education will widen the discussion and also allow the inclusion of views of a variety of social welfare organisations. The intention of Stages One to Three is to present the negative attributes of the social wrong, including the effect on ECEC practice, that is addressed within a consideration of the macro level obstacles that prevent the social wrong being overcome.

Stage	Description of activity
Stage One Focus upon a social wrong	An interdisciplinary approach to analysis will begin with a perceived social wrong. Social wrongs are social orders that are detrimental to an individual's well-being.
Stage Two Identify obstacles to the social wrong being tackled	An initial consideration of the way that the social wrong arises will involve a variety of orders of discourse and the way that they have been articulated together. The analysis will incorporate linguistic and semiotic policy text analysis to consider the argumentation and framing of the social wrong.
Stage Three Does the social order 'need' the problem?	The third stage raises the ideological question of the overall impact of the social wrong and questions if there is a specific reason the social wrong is perpetuated in society.
Stage Four Possible ways past the obstacles	A shift to a dialectical approach aims to identify any possible gaps and contradictions that could be used to positively effect change to the social wrong.
Stage Five A reflection on the process	The concluding stage provides an opportunity to reflect on the difficulties and tensions linked to the process of undertaking the DRA to CDA.

Table 4.1: The five stages of the DRA to CDA (Fairclough 2010).

The interdisciplinary approach will include linguistic textual analysis of five policy texts, published during one cycle of parliament (2010-2015), with a focus on the language and discourse used within and across the texts. Stage Four presents a positive consideration of the possibilities for overcoming the social wrong, at this stage alternative or marginal ways of

thinking about ECEC can also be incorporated. The final stage concludes the analysis with a reflection on the difficulties that were faced during the process.

4.2 Stage One: The social wrong

In this study the social wrong is the absence of a formal definition of disadvantage. I will argue that without a formal definition, successive governments have been able to present consistent discourses of poverty and disadvantage that have become dominant within society. Linking eligibility for disadvantage status to a measurement of a family's income level, is a move that overlooks the nuances and complexity of the experiences of children and their families. Without a formal definition of disadvantage, the variety of views across the social practices of government, politics, health, economics and education are subsumed into an assumed shared understanding of disadvantage that does not get challenged or debated.

4.3 Stage Two: The obstacles to the social wrong being tackled

Stage Two questions the way that social life is structured, particularly in relation to the effects of a neo-liberal approach to governing. An initial interdisciplinary analysis of the social wrong will determine how the existing social order works to reinforce inequality. The policy text analysis in Stage Two allows the political and economic context to be considered and begins with an overview of the discursive shift within the policy argumentation process and how this may adapt to link to and reinforce the dominant discourse of the text (Fairclough and Fairclough 2013). A further level of analysis will determine the semiotic styles used to frame disadvantage, incorporating the linguistic and visual strategies used within, and across, the policy texts. The determination of technical language to reinforce and formalise dominant discourses will also be highlighted within each policy text. The policy text analysis will conclude with a determination of the narratives of disadvantage used across the policy texts. Stage Two concludes with an exploration of the impact of the social wrong on the field of ECEC.

4.3.1 An interdisciplinary analysis of the social wrong

An interdisciplinary analysis of the social wrong involves the orders of discourse of politics, economics, education and society. The orders of discourse are relational and require consideration of how they impact on each other. For example, political discourse is an order of discourse that continuously adapts to reflect the wider processes of economic, social and cultural change. Analysis across the orders of discourse will determine the presentation of the social wrong at any given point in time.

Government policy texts often frame the 'global imperatives' of how to meet the challenges of globalisation. The concept of globalisation is based on the idea of borderless markets across nation-state boundaries. Improvements in communication and technology have enabled increased levels of global connectedness, encouraged by business, nation states and transnational organisations (Rivzi and Lingard 2010). Harvey (2005) states that while there are many possible forms of globalisation, it is neo-liberalism as an economic approach that has gained dominance over the last forty years. Neo-liberalism promotes freedom of the markets to allow a move towards minimal government intervention and reduced expenditure on social and welfare services. The encouragement of a market economy to deliver public services is justified as a financially efficient and fair approach to providing services to the public (Peck and Tickell 2002). As neo-liberalism gathered momentum, a new public management system evolved and redefined the role of citizens as consumers or clients. Hyatt (2014) suggests that a government retains control through the implementation of measures to ensure compliance, and the introduction of public policies to guide sectors and organisations in a particular direction. Thus, a transformation can shift a view of the state as a provider of goods and public services towards a view that problems are the responsibility of the individual.

The impact of macro strategies to create success within the global economy has far-reaching effects on society, with education considered a key factor in developing future economic and productive competitiveness globally (Ball 2013). Simon and Ward (2010) suggest the underlying intention is to improve the human capital of the country through investment in education and training, which leads to improved employability and higher future income for the individual, and increased productivity for the economy and state. Thus the implied benefit to society, and the reduction of poverty, is the connection between human capital and the spread of wealth further across the population will help to reduce poverty. A leading human

capital theorist, Heckman (2011), argues that investment in early childhood results in significant long-term benefits to the nation, in preference to investment at any other stage of education. The cost effectiveness of human capital development for the youngest children has been further influenced by international and supranational organisations, particularly the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank (White 2011). Moss (2014: p.32) highlights ‘the story of quality and high returns’ within which ECEC was based, and the assumption that providing early education would overcome the effects of structural problems of housing, low paid employment and poor health.

An alternative view of neo-liberalism is that it creates a more unequal and impoverished world, pressuring individuals living in poverty to take responsibility for their lack of education, training and employment (Rivzi and Lingard 2010). Gorard et al (2012: p.14) report that France, the UK and the US have all strongly applied the tenets of neo-liberalism resulting in increased levels of income inequality that have sharply reduced opportunities for individuals, families or groups to change their social status through education or employment. The varying levels of access to positive opportunities across society result in a further layer of inequality, leading Tyler (2013: p.1) to state that neo-liberalism is an ideology of the elite furthered by those who have already utilised human capital. As Moss and Vandebroek (2016) argue the effect of placing the burden on individuals to find a solution to overcome their lack of education and employment resulted in large sections of the population struggling further. Therefore for those members of society who cannot access education and employment the assumption that a neo-liberal approach will spread wealth further is disputed.

The next section will analyse policy texts to consider the extent to which the neo-liberal approach has halted attempts to overcome the social wrong. The policy text analysis will focus on five policy texts, published within one cycle of parliament 2010-2015.

4.3.2 Policy Text Analysis

Government policy is published in a textual form but is set within a wider system that assumes authority, and works to align public policy to the ideology of the political party in power. Chapter Two outlined the previous New Labour Government’s reliance on a market approach to ECEC and the subsequent expansion of the PVI sector. This policy intensification since 1997 has introduced measures to regulate and drive the ECEC sector, as outlined in Table 2.1. The

relevant Coalition Government policies to ECEC are listed in Table 4.2 alongside a brief reason for their inclusion or exclusion from the DRA to CDA process.

Date	Policy	Reason for inclusion	Reason for exclusion
October 2010	Spending Review	Includes positioning of disadvantaged children and families	
December 2010	Field Review, The Foundation Years: Preventing Poor Children Becoming Poor Adults	Includes positioning of disadvantaged children and families	
January 2011	Allen Review, Early Intervention: The Next Steps	Includes positioning of disadvantaged children and families	
March 2011	Tickell Review, The Early Years: Foundations for Life, Learning and Health		No specific reference to the positioning of disadvantaged children.
May 2011	Munro Review of Child Protection: A child-centred system		No specific reference to the positioning of disadvantaged children.
June 2012	Nutbrown Review, Foundations for Quality: The Independent Review of Early Education and Childcare Qualifications		No specific reference to the positioning of disadvantaged children.
September 2012	Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage		No specific reference to the positioning of disadvantaged children.
January 2013	More Great Childcare: Raising Quality and Giving Parents More Choice	Direct impact on providers and the construction of disadvantage.	
July 2013	More Affordable Childcare	Direct impact on providers and the construction of disadvantage.	

Table 4.2: Rationale for the inclusion of Coalition Government policy texts in the DRA to CDA.

The selection of policy texts was dependent on their primary focus and for this reason the policy texts specifically related to the EYFS, Qualifications or Child Protection were excluded.

The Field Review (Field 2010) and Allen Review (Allen 2011) are explicitly focused on overcoming disadvantage. The Spending Review (HMT 2010) set the scene for the parliament, and both More Great Childcare (DfE 2013a) and More Affordable Childcare (DfE 2013b) deepened the reliance on a childcare market, which impacted on the availability of provision for families considered disadvantaged. The DRA to CDA has a particular focus on how actions are interconnected and the arguments that are formed. Analysis of discursive practice involves an examination of which type of discourses are employed in particular contexts, with the intention of emphasising which discourses are privileged in particular areas of policymaking, and which are excluded. This provides the rationale for considering the framing of disadvantage across a range of policy texts of the Coalition parliament.

Argumentation within the policy text

To understand the framing of disadvantage it is necessary to first explore the wider argumentation within each policy text. Analysis involves unpicking the 'problem' to question the assumptions and framings involved, and how this may reinforce the dominant discourse of the Coalition Government. The terms used within the policy text analysis are summarised in Table 4.3 and the comments in blue highlight the dominant discourse presented.

The links between the premises, argument from authority, claim for action and dominant discourses are coherent within each policy. The discursive shifts will be challenged between, and across, the policy texts to consider how the argumentation evolved over time. The policy text analysis will consider the extent to which ideas from the orders of economics, education and politics have been re-contextualised into the discourse of the policy texts (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012). The analysis will take the view that language serves a political purpose, carefully constructing the situation and outlining the path to overcome the concerns presented by the political party in government (Bacchi 2000: p.47). Analysis of the text focuses on both linguistic features and inter-textual components. The linguistic structure includes grammar, sentence construction, vocabulary and semantics of the text. Intertextual analysis is also undertaken of the genres, discourses and narratives incorporated in the text.

Policy Text		
The Claim for Action: <i>dominant discourse</i> what the government must do or the means that will realise the goals		
Goal premise: <i>dominant discourse</i> the short, medium and longterm goals of action.	Circumstantial premise: <i>dominant discourse</i> outlines the context to define the initial situation	Means- goal premise: <i>dominant discourse</i> in what way is the proposed action necessary or sufficient to achieve the goal.
Value premise: <i>dominant discourse</i> the values that underlie the goals.	The framing of disadvantage: the way that disadvantage is presented	Argument from authority: the type of evidence that is used to support the argumentation.

Table 4.3: Terms used in the analysis of the argumentation process (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012: p.140-141).

The policy texts have been arranged into three distinct groups that demonstrate the timing and type of policy text:

Setting the Spending Budgets for the Parliament 2010-15

The Spending Review October 2010

Independent Reviews

Field Review December 2010

Allen Review January 2011

Department for Education Policies

More Great Childcare January 2013

More affordable Childcare June 2013

Each policy grid will detail the argumentation used and will be followed by a brief analysis.

4.3.3 Argumentation of the Spending Review 2010

The Spending Review		
<p>The Claim for Action: <i>austerity, economic stability, private sector involvement</i></p> <p>‘A new vision for a fairer Britain’</p> <p>Pursuing the idea of a ‘Big Society’</p> <p>Reducing the deficit as a necessary precondition for sustained economic growth</p> <p>Providing sustained routes out of poverty for the poorest</p>		
<p>Goal premise: <i>austerity, social mobility</i></p> <p>Families to improve their prospects</p> <p>Involvement of private sector in public services</p> <p>Reforms to welfare system</p>	<p>Circumstantial premise: <i>over-reliance on the state</i></p> <p>Unsustainable public spending</p> <p>Over-reliance of income transfers from the welfare system</p>	<p>Means- goal premise: <i>individual responsibility, economic stability</i></p> <p>Uncertainty in global economy /long-term path to recovery</p> <p>Significant austerity measures to reduce budget deficit</p>
<p>Value premise: <i>individual responsibility, social mobility</i></p> <p>Fairness and Social Mobility</p> <p>‘Work always pays’</p>	<p>The framing of disadvantage:</p> <p>Families who lack the skills to change their situation</p>	<p>Argument from authority:</p> <p>Supranational organisations- OECD and IMF.</p> <p>Government departments – DWP, HMRC and DoH.</p>

Table 4.4: Summary of the argumentation within The Spending Review (Her Majesty’s Treasury 2010)

The Spending Review in October 2010 set out the five year plan for a radical reform of public services. The Spending Review presents the budget deficit as ‘an urgent priority’ stating that the new government had ‘inherited one of the most challenging fiscal positions in the world’ (Her Majesty’s Treasury 2010: p.5). The options available to the Coalition Government are presented as ‘act now or place an unfair burden on future generations’ (Her Majesty’s Treasury 2010: p.6), thereby utilising practical reasoning to reduce the debate to a simple choice: either to continue the path of ‘wasteful spending...uncertainty...failing...’ or to work towards ‘economic growth... social mobility... fairness’ (Her Majesty’s Treasury 2010: p.1920). However, the reduction of the debate to a simple dichotomy does not reflect the complexity of the problem-solving processes. The Spending Review declared the wish to open up the debate about spending choices, but instead presented the vision of the ‘right choice’ unhindered by other perspectives.

The first paragraph of the Spending Review signals legitimacy for the economic decisions by citing the support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Office for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Austerity measures were planned to reduce public spending, alongside a priority for future spending that would promote the long-term economic growth of the country.

A political warrant for the change in direction is evident, as detailed in 'A new vision for a fairer Britain' (Her Majesty's Treasury 2010: p.7). Taking responsibility is a key part of the vision for a fairer Britain and builds on the Conservative Party ideological concept of a 'Big Society', whereby everyone plays their part to support and develop their community. The framing of disadvantage reflects the position of families who do not have the skills to take responsibility to change their situation. The encouragement of private sector expansion into public sector services was presented as a key approach to encouraging fairness. The term 'fairer' is used widely but is ambiguous in nature and is never fully explained. The presentation of a comparison between fairness for all members of society, and those families who rely on welfare benefits, demonstrates the shift away from a reliance on welfare payments and towards public services that support social mobility.

4.3.4 Argumentation of the Independent Reviews

Field Review (2010) The Foundation Years: Preventing Poor Children Becoming Poor Adults

The Field Review takes a conversationalist approach, presenting a narrative that implies a sharing of ideas between the author and the reader. The Field Review explores the nature of poverty within a child's environment and concludes that progress towards overcoming child poverty under the previous New Labour Government had been focused on the short-term reduction of child poverty rates through income transfers (Field 2010). The Field Review concludes that a significant change in approach is required to reach the goal of improving children's life chances (2010: p. 50). Throughout the text, claims for action consistently include the phrases 'needs to' and 'should' to create a sense of urgency and to reinforce the intention for change.

Field Review		
<p>The Claim for Action: narrowing the gaps, human capital, fairness</p> <p>New approach to tackling child poverty</p> <p>Narrowing gap in children's outcomes</p> <p>Pursuing idea of a 'Big Society'</p>		
<p>Goal premise: evidence, school readiness, supporting families</p> <p>Recognition of the Foundation Years (0-5)</p> <p>Higher distribution of funding to the early years of education</p> <p>Measurement of effectiveness</p>	<p>Circumstantial premise: benefit society, gaps in attainment</p> <p>Over-reliance on short-term reduction of child poverty rates through income transfers</p> <p>Wider consequences of child poverty and poor outcomes for low income children</p>	<p>Means- goal premise: austerity human capital, value for money</p> <p>Enabling parents</p> <p>Changing the distribution of skills</p> <p>Investment in early years</p>
<p>Value premise: early education, dysfunctional families</p> <p>Emphasis on personal and individual characteristics</p> <p>Poverty is not just lack of income</p>	<p>The framing of disadvantage:</p> <p>Intergenerational link</p> <p>Families caught in the trap of welfare dependency</p> <p>Poor parenting skills</p> <p>Lack of aspirations for children</p>	<p>Argument from authority:</p> <p>Government Departments: DfE, DWP, HMRC, HMT, OFSTED and DoH.</p> <p>Government-funded research: Millennium Cohort Study.</p> <p>US research articles and NBER</p> <p>Independent organisations: IFS, JRF, Human Rights Commission</p>

Table 4.5: Summary of the argumentation within the Field Review (2010).

The dominant discourse included in the policy text covers the argumentation of austerity as presented in the Spending Review and the importance of human capital. The framing of disadvantage was presented as deficit behaviours within families. This discourse placed emphasis on the financial cost of poverty, rather than an attention to easing the existing levels of deprivation of the home life of the family. Field referenced a wide variety of New Labour and Coalition Government reports, and government-commissioned reviews and research, to present support for the direction of the new Coalition Government.

Allen Review (2011) Early Intervention: The Next Steps

Allen Review		
<p>The Claim for Action: human capital, economic stability, individual responsibility</p> <p>Greater awareness of the benefits of Early Intervention</p> <p>Increased international competitiveness</p> <p>To raise the long-term GDP</p>		
<p>Goal premise: human capital</p> <p>Focus on social and emotional capabilities</p> <p>Increased levels of school readiness</p>	<p>Circumstantial premise: human capital, economic stability</p> <p>Reliance on late intervention and the high cost of late interventions.</p>	<p>Means- goal premise: private investment, economic stability, value for money, monitoring</p> <p>Establishment of Early Intervention Foundation.</p> <p>Measurement of EI outcomes</p> <p>Private investment in public services</p>
<p>Value premise: social cohesion</p> <p>Benefits of Early Intervention to individuals, families and society</p>	<p>The framing of disadvantage:</p> <p>Families who lack the skills to change their situation</p> <p>Poor parenting skills</p> <p>Lack of aspirations for their children</p> <p>Cyclical nature of behaviour</p>	<p>Argument from authority:</p> <p>Supranational organisations- WHO and OECD.</p> <p>Government Departments: DfE DCSF, DWP, PHE, ONS and DoH</p> <p>Government-commissioned review: Field Review</p> <p>Government-commissioned research: EPPE.</p> <p>US Neuroscience research</p> <p>Independent organisations: Save the Children, Triple P, NSPCC.</p>

Table 4.6: Summary of the argumentation within the Allen Review (2011)

Allen links an over-reliance on late intervention to the increased cost to society, and states that ‘people who have had adverse early childhood experiences can end up costing society millions of pounds through their lifetimes’ (Allen 2011: p.24). Allen uses a conversational style sharing his experience in Nottingham to advocate for similar approaches in other communities. Strategically included in the foreword of the text, Allen recounts the ability of Nottingham ‘to cope heroically on meager funds and incredible personal and professional commitment’ (Allen 2011: p.ix). The implicit positioning is that Early Intervention is not solely

related to the availability of funding but rather the skills, experience and willingness of the community.

The framing of disadvantage continues the presentation of deficit families, with a particular reinforcement of the cyclical nature of behaviour. The juxtaposition between the framing of individuals highlights the dominant discourse of economic stability, value for money and human capital:

Socially and emotionally capable people are more productive, better educated, taxpaying citizens helping our nation to compete in the global economy, and make fewer demands on public expenditure.

(Allen 2011: p.1)

and

... during their lifetimes they can impose heavy penalties on themselves and generate major costs, financial and social, for their families, local communities and the national economy.

(Allen 2011: p.3)

Such a polarisation of the situation is legitimised by appealing to the common sense of the reader and linking to the effects on society. The dichotomy is further reinforced through the use of the terms impact, invest, achieve, fulfill, effective and ready within the text to emphasise the growth predicted in the way forward.

To demonstrate the width of support for Early Intervention across the globe, a carefully chosen quote begins each chapter. The quotes include a US president, a US neurologist, a police chief in Northern England and the Secretary of State for Communities in England. A quote is not provided by a professional within the education sector.

4.3.5 Argumentation of the Department for Education Policies

More Great Childcare: Raising Quality and Giving Parents More Choice

More Great Childcare		
<p>The Claim for Action: human capital, workforce, economic stability</p> <p>Quality, affordability and availability of childcare varies across the country</p> <p>The value for money of government funding to ECEC.</p> <p>To ensure skills and knowledge of the future workforce</p>		
<p>Goals premise: effective childcare markets, human capital</p> <p>Dynamic childcare market: through a focus on availability, choice, quality, affordability.</p> <p>Tougher entry requirement to training courses to raise quality of practitioners</p> <p>Reduced involvement of Local Authorities</p>	<p>Circumstantial premise: ineffective childcare markets</p> <p>A failure to use the flexibility of the childcare market</p> <p>Lack of rigour and depth in qualifications within the workforce</p> <p>A challenging global environment and need to improve nationally to compete in the global race.</p>	<p>Means- goal premise: human capital, workforce</p> <p>Less prescriptive guidelines e.g. relaxation of ratios, and minimum space required per child.</p> <p>Making OFSTED the sole arbiter of quality.</p>
<p>Values premise: value for money, human capital, improving the workforce</p> <p>Value for money for parents and the tax payer</p>	<p>The framing of disadvantage:</p> <p>Limited to an acknowledgement of geographical areas of socio-economic disadvantage</p>	<p>Argument from authority:</p> <p>Supranational organisations- OECD.</p> <p>Government Departments: DfE and OFSTED.</p> <p>Government-commissioned research: EPPE and Evaluation of Graduate Leader Fund</p> <p>Government-commissioned reviews: Tickell Review and Nutbrown Review.</p>

Table 4.7: Summary of the argumentation within More Great Childcare (Department for Education 2013a)

The foreword to More Great Childcare highlights the intention of the policy is to ensure ‘high quality at good value’ for children, parents and the taxpayer (Department for Education 2013a: p.4). The policy title concisely sets the use of the term childcare, rather than early education, a move that positions the focus of the ECEC sector onto supporting the needs of working parents. The policy text acknowledges the improvement in childcare provision, but

argues that 'the childcare market' is not achieving its potential (Department for Education 2013a: p.13). The text of More Great Childcare prioritises improving availability, choice, quality and affordability for parents (as discussed in section 2.3). Providers are encouraged to adapt their working style to incorporate the order of discourse of new public management, treating parents as consumers to ensure an efficient service that reacts to the demands of the parents.

The text cites details of ratio levels and funding from OECD, Europe and the US to argue that the English ECEC sector's adherence to high child ratios leads providers towards the low skills and low pay route. The inclusion of a reminder of the levels of funding paid to the sector each year, as well as a comparison to levels of funding in European countries, reinforces the emphasis on the need for efficiency of the childcare market. The text of More Great Childcare suggests an alternative flexible approach, using highly qualified and experienced practitioners working at a relaxed level of staff to child ratios resulting in an efficient service providing higher quality provision at lower costs for parents and the taxpayer. An acknowledgement of the difficulty faced by locations of disadvantage is counteracted by the reorganisation of the role of the Local Authorities to provide support to the providers who need to adapt and develop their provision (Department for Education 2013a: p.36), but within the continuing confines of the childcare market.

Supporting the needs of children considered to be disadvantaged is a key aspect of the preschool provision that is directly contradicted by the announcement of the easing of the legal ratios between practitioners and children. Although the intention was promptly dropped in the light of pressure from the ECEC sector, and the Liberal Democrat political party that was part of the Coalition government (Lloyd 2015).

More Affordable Childcare: Raising Quality and Giving Parents More Choice

More Affordable Childcare		
<p>The Claim for Action: economic stability, workforce</p> <p>Value for money through effective use of government investment in ECEC funding</p> <p>More choice for parents</p>		
<p>Goals premise: childcare market, workforce</p> <p>Local Authorities to refocus on disadvantaged areas</p> <p>Tougher entry requirement to raise quality of practitioners.</p>	<p>Circumstantial premise: ineffective childcare market</p> <p>High cost of childcare</p> <p>Lack of availability of childcare at times that parents need.</p>	<p>Means- goal premise: childcare market, human capital</p> <p>ECEC benefits children, families and ultimately the economy.</p> <p>Providing information to parents to enable choices about childcare</p>
<p>Values premise: individual responsibility, workforce</p> <p>‘Work should pay.’</p> <p>Effective childcare market</p>	<p>The framing of disadvantage:</p> <p>Uses the term low-income instead</p>	<p>Argument from authority:</p> <p>Supranational organisation- OECD.</p> <p>Government Department: DfE, DWP, ONS and OFSTED.</p> <p>Childcare cost surveys: DfE</p> <p>Parental views survey: DfE.</p>

Table 4.8: Summary of the argumentation within More Affordable Childcare (Department for Education 2013b).

More Affordable Childcare builds on the recommendations of More Great Childcare to reduce the cost related to childcare for working families and the financial burden placed on childcare providers and taxpayers. The report repeatedly uses the adverbs ‘already’ and ‘despite’ to remind readers that parents and providers have been supported during the previous three years of the Coalition Government. The case for change is entitled, ‘Significant Government investment and some progress ...’ as a reminder that ECEC is not achieving as much as the Government expected (Department for Education 2013b: p.11).

The dominant discourse of the circumstantial premise is an ineffective market. Thus, reiterating the insufficient level of affordable provision outside of the school day, including an explicit statement of the role of providers in the future (Department for Education 2013b: p.8):

Over the next 10 years the government wants to see a significant increase in the supply of high quality, affordable childcare that is available at the times when parents need to use.

The goal of More Affordable Childcare is to develop an ECEC environment within which all types of childcare providers can 'flourish' (Department for Education 2013b: p.10), however there are no suggestions in the text of how the childcare market can be sustainable across the varied socio-economic locations of the country. The text of More Affordable Childcare continues the focus on improving quality, choice, availability and affordability for working parents but highlights that a market expansion limits the drivers that the government can use.

In this policy text the term disadvantage is replaced by low income, and the implied suggestion is if families engage in employment they will see a rise in their income. Such a shift in terminology highlights the lack of government interest in overcoming the effects of disadvantage. The use of the term low income without any levels attached works to widen the category and include many working parents who work in support sectors, including ECEC.

In conclusion, the initial analysis of the five Coalition policy texts was undertaken to highlight the discursive shift in the policy argumentation. The positioning of deficit parenting laid the foundations for the austerity measures that would cut welfare benefits and budgets for public services. The referencing of international multi-lateral organisations in the policy texts, including the IMF, OECD and the WB, is an attempt to legitimise the neo-liberal economic approach and present the long-term goals for the country. An accompanying reliance on government-commissioned reviews and research, of both the previous New Labour Government and Coalition Government, reinforced the use of circular policy discourse, as argued by Wood (2019). Thus providing policy-led evidence to support the policy direction without consideration of alternative empirical studies. From 2013 the argumentation shifted to the expansion of the economy, through an attention to the organisation of an effective childcare market that would ease the burden on working parents.

The next section will analyse the semiotic framing of disadvantage to critically explore how children and families considered disadvantaged are presented within, and across, the Coalition policy texts.

4.3.6 Framing of disadvantage

The concept of ‘framing’ is widely used in political communication, and Fairclough (2015) argues that framing can be viewed as the deliberate selection of premises intended to direct an audience towards a preferred conclusion. The dominant framing of disadvantage within each policy text was included in the policy grids (Tables 4.4 to 4.8). The range of the narratives used to frame disadvantage is presented in Table 4.9.

Framing of disadvantage	Spending Review	Field Review	Allen Review	More Great Childcare	More Affordable Childcare
	Oct 2010	Dec 2010	Jan 2011	Jan 2013	July 2013
Families caught in the trap of welfare dependency					
Cyclical nature of poverty and deprivation					
Poor parenting skills					
Home learning environment /Lack of aspiration for their children					
Acknowledgement of geographical areas of socio-economic disadvantage					
Uses the term low-income instead					

Table 4.9: The dominant framing of disadvantage within each policy text

The dominant framing of disadvantage in Table 4.9 has been arranged into four narratives for discussion, incorporating elements of the argumentation alongside a consideration of the linguistic strategies and visual imagery used.

The intense framing of deficit parenting in the early stages of the parliament, shifts at the midway point of the parliament in 2013 towards a geographic and income-related focus. The approach to framing will be explored through a discussion of the narratives employed across the five policy texts and linked back to the strategies used to normalise poverty and disadvantage, as explored in Section 2.1.3. The deficit discourse of families living in poverty

that is shared through the strategies of Othering, labelling, shaming and stigmatisation by the government and the media was at its most powerful between 2008 and 2012. The analysis of the framing of disadvantage will extend this concept in more detail to consider the semiotic strategies that a government employs within their official documentation.

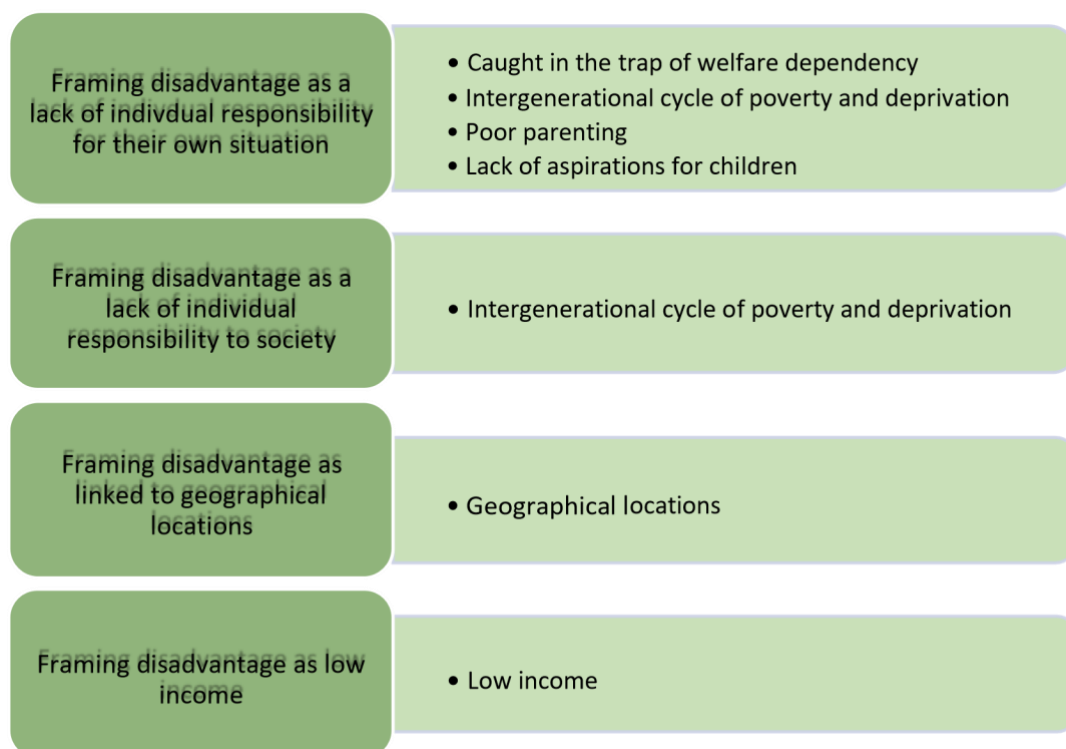


Figure 4.1: Organisation of the narratives of the framing of disadvantage

The first two narratives are based on the dominant discourse of individual responsibility and achieving potential at the forefront of the policy texts (Her Majesty's Treasury 2010; Field 2010; Allen 2011). The third and fourth narratives relate to More Great Childcare (Department for Education 2013a) and More Affordable Childcare (Department for Education 2013b) respectively.

4.3.7 Framing disadvantage as a lack of individual responsibility for their own situation

The Spending Review and Field Review reiterate that disadvantage is not just related to low income, and conclude that increases to the income of a family will not always result in increased achievement and life chances of their children (Field 2010: p.16). An overarching

view of the Field Review is that ‘a modern definition of poverty must take into account those children whose parents remain disengaged from their responsibilities’ (Field 2010: p.15).

Within this narrative the framing of disadvantage is linked to the behaviour of the parents, and will be separated into the following topics:

- Caught in the trap of welfare dependency
- Intergenerational cycle of poverty and deprivation
- Poor parenting skills
- A lack of aspirations for their children.

Although inter-related the issues will be discussed separately for clarity.

Caught in the trap of welfare dependency

The Spending Review implies that the welfare benefit system of the previous New Labour Government led families to depend on income from welfare payments, and has resulted in a lack of skills to take responsibility for their family (Her Majesty’s Treasury 2010: p.26). The Spending Review frames the planned changes to the welfare system as a necessary reaction to the behaviour and lifestyles of those families who rely on income from benefits. However, within the text of the Spending Review there was minimal information to explain the phrase welfare dependency, or to quantify the numbers involved. This suggests that an assumed understanding of the term across political, economic and social fields was followed, a move that forestalls an in-depth consideration of the issue.

Intergenerational cycle of poverty and disadvantage

The concept of a cyclical nature is used across the policy texts, and includes: a cycle of welfare dependency (Her Majesty’s Treasury 2010: p.26), and within the Allen Review a cycle of deprivation and dysfunction, a cycle of dysfunction, a cycle of wasted potential, a cycle of dysfunction and underachievement, and concludes with a cycle of dysfunctional behaviour (Allen 2011: p.ix, p.1, p.5, p.26, p.78). The consistent portrayal of a cyclical nature of behaviour reinforces the view that poor children develop into poor adults, thus forming an

intergenerational link (Field 2010: p.27). The presentation of a deficit link between generations, implies that dysfunctional families and unemployment are a key factor but there is no evidence or quantification within the policy texts. Nevertheless, the consistent use of the cyclical terminology leads a reader to assume that it is a widespread problem.

Allen also focuses on adverse childhood experiences, including extreme depictions of childhood with references to issues of child abuse, neglect and violence in the home. Following the adverse depictions, Allen (2011: p.1) reiterates the importance of forming an Early Intervention Foundation using emotive phrases:

...not just about money – important as this is, especially now – it is about social disruption, fractured lives, broken families and sheer human waste.

Allen (2011: p.16) includes generalised descriptions of socio-economic groupings, using the terms poor, middle class and rich to portray families:

If we can ensure that parents from poor families know how best to extend the life opportunities of their children (the advantages that many middle class and rich families take for granted and which a significant number of working parents achieve) – then even if we cannot end income poverty in the short-term – we can break this intergenerational cycle of disadvantage.

The generalised descriptions to portray comparisons between members of society belies the formal nature of the national review, and suggests that not all of the framings used had the same level of evidence available. The use of explicit Othering and labelling techniques within the quote above reinforce the rhetoric that was shared in Government speeches, interviews and within the media, as explored in Section 2.1.3. Furthermore, the reasoning behind the suggestion that it may be possible to break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage before ending income poverty is unclear. The emphasis is firmly placed on interventions into family behaviour rather than accompanying support to end income disparity.

The following two framings of disadvantage link specifically to parenting and will be presented separately to differentiate between the parenting skills needed in the early years, and the parenting of older children attending school and beyond.

Poor parenting skills

Field added a personal commentary to his review, reflecting that:

Since 1969 I have witnessed a growing indifference from some parents to meeting the most basic needs of children, and particularly younger children, those who are least able to fend for themselves.

(Field 2010: p.16).

This type of over-generalisation adds to the discourse that places blame on families. The Allen Review speaks broadly about parents, using quantifiers to make leading statements more emotive, the use of :some, for most, for many, are all terms which do not indicate the number or proportion of the population. The Allen Review focuses on a relatively small minority of parents who do not fulfill their roles sufficiently but this is not made clear in the text.

The Allen Review uses a variety of linguistic strategies to emphasise the findings: advocacy, evidentiality and the presentation of a dichotomy. For example,

...when all is said and done enabling every child to develop social and emotional capability is nothing less than what most parents routinely do for their own children.

(Allen 2011: p.xi).

and

These skills are such critical building blocks that most people would assume that they are common to us all. Yet for many they are absent or under developed.

(Allen 2011: p.7).

The strategy of presenting a view as an evidentiality is a way of presenting information as a fact to gain agreement from the reader. In contrast, the Allen Review used visual representations to gain attention and provide a visual rationale for Early Intervention. The front cover of the Allen Review (Figure 4.2) compares a brain scan of a normal threeyearold and a neglected three-year-old. The brain image has been widely quoted across political and educational contexts however, Perry (2002) references the image of the brain scan as severe sensory-deprivation neglect in early childhood rather than the result of poor parenting. Thus,

its use on the front cover and citation as due to poor parenting is controversial and designed to produce the maximum effect, as argued by Gillies et al (2017).

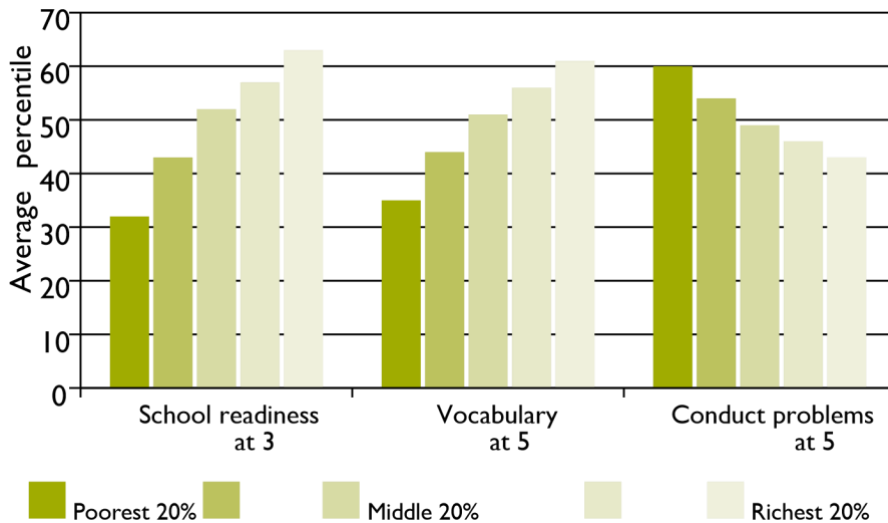
Early Intervention: The Next Steps

An Independent Report to Her Majesty's Government
Graham Allen MP



Figure 4.2: Brain image (Perry 2002) depicted on the front cover of the Allen Review (2011).

The Field Review also uses visual data predicated on negative behaviours to portray the difference between advantaged and disadvantaged families. Figure 4.3 compares socioeconomic groupings against levels of school readiness at age 3, vocabulary at age 5 and conduct problems at age 5. The measurement of school readiness and vocabulary against conduct problems is not explained in the policy text but presents a visual comparison between types of families. The table shows that 31% of children from the poorest families are school ready at age 3 and 60% have conduct problems. For the 'richest' child this equates to 62% school ready at age 3 and 42% with conduct problems.



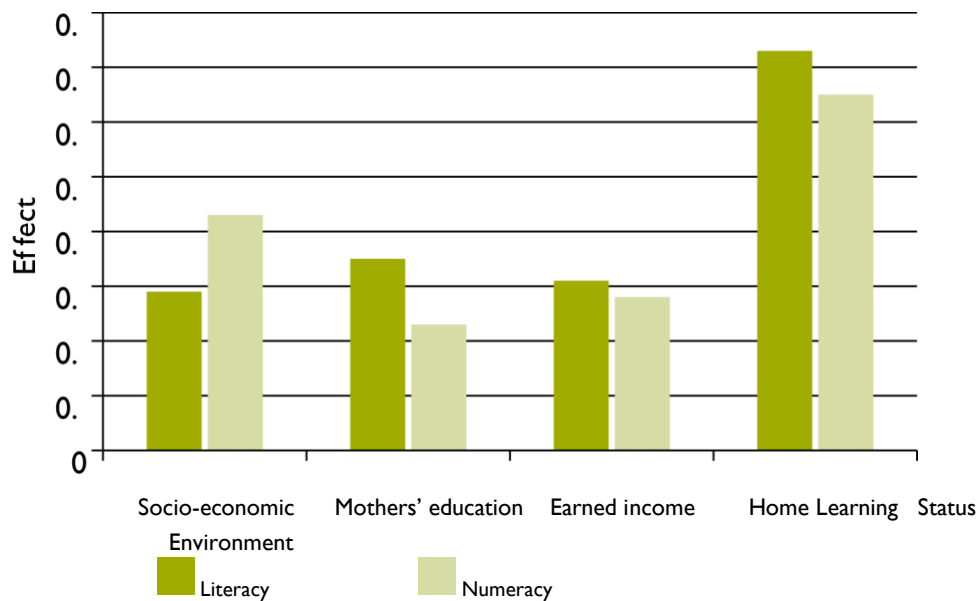
Source: Waldfogel, J. and Washbrook, E. (2008)

Figure 4.3: Mean child outcome by income at ages three and five (Field 2010: p.29)

There is no attempt to define conduct problems and the relatively high percentages across all socio-economic groups suggest that a wide definition is used. The Waldfogel and Washbrook (2008) article confirms that the issue of conduct problems was self-reported by the mothers in the study, and therefore represents a subjective measure that is not robust enough to be used as an effective measure of comparison. Nevertheless, Figure 4.3 as a visual representation does contribute towards the policy discourse of poor parenting.

A lack of aspirations for their children

The Field Review uses a personal commentary at the beginning of the first chapter to question why 'life's race is already determined for most poor children before they even begin their first day at school' (2010: p.11). Shifting responsibility onto parents by using a technique of evidentiality, to present a view as fact, is an approach that is used to solicit agreement from the reader. A further example reinforces the importance of the home learning environment, 'Nobody would doubt the fact that parents play the most significant role in influencing their children's future' (Field 2010: p.37). Such an approach elicits acceptance of the view that parents should be expected to be actively involved in supporting their children through school and into employment.



Source: Melhuish et al (2008)

Figure 4.4: Effect sizes of home life on age five outcomes (Field 2010: p. 31)

The inclusion of Figure 4.4 reiterates the Government view that poverty is more than a lack of income, and continue to relate poor parenting to the reason why children do not achieve their potential.

4.3.8 Framing disadvantage as a lack of individual responsibility to society

The Spending Review promotes work and personal responsibility, reinforcing that everyone in society must make a fair contribution (Her Majesty's Treasury 2010: p.28). An implicit division between parents depending upon their ability to engage in the Big Society was reinforced in the text and figures used within the Field Review.

In the Field review a comparison of the attitudes and behaviours of 14-year-olds from differing socio-economic areas (in Figure 4.5) focused on their frequency of smoking and drinking, and engaging in anti-social behaviour. Interviews with young people and their parents resulted in the self-reported data (Chowdry et al 2010). Visual representation is used to reinforce the perceived negative behaviours, although there is no consistency between the relative

frequency of the activities, varying from 'frequent' to 'ever involved'. Leading to a question of how the data would have differed if the category had been amended to frequently involved in anti-social behaviour or frequently played truant.

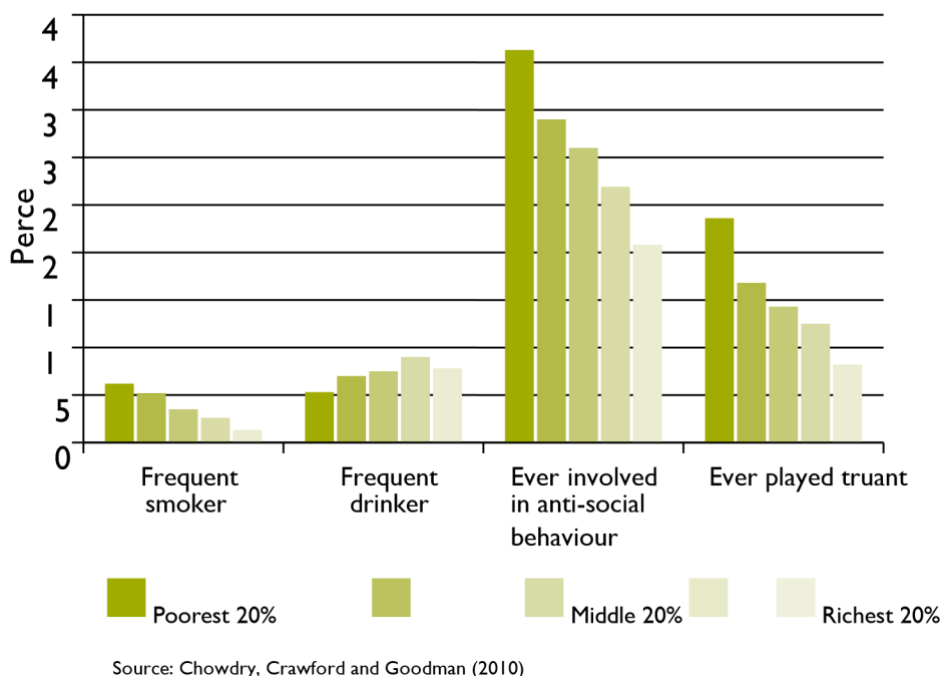


Figure 4.5: Young person attitudes and behaviours by socio-economic status at age 14 (Field 2010: p.30).

There was also no attempt made to present alternative data related to the comparison of the positive behaviours of all the children or to outline the living conditions of different families. Thus the visual presentation of data was carefully chosen to reinforce the dominant discourse of the policy.

The consequences of poverty are also outlined in the Field Review as increasing levels of ill health, unemployment and involvement in criminal activity, and further linked to deficit parenting and the resulting expense for the state. The cost of poverty was included in the Allen Review (2011: p.ix)

...every taxpayer pays the cost of low educational achievement, poor work aspirations, drink and drug misuse, teenage pregnancy, criminality and unfulfilled lifetimes on benefits.

Throughout the Allen Review a dichotomy is presented: socially and emotionally capable parents versus socially and emotionally incapable, depicting a virtuous circle versus a vicious

circle of failure. The virtuous circle in Figure 4.6 places the reliance on families for a child being socially and emotionally ready for the next stage of life, with the goal being a child who is school ready, life ready and ready for their own family.

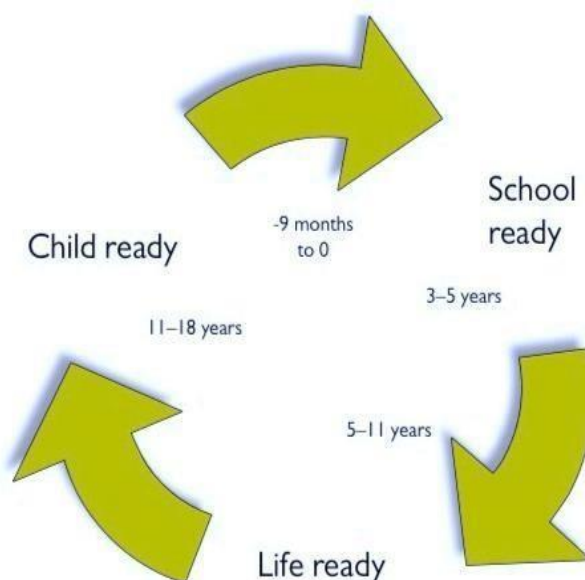


Figure 4.6: A Virtuous Circle (Allen 2011: p.8)

The virtuous circle represents a further depiction of a cycle of behaviour, as discussed in Section 4.3.7. The terminology of virtuous and vicious is used to 'Other', label and stigmatise families, thereby suggesting that a failure at any stage is a failure of parenting without a consideration of the structural factors or experiences involved.

4.3.9 Framing disadvantage as linked to a geographical location

More Great Childcare (Department for Education 2013a) was introduced half way through the Coalition Parliament and frames disadvantage as an acknowledgement that geographic locations of disadvantage may struggle as part of a market approach to ECEC. Positioning disadvantage in relation to the ECEC market rather than the effects of poverty represents the shift to a dominant rationale for ECEC of the human capital of the nation.

4.3.10 Framing disadvantage as low income

The analysis of the policy texts across the Coalition Parliament concludes with More Affordable Childcare (Department for Education 2013b), which explicitly uses the term low income in relation to eligibility for the two-year-old funding. The shift from the use of the term disadvantage to low income is a move away from an acknowledgment of the needs of the family and is predicated on presenting the movement of an individual into employment as a solution to poverty. Apart from the impact of meeting childcare costs there is no recognition of in-work poverty that may impact on families engaged in employment.

To summarise, attention to the framing of disadvantage demonstrates that the existing order of the discourse of poverty has continued to be repeated and reinforced over the last decade. The re-positioning of responsibility from the state to the individual has been contingent on changing the public perception of poverty, unemployment and disadvantage. The framing of disadvantage within policy texts has been a strategy to reinforce the causes of social problems, as well as providing a rationale for reducing financial support to families. A number of the narratives of the framing of disadvantage were closely linked to the deficit discourse shared by the government and media at the time of the general election in 2010, particularly in relation to welfare dependency and the intergenerational cycle of poverty and deprivation. These narratives relied on generalised commentary rather than evidence, with a semiotic style linked to emotive language, Othering and labelling.

The policy text analysis has formed part of the DRA to CDA to consider the obstacles to the social wrong being overcome, and concludes, that the variation of views across the orders of politics, economics and society works to ensure that any discussion of disadvantage continues to follow a narrow path. Thus reducing opportunities for a full consideration of disadvantage encompassing all possible effects of poverty on family life.

The following short sections will conclude the DRA to CDA through a consideration of alternative approaches to the social wrong. First, the effect on ECEC practice will be summarised, and this is followed by a determination of the extent to which the ongoing stability of the social order requires the social wrong. In effect questioning whether the

impact of overcoming the social wrong would alter the social order irretrievably. Stage Four of the DRA to CDA will present an interdisciplinary view of possible ways past the social wrong.

4.3.11 How does the social wrong translate into practice within ECEC?

Attention will now turn to the impact of a lack of a definition of disadvantage on practice within ECEC. At central government level the use of income levels to measure disadvantage presents an objective and effective way to provide early education to young children. At the level of the Local Authority and ECEC provider, the measurement of disadvantage provides access to provision for children from low-income families but overlooks a range of children whose disadvantage is manifested in more nuanced ways. The subjective nature of the understanding of disadvantage introduces a complexity to the debate, that is reinforced by the lack of a formal definition.

The shift in relationships between the fields of politics, economic, and the media have resulted in new articulations of the order of discourse of ECEC, including the concepts of early intervention, outcomes, quality, best practice and readiness for school that have evolved into normative ways of thinking about ECEC. Bibby et al (2017) highlight the policy climate that insists that gaps in educational performance can be narrowed, irrespective of an increase in wage inequality and increasing levels of child poverty. This policy construction results in ECEC presented as a period of preparation for school with Early Intervention one of a number of policy levers to ensure all young children are 'on the path to school readiness' (Allen 2011: p.xix).

To summarise, the increasing emphasis on outcomes, without an acknowledgement of the effects of poverty on children and their individual development, places further pressure on ECEC providers. For ECEC providers the practical experience of supporting children and their families results in tensions between the reality of practice, policy and the childcare market. These issues will be incorporated into the response to Research Question Four: What are the tensions between Coalition Government policy and preschool practice? in Chapter Six.

4.4 Stage Three: Does the social order need the social wrong?

A neo-liberal economic approach has been supported by successive governments since 1979 and is effectively embedded into the fabric of politics, economics and society. Successive governments have worked to ensure the stability of the social order, framed around supporting employment as action for the common good and for future economic prospects of the nation. The rationale of human capital does not leave space for a wide consideration of disadvantage as it would prove detrimental to the overarching aim of the neo-liberal approach.

Fairclough (2010) contends that by this stage it should be apparent if the social wrong can be overcome within the existing social order. In this case the likelihood of overcoming the social wrong without changing the social order is low as it is dependent upon changing the dominant discourse of poverty and disadvantage, which is reliant on the political will of the Government. The next stage moves the analysis from a negative to a positive critique, and will focus on possibilities to overcome the social wrong within the existing social order.

4.5 Stage Four: Identify ways past the social wrong

The tension between improved outcomes for children and supporting approaches to overcome inequality and disadvantage presents a major hurdle to overcome (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009: p.29-30). A formal definition of disadvantage by a government would be a necessary first step to change. This was questioned in 'Unknown children - destined for disadvantage' (OFSTED 2016) and included a public request from OFSTED to the incumbent Conservative Government to form a definition of disadvantage. The lack of response from the Conservative Government did not deter OFSTED from expecting Local Authorities and ECEC providers to provide their own definition, and demonstrate how they were working to support disadvantaged children during future inspections (OFSTED 2016). This addition to the inspection process reinforces the tension between the expectations from OFSTED, and the absence of a definition of disadvantage from central Government.

The impact of the close management of political communication through the media presents a hurdle that needs to be overcome. Hawkins (2018) argues that a new moral narrative is needed to shift thinking about poverty. The rhetoric of successive governments has not been unopposed by other actors in the political and international sphere. Most notably, Philip Alston, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, concluded in November 2018 (p.146) that:

...the full picture of low-income well-being in the UK cannot be captured by statistics alone. Its manifestations are clear for all to see. The country's most respected charitable groups, its leading think tanks, its parliamentary committees, independent authorities like the National Audit Office and many others have all drawn attention to the dramatic decline in the fortunes of the least well-off in this country.

Alston further concludes that a harsh and uncaring ethos has been evident through 'a punitive, mean-spirited and often callous approach' (Alston 2018: p.3) to welfare policy since 2010 and led to great misery. However the report was disputed by the incumbent Conservative Government and did not result in debate or amendments to the welfare system. Successive Governments have demonstrated their ability to ignore evaluations and reports from a range of education professionals, non-governmental organisations, parliamentary committees and political opponents (CEEDA 2014; Child Poverty Action Group 2017; House of Commons Education Committee 2019; House of Lords 2015), resulting in a difficulty to hold a Government to account for any issues related to poverty, education or ECEC.

A growing debate about in-work poverty was discussed within the literature review in Chapter Two and demonstrated the ongoing efforts by non-governmental organisations to raise awareness of families living in poverty. However income levels tell only a small part of the story of disadvantage and need to be challenged accordingly (Knight et al 2020). Moss (2014) argues that parental employment itself is not the solution to poverty and disadvantage. The government move to encourage childcare for working parents was an effort to increase the numbers of parents in employment, and thereby a reduction in families living in poverty. However, the problem of in-work poverty is overlooked, and as long as low paid employment exists a level of financial redistribution will continue to be required. The opportunity to develop a debate around poverty is halted by the refusal of government to engage, as evidenced in the government response to the UN report.

Tackling the naturalisation of practices and ways of thinking requires the presentation of alternative social imaginaries and representations of how things might or could be. Moss (2014) argues that different vocabulary is needed to move away from the neo-liberal visionary. The role of semiotics is crucial to present an alternative discourse to that currently shared within political and social contexts. Myth busting on its own will not change public views but the narrative, does need to change, for example to compare the levels of empathy towards children living in poverty against the level of blame placed on adults living in poverty.

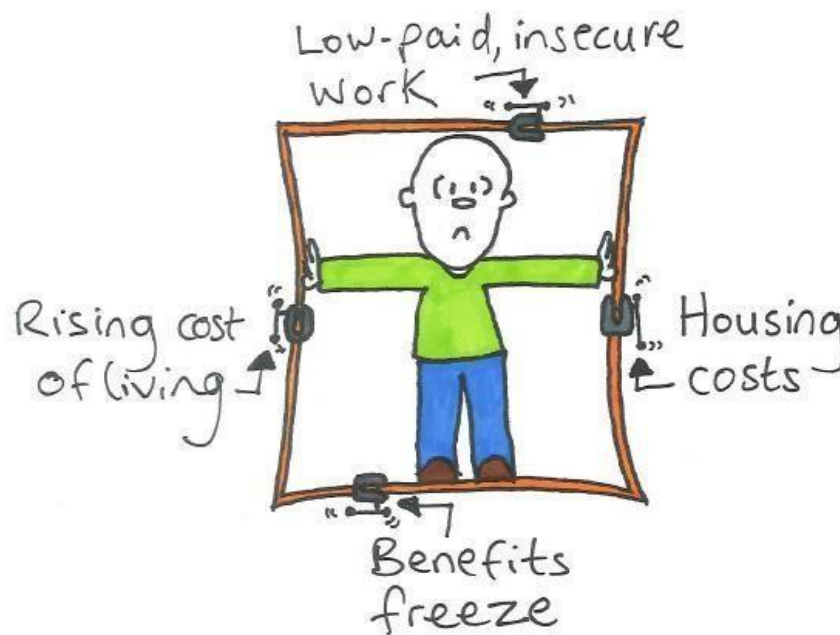


Figure 4.7 The metaphor of poverty locks people into benefits (Brook 2019)

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation produces a range of visual images to represent the structural effects of poverty. The use of metaphors to provide a realistic description of the problems, involves the narratives of those living in poverty. Figure 4.7 depicts the metaphor that 'poverty locks people into benefits', which presents a more positive representation than caught in the trap of welfare dependency (Field 2010). The likelihood of overcoming the social wrong within the current social order was stated to be low, however this section has demonstrated that a debate of ways to overcome the challenge of poverty and disadvantage is beginning to happen. Thus, the involvement of non-governmental organisations, education professionals, parliamentary committees and political parties is a positive change, although successive Governments continue to choose not to engage.

4.6 Reflection on the analysis

A DRA to CDA involves a researcher acknowledging their positionality relating to a social wrong, and their lack of neutrality. The inclusion of the social wrong at the heart of the analysis reinforces the Coalition Government's focus on argumentation and framing within the policy texts, as well as a view of adaptations over time. The opportunity to analyse the extent of the use of semiotic strategies to reinforce the government's position was a challenge. However working through the stages of the DRA to CDA ensured that interdisciplinary issues were attended to within the space allowed for this chapter.

This chapter presented an interdisciplinary analysis of a social wrong, including the political, economic and social context. Analysis of the five Coalition policy texts demonstrates that the lack of a formal definition of disadvantage enables the adaptation of the framing of disadvantage to suit the intention of the Coalition Government at a given point in time. The DRA to CDA forms a response to Research Question One: How is disadvantage framed in Coalition Government policy discourse? and will be further summarised within Chapter Six. The analysis will form an integral part of Research Question Four: What are the tensions between Coalition Government policy and preschool practice? The next chapter will present the Reflexive Thematic Analysis of the interviews held with the preschool managers.

Chapter Five: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Chapter Two demonstrated that government priorities for ECEC are linked to quality, choice, affordability and availability. These are factors that combine towards the neo-liberal human capital goals, but provide minimal support for families. The priorities for an effective childcare market influenced government policy during the Coalition Government, and was discussed within the Literature Review in Chapter Two and the CDA in Chapter Four. The use of Fairclough's DRA to CDA (2010) provided an interdisciplinary analysis of the social wrong of the absence of a formal definition of disadvantage across the sectors of government, health, social care and education. The framing of disadvantage between, and across, policy texts demonstrated the shifts in the framing used in order to align each policy to the changing rationale for ECEC from the Coalition Government.

This chapter will focus solely on the reflexive thematic analysis of the interview narratives, and will contribute to the analysis of Research Questions Two, Three and Four within the discussion in Chapter Six. The four research questions are:

1. How is disadvantage framed in Coalition Government ECEC policy discourse?
2. How do preschool managers construct disadvantage?
3. How do preschool managers describe the priorities of their practice?
4. What are the tensions between Coalition Government policy and preschool practice?

The interviews with six preschool managers provide an account of the experiences of leading a preschool within communities in a south coast city. Coburn (2005: p. 477) suggests that:

Teachers come to understand new policy ideas through the lens of their values and pre-existing knowledge and practices, often interpreting, adapting or transforming policy messages as they put them in place.

In agreement with Coburn's suggestion, I decided that analysis of the enactment of policy in isolation would result in a limited understanding of the preschool managers role. Thus analysis of their construction of disadvantage is a first step of the analysis and allows a greater awareness of the preschool managers' views, approaches and challenges.

The initial interview in June and July 2017 was devised to share information about the preschool and the local community, and the constructions of disadvantage held by the preschool manager. A second interview undertaken six months later focused more specifically on the priorities of the preschool managers. The contextual information shared was invaluable to the researcher for situating the constructions of disadvantage in practice.

The first section will present a reflection on the process of undertaking the Reflexive Thematic Analysis and incorporates the iterative nature of determining the codes and themes. This is followed by a presentation of each theme.

5.1 Reflections on undertaking Reflexive Thematic Analysis

I viewed thematic analysis as an iterative and reflexive process that develops over time, and followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to undertaking Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The process of analysis was explored within section 3.5.3, and is summarised in Table 5.1 as a reminder. Each phase of analysis will be briefly addressed, including the particular difficulties encountered.

	Description of the process within each phase
Phase One	Familiarisation with the data
Phase Two	Generating initial codes
Phase Three	Searching for themes
Phase Four	Reviewing themes
Phase Five	Defining and naming themes
Phase Six	Producing the report

Table 5.1: The six phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006: p.87)

Phase One Familiarisation with the data.

The first phase of the thematic analysis involved the thorough and clear transcription of the interview narratives. A large amount of data was generated, averaging two and a half hours per preschool manager across the two interviews. Multiple readings of the narratives, alongside searching for meanings and patterns allowed immersion into the practice within each setting. During the initial phase ideas for potential codes were noted, although coding continued to be refined throughout the entire analysis process.

Phase Two Generating initial codes

The process of coding was undertaken on hard-copy data to ensure a thorough and systematic approach, and to allow the continuing immersion within the data. Using a complete coding approach, interesting details of the narratives were coded across the entire data set to generate initial codes, using my intuition and professional knowledge. Data was collated for each code and extracts noted, including unusual or random parts of data.

The codes involved quoted extracts from the interview narratives and were carefully preserved in order to represent the essence of the views of the preschool managers. Following the suggestion of Bryman (2015) extracts of data were coded inclusively so the context and intended meaning was not lost. This meant that on occasion a long section of quoted text was included in order to ensure later clarity. The iterative nature of the coding process reinforced the need to continually work forward and backwards through the narratives.

Phase Three Searching for themes

Once the entire data set had been coded attention then turned to arranging the codes into themes with the aim of refocusing the analysis at the broader level. Possible themes were outlined and relevant coded data extracts were collated. To aid the process a code could be placed within multiple themes to ensure that all possibilities were available. A draft thematic map, in Figure 5.1, was devised to demonstrate the relationship between codes and themes, and across themes (Braun and Clarke 2013). The approach to analysis, as outlined in section 3.5.3, incorporated semantic and latent level comments to ensure that the underlying

assumptions and meanings were incorporated into the final depiction of the constructions of disadvantage (Braun and Clarke 2020). The absence of latent constructions would have narrowed the analysis and resulted in an incomplete understanding. The intention to use quotes from the preschool managers was to demonstrate the way that views and constructions were framed rather than as an attempt to give voice to the managers (Fine 2002).

Using an inductive approach to organise the data into possible themes required considerable time as the data could be presented in different ways. During the interview it was difficult to separate the funded two-year-old children from the whole provision of the preschool, although on reflection this helped to provide an overview of the context of the preschool practice.

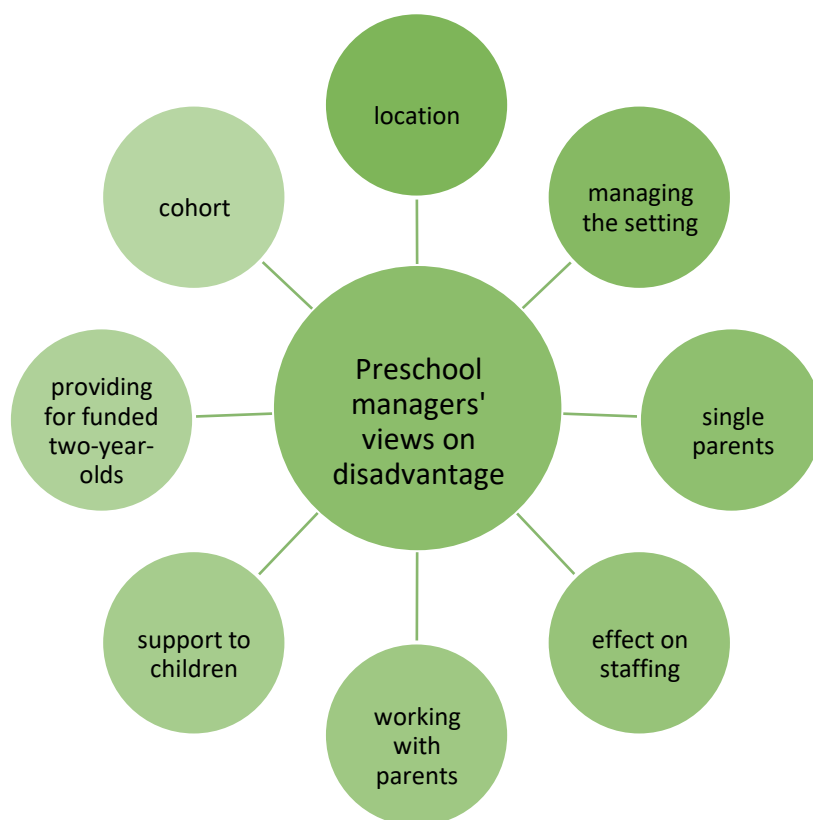


Figure 5.1: Initial thematic map

The initial thematic map in Figure 5.1 reinforced a concern that while the initial themes were focused predominantly on families and children, they only provided a description of the

interview data. Further revisions repositioned the codes and themes to focus on the perspectives of managers, as well as their experiences and working practices.

Phase Four Reviewing themes

At this point it was necessary to reflect across the data to consider the consistency of the relationship between the thematic map and the data set as a whole, and reinforced the need for the themes to be revised to cohere together meaningfully, as well as to ensure distinctions between the themes. The iterative nature of the thematic analysis entailed revising the codes and possible themes multiple times, a process which continued up to and including the writing stage (Braun and Clarke 2006). A dilemma surrounded the organisation of the themes related to the managers' constructions of disadvantage. My active role as the researcher utilised my intuition and professional knowledge to place the codes into possible themes to capture the ideas and interpretations expressed by the preschool managers. An initial idea was to have all constructions of disadvantage within one theme, but on reflection this presented a feature of data rather than a theme. Figure 5.2 demonstrates the relative proportion of the constructions shared, and was used as a basis for organising the constructions into two themes: home life and the child.

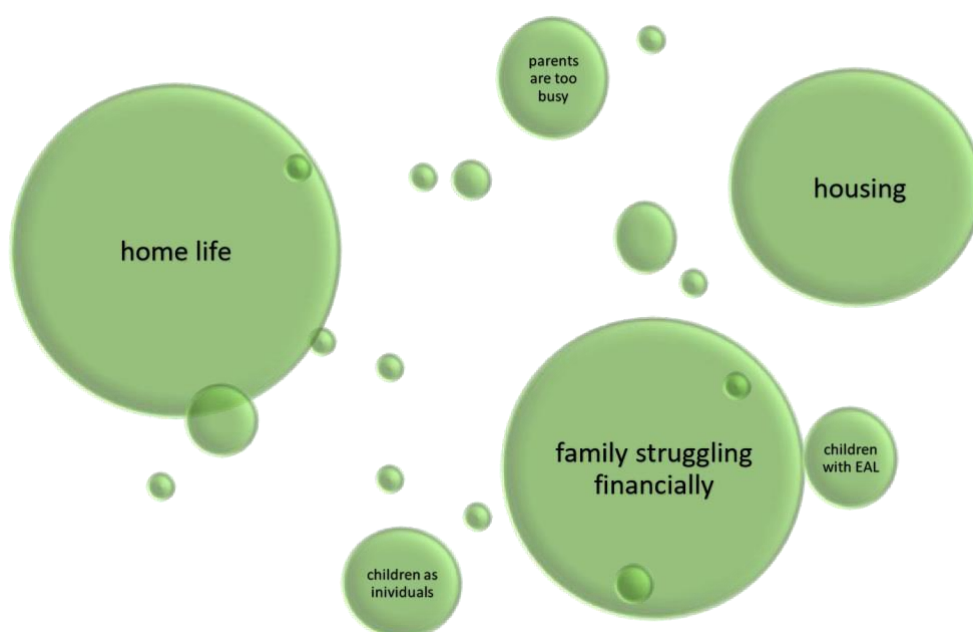


Figure 5.2: The relative proportion of the response to the question 'What is disadvantage?'

Finally, I separated the codes and themes into two distinct parts: the constructions of disadvantage and the on-going focus on the priorities of the preschool. On reflection it was clear that the management level of the preschool managers had enabled the sharing of a rich overview of the practice within each preschool, and the level of commitment that was given to ensuring the continuing existence of the preschool. Presenting two themes related to the continuing longevity of the preschool was unexpected at the outset but reflected the inductive approach of allowing the interview data to lead the thematic analysis.

Phase Five Defining and narrowing themes

The iterative approach to the analysis led to amendments to the specific details of each theme and an overall view of what the themes did and did not include. Once the overall focus was clear, the codes within the themes needed to be revised to cohere meaningfully. By stepping back and viewing the data set as a whole it was possible to consider the wider narrative that was shared.

The preschool managers' use of the term disadvantage demonstrated that it was easy to repeat the terminology of policy, but difficult to actually define what the term disadvantage meant. Hence it was also important to include narratives that suggest the conflicting views held, and these are organised as Theme Three. Adjustments to the themes continued until they were clear and distinct from each other. A sample page of coded transcript is included in Appendix Five, and details the final codes for a second stage interview.

The title of each theme was carefully considered to ensure it reflected the intended meaning and followed the advice of Braun and Clarke (2013) that the title should be understood out of context, with or without the codes attached. Figure 5.3 presents the final thematic map, colour-coded to differentiate between the two parts of the thematic analysis. Part A: Constructions of Disadvantage are shaded orange and Part B: Reflections on Preschool Practice are shaded blue; this will continue throughout the chapter.

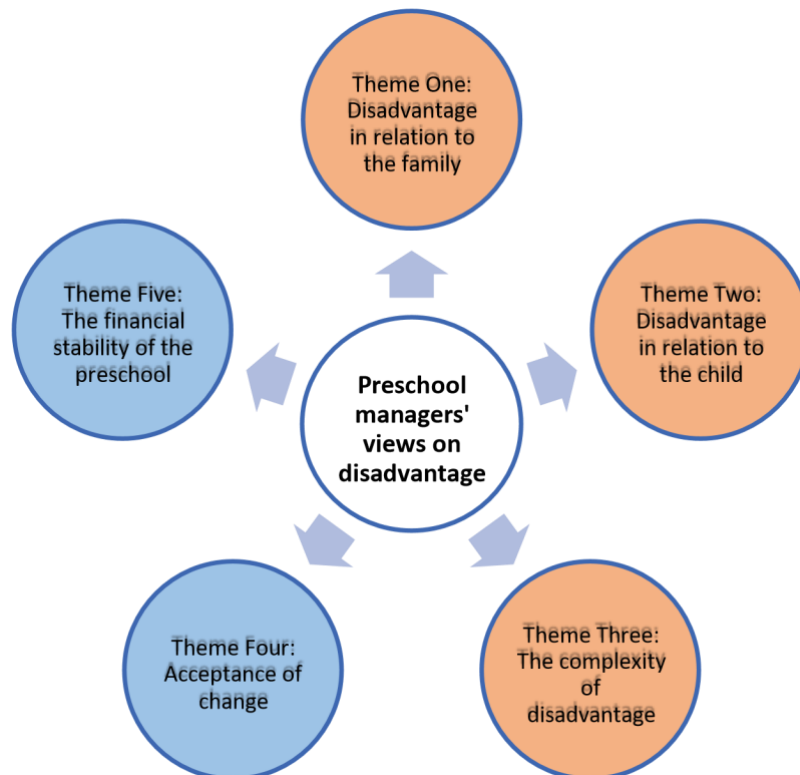


Figure 5.3: Final thematic map

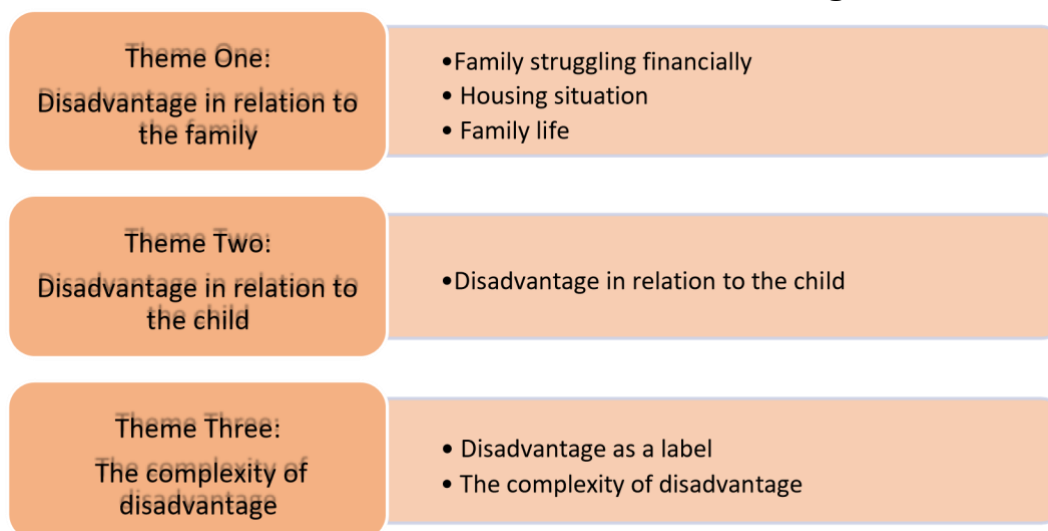
Phase 6 Producing the report

During the final phases of the Reflexive Thematic Analysis I also considered the choice of language and possible origin of the terminology that was shared by the preschool managers. Gee (1999) stresses that as dominant discourses change over time, consideration of the views of an individual requires an accompanying acknowledgement of the discourse they are in at that point of time. The sustained discourse and rhetoric during the period 2008-2012 involved Othering, labelling, shame and stigmatisation as strategies to normalise poverty and disadvantage across society. These strategies will form a part of the analysis of the themes.

The importance of the wider context of disadvantage allowed an analysis that went beyond government discourse and rhetoric, towards an in-depth understanding of the preschool managers' ethos and views. The concept of change was evident throughout the interviews and reflected the effects of the rapid expansion of ECEC over the last twenty years, and the

corresponding development by preschool managers to combat the issue of financial sustainability and the continuing longevity of their preschool settings.

Part A: Constructions of disadvantage



Part B: Reflections on preschool practice

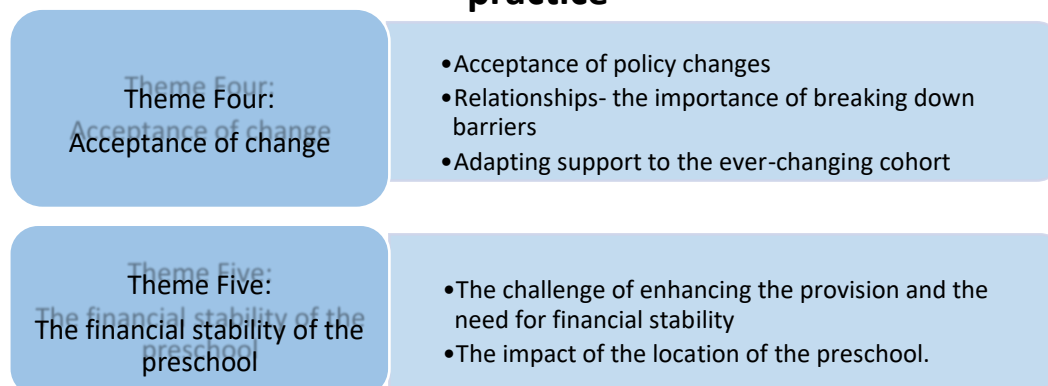


Figure 5.4: The final themes and sub-themes

In May 2018, the Local Authority sent by email the number of ECEC providers with at least five two-year-old funded children at March 2018. This was useful for determining the change in attendance at the preschools and across all ECEC provision between 2017 and 2018, and the rank of the ECEC providers with the highest numbers of funded two-year-olds. Table 6.3 demonstrates the rank of providers with the highest number of two-year-old funded children attending, and highlights the changes to eligibility levels across all ECEC providers.

This section has briefly described how the themes were identified and organised, and outlined the dilemmas encountered along the way. The presentation of the five themes is organised into two distinct parts: Part A Constructions of disadvantage and Part B Reflection on the preschool practice. The two distinct parts of the Reflexive Thematic Analysis provides a valuable analysis of the interview narratives.

5.2 Part A: Constructions of disadvantage

The three themes that form Part A of the reflexive thematic analysis are set out in Figure 5.5. Theme One and Two focus on the preschool managers' constructions of disadvantage in relation to the family and child respectively. Theme Three demonstrates the complexity of talking about disadvantage. The initial request for a definition of the term disadvantage was generally met with a response that disadvantage was difficult to define. A combination of the preschool managers' views, reflections on practice and the shared experiences of the families, was used to form the constructions of disadvantage for the preschool managers.

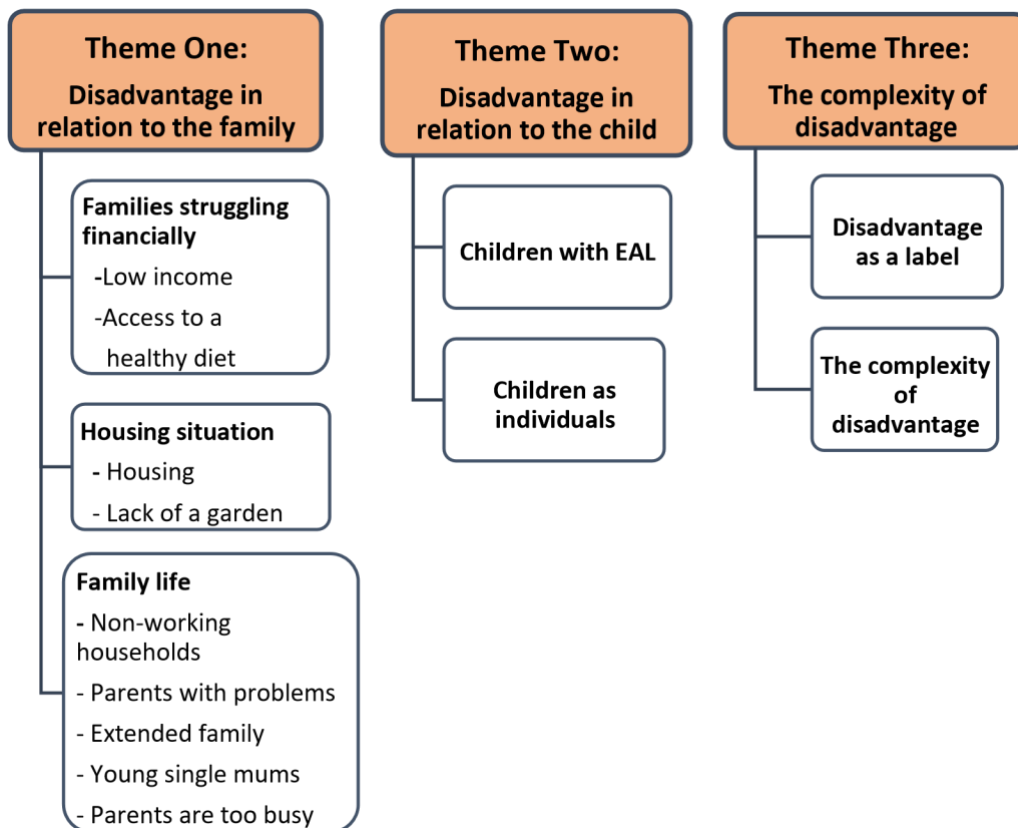
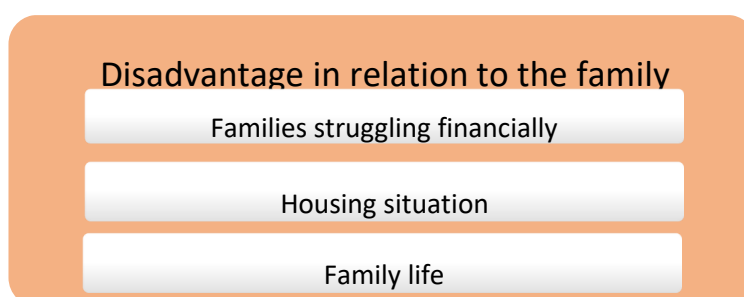


Figure 5.5: Final thematic map for Part A Constructions of disadvantage

Each theme will be addressed separately, although the subsections in Theme Two represent the viewpoint of one or two preschool managers only. Examples from the interviews have been included to demonstrate the preschool managers' awareness and understanding of the structural effects on families. Within each theme attention was specifically given to the use of language to determine the extent to which the views had been part of the rhetoric shared by the Coalition Government, amid recognition that the choice of words may be conducted at an unconscious level.

5.3 Theme One: Disadvantage in relation to the family

Theme One encompasses the majority of the comments shared in the interviews, as the preschool managers commented on the importance of the holistic family experience rather than just a consideration of the child in isolation.



5.3.1 Families struggling financially

Within the sub-theme of families struggling financially the comments were closely linked but have been separated into two main points:

- Low income
- Access to healthy diet

All preschool managers spoke about the financial struggles of the family although there was some variance relating to the corresponding impact on children and families. At the initial

interview Indiah questioned the use of the term disadvantage, 'Are you talking about financial disadvantage because that is the only disadvantage that I can see.' However six months later during the second interview she added issues related to the lack of a garden and children whose parents worked long hours.

Low Income

Camille initially described disadvantage as 'poverty, disadvantaged families that aren't working, living on benefits, living in poor and often overcrowded housing', while also acknowledging that it was a complicated term to define. This view is similar to the Coalition Government rhetoric of 'make work pay' that related disadvantage to a lack of employment. However, Gabi focused more on employment and suggested disadvantage was 'low income families, families where there might be disabilities at home, so families aren't able to work... go out to work or just aren't working'. Gabi acknowledged that it is difficult to know if a family is struggling unless close supportive links have been made:

We've had a couple of families that have been kind of really open about how they are struggling financially and we've been able to provide ... we had one family that we took one week's worth of shopping around because it's just heartbreaking.

She also explained how her preschool tries to support the lower income families that she felt needed 'a bit more support' at times. For example, offering access to a computer, support to bid for local authority social housing or help with applications for benefits, jobs or school admissions. Gabi reinforced that without support from extended family or friends there were relatively few options for the families to gain help.

Making money last was cited as a constant worry that impacted on the levels of stress and overall well-being of the parents and implicitly affected the other family members. Flaherty (2008) suggests that the terms 'poor' and 'poverty' were rarely used by those living in poverty, instead using terms such as 'struggling' or 'managing' to normalise the hardship faced by families. This was also the terminology used by the preschool managers to describe the families for example, the preschool manager described:

... parents who can't manage money ... they have been moved onto universal credit but are struggling.

Although on one occasion the terms managing and struggling were also used to describe a perceived negative behaviour of the parents, thereby demonstrating that the same language can be used in a variety of ways.

Times of additional expense during the year for example, during the school holidays, the purchases required at the beginning of a new school year or at Christmas time, were reinforced in research undertaken by Cooper and Stewart (2015). However, the preschool managers only made cursory comments about the particular financial difficulties faced by the families within their community. Beth and Jada mentioned low-paid employment with specific reference to children who had been eligible for two-year-old funding and then became eligible for the extended thirty hours as their parent(s) started employment. Beth and Jada both felt that the type of employment was often low paid, at unsociable hours and resulted in only a minimal increase to income, and thus placed a greater pressure on the parents and children. Overall there was minimal discussion about families employed on low pay or receiving welfare benefits, the majority of the preschool managers focused on aspects that they had direct knowledge of, rather than repeating the discourse repeated in the media.

Access to a healthy diet

The cost of providing a healthy diet was considered to be a concern for families who were struggling financially. Jada suggested that disadvantage could mean insufficient money to provide 'what we class as a healthy diet'. The preschools all relied on parents to provide a packed lunch each day and the observations of the lunch provided were often considered to be linked to the finances available to the family. The concern about the children's regular access to fruit and vegetables led to some of the preschools adapting their snack policies. Jada had recently introduced a policy of providing snack, overturning the long-standing practice that parents provided the snack each day for their own child. In contrast Gabi's preschool charged parents for the snack each week but the charge was waived for children in receipt of two-year-old funding. However, there is a danger that this approach could reinforce a narrow and discriminatory view of families in need. A two-year-old funded child does not become less disadvantaged once they reach the age of three, and also overlooks other families who may be in need.

The Food Foundation (2019: p.6) estimated that 3.7 million children were living in households for whom a healthy diet is unaffordable, a figure that far exceeds the 240,000 children eligible for two-year-old funding each year since 2014, and reiterates the importance of a wider consideration of disadvantage. Eve's preschool was based next to a children's centre and families in need were able to access the necessary paperwork to attend the food bank. Eve explained the impact of hungry children and the measure that she took to join the Fare Share Scheme, an organisation that redistributes food from major supermarkets to charitable and non-profit organisations each week. The issue of food poverty has increased significantly, with a 73.4 % rise in food bank use since 2013 (The Trussell Trust 2019: p.1), and it was estimated by The Food Foundation (2019: p.6) that 19% of children in the UK experience food insecurity. Garthwaite (2016) argues that the use of a foodbank is linked to feelings of stigma, fear and embarrassment for the families. While there were comments on the unhealthy food provided, Jada and Eve were the only managers to make a semantic comment related to the issue of food poverty.

The next sub-theme addresses the longer-term structural issue of suitable housing, with particular reference to the impact of temporary accommodation on family life and the impact on support networks.

5.3.2 Housing Situation

Within the theme 'Disadvantage in relation to the family' the sub-theme of the housing situation incorporates comments that showed a distinct variance depending upon the specific socio-economic area that the preschool was based within:

- Housing
- Lack of a garden

The managers of the three preschools in areas of deprivation spoke about a transient population, reliant on temporary housing and the need to move regularly. In contrast, the three preschools in the mixed socio-economic communities did not mention housing but instead focused on children who did not have access to a garden.

Housing

Beth and Camille's preschools were based in areas that had seen a large increase in housing provision for the student rental market due to the close proximity to a university campus. The subsequent increase in rental prices had reduced the availability of suitable properties for families in the area. Local Authority waiting lists for social housing were reported to be very long and resulted in families living temporarily in privately rented accommodation while waiting to be re-housed within Local Authority organised housing. Beth stated that attempts to privately rent to remain in the same area added more financial pressure to the family and gave little security of tenure. Statistics from the charity Shelter (2017) confirmed the difficulties faced by families, and estimated 250,000 families were becoming burdened with serious debt due to the unstable and short-term nature of private renting. Wider housing issues were highlighted by the UK charity Shelter (2018) and had deepened by the effects of cuts to Local Authority budgets, as well as increasing housing costs and nationwide reductions to levels of housing benefits, all of which impacted on the availability of suitable homes for families.

Beth specifically linked the need to move to suitable accommodation against a reduction in support networks. The impact of a family moving to suitable housing may cause disruption to the children's education but also resulted in reduced involvement of the extended family. In contrast, Camille reflected on the experiences of some of the families from her preschool living in poor and overcrowded housing rather than agreeing to move away from the area.

Lack of a garden

The three preschools based in mixed socio-economic communities focused on available access to outside areas and more specifically a private garden. Gabi, Indiah and Jada all mentioned families who lived in flats and did not have access to their own garden, citing the limits this would place on their access to outdoor play. Gabi qualified her view by stating that a family may have a lovely home but no access to the outside. In contrast Indiah questioned the relevance of drawing any conclusion from the lack of a garden:

Just because that child who lives in the flat doesn't have a garden doesn't mean they are disadvantaged. The parents may well be taking them to the park or getting lots of outside time.

Indiah further introduced the idea of the quality of the experience, for example families who regularly go to the park against those families whose garden is not suitable for their young children to play in.

A Shelter (2018) research briefing estimated that in 2017, 55% of families living in temporary accommodation were in work, a statistic that demonstrates that employed status is not a protection from homelessness. The high percentage of working families that were struggling with housing difficulties challenges the economic theory that cuts to public service will encourage families to take responsibility for themselves, and the options available are challenged by those who work closely with families and communities. These statistics stand in direct contrast to the government discourse that implies that it is only worklessness that causes problems.

Financial difficulties and the housing situation are closely inter-linked and have in recent years been compounded by the result of austerity measures introduced during the Coalition Government. The dichotomy described between the views of appropriate housing or lack of garden clearly demonstrate the subjective nature of forming a construction of disadvantage. The views related to housing and access to a garden have reinforced the differences between those preschools based in areas of socio-economic disadvantage and those who are in areas of mixed socio-economic families. The final sub-theme relates to family life, as such it holds a majority, and variety of viewpoints.

5.3.3 Family life

This sub-theme encapsulates a number of topics and depicts the considered heart of the issue of disadvantage, many of which also link to financial difficulties and poor housing. To demonstrate the breadth of the comments the issues will be presented separately, as detailed in Figure 5.6.

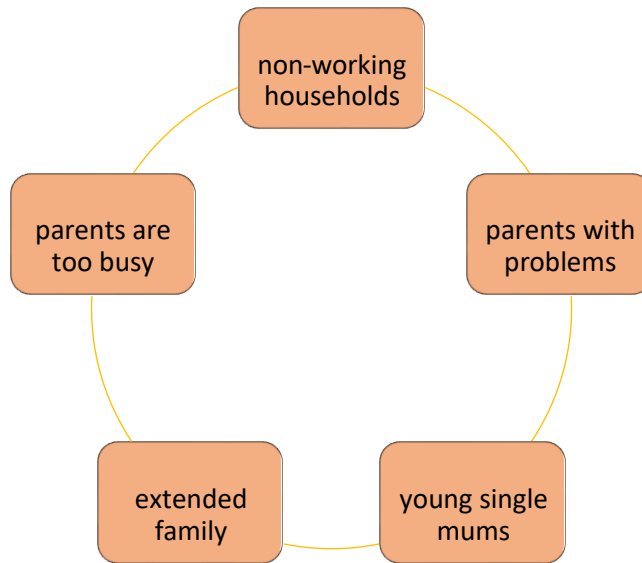


Figure 5.6: Characteristics of the sub-theme of family life

Non-working households

Non-working households were considered to have more impact on the financial difficulties faced by families. The reasons for the family members not working were varied, ranging from disabilities, ill health or a single parent family. Camille linked the lack of employment to a lack of routines in the home and the resulting impact on the resilience of the child.

We've had to be a lot more flexible in settling for those two-year-olds and particularly the funded two-year-olds, where again home life is a lot more chaotic ... there is not that routine because they don't have to get up and go to work which of course forces you into a routine.

The range of assumptions in the above quote draw on the deficit discourse that non-working families have no reason to get up in the morning or engage in activities outside of the home. Eve reflected that 'a lot of our two-year-olds have younger and older siblings ... working just doesn't figure into the equation'. Interestingly while the comments were all related to nonworking family members, there was only minimal recognition that family members could be working but receiving low rates of pay. The impact of long working hours but still struggling financially could lead to a different kind of stress and chaos for the family.

Parents with problems

The needs of parents were discussed by three of the preschool managers, all of whom were based in areas of socio-economic deprivation. Beth recounted that moving her preschool just a short distance to the local primary school had resulted in lots of new families attending. Beth reflected that 'the new families that have come in do have a majority of problems and early help involved with the families.' Beth had been unable to determine where the new children and their older siblings had attended before her preschool moved and she reluctantly concluded that the children had not attended any ECEC provision. At the time of the second interview in January 2018 Beth's intake had increased from a low number of 13 in 2016 up to 44 children, and her preschool team were supporting parents with a range of problems. In addition, the corresponding impact of the emotional needs of the children required a lot of daily support within each session at the preschool.

Camille's preschool had a similar socio-economic breakdown and she concurred with the view of the 'disproportionate number of family issues with the two-year-old funding.' She suggested that the children were generally without problems but the parents had problems and thus reinforced the need to work closely with the families. Eve also mentioned the high number of children receiving support from social workers and children placed on Child Protection registers. She reiterated that often this was a reaction to families struggling to cope with adversity and multiple disadvantages.

Young single mums

Both Beth and Camille included young single mums in their comments on disadvantage. They acknowledged the difficulty for young mums to change their situation as they lacked qualifications and work experience, an issue reinforced by the cuts to possible support services. Camille stated that 'they've gone straight from school pregnant and what job are they going to get? There's no support now all the support has gone'. The lack of support for young parents is compounded by the expectation that lone parents will enter the workforce by the time their child turns three. Welfare benefits have been linked to the parent(s) gaining employment once their youngest child turned a stated age, but over the last decade the age has decreased from youngest child aged 16 in 2008 to aged three by 2017 (Rabrindrakumar 2017). On behalf of Gingerbread, a charity supporting lone parents, Rabrindrakumar (2018)

argues that working can lead to little financial reward and more insecurity within the family. For single parents it was felt that the level of support available from extended family members impacted strongly on the ability of the parent to work.

Camille also reiterated that some of the younger mums required additional advice and encouragement to support their children:

There's quite a few speech and language issues and quite a lot of behaviour issues even allowing for the fact that they are two ... they [young mums] don't have much experience.

Beth held a similar view of young mums and discussed the support needed, particularly related to health issues and general childhood illnesses. Living in close proximity to extended family members could be helpful to young mums, but this was not always the case as will be demonstrated within the next section on the extended family. While the overall levels of lone parenting have remained stable over the last twenty years, the number of teenage mothers has fallen dramatically (Allen and Taylor 2012; Vincent et al 2010a) but this was not reflected in the areas of socio-economic deprivation within the research study.

Extended family

The issue of the extended family was raised in the majority of the interviews with a wide interpretation of the impact of involvement. Two of the preschool managers discussed the precarious nature of the involvement of the extended family, particularly with single parents or young mums. Camille described the difficulty of working with extended family members with differing views on parenting:

It's more complicated we're not just working with the mum who's younger and sometimes will listen a bit more but you're working with people your own age or older who've had kids or grandkids and don't necessarily want to be told... (*quoting Grandmother*) I've told him if he bites you, bite him back.

Beth had also experienced older generations supporting younger family members and recounted the discord that sometimes existed between the child-rearing views of older generations and the younger parents. However, Beth and Eve both felt that extended family support was not as prevalent in some areas as a result of families moving to new areas. In

contrast Gabi suggested that extended family support was most likely to be found in higher income families, with grandparents providing care for working parents.

I think that actually for a lot of families facing looking at returning to work when you've got a two-year-old and just fifteen hours funding, actually to find a job that fits in with those times.

Gabi reinforced that without help from the extended family or friends it is difficult to re-enter the workforce, particularly for single parents.

Parents are too busy

A general view that parents are too busy was shared by three of the preschool managers, although their intended meaning was quite diverse. Camille reflected on a family that were both working and sharing childcare:

Dad is working nights so he will have the baby in the daytime while mum is at work and the older child will come here, so he can sleep if the baby is willing – it's quite tough isn't it?

Camille stated that the family was not eligible for funded sessions for the youngest child for another 18 months and raised a concern about the impact on family life of parents who were constantly tired. Beth also expressed concerned about parents working unsociable hours, for example a parent not able to put the children to bed or not at home when the child wakes up in the morning. Beth also described the number of two-year-old funded children that were moving directly to the 30 hours of childcare for working parents at age three. Such a change in funding eligibility does not reflect the continuing level of disadvantage that may be experienced at home. Beth suggested that the children needed a couple of weeks to adjust to spending less time with their family, particularly for those children whose parent worked unsociable hours, which reduced the number of hours they spent together further still.

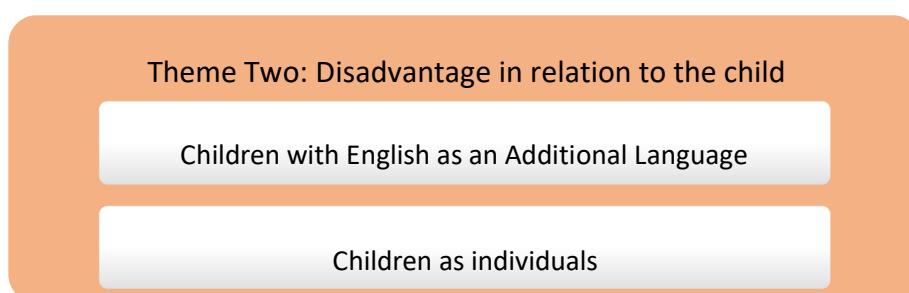
There were varying views on the impact of large families, with Eve suggesting that many of the parents had younger and older siblings and this impacted on their ability or willingness to work. However, this did not take into account the benefit system that required parents to find employment from the time a youngest child is aged three. Research by Jensen and Tyler (2015: p.478) conclude that 43% of larger families, those with at least three children, were

living in poverty, a statistic that reflects the scale of the problem that is compounded by the two child limit on benefits since April 2017. An alternative view was provided by Gabi, who described lots of siblings in a family that resulted in a child who 'is left to just get on with it', linking the number of children in a family with a level of disadvantage. Gabi cited a child who arrived at preschool aged two:

...and they've been treated like a six-year-old at home, whether or not that's a fault of the parent I'm not saying, but what I'm saying is when you've got lots of siblings and everyone has to get on.

In contrast to the other preschools, Indiah was based within a community with large variations of wealth and she considered that a child of an affluent family can also be disadvantaged as the parents work a lot describing the children who 'go home and sit on the iPad while mum's working or dad's working on the laptop'. However, across the interviews there was limited discussion of whether parents were working or not-working, with most preschool managers demonstrating an assumption that the families were on low incomes due to the benefits they received. There was also no clarity of the impact on a family of low-paid employment, or the additional issue of the parent having less time in the home.

5.4 Theme Two: Disadvantage in relation to the child



Theme two incorporates the views that are specific to the child, that were a minority of overall views. The sub-themes are:

- Children with English as an additional language
- Children as individuals

5.4.1 Children with English as an Additional Language

Only Gabi specifically mentioned that children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) could be considered disadvantaged, and clarified that this is irrespective of the level of their family income. Gabi emphasises 'their communication is a massive barrier' that they have to overcome, and affects their social and emotional development within an ECEC setting. Beth and Camille were based in areas with a high proportion of multi-ethnic families but did not mention their home language as a disadvantage.

5.4.2 Children as individuals

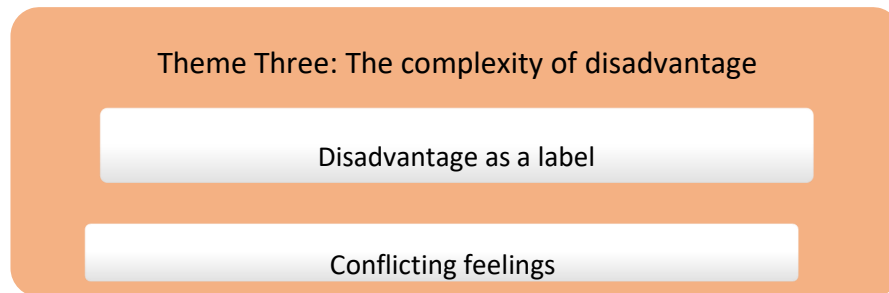
The preschool managers explained in the interviews how they supported two-year-old funded children in their setting through key groups, small group sessions, and particularly speech and language intervention. Jada suggested that there is an initial assumption that the two-year-old funded child will require some support, particularly for speech and language delay or to develop their attention levels. Jada questioned the simple correlation between eligibility and need:

Obviously they're getting the two-year-old funding for a reason and if they are eligible for it then it is suggesting that they are from more disadvantaged backgrounds but I don't think that always tallies up.

Jada further queried the grouping together of children considered disadvantaged, particularly the need to track them as a group for the OFSTED inspection process.

The intention of the two-year-old funding was to ensure the children were ready for school with the expectation of increased outcomes for all children. Indiah was the only manager to specifically mention outcomes, in relation to the extra terms of attendance at an ECEC setting. She suggested that without funding the children cannot attend a setting, so the outcomes are going to be better because they have had access to an ECEC setting for two to three years.

5.5 Theme Three: The complexity of disadvantage



Preschool managers seemed uneasy about providing a definition of disadvantage. Gabi reflected that ‘it’s not easy to answer to be honest’, while Indiah suggested that there are many ways to view disadvantage. This viewpoint seemed in contrast to the practical approaches that all preschool managers described as part of their everyday provision.

Theme three explores the complexity of constructing disadvantage through the subthemes of

- Disadvantage as a label
- Conflicting feelings

5.5.1 Disadvantage as a label

The following comments were made by the preschool managers and, while only small in number, detail the complexity of defining disadvantage. The use of the term disadvantage as a label was used with varying intentions: disadvantaged child(ren) and disadvantaged family. The term was used to describe a type of family and this seemed to be a clear focus on labelling and positioning of the family. For example, Eve stated:

We’ve got quite a lot of disadvantaged families but they are really open they come and talk to us and that’s what I really like about it. They don’t feel that we are judging them.

This comment relates to the neo-liberal view of individuals needing to take responsibility for themselves, and a latent expectation that judgements will be made about them. Gabi

described her approach to supporting families who are receiving two -year-old funding for their child:

...often with disadvantaged families are that the parents are not always confident enough to come in and have a chat and so when you go into their home environment, they are a lot more relaxed.

Both these comments seem to over-generalise families considered to be living in disadvantaged circumstances, and attempt to group diverse families together without consideration for their uniqueness.

A further example of positioning and labelling was Gabi's decision to do home visits each term, but just for two-year-old funded children. This move raised concerns about the type of family that had been prioritised and the lack of opportunities for other families to express a request for a home visit due to their unfunded status. This narrow interpretation is in direct contrast to the wider consideration of disadvantage that was shared by Gabi, and demonstrates the complex views that together form the managers' constructions. Alternatively, Indiah stated that her preschool had the 'least disadvantaged two-year -olds', and expressed a surprise that her preschool had been eligible for inclusion in the research.

Talking about disadvantage introduced views from a variety of perspectives and required analysis to determine if the origins were based in the Coalition Government rhetoric. A comment by one of the preschool managers demonstrated a high level of semantic and latent judgements, and unconscious bias towards the families in her care. While reflecting on her enjoyment of the preschool role she commented 'I think you have to look at this reward that you get from being like a good person rather than financially.' The depiction of a good person could be related back to the Coalition presentation of a binary: deserving/ undeserving and worker/ shirker. The distinct Othering of the families and reinforced the deficit positioning of families highlighted within the political rhetoric of the Coalition Government.

5.5.2 Conflicting feelings

Overall the links between the views of disadvantage and the practical responses were well matched. For example Eve had explained her decision to sign up to the Fair Share scheme to provide food for the children 'coming in hungry through no fault of the family but it just

happens'. The statement raises questions over the Othering of the type of family that allows their child to go hungry, but the practical response Eve made to the problem demonstrated her willingness and moral responsibility to respond to concerns within her preschool. Furthermore Eve reflected on her own life, stating 'it just seemed so much easier to cope and I don't think you had ... all the consumables that you have now' before concluding:

You know I feel so sorry for those people who don't have any money but then there's also that parent that is pleading poverty I really feel for them and we do support them as much as possible. But she smokes and its like that kind of thing ... shouldn't they have that pleasure in life.

There are many contradictions presented within Eve's comment. The representation of the semantic Othering of the families and stigmatising of their choices is reinforced by the rhetorical 'for those people' and 'but she smokes and its like that kind of thing ... shouldn't they have that pleasure in their life', that positions the bad choices of the family. The 'pleading poverty' comment and the interpretation of low income as parents who cannot manage money, imply a judgement that the family was to blame. Overall Eve's comment reinforce the Coalition Government view of deficit parenting and the need for individuals to take responsibility for issues within their family. In contrast to the depiction of consumerism shared in research conducted by Simpson (2013) and Lyndon (2019a; 2019b), the above was the sole comment made by the preschool managers in relation to items bought by parents.

To summarise Part A Constructions of disadvantage, the contrast between the Coalition Government discourse of deficit parenting and the interview narratives demonstrated the predominance of views based on the current situation of children and families. Although there were instances of repeating the discourse of the Coalition Government these were within an acknowledgment of the all-consuming effects of family difficulties, financial insecurity, poor housing and a lack of support resulted in families struggling to cope. The issue of financial difficulties was not seen in isolation but through the far-reaching impact on family life, particularly the impact of the transient nature of temporary housing on home life and may disrupt informal and formal support networks that exist(ed).

Themes Two and Three were brief but highlighted a variety of viewpoints, as well as further reinforcing the subjective nature of the views. The interviews demonstrated the importance of family and the premise that family life is dependent upon a parent's ability to provide a

calm and supportive environment. While there is no disputing that families get caught in a cycle of poverty (Field 2010), the accompanying blame on families was not wholly accepted by the preschool managers.

5.6 Part B: Reflections on the preschool practice

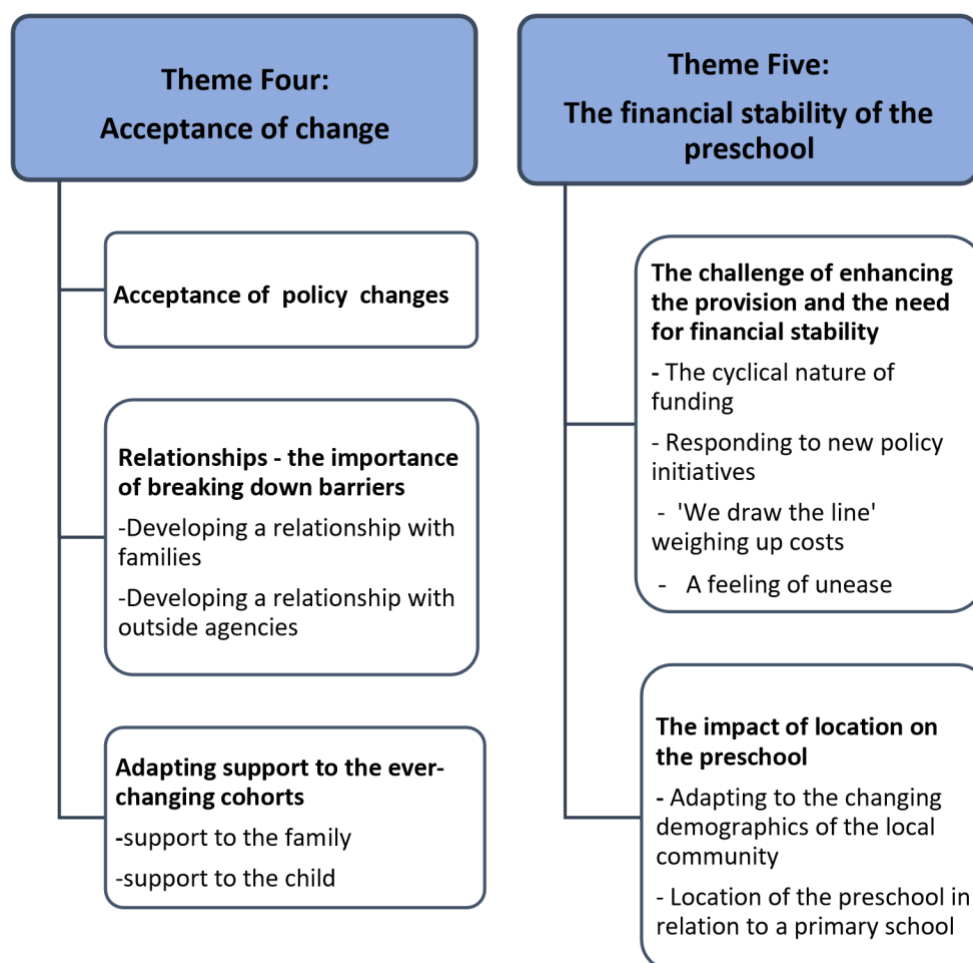
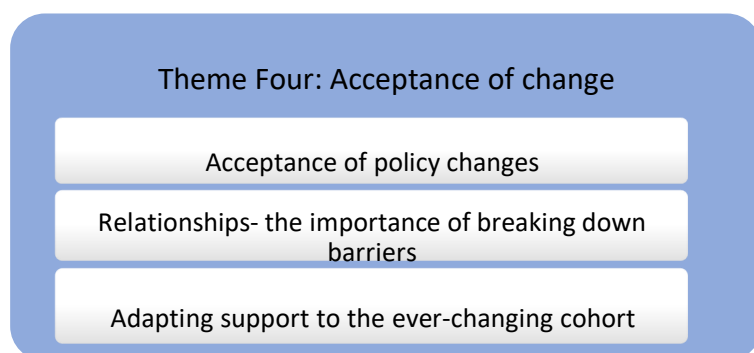


Figure 5.7: Thematic map for Part B Reflections on the preschool practice

Part B of the Reflexive Thematic Analysis relates to the situation within the preschools, and the role of the preschool manager to negotiate a path between Coalition Government policy and the reality of the situation within their communities. Ball (2013) positions policy as creating the circumstances within which the preschools have to adapt and the sharing of examples of the preschool managers approach to the policies introduced reinforces the messiness of policy.

The preschool managers balance their practice against the introduction of Coalition Government policy and the effects of the Coalition austerity measures. Figure 5.7 outlines the two themes related to the reflection on the preschool practice. Theme Four explores the strategic compliance of practitioners to the multiple policy changes, and will briefly outline some of the ways that the preschools have adapted their provision to support children and their families. Theme Five highlights the concerns of the preschool managers that were compounded by successive government's insistence of a childcare market that has limited viability in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. The distraction of being financially stable, responding to the changes to ECEC policy, and the changing socio-economic demographics within the local community situates the dilemmas that are faced by each preschool manager.

5.7 Theme Four: Acceptance of change



Theme Four features the resilience of the preschool managers to be flexible in their approach, react pragmatically to policy changes, continue to develop their provision and to support families. Beth admitted the pressure of constantly evolving and adapting to policy each year and a particular concern about future attendance levels. She described the efforts of her team to get the preschool ready in its new location over the summer holiday, and detailed the level of change the preschool had undergone. Beth jokingly added 'so its onwards and upwards!' as an indication of her continued willingness to mediate between the policy interventions and her preschool practice.

5.7.1 Acceptance of policy change

Interviews with the preschool managers found that there were minimal opportunities for preschool managers to network across their Local Authority due to their high workload. The limited opportunities for sharing knowledge and experiences impacted on their awareness of the situation within other settings. For Jada this was emphasised by the realisation that over the last few years her preschool had been supporting a high number of two-year-old funded children in comparison with other PVI and maintained settings in the Local Authority. Jada reflected that she had assumed that other settings also supported a similar number of children:

Because it's what we are used to and it wasn't until I actually knew that we were that high up (*The Local Authority Early Years team*) actually said to us apart from the maintained settings we are the highest number.

While the numbers attending the preschools may be similar in both years there are also variations, particularly for Beth, Eve and Indiah that reinforce the flexibility and willingness required to adapt to the changing cohorts each year, or more realistically each term.

At the first interview it was apparent that the introduction of extended hours of funded sessions for working parents was a challenge, particularly the difficulty of predicting eligibility due to the unsociable hours worked by some parents. Evening, night and weekend shifts did not always impact on collecting the children from preschool and therefore the staff were not always aware that the parent(s) were working. Both Beth and Jada raised concerns about children who had received two-year-old funding but were now eligible for 30 hours funding, expressing worries over the parents' reliance on low paid work, unsociable working hours and the potential for disruption to the family. The pragmatic acceptance of change by the preschool managers was perfectly summed up by Jada as the need to be 'just getting on with it'.

5.7.2 Relationships – the importance of breaking down barriers

This sub-theme includes:

- Developing a relationship with families
- Developing a relationship with outside agencies

Developing a relationship with families

A positive relationship with families was considered by all preschool managers to be key to supporting the children and their families. All of the managers acknowledged the need to get to know a new family and this was considered particularly relevant for possible child protection issues. Beth, Camille and Eve had similar approaches to developing relationships with families, and utilised the settling in process as an opportunity to develop relationships and share information. Beth reflected on the difficulties of supporting a child without knowledge of the family's needs:

We could have been helping earlier with that family ... if you are aware of everything it gives you a wider picture ... not until later on that you find that they have got a social worker involved and then 6 months down the line when there's a core meeting or a group meeting and you find out that yes there's been lots of incidents ... you know things that haven't been shared.

Camille reiterated that asking too many questions of a family before a child starts can sometimes be counter-productive, instead she waits until they start and then contacts the health visiting team and speech therapist or signposts to outside agencies as appropriate to the family. The approach supports the view of Knowles (2013) that working closely with a family allows the practitioners to have a better understanding of the challenges faced by the family and child. The strategies suggested by the preschool managers support a holistic focus on a child to reduce the effects of poverty.

Developing a relationship with outside agencies

Providing support to the families required links with outside agencies, and the preschool managers listed health visitors, social workers, speech and language therapists and local

schools in their daily communications to support children and families. All of the preschool managers viewed outside agencies as overworked and, while the inability of the outside agencies to always respond in a timely or consistent way was a frustration, there was also a tacit understanding even if the corresponding impact on the preschool setting was significant. As Beth suggested, they are “not always as supportive straight away, and that puts pressure on to us”, and further stated that cuts to services impacted on support to the preschool and to the families. Camille also held a similar view and explained how the setting struggled to support children and families with multiple difficulties. The managers mentioned that support from the health visiting team, special needs support, and speech and language therapist had all been reduced in recent years as a direct result of cuts to public spending budgets introduced by the Coalition Government. On a positive note, all managers reported good links with local primary schools and worked closely for transition.

5.7.3 Adapting support to the ever-changing cohort

The changing levels of two-year-old funded children attending each setting across the Local Authority is detailed in Appendix Two, comparing numbers in March 2017 to March 2018. The support to families, could vary in intensity from term to term, to reflect the number of children attending but also the range of short-term or long-term family difficulties that may arise. This sub-theme is separated to include:

- Support to the family
- Support to the child

Support to the family

The preschool managers all reinforced the continuing development of relationships with family members as the cornerstone to working as a support network. Attendance at child protection meetings instilled the need to help the families. Eve reflected on the impact of hearing about the difficulties in a family and how this reinforced the desire to help.

We go to meetings with social services ... you know it does open your eyes up a little bit and you think wow and that to me makes it why we should be more encouraging and involving ... you know looking after them more.

Beth stated that it is 'new for us to have a two-year-old ... on child protection ... that's for neglect so we help support the family', and reiterated that once settings and families had developed a relationship then support can be provided. Camille also described the number of calls that are received from social services, usually requesting information about a family and whether there were any existing concerns. A high level of anonymous calls from neighbours and family members to social services highlight the stress that the family may be under and an awareness of problems that exist within the home and community. Ridge (2011) reflects on the difficulties faced by parents to manage family life on inadequate incomes, and the resulting stress and anxiety.

The complexity of supporting families of children eligible for two-year-old funding was highlighted by Georgeson et al (2014), and referenced the scale of support and time required by the practitioners. An awareness of the home life led to concern for the emotional wellbeing of the children and Camille reflected on the attachment difficulties of some children that may make the settling process more tricky. In this case a solution was to offer flexible settling sessions to encourage the child and family to adapt positively to a new environment, as a way to positively support a new family. While the impact on staffing levels of a lengthy settling in process was difficult there was no other option considered available, and Camille was confident that in the long-term the well-being of the youngest children would improve.

The practical improvements made to the preschool all relate strongly to the preschool managers subjective view of disadvantage, as well as their resilience to adapt and develop their provision. Preschools based in mixed socio-economic areas were able to respond to their relative view of the children's lack of access to a garden. Gabi, Indiah and Jada had all focused on improving the outside areas of their settings, and Gabi was working towards a forest school qualification.

Beth also had focused on messy and sensory play as she felt it was an activity at home, and the acceptance of gaps in children's experiences was key to providing individual support to each child. Close observations of the children enabled staff to develop a strong understanding of the individual child although this did not always result in a consideration of particular need.

For example Jada's cohort of two-year-olds at that time did not need any more support than the other children. Finally, Beth had focused on the health needs of the children attending her preschool. She had recently introduced teeth cleaning after lunch each day:

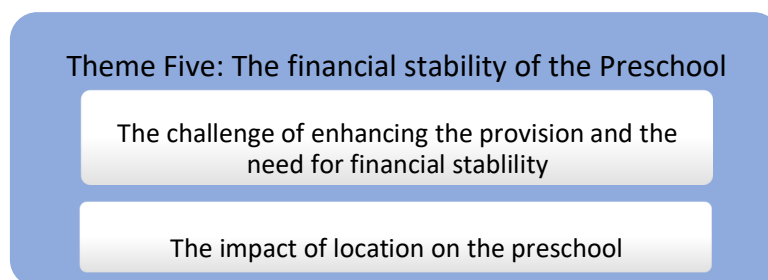
Because of everything in the news now that families aren't taking children to the dentist, so we've noticed that and a lot of parents have said 'oh it's good that you're doing because we don't always'.

Beth acknowledged that it was a chaotic time of the day but she considered it was worth the trouble to know that the children were taking care of their teeth at least once a day.

Finally there was a wide acknowledgement that support for SEND and EAL children continued in a reduced form, but was still far better than the offer of support in neighbouring Local Authorities. All of the preschool managers mentioned children with SEND and EAL that they were supporting, although this did not form an explicit part of the overall discussion of disadvantage. Targeted support was provided to extend the children's turn-taking and sharing skills, often through weekly small group sessions with a key worker. This was also used as a precursor to future support for speech and language concerns. Eve encouraged her preschool practitioners to follow the play of the children, so a lot of time was spent doing 'homey stuff', for example having a cuddle with a blanket and an adult while sharing a story. The attention levels of the youngest children were a recurring issue and opportunities to provide simple activities and extension to play by an adult were essential.

Theme Four addressed the tension between policy and practice, presenting examples of the practical approaches employed by the preschool managers to adapt to policy interventions, while continuing to focus on the children and their families. Theme Five will focus on the resilience of the preschool managers amidst the financial implications of the location of the preschool and the challenge of the childcare market. Attempts to extend the longevity of the preschool conflicted with the need to respond to policy interventions, particularly the introduction of the extended hours for working parents that resulted in ECEC settings having to plan for all eventualities.

5.8 Theme Five: The financial stability of the Preschool



The context of each preschool was discussed in detail during the first interview and it became apparent that the preschool managers were pre-occupied by attempts to ensure their continued financial stability. The financial issues of the preschool were related to the level of funding provided for government funded sessions for two-, three- and four-year-olds, the changing socio-economic status of the community and a reduction in public services.

5.8.1 The challenge of enhancing the provision and the need for financial stability

This sub-theme explores the tensions for the long-term financial stability of the preschool, particularly in a climate of perceived low funding rates (CEEDA 2014; National Day Nurseries Association 2015; National Audit Office 2016). The issues are inter-linked and provide a recurring pressure that permeates the choices and decisions of the preschool managers.

- The cyclical nature of attendance
- Responding to new policy initiatives
- ‘We draw the line’ weighing up costs
- A feeling of unease

The cyclical nature of attendance

Apparent during all the interviews was the impact of the cyclical nature of attendance each year. Children become eligible for funding the term after their second or third birthday and there is always a variance in attendance across the three terms. The managers’ responses to

attendance numbers impacted on staffing levels, either offering short-term contracts until July each year, or covering the extra costs of staff during the quieter autumn and spring terms. Both options impacted on finances and the stability of the setting, but financial concerns were leading more of the preschools to opt for short-term contracts. Indiah cited the difficulty of attracting qualified and experienced staff due to low pay rates and term-time only contracts.

Gabi began to offer holiday provision in 2016 and this had become a positive part of her setting. The other five preschools opened term-time only, citing the lack of parents willing to pay for holiday sessions. For example, Jada's setting had trialed holiday provision for the summer of 2017, offering four days over a two-week period in August. Jada reflected that the take-up had been low until the last minute and had added to her stress about the financial implications of paying staff costs for the additional opening days. At the time of the second interview Jada was still undecided if she would open during the summer holiday of 2018.

Responding to new policy initiatives

The preschools had all accepted two-year-old funded children since it had been formally introduced in 2012. However, midway between the two interviews saw the start of a new funding initiative introduced as part of the Conservative Party mandate from the 2015 election. The extension of funding up to 30 hours per week was aimed at working parents and offered an additional 15 hours per week to parents who were earning the equivalent of 16 hours at the minimum wage each week. Two of the preschools were already open at least 30 hours per week and the remaining four settings were in the process of extending their opening times to meet the required amount of 30 hours each week. Although it was not compulsory to offer the 30 hours of funded sessions the managers all considered it was difficult not to respond and possibly miss out on new children attending. During the first round of interviews in June and July 2017 the preschool managers were still not clear how the attendance levels would be affected by the policy implementation in September 2017. The exception was Gabi's setting, which already had a high number of working parents who had proved their eligibility. For the preschools situated in areas of socio-economic deprivation there was a sense of unease about the possible levels of take-up. An additional difficulty was the term-time and sessional style of the preschool, which limited the suitability for parents who were working longer hours, unless they had the support of family members.

The impending extension for working parents exemplified the shift in rationale for ECEC to support working parents. The targeted funding for two-year-olds continued but there was a concern by Beth that children considered advantaged might be offered spaces instead of the younger children. However, Brewer et al (2016) reported that a crowd-out of places meant that places transferred to 30 hours funding had previously been paid for by parents. Nevertheless by 2019 the number of children eligible for extended funded hours was 328,100 higher than initially expected and led the Department for Education (2019b) to also raise concerns about future availability of places.

‘We draw the line’ weighing up costs

Low attendance figures placed a strain on the budgets available across the preschools and sometimes difficult decisions had to be made. Camille recounted the difficulty of trying to get financial support to pay for an additional adult to support a child. She reiterated that ‘our budgets are very low ... I can’t afford to pay for it ourselves.... I would have been able to some years when it was busy’. The professional and ethical dilemmas faced by the preschool managers were compounded by the knowledge of the needs of the children within their care.

The perceived pressure to follow new approaches and provide resources, for example for an impending OFSTED inspection visit, placed additional pressure on the managers and was not always led by the specific needs of the children attending. Eve recounted the expense of resources purchased for heuristic play that were broken by the end of the first day. In contrast, Gabi provided a supply of raincoats and welly boots so all children could access the outside areas in all weathers. Jada also reflected on a recent change within her setting that had to be reined in due to small but spiraling costs.

Some of the two-year-old funded children were coming in with quite unhealthy foods and so we started doing some fruit tasting sessions and we found that it was really popular actually So we decided to scrap the parents sending in snack and this is our third week. It’s funny because our fruit and veg bill has gone up from £20 a week to £30 and last week we were on £40 and we were like right we need to say no at some point - we draw the line!

The need to be careful over relatively small expenditure reinforced the precarious nature of the preschool finances. However, it was also possible to make positive adjustments without additional costs, for example Jada had looked at the whole routine and structure of the day,

and opened up access to the garden to allow free flow to the outside areas for the majority of time. This exemplifies a positive move that was not costly but was beneficial to the needs of the children.

A feeling of unease

A precarious financial situation was acknowledged at four of the six preschools. The introduction of up to 15 extended hours of funded sessions for working parents of three- and four- year-olds had placed an increased level of pressure on the preschools over the period July 2017 to December 2018 between the two interviews. The difficulty of adapting to meet the policy changes without a clear idea of the impact on the preschool reflects the pressure of responding to policy within a marketised ECEC sector. The unease about extending the opening hours to meet unknown levels of attendance was continuing although some of the preschool managers spoke about the option of reverting back to the original opening hours if the new hours did not prove to be cost effective. The sense of unease was compounded by impending OFSTED visits and child protection related concerns, and resulted in a level of anxiety omnipresent for the managers. The feeling of pressure led Eve to comment that ‘sometimes I think it would be easier to work in Tesco ... but then the shifts play havoc with a family’. Alongside the priority of financial sustainability, a high level of resilience was required to negotiate the implications of the new policy, lead improvements to practice and also respond to issues that were specific to their own preschool and community.

5.8.2 The impact of location on the preschool

A direct connection between the socio-economic features of the local community and the continuing endurance of the preschool was not evident in the data. More Great Childcare (DfE, 2013a) had acknowledged that areas of disadvantage may struggle as part of a childcare market approach and Local Authorities were detailed to support providers in areas of disadvantage to adapt and grow. The advice typically provided by the Local Authority related to the fee structure and suggestions of raising the hourly fees for fee paying children, but in an area of deprivation such strategies would only make a minimal impact from the small number of parents willing to pay fees. The following factors will be addressed:

- Adapting to the changing demographics of the local community
- The location of the preschool in relation to a primary school

Adapting to the changing demographics of the local community

The changing demographics of the local area was discussed in the interviews and concerns were raised about the difficulty of responding to the effects of changes in the community over time. The table below demonstrates that there is not necessarily a direct correlation between the social-economic demographic of a community or a consistent level of two-year-old funded children attending preschools. Three managers were based in areas of mixed private and social housing. One of the managers had decreasing numbers attending while the other two had high attendance levels. For example, Gabi had just expanded to a second site after ‘noticing a gap in the local community’. Community dynamics and the location of other settings in the area were all contributing factors to the numbers of children attending.

	Beth	Camille	Eve	Gabi	Indiah	Jada
Number of two-year-old funded children in March 2017.	10	6	14	9	5	21
Number of two-year-old funded children in March 2018.	16	6	10	8	<5	19
Socio-economic demographics of the local community	High level of deprivation/ Student housing	High level of deprivation/ Student housing	High level of deprivation	Mixed private /social housing	Mixed private /social housing	Mixed private /social housing

Table 5.2: Outline of each preschool in the study (Local Authority figures)

The preschool managers were flexible to respond to the demographics of their community to dictate the size of the cohort. Camille explained how her setting had reduced the total number of children attending and placed a maximum level of two-year-old children within each session. In a similar way Eve had allowed an increase in the number of two-year-olds attending from four per session to eight, which had a considerable effect on staffing ratios but helped to offset the drift to the local school-based nursery at age three. Alternatively, Jada had widened the age range further to accept one-year-old children, as the style of her building allowed for age related rooms. The adaptation of the preschool to attract more children demonstrated a focus on the longevity and sustainability of the preschool. For most preschools that were open-plan it proved easier to make minor changes, for example to adapt

opening times rather than make structural changes to extend the age group to also include children under two.

The location of the preschool in relation to a primary school

The importance of the location of the setting within a community correlated with numbers of children in attendance, for example a close proximity to a primary school had a positive impact as evidenced in the interview with Beth and Jada. The ease of dropping children to school and preschool within the same location was an attraction for their preschool. All of the preschool managers acknowledged the need to adapt their opening times to fit in with the nearest school(s). Eve described the continuing 'trial and error' approach to opening times, although Indiah and Jada were happy with their current opening times as they were convenient for both parents and their local staff.

Two of the settings were based in areas of high student housing but their situations were quite different. Beth had moved her preschool into the local primary school and by the time of the second interview in January 2018 the preschool had expanded to two further rooms to meet increased demand. Beth explained how quickly the number of children increased:

Really I think we quadrupled our numbers since being here... the first day of opening here we had 3 or 4 parents come in... just being down that hill a little bit has attracted families.

Further discussion explained the reducing intake of the school which had resulted in the school being able to offer classrooms to the preschool. In contrast, Camille has been based in the grounds of a primary school for a number of years and both the preschool and primary school were struggling with dwindling numbers. These examples highlight the impact of the changing socio-economic situation within communities and the dilemma faced by the preschools to remain open with reduced cohorts each term.

To summarise Part B Reflections on the preschool practice, the narratives of the preschool managers evidenced their varied approaches to the enactment of the Coalition policy, providing support to children and their families, and ultimately to survive as a preschool. Throughout the themes an underlying ethos of the need to support families is demonstrated, even if at odds with policy interventions and the growing gap between funding and costs. The

preschool managers' demonstrated an awareness of the variety of factors that impact on a child's home life. The minimal focus on children in the semantic constructions of disadvantage was linked to the holistic view of the disadvantage of the whole family. The pragmatic acceptance of change in Theme Four highlights the paramount focus on supporting children irrespective of the challenges that may be faced by the preschool .

This chapter has outlined the reflexive thematic analysis of the interview narratives. The next chapter will form the response to the research questions that formed the basis of this research study. Themes One to Three of the reflexive thematic analysis will respond to Research Question Two and Themes Four and Five will be used to respond to Research Question Three. The final Research Question: What are the tensions between Coalition Government policy and preschool practice?, involves two tensions that are apparent within the interview narratives. The analysis will use the priorities of the preschool managers as a framework for the discussion.

Chapter Six: Discussion of the Research Questions

This chapter presents the response to the four research questions that formed a study to explore the impact of Coalition policy on preschools in communities of mixed socio-economic disadvantage in England. While the discussion would be considered relevant to all ECEC settings, the intention was to consider the situation within non-profit preschool settings that were based within mixed socio-economic communities.

The four research questions are:

1. How is disadvantage framed in Coalition Government ECEC policy discourse?
2. How do preschool managers construct disadvantage?
3. How do preschool managers describe the priorities of their practice?
4. What are the tensions between Coalition Government policy and preschool practice?

The response to the research questions will incorporate the context of poverty and disadvantage through analysis from the preceding chapters: the review of relevant literature and research, the DRA to CDA of Coalition policy and the narratives of the preschool managers. Research Questions One and Two link directly to Chapters Four and Five respectively. Research Question Three presents an overview of the priorities of the preschool managers that were threaded through the reflections on their preschool practice within Theme Four and Five of the interview narratives (Sections 5.6 and 5.8). Finally, Research Question Four concludes the research study through a consideration of the impact of the preschool managers' enactment of Coalition Government policy on their practice. The preschool managers' priorities of sustainability, longevity and resilience will be used as a framework to explore two dominant tensions between the pervasive influence of neoliberalism on the government approach to disadvantage and ECEC, and the practice of the preschools.

6.1 Research Question One

How is disadvantage framed in Coalition Government ECEC policy discourse?

The Coalition Government's neo-liberal vision of a competitive global order is highlighted by Bailey and Ball (2016) to explain the presentation of human capital development as a solution to overcome poverty, rather than the extension of support through improved public services. Successive governments have resisted formalising a definition of the term disadvantage, relying instead on an assumed shared understanding across political, economic and social contexts.

Within ECEC a family's income level is used to determine eligibility for funded provision for two-year-old children considered disadvantaged. As outlined in Chapter Two, the approach by successive governments to link disadvantage to income limits the opportunities for debate between stakeholders, and demonstrates the unwillingness of the Coalition Government to engage with the wider impact of poverty and disadvantage on individuals, families and society. The response to Research Question One requires a consideration of the way that the Coalition Government chose specific language to share and maintain their dominant discourses of poverty and disadvantage. In recognition of the shifting portrayal within Coalition Government policy texts the term framing was used instead of construction, to reinforce the changing use of the term across the term of parliament 2010-2015.

An analysis of five Coalition policy texts, as detailed in Section 4.3.6, organised the framing of disadvantage across four narratives:

- Framing disadvantage as a lack of individual responsibility for their own situation
- Framing disadvantage as a lack of individual responsibility to society
- Framing disadvantage as linked to a geographical location
- Framing disadvantage as low income

The next section will summarise each of these four narratives in turn.

Framing disadvantage as a lack of individual responsibility for their own situation

An initial positioning of blame on individuals cites welfare dependency and an intergenerational cycle of poverty and disadvantage as demonstrated in the Field Review (2010) and Allen Review (2011). The Allen Review (2011) provides an emotive and persuasive account of the choices for childhood, as either a virtuous cycle of achievement or a vicious circle of failure. The Coalition Government presents the rising number of unemployed and welfare recipients as evidence of a growing cycle of poverty and dysfunction within society, without an accompanying acknowledgement of the rising number of working families receiving low rates of pay and living in poverty. An over-reliance on evidence from government-initiated research reiterates that while responsibility is on families, the financial burden falls on the taxpayer (Her Majesty's Treasury 2010).

Stereotypical narratives were used to reinforce the deficit discourse of parenting and were sustained through consistent political rhetoric and discourse. De Benedictis (2012: p.1) highlights the practice of Othering large sections of society, and the labelling of impoverished families as 'trouble', 'feral', 'lazy', 'undeserving' to divert attention from the structural factors of a lack of jobs and poor housing. Extreme examples were used to gain the attention of the public, for example the labelling of 120,000 Troubled Families and the suggestion that they cost £9 billion per year to taxpayers (Department for Communities and Local Government 2013; Department for Work and Pensions 2012). The scenario of Troubled Families, as depicted in Section 1.4, presents the problem of poverty and disadvantage as a threat to society and thus secures public acceptance of the Coalition Government's normative approach to poverty and disadvantage.

Framing disadvantage as a lack of individual responsibility to society

The cumulative effect of labelling and Othering allows more implicit references to be made, as evidenced during a speech by George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 2012:

Where is the fairness, we ask, for the shift worker, leaving home in the dark hours of the early morning, who looks up at the closed blinds of their next door neighbour sleeping off a life on benefits.

The implication of the worker versus shirker dichotomy in the speech links the listener back to the rhetoric of 2010-2011, while the representation of a distinction between neighbours overlooks the nuance and complexity of family life, and reinforces binaries that are not reflected so simply in reality.

To summarise, the individualistic approach of neo-liberalism actively discourages political engagement from a consideration of problems faced by members of society, resulting in the deflection of any government responsibility to address these problems (Crossley 2016; Lambert 2019).

Framing disadvantage as linked to a geographical location

From 2013 the rationale for ECEC shifted towards supporting working parents through lowcost childcare and the need for an efficient childcare market. At this point, the framing of disadvantage was limited to an acknowledgement of geographical locations of disadvantage that could prove challenging to childcare markets (Department for Education 2013a).

Framing disadvantage as low income

Six months later the term disadvantage was replaced in the policy text by the term low income (Department for Education 2013b), and the implication that a higher income for a family could be gained by family members returning to employment.

The DRA to CDA concluded in section 4.6 that the possibility of changing the social order within the current order of discourse was low, reiterating the success of the consistent government rhetoric. However, recent research suggests that as austerity measures continue to embed into society there has been a subtle shift in the public's awareness of the effects of poverty and disadvantage across society, and particularly the developing awareness of professionals who work closely with families and communities (Bourquin et al 2020; Lyndon 2019b). Research Question One has presented the Coalition Government's shifting approach to framing disadvantage, to coincide with the changes to policy rationales with ECEC and education more broadly. The changes in approach reflect a distinct move away from responding to the situation of the members of society who live in poverty and disadvantage.

6.2 Research Question Two

How do preschool managers construct disadvantage?

Chapter Five presented an analysis of the preschool managers' views, using the researcher's insider knowledge and understanding of the ECEC preschool sector, and supplemented by critical analysis of the strategies of argumentation and persuasion of the Coalition Government policy texts. The active role of the researcher involved a critical comparison of the contexts in which the framing of disadvantage in the policy texts and the constructions of the preschool managers were situated. The knowledge and experiences of the preschool managers determined their rejection of the over-simplified binary positions of poverty and disadvantage that have been widely presented by the Coalition Government.

The preschool managers' unease over defining disadvantage was apparent although the involvement of each preschool manager in two interviews allowed the initial semantic generalisations of disadvantage to be developed further. The latent views expressed during the interview were informed by contextual reflections of the experiences of families attending the preschool. The process of forming the constructions of disadvantage involved combining the initial definitions, experiences shared and awareness of disadvantage. In this way the research can only present an interpretation of the managers' constructions, although these are rendered as closely as possible to the narratives of the interviews with the managers.

The next section will consider the range of factors shared by the preschool managers, and determine the extent to which they differ depending upon the socio-economic location of the preschool.

6.2.1 The range of factors contributing to the constructions of disadvantage

The rich descriptions by the preschool managers show the depth of their understanding of the complexity of poverty and disadvantage. The preschool managers were generally empathetic to the situation of the families and pragmatic about the factors contributing to the problems. During the analysis stage it became apparent that the six preschools could be split into two distinct groups: socio-economic deprivation (Beth, Camille, Eve) and mixed

socio-economic communities (Gabi, Indiah and Jada). A direct correlation between the number of funded two-year-old children attending each preschool and the type of community was not found (see Table 5.2).

Type of community	Areas of socio-economic deprivation			Areas of mixed socio-economic status		
	Beth	Camille	Eve	Gabi	Indiah	Jada
Factor						
Low-income	•	•	•	•	•	•
Low paid employment	•					•
Non-working		•	•	•		
Poor housing	•	•	•			
Temporary housing	•	•	•			
Poor diet			•	•	•	•
Lack of garden				•	•	•
Large family				•		
Parents with problems	•	•	•			•
Extended families	•	•	•	•		
Young mums	•	•				
EAL				•		
Working too much	•				•	

Table 6.1: The incidence of factors of disadvantage within each preschool managers' construction of disadvantage.

Attention was given to the range of factors shared by each preschool manager and the type of community, as summarised in Table 6.1. While the elements are diverse they share an acknowledgement of the key role of structural factors to the experience of disadvantage which was experienced by large numbers of their families. In addition, the impact of family problems is also included, due to the possible effect on a family's resilience to overcome problems.

The reflections of the preschool managers bear a similarity to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954) as shown in Figure 6.1. Addressing children's needs through the lens of Maslow's

theory allows consideration of the basic needs to be fulfilled to ensure that children can develop and thrive.

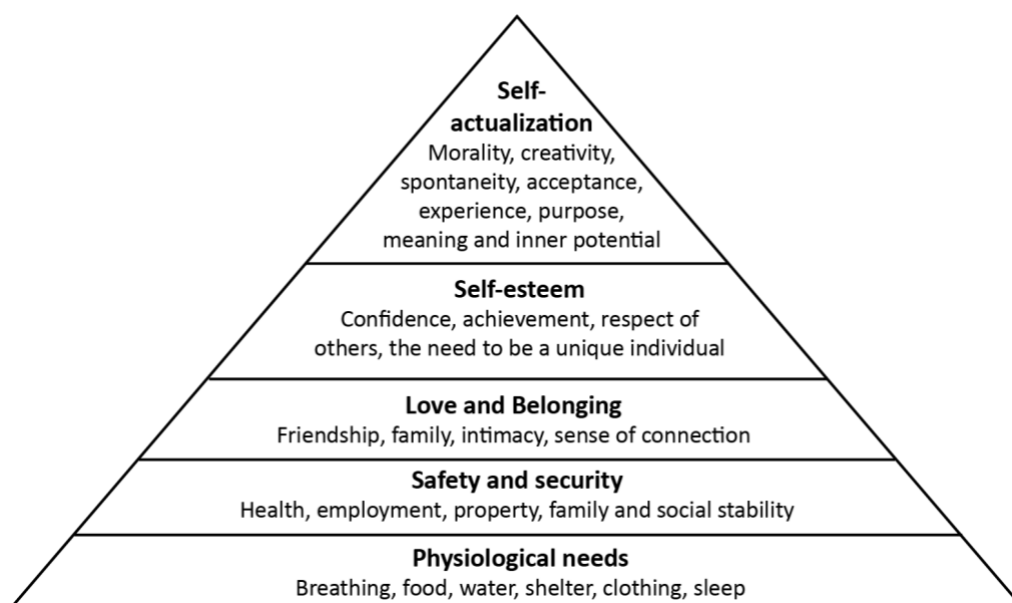


Figure 6.1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954)

The issues of housing, access to a garden, food and family problems formed the majority of the constructions of disadvantage of the preschool managers, factors that are located in the two lower levels of Maslow's pyramid. The preschool managers recognise that the physiological, safety and emotional needs of the children have to be acknowledged and addressed before expecting an increase in academic outcomes. This view reinforces the concern that structural issues have a negative effect on a child's capacity to develop academically. The current home life of the children was paramount in the concerns of the preschool managers rather than future attainment, and this is a direct contradiction of the Coalition Government policy intention to prioritise more time in early education in order to achieve the end of EYFS outcomes and be ready for formal schooling (Allen 2011).

To summarise, the analysis of preschool managers' views and experiences of disadvantage involved a level of subjectivity which was apparent between the areas of socio-economic deprivation and mixed socio-economic status. Two examples will be used to demonstrate the range of views offered, linked to housing and low paid employment.

Disadvantage as poor housing or lack of a garden

Structural difficulties related to living conditions were included by all of the preschool managers but a disparity of views was evident. The construction of disadvantage as poor housing and transient families due to temporary accommodation were shared in areas of deprivation, against views of a lack of a garden and poor diet in areas of mixed socio-economic families. Eve and Beth both mentioned transient families struggling with a lack of security and the need to change schools was considered an upheaval for the children. Beth had suggested that families sometimes chose to stay in their overcrowded accommodation rather than move away from their community, and extended family support, as well as the risk of change to their children's schooling.

While Gabi and Indiah stressed a lack of garden as a factor of disadvantage even if the family also accessed local parks. The effects of poor housing/ temporary accommodation versus the lack of garden are not comparable in difficulty to a family, but both views reflect a considered contextual disadvantage. The disparity is attributable to the subjective nature of the preschool managers based in differing locations and highlights the difficulty of gaining parity of views across society. Such a contrast reinforces the problematic situation of the reliance on an assumed shared understanding of the term disadvantage, that is open to interpretation, and impacted by location and contextual factors.

A lack of awareness of in-work poverty

Most of the preschool managers linked a low income to a reduction of choice over where the families lived, and a corresponding impact on all aspects of family life, including the diet and well-being of family members. Contradictions were also apparent, linked to the Coalition discourse of worklessness, as demonstrated by Camille's suggestion that non-working parents often struggled with attendance and timing. The absence of employment and the accompanying work patterns was considered to impact on the difficulty of a family keeping to a routine, particularly those arriving at preschool late each morning. Camille linked the inability of a child to cope with a new situation and settling into preschool to families where 'home life is a lot more chaotic... there is not that routine...'. A further linkage to employment suggested that the lack of routine may be a factor in preventing continuous employment.

The preschool managers focused the majority of their descriptions of low income on those families who were not in employment and a variety of reasons were given for why a family may not be able to work. In contrast only two preschool managers mentioned the impact of low-paid employment, with no specific link to the issue of in-work poverty. The examples highlighted parents who shared work shifts and childcare, and the impact on children of attending long hours at ECEC while parents were employed in low-paid work at unsociable hours. McGuinness (2018) states that 67% of families living in poverty were in work and the absence of a shared awareness of low-rates of pay is a conundrum in light of the high incidence of low-pay within the ECEC sector. The lack of comments suggests that a level of stigmatisation may have precluded the topic from discussion in the interviews. Thus, in-work poverty and the precarious employment of preschool staff is an area that would benefit from further research.

Although a variety of factors of disadvantage were shared, they all derive from the structural effects of poverty and disadvantage. The next section will compare the constructions of the preschool managers to those presented by preschool practitioners in research undertaken by Simpson and Lyndon, as described in section 2.1.4.

6.2.2 A comparison with earlier research

Research from the period 2011-12 by Simpson (2013; 2019) and Simpson et al (2015a; 2015b; 2017a; 2017b) was undertaken at the height of the Coalition Government approach to sharing a rhetoric of poverty and deficit parenting. Simpson concludes that the preschool practitioners generally held an over-riding acceptance of the Coalition Government discourse of the undeserving poor. An accompanying low level of poverty sensitivity was initially apparent (Simpson et al 2015a), however as the research study widened to include two further counties in 2013 the awareness levels of poverty rose. It is not clear if the improved awareness related just to the diversity of the new counties or also to a period of at least one year that allowed an impact of the beginning of the austerity measures to emerge.

Lyndon explored the perspectives of preschool practitioners in 2017/18, a period of seven years after the announcement of austerity measures. Lyndon (2019b) cites instances of the preschool practitioners Othering families who were welfare dependent, but also demonstrates the practitioners' greater recognition of the impact of a combination of issues

related to disadvantage. Lyndon's research concurs with the suggestion of Hall et al (2014: p.1) that

... while harder views towards poverty remain, the economic circumstances of recent years have encouraged some to reconsider both who might be affected by poverty and its cause.

These comments reiterate the expectation that a wider level of poverty awareness by 2017/18 would be expected. In this research study there are a small number of comments that display roots in the Coalition Government deficit rhetoric. Nevertheless, the majority reflect a more nuanced view, accepting that the experiences of the families were complex and not the direct result of one factor.

Research Questions One and Two have presented the contrasting perspectives of Coalition policy and the preschool managers. The next section will briefly present a comparison of the approaches.

6.3 A comparison between the approach of the Coalition Government and the awareness of the preschool managers.

The Coalition Government presented a lack of responsibility and poor parenting as key factors for living in poverty and disadvantage. In contrast, the preschool managers did not view the effects of structural difficulties of poverty in isolation but through the far-reaching impact on family life. This viewpoint agrees with the conclusions of previous research, that unequal distributions of wealth underlie many family problems (Ribbens McCarthy et al 2013; Whitebread and Bingham 2012). The impact of financial hardship may affect the ability of families to cope and respond to problems which might otherwise be viewed as part of everyday life.

The preschool managers were aware of the parents' predicament to juggle finances and the efforts by families to prioritise the well-being of their children (Daly and Kelly 2015). Difficulties compounded by austerity measures in the preceding years were shared by the preschool managers, and added to their unwillingness to place the blame on to the parents.

They all spoke of the importance of developing good relationships with families in order to understand their situation and support the children and families as much as possible. Overall there was a sense of moral responsibility towards the families that led to the preschool managers basing their constructions on experience, understanding and empathy rather than reverting to the rhetorical positioning of the Coalition Government era.

In Table 6.2 the constructions of disadvantage shared by the preschool managers are contrasted with the position of the Coalition Government, using Duncan Smith’s (2010) outline of the Five Pathways to Poverty, discussed in Section 1.4, as the basis for the Coalition Government’s initial framing of disadvantage.

Coalition Government: Five Pathways to Poverty (2010)	Preschool Managers: Constructions of disadvantage (201718)
Family Breakdown Educational Failure Addiction Debt Worklessness	Family Issues (including extended families) Low Income Poor Housing Non-working members of the family Poor diet

Table 6.2: A comparison of the depictions of poverty by the Coalition Government and the preschool managers.

A stark contrast between the Coalition Government policy rhetoric and the more nuanced contextually-situated understanding of the preschool managers is apparent from the categories used. The absence of structural factors in the Five Pathways to Poverty reflects the unwillingness of the Coalition Government to engage in issues that would be costly to improve and require long-term intervention (Jensen 2010; Wiggan 2012).

In summary, the timing of the interviews in 2017-18 was intended to determine the extent of the continuing influence of the Coalition Government discourse of deficit parenting. The preschool managers viewed the ability to overcome the adverse impact of poverty and disadvantage on family life as of paramount importance for the child and all family members. The preschool managers contextualised the difficulties faced by their families and presented

a nuanced reflection on the combined effect of structural issues. A variety of family-based issues that either contributed to structural problems or had been adversely affected by family breakdown, ill health and mental health. Furthermore, the introduction of cuts to public services had reduced the options for advice and support services to the family, and as a result placed more emphasis on support and signposting from the preschools.

The next section will present the preschool managers' priorities for their practice, and consider the extent to which these priorities link to the enactment of the coalition policies.

6.4 Research Question Three

How do preschool managers describe the priorities of their practice?

A childcare market predicated on expansion through the PVI sector, and relying on a mixture of private and public funding, was in direct contrast to the advice of the OECD (2006) and the publicly funded situation in other European countries, as highlighted in Chapter Two. The government priorities for the ECEC market of choice, quality, affordability and availability (Department for Education 2013a; Department for Education 2013b) were designed to meet the goals of a neo-liberal economic approach to developing the competitiveness of the country internationally. The Coalition Government policy presents an outline of the rationales and circumstances for the ECEC sector, and the responsibility of policy enactment rests on the individual preschool managers. Ball et al (2011: p.626) suggest that there are a variety of types of policy actors including narrators, entrepreneurs, transactors and translators involved in forming an understanding of, and response, to each policy. The independent nature of the preschools places pressure on the preschool managers to enact the policy in isolation, without the support of a wider network, and thus the preschool managers take on multiple roles to ensure a policy is adapted into their practice. Maguire et al (2015) argue that It is necessary to also consider the unintended consequences of those policies on ECEC practice, which will aid an overall picture of the disruptive effects of policy that lead to tensions at the site of the preschool practice.

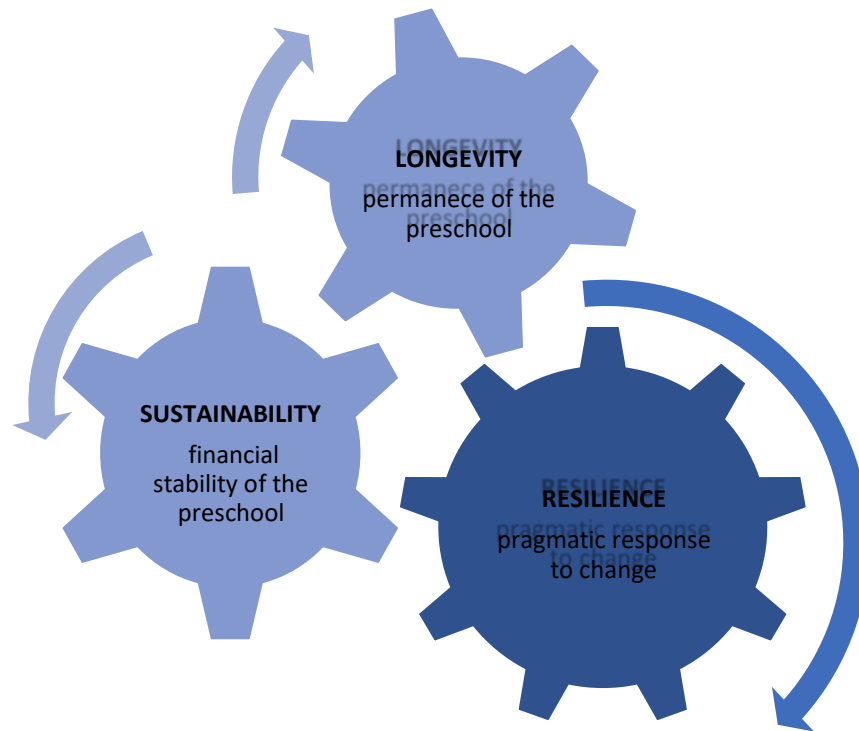


Figure 6.2 The relationship between the preschool managers' priorities of sustainability, longevity and resilience.

The thematic analysis of the interview narratives led to a determination of the preschool managers' priorities as sustainability, longevity and resilience. The priorities reflect the predicament of the preschool managers to prioritise the continuation of their setting as well as to respond to the challenges of supporting the disadvantaged children who attend. The priorities permeate all aspects of the preschool provision, and relate to the preschool managers' own roles and those of their preschool team. The ability of the preschool managers to demonstrate resilience in the face of policy and funding changes represents the largest cog in the wheel in Figure 6.2. The distinction between the priorities of sustainability and longevity highlight that the long-term continuation of a setting is based on more than financial viability, and in this context concerns the permanence of the preschool. For those providers in areas of socio-economic deprivation their long-term sustainability was affected by a combination of low funding levels, a difficulty of attracting sufficient numbers of fee-paying parents and the impact on income of the extension of funded hours for working parents.

Each of the priorities of sustainability, longevity and resilience will be presented separately for clarity.

6.4.1 Sustainability

The Coalition Government acknowledged the improving quality of ECEC provision, determined through OFSTED inspections, although tempered the positive comment with a concern of an ineffective childcare market that did not meet the needs of parents (Department for Education 2013b). The implications of the discourse presented in *More Affordable Childcare* (Department for Education 2013b) offered a stark warning to providers of the need to be entrepreneurial in an effort to ensure their financial sustainability, rather than rely on future increases to government funding levels. The preschool managers shared varying levels of concern related to the financial position of their own preschool, ranging from a recurring consideration to a constant worry for those based in areas of socio-economic deprivation.

6.4.2 Longevity

Longevity relates to the durability and permanence of the preschool. The impact of the location and the cohort affect the potential longevity of each preschool, and this was emphasised throughout the narratives of the interviews. The difficulty of the financial situation of those providers based in areas of disadvantage had been acknowledged by the Coalition Government and the role of support was passed to the Local Authority (Department for Education 2013a). However, the extent of the involvement was not clear and Penn (2019) argues that a Local Authority has to offer information and support, but has no role in maintaining or developing the service.

6.4.3 Resilience

Resilience incorporates the attitudes, skills and wellbeing of the preschool manager to adapt the preschool provision to meet the combined requirements of government policy interventions, the local community, the pressure to workloads and to ensure continuity of the provision. The empathy and diplomacy of the preschool team to meet the challenge of

ongoing engagement with parents and outside agencies is considered key to supporting the children and families.

The priorities of the preschool managers were situated within the changing socio-economic demographics of the locations of their preschools, and the mediating strategies they implemented to address the impact of the neo-liberal policies on their provision. The priorities of sustainability, longevity and resilience will be used as a framework to consider the tensions between policy and practice within Research Question Four.

6.5 Research Question Four

What are the tensions between ECEC policy and preschool practice?

Penn (2019: p.108) described a realistic scenario of private ECEC provision:

No doubt there are good private nurseries with conscientious leaders and inspired leaders who provide a considerate, loving and imaginative service for young children, and their families. But in general, a privatised system means that these will always be the exception rather than the rule ... An alternative view is that leaders or managers are best described as firefighters, struggling to maintain staff retention and recruitment in a demoralising situation where pay, prospects and job conditions are poor, parents struggling to afford the fees, and vulnerable children receive little, if any, extra support.

The dichotomy between the conscientious leader and the firefighter depicts the widening gap between reality and rhetoric within the ECEC sector, and highlights the situation within which the tensions between policy and practice developed.

The policy intensification in ECEC introduced across the New Labour and Coalition Governments was outlined in Table 4.1, and led to unprecedented levels of reform to the sector (Jones et al 2016). Sims (2017) argues that the efforts of successive governments to adapt ECEC to meet the demands of neo-liberal economic policies is the basis of the crisis within ECEC, and has resulted in a difficult climate for the predominantly PVI providers in the sector.

Adamson and Brennan (2014) cite the government intention to increase the human capital of future generations through the mechanism of a market approach to providing ECEC provision. The encouragement of competition, choice and quality is a key factor in the policy practice tensions. Furthermore, Penn (2010) argues the use of government-initiated research to produce evidence for policy initiatives has led to increased expectations of policy goals, particularly the expectation that gaps in attainment should be reduced irrespective of the home background of a child. The introduction of an expected level of outcome for children at the end of the EYFS implies that a failure to achieve the norms is due to a failure of the child, family or ECEC provider, rather than linked to the policy frameworks (Urban 2016). As a result Campbell-Barr (2014) suggests the ECEC sector has the challenging task of achieving diverse and contradictory goals: to demonstrate a reduction in attainment gaps for children, provide low-cost childcare and continue to exist as a sustainable provider.

Analysis of the impact of Coalition policy on practice involves an integration of the additional issues of the public spending cuts of the Coalition Government, and the changing socioeconomic dimensions of the local communities in which the preschool are based. Tensions have been identified between the preschool managers' enactment of the policy implications, widening OFSTED regulations, response to the needs of families and ensuring financial viability.

Figure 6.3 outlines the external pressures that need to be fulfilled to meet the requirements of the Department for Education and OFSTED, particularly the government demands for datafication that have led to the formalisation of ECEC (Kay 2018; Lee 2019; Moss 2017; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury 2016). The scale of these tensions has made the position of some ECEC settings untenable while others are adapting to survive.

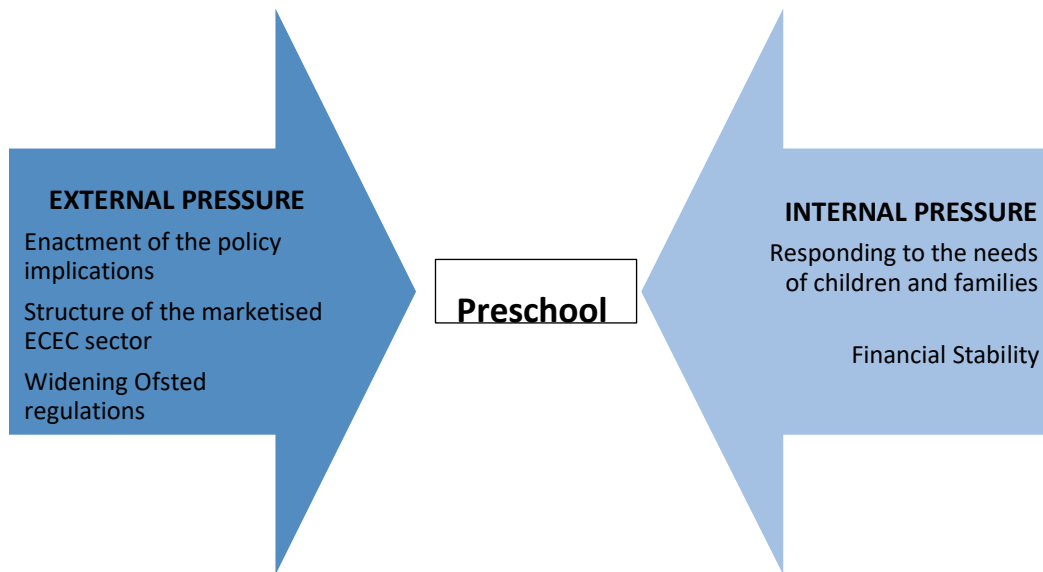


Figure 6.3: The tensions between the external pressure of policy and the internal pressure from the preschool

The range of tensions that exist between the external pressure of policy and the internal pressure from the preschool, are highlighted in Figure 6.3. Research Question Four will consider two dominant tensions that were threaded through the interviews, as evidenced in Theme Four of the reflexive thematic analysis in Section 5.7. The dominant tensions are:

- Tension One: The challenge of marketisation in areas of socio-economic disadvantage
- Tension Two: The dilemma of a moral responsibility towards children and their families.

For each tension the wider context will be addressed before a consideration of the effect on the preschool managers' priorities of sustainability, longevity and resilience.

6.5.1 Tension One: The challenge of marketisation in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage

Tension One evolves from the external pressure of the view of successive governments that the marketisation of ECEC is the most cost-efficient means of meeting the needs of parents and their children (White and Friendly 2012). The concept of marketisation favours large providers who can respond to the policy drivers of quality and low-cost childcare through a

focus on economies of scale, particularly a central administration of the organisation (Paull et al 2017; Lewis and West 2016). As demonstrated in Figure 2.1 almost sixty percent of PVI providers operate as standalone settings and CEEDA (2020a) confirms that more than one in four standalone providers are making a loss.

The logic of an effective market dictates that the focus for expansion of ECEC provision will be locations with the potential to be profitable, offering a plentiful supply of consumers willing to pay for additional services as either extra hours, additional activities or meals. Successive governments have used the term 'market failure' to describe the unwillingness of new private providers to set up ECEC provision in areas of socio-economic disadvantage (Clarke et al 2011). Simon (2017: p.70) argues that Government-led policy continues to use market-based solutions to overcome the inadequacies of the market approach. The failure to acknowledge the complexity of the ECEC market ensures that new providers are attracted to more prosperous areas impacting on the success of the government priorities of choice, quality, availability and affordability. Bourne and Shackleton (2017) highlight that the unintended consequence of a reliance on a childcare market has been the lower availability of quality provision in areas of disadvantage. Thus, disadvantaged communities continue to face difficulties and ECEC providers are more likely to report financial losses and low confidence in the viability of their ECEC business (CEEDA 2019; CEEDA 2020a).

More Affordable Childcare (Department for Education 2013b) recognises that areas of disadvantage are not natural sites for market success, and thus the task of providing provision in disadvantaged communities falls to Local Authority maintained nurseries and not-for-profit preschool settings. The statistics related to two-year-old funding levels, were provided by the Local Authority Early Years Team in March 2017 and March 2018, allowed a comparison to be made across the two years. The table in Appendix Two shows the 54 settings that had at least five funded two-year-old children attending in March 2017. Levels for March 2018 are included to demonstrate the contrast in numbers attending between the two years and to emphasise the difficulty of planning and staffing for the attendance of two-year-old children that differs from term to term, as discussed in Section 5.8.1.

March 2017			March 2018		
Rank	Type of setting	Number of funded two-year-olds	Rank	Type of setting	Number of funded twoyearolds
1	Maintained nursery	35	1	Maintained nursery	38
2	Maintained nursery	26	2	Maintained nursery	33
3	Maintained nursery	24	3	Jada's preschool	19
4	Maintained nursery	23	4	Maintained nursery	17
5	Jada's preschool	21	5	Maintained nursery	17
6	Maintained nursery	16	6	Maintained nursery	16
7	Maintained nursery	15	7	Beth's preschool	16
8	Full day care nursery	15	8	Full day care nursery	16
9	Maintained nursery	14	9	Full day care nursery	14
10	Eve's preschool	14	10	Full day care nursery	14
Total children		203	Total children		200

Table 6.3: Rank of setting with the highest number of two-year-old funded children (Source: Local Authority Early Years Team).

The type of provider with the highest number of two-year-old funded children attending are ranked in Table 6.3. The type of provider is listed to demonstrate the variation between, and across, the different types of provider. For example, in March 2017 of the top ten ranked providers seven were maintained settings, out of a possible eight, but by March 2018 this had reduced to five maintained settings. The increase in the number of full day care nurseries in March 2018 highlight that children eligible for two-year-old funding live across a variety of socio-economic locations (see Appendix Two for full details). The ranks highlight the similarity between the role of maintained setting in areas of deprivation and the role of the PVI settings. Williamson (2019) states that a higher level of funding to Local Authority maintained nurseries reflects their role supporting areas of disadvantage (Williamson 2019), although a corresponding fund is not provided to the PVI sector that work in similar circumstances.

Although substantial budgets are allocated to the ECEC sector, the level of funded provision for two-, three- and four-year-old children offered by government is considered insufficient to cover the full cost of the funded sessions in 2016 (CEEDA 2018), and suggest an increasing discrepancy for years 2017-2020. The Department for Education's funding rates for 2016 were

calculated on cost data from 2015, and were set until 2020. Concerns over funding levels have been raised by providers and parliament communities (CEEDA 2019; House of Lords 2015) but to no avail. CEEDA, an independent research organization undertakes regular national surveys across the ECEC sector to produce evidence of the funding/expenses conundrum (2014; 2018; 2020). The CEEDA Early Years Annual Report (2020a) estimates a £662 million funding deficit in the year 2019-20 and concludes that both families and providers are subsidising the 'free entitlement' for government funded early education sessions. Even though £779 million was spent in 2019-20 on extended funded hours for three-and four-yearold children of working parents (Britton et al 2019) there continued to be a high incidence of additional fees levied to working parents (CEEDA 2019; Department for Education 2019a; National Audit Office 2020). Thus, the Coalition Government priority of low cost childcare has not become a reality for many parents. In contrast, only £442m was spent on the two-yearold offer (Britton et al 2019). The disparity between the figures demonstrate the inequality between the support for lowerincome families to access ECEC compared with those families who are employed and receiving higher incomes (Blanden et al 2017; Johnes and Hutchison 2016).

The following sections will use the framework of the priorities of the preschool managers: sustainability, longevity and resilience to explore the challenges faced by the preschool managers to ensure their preschool survives for the long term.

6.5.2 Sustainability

Sustainability will consider the financial issues faced by the preschool managers and the limited opportunities to gain additional income. The National Audit Office (2020) reports that a demand-led funding approach resulted in the use of short-term funding, from term to term, and adds to the long-term financial sustainability issues of PVI providers. The diverse nature of the market results in a divide between providers who rely on public funding against those who can attract income through private fees or additional charges on top of the governmentfunded hours (CEEDA 2020a). The situation was intensified by the stress to budgets of the introduction of a statutory minimum hourly wage and pension contributions from 2015, and further compounded by annual increases to the minimum wage and to lease, rental and utility expenses. A feature of standalone preschools is the lack of a larger organisation to fall back on during periods of low attendance or financial difficulty, thus increasing the precarious nature of their business.

The interviews in 2017/18 took place at the same time as the introduction of a policy initiative in September 2017 to allow up to 15 extended hours for three- and four- year-old children of working parents. The disruptive impact of the 'thirty hours' funding relates to the replacement of fee income from parents with a lower level paid for the funded hours. For the preschools in the study, the average hourly rate charged to parents was £5.50 but funding rates were £4.06 per hour (Local Authority Sustainability Report 2018). For some of the preschools in the study the challenge of the thirty hours was linked to their lower opening hours. Resulting in a dilemma to either extend their opening hours to attract working families, or keep the existing hours and potentially be unsuitable for a working parent. Delays to the centralised system for deciding eligibility resulted in a level of unease that was apparent during the first round of interviews held in June and July 2017.

Attention will now turn to the limited financial impact of additional funding streams available to all ECEC providers, including PVI and maintained settings, to support disadvantaged families and children. For children eligible for two-year-old funding an enhanced hourly rate is paid to all providers, equivalent to £5.25 in 2018 for the local authority of the study. For children aged three and four the additional funds are Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) and Deprivation Allowance. Both funds are based on termly eligibility, so vary each term and adds to the short-term nature of funding. EYPP was introduced in 2015 and eligibility is dependent on the income of the parents, providing 51 pence per hour for a child from a low-income family up to a maximum of 570 hours per year and is paid directly to the provider. The hourly rate has not increased in line with inflation but has stayed at a static level since 2015.

Gabi detailed the use of EYPP money to pay towards staff costs related to the role of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, and similar approaches were shared by Beth, Eve and Indiah. Gabi, Indiah and Jada spent EYPP money on improving their outside areas and Gabi was also working towards her forest school qualification. Part of the OFSTED inspection process is to track the progress of the children receiving two-year-old funding and the preschool managers must demonstrate the effective use of the funds to meet the specific needs of the eligible children.

In contrast the level of funds available as Deprivation Allowance is dependent upon each Local Authority as part of their individual approach to supporting areas of deprivation. In the Local

Authority of the research study an allocation of 41 pence per hour was provided for all three- and four-year-old children who live in a postcode considered to be among the 20% most deprived in England, and is irrespective of a family's income. As a Local Authority initiative there is no requirement to provide analysis to OFSTED and the preschool managers' report the allowance is increasingly used to pay for general staffing and leasing costs. Camille stated that 80% of the children at her preschool live in postcodes eligible for the deprivation allowance and therefore this makes a small contribution to the costs of supporting the children and covering and extra practitioners to support children or to attend meetings related to the needs of the families. The availability of extra funding streams to bridge the gap between funding and expenses was welcome, but the equivalence each week per funded child of £7.95 for EYPP or £6.15 for Deprivation Allowance makes only a small difference overall to the financial position of each preschool.

Finally, the precarious nature of the funding available for the preschools leads to a concern for the working situation of the preschool team. A recent report by the Social Mobility Commission (2020) describes practitioners as underpaid, overworked and undervalued, with the result that 45% of practitioners claim benefits to reach a manageable level of income. Penn (2019) argues that regulatory legislation for ECEC does not extend to staff pay and conditions or a lack of union representation, while in some organisations conditions of pay may not cover pension, sick pay or holiday. The Education Policy Institute (2020) cites a direct link between underfunding and the low pay suffered by ECEC practitioners. To counteract this the Social Mobility Commission (2020) recommends that a first step towards improving conditions should be to address the funding shortfall in the short-term, to reduce the precarious nature of the termly funding changes and followed by a consideration of possible longer-term changes to the allocation of public funding.

6.5.3 Longevity

A consideration of longevity will focus on the organisational structure of the setting, the location and the opportunities for the future. The six preschools were all long-standing, and had been in operation for between nine and twenty-five years. The longevity of the setting was reliant on the financial sustainability and resilience of the manager but also dependent on external factors related to the location and community. The preschool managers demonstrated a sense of unease about the future of their preschool detailed in Section 5.8.1.

The need for policy enactment regardless of the possible impact on the preschool results in increasing pressure on the longevity of the preschool. The challenge of maintaining a continuing relevance within a changing sector was a concern shared by some of the preschool managers.

Traditional committee-run preschools had been the norm for non-profit providers, and involved parents in the decision-making processes of the preschool. The marketisation of ECEC required a different approach and some of the preschool managers demonstrated their move away from the parent-committee structures towards charity status, limited companies or a Trustee organisation. The owner of Jada's preschool had moved away from a committee structure due to the regular turnover of members and had recently set up a board of trustees to ensure the 'longevity and continuity of the setting':

What we were finding was that the committee was changing every year or two years it was getting more difficult ... because parents are busy aren't they we haven't got the time to be able to give what we needed and then we were every two years having to do all the new DBS's.

Alternatively, Eve was satisfied with the charity status of her preschool and welcomed the close involvement of the committee at key times during the year. Eve also found it very useful to be able to draw on the skills of committee members, one of whom volunteered administrative support each week. The changes to the structure of a preschool did not imply that the preschool(s) were intending to become a for-profit provider, but was an attempt to provide a level of consistency within the changing demographics of their communities.

Longevity also includes the importance of a good OFSTED inspection to demonstrate the quality of the setting to current and prospective families. Wood (2019) argues that the remit of OFSTED has extended to become the sole arbiter of quality and a publisher of occasional guidance on practice. The persuasive narrative of the guidance suggests a preferred practice for topics including Teaching and Play, the role of phonics and the concept of school readiness (OFSTED 2015a; OFSTED 2016; OFSTED 2019). Urban (2018) suggests varying degrees of compliancy amongst practitioners, those that may follow trends in the hope that it will contribute to a favourable OFSTED inspection, or those that are confident with their own moral judgements. The preschool managers all confidently shared their positive practice, but

there were latent suggestions of the continuing power effects of OFSTED. Two examples from the interviews demonstrate possible reactions to OFSTED. Eve detailed the purchase of resources that had been widely acclaimed in early years social media and training as suitable for young children:

We spent quite a lot of money on heuristic play. We had a lovely basket with cones and wood all laid out. By the end of the day they were smashed, they were in pockets, so we've just had to say – OFSTED want to see this and this and this but we can't.

The purchase of resources that follow trends rather than the developmental needs of the children is an unfortunate expense that was related to the belief that OFSTED expected a certain type of provision. However, Eve also reflected on the positive steps taken after this incident to 'go back to basics' to provide for the youngest children, offering lots of cuddles and stories, and simple cause and effect toys. In contrast, Beth used her awareness of the health needs of the children attending her preschool to introduce teeth cleaning after lunch each day. Although it was a chaotic time of the day Beth considered it was worth the trouble to know that the children were taking care of their teeth at least once a day. These two examples demonstrate the different ways that the preschool managers react to OFSTED.

Finally, there are some benefits of being a standalone preschool, including the ability to be flexible and take a risk. Beth had moved her preschool into the local primary school and a considerable number of ethnic minority families joined the setting, resulting in a further expansion a term later to rent a further two classrooms for her newly burgeoning cohort. Beth's ability to make prompt decisions within a new limited company structure proved a catalyst that succeeded in ensuring the longevity of her preschool. Although moving to a new site and the subsequent expansion had been a challenge, it was reliant on the willingness of the preschool team to help to organise and decorate the new preschool over the Christmas holiday period. Without the team effort there would not have been the finances available to employ others to do the work. In the same way Gabi shared the experience of bidding for the lease of a building that had been vacated and was in close proximity to their existing site. The recognition of a 'gap in the local community' was a risk she considered it was necessary to take and allowed a move to a fixed site that allowed her preschool to expand.

6.5.4 Resilience

The insights into the challenges faced by the preschool managers are specific to the small nature of the preschools and the location within which they are based. The demands on the level of resilience of the preschool managers are exacerbated by the complexity of ECEC leadership and management. The nature of leading small settings ensures that responsibility is carried by just one or two staff at senior level (Miller 2008; Mistry and Sood 2012; Woodrow and Busch 2008). Preston (2013) explores the demands on managers to undertake a full range of management tasks, including attracting new business, financial targeting, managing budgets and administrative tasks. In addition, the list needs to include the role of responding to policy implemented by government.

Eve cited the need to work out sick pay, maternity pay and other employee-related issues which she had found a new and stressful experience. She reflected on her previous role within the NHS where she had been able to rely on a Human Resources department for 'all things related to staffing'. The narratives of the interviews outlined how each of the preschools had a different approach to business administration, with three of the preschools employing specific staff with responsibility, one relying on volunteer support and the final two the managers undertook the work themselves. Similarly in a study of value-for-money within the sector, Campbell-Barr (2009) suggests that providers were often masking the true cost of ECEC provision by undertaking multiple tasks at home. Although this can be seen as a way to ensure that any additional costs were kept to a minimum, as the need for a work life balance was challenged by the need to survive.

Tension One has outlined the external pressure of the impact of the marketisation of ECEC and the impact on the financial situation of the preschools. The preschool managers ability to pragmatically approach each new challenge has ensured that their provision continues to exist. Tension Two will explore the dilemma of the feeling of a moral responsibility towards the children and their family, and the impact on the preschool team.

6.5.5 Tension Two: The dilemma of moral responsibility towards children and their families

The link between economic disadvantage and parental stress affects the early childhood experiences of children (Whitebread and Bingham 2012). Pascal and Bertram (2019: p.3) describe the complexity of meeting the needs of children and families experiencing poverty and disadvantage:

Working with children when the socio-economic levels of families had deteriorated ...complex needs go far beyond the child's learning and development and include wider family needs for help with basic life requirements such as housing, food, safety, debt management and drug and substance abuse and the differential impact of austerity on the poorest in society.

The impact of adverse family life experiences is difficult to overcome and for this reason the ability of the preschool to provide support to families and signpost to outside agencies is key. Penn (2019) raised a concern over the level of extra support available for vulnerable children. In contrast the narratives of the preschool managers demonstrated the underlying ethos of the need to support families as well as their children, even if at odds with the financial stability of the preschool or the focus on outcomes.

The number of children taking up the two-year-old funding sessions has seen fluctuations since the initial extension to 40% of all two-year-old children in 2014. The highest uptake of 72% recorded in 2018 had reduced to 68% by 2019, but this figure reflects a reduction in the overall numbers eligible for the funding due to changes to the eligibility criteria linked to the expansion of universal credit nationally. CEEDA (2020a) suggest that the changes to eligibility has resulted in reduction of 19% since 2014/15. However, the reduction of eligibility does not mean that the situation of the children has improved and raises concerns about the needs of the children and families who are not eligible for the funded sessions.

The increasing datafication of ECEC as a preparatory stage for formal education is in contrast to the moral and emotional construct of the preschool managers view of ECEC (Osgood 2010). Tension Two will explore the dilemma of a moral responsibility towards children and their families. The preschool managers all expressed a confidence in their ability to provide quality provision for their children, but raised concerns about the impact of their responsibility to children on their finances and the wellbeing of the preschool team. The following section will

address Tension Two through the framework of the priorities of the preschool managers: sustainability, longevity and resilience.

6.5.6 Sustainability

Sustainability will consider the direct impact of the preschool managers' responses to the needs of children and their families on the financial situation of each preschool. More Great Childcare attempted to reduce the legal ratios required for three- and four-year-old children as a strategy to drive lower fees for parents, citing as evidence the ratios of staff to children used in other European countries (Department for Education 2013a). Although the amendment to staffing levels was firmly rejected by the ECEC sector, the interviews with preschool managers in 2018 detail that the practitioners were working closer to ratios in response to the financial pressures on the preschools. Eve recounted that a staff member had left her preschool and was not replaced because 'you've got to live to your means haven't you.' Research conducted by CEEDA (2020a) also concluded that there were increasing levels of stress for practitioners, struggling to make up staffing gaps or work closer to ratio. Beth acknowledged the pressure on all staff of working closer to ratio, particularly with regard to supporting two-year-olds, many of whom were in receipt of the disadvantaged funding. The preschool managers shared the range of strategies implemented for the children, including small group sessions and language support. Whilst these are positive strategies, the cost implications of extra practitioners at key points during the day add to the financial sustainability concerns for the preschool.

There were a variety of views on the relationship with outside agencies, particularly Health Visitors, Speech and Language Therapists and Inclusion Support. Gabi and Eve highlighted their role of signposting families to public services and outside agencies, and agreed that it is more difficult to get a positive response to the requests for help. The resulting impact on the preschool placed more pressure on the practitioner team and manager. For example, the spending cuts to public services has required managers and practitioners to take on the roles of providing speech therapy support within the setting or health visitor advice to parents to include sleep routines, diet or toilet training. In addition to supporting children within the setting, there was also a high level of support to families particularly in the preschools based in areas of deprivation. Camille described the implications of multiple members of the extended family involved with the caring responsibilities of a child, the differing expectations

often led to contrasting views and the need for support and advice to overcome difficulties. Supporting families may take the form of input for a particular problem the family is facing, or ongoing wellbeing support to a parent who is struggling. Thus, the significance of the moral responsibility to children and their families is not just the financial implications but also the impact on the workload of the practitioners. This will be addressed within the following focus on longevity and resilience.

6.5.7 Longevity

The moral dilemma of providing support to children and their families recognised the potential strain on the workload and well-being of the preschool team. Earlier research with preschool practitioners by Simpson et al (2015a) concludes that a consideration of the poverty of the home life would divert from the focus on meeting the expectations of OFSTED. However, within this study the emotional wellbeing of the children was a key concern of all the preschool managers. For example, Camille and Jada reflected on the attachment difficulties of the children and offered flexible settling-in sessions to encourage the child and family to adapt positively to the new environment. While the impact on staffing levels of extended settling-in sessions was difficult, Camille was confident that positive relationships would develop and the well-being of the children would improve.

Responses from the six preschool managers also indicated that annual increases to minimum wage levels since 2015, and increased costs of utilities and leases, had reduced the income available for resources and training for the practitioners. Beth detailed the historical practice of offering each practitioner two training courses each year but the recent increase in charges to attend the Local Authority courses resulted in practitioners undertaking online courses instead. The reduction in interactions with others at training courses impacted negatively on the opportunities for sharing of experiences and approaches between practitioners and settings.

6.5.8 Resilience

The preschool managers in the interviews unanimously stated the importance of their relationships with children, families and other professionals. The preschool managers clarified

that all types of families may need support, although acknowledged that families living in poverty and disadvantage were more likely to struggle to resolve problems themselves. Meehan and Meehan (2017: p.419) suggest children's life chances are improved when there are positive relationships between practitioners and families. The ability of a preschool to develop a good relationship with the parents and families is of paramount importance, without knowledge of the child and family there may be opportunities missed to provide support or signpost to other services. A survey undertaken by The British Association for Early Childhood Education details that settings were regularly offering practical ideas and support related to finances to parents to the extent that many settings reported the changing role of the educator (Early Education 2020).

The preschool managers demonstrated their response to the social wrong of a lack of a definition of disadvantage. They shared a wide view of disadvantage, and explained their approach to supporting the families. Using Jada's preschool as an example of the possible levels of families needing support, during the spring term of 2017 21 two-year-old children received funded sessions out of a total cohort of 112 children. However eligibility changes each term so consideration also needs to be given to the children who were eligible for two-year-old funding previously as their considered level of disadvantage does not disappear. The number of children who are, or have been, eligible for two-year-old funding may in some cases reach up to 60% of the children at a setting, as explained by Beth, Camille and Jada. In addition, this does not include those families who are considered relatively advantaged, but may also need support. Thus, the range of families being supported is more than just the number of children eligible for two-year-old funding each term. Simpson et al (2015a) highlight the challenge of ongoing engagement with families, and this view was shared by the preschool managers. Nevertheless, the preschool managers persevered to develop good relationships irrespective of the extra stress on decisions regarding staffing levels and the corresponding need to support the well-being of practitioners. Within a small setting this relies on the preschool manager and practitioners to develop a supportive team environment.

To summarise, this chapter has provided a response to the four research questions that formed the basis of the research study. Attention to the contrasting approach to constructing disadvantage by the Coalition Government and preschool managers provided the context for a consideration of the tensions that exist between Coalition Government policy and preschool practice. The Coalition Government viewed ECEC as a base for the nation's human capital

development, without an accompanying consideration of the inherent complexity of marketisation. The impact of government-driven policy is particularly evident in the expectation that providers should be entrepreneurial to find ways to be financially sustainable (Department for Education 2013b). The precarious financial position of some preschools leads to questions about their continuing viability, risking the availability of spaces for children and the potential for more families to miss out on the support in future. The lack of business interest in locations of disadvantage contributes to a dearth of provision for families, limiting the government stated priorities of quality, choice, affordability and availability. This analysis highlights the expectation of the Coalition, and subsequent Conservative Governments, that more provision and competition will result in better quality, rather than a consideration of providing effective support to existing providers.

Without any improvements to the circumstances of families living in poverty, it is the flexibility and willingness of the preschools that offer a small amount of support. Nevertheless comments shared by the preschool managers indicate the determination to continue to support families even though there is an understanding that improved early years provision alone cannot mitigate effects of structural poverty and disadvantage. The concepts of sustainability, longevity and resilience represent the priorities of the preschool managers, and Research Question Four demonstrated the relevance of using the priorities as a framework to analyse two dominant tensions that exist between ECEC policy and practice.

The final chapter will conclude the thesis by reflecting on the research study and the implications for practice within preschools and across ECEC more generally.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

The research study aimed to explore the situation of preschools positioned in mixed socioeconomic communities in England and provided an opportunity to reflect on the longterm effects of a neo-liberal policy landscape in ECEC. A social constructionist approach to the research study determined the ways in which the Coalition Government, and the media, shared deficit discourses of families living in poverty and disadvantage. A comparison with the constructions of disadvantage shared by six preschool managers provides a juxtaposition that was further illuminated in the context of the preschool managers' priorities for their practice, and the tensions revealed between policy and practice.

This chapter will conclude the thesis, presenting a brief overview of the research study, a reflection on the process and a consideration of the contribution to knowledge. This is followed by the implications of the research in relation to the constructions of disadvantage, the understanding of the PVI sector, as well as future policy and research. Finally, a coda will situate the 2020 covid-19 pandemic into the research study conclusions.

The four research questions were:

1. How is disadvantage framed in Coalition Government ECEC policy discourse?
2. How do preschool managers construct disadvantage?
3. How do preschool managers describe the priorities of their practice?
4. What are the tensions between Coalition Government policy and preschool practice?

The research questions required an initial exploration of the words and language used to present the dominant discourses of the Coalition Government, and was followed by analysis of the dichotomy between the framing of disadvantage across Coalition Government policy texts and the constructions of disadvantage shared by the preschool managers. Practicefocused narratives from the interviews led to a determination of the priorities of the preschool practice: sustainability, longevity and resilience. These three priorities of practice were used as a framework to analyse the dominant tensions between Coalition Government policy and practice that were shared by the preschool managers. A detailed response to each

Research Question formed the basis of Chapter Six, allowing this final chapter to focus on the implications of the research study.

7.1 Reflections on the research process

Social constructionism views knowledge as more than a reflection of reality (Gergen 2018), and acknowledges that social, political, economic and historical contexts contribute to each individual's construction of knowledge. Thus, the constructions of disadvantage shared by the preschool managers needed to be situated within the wider political, economic and social context in order to determine the underlying influences. To achieve this, I used Fairclough's Dialectical Relational Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis to place a social wrong at the centre of the analysis, to explore policy text analysis within the wider semiotic approaches used by the coalition government. The social wrong was the absence of a formal definition of disadvantage across the fields of government, health, economics and education. A situation that effectively overlooks the nuances and complexity of the experiences of the families living in poverty. My developing awareness of Othering, labelling, shaming and stigmatisation as strategies of the Coalition Government (Lister 2004; Lister 2015) was discussed within Chapter One, and formed a part of the DRA to CDA to determine the context of poverty and disadvantage within England. The reliance on a measurement of family income to decide eligibility for funding for two-year-old children who are considered disadvantaged was the starting point to both the DRA to CDA and interview analysis.

As the six preschools in the study had all been open between nine and twenty five years it was interesting to understand the history of the preschools and the paths that had been taken to reach the current practice. I had initially expected the quality narrative of policy and the demands of OFSTED to take precedence in the interviews, but the inductive nature of the study was led by the preschool managers' strong critical reflection of their practice and their priorities related to the business side of their provision. As mentioned throughout Chapter Five, the preschool managers were flexible to adapt and extend their provision to meet the demands of Coalition Government policy, and to suit the changing cohort and community.

The role of the researcher

Within social constructionism the active role of the researcher is critical to eliciting the preschool managers perspectives, Brock (2013) emphasises the importance of knowledge of the field of ECEC, and in this thesis, my knowledge was coupled with a respect for the preschool managers and their work. My professional role of leading a preschool affords an awareness of the complexities of working within the non-profit sector, and within the same Local Authority as the preschool managers in this study. I consider myself a relative insider: aware of preschool provision with the ECEC sector but not aware of the intricacies of each preschool involved in the study. Sikes and Potts (2008) suggest that engaging positively and with empathy could lead to more information being shared by a participant. In addition, I was also alert to the importance of reflexivity in relation to my position and the interpretations made throughout the interview and analysis stage to reduce unconscious editing due to my own values (Berger 2015). Nevertheless, I acknowledge that my relative insider position relates specifically to preschool provision, the situation of a private for-profit provider would result in a different position along the insider/outsider continuum (Stephen and Brown 2004).

At the end of Chapter Three I suggested a possible limitation of the research study could relate specifically to the interview process and analysis. The unwillingness of the preschool managers to engage with the interviews could have impacted on the potential range of analysis possible, however this problem did not arise. At the outset of the interview process I emphasised to the preschool managers that talking about disadvantaged two-year-old children was an entry point to a wider discussion of ECEC practice. I was aware that as preschool managers there are not many opportunities to talk about practice and the challenges that are faced, and for this reason I wanted to ensure that there was a sense of freedom for the preschool managers to share their perspectives and experiences. While the interviews were positive encounters, the remarks expressed at the end of the first interview gave a clue to the underlying feelings of the preschool managers about the interview process. One manager exclaimed 'ohh that was terrifying ... just like a job interview' while another commented 'We could chat for hours ... I was going off track'. The preschool managers all welcomed the second interview and were keen to share their experiences of the thirty hours policy that had been introduced between the first and second round of interviews.

As part of the process of the Reflexive Thematic Analysis I used quotes from the narratives of the preschool managers as the codes, to ensure that their words were considered and to convey the authenticity of the research data (Denscombe 2014). I combined the semantic and

latent views from across the interviews and together these formed the construction of disadvantage, and priorities for practice. Nevertheless, I did not consider that I was presenting the voices of the preschool manager, but rather an interpretation of their narratives in the interview. To adhere to my ethical responsibility to provide anonymity for the preschool managers I have not named the Local Authority of the research study, or the city in which the research was undertaken.

Finally, one of the challenges I faced during the research study was my continuing involvement as a preschool manager during the post-interview period of the research study. At certain points during the process of analysis and writing the thesis it was necessary to refer back to the transcripts of the interviews to get a feel of each interview again. In this way I was able to separate the current climate from the position that existed at the time of the interviews in 2017 and 2018.

7.2 Limitations of the research study

Throughout this research study, the words and language used to form the discourses shared by the Coalition Government have been used as a basis to consider the understanding of the concept of disadvantage. The level of rhetoric shared by the Conservative Party (2008-2010) and the Coalition Government (2010-2015) reflects the unprecedented political climate of the period. As such it does not reflect the situation after 2015, the level of rhetoric was not needed as the deficit discourse of parenting had gained general acceptance across the country.

The research study was small-scale in nature involving six preschool managers but the rich descriptions they shared provide valuable insights into their views, practice and priorities. The involvement of preschools with higher than average numbers of disadvantaged two-year-old children resulted in the selection of preschool providers who had a greater awareness and experience of the difficulties faced by disadvantaged families. For this reason, the constructions of disadvantage formed in this study may not be shared by all ECEC practitioners. The interviews were placed at the beginning of the research study timetable (see Table 3.2) to ensure that the policy analysis did not impact on the interviews. In hindsight this continues to be the right choice as my awareness of the political framing of disadvantage evolved during the DRA to CDA process and therefore there was a risk that it could have

affected the focus of the interviews or my reactions to the views of the participants. However, this has resulted in constructions of disadvantage that were formed in the summer of 2017 and spring of 2018, even though the thesis is completed at the end of 2020.

Finally, the ECEC sector is diverse and while the discussion would be considered relevant to all settings, the conclusions are relevant to non-profit preschool settings that are based within areas of mixed socio-economic communities.

7.3 The contribution to knowledge

The overarching aim of the research study was to explore the tensions that exist between ECEC policy and practice. The research study involved a variety of strands that together allowed a detailed exploration of the contrast between Coalition Government policy rhetoric and the nuance of contextually-situated experiences and understanding as shared by the preschool managers. The contrast in the views and understanding contributed to the tensions between ECEC policy and practice, and ultimately to the priorities for practice shared by the preschool managers.

This section will explore the contribution to knowledge of this thesis in relation to policy and practice. First, the importance of the analysis of the strategic use of words and language to shape discourses of poverty and disadvantage will be acknowledged. This will be followed by the practice-related priorities of the preschool managers, which demonstrate the challenge of supporting areas of socio-economic disadvantage within an ECEC market system.

7.3.1 A contextually-situated understanding of how words and language shape the discourse and understandings of disadvantage.

Preparation for the 2010 general election, after thirteen years of a New Labour Government, required a coherent discourse to support the intentions of the Conservative Party. Language was a key aspect the strategies of Othering, labelling, shame and stigmatisation that were used to position individuals and families living in poverty as deficit. The impact of the sustained discourse and rhetoric during the period 2008-2012 resulted in a normalisation of poverty and

disadvantage across society (Looney 2017). In effect placing the blame on families and reducing the moral imperative to support families in need. The sustained level of rhetoric laid the foundations for acceptance of policies introduced over the course of the Coalition parliament.

For example, at the beginning of the Coalition Parliament disadvantage was framed as a lack of individual responsibility for their own situation (Her Majesty's Treasury 2010; Field 2010), and to society (Allen 2011). Two years later this was adapted to relate to locations of socioeconomic deprivation (Department for Education 2013a) and replaced by the term lowincome (Department for Education 2013b). The shifts in the framing of disadvantage across five Coalition Government policy texts demonstrated the use of the term disadvantage to support the overarching focus of the Coalition Government, rather than a considered view of the effects of poverty and disadvantage.

Chapter One highlighted the importance of separating the concepts of poverty and disadvantage in order to ensure analysis that moves beyond disadvantage as solely an economic issue. As this research has documented attempts to link disadvantage solely to income tells only a small part of the story of disadvantage and needs to be challenged accordingly (Knight et al 2020). The focus on disadvantage in this study allowed analysis of the government discourse and policy rhetoric as a basis for exploring the understanding and experiences of the preschool managers. Discussions with preschool managers in isolation, without consideration of the context, would have resulted in analysis that did not account for the origins of the views or specific language used.

Interviews held with preschool managers in the summer of 2017 and spring of 2018 highlighted the extent of the continuing influence of the rhetoric and discourse that had been shared by the Coalition Government. The preschool managers' constructions of disadvantage reflected their experiences within their preschools and their recognition of the negative effects of structural issues on families. However, the greater understanding shared by the preschool managers did not preclude levels of subjectivity, particularly in relation to the socioeconomic level of the location of their preschool. Most notable is a variance between the issue of poor housing and a concern for a child's lack of access to a garden and poor diet, this disparity highlights the potential for subjectivity within any construction of disadvantage. Although widespread exposure to the rhetoric of deficit parenting continues, this has been

tempered by the added impact to the public of austerity budget cuts over the last five years (Lyndon 2019a).

7.3.2 Priorities for practice: sustainability, longevity and resilience

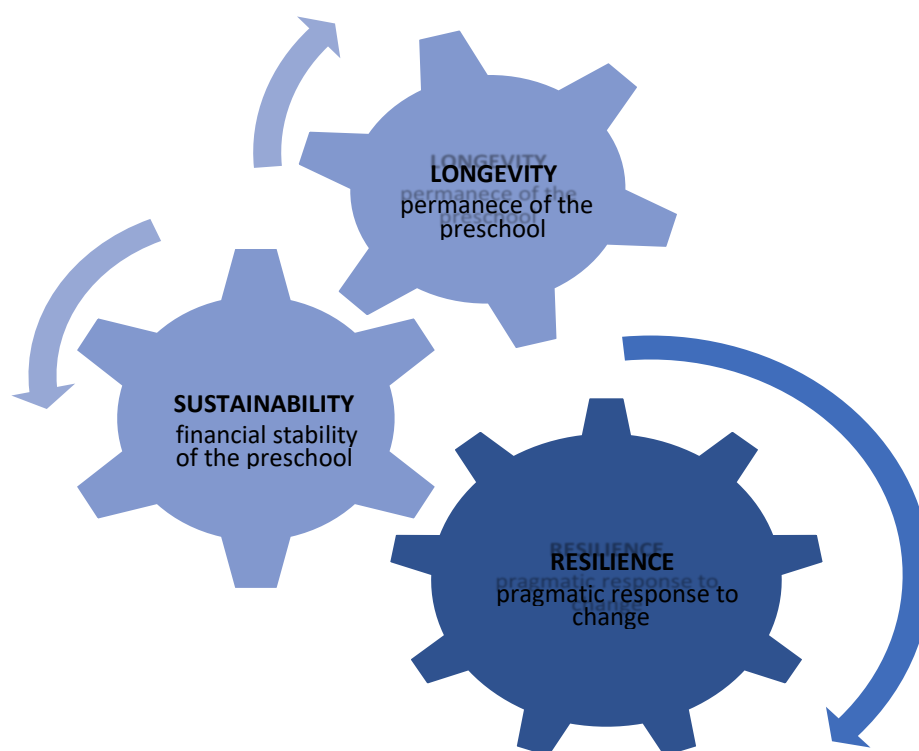


Figure 7.1: The relationship between the preschool managers' priorities of sustainability, longevity and resilience.

In comparison to earlier research by Simpson and Lyndon, the constructions of disadvantage of the preschool managers were not the sole aim of this research study, but were used alongside the shared experiences of the preschool managers to create a greater understanding of the difficulties faced in the preschool sector. The concept of change was evident throughout the interviews and reflected the effects of the rapid expansion of ECEC over the last twenty years, directed by government policy. Ball (2006) positions policy as creating the circumstances within which the preschools have to adapt, but this study has shown that the enactment of Coalition Government policy is dependent on each preschool

manager and leads to a predicament of how to prioritise the continuation of their setting, support disadvantaged children and respond to the policy interventions. The examples shared by the preschool managers reinforced the messiness of policy and their priorities for practice.

A contribution to knowledge involves the analysis of the priorities for practice of the preschool managers, particularly the aspects related to the challenges of their location in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage. The preschool managers identified aspects of practice that depict the precarious nature of their preschools, but also their willingness to persevere with the hope that the situation will improve. In Figure 7.1, resilience is displayed as the most significant cog, which helps to drive the measures to improve the sustainability and longevity of the preschool. As such these three priorities could be used to inform further research into preschool provision in local areas, across local authorities or nationally.

The following section will consider the implications of the research study, with particular reference to the wider awareness of disadvantage, understanding of the PVI sector and future policy.

7.4 Implications of the research study

The possible implications of the research study will be addressed in relation to the:

- Implications of a wider awareness of disadvantage.
- Implications for understanding the PVI sector.
- Implications for future policy.

7.4.1 Implications of a wider awareness of disadvantage

Social welfare organisations share a view that the causes of poverty and disadvantage are economic, structural and political (Hawkins 2018), and construct poverty with a recognition of the experiences of those living in poverty. In contrast, political parties and successive governments have been reluctant to define poverty and disadvantage, continuing to focus on increasing the human capital of the population. This approach has resulted in increasing

sections of society that are excluded from society. Research has demonstrated that poverty impacts on every area of a child's life, affecting educational, social and psychological development (Ridge 2011). The overwhelming view is that attendance at an ECEC setting is not enough to eradicate the negative effects of poverty and disadvantage on children and their family life (Pascal and Bertram 2012). Lloyd and Potter (2014) suggest that the consequences of poverty require multiple approaches to address children's development levels, access to nutritional foods, housing and public services. In reality the austerity budget cuts of the Coalition Government were reducing the availability of these services and ultimately limited the fulfilment of the Government's stated priorities for the ECEC sector of quality, choice, affordability and availability (Gambaro et al 2013).

The increase in clarity of the views of the preschool managers in this study is a positive achievement but needs to be tempered by recognition that the preschool managers were all supporting higher than average numbers of disadvantaged children. For this reason, the level of awareness of practitioners and managers within other types of ECEC provision or locations may vary. In Chapter One I suggested that linking eligibility for two-year-old funding to income levels would allow a reliance on an assumed shared understanding of disadvantage. At the conclusion of the study I am able to state that a similar understanding was shared by the preschool managers who were based in areas of comparable socio-economic levels, and resulted in two groups of preschool managers, three from areas of socio-economic deprivation, and three from mixed socio-economic areas (see Table 6.1). The existence of subjective differences between preschool managers who all supported higher than average numbers of children considered disadvantage raises concerns about the level of variation that occurs across the views of the public as a whole. Therefore an assumed shared understanding is not a realistic approach, but has proved an effective way for successive Governments to detract from the underlying structural issues of poverty and disadvantage. The DRA to CDA in Chapter Four concluded that within the existing social order the opportunity to overcome the social wrong of an absence of a definition of disadvantage was low. Nevertheless, a formal definition of disadvantage should be agreed and adopted by government in consultation with members of the community, and professionals of the health, social care and education sectors.

Hawkins (2018) suggests that a new moral narrative is needed to shift thinking about poverty and disadvantage. This draws attention to the crucial role of semiotics to present an alternative discourse, as myth busting on its own will not change the public views but may help to change the narrative, for example to compare the empathy for children living in poverty and disadvantage against the blame culture for adults living in poverty (Brook 2019). A drive to improve understanding of the effects of poverty and disadvantage across the ECEC sector would provide a greater level of support offered to families in need. Although social welfare organisations have been addressing this issue, the political will of government is absent, and policy attention has been diverted as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

7.4.2 Implications for understanding the PVI sector

A lack of robust evidence of the long-term positive effects of children's attendance in ECEC provision has not diminished the expectation for providers to be able to improve outcomes and manage value for money approaches to finances in the long-term. Tensions led Paull and Xu (2017) to criticise the government expectation that improvements to outcomes would also lead to reduced expenditure on remedial public services and welfare benefits. This study concluded that the tensions between the competing rationales for ECEC are difficult to reconcile and resulted in two dominant tensions between policy and practice: the challenge of marketisation and the dilemma of a moral responsibility towards children and their families. This study reveals how this tension is exacerbated in settings that support high numbers of families considered disadvantaged.

Wider research demonstrates that ECEC providers are adapting to the demands of policy and extending their professional role to support the families within their provision (Campbell-Barr 2018; Osgood 2010). The increase in pressure on settings, as discussed in section 6.4, needs to be acknowledged and addressed for each provider and also across the ECEC sector. Tension Two in section 6.4.5 detailed the impact of the preschool managers' feelings of moral responsibility towards supporting the families, and was juxtaposed with the deteriorating financial situation of the preschools. The importance of the relationships between the preschool practitioners and the families was acknowledged across the interviews (Meehan and Meehan 2017), and the preschool managers agreed with the conclusion of Simpson (2015a) that sustaining the parent/practitioner relationships was in some cases difficult. The

additional narrowing of support available from outside agencies due to public spending cuts (Early Education 2020) has placed further pressure on all providers.

The diverse nature of the ECEC sector makes it difficult to address problems as a homogenous group, as the challenges faced by providers are inextricably linked to the type of setting, location and the cohort of families attending. The priorities of sustainability, longevity and resilience faced by the preschool managers in this study are compounded by the small nature of the preschool and the location (Mistry and Sood 2012). Nevertheless, it is important to determine the extent to which those priorities are shared by other members of the sector. The rich narratives of the preschool managers could be shared with other parts of the sector to encourage consideration of the priorities of the wider ECEC sector.

7.4.3 Implications for future policy

Moss (2017) argues that the early intervention and school readiness agenda together increased the government commitment to steer towards further replication and consistency of ECEC. Penn (2019) highlights a disjointed and diverse sector that cannot continue to survive on a 'one size fits all' approach within policy frameworks. In recent years there has been an increasing focus on the static government funding levels and research has been undertaken by CEEDA (2018; 2019; 2010) to highlight the difficulties that are faced by funding levels that do not reflect the reality of the costs of providing the funded sessions. The negative impact of low levels of funding on the preschools in this study could be generalised to the wider national context of funding to all members of the ECEC sector. Campaigns to raise awareness of the financial situation of the sector, have been undertaken by the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) and the Early Years Alliance (EYA), in an effort to persuade the government to consider the realistic cost of delivering quality care and education to young children. CEEDA (2016; 2018; 2019; 2020a; 2020b) have produced a variety of reports of the annual position of the ECEC sector, although the situation continues to be ignored by the Department for Education and the current Conservative Government. Furthermore the Social Mobility Commission (2020) suggests that addressing the funding shortfall could result in improved pay conditions for the ECEC practitioners. Bringing together membership bodies, nursery groups, education charities and independent research groups, and training organisations to engage on a comprehensive review of the approach by the current government is needed to offset the unsustainable situation at present.

The ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on families and preschool providers will be briefly included as a coda to this study.

7.5 The Impact of Covid-19

At the conclusion of this research the Covid-19 pandemic has severely impacted on all aspects of society. Those living in poverty and disadvantage prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 were more likely to struggle with the impact of further financial difficulties and additional lockdowns that have reduced the opportunities to visit family or friends, affecting the wellbeing and mental health of children and families.

The impact of the pandemic has also introduced new levels of disadvantage to those families who were previously employed, but due to redundancy or furlough are unable to keep working. While low paid workers are often employed in service industries that have continued during the lockdowns, this has placed them at greater risk of exposure to Covid-19 from the work environment. New levels of disadvantage may be short-term but there are indications of rising levels of unemployment and precariousness in housing which may be longer-term. Save the Children (2020) estimate that nearly two-thirds of families on universal credit had fallen into debt during the first lockdown in 2020 and Shelter (2020) quotes government statistics of 6,000 more families in temporary accommodation during the first three months of the pandemic in 2020 alone.

For ECEC providers, Blanden et al (2020) suggest that non-profit providers, those reliant on government funding have not been so adversely affected as funding has been provided even if a child does not consistently attend. However, if the provision was already struggling prior to March 2020 there is a concern that the situation may result in small providers closing. During the first lockdown of March to June 2020, more than a million 0-4 year old children stopped attending ECEC settings (Blanden and Crawford 2020). Since June 2020 formal childcare usage has been slow to recover (Department for Education 2020b) and raises questions about the future for the sustainability of the sector (CEEDA 2020b).

Finally, the re-opening of provision over the summer of 2020 resulted in an increased use of outside areas to prevent the transmission of the infection. This raises the issue of the ongoing suitability of some provision. Penn (2019) highlighted inadequate access to outside settings or poor ventilation as signs of inappropriate premises; however these issues become more prevalent in the context of the pandemic, and suggest that the settings may have difficulty opening safely. The implication of more provision provided outside is a positive change but again raises concern about providers in areas of socio-economic deprivation that do not have the financial capital to make changes, particularly if the setting has limited outside space.

7.6 Future Research Possibilities

The research study explored the situation of preschools in areas of socio-economic deprivation, and concluded that priorities of sustainability, longevity and resilience were consistent across the six preschool managers. An opportunity to compare the priorities of preschools based in a variety of locations would determine whether the framework of sustainability, longevity and resilience is relevant as an approach for analysing tensions that exist more widely in ECEC between policy and practice. My current insider status would be suitable for undertaking further research within non-profit providers. The impact of recent funding issues and Covid-19 on the preschool managers of this research study would suggest that further research could provide a contextual update.

One area of disadvantage that had a limited level of awareness across all preschool managers was the issue of low paid work and the resulting in-work poverty. The reason for this omission is not clear and may link to the high level of in-work poverty experienced within the ECEC sector, but would benefit from further study.

To conclude this thesis, the context of ECEC provision is constantly evolving and responding to societal changes and the demands of policy. Beth summarised her approach to leading the preschool as 'Onwards and upwards!'. At the time we laughed together over the remark but did not realise how prophetic it would be.

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Appendices

Appendix One: Eligibility criteria for funded provision

Funding provision	Eligibility
<p>Two-year-old funding for disadvantaged children</p> <p>15 hours per week (up to 570 hours per year)</p>	<p>Free childcare in England if a parent receives one of the following benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income Support • income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance • income-related Employment and Support Allowance • Universal Credit, and your household income is £15,400 a year or less after tax, not including benefit payments • tax credits, and your household income is £16,190 a year or less before tax • the guaranteed element of Pension Credit • the Working Tax Credit 4-week run on (the payment you get when you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit) <p>2-year-olds can also get free childcare if they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are looked after by a local authority (LAC) • have an education, health and care plan • get <u>Disability Living Allowance</u> • have left care under an adoption order, special guardianship order or a child arrangement order
<p>Universal Entitlement for three and four year-old children</p> <p>15 hours per week (up to 570 hours per year)</p>	<p>Universal available for all children from the term after they turn three years old.</p>
<p>Extended Entitlement for three and four-year-old children</p> <p>Additional 15 hours per week (up to 570 hours per year)</p>	<p>Entitlement for eligible working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • minimum salary equivalent to 16 hours at minimum wage level • maximum salary of £100,000 per year

The criteria are quoted from gov.uk (2020).

Appendix Two: List of providers with at least five two-year-old funded children attending

The list of 54 settings that met the criteria for at least five two-year-old funded children.

Maintained Setting

Preschool

Private day care

Number of two-year-old funded children attending each setting		
Type of setting	March 2017	March
Maintained nursery	35	38
Maintained nursery	26	17
Maintained nursery	24	16
Maintained nursery	23	33
Jada's preschool	21	19
Maintained nursery	16	12
Maintained nursery	15	17
Full day care nursery	15	11
Maintained nursery	14	10
Researcher's preschool -not included in the study	14	11
Eve's preschool	14	10
Maintained nursery	13	10
Full day care nursery	13	13
Full day care nursery	12	6
Full day care nursery	12	16
Full day care nursery	11	11
Full day care nursery	11	6
Preschool - declined to take part in study	11	5
Beth's preschool	10	16
Full day care nursery	10	14
Full day care nursery	10	8
Full day care nursery	9	14
Gabi preschool 1	9	8
Full day care nursery	8	6
Full day care nursery	8	7
Full day care nursery	8	7
Full day care nursery	8	6
Preschool- closed April 2017	8	-

Number of two-year-old funded children attending each setting		
Type of setting	March 2017	March
Full day care nursery	7	13
Full day care nursery	7	9
Gabi preschool 2	7	8
Full day care nursery	7	9
School based nursery (maintained)	7	13
Full day care nursery	6	<5
Full day care nursery	6	11
Full day care nursery	6	<5
Preschool – declined to take part in the study	6	7
Full day care nursery	6	<5
Preschool – declined to take part in the study	6	5
Full day care nursery	6	9
Full day care nursery	6	<5
Camille’s preschool	6	6
Full day care nursery	6	8
Full day care nursery	6	<5
Full day care nursery	6	<5
Full day care nursery	6	7
Full day care nursery	5	<5
Full day care nursery	5	<5
Independent school	5	<5
Preschool – declined to take part in the study	5	<5
Full day care nursery	5	11
Indiah’s preschool	5	<5
Full day care nursery	5	<5
Full day care nursery	5	<5

Source: Local Authority Early Years Team

Appendix Three: Participant Information Sheet

Research Project Title: Providing Government Funded Sessions for two-year-olds: Pre-school practitioners constructions of disadvantage.

Introduction

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project. It is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve before you agree to take part. Please read the information sheet carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything that is not clear please ask.

What is the project's purpose?

I am undertaking the research project as part of my EdD study at Sheffield University. The research project aims to explore how preschool practitioners in England construct their understandings of disadvantage.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because as a preschool practitioner you have experience of at least five children receiving two-year-old funding in your setting at any one time.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide if you want to take part. If you decide to take part you will be provided with this information sheet as well as the need to sign a consent form. You can withdraw at any time without the need to give a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be interviewed at a time and place of your convenience. The interview will take about 60 minutes. You may also agree to follow-up interviews to share your understanding and experience further. At the end of the research project a group interview will be arranged and you may be invited to attend.

What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection relevant for achieving the research projects objectives?

The information collected will be your opinions and views on disadvantaged two-year-olds. I am interested in interviewing practitioners who work very closely with the children.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

The interview will be recorded and a transcript will be produced. You will be given an opportunity to comment on the transcript. The transcript of the interview will only be accessed and analysed by Alison Wakeford, the researcher. No other use will be made of the audio recordings and transcripts without your written permission.

Will my taking part in this research project be kept confidential?

All the information I collect during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. All data collected and transcribed will be anonymised and given a research code, known only to the researcher. The audio recording and transcripts will be kept on a password-protected computer and hard copies of the transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet. Audio recordings and transcripts will be kept for three years after the completion of the project.

If you withdraw from the study I will destroy the audio recording of your interview(s) but will need to use the data that was collected up to your withdrawal.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no known risks or disadvantages of taking part. The opportunity to reflect on your views and beliefs may result in a low level of stress.

What are the possible advantages of taking part?

I cannot promise the study will help you but the information we get from the study will help to increase the understanding of how pre-school practitioners construct their understanding of disadvantage.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results from the research project will be used for my thesis and also for journal articles and presentations at conferences. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

What if something goes wrong?

If you have any concern about any part of the research project you should contact the researcher awakeford1@sheffield.ac.uk

[If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally you can do this through the Education Department, Sheffield University.](#)

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via Sheffield University's Department of Education ethics review procedure.

Contact for further information:

Alison Wakeford

Appendix Four: Participant Consent Form

Title of research project:

Providing Government Funded Sessions for Two-Year-Olds: Preschool practitioners constructions of disadvantage.

Name of Researcher: Alison Wakeford

Participant identification number for this project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated explaining the above research project.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If I do not wish to answer a particular question or questions I may decline.
3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis.
4. I understand that I will be audio recorded during the interview.
5. I understand that I will be given an opportunity to comment on the transcription of the interview.
6. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of participant Date Signature

Researcher Date Signature

To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant

Copies: Participant Researcher

Appendix Five: Sample coding of transcript

Preschool Manager (Researcher)	Code
<p>We thought we were going to be quiet for the thirty hours, we thought it wasn't going to be that many, and then we broke up for the summer and then I think we had about 6 and we are now on 26. So upstairs is really busy after Christmas we have twoyearolds turning three and so they're eligible and will move upstairs and we are full upstairs and downstairs so for the twoyear-olds and three-year-olds every morning and we are close to ... just looking at the numbers ... we are close to capacity just two or three away upstairs in the afternoons as well. We've actually found that downstairs in the afternoon with the two-year-olds we're slightly lower (oh) we would often find that the two year funded children would take afternoons because our two and a half hour sessions fitted with the fifteen hours but for some reason I'm not quite sure why but this year it seems to be that they are using it slightly differently. (It does seem to be very busy this year). So what will you do split, just say to the parents, that you have the choice to split the thirty hours if you haven't got the space? (Most of our thirty hour children are not using all their hours at the moment ... luckily some of them are only using 18 or 20 hours). We are finding that with the thirty hour children most are taking four full days which equates for us to 28 hours (ok) We have got a couple who have gone for the five full days and they have topped up (and do you charge extra for doing the thirty hours?) no no.</p> <p>We were quite shocked when we tallied it all up. We got to sixteen, seventeen and we said oohh because we estimated before it all actually got going, we estimated about 20 of our families that we knew and then before we broke up the uptake was so small we thought oh we must have got that completely wrong! And then it was 17, 18 and then we are still increasing we still have got parents with children turning two who say we think we are eligible (oh ... yes) so we are going to get to the point where we just won't have the spaces.</p>	<p>Acceptance of policy Change</p> <p>The cyclical nature of attendance</p> <p>Responding to policy initiatives</p> <p>A feeling of unease</p> <p>Responding to policy initiatives</p>

Appendix Six: Ethics Approval



Downloaded: 19/09/2020 Approved: 27/02/2017

Alison Wakeford
Registration number: 140105829 School of Education
Programme: EdD

Dear Alison

PROJECT TITLE: Providing Government Funded Sessions for Two-year-old's in England: Pre-school practitioners constructions of disadvantage.

APPLICATION: Reference Number 012672

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 27/02/2017 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 012672 (form submission date: 01/02/2017); (expected project end date: 14/12/2018).
Participant information sheet 1026965 version 1 (01/02/2017).
Participant consent form 1026961 version 1 (01/02/2017).

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.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

David Hyatt

Ethics Administrator School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy:

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure>

The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy:

https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf

The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.

The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.

The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.