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Review Article

POLICY AND GOVERNMENTALITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN ENGLAND

Abstract

This paper provides an overview and investigates the English Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) policy landscape. It introduces the political and ECEC policy history, and the development of the statutory Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2021) framework, whose publication in 2008 was a significant milestone in ECEC in England. Twenty-two nursery workers from a variety of nursery settings were interviewed to learn what they think, know, and how this policy influences their professional practices. Foucault's (1988) and Dean's (1999) idea of 'governmentality' was used to analyze the data, as governmentality offers a way to create critical analyses of the ECEC policy that affects young children. The analysis recognizes the nursery worker's strong and often stressful relationship with government policy and highlights how policy documents mandated their work. The study also reveals that despite government regulations and guidance, most of the participants decide to continue with their professional development and enrol to study for a higher education degree.

Keywords: narrative research, Foucault, governmentality, early childhood education and care policy

Introduction

By investigating the statutory framework, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2021) in England, the study provides a space for a wider conversation around the purpose of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in England and how this is enacted and regulated. To facilitate this, the research focused on a range of nursery workers' stories, as through their lived experiences it was possible to broaden the debates around contemporary policies, the problematization of the gendered workforce, and ECEC practices in England. Since this document is statutory, it is under con-

tinuous scrutiny, with ongoing amendments imposed by the government; this has had a major impact on the ways in which professional nursery workers are constituted. The concern is how central government policies set out to influence outcomes for children at local levels, which in turn relates to the ways in which nursery workers' practices are shaped. When researching those who work in nurseries, the decision to focus on individuals with diverse educational levels, roles, and experiences was paramount; by exploring their narratives, better arguments around their understandings of policies are likely to give a better overview of their professional practice and the ECEC in general.

It is important to stress that in the UK context, a higher education degree is not necessary to work with children (DfE, 2021) and the qualification requirements and issues around obtaining a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at levels 2 and 3 are specified in the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework (DfE, 2021). In this document, the criteria set out the minimum needs for what a level 3 nursery worker should know, understand, and be able to do in order to be considered a qualified person who supports young children from birth to five years old in the nursery. One of the biggest areas of debate in the UK is over adult-to-child ratios for ECEC.

The term "nursery" is used generically throughout this paper and refers to a setting in which children aged between 0 - 5 years receive education and care away from the home in a regulated provision. The term 'nursery worker' is used to refer to someone who works within a nursery, regardless of their job role.

History of the Early Childhood Education and Care Policies in England

To provide a background to this study, a brief historical account of government policy towards the ECEC workforce is recounted. This aims to demonstrate the changing policy that has contributed to the shaping of ECEC and that informs nursery practice. Thus, it assists with understanding how nursery workers are constructed by the government in England and conceptualizes the current trends in policy documentation within the political context in England. It can be argued that the continuous change presents possible benefits for enhancing the professional recognition of the nursery worker (Fairchild et al., 2022). However, the fluid policy environment also gives rise to confusion for nursery workers' professional practice.

The unparalleled attention given to ECEC services, nursery places, and choices has roots in the Second World War, when mothers' participation in the labor market increased. At this time, nursery places were expanded due to the demands of the war economy, which meant that old prejudices about what females could and should do were cast aside in the name of patriotism (Enoch, 2012). As a result, the situation in which mothers found themselves left them with less time to care for their children. This approach was strengthened in the 1990s, when there was a drive to get more mothers to return to the workforce in England (DfES, 2007). As a result, there has been a rapid expansion of nursery provision, which, when coupled with revised curriculum

developments, has highlighted a need for a larger and more highly skilled ECEC workforce to deal with changing demands (Mikuska, 2021).

Under the New Labour Government (from 1997 to 2010), ECEC services continued to receive attention in England. In the period 1997 – 2010, two influential pieces of research were completed that impacted ECEC. The first of these was the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) Project (conducted from 1997 to 2004), the largest European "longitudinal investigation into the effects of pre-school education and care" (Sylva et al., 2003: 1). This study sought to assess the effectiveness of preschools on a diverse range of children from various backgrounds, as well as to identify the characteristics of preschools that made them "effective". The second piece of research was "Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY)," which was commissioned by the DfES in 2002 (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) and was based on the EPPE data set. It was developed to explore the pedagogical strategies that enable learning to take place. The research showed that there were concerns about transitions between nurseries and schools, and that in those settings where there was "continuity of learning between the setting and the home", the cognitive outcomes for the children were considerably better (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002:15).

To support practitioners working with children, several government documents were developed, such as the National Childcare Strategy (DfES, 2007), the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA, 2000; DFEE, 1997), which focused on 3 to 5-year-old children, and Birth to Three Matters (DfES, 2003), which covered 0 to 3-year-old children. These were significant steps toward workforce recognition; by establishing two frameworks, the division between 0-3, and 3-5-year-old children was formalized. In addition to this guidance, nurseries had to follow the Full-Day Care National Standards for Under 8s Day Care and Childminding (DfES, 2003). This document (known as "the red book") detailed 14 standards and represented "a baseline of quality below which no provider may fall" (DfES, 2003: 1). Consequently, at that time, practitioners working with children from birth to 5 years old were expected to work under these three different frameworks – Birth to Three Matters, the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage, and the Full Day Care National Standards for Day Care and Childminding. To bring together all aspects of early education and childcare policies and to bridge the gap between the 0-3 and 3-5 years old and between ECEC and school education, in 2007 the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework was created (Miller, 2008) which became statutory in the following year. This framework incorporated the Birth to Three Matters, Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage, and the Full Day Care National Standards for Day Care and Childminding (DfES, 2008). The results of the EPPE (Sylva et al., 2003) and REPEY (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) studies were also reflected in the EYFS (DfE, 2021). The combination of care and education comes from the EPPE, while the "school-readiness" concept comes from the REPEY report. Instead of purely educational learning goals, the EYFS also stipulates the importance of attachment, incorporating a statutory key person approach, and an imperative that "no child gets left behind" (DfE, 2021).

Discourses of nursery workers

It is important to highlight the highly gendered composition of the workforce and how nursery workers have been positioned professionally with reference to policy discourses of the "substitute mother," nursery workers as technicians," and "nursery workers as change agents." The argument is supported by the statistical trend in terms of women's employment and qualification of the ECEC workforce in England. These discourses largely draw on the work of Moss (2010; 2017; 2019), Osgood (2012) and Bonetti (2018; 2019) and examine how nursery workers have been positioned within a predominantly low-status and gendered workforce.

Since the Childcare Act 2006, all early childhood providers in England have been required to register and be subjected to inspection by Ofsted. Bonetti (2018, 2019), however, reported that the private day nursery sector remains a competitive but fragmented market. In England, the overwhelming majority (78%) of nurseries are private (profit-making), voluntary, and independent (Robert-Holmes, 2012), for which there are no requirements to employ qualified staff (DfE, 2021). There has been much discussion about who can work with children and what skills and qualifications nursery workers require. These debates are based largely on the nature of ECEC policies that seek to "*improve the quality of early years training*" (DfE, 2021: 17) and that "*set the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe*" (DfE, 2021: 5). In order to meet these requirements, Moss (2006: 36) described the nursery worker as a "technician," who has:

... varying levels of skill and qualification. But their role is to apply a defined set of technologies through regulated processes to produce pre-specified and measurable outcomes.

This type of work is in contrast to the discourse of the "substitute mother," as previously explained. Moss's (2006) ideas of the "technician" link closely to Osgood's (2012) analysis of developments in the early-career workforce. Nursery workers have been subject to increased state regulation and accountability, resulting in an increased workload and an emphasis on "technical competence and performativity" (Osgood, 2012: 146). Despite all these challenges for the nursery workers, there is opportunity for progress to be made in repositioning the ECEC workforce. It could be argued that nursery workers have the potential to be repositioned as "change agents", with the ability to contest the discourse of "substitute mother" as well as the "technician" approach to professional recognition. Osgood (2012) proposed that nursery workers can transform the existing "image" through professionalizing the ECEC workforce, which firstly embraces the "ethics of care", recognizing the importance of supporting and protecting children and families, and secondly, acknowledges the importance of critical reflection on how nursery workers have been positioned. Mikuska (2021), however, highlighted that the way in which nursery workers have been seen by society and mic-

romanaged by the government is largely invisible and difficult to challenge. Nursery workers can be seen as change agents in the way in which they interpret and transform policy, which can create opportunities for new discourses to be created through the merging of existing discourses such as "substitute mother" and "technician."

Theoretical approach

The theoretical approach for this study followed Dean's (2010) framework as a starting point, providing a practical application of Foucault's (2001) work on governmentality. The four dimensions of governmentality are 'fields of visibility, the technical aspect of government, forms of knowledge, and the formation of identities' (Dean, 2010: 41). Dean suggests that for policy analysis, certain questions need to be asked, such as, "What forms of conduct are expected from them? What duties and rights do they have? How are these duties enforced and rights ensured? (p.43) To answer these questions, Foucault's (2001) concern with self-work was acknowledged, in which self-work is understood as an intersection of subjectivity and governmentality. Foucault states that:

Governmentality implies the relationship of the self to itself, and I intend this concept of governmentality to cover the whole range of practices that constitute, define, organize, and instrumentalize the strategies that individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other. Those who try to control, determine, and limit the freedom of others are themselves free individuals who have at their disposal certain instruments they can use to govern others (Foucault, 2001: 300).

Foucault emphasizes the relationship between the self and the governing of others. This is a useful concept for understanding nursery workers' work and their relationship with policies. In the policy text analyzed, lack of qualification and skills are commonly ascribed to nursery workers, therefore:

Providers must help their staff get the right training and professional development so that they can give children high-quality learning and development experiences that keep getting better (DfE, 2021, p. 20).

As nursery workers, they are responsible for "creating high-quality settings that are welcoming, safe, and stimulating, and where children are able to enjoy learning and grow in confidence" (DfE, 2021: 16). The paradox of public sector spending cuts and increased calls for early years services to do better in addressing the "needs of children and their families" (Readon et al. 2018: 4) became a reality beginning in 2011. The government claimed that children are not ready for school by age 5. Delayed speech and poor social skills are the most cited issues. The government vision was to regulate why and by when children should be 'ready for school', so the revised statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2021) was adopted. The document encompasses official standards for learning, development, and care for babies and young children that must be met:

The EYFS promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' and gives children a broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life (DfE, 2021: 2).

While the original idea of the EYFS implementation was to support nursery workers, there was a very limited amount of guidance on how to do this and what skills they needed to have to address seemingly "needy" children. The "ideal worker" described in the policy document is therefore someone who promotes teaching and learning and continuously ensures an inspiring and happy environment in which children thrive. This notion requires understanding how nursery workers have been governed as well as the considerable amount of self-work involved. Dean (2010) suggests that situating the notion of ethics within a framework of governmentality is important for governmentality to be concerned with not only practices of governing others but also practices of the self.

Foucault (2001) argues that it is the concept of governmentality that makes it possible to bring out the freedom of the subject and its relationship to others, and this, he argues, is what constitutes ethical work (promoting teaching and providing a happy environment, for example). These practices are not invented by the individual but by society, culture, and social groups (Foucault, 2001). In casting this shift towards the relationship of the self to itself and others, such as children and their parents, Foucault (1988) stresses this relationship as a continual process of negotiation that needs to be seen as important rather than the codes of behaviour themselves. However, in terms of the EYFS framework that nursery workers must follow in order to demonstrate that they are professionals, it produces a set of behavioral codes that require them to meet government and thus parent expectations. The importance of these expectations is that they go beyond an engagement with ethics and establish a set of competencies or capabilities to which nursery workers must aspire. This approach can be traced to the four areas of development, as these areas were used as tools for assessment and data collection, which were then used to measure children's "school readiness" (Trevarthen, 2011; Moss, 2017), rather than guide nursery workers on how to best work with children.

The regulation and inspection under Ofsted heightened the fact that the early years provision was centralized leaving little space for the nursery workers' creativity as well as the danger of reducing professional autonomy (Fairchild and Mikuska, 2021). As a result, the concept of the "ideal" was restricted to government vision. In such a policy context, there is another danger, namely that nursery workers' good practice, children's development, and emotional well-being are measured as 'outcomes', and evidence-based against externally prescribed standards and benchmarks to ensure that services are worth the investments (Moss, 2019).

The high-profile policy attention was not only aimed at the ECEC workforce but also to serve particular political agendas, such as improving employability by providing childcare support to working parents and outcomes for children to tackle disadvantage (Fairchild et al., 2022). The ECEC workforce was, therefore, constructed as

the means by which the government can achieve its vision. They have been given a central role to secure for children the "best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfill their potential" (DfE, 2021:5) and to educate them in an "appropriate" and "good" way, and that is listed in the EYFS (DfE, 2021).

Methodology

Since this research was undertaken within the qualitative paradigm, the aim was not to generalise but to illuminate and understand the complex issues of life experiences. In order to recruit an appropriate sample group for the qualitative study, an Early Years Network Officer at the Local Authority was approached, who disseminated invitations to participants. As expected, most of the participants who came forward were White British females in various positions: managers, deputy managers, room leaders, and practitioners. In total, twenty-two participants were interviewed. The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed for in-depth discussion of specific topics. For example, among other important topics, this method gave a platform to question and explore in more depth the issue of the staff-to-child ratio and the way in which the new EYFS (DfE, 2021) was understood.

Data Analysis

The data was thematically analyzed, and this section of the paper begins with an examination of (i) the relationship between the nursery worker and how policy documents mandated them, followed by an examination of (ii) how nursery workers understand and follow the policy when discussing their nursery work, as revealed by interview findings.

1. Relationship between the nursery worker and policy documents

The pedagogical debate between formal education and play-based learning has been a much-debated topic in England. The anxiety about the "schoolification" of young children among nursery workers has been raised by many, such as Trevarthen (2011) and Moss (2017, 2019). The "school readiness" agenda was evident in the EYFS (DfE, 2021), as it states that "*Children must be given access to a wide range of reading materials (books, poems, and other written materials) to ignite their interest*" (p. 8), and "*when assessing communication, language, and literacy skills, practitioners must assess children's skills in English*" (p. 9). In such a policy context, there is a danger of viewing nursery workers' good practice, children's development, and emotional well-being through measured outcomes. The evidence-based nursery practice is measured against externally prescribed standards and benchmarks to ensure that ECEC services are worth the investment. "Measuring" children's outcomes disregards

the uniqueness of the individual child and may neglect the cultural, linguistic, and other heritage valued by their parents.

Foucault's (1988) theorisation suggests that these kinds of activities of nursery workers lead to the construction of nursery workers' own subjectivity through a constant reflection about themselves as someone who adheres to the EYFS (DfE, 2021) guidance. This reflection necessitates that nursery workers monitor, test, improve, and transform their own professional practice. In this sense, the EYFS framework "tells" the nursery workers how to conduct themselves to be 'good' in order to achieve the best outcomes for the children in their care. This can refer to the achievement of (or striving to achieve) a certain mode of being that contains the characteristics of an individual's notion of the ethical subject and the ways in which the nursery worker cannot choose the way they behave but are 'mandated' by the imperatives of the policy document (Foucault, 2003). Foucault further argued that it is through these active professional practices that the self is not invented by the individual but by society, culture, and social groups. Therefore, the ways in which nursery workers contest and respond to the EYFS are based on the legal requirements to be followed, as well as on the expectations of children, parents, and nursery workers.

Furthermore, Dean's (2010: 42) concept of "the technical (or technical) aspect of government" shapes a specific body of knowledge. "Techne" in this sense refers to the EYFS, which leads to insisting on a certain type of identity for nursery workers, one that "passively" follows the statutory guidance. This kind of approach draws attention away from the value and importance of reflection as a critical thinking tool when evaluating and shaping nursery practice. In this sense, the focus is on the production of evidence from workplace activities, such as nurseries, to demonstrate skill. This is the "technical competence" discourse of nursery workers; this is what Moss (2006: 32) called "nursery workers as technicians."

1. How nursery workers understand and follow the policy

In this study, the people who took part were asked to describe and explain how they saw their work in terms of policy. Frequent reflections were made in reference to relevant qualifications as well as the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2021) framework, suggesting that by following the statutory guidance, their practice is important. The wider assumption is that relevant higher education qualifications produce a *professional* nursery worker (Miller, 2008). The EYFS (DfE, 2021) states that *the manager must hold at least a full and relevant level 3 qualification, and at least half of all other staff must hold at least a full and relevant level 2 qualification (p.21)*. The interpretation of this guidance reflects the numerous comments made about the nursery workers' qualification level. Several participants described a nursery worker as a "good professional" even though they did not have a relevant qualification. For example, one person spoke highly of one of the nursery workers despite not having relevant qualifications:

She's the most amazing practitioner. Like, you know, a very creative person, so it's really sad that she was "stopped" from having a qualification she really wanted. I know it's probably been told a thousand times over across the country, but, you know, these people who are making a decision in their office are not necessarily seeing how absurd and ludicrous and illogical it is sometimes. Because when you see somebody so fantastic with children who's actually being held back from developing their career because of not being able to process mental arithmetic questions fast enough, it's really very sad and silly.

Similarly, another participant explained how much she wanted to have a degree, but due to her diagnosis of being dyslexic, her dream was never fulfilled. She said:

I didn't pass the exam. I went and tried again, but I didn't achieve it because of my dyslexia. I just don't do very well in exams, and this exam was three hours long. I was so scared of doing it again; I don't want to fail, and I don't like failing. I was a little down, but I'm fine now.

In both individual cases, there was a sense of further professional development through gaining a qualification. Fairchild et al. (2022) suggested that qualification increases quality and outcomes for children. What was not highlighted in their work, however, as the above examples illustrate, is that for some nursery workers, it is not possible to achieve their potential and their aspirations due to individual learning difficulties. For these two nursery workers, the ways in which the ECEC qualification was designed meant that career opportunities through this channel were not possible. Instead of providing alternative methods for gaining the qualification, the two cases mentioned can be conceptualized in relation to the ways in which individuals seek to transform themselves. In the second extract, for example, by convincing herself that "I am fine now," she indicates self-work to cope with the failure and with possible future failures. This self-control is one feature of governmentality where the "autonomous individual's" capacity for self-control is linked to the forms of political or educational rule, such as the ways in which examination takes place. In this sense, the individuals' "thought" processes and how they operate within the organised ways of doing "*shape and reshape the "truth" in social, cultural, and political practices*" (Foucault, 2001: 27). This means that in both cases, the individuals governed themselves according to what they saw as "true." In this case, their 'truth' is that the desired qualification cannot be obtained due to learning difficulties, causing disappointment; however, this did not prevent them from working in the nursery. Their examples also indicated that qualification was not necessary to do their job well.

In one account, he said this about the nursery worker, which is another example of how he interpreted the policy:

I think ideally professionalism would be more similar to "good," but it's very hard to define because professionalism is meant to be agreed on by everybody,

whereas "good" can't ever be agreed on by everybody because we are all individuals with our own subjective perceptions of what "good" practice is.

In this quote, some distinctive differences were made between professionalism as defined by the government and being a professional. There is a recognition of the participant's subjective approach to "good," but it also denies the existence of the idealistic approach to professional nursery work. Statutory requirements and guidance are central to this participant's understanding of professionalism, where "professionalism is meant to be agreed on by everybody."

As stated before, the statutory guidance is that the nursery manager should hold at least a level 3 qualification (DfE, 2021). Another participant expressed her belief that obtaining a degree, in addition to the level 3 qualification she already possesses, would increase her knowledge and ability to successfully run the nursery, with the hope that obtaining a degree would make her feel more respected, providing validation of her knowledge.

I do not feel like I know enough as an NVQ level 3 qualified manager, which is why I want to do the foundation degree and then try to gain the Early Years Teacher status, which will show and validate my knowledge and experience and really make them more valuable.

In this account, references were made to the need to increase subject knowledge. By doing so, this participant believes this would have a positive impact on children's outcomes. This is what Melhuish and Gardiner's (2018) research showed: that with an aspiration to hold a higher professional qualification, a positive impact on the nursery staff and services can be produced. Self-reflection indicates that the reason for studying is to execute her role better and to be valued more. Another participant, for example, completed a higher education degree. The reason for this was that, through reflecting on professional practice, it was felt that the degree would give confidence in knowing what to say to parents and what to do in difficult situations. It was said:

Recognizing that I lacked the breadth and depth of professional knowledge required to resolve issues prompted me to apply for the degree program. I first started working in the nursery about 20 years ago, and I only recently had the desire to further my training. I felt like I had more to prove—not just my own satisfaction at having a degree—because childcare has been viewed as a simple job that anyone could do.

This account shows that people working in ECEC need more recognition. Furthermore, Sue's account also illustrates what Dalli and Urban (2010) have said that specific knowledge leads to professionalization, which in turn leads to high-quality nursery work.

Some participants, however, expressed their frustration after achieving a higher qualification, as they realised that there was little or no prospect of promotion. For example, one participant said that both of her managers "are only NVQ level 3 quali-

fied" and noted that she is more qualified than any other employee at the nursery where she is working. This participant held a higher education degree. She also said that her motive to study was based on her individualistic reasons:

I felt I wanted a new challenge. I had a broad range of experience in my early years of practice, but completing the Foundation Degree has provided me with real breadth and depth of knowledge and built my confidence.

In the same way, another participant said that getting a higher education degree gave her more confidence, saying:

I didn't realise how much my practice improved during and after the degree, just in how I dealt with day-to-day things. I think it's my confidence that has grown more than anything, and I think this is why we probably improved the last Ofsted inspection that we had just over a year ago. Whereas the previous one was satisfactory, this time it was good in all areas.

Both extracts show how participants experienced a growth in confidence and competence as they progressed through the higher education course. This reflects a wide range of research that suggests higher qualification improves competence (Fairchild et al., 2022) and, with increasing competence, good quality service. This was rewarded with an improved inspection result.

Another key factor found prominently in the data was a sense that workload had, over a period of time, intensified. This was primarily attributed to a cultural shift in nursery provision that demanded greater evidence of effectiveness (for example, increased record-keeping and monitoring, planning, and preparation for Ofsted inspections). This process has been extensively debated in the field of education (Ball 2003), with commentators concluding that such reforms reduce educators' autonomy, implying that they become preoccupied with adherence to standards and regulatory processes, the formal part of their work. For the nursery workers, meeting the formal part of their role has caused an issue as to how to meet the staff: child ratio. The EYFS (DfE, 2021: 28) clearly sets out the staff: child ratio that needs to be followed, stating that *'staffing arrangements must meet the needs of all children and ensure their safety.'* However, rigid adherence to ratios has proved to be challenging as the nursery has to ensure that they have the correct number of qualified staff to care for children, cover sickness, annual leave, or staff's professional development. Further difficulties arise when nursery workers need to attend to tasks that leave the other member of staff alone, such as food preparation, nappy changing, or completing the increased record-keeping and strategic planning preparation for inspections. This can result in a failure to maintain the appropriate staff: child ratio. As a consequence, providers are caught between providing the best care for the children under the circumstances and meeting the criteria of the EYFS and Ofsted. The following quotes illuminate this.

It is really important to meet the ratio, but sometimes when people call in sick or are on holidays, it is really hard. I became concerned when three employees called in sick. I mean it; I really panicked.

I constantly have to update my policies to ensure that the nursery is running smoothly and that we are meeting the ratio. We have to be ready for Ofsted to show that we do everything that is required.

Both stories can be linked to Foucault's (1988) and Dean's (2010) concept of "conduct of conduct"—how the actors within the nursery are subject to the EYFS (DfE, 2021) framework. Conduct in their stories refers to the behaviour and actions by which they follow the set of standards and by which their behaviour can be judged. When this action is interrupted, however, by unforeseen events, such as a staff shortage, the staff: child ratio cannot be met, and the staff can panic.

Furthermore, by saying things like "it's really important to meet the ratio" or "we have to be ready for Ofsted," both participants are reinforcing the government goals that prioritize nursery workers. In this working environment, nursery workers are positioned as people who will provide quality service by being 'Ofsted ready' and by meeting the staff: child ratio. This was mentioned by another participant, who said:

I'm trying to understand what needs to be done, and I'm trying to get out of the room to do the paperwork, but sometimes it is a nightmare. I have to cover sickness and staff shortages and monitor the room to meet the ratio.

The regulatory function of the policy organizes the nursery workers' everyday experiences and their actions, leading to anxiety and emotional burnout. This is when the emotional implications for nursery workers become a reality (Mikuska & Fairchild, 2020). Similarly, it was said that in order to be ready for Ofsted, certain rules needed to be followed (completed paperwork, meeting the staff: child ratio, for example). Urban et al. (2012) stated that this argument goes back to policy making, in which the individual nursery worker has been hardly reached for their view, despite being the main actor who works towards realising the statutory EYFS (DfE, 2021) framework.

As Foucault (1988) suggested, the individual, in this case the nursery worker, is transformed into the subject, where the transformations take place outside of their work. He went on to say that this is a different type of power dynamic in which:

Individual practices [of oneself] are not, however, something that the individual creates. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and that are proposed, suggested, and imposed on him by his culture, his society, and his social group. (Foucault 1988: 122)

While Foucault sees technologies of self as having an effect on the individual, where they have "*transformed themselves in order to attain a certain type of happiness*" (Foucault, 1988: 18), the ways in which some nursery workers act and react in relation to an event (not meeting the ratio, for example) transform the individual. In order to meet standard frameworks, this transformation is accomplished through increased paperwork or documentation of professional practice. The rationale is that inspecting and

measuring quality inevitably leads to better outcomes (improved professional standards and quality provision, and hence "school readiness" for children). Such cultures of accountability are expressions of "governmentality" (Foucault 1988), which prompt the use of assessment data within a culture of accountability that allows the centralization of control over local practice through largely self-monitoring responses.

Conclusion

This paper investigated the EYFS (DfE, 2021) statutory framework using Dean's (2010) and Foucault's (1988) ideas of governmentality and the ways in which nursery workers interpreted the policy in England. It highlighted how the policy "made" the nursery workers act and "feel" (Fairchild and Mikuska, 2021) in certain ways in order to fulfill their role. While the majority of participants discussed the importance of the qualification in terms of professional recognition, there is some confusion about the EYFS (DfE, 2021) framework, which created tension in terms of the appreciation of specialized ECEC knowledge. While the framework was welcomed, the sentiments surrounding the "overdue" framework were mitigated by the participants' perception that the reform had resulted in demands to alter their practice, sometimes in seemingly unreasonable ways.

While the original idea of the EYFS implementation was to support the nursery workers, there was very limited guidance on how to do this and what skills they required to address seemingly "needy" children (Osgood, 2012). The description of nursery workers in the policy document, therefore, is someone who promotes teaching and learning and continuously ensures an inspiring and happy environment in which children thrive. This notion requires an understanding of how nursery workers have been governed as well as the need to recognise that there is a considerable amount of continuous personal development that nursery workers face. As Dean's (2010) framework suggested, policy heavily influences the technical aspects of government and the types of knowledge required to be a professional nursery worker (Miller, 2008). The qualification was problematised in order to enable different understandings of how participants' performances are currently shaped. In many ways, the application of top-down measures designed to enhance the quality of nursery provision was viewed as inherently benign and overwhelmingly positive. It can be argued that there has to be a place for complexity, values, flexibility, subjectivity, and multiple perspectives regarding what is considered a professional practice. Qualification gives specialised knowledge to those participants who managed to get their degree; this has had a positive impact both on professional practice and personal satisfaction. Narratives revealed that there was a notion to move from the label of "babysitter" to a more professional role, which can be achieved by obtaining a relevant qualification.

ПОЛИТИКЕ ЕНГЛЕСКОГ ОБРАЗОВАЊА И СТАРАЊА О РАНОМ ДЕТИЊСТВУ

Апстракт

Овај рад истражује окружење и даје преглед Политике енглеског образовања и старања о раном детињству (*English Early Childhood Education and Care*). Увод у историју политике енглеског образовања и старања о раном детињству, као и развој законског оквира *Early Years Foundation Stage*, 2008. године представља значајну прекретницу енглеског образовања и старања о раном детињству у Енглеској. Интервјуисано је 22 радника у вртићима из различитих окружења да би сазнали шта мисле, знају и како ова политика утиче на њихову професионалну праксу. „Владина“ идеја аутора Fouscalt & Dean (1988, 1999) коришћена је за анализу података, пошто она нуди начин за креирање критичке анализе енглеског образовања и старања о раном детињству, а која утиче на децу раног узраста. Анализа препознаје јак и често стресан однос радника у вртићу са владином политиком и наглашава како су политички документи налагали њихов рад. Студија такође открива да упркос владиним прописима и смерницама, већина учесника одлучује да настави са својим професионалним развојем и упише студије за високо образовање.

Кључне речи: квалитативно истраживање, Fouscalt, владавина, политика образовања и старања о раном детињству

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