

# **Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care: Insider Perspectives**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education

by

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# **Abstract**

This research investigates the intricate landscape of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), seeking to explore the factors that influence good leadership through the perspective of fifteen professionals. The study navigates the contested terrain of ECEC's purpose, acknowledging diverse perspectives influenced by contextual factors. Current literature suggests multifaceted notions of leadership in ECEC, encompassing pedagogical, entrepreneurial, and social justice dimensions. Recognising the need to capture the unique essence of the sector, this research employs a participatory methodological framework, merging feminist-pragmatism, praxeology, and phenomenology.

Through a lens of experience-centered narrative research, this research unfolds the collective purpose of ECEC and its leadership, exploring the responsibilities vested in all stakeholders. The chosen methodological framework fosters trust and openness, allowing participants to share nuanced stories, contributing to the identification of layers of meaning. Thematic analysis reveals essential insights, paving the way for a deeper understanding of leadership challenges and good leadership within the ECEC workforce.

Research findings advocate for the dissolution of barriers and the fostering of collaboration and envisions a future where ECEC stakeholders possess enhanced professional confidence. Such empowerment, coupled with a collective identity, holds the potential to cultivate a more competent and cohesive ECEC sector for generations to come.

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# **List of Abbreviations**

APPG – All Party Parliamentary Group  
CAC – Central Advisory Council  
CA – Contractual Accountability  
CPD – Continuous Professional Development  
CWDC – Children’s Workforce Development Council  
DSG – Dedicated Schools Grant  
DCLG – Department for Communities and Local Government  
DCSF – Department for Children, Schools, and Families  
DfE – Department for Education  
DfEE – Department for Education and Employment  
ECEC – Early Childhood Education and Care  
EPPE – Effective Provision of Preschool Education  
EYFS – Early Years Foundation Stage  
EYNFF – Early Years National Funding Formula  
EYP – Early Years Professionals  
EYSFF – Early Years Single Funding Formula  
EYT – Early Years Teachers  
INSET – In-Service Training Day  
NCFE – Northern Council for Further Education  
NCTL – National College for Teaching and Leadership  
NNEB – National Nursery Examination Board  
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development  
Ofsted – Office for Standards in Education  
ORF – Official Recontextualisation Field  
PRF – Professional Recontextualisation Field  
PVI – Private, Voluntary, and Independent  
QTS – Qualified Teacher Status  
RA – Responsive Accountability



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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background

This research intends to explore what influences good leadership in ECEC, from the perspective of fifteen participants, that all work in the ECEC sector. Working in ECEC can mean different things depending on factors such as place of work, be it as a home-based educator, a large private nursery group, a maintained nursery, and others. These places of work are influenced by policy in different ways, and this coupled with different factors on an individual level too, for example level of experience or qualification. Therefore, the context of ECEC for individuals is contributed to by a cocktail of factors and offering insight into this is the purpose of this chapter before I go more deeply into my research within this context.

Gibbs (2021) suggests that we do not yet understand how effective leadership emerges and develops in ECEC and that this is compromising the development of effective leadership, and consequently children's rights to high-quality provision. This is primarily attributed to complex workforce issues, inadequate understandings of leadership and insufficient preparation for leadership roles, as well as few opportunities for professional development (Alchin, Arthur, and Woodrow 2019).

There is a contested purpose of ECEC, which Morton (2022) suggests is fuelled by hard-to-understand and fragmented qualification routes, a turbulent policy context (Lewis and West, 2017) and a wide range of providers in a childcare market that lacks parity and transparency (Archer and Oppenheimer, 2021). These complexities in the context of ECEC in England make leadership realities turbulent and challenging. Consequently, some believe the sector is on the brink of collapse (Berry, 2022). Sakr and Bonetti (2021, p.3) suggest that the sector in England is much like early years sectors around the world, in that it "is complex, diverse, and fragmented" and that "the complexity impacts on discourses of professionalism, how the workforce is perceived and treated, and the quality of EY education". Archer and Oppenheim (2021) describe the current situation as a dysfunctional market failing the children in disadvantaged areas that need it most and suggest this is a result of piecemeal rapid growth of the

sector over the past 25 years, with a failure to meet objectives of funding, access, and take-up in a comprehensive way.

The ECEC sector in England is made up of multiple different types of provision offering a range of services that are open to under 5-year-olds that can be financed either privately by parents or using government funding, often it is a messy combination of the two (see section 2.2.3 for a full exploration of funding). A major shift in the past 25 years has been the state's intention to create, then drive the growth of the childcare market. It could be suggested that this market has more recently become dominated by large nursery groups. These groups and other Private, Voluntary, and Independent (PVI) providers have more autonomy to react to policy initiatives and are more likely to survive, if not thrive relatively speaking, in the current policy context. This is because they can charge for elements of their service like food or visitors and can offer stretched funding to encourage parents who need all-year-round care to pay more themselves. Whereas the maintained part of the sector is more at risk of possible closures, mostly due to financial constraints (Hoskins, Bradbury, and Fogarty (2020). The DfE show their awareness of this momentum in their 2015 report that said the entrepreneurialism agenda coupled with reduced regulation has stimulated growth in the market (DfE, 2015) alongside this there has been simultaneous closures of maintained settings reported in government statistics (DfE, 2018).

There is a need to set out where the childcare market is today and to question the inevitability of this market perpetuating. I will explore the development of the childcare market from its disjointed and turbulent roots, and the consequences of this growth perpetuating today under current political conditions and the impact this has on the workforce and leaders. I will then set out my background in relation to this research and the aims of this research leading to the contribution to knowledge it intends to make.

### **1.1.2 History of the ECEC Context**

The ECEC sector, as we see it today in England, is built from the accumulation of fragments of different visions that developed over time since the sector was demarcated with the school age being set at 5 years old in England in the Education

Act. 1870 (Stephens, 1999). There was little reported societal or government interest in this age group initially, particularly not from an educational perspective. What interest there was, was from a health perspective. It wasn't until the wartime when the sector experienced attention and ensuing, yet piecemeal, growth. An overview is provided in the policy section of the literature review (see section 2.2.2) but notably, one debate emerging prior to WW2 was the tension between McMillan and Owen (Margaret McMillan and Grace Owen). This started around the inception of the Nursery School Association in the 1920s and was centred around the fundamental purpose of the sector and continues to shape the ECEC sector today woven deeply into the education vs care tension.

There was a report titled 'The case for nursery schools' (1929) (Holmeley, 1929), that could have been written today given its contents. It was ultimately decided by this report committee that nursery schools should be in the most deprived areas as they were better equipped for the related challenges, and cheaper nursery classes would be preferred in less deprived areas, with lesser challenges. Embedded in this discourse of how the maintained provision of ECEC should be organised is the debate between the 'heart' and care aspects of ECEC provision, as advocated for originally by McMillan, versus the 'head' and educational aspects of ECEC provision advocated for originally by Owen, in other words, the education vs care tension.

Owen was more akin to the approach advocated for by government whereas McMillan was staunchly against government initiatives at the time. Despite their differences, both women, according to Koven (1993), used maternalistic imagery and arguments to support their visions for ECEC provision but warned that these visions cannot occur in an ideological or political vacuum. McMillan had an activist background fuelled by an intolerance for inequality and heavily informed by her religious roots (Jarvis and Liebovich, 2015). This lack of pedagogic background proved pivotal in her later battle with Owen who had an academic background more in keeping with the Nursery School Association's status quo at the time. Ultimately, as stated by Jarvis and Liebovich (2015):

“Owen’s ‘head’ and McMillan’s ‘heart’ oriented approaches, created an incompatibility that marred the fledgling association’s attempts to create a cohesive national policy for British nurseries.” (p.925)

This lack of cohesion in the sector led to remediation being advocated for ever since, however, the reality has been the ad hoc development the nursery enthusiasts had hoped to avoid (Palmer, 2016). In other words, this tension has made the reality in ECEC less desirable and the inability to see the sector as one, by those in it, has done more harm than good. It is reasonable to suggest that these mistakes continued throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and still do so today. Even being funded under the same policy was not enough for the sector to focus on its similarities rather than its differences and many papers more recently still write in divisive language regarding the provision of ECEC and the Childcare Market (Campbell-Barr and Akademi, 2014; Penn, 2019; Burgess-Macey, Kelly, and Ouvry, 2021).

### **1.1.2 Contemporary ECEC Context**

There are currently eleven types of ECEC provisions that strive to fulfil the needs for families with children 0-5 years old in England. This results in a disparate and complex landscape for leaders to navigate that brings with it many tensions and difficulties that policy has perpetuated. To explore good leadership as I intend to in this research, an awareness of each type of provision being lead is needed, therefore a summary of provisions available are as follows, in no particular order:

#### **Maintained**

1. Children’s centres – wide range of purposes to meet family’s needs often in the most deprived areas.
2. Reception classes – first year of primary school at 4 years old, term time only under the school’s Ofsted registration.
3. Nursery schools – separate pre-school for children from 3 years old. Children may attend for half a day and term time only, with some extensions available.
4. Nursery classes – class within a primary school for children from 3 years old.

## Private, Voluntary, and Independent (PVI)

### *Private*

5. Day Nursery – centre-based provision sometimes from 3 months old, can be a single or large group of nurseries operating primarily for profit.

### *Voluntary*

6. Play groups – usually part-time for children from 2 years old, they don't have to be registered with Ofsted and are usually seen more as a drop-in stay and play activity. These are increasingly being referred to as Pre-schools now and are registering with Ofsted to be able to avail of funding and childcare voucher schemes.
7. Charity led – Settings often run like day nurseries but for non-profit by charity organisations and are often term-time only and called pre-schools.

### *Independent*

8. Nurseries in private schools – owned privately operating term time only under the schools Ofsted registration.
  9. Reception classes in private schools– first year of a private primary school at 4 years old term time only, under the schools Ofsted registration.
- 
10. Home-based childcare – Ofsted registered professional day carers looking after children on domestic premises, usually offering good flexibility. Also referred to as childminders but this has been seen as derogatory to some.

The DfE Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers Technical report (2018, p.6) introduced for the first time “group-based provisions” as “childcare providers registered with Ofsted and operating in non-domestic premises” and “school-based provisions” as “nursery and reception provision in schools”, most importantly without separating out independent and maintained schools. Furthermore, references such as “sessional care” meaning out of school care like holiday clubs, but also pre-school and play groups offer “sessional care”. Further confusions come from that nursery schools can be referred to as sessional and be called Children Centres. Children Centres have also been referred to as Sure Start centres or Early Excellence Centres and it is increasingly possible for private day nurseries to operate within a children's centre too. This provides a snapshot of the nomenclature issues pervading the sector.

The childcare sector has increased in value in recent years. This growth has been linked to two 'super' groups of nurseries, who keep increasing in size and both have over five times the number of provisions than the group third in the largest group list, and their growth continues. This is despite the ongoing underfunding and recruitment crisis (Gaunt, 2019). In monetary terms, the sector was valued at approximately £4.9 billion in 2013-14 and it has been clear that a major goal of the conservative government was to ensure the childcare market is promoted and remains healthy (Gyimah, 2015b). This is a significant increase from the £2.66 billion in 2000, and a quadrupling since 1990 (Ball and Vincent, 2005). More recent reports available from 2018 shows further growth to be valued at £5.5 billion and then again, a rise to £6.7 billion in 2020. This is a confounding statistic as despite this growth with financials, places available have plateaued if not decreased (LaingBuisson, 2018) which has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which may also lead to some damning consequences for the value of the sector. Although, the roughly 7% per year growth relates to increased maternal participation in the workforce and this may not change because of COVID-19, keeping childcare as a must have rather than a luxury (LaingBuisson, 2020)

It is interesting to explore how this money translates in provisions, as there have been winners and losers in this monetary value of the sector. Previous data indicate PVI provisions have grown from providing 19% of the sector (Gillie and Allen, 1996) to 82% in the space of just 24 years (Ceeda, 2018) and this would not be possible without many factors supporting the shift in the sector at a macro level, alluded to in both the policy and funding sections previously. In line with this overall shift, comparable government data from 2005 through to 2010, show an overall decline in 'early years' provision but an increase in 'childcare' provision, which was recorded with these specific labels at the time. Most notably in the childcare provision part of the sector, *active* home-based childcare individuals have declined from 57,900 to 47,400 (despite 57,900 being registered as of 2010) and full day care nurseries increased by 4,000. Conversely, in the early years provision section, nursery schools declined but nursery classes increased. This is in terms of number of providers, not places, it is unlikely the increase in individual nursery classes would negate the decline imposed by nursery

school place reduction given their relative capacities (Brind, Norden, and Oseman, 2012)).

The two 'super' groups, Busy Bees and Bright Horizons, account for 8% of the whole childcare market and there is increasing international interest in acquiring UK nurseries. A consequence of this is that by 2018 individual nurseries had declined by 20% and home-based childcare individuals have declined by 27% (LaingBuisson, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic will influence more recent data which is not readily available at the time of writing. The most recent statistics available show that Sure Start centres, despite initial rapid growth from their inception in 2003 had continued to decline year on year since their peak of 3,620 in 2011 (DfE, 2019), 2018 to 2019 is the first year this decline has not continued, with the number remaining at 3050. This may show signs of resilience from this important part of the sector as explicated in detail in Hoskins *et al.* (2020). The nomenclature issues are ubiquitous here with other DfE statistics not referring explicitly to Sure Start centres instead referring broadly to 'school-based' and 'group-based' providers. Interestingly, this data suggests both parts of the sector have increased, suggesting an immediate turnaround in the reduction in places suggested by LaingBuisson's report (2018). A comparison between the 2018 and 2019 DfE report is very challenging due to the omission of before and after school places in the 2019 report, the reason for this is not made clear. This is another example of the nuances and inconsistencies that need to be considered during analysis of government data on numbers of providers.

In the comparisons, group-based providers, made up of the PVI sector primarily has increased by 368 places in 2019 compared to 2018 with nearly all that growth being in the private day nursery part of the sector (DfE, 2019). There is a concern with home-based childcare individuals' numbers decreasing, particularly as not all registered providers are active as reflected in 2010 data. Their numbers dropped by 1573 from 40,940 in 2018 to 39,367 in 2019. The most recent data produced by the DfE (2022) indicates the total number of providers fell by 3% from 2021-2022 and comparing 2022 numbers to 2018 there has been a fall of 10%.

The concern around maintained nursery school places was the focus for the work of Hoskins *et al.* (2020). This paper uses data arising from detailed interviews with



seventeen staff across four nursery schools and report on maintained nursery school as being the 'jewel in the crown' of early years provisions with a higher quality and wider range of services available anywhere else in the sector. Drawing on the work of Campbell-Barr (2018) and Murray (2017) it was suggested that funding arrangements were only extending gaps between the advantaged and disadvantaged children and additionally, nursery schools were closing in the areas that need them most. Minister Lucy Powell led a backbench debate around the sustainability of nursery schools claiming the perfect storm had now hit as a combination of funding changes, inequalities in overheads and local authority support being cut, and it is only set to worsen (House of Commons Backbench Business, 2019). Hoskins *et al.* (2020) go on to suggest that without much-needed supplementary funding, staff and quality levels are set to reduce and a false economy of savings will be experienced as there will inevitably be increased spending in other areas of the public sectors to make up for the lost frontline services nursery schools provide.

This lack of funding raises concerns when considering claims that any pursued expansion of the PVI sector (indirectly through stimulating the childcare market or otherwise), provision should be modelled on policy and practice in nursery schools, nursery classes and integrated centres providing education and care (West, 2006). The lack of funding concern is augmented by Penn (2019) claiming private nurseries are not concerned to share good practice and instead see this as a market advantage and less inclined to support the development of the sector more widely. All the concerns around lack of funding suggests an unstable future for the ECEC sector in England with maintained provision declining and a more market driven private sector increasing. Despite this gloomy picture, recent government data from inspections suggest that whilst home-based childcare individuals' numbers have decreased, the overall numbers of childcare places have risen over the past year thanks to growth in places on non-domestic premises. Additionally, more than 9 in 10 providers were judged good or outstanding which is 10% more than 5 years ago (DfE, 2019).

It could be argued that this is all reflective of the neo-liberal market philosophy that dominated welfare provisions in England (Powell, 2007; Penn, 2012) and has blurred the lines in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century aims of England's National Childcare Strategy between child outcomes and parent employment (DfE, 2013a). More recently drawing on

elements of human capital, ECEC has become “all things to all people, equal opportunity for maternal employment, tackling child poverty and social inclusion, improving school-readiness and supporting child development” (Campbell-Barr, 2018, p.40). This exemplifies why confusions exist in the sector and reinforces the possible presence of the childcare market in England, which has implications for leadership in the sector.

These complexities and confusions, as well as their consequences, are detailed more in the literature review, and a specific example of a consequence of occupational standards acting to formalise and inculcate neoliberal forms of governmentality and responsibilisation is well articulated by Archer (2021) when considering the ideal ECEC worker. He stated that:

“As a consequence, policy texts frame the ideal early educator as a compliant technician, but also as autonomous, entrepreneurial, self-improving, subject to both vertical and horizontal surveillance (i.e. by both regulators and by peers) and engaged in self-surveillance.” (p.3)

It is hard to comprehend how these facets can operate together as one, with both surveillance and autonomy operating at the same time, with Ofsted playing a close regulatory and controlling role, whilst the workforce is encouraged to have confidence in their own knowledge of children and learning by setting leaders. Similarly, Oosterhoff, Oenema-Mostert and Minnart (2020, p.138) state that “early childhood teachers worldwide feel that their ability to act according to their professional knowledge and values is constrained”, often this is due to accountability pressures arising from a desire to ensure and improve educational quality. This is strongly connected to context and the related policy work of individuals when enacting policy, which can vary significantly (Ball, Maguire, Braun, and Hoskins, 2011).

### 1.1.3 Leadership in ECEC

Surveillance versus autonomy is not the only tension present that contributes to the lives of the ECEC workforce. There is also tension between children in their ‘golden age’ to be nurtured in a safe and developmental environment – to be cared for (Moss and Petrie, 2005), versus a continued influence and interferences coming from government in terms of policy, regulation, and funding in a move towards equal access

and school readiness for all children – to be educated. These tensions highlight the importance of ECEC for both future life chances for all children and in actively compensating for socio-economic disadvantage (Hoskins, *et al.*, 2020), that arguably depend on both being cared for and educated, in equal measure (Fogarty, 2020). They also consequently influence strongly what it means to be a good leader, which has played a strong part in the motivation for wanting to explore factors influencing good leadership more in this research.

Existing literature on leadership in ECEC echoes confusions presented here around purpose, underscoring concerns of insecure and insufficient funding for settings and low status of the sector despite the key role it plays in children's lives. There is a paucity of empirical research available that explores these challenges for ECEC leaders, as has been widely noted by others (Rodd, 1996; Murray and MacDowall, 2013; Woodrow and Busch, 2008; Cohen, Moss, and Petrie, 2018; Nicholson, Kuhl, and Maniates, 2018). Existing research could do more to consider the voices of workforce and better cater for the composition of ECEC, namely its feminine, non-hierarchical, care-orientated foundations. In other words, there is space for an exploration of understandings of good leadership in ECEC literature, that keeps the workforce and context central. (see section 2.3.6 for literature around this). Interestingly, Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016, p.40) suggest in that “the plethora of reports and heightened public and political interest in the quality of leadership in the sector have been at odds with the daily experience of early years leaders”. In the same text, they state that ‘often leadership is seen as a feature of quality early years provision, but what this actually means theoretically or practically is not explored’ (p.1). Therefore, this research seeks to explore the intricacies of leadership to gain a holistic picture of good leadership through constructing narratives with the workforce around their experiences of leadership and good leadership (which is highly contested) that build on their understanding and experiences of purpose in ECEC.

The motivation to develop good leadership in the sector is not new (Rodd, 1996) and Gibbs (2019) suggests it is an ongoing battle and organisations still do not prioritise leadership development. Despite research like Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016, p.47) stating that knowledge about the impact of quality leadership on provision has “led to demands for improvement in the leadership capacity of individuals at all levels

of an organisation". Nuttall (2016) suggests that leadership development initiatives must be set within a systems approach, looking at the broader landscape in and around the ECEC sector, with clear connections between leadership and purpose.

This relates to another ongoing issue that has been grappled with by Urban, Vandebroek, Van Laere, Lazzari, and Peeters (2012) and I seek to add to (see section 5.4 for a full exploration of this). Urban *et al.* (2012) explore competent systems in ECEC which develop reciprocal relationships between stakeholders, "to help individuals realise their capability to develop responsible and responsive practices" (p.21) and is a continuous process that involves both learning and critical reflection. Part of their suggestions included the need for the following key issues to be addressed to be able to enhance the quality of ECEC: adequate public investment, staff/child ratios, working conditions, staff retentions and high share of graduates. However, the reality 10 years on, is that relative investment is dropping with a real term spending per hour for places falling in the last year despite spending around £5.7bn (Britton, Farquharson, and Sibiet 2020), which interestingly is approximately in line with the recommendations suggested by Urban *et al.* (2012) for at least 1% of GDP. Furthermore, considering COVID-19, more allowances for staff to child ratios have been allowed to occur and there is a concerning suggestion there will be more permanent changes to these ratios increasing the number of children that each staff member is permitted to care for (Savage, 2022; Lawler, 2022). On the contrary to increasing ratios, in their recent report for UNICEF, Gromada and Richardson (2021) recommend among other things, that there is an investment in the ECEC workforce, their qualifications and their working conditions. They specifically state low children to staff ratios should be in place to enhance the quality of provision.

If ratios increase, roles will become more intense and retaining staff could become increasingly challenging as they are already regularly leaving the profession to get paid more in restaurants or supermarkets (NDNA, 2019). It is also important to note that the proportion of staff with a Level 3 qualification has fallen from 83% in 2014/15 to 52% in 2018/19 (NDNA, 2019). Therefore, the sector ultimately remains in "a fragmented and confusing picture" (Burgess-Macey *et al.* 2021, p.131) and one that does not reflect the essential work the sector does. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the fragmented state of the sector, with recent literature stating that

ECEC has been comparatively neglected as a policy priority both before and during the pandemic (Neuman and Powers, 2022) and literature around the world has captured the threat COVID-19 has posed to educator well-being in ECEC by worsening existing stressors as well as introducing new ones associated with a global pandemic (Hanno, Gardner, Jones and Lesaux, 2022).

In a recent government white paper, Opportunity for all (DfE, 2022a), the government demonstrates the disconnect between the ECEC and primary phases of the education sector, from their perspective. The lack of clear commitment from the government to the sector does not imbue a sense of confidence and strength in response to the challenges presented previously (see policy section 2.2.2 for more on this) resulting in a challenging context for good leadership in ECEC. There were welcome mentions of increased CPD offerings including an NPQ in ECEC Leadership but no promise of subsequent pay boosts for those achieving this qualification. In response, Early Education (2022) comment that the government should be championing the benefits of ECEC for children, and this should be a central pillar of their levelling up strategy with the investing required to realise it.

## **1.2 My background in relation to the study**

Leading an ECEC provision is a challenging task and one that I have grappled with personally for over five years, providing further motivation for this research to explore what it means to be a good leader in the sector. Whilst this is a relatively short time, I have been on an incredibly steep learning curve which has been necessary as, like the sector more widely, it is in an almost continuous state of change and COVID-19 has brought unique challenges to leading (Fogarty, 2020). Throughout my personal journey I have encountered practical challenges like other leaders in the sector and this thesis is borne out of my curiosity and desire to explore what influences good leadership in ECEC, for the betterment of the provision we can offer children in vital stages of their development as underscored by Urban (2010):

“Care and education for young children and the social institutions we construct around early childhood lie at the very heart of any human society, they define what we are and what we aspire to become as a society.”  
(Urban, 2010, p.2)

Hoskins *et al.* (2020) suggest that there are ongoing and deep-seeded problems in the sector that have been exacerbated by COVID-19. UNICEF's (2021) latest estimate suggesting the pandemic has disrupted 1.6 billion children's education worldwide and 43% of all children under 5 years of age were estimated to be at risk of not achieving their developmental potential (Black, Walker, Fernald, Andersen, DiGirolamo, Lu, McCoy, Fink, Shawar, Shiffman, Devercelli, Wodon, Vargas-Barón and Grantham-McGregor, 2020).

Good leadership is also central to my other role which was the programme lead on the Masters in education at Brunel University as I began this work and is now the Director of Teaching and Learning for the Education Department. Moreover, I teach the leadership and management specialist pathway on the Master's in Education programme and engage regularly with the latest theories and ideas around leadership in education. This stems from a long history of interest in leadership theory and practice and together this all motivates me to continue to be a leader whilst teaching about leadership, and therefore extending my knowledge and understanding of leadership both theoretically and practically. My motivation has been further fuelled by my recent appointment as a Trustee of TACTYC, a charity advocating for the professional development of the sector. Most importantly, the arrival of my two sons during the creation of this thesis has inspired me to contribute to the betterment of the sector in any way I can.

My positionality is unpacked in more detail in the methodology chapter (see section 3.8) but given the closeness I have to the focus of this thesis both practically and theoretically, I offer a foregrounding statement here to set out how I have acknowledged and managed my positionality throughout the creation of this thesis.

In the initial stages my positionality could be seen as a strength, guiding my formation of research questions and my reading to ensure a suitably broad and deep understanding of the context of ECEC in England. Challenges around my positionality grew in the later stages when it came to discussing and analysing my findings, as I had to be constantly cognisant of the reach of my data, to ensure rigour when presenting my findings. Working closely with my supervisors was integral at this stage

to ensure conclusions reached were drawn from my data. An example of this process was the methodological commitment to ensuring participants perspectives were central to this work. Overall, my positionality is underpinned by both academic and practical involvement in ECEC leadership as well as my passion for the ECEC and commitment to exploring other perspectives of what influences good leadership in the sector.

As Andrews (2014, p.10) suggests:

“When we begin to think seriously about the viewpoint of another, we must first confront our own otherness... thus it is that the imagination is not only vital to our attempt to penetrate the meaning-making system of another, but it is employed in our attempt to understand how we are viewed by them. We must imagine how we are imagined”.

I hope participants in this study see this work as an opportunity to be involved in an exploration of what influences good leadership in ECEC from within the sector, as a collaborative process with someone as invested in this work as they are and with a contemporary understanding of what it means to lead in ECEC. Connected to this, like Scacchi (2021), I believe that a completely unbiased view of the research design, methods and data is not practical. It is more about being open-minded and alert to potential issues and adopting a stance from the outside as much as possible and being alert to the influence of the different roles I have, which I explore in more detail in section 3.8.

### **1.3 Aims and Research Questions**

In recent literature, Cumming and Gibson (2020, p.95) ask if England “are on the precipice of a discursive shift which may elevate the worth of the ECEC workforce? Or is the entanglement of inconvenient ‘truths’ too entrenched to traverse?” It is the intention of this thesis to contribute to part of the response to this question, specifically this work seeks to explore the factors influencing good leadership, as leadership is central to any discursive shift for the ECEC workforce, from the perspectives of the 15 ECEC professional. To do this, the three research questions focused on are:

1. What are individuals' working in ECEC lived experiences of the purpose of the sector?
2. What are individuals' working in ECEC lived experiences of leadership in the sector?
3. What are individuals' working in ECEC lived experiences of good leadership in the sector?

My intentions are to explore what influences good leadership in ECEC and to do this I will implement an evidenced and nuanced exploration of purpose and leadership in ECEC that considers the challenges of the policy context of ECEC, as experienced by the participants. The connection between these two lines of questioning, with research question one focusing on purpose and research questions two and three focusing on leadership, is centred on the idea that purpose is part of the foundation for leadership as without a clear sense of purpose leadership is likely to lack clarity and vision. To explore nuanced understandings, individuals' first-hand experiences and impressions of being a member of the ECEC workforce need to be foregrounded. The research questions are designed with this in mind and seek to explore the purposes of the ECEC sector, and the understanding of leadership as perceived by the workforce as a result. Individuals in the ECEC sector often experience similar things, for example funding changes and new Early Years Frameworks. There are however nuances in how individuals live through them and are impact by them. In this thesis the term lived experience is used throughout to capture this nuance and to ensure participants know that these collective experiences, and more importantly how they experience them, matter. The term lived experiences more suitably captures this than or experience alone would because these terms are more limited. Perceptions are someone's awareness of something, and I intend to go deeper than this and similarly experiences are observations of facts which I intend to go beyond with participants. I intend to build on these research questions by operationalising a participatory methodology that includes a combination of feminist-pragmatism epistemology, praxeological and phenomenology. along with narrative research (see chapter 3 for full methodology).



## **1.4 Contribution to Knowledge**

Given the context of ECEC explored so far, adopting a participatory methodology for this exploration of factors influencing good leadership could illuminate nuances of purpose and leadership experience in settings in England, with the perspective of those who work in the sector every day. This methodological approach enables me to explore the lived experiences of the ECEC workforce in relation to what influences good leadership, whilst maintaining an awareness of my own experiences of leadership in ECEC. The distinctiveness of my research is enhanced by my position, as set out earlier in this chapter and in more detail in section 3.8.

I attempt to make sense of what influences good leadership and, through the perspectives of participants, explore understandings of purpose and leadership of the sector, and offer insights into possible ways forward for them. This includes a better understanding of how the contexts within ECEC are impacted by individual understanding of purpose, what challenges there are for leaders operating in these contexts and the elements of good leadership valued by my participants. All of which form part of a persuasive case for the workforce becoming central to the positive changes that could follow for the ECEC sector.

## **1.5 Summary of the Thesis**

This study explores the workforces' perceptions of factors that influence good leadership. It is a qualitative exploration collecting narratives from fifteen professionals in the workforce. These narratives, along with a deep exploration of existing literature and a participatory methodological framework, position this thesis as a potential agent for positive change. Given the sector has been grappling with the problem explored here for many decades, it is unlikely I will be presenting a panacea, but I strive to support movement in the right direction.

This thesis is set out in 5 chapters. In this chapter, I have set out, broadly, the background of the study and my position in relation to that. I have presented my research questions and wider aims of the research and indicated the intended contribution to new knowledge this thesis will make.

In chapter 2, I set out a comprehensive literature review that broadly focuses on why we are where we are in ECEC, the individuals that make up the workforce and their leadership responsibilities. These broad foci are broken down into key themes within this including policy, purpose, and provision as well as existing understandings of leadership, the impact of these on the workforce, and possible ways forwards.

This leads into chapter 3 which sets out the research journey I have followed, including engagement with key literature around the amalgamation of existing methodological elements chosen to culminate in a participatory research design. It was essential that my research design was such that it promoted participants voices to be heard, given the underlying intentions of my research, and allowed me to explore the perspectives of purpose and leadership of individuals in the workforce.

In chapter 4 I set out my findings and discussion in a four-part chapter. The first part offers a new idea constructed in this thesis called professional confidence and sets out the layers of meaning withing this term and how it was present in my participants narratives. The next three parts respond directly to each research question in turn – the complex purpose of ECEC, leadership realities in ECEC and good leadership in ECEC.

Finally, I will bring my thesis to its conclusion in chapter 5, which includes synthesising the main arguments raised whilst considering the limitations of my work as well as implications for policy, practice, and future research. These are centred on my original contributions to knowledge.

# **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

## **2.1 Introduction**

This literature review is in two parts, the first part will consider the key factors needed to understand why we are where we are in ECEC today, namely policy, funding, and regulation as these influence the workforce's daily lives and leaders must navigate and mitigate this influence constantly. The second part will explore individuals and their leadership responsibility, including existing understandings of leadership in ECEC, what this means for individuals daily work and new ways of thinking about individuals and their leadership responsibility, as these elements all directly connect to the focus of this research to explore the factors that influence good leadership in ECEC. Together, this offers a clear understanding of ECEC today that my specific research builds from to explore the factors influencing good leadership from the perspective of fifteen professionals.

## **2.2 Why we are where we are**

### **2.2.1 Introduction**

The first part of this literature will provide an overview of why we are where we are in ECEC today specifically related to policy, funding, and regulation, three factors that influence individual's experiences in the sector. These factors could be described as an imposed purpose upon individuals working in the sector to respond to policy changes, to cope with turbulent funding mechanisms and to meet the ever-changing demands of regulatory frameworks. Firstly, I will summarise and analyse shifts in policy focus periods over time before setting out funding then regulatory realities for the sector.

### **2.2.2 Policy**

There are fourteen critical periods of time that contain shifts in policy focus with far-reaching impacts for the sector, these critical periods have been identified through rigorous review of existing literature and Government documentation (Hevey (2010);

Melhuish (2016); Palmer (2016); Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016); Lewis and West (2017); West and Noden (2019). An amalgamation of the work of Kingdon (2014) and Hall (1993) will be used to navigate through the complexities of policy initiatives in ECEC in England (see table one). Both Kingdon and Hall concern themselves with the sources and causes of change to policy and have comparable ideas that can be combined to offer a holistic approach to understanding the motivations behind, as well as the consequences and development of, individual policies over the past 100 years in ECEC in England.

Kingdon's key concern was the formation of the decision-making agenda within government, applicable to all governments but predicated on and around the US government. He uses the metaphor of various 'streams' coming together to describe this process (Kingdon, 2014). Problem streams are made up of publicly perceived problems that require government action to resolve them, these then form a 'policy window' if they coincide with a political stream. A political stream is made up of executive or legislative turnover, for example an election or a strong advocacy campaign and shift in national mood. When there is a policy window, policy alternatives can be explored and a policy stream is formed, filled with solutions as purported by experts and analysts. This makes a role for policy entrepreneurs who are individuals who invest resources in pushing their problems or solutions to the top of the agenda at certain times (Beland and Howlett, 2016) to have their own concerns, or concerns of those they represent, addressed as expediently as possible.

Similarly, Hall (1993) suggests that the key agents in pushing forward policy should be experts in the given field, either employed by the state or given privileged positions by them. He goes on to consider policy as a process of social learning where new policy is informed by learning from previous policy. In comparison to Kindgon's (1984. 2014) work, this may be what leads to the problem stream formation, as consequences of previous policies contribute to malaise among a proportion of the electorate. Hall (1993) also suggests that policymakers work within a policy paradigm framework that specifies the goals, the instruments and the levels of instruments used to attain each goal. For example, to improve access to ECEC (the Government's goal) different arrangements of funding both in terms of the journey from central government to service provider (the chosen instruments) and the amount of funding associated for a

certain child or locations (the levels/settings). Hall (1993) argues there are three orders of change that are in response to new knowledge or considering new experiences or failings of previous policy. A first order change is when the levels/settings of basic instruments are changed, but instruments and goals remain the same. A second order change is when instruments of policy as well as their settings are changed, but hierarchy of goals remains the same. Finally, a third order change is more of a wholesale change when instruments and their settings as well as hierarchy of goals all change. It could be suggested that the increased order of change relates to a more intense flow in the problem and political streams.

Regarding ECEC specifically, there are many stakeholders in Kingdon's (2014) problem and political stream, resulting in a variety of alternatives in the policy streams. There is also evidence of several third order changes in Hall's (1993) terms. There has been a layering of goals on top of each other. Broadly, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the focus was on quantity of ECEC provision which was shifted towards a goal of access towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. During this shift, an additional layer of quality in ECEC was added, which has grown in focus and complexity since the 1930s. There are also a multitude of first and second order changes that as we move towards the present day seem to be a continuous occurrence. These are summarised in table one below and explicated in more detail subsequently. It is important to note that the motivation column of table one should be considered the underlying motivation of the Government at that time and whilst the size of each segment when there are multiple motivations is the same, this does not equate to equal strength or presence of each motivation during that time, quality tended to increase in strength as time went on. This underlying motivation is not always made explicit in Government documents in relation to the problem stream, however it is often discernible as I go on to explicate. The policy stream column includes the specific publications of interest from government and the consequences column outlines primarily first and second order changes of a policy window opening.

Table One – Fourteen Critical Policy Periods in ECEC – (Hevey (2010); Melhuish (2016); Palmer (2016); Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016); Lewis and West (2017); West and Noden (2019))

Time period	Motivation		Policy Stream	Consequences
Pre WW1	Quantity of places		Cyril Jackson's report (1905)	A focus on improving ill-health of children and constrained any broader focus suggesting only more deprived children need access
During WW1	Quantity of places (as nursery classes)		Office Committee report (1917)	Nursery schools were viewed as the expensive and less desirable alternative to nursery classes attached to primary schools
Between WW1 and WW2	Quantity of places (as nursery classes)		The Education Act. (1918) Maternity and Child Welfare Act. (1918) The Education Act. (1921) Hadow Report (1933)	Second order changes with new grants in place to create new provisions. These were tweaked in 1921 with first order changes to make grants more flexible and available. Later in 1933, attempts were made to increase places again by maximising cooperation between local authorities and the private sector.
WW2	Quantity of places (as wartime nurseries)		White Paper (1943) The Education Act. (1944)	Local authorities' <i>power</i> to provide places became a <i>duty</i> . Again, quantity was prioritised over quality with war-time nurseries being adapted to form nursery classes.
Post-war era	Quality of places at first, then financial constraint		Nurseries & Childminder Regulations (1948) [later repealed] The Children Act. 1948 Circular 210 (1949) Circular 242 (1951) Circular 8/60 (1960)	Formal recognition of childminders existence and increased financial restraint insisted upon due to financial crisis. There was confusion around Bowlby's (1951) work on attachment leading to restrictions on care for children under school age and closure of settings.
A turn to the mothers but then all went quiet	Quantity of places (again) to allow mothers to work		Provision for care of children for working mothers (1962) The Plowden Report (1967) A Framework for Expansion (1972)	Playgroups formed to allow mothers to work, and less focus was on the nursery class vs nursery school debate and there was also a renege on attachment concerns raised in the previous era.
Centralised decentralisation beginning	Quantity of places		The Education Act (1980)	Renege on the post-war focus on local authorities' duty to provide nursery education, instead confirming they had the <i>power</i> but not a <i>duty</i> . This opened space for other parts of the sector to grow.
Quality and accountability movement	Quality of places		The Education Reform Act. (1988) The Children Act. (1989) The Rumbold Report (1990)	Focus on quality of education and learning and less about quantity of places. Mechanisms for this were less obvious initially, but over the coming years would be realised through regulation instruments and measures.
Money, Money, Money	Access to places	Quality of places	Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Act. (1996) National Childcare Strategy (1998)	Grant systems developed and regularly tweaked (expanded on in the next section) leading to an uneven playing field for the sector where providers were offered the same level of funding yet being held accountable in different ways and operating to different standards, this challenge continues.
Stepping into the classroom	Access to places	Quality of places	Care Standards Act. (2000)	New instruments designed to control quality through regulation and prescription, adding 'more teeth' to The Children Act. (1989) to

			<p>The National Standards for Day Care and Childminding (2002)</p> <p>The Education Act. (2002)</p> <p>Every Child Matters (2003)</p> <p>The Children Act. (2004)</p> <p>The Education Act. (2005)</p>	<p>increase economic competitiveness. Other second order instruments around professionalism created too. Sure start centres created and welcomed. Also, there were first order adjustments to funding arrangements.</p>
Managing the market and the classroom	Access to places	Quality of places	<p>The Childcare Act. (2006)</p> <p>The Children's plan (2007)</p> <p>Statutory Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (2008)</p> <p>Practice Guidance for the EYFS (2008)</p> <p>Development Matters (2008)</p> <p>Early Years Single Funding Formula</p> <p>Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare (2009)</p>	<p>Local authorities were required to manage the childcare market. There was also increased interference in what was taught in ECEC under the guise of increasing quality. There were attempts made to level the playing field through a more intricate funding formula.</p>
A period of closer review	Access to places	Quality of places	<p>Tickle Review of Curriculum (2011)</p> <p>EYFS Framework Review (2012)</p> <p>Development Matters Review (2012)</p> <p>Nutbrown Review (2012)</p> <p>More Great Childcare (2013)</p> <p>Early Years Outcomes (2013)</p> <p>EYFS Framework Review (again) (2014)</p>	<p>Attempts to lessen the bureaucracy and workload for the workforce and a reduction of the curriculum goals. Changes to staff:children ratios too.</p>
Time to get down to business	Access to places	Quality of places	<p>Ofsted First Annual report (2014)</p> <p>Small Business Enterprise and Employment Act. (2015)</p> <p>Review of Childcare Costs (2015)</p> <p>EYFS Framework review (again x2) (2017)</p> <p>30h free childcare policy (2018)</p>	<p>Inception of childminding agencies to support home-based educators running their businesses and grants to incentivise entrepreneurs. The rise of the school-readiness agenda, with resistance, whilst streamlining processes to make it easier for new settings to open. Also, more changes to funding (detailed in the next section) and more confusion in the education/care debate (detailed in a later section)</p>
Changes through the back door	Access to places	Quality of places	<p>Consultation on the Early Learning Goals (2019)</p> <p>Development Matters Review (2019)</p> <p>Ofsted Inspection Framework (2019)</p> <p>New EYFS Framework (2021)</p> <p>New Development Matters (2021)</p>	<p>A rewrite of the curriculum 'through the back door' (Early Education, 2019) resulting in a fundamental first and second order change for the daily lives of the workforce and the requirement to understand and new framework (again)</p>

I will now focus on the latter parts of table one as they are more relevant to the contemporary context around my research. Lewis and West (2017) suggest that until the Labour government came into power in 1997, childcare was a relatively neglected area of public policy, and their work is central to this section of my thesis. Lewis and West (2017) centre their work on showing policies around availability, affordability and quality have resulted in gradual change from focusing on child development to mothers' employment combined with a firmer orientation towards growing the childcare market.

Whilst the evidence in table one suggests at periods during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century there has been a lack of commitment to policy changes by government, there has been an increase in the decade prior to Labour taking over too, therefore, to suggest ECEC is a neglected policy area may be problematic. Lewis and West (2017) suggest that policy goals have been split between promoting child development and increasing mothers' employment and that one or the other has tended to take priority for policymakers. It could be said that promoting child development is in line with raising quality of education and care and increasing mothers' employment has historically been about increasing quantity of places in ECEC provision and more recently about promoting access for all to ECEC provision, to get a wider range of parents back into work. Leaving the quality of places to be regulated through the childcare market and a more business-like supply and demand model, which is itself subject to great political intervention and worth challenging. To be clear, raising quality of provision and getting parents back to work are not mutually exclusive but whether the current approach to doing either is contentious.

From 2006-2010 the New Labour government continued to be committed to extending equal opportunities and continued the increase of state intervention in ECEC (Lewis and West, 2017). During this time there were also increasing gaps in provision and questions around sustainability of the sector, with ECEC providers being seen as deficient rather than the childcare market itself being deficient (Campbell-Barr, 2014), in that the individuals themselves were responsible for undesirable outcomes for children rather the constraints within which they must work. This is due in part to several first order changes to funding instruments with the Single-Funding Formula (West and Noden, 2019) meaning there was not parity across the sector. Since 2010,



the emphasis has been on the childcare market first and foremost (Lewis and West, 2017). It could be said that subsequent governments thought by further cementing and stimulating the childcare market, other aims would be taken care of in response to that stimulation. Significant changes in the way funding arrangements were organised will be considered in the subsequent section, but it is important to note here that proposals for a national funding formula from 2011 to 2014 concerned the distribution of resources from central government to local government, and subsequently attempted to address fair and transparent distribution between different types of providers thereafter (West and Noden, 2019). Following thirteen years of Labour government and five of the Coalition that seemed to have reached a consensus about childcare (Cory, 2015), in 2015 a Conservative Government was elected. Brexit had dominated political discourse in recent years until the onset of COVID-19 in early 2020 but the ECEC sector has still experienced some significant shifts around funding and more recently additional changes to curriculum from the current Government. The political stream at this time, when not focused on BREXIT or COVID-19, still largely seems to be consisting of concerns around closing the academic gap and access to ECEC services for the lower socio-economic families (West and Noden, 2019), which seems to be understood as those without the means to place their children in nursery without financial support.

I have presented here fourteen critical periods of change with a medley of problems, political and policy streams contributing to copious first, second and third order changes as summarised in table one. The journey of policy goals includes initially the need to have a higher quantity of places to support war efforts and mothers needing to work (Education Act. 1944), shortly joined by a secondary focus on quality (Nursery and Childminder Regulations, 1948). The focus on quality has been implemented through reliance on the childcare market to drive up quality in the name of healthy competition and supposed parent choice (Palmer, 2016). The work of Palmer (2016) is central to this section and her work is centred on her analysis of education policy in England from 1918 to 1972.

More recently, government focus has been on funding arrangements to promote access for all to ECEC provision but there is still a precarious future for the sector (West and Noden, 2019). Also noteworthy is that despite the apparent reduction in

problem and political streams, particularly given the rate of new policy initiatives, policy streams continued to flow as new changes continued to be implemented. This may well return us to Heclo's (1974) suggestion that elitist interpretations of policy processes can override pluralistic interpretations and social learning processes, rejecting other influences on the direction new policy should aim for.

There is still a blurring of what constitutes education and care, further fuelled by ambiguity in policy documents, for example with "the 30 hours 'free childcare' policy: this comprises 15 hours a week 'free early education' and 15 hours a week 'free childcare'", (DfE, 2018a, p.6) yet providers are required to provide both in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage (2021) across the whole 30 hours. It is also important to note this is term time only, not all year round. In addition to this confusion, we are also experiencing a hostile policy context around funding more widely, particularly in certain parts of the sector. There is a mis founded belief that there is a level playing field across providers, leading to the National Funding Formula 2017 allowing local government distribution of funds to be equitable largely based on need (West and Noden, 2019). Nursery schools were left worse off as they have more stringent requirements in terms of staffing and Special Education Need provision and therefore higher operating costs. Until expectations reflect funding arrangements in government policy, there cannot be a level playing field and funding allocations should be considered accordingly to avoid portions of the sector being under the threat of the closure (Hoskins *et al.*, 2020). This will, if left to continue, possibly result in a sector even more unable to fill the needs of the country.

With an average of one major policy change per year for the last 30 years, the whole shape and state of ECEC has changed almost beyond recognition (Nutbrown and Clough, 2013) and thus it is not surprising that this interference has come at a price and this price is to compromise the education and care of the nation's Early Years children. This has placed a heavy burden on leaders in the sector and on individuals working in the sector. More exploration is needed of the core sub-themes within policy before its consequences can however be fully understood. These sub-themes are funding and regulating quality and will be explored now in turn.

### 2.2.3 Funding

Funding is a relatively new element of the ECEC discourse in - England, increasing in its prominence since the Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Act. 1996 with the introduction of a vouchers scheme for parents. Primarily, it can be said that funding initiatives intend to meet the most recent third order policy goal of equitable access to ECEC for all. This is particularly important given the limited yet vital access to ECEC for the most deprived families (Hoskins *et al.*, 2020). This section will provide understanding of the funding element of policy discourse, building on references made in previous sections, to better understand why we are where we are in the ECEC sector.

Broadly speaking, before 1996, public funding for the ECEC sector in England had been directed towards public providers (nursery schools, nursery classes and reception classes), which have been a frontline service, and continue now to provide much more than childcare for the more deprived families (Hoskins *et al.* 2020). Since 1996, the 'Private, Voluntary and Independent' portions of the sector (PVI) have been receiving public money too, as the maintained sector were not able to meet the demand for places across the nation which was encouraging mothers back to work. Whilst the overall goal of funding has remained ostensibly unchanged, focused on equal access, there have been first and second order changes, with shifts in the instruments and instrument settings on an almost year basis, culminating in the inception of the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) in 2017, resulting in both 'winners' and 'losers' with consequences that will be discussed shortly, and with recent increases in hourly rates not keeping up with national minimum wage increases, there are becoming more losers than winners.

The nursery education voucher scheme was introduced as part of the Nursery Education and Maintained Schools Act 1996. This was a new policy instrument to allow PVI providers to be funded on the same basis across the country as the maintained sector, at a flat rate. Concerningly, this was not accompanied by a push for PVI providers to be held to the same qualification standards as the maintained sector. Therefore, the playing field couldn't be level at this time, and has not been since (West and Noden, 2019. Labour MP at the time, Mark Blunkett, criticised this as

an “ideological experiment” imploring the PVI sector to compete with the public maintained sector, largely placing money away from those children who currently do not have a place in ECEC provision (West and Noden, 2019).

Since this major change in policy instruments, there have been continuous tweaks that are hard to capture in a succinct way. Table two below is a summary of the second and first order changes that have occurred in public funding of ECEC that builds on the work of West and Noden (2019) and Akhal (2019), who offer a useful and thorough analysis of the transformation of public funding in ECEC. 1996. There will then be a more detailed analysis of these changes,

*Table Two: Policy development of public funding of ECEC (children under 5) from 1996-2019 (adapted from West and Noden, 2019 and Akhal, 2019)*

Year	Policy Instrument	Policy measures and settings
1996	Nursery Voucher Scheme for 4-year old's	PVI's – nursery education grant of £1100 per place Maintained schools – revenue support grant based on a local funding formula
1998	“Free” entitlement to part time education	Initially set to 12.5 hours p/w for 33 weeks a year for 4-year-olds
2003		PVIs and Maintained schools both received the revenue support grant. PVIs received this under local authority discretion whereas Maintained Schools were under the local funding formula still
2004		“Free” entitlement extended to 3-year old's too, otherwise the same measures apply
2006		“Free” entitlement extended to 38 weeks through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), otherwise the same measures apply
2010		“Free” entitlement extended to 15 hours p/w, otherwise the same measures apply
2011		Early years single funding formula (EYSFF) gave back responsibility to local authorities to determine a locally calculate rate for funding
2015		Early years Pupil Premium introduced
2017		Early years national funding formula (EYNFF) removed local control and determined local authority funding rate based on a national base rate combined with additional needs and an area cost adjustment. Accompanied by an extension to 30 hours entitlement for working parents.
2017	Tax free childcare introduced in addition to the “free” entitlement	Government organised a tax-free scheme with more flexibility than existing childcare voucher schemes, these continued to run for now.
2018		Childcare voucher scheme ends with no new parents being able to join them, meaning all new parents only have the government route available to them.

Accompanying the coordinated funding of ECEC in 1996, was the requirement for Ofsted to inspect nursery schools and classes (Hevey, 2010). This line of analysis will be picked up in the subsequent regulation section. Since Labour came into power shortly after this initial positive policy strategy, it never gained momentum as they were committed to ending it. As part of their National Childcare Strategy, they replaced it with an entitlement to a free part-time 'early education' place. They stated that "for young children there is no clear distinction between care and education" (DfEE, 1998a, p. 20) an important point to be considered in the consequences for the purpose of ECEC. Their stated policy aims were to increase the availability, quality, and affordability of childcare (West and Noden, 2019), these words are synonymous with the three third order policy goals that have been discussed – quantity, quality, and access.

It is important to note that the use of the term 'free' entitlement has been contested by the sector, particularly PVI provisions, because it sends the wrong message to parents. This is because the child's place is not free, there is funding to contribute to the cost of each place. A contribution that does not cover providers costs in most cases, resulting in PVI provisions charging for things such as food, some activities like language classes and other services that were previously included in the sessions costs. The flexibility PVI providers can do this with compared to maintained provision only perpetuates the uneven playing field further. More flexibility for the PVI sector is the option to combine a strategy of stretching the 15 hours term time support across the year, with a minimum attendance requirement. This leaves the parent needing to pick up the void in funding at a rate at which the provider has total autonomy to set. Whilst this can secure sustainability for PVI providers, it also can result in extremely high childcare and early education costs for families.

The journey of the 'free' entitlement funding included several nuanced paths for the money heading from central through local government onto providers. Central government control was sought in 2006–2007, with a new ring-fenced Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), aiming to ensure increased investment in education spending was passed on in full to providers, reducing local authority discretion (West and Noden, 2019). The early years pupil premium grant required local authorities to

allocate funding to providers at the level prescribed by the government, exerting further centralised control over this part of funding.

Concerns over inequalities across local authorities led to a three-year journey to implementing the EYSFF, guidance for which was first published in 2008 (Department for Children, Schools, and Families (DCSF), 2008). Another Government document stated that rates “must be set to enable a level playing field in the market and encourage quality of provision through raising the qualifications and training of staff regardless of where they work” (DCSF, 2009, unpaginated). It wasn’t until 2011 when the EYSFF was finally implemented by the succeeding coalition government, suggesting across party agreement in the way forward for ECEC funding. Local authorities at this stage must allocate funds with a locally developed formula, therefore clawing back some discretion in part (West and Noden, 2019). This also provided a framework with all providers funded based on participation, not places, and supplements for quality and flexibility permitted (Lewis and West, 2017).

Changes to funding after this included first order measure changes to improve access with free part-time places for 2-year-old children in the 20% most deprived families in 2013. Then this was extended to the 40% most deprived families in 2014 (West and Noden, 2019). The policy stream has had some flow from unexpected areas in addition to the recent funding tweaks with the Small Business Enterprise and Employment Act. 2015 set in motion second and first order instrument changes for funding. Other changes to funding included extensions to free childcare hours in 2016, first order changes with a minimum rate being imposed, second order changes with the EYSFF and erroneously reported third order changes to funding goals regarding the distribution of funding (West and Noden, 2019), this is in fact another second order changed. Additionally, there was a removal of one instrument for access with the childcare voucher scheme ending in 2018. However, this was replaced by a universal system through the government that has similarities, although there is both strengths and weaknesses to this new approach.

The next notable shift in instruments and their settings emerge from increased attention on the fair and transparent distribution between different types of providers, rather than the distribution of resources from central government to local government

(West and Noden, 2019). Changing the distribution led to the EYNFF implemented in 2017 to replace the EYSFF, that used an equation to distribute funds equitably, predominantly based on need, from central to local government, and from local government to providers, although there is less clear guidance for that final step (Pre-School Learning Alliance, 2016).

Additionally, in 2017, the government replaced the childcare vouchers scheme and introduced a government tax-free childcare scheme alongside an increased in the 'free' entitlement to 30 hours (Akhal, 2019). This was to be funded through £6bn in childcare spending where £1bn is used to support this increased free entitlement (Akhal, 2019). Despite this increase in funding and 'free' entitlement, the apparent childcare market remains unstable, and affordability is said to continue to be a challenged for many families. Ball and Vincent (2005) commented over 15 years ago that parents were footing 75-85% of the total cost of childcare, comparatively high in relation to the rest of Europe and this continues today.

One final funding concern to report for parts of the sector comes from the instability of the early years capital fund, valued at £100m in 2016 (Akhal, 2019). This money is prioritised for the local authorities providing the highest rate of 30 hours 'free' entitlement, supporting the most deprived families. Hoskins *et al.* (2020) report that this rate is now closer to £60m yet still under threat, most concerningly for maintained Nurseries, which are the jewel in the crown the sector (Powell, 2019) and this money remains in a precarious position year after year. Without this money, the quality of this part of the sector may suffer and settings may close and less settings will have a knock-on effect for other services that support those most deprived families that currently nursery schools provide a multitude of support for (Hoskins *et al.*, 2020).

An OECD report (OECD, 2012) suggested that England's government expenditure on ECEC was higher than average and the then Under Secretary of State at the Department for Education, Elizabeth Truss, has used this evidence to argue for deregulation, which it was believed would make the childcare market more efficient (DfE, 2013c). Cooke and Henehan (2012) raise an important factor that impact these reports authenticity in that most European countries start at age 6, so including age 5 in this data will inevitably push England up the table. Despite this, regulation and more

recently, de-regulation, has occurred and needs to be reported on next before moving on to analysing the consequences.

Most recently, and in response to COVID-19, the Government have stated they will be investing £180m into early years to support the recovery. Part of this is an Early Years Covid-19 Recovery Experts and Mentors Programme, where those working in the sector (with the capacity to spare time) can support other settings in several different ways to recover and develop from the impact of COVID-19. Time is needed to see how impactful this will be.

## **2.2.4 Regulating Quality**

Having a purpose is essential in ECEC just like any profession and working towards the goal for developing children educationally, whilst remaining centred on the care imperative, is what constitutes a quality ECEC provision. This term 'quality', although omnipresence in ECEC discourse particularly in reference to regulation, can be a problematic term as I will demonstrate. Concerningly, as we have seen in the policy section there has been a great focus on quantity and access, with some focus on the much-contested issue of quality. Although this could be considered an indirect or secondary focus, leaving that to be developed because of the childcare market.

Regulatory judgments of outstanding quality will vary from context to context, and if it can be confusing for the ECEC workforce, it must be perplexing for parents to decipher. Moss and Penn (2003, p. 24) state that:

“When it comes to early childhood services, Britain suffers a poverty of expectation and a low level of awareness of issues arising from years of [policy makers'] neglect and indifference”.

The poverty of expectation linked to policy maker neglect and indifference is important to demonstrate how inextricable policy and practice are in ECEC, and the role of regulation as a conduit between the two. This practice in ECEC, is now regulated by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), as is most other educational institutions in England. The ECEC workforce are still now



experiencing the 'terrors of performativity' (Ball, 2003). Meaning there has been a historical, gradual, increase in control exerted by central government on local authorities and providers followed by a more recent unabated policy torrent that has had consequences of the lived experiences for all stakeholders in the sector.

The history of regulation in ECEC is sparse in the literature and lacking clarity. Whilst there were agencies like the Nursery Schools' Association (NSA) advocating for a focus on quality as early as the 1930s, there was no formal systems in place by central government. Instead, local authorities had localised responsibility. It wasn't until the 1989 Children Act. that regulation began to emerge from the policy agenda. This Act established criteria to target the more deprived families (Palmer, 2016). It was sometime after the inception of Ofsted in 1992, following the major overhaul and centralisation of education in the Education Reform Act 1988, that Ofsted inspections were brought to the ECEC sector through the 1996 Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Act. This was only in reference to maintained providers of ECEC in nursery schools and classes as well as reception classes. Alternatively, PVI settings were accountable through the Desirable Learning Outcomes standards. There was a need to regulate the public spending of money to ascertain value of investment, regulation is a second order instrument change targeted at monitoring quality of provision and value of investment.

Following from the Care Standards Act 2000, the first national system of regulation and inspection of under-eights day care and home-based childcare was established by adding Part Xa into the Children Act. 1989 (Hevey, 2010). Ball and Vincent (2005) commented that this gave legislation 'more teeth' than anything that had been seen before, with third order adjustments to regulatory instruments. Since taking over responsibility, Ofsted's inspection frequency has lengthened from a maximum 2-year gap to 4-year cycles under the Childcare Act 2006 and is now at 6-year intervals for nurseries. Consequently, each inspection can only provide a brief snapshot of 'quality' raising concerns perpetuated by the reported high levels of change in staff and continued influence of policy changes (Vincent and Ball, 2006).

Ofsted has been said to provide a Foucauldian panoptic gaze, which is the idea of a silent overseer monitoring all aspects of life, (Foucault, 1975) to monitor the delivery of ECEC (Campbell-Barr, 2014). Foucault (1975) argued that governance, like the role

that Ofsted play in the ECEC sector, involves the use of a range of technologies to exercise power over the actions of individuals. It allows an element of competition with neighbours that works against collaboration and sharing best practice that would be more likely to benefit the children. Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) suggest that within this context, there is evidence that some of the workforce questioned, challenged, and resisted the performativity culture and retained, where they could, their child-centred focus. Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) went on to say that the intensification and 'datification' of regulation in the sector is an uncomfortable reality that is part of the workforce's lived realities now.

Perhaps then, the call for deregulation to improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness (DfE, 2013c), would be a welcomed one by the sector and perhaps a reinvigoration of the problem stream? Deregulation has been stated as a government aim with the emphasis put on supporting providers to offer more quality and flexible provisions with more qualified staff (DfE, 2013b). This move was accompanied with the further diminishing role of local authorities who "must rely solely on the Ofsted inspection judgement of the provider ... as the benchmark of quality" (DfE, 2014, p. 10). In the view of the Government, local authorities were being 'freed' to concentrate on "identifying and supporting disadvantaged children to take up their early education place" (DfE, 2013a, p. 4). There seems a sparsity in evidence supporting if this second order policy adjustment to remove regulation will indeed lead to these wholesale improvements purported in government documents.

The Small Business Enterprise and Employment Act. 2015 stated the aim of promoting a prosperous and growing childcare market, with a commitment to supporting growth within the sector. One result of this was inspection being relaxed around home-based childcare, individuals could join an agency to avoid individual inspection. Joining an agency for inspection purposes was not widely accepted and acted upon by home-based childcare individuals, however. The purpose of agencies was more for business support than promoting best practice (Lewis and West, 2017), speaking volumes around the focus of this initiative.

At the time of writing, the ECEC sector are still coming to terms with the consequences of the EIF framework (Ofsted, 2019) with initial reflections suggesting it has been well

received by the sector. The professional association for childcare and early years (PACEY) suggested that there is a shift in Ofsted focus in the new EIF, putting the curriculum at the heart (which has undergone a concurrent overhaul – this is explored in a subsequent section). There is also more emphasis on the quality of education and care which comes with its own challenges, and a reduced focus on data (PACEY, 2019), which has been sceptically welcomed by the sector. More time will be needed to understand the lasting impacts of this latest change to regulatory frameworks.

The reduced focus on data is welcomed considering Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) reporting that provisions are collecting vast amounts of metadata for the purpose of accountability. This is a lasting consequence of a fear of not producing the right data in line with Ofsted's historical focus of on notions such as 'tracking progress', 'reducing the gap' and 'value added'. This fear will take some time to be reversed throughout the sector, although efforts are being made from Ofsted themselves (Jones, 2017) and the DfE to support this movement. Another point that is taking some time to be reversed is that despite nursery schools gaining the highest scores on quality and promoted better intellectual outcomes for children (Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, Melhuish, Sammons, Taggart, Evans, Dobson, Jeavons, Lewis, Morahan, and Sadler, 1999), government are still not recognising and protecting this form of provision. Instead, they are continuing to try to improve quality through the range of provisions linked to the childcare market, hitting nursery schools the hardest with many closings and continuing to struggle.

Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) go on to add that the 'datafication' of the sector is making it the first stage of education, passing 'appropriate' numeracy and literacy data higher up the data chain and into the primary and secondary school systems. This has not historically been the purpose or pedagogical focus of ECEC, and when considering other developed countries do not begin education until the age of six (or later), it raises important questions around the desirability and necessity of this form of regulation. Not to mention that this is all in response to regulatory measure imposed by Ofsted, which has been criticised by academic researchers around the extent to which Ofsted's measure of quality shows a poor correlation with other measures (Mathers, Ranns, Karemaker, Moody, Sylva, Graham, and Siraj-Blatchford, 2011). Mathers *et al.* (2011) go on to suggest quality measures need to capture a definition

of quality which is recognised by all stakeholders that includes process quality with structural characteristics that underpin them, and leadership committed to quality improvement. This is of course easier said than done when they all suggest quality measures need to capture elements which are predictive of positive outcomes for children and are useable by, and accessible to, all stakeholders for quality improvement. The notion of quality is clearly a multi-faceted and complex one that any single regulatory report will struggle to capture effectively.

These models of regulation appear to increase layers of bureaucracy and control under the guise of raising quality (Ball, 2008). Importantly, Moss and Petrie (2002) state:

"There is no one 'best practice' or 'standard of quality' to be found since such concepts are always value laden and relative" (p11).

This is because context is a pivotal factor that influences quality, although it does not seem to feature in prominent government frameworks of regulation. Therefore, there should be a drive to understand individuals' conceptions of their purpose as they are the experts of their context and are better placed to articulate what quality is needed for their setting. What's more is that the pursuit of quality tends to conflict on several levels with what can be seen in the policy journey. Firstly, with the policy goal for the most part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of raising quantity of places, often rapidly. Secondly, the more recent need for equal access (Lewis and West, 2017). Lewis and West (2017) go on to suggest that even when there is knowledge of 'quality', what choice does this really give parents? Particularly, those from more deprived backgrounds. What we have then is a contested term used to give supposed 'choice' in a context of harsh accountability measures demanding continued improvements with less. This context of high demands with low resources has been referred to in the sector as "champagne nurseries on lemonade funding" anecdotally by those working in the sector, and is the name used by one of the most popular Facebook groups for the workforce nationally.

This notion of context and quality is connected to leadership in the work of Leeson, Campbell-Barr, and Ho (2012) who stated that leadership of ECEC settings is a critical factor in facilitating and developing quality. It is also evident in Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016) who draw on their four participants' understanding of quality in relation

to setting a vision for quality that whilst adhering to mandatory Ofsted requirements also responds to the needs of the local community and gives a voice to the children around the features of quality. This broadens what leaders need to think about around quality but twenty years ago, Moss, Dahlberg, and Pence (2000) argued that:

“The concept of quality is neither neutral nor objective but permeated by values and socially constructed within the project of modernity...it has no place for complexity, values, diversity, subjectivity, indeterminacy and multiple perspectives.” (p.13)

If quality does not have place for complexity, why does ‘quality’ continue to have such a prominent place in discourses around ECEC and education more widely? With recent work like Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016) building on this discourse. Moss *et al.* (2000) postulate that the process of defining quality is essential and should not be controlled by a small group of experts, at the exclusion of other stakeholders like the workforce, owners, and families. Moss *et al.* (2000) goes on to suggest quality should be seen as a dynamic concept with multiple understandings and intends not to rework the concept of quality but to suggest we have a choice to work with the concept of quality or not. The essence of quality as it has come to be known can be lost when simple measures are unthoughtfully adopted. Measures of quality have been a large part of the discourse that has dominated education in England, and continuous first and second order changes to the instruments and measures of regulation over time. The attraction of quality with these measures is its ability to offer certainty, uniformity, and objectivity. Therefore, as Clarke (1998, p 178) suggests it is a way "of coping with the complexities and uncertainties of the modern world", albeit perhaps insufficient of this task, as indicated by Moss *et al.* (2000) as mentioned previously.

To avoid the restrictive and misleading nature of quality, Moss *et al.* (2000) instead proposed the concept of meaning making. They suggest this is a response to understanding a world that is being transformed without modernistic supports, embracing the realities of uncertainty and postmodernity (Gibbins, 1998, p.34). By taking this approach, all stakeholders in ECEC are “active participants in the process, engaged in relationship with others in meaning making rather than truth finding” (Moss *et al.* 2000).

Meaning making, in about constructing and deepening understanding of ECEC (Moss *et al.*, 2000), in terms of purpose, pedagogy, provision and personnel - to make meaning of what is going on. Understanding quality through meaning making is, as reported in Seith (2017), in contrast to factory techniques akin to pig farming pervasive in other parts of education. Biesta was quoted in Seith's article saying that "education is a complex endeavour that should not and cannot be reduced to a causal input-output system (like pig farming), where impact can be measured through test scores" (p.1).

There is a mistaken assumption that parental choice, based on these test scores amongst other things, will push up quality, but this choice is likely to be constrained by "cost, location, lack of information, by parents valuing characteristics not rated highly by child development experts and by the need for continuity of provision" (Lewis and West, 2017, p. 334). With more autonomy and professionalism, the purpose of ECEC could perhaps secure the prevalence of quality, without the need for interference from neo-liberal mechanisms.

Moss *et al.* (2000) suggest that getting beyond the problem of quality is not about reworking the concept of quality but deciding whether we want to work with that concept, they would rather us work towards meaning making. In a similar vein, this thesis is about going beyond the problem of leadership in ECEC to understanding what leadership is in ECEC from all different perspectives on this value-laden concept.

Before that, the consequences of this journey of understanding why we are where we are must be understood. An overarching point that can be taken from precluding sections is that there is an absence of England's government ever taking a more long-term view of the system that they are building. They instead continue to sacrifice the bigger picture, for the shorter-term tweaks that continue to be contestable. Palmer (2016) suggests that only when politicians can see beyond the end of their term in office will we finally achieve the logical and fair system that is of the quality that young children and families deserve, with its purpose wholly child centred.

As will be seen in the following sections, the consequences of policy, funding and regulation have been influential in shaping purpose and pedagogy which inherently influence leadership across the sector.

## **2.3 Individuals and their leadership responsibilities**

### **2.3.1 Introduction**

Penn (2019) suggests that leadership is always contextual, and context is driven by purpose. In the context of early childhood, education, and care (ECEC) the question of purpose has been debated since the early 1900s. Following on from the exploration the consequences of the policy discourse in ECEC alongside funding and regulation, it can be suggested that the ECEC context is impacted by complexities that influence working conditions and the leadership approaches that are employed.

In this second part of the literature review, I will discuss a brief history of existing leadership understandings in ECEC, leading to prevailing understandings in contemporary discourse focused on pedagogical and entrepreneurial leadership. I will then set out what this has meant for the individuals in the workforce in terms of purpose, pedagogy and curriculum, and professionalism. With this greater understanding of the individuals in the workforce, I will go on to refer to the positive steps that have been made for understanding leadership, rooted in discussion of gender and social justice. This is essential to inform the exploration of factors influence good leadership central to this research.

### **2.3.2 Existing understandings of leadership in ECEC**

The increased attention on leadership in ECEC is relatively new, and whilst this can be attributed in a large part to policy discourse, there are other factors too. For example, the death of Victoria Climbié in 2000, which was a failure of a wide range of services in and around ECEC, made the role of working and leading in ECEC even more important and publicly accountable. The question remains though, how can we be sure we are development leaders in the right way when we are not even sure what

leadership in ECEC is or should be? This uncertainty is not aided by the historical tendency to draw on research from business and school leadership literature, which has led to a greater impetus placed on performance, competition, and authority (Nicholson *et al.*, 2018).

Mujis, Aubrey, and Harris (2004) suggest that around the turn of the century, a great deal of leadership literature was anecdotal and did not go beyond 'top tips' for leaders. and go on to offer that there were facets of leadership that leaders were aware of, for example the fundamental importance of safeguarding children and other stakeholders. However, the contribution of leadership theories to improving organisational performance and raising achievement was less tangible in the ECEC context. This tension is raised again several years later by Woodrow and Busch (2008) who suggested that strong leadership is especially important in advocating for children, families, and social justice in the face of neo-liberal policy initiatives and the presence of marketisation of education.

Wise and Wright (2012, p.2) stated that "current research...points unequivocally toward leadership as an important factor in the achievement of quality in most educational institutions" but existing literature falls short of offering a consensus of what specifically this leadership might consist of. It has, however, been suggested that the current understanding of leadership in ECEC is not adequate for purpose and lacks clarity. As Cohen *et al.* (2018) suggests, the ECEC field is one with confusion of intent and proposes that leadership constructs and behaviours also share this affliction, as there is a wide range of roles and responsibilities leaders in ECEC must fulfil. Similarly, Rodd (1996) refers to a vagueness and haziness of what is meant by leadership in ECEC. These references are over 20 years apart and continue to be largely applicable today.

This lack of clarity is not helped by conflict between traditional notions of leadership and the pedagogy and ethos of ECEC personnel (Murray and MacDowall, 2013). These notions of leadership are not well suited to application within the ECEC context due to the stronger impetus placed on competition rather than collaboration between providers and personnel (Kagan and Hallmark, 2001). Other elements of issue include an over-reliance on theories from the business world such as hierarchy, competition,



and trait theory (Nicholson and Kroll, 2014). Mujis *et al.* (2004) adds that some research has explored the characteristics of effective leaders in ECEC, as an embodiment of trait theory and what is 'special' about those at the top of organisations. Trait theories are, however, dismissive of those not in possession (or at least they believe to not be in the possession) of the 'right' traits to be an effective leader. It is far messier than that (Krieg, Davis, and Smith, 2014) and many individuals not 'at the top' are ultimately leaders of their key children's learning and other elements of provision.

Contemporary discussions of leadership in ECEC have challenged traditional assumptions of trait theory and other traditional understandings of hierarchy, competition and authority and instead raised attention to the relationship-orientated facets of ECEC in relationships, collaboration, and family engagement (Nicholson *et al.*, 2018). Objectives of leadership must be aligned with improving social injustices in society, a claim that aligns itself with contemporary discourse in literature and in government given the recent All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) led by Lucy Powell. In the House of Commons Backbench Business (2019) debate around the sustainability of maintained nursery schools, Lucy Powell stated that the perfect storm now is a combination of the EYNFF taking the discretion away from local authorities to subsidise high quality nursery schools and the 30 hours funding formula adding extra pressure on nursery schools as they do not get all their funding back for providing provision for the most deprived children (House of Commons Backbench Business, 2019).

It is argued that a fundamental purpose of the ECEC sector must remain as the 'habitus of care', which is a conceptualisation of 'niceness' (Hard and Jónsdóttir, 2013). They suggest niceness is a result of a highly feminised field that entwines the expectation of care for others and the way this expectation impacts on intra-staff expectations of behaviours. Although, this conceptualisation of 'niceness', as well as being at odds with the contemporary hostile policy context, does not fit with traditional elements of leadership that emerge from the business world that the sector has so readily borrowed from, with nursery *managers* expected to be *leaders* of provisions. More consideration needs to be made for the differences between the two as well as the use of terms such as 'niceness' when defining purposes of ECEC and its leadership and the connection to being in a feminised sector (see section 2.3.3.7 for

more on this). These may be contributors to the lack of positive societal perception of ECEC and the ongoing struggle for the sector around professionalism. Although, there is limited research available that has explored what the voice of the sector has to say on this topic, which is part of the intention of this thesis. Societal perception and professionalism are just two of the factors that may impede an individual's capability and readiness to lead. In response to this, pedagogical leadership has been offered as a way forward for individuals working in ECEC to better understand and implement leadership.

### **2.3.3 Pedagogical leadership – part of the way forward**

Pedagogical leadership places learning and development at the forefront and has been heralded as “addressing more fully the challenges facing educational leaders and provides a more holistic approach in creation and content of effective learning environments” (Male and Palaiologou, 2012, p. 107). Through a critical exploration of pedagogical leadership, I will highlight its strengths, as well its shortcomings to set out this element of leadership as it is understood in ECEC today. Pedagogical leadership is relevant to this research because it is recognised as an integral element of good leadership in the sector (Male and Palaiologou, 2015; O’Sullivan, 2015 and many others). In short, even though this could be considered an improved notion of leadership in ECEC, there is more work that could be done to account for gender or social justice issues in ECEC and to fully consider the role of the leader and leadership that is better suited for the complexities in the sector.

Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) contend that leadership in ECEC needs to be knowledgeable and there needs to be specific attention to the study of leadership and particular skill development. Pedagogical leadership is not the silver bullet, but it does provide a useful anchor to attach future efforts to, whilst leaving further work to do. There are many conceptualisations of pedagogical leadership, all contributing to a contemporary definition of pedagogical leadership. Listed below is a snapshot of the most notable points on pedagogical leadership that span across the last 30 years:

1. Reciprocal influence ... shared purposes ... connected to moral obligations where adding value to human capital is a key strength of the pedagogical leader (Sergiovanni, 1998)
2. Leaders acting as a bridge between research and practice, and whilst being armed with first-hand experiences they also interpret research and theory to disseminate new information to other stakeholders (Kagan and Hallmark, 2001)
3. Where leading and learning go together, and leaders and followers reflect together (Lunn and Bishop, 2002)
4. Forms a bridge between research and practice through disseminating new information and shaping agendas (Mujis *et al.*, 2004)
5. 'Leading for learning' is closely linked with pedagogical leadership, it relates to effective communication, collaboration, and the development of children's learning in ECEC (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2006)
6. It is to take responsibility to ensure that practices are appropriate for children (Heikka and Waniganayake, 2011)
7. An alternative to instructional and learning-centred leadership, it is a construct which places knowledge creation and management ahead of knowledge transmission (Male and Palaiologou, 2012)
8. An activity of leading, developing and implementing curriculum (O'Gorman and Hard, 2013)
9. An early attempt to disentangle ECEC leadership from corporate discourse, it is related to innovative teaching practices in early childhood (Nicholson and Kroll, 2014)
10. The capacity of any individual in an organisation – regardless of the official role they have or the place that they occupy in the managerial hierarchy – to drive forward the pedagogy of the EY setting (O'Sullivan 2015).
11. A dynamic process that involves ECEC professionals within one location in a shared construction of the understanding of visions and strategies that can be promoted by focusing on the roles and responsibilities of the ECEC teachers within pedagogical team processes. (Heikka, 2014)
12. Pedagogical leadership is praxis as it is concerned with the actions and the processes of constructing or deconstructing knowledge according to the context of the learning groups and individuals and recognising the set of social axes (Male and Palaiologou, 2015)

All definitions have elements of sharing knowledge and working together, as well as having an increased focus on learning. This is a shift away from the shortcomings of traditional understandings of leadership, more akin to the business world, and one that encourages a more distributed mindset when it comes to leading. Particularly in the case of O'Sullivan (2015) it is focused on everybody taking action to move pedagogy forward. Also, as there are no mention of hierarchies or power, there are suggestions that leadership responsibility stretches beyond role-based understandings. Therefore, this approach fills some of the gaps highlighted in existing understandings of leadership in ECEC. However, there may need to be some consideration for hierarchies and power. Male and Palaiologou (2012) suggest pedagogical leadership addresses more fully the challenges facing educational leaders and provides a more holistic approach in creation and context of effective learning environments. There is clearly a greater focus on the creation, rather than the transmission of knowledge. This is supported by the viewpoint offered by Bottery (2006) who suggests leaders need to recognise the uncertainty of knowledge and thus exhibit caution in their ability to know final answers.

In line with this, pedagogical knowledge is said to be dynamic and encompasses a range of complex factors that influence the process of learning. Male and Palaiologou (2012, p.116) claim that "pedagogical leadership is an alternative means of viewing leadership in education administration, one collectively and therefore optimally capturing the functions of education," and many argue this *should* be the primary focus for leaders. However, considering the reality in ECEC it also disregards many other elements that impact on the day to day lives of leaders and leadership in ECEC, as described well by Rodd (1997) commented on in the next part of this chapter. It masks the reality of what leadership looks like in a range of provisions for the professionals within them.

Since Male and Palaiologou (2012) brought pedagogical leadership into the ascendency, O'Gorman and Hard, (2013) and Nicholson and Kroll (2014) have offered support for pedagogical leadership, and Palaiologou and Male (2018) have gone on to suggest that although the preceding literature has opened public debate on what constitutes leadership in ECEC, it has not examined it at a practical level. Much of the

research has been limited to describing influencing factors on the leadership framework in situ in the field, highlighting the existing shortcomings in the literature and problematic nature of having numerous definitions of the term. There is, however, some empirical work done by Male and Palaiologou (2015) that helps better articulate what pedagogical leadership entails in practice. From interviewing leaders and headteachers of early years settings, they affirmed the notion that “pedagogical leadership is shaped by theory, practice, and the social axes relevant to educational settings” (Male and Palaiologou, 2015, p. 216). This is to underscore the importance of context that is informed by both internal and external axes made up of individual values, beliefs, culture as well as societal values, global economy, national curriculum, mass media and social networking Male and Palaiologou (2015). They suggest this view sees “leadership as a process that involves interpretation, understanding and application in making action as human beings and how these actions are directed at other human beings” (Male and Palaiologou, 2015, p. 216).

More recently Sakr and O’Sullivan (2022b) produced a contemporary collection of perspectives on pedagogical leadership from around the world. These perspectives include notable academics and professionals that range from exploring pedagogical leadership in relation to policy in the UK context, specifically within baby rooms, in relation to development in everyday working conditions and so on. Sakr and O’Sullivan (2022b) centre their book on the understanding that there needs to be more discussion about pedagogical leadership in relation to research and experience. Sakr and O’Sullivan (2022b) claim that pedagogical leadership is a bundle of practice relating to relationship building, professional development among teams, support for collaborative working environments and community, family, and cross-sector partnerships. This ‘bundle’ both brings together and extends the notion of pedagogical leadership as understood here to this point.

One final layer to add is the notion of distributed pedagogical leadership offered by Heikka, Pitkäniemi, Kettukangas and Hyttinen (2021). Fundamentally, Heikka *et al.* (2021, p.335) suggest “the essence of distributed leadership is the creation and development of the shared meaning of the organisation by all staff members” and couple this with the notion of teacher leadership that ultimately focuses leadership efforts on the classroom, focused on professional learning and they see this as a

combination of individual and collaborative work. These are important elements to keep in mind as this thesis progresses in its methodology and findings. In those sections I will emphasis a participatory approach that rests on working together and promoting collective action, but before that, there is also another perspective on the other side of the leadership coin, the often-hidden side, that now needs to be brought into focus.

### **2.3.4 Entrepreneurial Leadership – the elephant in the room**

Heikka and Waniganayake (2011) comment on the overly narrowness of pedagogical leadership and state that it cannot be considered on its own, as it does not capture the full picture of what it means to lead in ECEC. Previous literature adds more dimensions to the constructions of leadership in ECEC such as administration, advocacy, community, conceptual leadership (Kagan and Bowman, 1997) that go beyond pedagogical leadership and need further exploration.

Furthermore, Kagan and Hallmark (2001) sketch four types of leaders in ECEC in addition to pedagogical leadership. Firstly, there are administrative leaders who provide settings with vision, inspiration, structure, and direction. Secondly, conceptual leaders have a broad view of ECEC and look outwards to the future and role of provisions within society. Thirdly, diverse leaders look at how provision can better respond to the range of families they meet in an increasingly diverse population. Fourthly, advocacy leaders understand the needs and concerns of all stakeholders and understands legislative process. Existing literature is not readily available about the importance of these other types of leadership, particularly in line with the ECEC landscape the administrative and advocacy leaders who perhaps form the integral counterpart to pedagogical leadership that subsumes these other elements described here by Kagan and Hallmark (2001), which can be captured under the term ‘entrepreneurial leadership’.

The term ‘entrepreneurial’ in ECEC comes from the work of Campbell-Barr (2014). She suggests that this discourse is based on economic rationale where accountability is privileged and reflected in a managerialist agenda. As demonstrated in earlier sections, the reality for ECEC is rife in performative structures and systems and moves

to professionalise the workforce that are in harmony with the entrepreneurial discourse (Campbell-Barr, 2014). In line with this, leaders must have objectives of sustainability and viability that underpin investment and support in provisions. Campbell-Barr (2014) goes on to suggest that provisions have been labelled as deficient in this construction of ECEC due to gaps in provision and continued concerns over sustainability. Although, as we have seen, this is just one construction of leadership in ECEC.

Where pedagogical leadership is more akin to the historical positioning of children outside of economics, in a humanistic domain focusing on family and social construction and development, entrepreneurial leadership sees parents as purchasers and is influenced by the government drives to support workforce participation. This is what Goodfellow (2005) describes as the 'childcare paradox' of tension between economic and humanistic drivers of ECEC. As uncomfortable as it may be for traditionalists, there would seem to be a need for both, in the context of ECEC England at least. Entrepreneurial leadership recognises childhood as a site for consumption with a commercialised view of a child (Woodrow and Press, 2007), which must be balanced against the consequences for quality, development, and the work of individuals in the sector which is prized by pedagogical leadership.

The importance of balance between this tension is seen when drawing on Rodd's (1997) attempts to demarcate portions of the leader's role in ECEC. Whilst this attempt does limit the scope of leadership to one individual, which restricts the notion of leadership in ECEC, it does depict the broad scope of leadership responsibilities that are useful for the purposes of this research. Rodd (1997) conducted interviews with seventy-six practitioners in England in three groups, this included seventy-five women and one male. She found that a leader's role consisted of the following responsibilities: managing and supervising staff (34%); contact with parents and other professionals (22%); staff support and development (16%); managing the budget (11%); and coordinating role (11%). Rodd (1997) goes on to comment that not only does the leader appear to be spread rather thin, they also are much more heavily focused on maintenance and the now, therefore more akin to understandings of management. As opposed to leadership which tends to be more forward thinking and focused on development, it remains to be clear if focusing on the leadership and management dichotomy is even a helpful thing to do and even within the reach of a leader in ECEC.

So not only are there tensions between leadership and management within this spread of leadership, but there will also be tensions between pedagogical and entrepreneurial imperatives too.

Additionally, Aubrey (2007) reported that in the maintained portion of ECEC, there are head teachers that conduct budgeting work allowing foundation stage leaders to focus on pedagogical leadership. This is just one example of how more than one individual with leadership responsibility can allow for a more concentrated and specialised approach. Although, the two cannot be separated fully as Avery (2004) stated that there “is no agreed definition of leadership or what the concept should embrace, leading to fuzzy and overlapping ideas throughout the literature,” (p.23) and in practice.

It can be argued that leadership in ECEC is bigger than that of the single leader (or manager) and something that should be embraced in organisations. East (2019) advocates for this and claims leadership is everywhere and potentially, in everyone. This lends itself to the creation of pedagogical communities moving beyond teaching or leading in isolation and developing communities of practice. Although, there remains an entrepreneurial imperative for leadership in ECEC that should be considered carefully when striving for change.

Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) build Rodd’s (1997) work and add further complexities by suggesting that many ECEC professionals do not want to engage with leadership discussions involving power and authority, as they see it as irrelevant to working with children and their families. Therefore, it is important to consider firstly the individuals in detail and to particularly look beyond those in formal leadership positions in ECEC. Secondly, this consideration should be joined by further efforts to understand and exemplify entrepreneurial leadership, pedagogical leadership, and the fuzziness in between.



### **2.3.5 What does all this mean for the individuals working in ECEC?**

The discourse so far has centred around the consequences emerging from policy, regulation, and funding issues in ECEC and the understandings of leadership in ECEC to date. The consequences of these facets are embedded in the lived experiences of all those working in the sector. Not only those in formal leadership positions, which existing leadership literature focuses on. Therefore, I now intend to widen my focus onto the entire workforce, including those without ‘formal’ leadership responsibility and look at the factors influencing their lived experiences of working in the ECEC sector.

The workforce currently seems to be the missing persons or are only considered in a narrow context, despite being held accountable for the shortcomings of the sector. For example, Osgood (2009) aimed to explore the ways in which nursery workers are constructed through government discourse and offered a deconstruction of policy texts. She suggested that the workforce being seen as invisible individually, yet together as responsible for the failings of neo-liberal government. I will now explore what the resultant understandings of purpose, pedagogy and curriculum, and professionalism in response to the question, what does this mean for the individuals working in ECEC? Where this, is the policy, funding, and regulatory backdrop alongside existing understandings of leadership.

#### **2.3.5.1 Purpose**

It is widely accepted that children in ECEC are at an essential part of their life that will have a long-lasting impact on their future. Despite this, the purpose of the ECEC sector’s role in this is a contentious issue and is central to this thesis. Purpose is influenced heavily by the history of policy shifts presented in section 2.2.2 previously. The consequences of the policy changes on the purpose of ECEC include tensions perpetuating between education vs. care and romanticism vs. entrepreneurialism. These consequential tensions will be explored in turn here in relation to the policy discourse and then with a lens for broader consequences.

Children 0-5 years old are in a pivotal developmental stage of their lives with long-lasting impact. This is captured in the words from the Department for Education (DfE):

"If we want our children to succeed at school, go on to university or into an apprenticeship and thrive in later life, we must get it right in the early years. More great childcare is vital to ensuring we can compete in the global race, by helping parents back to work and readying children for school and, eventually, employment." (DfE, 2013b, p. 5)

Whilst there is widespread agreement with the first part of this quote, we want children to "thrive in later life", the second part raises several issues, assumptions, and contentions around the purpose of ECEC that touch upon the three main tensions that will be explored here. These issues include using the term "childcare" rather than education, despite the notion of "readying children for school". There is reference to the managerialism, entrepreneurialism, and performance focused "global race" rather than being child-focused and there is also the claim that ECEC should be "helping parents back to work" and sees them as purchasers. This raises issue around what will ECEC settings not be doing at the expense of this 'schoolification' and entrepreneurialism route?

There is a wealth of research (Bertram and Pascal, 2002; Campbell-Barr, 2014; Jarvis and Liebovich, 2015 and many others) exploring the purpose of ECEC that is helpful in unpacking these issues raised in just one reference to policy that captures the complexity and confusion present in the sector.

Firstly, is the ECEC a sector for public health and care or conversely one which promotes children's learning and development where centralised regulation, and national standards are seen as essential? (Hevey, 2010). In other words, is ECEC for education or care? The education vs care debate can also be seen as an extension of the head vs the heart discourse that has existed for over 100 years. With a surge in ECEC provision amidst war time labour requirements, McMillan became (and still is with her legacy) a leading figure in advocating for a care-orientated framework of nurture, focusing on deprivation and nourishment of the heart through welfare and health in England. Conversely, Owen, another leading figure in the NSA movement, emerging from a more academic background, fuelled the growing focus on educative settings for aspirational middle-class families (as explored in section 1.1.1).

In addition to the tensions between those working on the front line between education and care, there is also tension seen when exploring the nomenclature of services that have been conflated and contrasted by government documents and researchers alike. In short, there has been a less than thoughtful use of childcare and education, that has contributed to confusion in the sector to this day (Jarvis and Liebovich 2015). A recent example of this is in regard to the drive around funding of ECEC in England mentioned previously with “the 30h ‘free childcare’ policy: this comprises 15h a week ‘free early education’ and 15h a week ‘free childcare’”, (DfE, 2018a, p.6) yet providers are required to provide both in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage across the whole time a child is in their provision, whether they attend for 15 hours or have a full time place up to 50 hours.

We also can see the use of the term ‘educare’ (the connecting of the word education and care), and this tension is explored by Stephen (2006) who suggests on the one hand that ideas of ECEC can be shaped by ‘ideas of children, childhood and learning’ whereas on the other it could be shaped by ‘socio-political objectives for investing in ECEC’. The tension between political voices and ideas of learning raise issues around important notions of well-being as well as the ever-increasing influence of human capital theory through the marketisation of ECEC. Moving from the notion of ‘educare’, we can explore another tension in the discourse between the entrepreneurialism vs romanticisation notions of childhood discourses (Campbell-Barr, 2014). Whilst both have a passive view of the child, they are two notions that need to be explored as part of this literature review.

Entrepreneurialism vs romanticisation is a philosophical tension around value in ECEC, it is widely recognised that “childhood is a social construction deeply embedded within societal norms and values” (Bertram and Pascal, 2002, p. 8). The romanticisation of childhood discourse has continued to shape provisions and policies where children are seen as the “golden age’, where they need to be sheltered from the ‘corruption of the adult world” (Moss and Petrie, 2005, p. 58). It can be argued that this is what is purported by *all* ECEC provisions, it can be found on all their websites as part of their marketing strategies. It is important to note here how essential it is for ECEC settings to have marketing strategies and be entrepreneurial to survive too,

which will be explored more subsequently, but also that there must be compromises to not marginalise the 'primary' importance of supporting children's development.

Brind *et al.* (2012) capture the invisibility of entrepreneurialism by referring to the 'unknown quantity' when it comes to profit in ECEC, particularly for the big chains, like Busy Bees and Bright Horizons that dominate the sector. They were not willing previously to cooperate with government attempts to explore this information (DfE, 2015: 78). Therefore, there is a situation now where there is a price on the happiness and development of our nation's children (Lewis and West 2017). The distinction between entrepreneurialism and romanticism is made clear by Campbell-Barr (2014) who stated that there is a humanistic ideal with a focus on family as a social construct with an ethical view of caring (romanticism). On the other hand, there is an economic model (entrepreneurialism) that sees parents as consumers, with a government level goal of workforce participation.

Preparation for school as part of ECEC purpose is moving into a debate referred to widely as 'school readiness' where preparation for adult economic life as potential human capital, within a global education 'race' is seen to begin in pre-school (Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury 2016) (this will be explored in more detail in the subsequent pedagogy section). The 'edu' side of educare is further supported by Ball and Vincent's (2005) claim that ECEC should be purposed with raising standards in education by "giving children the skills and experience they need to succeed in compulsory education". Palmer (2016) comments that the childcare services (PVI) part of ECEC should support families to look after children when parents work and nursery education (maintained sector) should be focused more on meeting core development needs of the child, unaccepting of the term 'educare' altogether, and marginalising the care part of the term further.

With care increasingly marginalised in contemporary policy discourse in ECEC, we are left with a sector more closely wedded to entrepreneurialism and school readiness, with many providers fighting for survival, charging top up fees to avoid closures, a fate that many have already experienced. Simultaneously, large PVI chains continue to grow, and perpetuate issues around professional status, qualifications and pay. This discourse sits uneasily within the pedagogical focus often favoured by the sector, one

that embraces play. Instead, settings lean towards accountability exercises with pressures from regulatory frameworks still very much being felt (Palmer, 2016). Pedagogy and curriculum are inextricably linked purpose, in that if purpose is one that values entrepreneurialism or romanticism or education or care, this will influence the pedagogical approaches adopted in settings.

### **2.3.5.2 Pedagogy and Curriculum**

Whilst initiatives in ECEC settings often purport to be focused on the betterment of children's development, by focusing more centrally on the development of children's cognitive and academic skills deemed fundamental for success in school and later life, knowledge about the value and benefits of play, joy, and resilience amongst other things, are overlooked (Ødegaard, 2021). This is to overlook an integral part of pedagogy and curriculum.

Put simply, pedagogy is the 'how' of teaching and curriculum is the 'what' (Fogarty, 2020), but this is a much more complex discourse than that. I plan to first offer an understanding of the purpose of education more broadly, as an extension to my previous exploration of the purpose of ECEC. This understanding will form the backdrop to explore several tensions between the way curriculum is formed in ECEC, the range of pedagogical approaches present as a result and the most recent debate in policy and media around the importance of play vs school readiness, which has its foundations in the seminal work of Bernstein (2000) alongside the history of policy initiatives from government.

As New Labour strived to improve the quality of ECEC, focus shifted to pedagogy and curriculum. As a result, in September 2000, the Foundation Stage was introduced for children aged three to five years, expanding the reach of the National Curriculum introduced over 10 years earlier for the later stages of education. The original foci of personal, social, and emotional development; communication, language, and literacy; mathematical development; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development and creative development are broadly the same as they are today (Melhuish, 2016). There are still early learning goals (ELGs) within each broad area

for learning and hence a strong element of top-down control over what is taught in ECEC provisions.

After this in 2002, there was a framework of support and guidance for those working with younger children called Birth to Three Matters (Chalke, 2013) and nearly 20 years later in 2021, this has been extended to Birth to 5 Matters, tagged as guidance for the sector, by the sector. In between this, there has been a series of tweaks and changes and new policy documents revolving around pedagogy and curriculum (Childcare Act. 2006; EYFS Framework, 2008; Tickell Review, 2011; EYFS Framework 2012; Development Matters, 2012; Early Years Outcomes Guidance, 2013; EYFS Framework 2014; EYFS Framework 2017)

More recently, the DfE launched a consultation on changes to the EYFS framework in October 2019. The media, experts and pressure groups have had their say on this as well as several consultation reviews being published. Pressure group Early Education (2018) describe this as “a rewrite of the EYFS curriculum by the back door” (unpaginated, paragraph 5) as the government claimed to be presenting a review of ELGs only. They go on to say that despite supporting government’s purported aims to reduce workload and improve children’s skills, “the proposed revisions are unlikely to do” (unpaginated, paragraph 8). Furthermore, Merrick (2018) suggests that meddling with ELGs under the guise of reducing workload is a misnomer and that on the contrary, the entire sector will now need to familiarise themselves with all the changes to the ELGs and revise their practice accordingly.

With the plethora of changes and ‘guidance’ out there, coupled with funding and regulatory constraints, it cannot be a surprise some guidance is being misused (Grenier ,2019). Male and Palaiologou (2012) suggest that:

“The currency of the future lies in the ability to absorb, adapt to and amend the environment—and allows students to enter the adult world; to do so successfully, a learner will need to be an active learner.” (p.110)

Whether or not this is adequately captured in the latest iteration of EYFS statutory frameworks and ELGs, or non-statutory supporting guidance, is beyond the scope of

this literature review. Although, there will be hope that the sector can realise a situation where more value is placed on what ECEC settings do, rather than what they say and report they do. The sector then may be able to move past the tension between the purported advocacy for 'play' in the early years and the restrictive requirements for assessment and accountability (Rogers and Lapping, 2012). In the study from Rogers and Lapping (2012, p.253-254) who draw on Bernstein's conceptualisations of recontextualization strategies, a member of the workforce stated, "it's not about the EYFS – it's about the profile and the expectations of government for data"; "It's about the obsession with sticking a number on everybody"; "this whole thing with the data"; "they're trying to make something that's not numerical numerically meaningful". The study goes on to set out the frustration members of the workforce have with a lack of trust for their professional judgments and knowing where a child is at developmentally.

A question for this thesis is who is driving this drive for reform, year upon year, with no real time to see the effects of any previous changes? Existing literature points to the state with the dichotomy between Bernstein's official recontextualising field (ORF), created by the state and its representatives, and a pedagogic recontextualising field (PRF) created by specialist educational practitioners that make up the workforce (Bernstein, 2000). This discourse will be aided by firstly considering another related dichotomy between play (in line with the PRF) and school readiness (in line with the ORF).

Play does not merely describe an activity, it also contains an evaluation of that activity and therefore, there is productive play and less productive play that can encompass a wide range of types (Rogers and Lapping, 2012). Play is an essential part of young children's lives and therefore is integral to the ECEC landscape because:

"Play is a child's life and the means by which they come to understand the world around them" (Isaacs, 1971, p133).

Additionally, play has also been recognised as important in government documents:

'Play underpins the delivery of *all* the EYFS'; 'Play underpins *all* development and learning for young children (DCSF, 2008, p.19)

Play is heralded by psychologists, sociologists, educationalist and seemingly the government alike. According to Vygotsky (1978, p. 7) play “is the source of development” and “bridges the gap between real events in the changing world and the imagination within one’s head”. Despite strong evidence highlighting the importance of play and advocating for more play in ECEC (Palaiologou, 2017), the government is driving towards a more formal approach to learning that reduces the time children have available to play (Palaiologou, 2017). Consequently, Palaiologou (2017) advocates for the assessment of child’s play that focuses on examining ingredients or indicators of the children’s play environment rather than developing technical skills and ‘tick box-based’ tasks that has been reported previously in relation to the Development Matters framework (Grenier, 2019). Therefore, the concept of play pedagogically is being re-examined and reinvented or perhaps in the language of Bernstein (2000) recontextualised to be more closely related to learning and development and control ostensibly for educational purposes (Brooker, Blaise, and Edwards, 2014).

There is a trend in England as well as internationally towards a school readiness focus to be achieved through play (Palaiologou, 2017). Kagan and Lowenstein (2004) have warned that striving for school readiness through play is in fact an oxymoron. School readiness has been defined by Whitebread and Bingham (2011) as the desire for children to arrive at school ‘ready to learn’. This is affirmed by Ofsted’s first annual report on ECEC (2014, unpaginated, paragraph 12) stating that:

“Too much [ECEC provision] is being delivered without a strong enough focus on the essential skills that a child needs to start school’. ‘A child who is ready for school must have the physical, social and emotional tools to deal with the classroom, as well as the basic groundwork to begin to develop academically.”

Neaum (2016) suggests that current political rhetoric has an imbalanced focus on the acquisition of pre-determined knowledge and skills that can be closely monitored. Whereas a competence model outlined by Bernstein (2000), aligned with PRF, places emphasis on a fluid response to children as individuals, starting from what they currently know and can do, not a deficit model of what they cannot currently do. The performance model aligned with the ORF, requires the workforce to sacrifice autonomy to the top-down influence of national curriculum, with undesirable consequences for the workforce as well as the children.



There are clear tensions in the discourse around pedagogy in ECEC. In relation to the notions of quality and play. It has been suggested that the problem is not located in the children, but in provision (Whitebread and Bingham, 2014). The landscape of ECEC provision is increasingly being informed by the ORF and operating within performance models of pedagogy, to the detriment of the PRF and competence models of pedagogy. There is a call for the PRF to overcome the dominance of the ORF and resist the influence of neo-liberal agendas (Moss, 2014). It could be suggested that the ORF is inappropriate for ECEC, and that education more broadly should not be spoken about in terms of economic value and contribution to international market competitiveness, within the entrepreneurialism philosophy.

In this section I have explored the most pertinent influencers on why we are where we are in ECEC. The causes of impact were centred around policy, which through an increased rate of production has vastly changed the way the sector is organised and most notably regarding funding and regulation. With these causes set out the chapter centred on how the purpose of ECEC has been skewed, confused, and contested throughout history and then the connected impact this has had on important elements of the ECEC workforces' daily lives. To continue this exploration in existing literature I will now explore professionalism and its tenets in ECEC, including values, status, and qualifications, with notions of quality running throughout as this is central to understanding what influences the factors influencing the daily lives of the workforce.

### **2.3.5.3 Professionalism**

The stage was set for professionalism to emerge in ECEC with the wholesale changes that were brought into the sector with the National Childcare Strategy (1997). This marked the beginning of those working in ECEC becoming key to government policy, catapulting them from the margins (Osgood, 2009). Paradoxically this does not mean that the workforce themselves, as individuals, were no longer being marginalised, as will be seen, they still were at that time and remain so today. The National Childcare Strategy (1997) marked the start of unabating policy initiatives largely centred around increasing quality of ECEC provision.

It has therefore been suggested that the ECEC workforce should be 'professionalised' so they can cope with increasing requirements and extensive challenges in the sector (Chalke, 2013). These challenges depict the reality within which ECEC provisions operate in England today, as well as the ongoing and complex struggle for the ECEC workforce to negotiate their professional status. There has ultimately been a perpetuating lack of appreciation for major parts of the sector that can be attributed in part to the education vs care dichotomy, which has served as an antecedent to the devaluing of ECEC work as a profession (Sims and Waniganayake, 2015).

Discourses around quality and professionalism tend to merge (Urban 2008) and are even used interchangeably in debate. In relation to leadership, quality has been connected to previously (see section 2.2.4) and can be built upon here through considering the work of Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016). From their research with four practitioners, Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016) were able to suggest that quality is much more than a set of pre-determined indicators, it is about teamwork, the autonomous child and ethos. Ethos is pivotal in how individuals lead quality ECEC provision (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016) and professionalism plays a huge part in setting an ethos of a setting with tenets of values, status and qualifications that will be explored in this section.

Simpson (2010) states that that discourses around quality are creating systems that imply there is only one right way of doing things and therefore recasts professionals as technicians. The issues produced by this are widespread, Cooke and Lawton (2008) suggest challenges around quality work against the key role of ECEC services delivering both social justice and economic prosperity. Another notable issue with quality of ECEC services is summarised in the chasm formed in competing publications. An example is provided by Kay, Wood, Nuttall, and Henderson (2019) who suggest that in *More Great Childcare* (DfE, 2013a) quality is said to arise from better management and surveillance. *More Great Childcare* (DfE, 2013a) was a supposed response to an independent review suggesting quality arises from skilled professionalism (Nutbrown, 2012), although the connection is not that clear which adds to the problem-laden term 'quality', as explored previously with more specific regard for provisions as a whole and not the individual.

Most pertinent to personnel, there are two forms of holding individuals to account for quality that highlight how it can be done either positively or in a way that erodes trust and develops risk-adverse dispositions towards practice (Sachs, 2016). Contractual accountability (CA) is based on an explicit and implicit measurement driven contract related to standards. Conversely, responsive accountability (RA), refers to decision-making by educators, more concerned with process than outcomes and relies on self-regulation to achieve its goals. RA is more encompassing of inclusion and collective wisdom compared to CA being more about surveillance of central compliance and control, akin to the way Ofsted operate in education. Halstead (1994) suggested over 20 years ago that because of financial investment by government it is not surprising that CA is preferred.

The term quality has been linked with terms like ‘best practice’ and ‘evidence-based practice’ which Moss (2010) suggests have one shared problem in that it is a totalising normative understanding that assumes one right answer, with no room for different perspectives. Similarly, Boardman (2020) suggests that internationally, quality is still left clearly undefined and Penn (2011) states there is no magic formula for improving quality as it is a relative term with many adjustments to suit each set of circumstances. This is supported further by Osgood (2009) who agrees that there is no definition of standards of good quality care widely recognised across settings in England and reflected in the gaps and inconsistencies in the system of regulation (Osgood, 2009). This seems contradictory with language of quality being both ambiguous and totalising, although this is central to the issue with this discourse as an ill-defined term remains dominant and largely accepted.

Like quality, professionalism is recognised as a complex changing phenomenon located in specific cultural and historical situations (Freidson, 1994, 2001). Also, like quality, Friedson (2013) suggests that we must shift away from a static conception of professions and see it more as a process than a structure. He adds that “to speak about the process of professionalisation requires one to define the direction of the process” (p. 15) and this end-place is likely to be transient. Thus, it is not surprising that there are many interpretations of professionalism in ECEC. Five interpretations pertaining to ECEC are considered in table three below, not all of which are easily or universally understood. However, there are consistent themes that can be synthesised

to provide a foundation for further exploration. Where elements are akin to one another they have been placed intentionally on the same row; if they are unique, they are on a row alone.

*Table Three: Core concepts of conceptualisations of professionalism*

Katz (1985)	Oberhuemer (2005)	Friedman (2007)	Lloyd and Hallet (2010)	Brock (2012)
Social necessity				
Altruism				Values
Autonomy		Gender and power	Group member solidarity	Autonomy
Code of ethics		Ethics		Ethics
Distance from client	Partnership with parents			Rewards
	Interacting with children			
Standards of practice	Care management and leadership	Leadership and change		
Prolonged training			Restricted access to learning opportunities requiring accreditation to practice	Qualifications, training and CPD
Specialised knowledge	Knowledge base		Monopolisation of specific and exclusive skills and knowledge	Knowledge
				Skills

Table three depicts a complex understanding of professionalism in ECEC. A closer look shows the claims for social necessity has not stood the test of time compared to perpetuating notions of values and ethics, individual's autonomy, training, and specialist knowledge. Another consistency of concepts is brought together under Brock's (2012) categorisation of 'rewards', which she notes is of equal status to all her other notions. She states that 'rewards' include personal satisfaction from roles, meaningful relationships with parents and children and a strong commitment to the professional role. What stands out as novel in her 'rewards' category are the notions of being valued and financial remuneration, both of which will be included in the

extensive subsequent exploration, or as Friedman (2007) captures it, the “untangling of the knotted ball of string that is professionalism” (p.126).

Looking deeper at these conceptualisations reveals questions worthy of further exploration. For example, Urban (2008) proposes that instead of professionalism embodying hierarchical concepts of an agreed body of knowledge, there needs to be an alternative paradigm of “relational, systematic professionalism that embraces openness and uncertainty and encourages co-construction of professional knowledges and practices” (p. 135). This is in line with Friedson’s (2013) suggestion for valuing process over structure.

Who controls this body of knowledge though, what do they value and what role can the workforce realistically play in its construction? Raising similar questions, Oberhuemer (2005) argues for democratic professionalism valuing participatory relationships, alliances, and collaborative action between all stakeholders. Additionally, Lloyd and Hallet’s (2010) interpretation suggests the need to engage in extensive learning *before* practicing, therefore prioritising knowledge over skills, and privileging the mind over physical work (Chalke, 2013).

Hordern (2016) offers a neat overview of the recent history of the conceptualisation of professionalism in ECEC, including notions of welfare, governmental, educational, organisational, and corporate professionalism. These notions could be informed by different measures of the elements explored here. Hordern (2016) captures the current situation well in that “this heady mix of ‘government’ and ‘organisation’ invites bureaucratic and market logics that sit in opposition to the traditions of justified autonomy and expertise that have characterised classical forms of professionalism” (p.3). This opposition influences the process of meaning making referred to in the regulating quality section previously and can limit an individual’s confidence and competence in meaning making of the complexities of ECEC (see section 2.2.4). These tensions are informed by other concepts too and more time will now be spent exploring other concepts driving or inhibiting professionalism in ECEC.

#### **2.3.5.4 Status of the Workforce**

Building on the economic narrative prevalent in the overarching notions of quality and professionalism, Brock (2012) highlights a notable disparity between pay rates in England and other comparable countries and this debilitating lack of pay is ubiquitous in literature internationally (Moyle 2001; Moss, 2010). Having said that, levels of qualification, for example, also vary greatly internationally which largely accounts for the disparity of pay. This contributes to the underlying tone for all subsequent issues that will be discussed around status of the ECEC workforce, for example the lack of professional opportunities (Kay *et al.*, 2019), the struggle with a range of vague and ambiguous titles (Banković, 2014), the unabating implicit message that childcare is not 'real' work (Osgood, 2009) or the competing multiple voices influence everyday practice (Taggart, 2011).

Many of these issues are borne out of a comparison between those working in school-based settings, most referred to as teachers, with those who do not, referred to as nursery nurses, practitioners, early years educators, level 3's, early years professionals, early years teachers but seldom referred to as teacher. This is despite for many years it being recognised that, although the ECEC workforce is generally viewed as non-teaching, it requires a similar repertoire of skills to teaching (O'Keefe and Tait, 2004). The roots of this comparison are the education vs care dichotomy explored at length earlier in this chapter, with more recent tension between the purpose of ECEC settings being about play or school readiness also explored in more detail earlier in this chapter.

There is a huge disparity between pay and professional development opportunities for even those most highly qualified in ECEC and those with qualified teacher status (QTS) in schools (Kay *et al.* (2019). Chalke (2013) reports on a further divide within the sector between those who work with children who are over three years old and those who are younger, highlighting the layers of division that contribute to shaping professionalism in ECEC.

Sachs (2016) was interested in how teachers were viewed externally, by employers, communities and government and what teachers needed to do to enhance its status

as a profession. Through accountability and transparency trust could be built with external stakeholders and improve the capabilities of teachers. Although, Sachs (2016) goes on to warn that this understanding of professionalism leads to the teacher being seen as a technical worker. Osgood (2009) supports the established argument of tensions between intrinsic tenets of professional conduct and government initiatives in the form of curriculum prescription and standards, limiting the scope of professional autonomy. Moyles' (2001) work is centred on a collection of collaborative, interventionist and constructivist research undertaken with practitioners across several years and suggests this sort of tension can lead to practitioner learning from prescribed practice rather than from reflecting on their own practice to learn, lessening their capabilities to contribute to the specialist body of knowledge integral to a profession.

Hargreaves (1999) gave an optimistic account of professionalism that is predicated on trust, competence and strong occupational identity and cooperation. Gewirtz, Ball, and Bowe (2009) compared this occupational professionalism with organisational professionalism. Like Hargreaves's (1999) occupational professionalism, the conception from Gewirtz *et al.* (1995) included trust and collegiality but also a strong emphasis on control being with the professional group themselves and ethics monitored by institutions and associations. This is more akin to RA discussed previously (Sachs, 2016). Conversely, organisational professionalism places control away from the workforce with more focus on standardised procedures, hierarchies and external accountability and regulation (Gewirtz *et al.*, 1995). This is more akin to CA considered previously (Sachs, 2016). The RA vs CA tension exemplifies the reality of where we are in ECEC as explored in the purpose, pedagogy, and provision sections.

Moss (2010) suggests that what could be worse than the growing reality of those working in ECEC being taken for granted is the genuine threat of the sector being subsumed in school education and being fully 'schoolified'. Similarly, Moyles (2001, p. 87) states that "education, education and education—usually means tests, exams and formal schooling". Therefore, whilst striving for those working in ECEC to be seen on equal footing with teachers' professional status, there could be drawbacks in achieving this too. In other words, as Nurse (2007) suggests, if we look back to the 1990s the debate at the time was whether primary school teachers could be seen on the same

professional standing as secondary teachers or not. Considering the equal qualification recognition and similar pay-scales today, one could argue that this has been achieved. However, pedagogical freedoms were lost to obtain this professional status and a smaller gap had to be closed for this transition to occur than would be the case for ECEC. More detail around these points is not readily available in existing literature within England and therefore require careful consideration when formulating a new theoretical understand of what ECEC's purpose is in relation to professional status, as I am attempting to do in this research. Literature from around however the world suggests there are more concerted efforts towards an increased professional purpose with Arndt, Smith, Urban, Ellegaard, Swadener and Murray (2021) exploring a smart investment for a smarter Australia, an ambiguous new national curriculum to fight for better staff-child ratios in Denmark and power to the profession in the United States. Interestingly, Arndt et al (2021, p.418) suggest that "The debate about professional identity in our field has (if only recently) begun to reorient itself around an Ethics of Care" and closely related to the work Noddings.

With the increased prevalence of market forces in ECEC, there are potentially multiple and competing voices having their say on what ECEC is for, and therefore, how those working in ECEC are perceived. Moyles (2001) suggests that public perception of low status is only a consequence of low pay. Moyles (2001) goes on to state that this then limits self-confidence and self-esteem of the workforce, as this perception is well-documented and widely perceived within the sector too (Chalke, 2013). From this weakened position, the workforce is more susceptible to the influence of multiple voices over their practice, forming a vicious cycle of perpetuating negativity and a feeling of low self-worth. Some of these issues will be picked up shortly in more detail but what remains essential is that this disempowerment of ECEC workers is not in the children's best interests, as in some instances these workers know the children better than anyone else (Powell and Gooch, 2012) and are integral for setting the foundations for their learning for the rest of their lives. This discourse, alluding to power, has strong connection to the gendered nature of working in ECEC, where the strong association of mothering skills being needed for the role works against the idea of this being a learned and valuable profession (Findlay, Findlay, and Stewart, 2009). Before that, whilst it may be widely perceived that individuals casually embark on a career in ECEC (Osgood, 2009), with it often anecdotally being offered to those who



couldn't make it at hairdressing, there are qualification requirements needed. The requirements have a turbulent history, riddled with inconsistencies and confusion that have had admirable aims but ultimately fallen short of the workforces' expectations, as will be explored now.

### **2.3.5.5 Qualifications**

This section will explore notable qualification discourse in Government policy, as well as the antecedents and consequences of these initiatives for the personnel in the sector, most recently with strong incentivisation to recruit apprentices onto Level 3 Early Years Educator programmes and around new T Levels. Discourse around qualifications exemplifies confusion and complexity thread through the literature to this point, notably the work of Hoskins and Smedley (2020) draws on the Nutbrown review to highlight concerns raised 10 years ago around the confusing nature of credentials and in-substantive content of certain qualifications. Hoskins and Smedley (2020) add from their own work that context shapes access and possibilities to the workforce seeking further qualifications with is troubling given qualifications centrality to developing as a professional.

To continue, Moss (2010) suggests that being a professional involves:

“Being able to construct knowledge from diverse sources, involving awareness of paradigmatic plurality, curiosity and border crossing, and acknowledging that knowledge is always partial, perspectival and provisional” (p. 15)

Furthermore, Hammond, Powell, and Smith (2015) suggest graduate level education for ECEC professionals should be about finding a way of engaging in ECEC practice that concerns participation, empowerment, and mutuality, and that this should not be pre-determined nor defined by intended outcomes. The lack of t4/9 outcomes is in direct conflict with the increasing influence by central Government on all teacher training being seen as a craft best learnt in an expert–apprentice relationship in the workplace, whilst meeting a set of pre-determined standards. The use of pre-determined standards inhibits the importance of trainees and new professionals being able to reflect, rethink and transform (Barron, 2016). There seems to be limited support to enable new teachers to “negotiate the spaces between policy, theory and beliefs as they seek constantly to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct ethical professional

identities for themselves” (Barron, 2016, p. 338). The question therefore remains whether a unique body of knowledge can really be formed, let alone reflected upon and developed with the existing set of qualifications? (Chalke, 2013). Recent research from Sakr and Bonetti (2021) suggests work is needed to understand more about leadership development available which focuses specifically on CPD planning, though the authors recognise that this suggestion is in the context of a clear lack of ECEC leadership development in general (Sakr and Bonetti, 2021).

Government initiatives in ECEC over the past 20 years have increasingly focused on the development of a graduate led workforce, a recent history from this point is captured in table four below. The assumption was that a graduate led workforce can lead an improvement in quality through promoting collaborative professional working (Simpson, 2011) and this is captured further by Arndt *et al.* (2021, p.415) who said, “there is an urgent need to facilitate a collective approach and a coherent voice to ensure systemic and equitable policy development for the future sustainability of the sector”. There has been a similar drive internationally, in Finland, Australia and elsewhere, under the assumption that quality of staff is a key factor in service quality, and this can be improved by improving levels of staffing (Sims and Waniganayake, 2015). Hoskins and Smedley (2020) acknowledge though, there are tensions around what constitutes quality in training and qualification.

*Table Four – An Overview of Qualification Development in ECEC in Recent History*

Year	Policy/Review document	Details and impact on professionalism
2003	Green Paper Every Child Matters	Affirmed the integration of care and education in ECEC that led to the need for workforce reforms attempting to remedy the undervaluation and poor rewards connected to working with ECEC children (Simpson, 2011)
2005	Children's Workforce Strategy	Informed by EPPE project (Sylva <i>et al.</i> 2004) highlighted the need to focus on skills, training, and career paths
		The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) was established to support the implementation of this agenda
		Graduate Leader Fund established and the emergence of foundation degrees, but the fund was then replaced by an Early Intervention Grant (EIG) that was not ring fenced for enhanced salaries (Gove, 2010).
2006	The Childcare Act.	Developed the Early Years Professional (EYP) role, significantly only for the PVI portion of the sector (Osgood, 2009).
		EYP status can be achieved by individuals meeting a set of thirty-nine national standards at level 6 (Taggart, 2011)
2012	Nutbrown Review	Set out recommendations that informed the next policy document but there are clear disconnections between this reviews recommendations and the resultant policy details.
2013	More Great Childcare	The Early Years Teacher (EYT) status replaced EYP status, defined as developing "graduate leaders responsible for organising and leading high-quality teaching practice in a range of early years settings" (NCTL, 2013, p. 1)
2017	Early Years Workforce Strategy	Made some erroneous claims about the impact of EYT status. Set out how the department plans to support the early years sector to remove barriers to attracting, retaining, and developing the early years workforce
2022	Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner Competencies	Developed to ensure degree level qualifications are full and relevant and subject to rigorous standards.

Professionalisation through attempting to increase graduate numbers in the workforce has been strived for under the consistent gaze of the government (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010). Like other government initiatives, a lack of continued investment in qualifications weakened the impact of investment, and left individuals underwhelmed by the resultant (lack of) professional recognition, as the role was never clearly articulated or valued (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010) and there was still a distinct lack of professional recognition, respect, and rewards, as well as a forward trajectory for them that will keep them in the sector, often resulting in individuals leaving for improved remuneration elsewhere (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010).

Furthermore, there have mostly been technical notions of professionalism that has been problematised previously by Hammond *et al.* (2015) in that pre-determined outcomes are not desirable. Resulting in the suggestion that these initiatives more of a function, than a position, role, or transient process, focused on being an agent of change to exemplify high standards and improve professional practice (Murray, 2013). This is problematic for the professionalism and quality of ECEC as those aspiring to be part of this graduate group have been said to desire a collective personal identity in a cohesive group with a share vision and understanding and a shared voice (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010). The hope was that this can support change and be a tool for networking and business development (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010) but this has not been realised. Notably, even with the EYT status, with the same entry requirements and similar standards and training model to qualified teacher status (QTS), there are no accompanying initiatives to address the lack of parity with QTS in other terms such as pay and progression routes. Despite this concern, the Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017, p.14) states that “Achieving EYT status can give a real feeling of professionalism to nursery staff, increasing their confidence, giving them the ability to promote excellent practice and the authority to share knowledge and good practice with colleagues”.

More recently from 2020, there has been a drive towards apprentice qualifications with cash incentives in place for provisions, both at level 3 and level 5 and most recently T level qualifications. There is no academic literature available on this at the time of writing, however, Goddard (2022) suggests the lack of data makes it hard to determine if those completing a T Level in Education and Childcare are progressing into a career in Early Years. Furthermore, the government’s own early research indicates there is still a stronger pull towards apprenticeships over T levels as they also give a license to practice (Straw and Bradley, 2022). Goddard (2022) goes on to report that it is too early to fully understand T Level impact on the workforce but that the number of these graduates is likely to increase with the course now being offered by a wider range of providers. The Government are also planning to remove funding from other college-based level 3 qualifications. This is concerning, however, as Goddard (2022) also reports some in the sector doubt if T Levels are producing graduates sufficiently qualified to practice at Level 3 expectations and perhaps in comparison to the existing courses the T Level does not provide the same amount of knowledge and experiences

for learners. However, the introduction of this qualification does not address the need for a career progression structure advocated for by Nutbrown (2021) over 20 years after Abbott and Pugh (1998) put forward the idea of a career ladder. These factors continue to contribute to issues for the workforce that will now be discussed.

As coined by Kay *et al.* (2019) there was evidence of responsabilisation with EYTS being expected to bring advanced expertise to settings to solve problems of practice, but without any additional resources from the state. There is additional concern about the drivers behind the inception EYP status and EYT status. Roberts-Holmes (2013) suggests strong historic and theoretical traditions of teaching and pedagogy were rejected when EYP status was produced out of seemingly nowhere. Hevey, Lumsden, and Moxon (2007) suggested that these functions were created without coherent strategy and without the necessary recognition of fundamental issues around professionalisation.

The discourse around QTS and EYP status provides an inadvertent and strengthened division between the PVI sector and maintained school sector (Roberts-Holmes, 2013), that are further perpetuated when considering in-service training too which is generally lacking in PVIs compared to the maintained sector. This is exemplified in recent work by Hudson, Brammer and Witton (2022) who found based on data collection from the EYTs community that the workforce is at risk of losing its identity and that due to these individuals largely being employed as unqualified teachers, the workforce is at risk of losing these individuals who are tending to seek QTS to obtain teacher pay and conditions.

Both PVI and the maintained parts of the sector have a shared issue of an over-technical approach to professional learning and development, fostered by the Government's primary and long-standing concern with enhancing quality (Bolam and McMahon, 2004). However, whereas teachers have regular in-service training days (INSET) days and can partake in more intensive initiatives like the 'improving teacher programme' the 'outstanding teacher programme' and a range of offerings the National College for School Leadership. ECEC workers report intermittent access to in-service training, most of which related to practical health and safety issues, food safety, child protection or safeguarding (Powell and Gooch, 2012). New ways of

thinking are needed for continuous professional development (CPD) and qualifications in ECEC to avoid promoting a limited conception of teaching, being a teacher (Day, 1999) and having professional status.

There is a related discursive construction of professional status in ECEC which is problematic, perpetuated by the marginalised workforce being fragmented across the sector and seemingly powerless to challenge top-down policy implementation. Although, Chalk (2013) suggests that higher education qualifications may help graduates to resist policy initiatives that limit ECEC professionalism or pigeon-hole it in a technical way. These qualifications may also perpetuate tension from the dichotomy between a caring, maternal, and gendered workforce being opposed to a professional, degree educated and highly trained workforce (McGillivray, 2008). Exemplified with the CWDC (2007) saying that caring nurturing and loving are central tenets of the workforce but goes on to state that these qualities are not valued as part of their professional standards for EYP status.

Furthermore, Osgood (2009) warns that graduates may be recruited into ECEC settings based on their status as graduates and they could be the embodiment of government constructions of professionalism, whilst lacking experiential expertise in the field. The lack of experience is not helped by a portion of the sector who Osgood (2009) states will meet graduates “with suspicion and hostility” (p.744). Conversely, graduates entering the workforce does not necessarily lead to a devaluing of the expertise present in the field and leadership is everyone’s responsibility, not reserved to those in a leader role (East, 2019), as I will come on to explore in greater detail.

The professional status of personnel in ECEC continues to be affected by lack of pay, status and conditions of work that perpetuate the divide between the sector and other levels of education in England. This division undoubtedly contributes to this lack of parity which is due to more than initial training, ongoing training, and qualifications. As qualifications are not the sole arbitrator of quality in ECEC and many providers are losing interest in offering routes in EYT status (Crown, 2018).

The impact of policy, funding and regulation on the individual is widespread as has been set out here specifically in relation to purpose, pedagogy and curriculum, and

professionalism. I will now explore new ways of thinking about individuals and their leadership responsibility by discussing issues of social justice and gender as foundations for change, before setting out how this will be explored in this thesis in my methodology chapter.

### **2.3.6 New ways of thinking about individuals and their leadership responsibilities**

Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) raise an important question that encourages a shift in thinking: does leadership refer to a person in a particular role, or something that can be enacted by everyone? This question is central in the work of East (2019), explored earlier, and forms the premise for this section of the literature review where, with a fuller understanding of leadership in ECEC and the tension rich policy discourse, I can begin to explore new ways of thinking about individuals and their leadership responsibilities theoretically, before exploring this empirically with those working in the sector. This section aims to capture and emphasise the lived experience of tension for individuals working in ECEC and the resultant leadership responsibility for them all as it permeates the available literature to date. First, I will explore the literature around individuals in relation to social justice before exploring their leadership responsibilities and finally new ways of thinking about this offered by more recent literature.

#### **2.3.6.2 The individuals**

There is a tension laden reality for individuals in the sector that is fuelled by gender and social justice issues perpetuated by the consequences of policy initiatives. However, drawing on recent work around related marginalised groups such as the BAME community (Miller, 2019) and some less recent feminine constructions of leadership (Helgeson, 1990), I begin to highlight new ways forwards and areas for further exploration from existing literature that could have meaningful impact for the individuals in the sector.

Sims and Waniganayake (2015) stated that “those who are the most effective leaders are those who self-identify as leaders.” (p.103) This idea is predicated on the idea that leaders have a strong internalised identity and behavioural intentions. Considering the

ubiquitous low status and pay construction of the workforce in tandem with the confusions and complexities of the sector, it is not surprising that to have a strong internalised identity and clear behavioural intentions is extremely challenging, if not impossible. Educational leaders who believe in themselves as educational leaders, can have a positive impact on the quality of leadership in ECEC (Sims and Waniganayake, 2015). To overcome this seemingly insurmountable challenge, significant progression is needed for the individuals in the sector. Individuals in the sector tend to distrust and underestimate their own insights (Moyle, 2001) and therefore devalue their own expertise in professional practice and can ultimately play a role in their own demise as suggested by Miller (2019).

Miller (2019) proposes a conceptual model of progression that reflect the experiences of BAME heritage based on his work across five years in four separate studies interviewing a range of BAME teachers in England, primarily in London. I am adopting this model to frame a new way of thinking about progression for the almost entirely female workforce that have been marginalised a great deal throughout history. According to Miller (2019) the deep sensitivity to ethnic and cultural differences that operate in England is depicted in overt and covert ways and consequentially can define experiences of individuals. The gendered nature of ECEC follows suit with this and are also in line with further suggestions by Miller (2019) that espoused values of respect for individual liberty and tolerance have created an in group and out group system that fuel tensions in society.

Furthermore, Miller (2019) proposes five barriers to progression that are evident for the ECEC workforce, rooted in a shared struggle for BAME for equality and mutual recognition (Miller, 2018) that is mirrored by individuals in ECEC (women in particular). Whilst religion barriers are less prominent in ECEC, Miller's other suggestions of policy, institutional practices of marginalisation and institutional culture and group membership all depict part of the reality of the barriers for ECEC individuals. Policy has continued to degrade individual's autonomy and status. When considered as part of the education sector, which economically they certainly are, the sector is marginalised and interfered with by many voices, and they do not boast the same level of networks and professional body support as their teacher counterparts in primary, secondary, and tertiary education.



The other barrier Miller (2019) noted was that of stereotyping and discrimination both directly and indirectly in racism. It is clear the ECEC workforce is also stereotyped in societal perceptions and Government policy construction. This is not to say that all institutions uphold these barriers, as Miller (2016) notes some will be uninitiated with no framework or plan, others will be initiated with a plan but not evident in roles. More developed organisations may be experimenting with some BAME members in leadership roles although only some will be engaged with BAME staff at all levels of leadership hierarchy. Whilst I do not promote a role-based hierarchical application of leadership for ECEC, I do recognise the existing of hierarchies in the sector and this reality will not disappear, or even lessen, without concerted effort and progression which is what those in leadership positions can and should advocate for, tirelessly.

The culmination of Miller's (2019) work is a four-part conceptual model for progression of marginalised individuals. Whilst his drive was for BAME personnel to progress, mine is for ECEC personnel, and I will discuss the model from that perspective now. Firstly, meritocratic agency which is based on individuals on worth and the systems recognition of this worth. For ECEC personnel their lack of self-belief as already been problematised but here there is more evidence for the importance of this to be developed to move individuals' forwards. Similarly, the system of recognition with regards to EYP status and EYT status has failed those who achieved this status. The second part is contrived/expedient agency which is opposed to meritocratic agency where despite having the right merits (qualifications and experience) individuals need to seek affiliation with networks or groups to be more favourable for progression. The third part is endorsement, Miller (2019) suggests that despite purported equity in the system there are evident benefits of having 'white sanction'. Miller (2016) also suggests that BAME capital is restricted and can be restrictive which can be argued is comparable to the marginalising 'habitus of care' in ECEC that has constrained professional growth and sustained low societal perceptions. Finally, institutional habitus which is based on "planned and deliberate changes to institutional structures, practices and cultures" (Miller, 2019, p.29), can be likened to Marxist feminism as previously explored, advocating for structural change to support the progression of women in ECEC. It is recognised that the greatest likelihood of progression is when institutional habitus creates a context that promotes and manifests equity and

engenders individual ambition. For this to be possible, collaboration needs to be the default position of an organisation.

This new way of thinking may support the empowerment of individuals in the sector to find a stronger voice and construct more thoughtful understandings of their purpose and leadership. This approach may speak more to the marginalised history of women that span beyond the ECEC sector and may have contributed to the way women think today. Gilligan (1982) suggests that women speak in a different voice, and it can be said that men may prioritise autonomy, generality, abstract impartiality, and women prize caring, nurturing, and the formation of interpersonal community (Crotty, 1998). Despite this, we must move beyond this gender binary as there may not even be one as previously discussed. To add to this here, Farganis (1986) suggests that there may be no traits particular to a single sex, it may be that prevailing understandings of feminine and masculine traits is more of a historical social construction than a biological one. Therefore, considering that both feminine and masculine traits may be socially constructed, any construction of leadership that wants to promote progression in line with Miller's (2019) model, must not be assumptive of gendered notions and consider individual merits and promote an authentic system of equity and promotion.

Furthermore, Peeters *et al.* (2015) suggest that there needs to be more gender-sensitive career advice and instead of trying to neutralise gender, we need to become more gender-conscious and go beyond traditional gendered understandings of professionalism and leadership with new perspectives on care and 'feminine capital'. Therefore, strategies are needed not only for 'more men', but to transform the gender-regime structures and affirmations (Peeters *et al.*, 2015). Through challenging engrained beliefs and perceptions of gender in society, a more balanced view of gender may emerge and open the possibility for new gender dialogues and a greater sense of shared responsibility between genders.

Becoming gender-conscious and recognising the non-hierarchical and fluid nature of masculinity and femininity and ensuring ECEC is as welcoming for men as it is for women, will support a more balanced and sustainable workforce, more motivated as a group and more capable of progression and enacting leadership at all levels of the

sector. This focus on the 'group', as in more than just the leader in a hierarchical sense, is the important next step in this new way of thinking.

### **2.3.6.3 Leadership responsibility**

Nicholson *et al.*, (2018) states that considering leadership in a hierarchical sense reserved for those at the top, in line with the idea of formal authority and traditional notions of leadership, is at odds with the purpose and context of ECEC. By shifting perspective and adopting the emergent view that leadership is everyone's responsibility (Bolden, Petrov, and Gosling, 2008) I can begin to de-stabilise beliefs and ill-formed 'truths' (see truth explicated more in a later section) around leadership in ECEC and the education sector more broadly. With new ways of thinking about leadership responsibility, knowledge construction is contextualised, socially constituted and dynamic. Knowledge therefore is tension laden as intersections between cultural, social, historical, and political contexts that are understood to impact how individuals make sense of their experiences (Nicholson *et al.*, 2018). Whilst this may not resolve these tensions that have troubled the sector for some time; by owning this tension, individuals be empowered to enact leadership at all levels.

There is growing interest in non-formal leadership, that is, leadership from those who do not have a traditional leader role assigned to them. It is not a new idea that leaders *and* leadership is crucial to improving success, teaching, and learning in education institutions (Middlehurst, 2008; Parrish, 2013). Some efforts have been made outside of ECEC to understand how those not employed in formal leadership roles understood themselves as leaders. Hofmeyer, Sheingold, Klopper and Warland, (2015) explored this in higher education (HE) and reported that those not in formal leader roles saw power as a dirty, uncomfortable word. One participant of Hofmeyer *et al.* (2015) stated that:

"You can be a leader without being anybody's boss, so you can be a peer, but can be the leader of a group" (p, 185)

Hofmeyer, *et al.* (2015) went on to conclude that leadership development must be available for all academics in HE and that all individuals have a moral responsibility to cultivate civility and foster inclusive cultures and networks. As previously alluded to, individuals need to feel empowered to enact this form of leadership responsibility. The

hope is that this will not only develop more leaders but more types of leaders. As Kagan and Hallmark (2001) suggested 20 years ago which is still applicable today, the demands facing early childhood workers require the cultivation of not only more leaders but also more kinds of leaders. This cultivation must be equitable and realistic in the field, and there is greater chance of achieving this if it is constructed with those working in the field as is done in this research. Also, nearly 20 years ago, Mujis *et al.* (2004) called for a timely exploration of what is meant by effective leadership in ECEC, and consequently how leaders could be equipped to be more effective. Effective leadership remains elusive and as we have seen, the broad pedagogical and entrepreneurial leadership responsibilities are a huge undertaking and tension laden. Therefore, these ideas together, promote the notion of leadership being everyone's responsibility and how it should not be reserved for role-based hierarchies. Through this greater empowerment, there could be an increased likelihood of the use of active dialogue in the sector to breakdown embedded notions and co-construct a form of leadership that can be enacted through "reciprocal relationships and participative pedagogy", as advocated for by Murray and MacDowall (2013, p. 299).

Dialogue brings with it the question of language and Lau Chin, Lott, Rice, and Sanchez-Hucles (2007) suggest that the language of leadership contributes to constraining the models and meanings. Nicholson and Kroll (2014) suggest that the four wisdoms offered by Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000) could be helpful in shifting the understanding and language of effective leadership for ECEC. These wisdoms are people, emotional, role and resource wisdom and have connotations of the importance of valuing both entrepreneurial and pedagogical leadership which were explored previously.

Drath, McCauley, Palus, Van Velsor, O'Connor and McGuire (2008) go beyond more traditional distributed and non-formal approaches to engendering leadership to suggest that we should reject the traditional 'tripod' notion of leader, follower and shared goals and instead adopt a construct that invites fluidity for individuals to navigate across traditional binaries through a range of interactions. Drath *et al.* (2008) propose a shift in leadership towards the focus on outcomes of leadership of direction, alignment, and commitment, (DAC) with each outcome more likely to be realised in the presents of effective leadership and followership behaviours within a whole

organisation, rather than from those in a formal leadership position. These theories (Kagan and Hallmark, 2001; Drath *et al.*, 2008; Nicholson and Kroll, 2014) move away from the role-based ideal of the leader towards the importance of shared understandings of leadership. Douglass (2018) offers a definition of leadership that I subscribe to for its concise, thoughtful, and relevant detail. She states that “leadership [is] a process of influencing change to improve early care and education and is not reserved just for those with a formal leadership position” (p.387). This is in harmony with the DAC model (Drath *et al.*, 2008) with its non-hierarchical and collaborative undertones, it also can be subsumed by Helgeson’s (1990) Web of Inclusion theory of leadership that will be explored subsequently.

Whilst existing language around leadership in ECEC has a place, new language, generated by the sector itself could have powerful benefits to the sector (this is explored more in the methodology chapter). Nicholson and Kroll (2014) call for a move “beyond theories of leadership styles, towards conceptualising leadership that can encompass the diversity of contexts and experiences that characterise early childhood education. As well as contribute to more nuanced theorisation about early childhood leadership for contemporary times” (p. 30). Language is something that plays an integral role in the development of the methodological approach in this thesis and will be explored further in the next section.

Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) suggest that literature and leadership theory can only partially satisfy the current leadership requirements in ECEC and equally important is the notion that leadership in ECEC cannot be constructed through the adoption of models developed external to the field. To successfully support effective leadership in ECEC, there needs to be an acknowledgement and empowerment of the individuals in the sector and their innate drivers and complexities as well as the tensions in the sector. Douglass (2018) goes further to state that “Leadership development is the next frontier of advancing ECE quality and the workforce” (p. 389). Her research captured the voices of 43 front-line workers who were calling for a higher value being placed in their expertise and those of their fellow front-liners. Douglass (2018) goes on to convey that her participants felt we need to “get leadership from those of us who have had the experience” (p. 391). It is though integral to consider if the experience of leadership of individuals considers the following three key concepts that emerge from previous

literature and contribute to an interesting conceptual understanding of leadership in ECEC.

#### **2.3.6.4 Features of a new understanding of leadership in ECEC: Social justice, activism, and Inclusion**

Wise and Wright (2012) claim that existing literature has not explored how women currently holding leadership positions in early childhood settings (which is the vast majority) make meaning of leadership. Given the high proportion of women in ECEC, this omission exemplifies the lack of understanding of the nature of leadership in ECEC. This is despite a history of research providing foundations (Helgeson, 1990) for a more thoughtful and encompassing understanding of leadership within this field with a high proportion of females, that embraces the strengths of feminine leadership. A conceptual new way of thinking about leadership will now be presented that does consider this history of ECEC individuals, in line with the broader picture of leadership in ECEC that has been explicated previously.

There is a possibility that ECEC leaders and professionals are more interested in their own practice and caring for the children in their setting than theory and advocating for the profession more widely, certainly on a political level. I posit that this may have contributed to the low status of the profession and may be perpetuating the feeling of isolation experienced by the sector. Park (1996) articulates this clearly by saying this results in a “gender-role hierarchy where jobs identified as (culturally) feminine and allocated to (biological) women are undervalued and underpaid” (p.47). Additionally, Rodd’s work (1996, 1997 and 1998) has consistently suggested that “those in the field of early childhood have an aversion to embracing leadership and that this lack of leadership activity has related to a limited political voice and a low social profile for early childhood education and care” (1998, p.44). The implications of this may well have made way for the build-up of the hostile policy context the sector is in today. This is a core message from the work of Miller (2019) presented previously (see section 2.3.6.2) where those in a marginalised group must work together, to change the institutional habitus around ECEC and be proud of the culture inherent with the role.

Leadership in ECEC can be described with two broad categories, pedagogical leadership and entrepreneurial leadership that have been explored in the preceding sections, that subsume many other facets such as marketisation, education vs care tension and the purpose of the sector. It has been argued that this is more responsibility than should be reserved for one person. Instead, leadership in some sense is a responsibility for all individuals (East, 2019). To empower all individuals to be able to enact their leadership responsibilities, particularly those living with the contextual challenges of ECEC, further scaffolding is required. Further scaffolding could be through education as Gacoin (2016) suggests, whilst individual and collective understandings of empowerment are underpinned differently, they are united by the premise that identities can be empower through education. The ECEC workforce as a collective and as individuals can be educated and empowered to defend its values because of the continued Government policy production that has led to a tension-laded reality. These tensions are within the sector itself (as mentioned with horizontal violence for example, see section 2.3.3.8) and between the sector with primary schooling and elsewhere in education and as Palaiologou and Male (2018) suggest, there is a need to:

“Construct knowledge to represent the relationship between care and knowledge under the name of education, whilst paying attention to the living ecology of the community of practice, instead of ignoring all the antinomies and oxymora that lead to borrowing leadership models from outside the field of ECEC.” (p.7)

To be able to do this, entrepreneurial and pedagogical leadership must be framed within a third concept of leadership, social justice leadership. Miller, Hill-Berry, Hylton-Fraser, and Powell (2019) suggest that being able to ‘push back’ against practices that are out of kilter with equality and the values and purpose of ECEC, is the work of social justice leadership. Through interviews with school leaders, Miller *et al.* (2019) found that they were focused on ‘doing right by others’ and ‘fighting’ for rights which invoked three interrelated activisms as part of their social justice leadership. Pedagogic activism is centred around seeking better outcomes for children and could be extended for all stakeholders in ECEC. It focuses less on technical outcomes and more on effective functioning as a responsible citizen. Regulatory activism particularly responds to institutional habitus and working to ameliorate structural and procedural injustices caused by inconsistent policy initiatives. Finally, emancipatory activism

works to eradicate oppression and create opportunities for all stakeholders to be empowered. This requires collaboration and reflection to ensure you remain on the right track.

What becomes clear from this activist conceptualisation of social justice leadership is that it is an active responsibility aiming to disrupt and challenge, as well as to develop. Miller *et al.* (2019) goes on to state that this work therefore required purposeful effort from individuals whatever their position and status in their organisation, this adds to the importance of a “climate of fairness, inclusion and excellence for all” (Miller *et al.*, 2019, p. 17).

Szeto and Cheng (2017) go further to suggest that social justice leadership:

“Involves a battery of strategies adopted by educational leaders and administrators to ensure inclusion is practiced in their academic communities and related cultures.” (p.56).

Furthermore, Miller *et al.* (2019) found that distributed leadership can be instrumental for capacity building and social justice. Smith (2013) stated the benefits of this are that leadership responsibility is not borne by only one or two individuals and consequently there is a larger pool of leadership capacity to draw from within the organisation. The web of inclusion (Helgeson, 1990) is an implementable approach to distributed leadership as it promotes multiple interactions of individuals and situations (Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond, 2004). Further benefits of this approach to leadership are enhanced succession planning and leadership capacity to embed social justice practice across organisational contexts (Miller *et al.*, 2019). Furman (2012) further affirms this by stating that “leadership for social justice is everyone’s responsibility” (p. 200).

This notion is inherent in the inclusive nature of Helgeson’s (1990) Web of Inclusion as it is an activist form of leadership striving to engender an environment for everyone to thrive in, which requires an impetus placed on how we live and treat one another as members of a community (Rebore, 2011). Through observations and in-depth interviews with women leaders, Helgeson (1990) developed a theory of leadership she believed was unique to women, suggesting it is more appropriate when considering



possible features of a new understanding of leadership in ECEC. She coined the 'Web of Inclusion' theory of leadership, or more accurately a woman's way of organising her workplace, with no hierarchy, but connected and integrated. She went on to suggest that this structure could have significance that also goes beyond the bounds of gender, making it more appropriate considering other research promoting gender consciousness and fluidity (Beynon, 2002). This theory was built from Gilligan's (1982) work where she suggests the images of hierarchy and web convey different ways of structuring relationships and whilst a web is more akin to the nurturing, feminine tradition, it can be seen here more as a way of thinking that a gendered way of thinking, open to both sexes. Helgeson (1990) also offered eight principles of leadership found in woman leaders that include notions of calmness and care, with a focus on relationships and a recognition of a worker beyond the tasks they perform for their organisation, all of which are applicable to the inherent values of the ECEC workforce.

However, I am not ignorant to the perpetuating view that ECEC is inherently the role of the mother and therefore I am hopeful that the grounding of this concept of leadership will be more palatable to all individuals both within and outside the sector. It is my intention to challenge the view that the 'cult of domesticity', intertwined with this mothering tradition embedded within this highly feminised workforce (see section 2.3.3.7 and 2.3.3.8 for more on this) that brings with it a lack of credibility for leadership in ECEC (Blackmore, 1999) that still perpetuates today (House of Commons Backbench Business, 2019), and instead be seen as a unique strength of leadership in ECEC. This in turn could remove the sense of reluctance for professionals in the sector to identify with leadership aspects of their role, as this may be due to a lack of understanding of what leadership means in terms of ECEC (Rodd, 1997). An important gap I intend for my research to fill, for a better understanding of leadership.

In a hierarchical sense, being a leader can be isolating which may deter many away from the role. Particularly those who thrive in teams with many connections and relationships and who prioritise care and attentiveness, all of which are traits closely associated with the role of individuals in ECEC. This is where the work of Helgeson (1990) becomes particularly relevant. The foundation of this approach is predicated on a circular, inclusive notion that allows for flexibility, collaboration, and inclusion, all inherent in ECEC. Helgeson (1990) reported that typically women described their

leadership as being in the middle of things in the centre, not at the top, where they can reach out to their team, as opposed to reach down to them. This notion of leaders being in the centre places great importance in a strong centre that is well connected in all directions, as this is where power comes from, naturally advocating for teamwork.

Whilst this approach provides a welcome move away from hierarchical understandings of leadership, it still places role-based leadership in the centre. However, it does, as Helgeson states (1990), facilitate “free-flowing and loose structures” (p.45) that open possibilities for individuals to be the centre of the web at different times depending on the context. More broadly, this approach embodies diffuse and growth-centred notions of success that women have historically been criticised for holding (Helgeson, 1990), despite more recently this becoming an integral part of all organisations, particularly in education. This connectedness is of particular importance given its dissonance with the traditional problems of dominant masculine leadership where there may be a lack of human connection and a prioritisation of efficiency at the expense of humane values (Helgeson, 1990), instead embracing the positive elements that can be experienced because of being in a highly feminised workforce as explored previously (see section 2.3.3.7).

Another important tenet of this approach is more tacit in that there is a never-ending building process that starts from the centre. The architect of the web is the individual with leadership responsibility in a particular context and they make new connections and developments to strengthen the existing web. Access and engagement, more like a dialogue, as opposed to force and regulation, are the tools for success. In other words, those in the centre of the web must secure their position by empowering others to grow too through communication and with it comes a shift in the language of leadership (Helgeson, 1990).

A notable shift towards the typically feminine language of collaboration in leadership is to move beyond the inefficiencies of the old ‘great man’ hero leader. This serves to empower all individuals to have responsibility for leadership, it is also integral to ensure meaningful connection remains between these individuals. As simple as it sounds, listening is an essential skill to embed in individuals. Singer (1999) describes analytical listening as a synthesis of intellectual power and emotional response which is a skill

that bridges the dichotomy between the ‘bottom line’ (entrepreneurial) and concern for people development (pedagogical). With this balance, people’s creativity can be unlocked as they feel more valued and empowered (Helgeson, 1990). This sort of shift is a move to right the wrongs inflicted on the ECEC workforce as a marginalised group and this is an integral role for social justice leaders (Miller *et al.*, 2019). They can use their role to create safe spaces and opportunities for other individuals to be empowered too which is something I did with my methodology as explored in more detail subsequently (see section 3.8).

Despite this possible conception of leadership in ECEC, there is continued polarisation of men and women described by Park (1996) as only reproducing gender stereotypes and making the adoption of leadership roles more problematic for women (Wajcman, 1999). Discourse needs to move away from the use of male and female labelling of leadership styles, to allow concepts and characterisations to be open, inoffensive, and appealing to all individuals (Hard, 2004). This unique context of ECEC calls for unique leadership styles (Nivala and Hujala, 2002) not currently being offered in existing literature. Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000) found through interviewing childcare centre directors that traditional leadership theories did not resonate with them, and although they did not offer a clear framework for ECEC leadership to move forwards with, they did suggest that leaders in the field are developing a new and unique language of leadership built on feminist models. Although further details of this language were not forthcoming from Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000) and over twenty years on their remains a lacuna in the literature here although there have been some forward steps. Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) report a reference to feminine leadership rather than woman leadership, which I think is a subtle yet important shift as this is not to say that men cannot enact this style either, or that this style will continue to be associated with exclusively women into the future. They say that it emphasises relationships, communication, being motivating and the privileging of democracy and participation, which is not in the exclusive domain of women to do but will continue to be considered feminine.

Coupling this emerging language shift with Campbell-Barr’s (2014) urging to individuals to “go further and to grasp the opportunity to be involved in constructing an understanding of ECEC from within the sector” (p.13), sets out meaningful aims and

possibilities for the workforce. Social justice leadership is the underpinning of this which is activist both in its intent, to promote the marginalised workforce and the holistic development of children, and in its approach, which must be inclusive as set out by Helgeson (1990) in the Web of Inclusion. This promotes a broad and distributed understanding of leadership defined as pedagogical and entrepreneurial leadership that considers the material, economical, and social factors enabling leadership in ECEC to set out change systems, processes, and structures to better respond to the needs of stakeholders (Miller *et al.*, 2019), essential for the progression of the marginalised ECEC workforce. This inclusive and collaborative approach can potentially extend beyond single organisations too, with Greenfield, Braithwaite, Pawsey, Johnson and Robinson (2009) suggesting that sharing expertise widely can lead to learning while building leadership capacity and fostering synergy. This may make for a more powerful ‘push back’ against circumscribing Government initiatives. With this, there may ultimately be not only learning organisations (Senge, 1990) but a learning ECEC sector, where individuals are learning leadership through multiple interactions (Harris, 2008) and a broader outcome is likely to be leadership sustainability in an environment where social justice resides (Hargreaves and Fink, 2004).

## **2.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter connects a system level, broader, understanding of why we are, where we are with a micro-level, individual understanding of the same. This has resulted in a meaningful, substantive understanding of leadership from a combination of sources, based on a clear understanding of why we are where we are in ECEC and the ongoing struggles for the whole workforce in the sector because of the tension-laden reality permeating. This reality is perpetuated by the ongoing policy discourse impacting funding and regulation mechanisms that impact the purpose of the sector most notably regarding pedagogy, professionalism, and provision. I drew on further literature, including many government documents, to set out the history of these, highlighting key moments across this journey. I then drew on extant leadership literature to hold two encompassing forms of leadership, pedagogical and entrepreneurial, in the ascendancy and to highlight the existing tension between them.

Through considering the individuals in the sector thoughtfully, there was a need to set out possible ways forwards for ECEC leadership within a social justice leadership framework (Miller *et al.*, 2019) with an inclusive approach (Helgeson, 1990) to enacting leadership and structuring organisations. Building on this literature, it is conceivable to envision a deeper exploration of the lived experiences of purpose and leadership in ECEC. In this research I intend to explore lived experiences of purpose and leadership in ECEC with efficacy and thoughtful underpinnings that can be inclusive and empowering for all individuals in ECEC.

To do this, I am seeking to foreground the voice of those in the sector, exploring what the purpose of ECEC and good leadership in ECEC is, that will be both useful, empowering and possibly emancipatory for personnel in the ECEC sector. In line with Rodd (1998), I strive for:

“All members of staff [to] believe that they are respected, that their contribution is valued, that they have some control over factors affecting their working life, that they can participate in decision making and that they can communicate with others in an open and professional manner.” (p.35).

This is a challenge for good leadership in ECEC, which is central to this thesis. Nicholson and Kroll (2014) highlight the plurality of leadership in ECEC and suggest that no matter the length of guidelines that could be constructed it would not be enough for an effective leader to follow and be able to respond to the uncertainties rife in the sector, which formed a large part of the literature informing this research. The aim of this research is to explore the factors influence good leadership in ECEC from the perspective of participants, who are individuals working in the sector. As Douglass (2018, p. 395) states “the greatest potential for transformative change may indeed lie within our field’s own workforce.” I do not do this unproblematically, which the subsequent chapter makes clear and attempts to respond to through the explication of my methodological choices.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

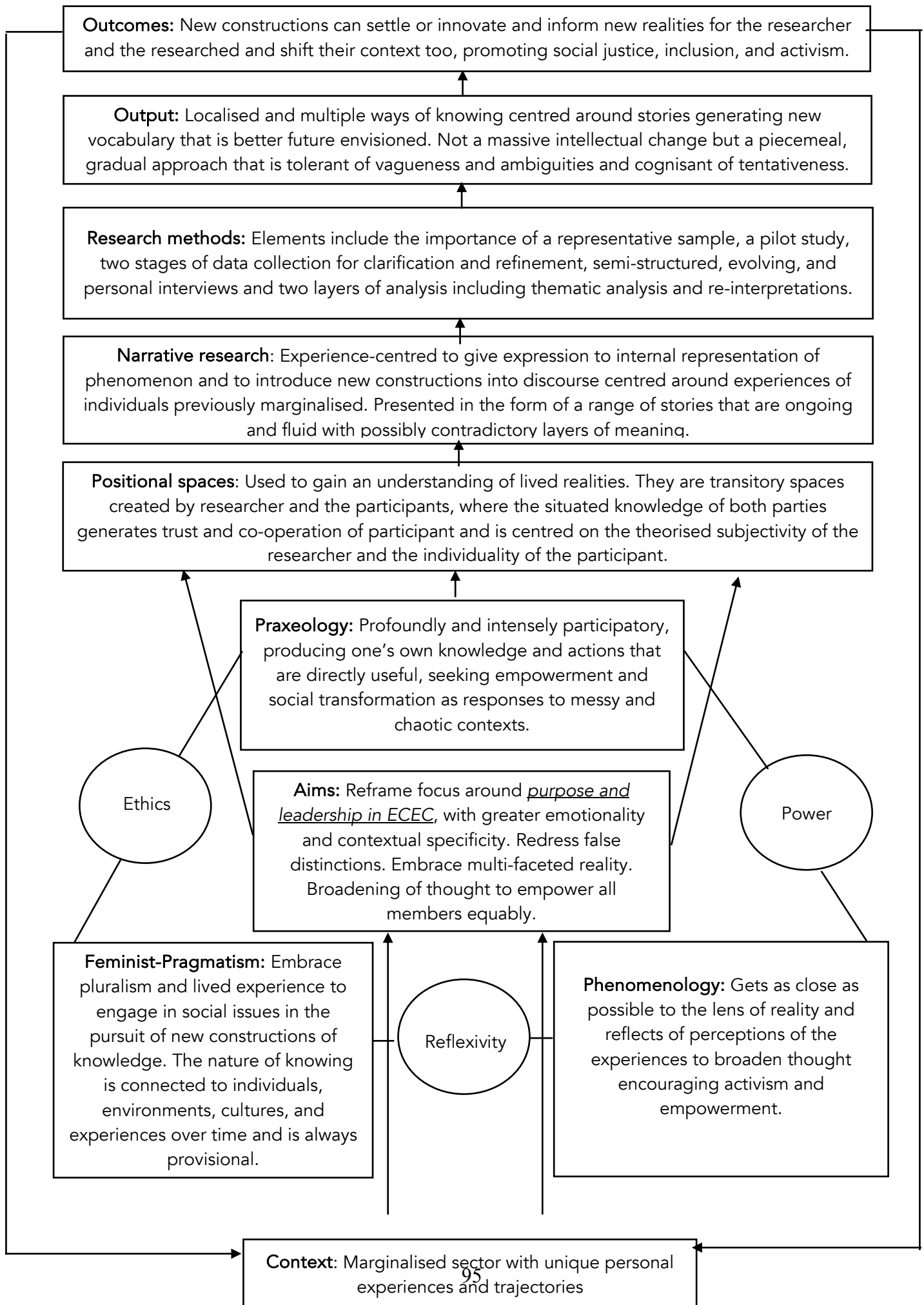
## 3.1 Introduction

This research aims to explore the factors influencing good leadership in ECEC. The first part of this chapter will explore my methodological approaches that combine feminist-pragmatism epistemology, the notion of praxeology (Pascal and Bertram, 2012) and phenomenology. From there, I will present my chosen research design, centred around narrative inquiry and analysis, and provide suitable rationale for those choices. Overall, I intended to glean responses to the following research questions:

1. What are individuals working in ECEC lived experiences of the purpose of the sector?
2. What are individuals working in ECEC lived experiences of leadership in the sector?
3. What are individuals working in ECEC lived experiences of good leadership in the sector?

My methodological approach is a combination of several existing elements that are presented in figure one below. The figure will be discussed and justified in this chapter fully and is presented here to provide an overview for how this research has been conducted. To support understanding of figure one at this stage, I will now provide a summary of its components and connections. The model is intended to be read from the bottom up, starting with the context within which the research is conducted. The aims of this research are set from this context within a feminist-pragmatic, praxeological and phenomenological framework with issues of power, reflexivity, and values considered. From here, positional spaces are formed (see section 3.8) that are embedded within the social axes (Male and Palaiologou, 2015), the researcher's theorised subjectivity (see section 3.8) and the personal trajectories of the individual being researched. This intends to be a robust foundation for narrative research to be conducted utilising appropriate methods and analysis to lead to the production of contextual, relational, and provisional outcomes and outputs that respond to research questions.

Figure One: A methodological framework for researching marginalised groups



## 3.2 Epistemological Perspective

My research questions focus on understanding the everyday lives of ECEC practitioners as they experience it, where they need to navigate various challenges set out in the literature review. My research questions also are designed to inform the discussion around concepts, distinctions and ideas thought to be fundamental, which are recurring themes in the feminist-pragmatism epistemology (Rooney, 1993). Sachs and Blackmore, 1998 and Moyles. 2001, amongst others, have suggested this paradigm had been attractive to those on a quest to reframe leadership with stronger notions of emotionality, partiality, and contextual specificity. What makes feminist-pragmatism particularly apt for this study, is its emphasis on the need to redress false distinctions, in this case notably between feminine and masculine work. In this context there has been negative consequences for individuals in the workforce, both females and males, as set out previously in my literature review.

The feminist-pragmatism epistemological standpoint offers a relational way of knowing that is provisional, and through allying feminism and pragmatism, there is a philosophical theory grounded in practice with “the goal of empowering all members of society to help determine the conditions according to which we live” (Seigfried 1993, p.11). This type of work is driven to contribute to revising theories and practices around disadvantaged groups. Thayer-Bacon (2010) emphasises the ephemeral nature of any knowledge or ‘truth’ emerging from research and goes on to underline the interconnected nature of knowing- not just with other individuals but with our environments, cultures, past, present and futures, making consideration of context paramount in this approach. This awareness will extend to the factors influencing purpose as well as connecting theory with praxis whilst tolerating vagueness and ambiguities.

Feminist-Pragmatism is an appropriate foundation for my research as it is fundamentally focused on broadening thought through activism, with pragmatism placing emphasis on pluralism, lived experience and practice engaging in social issues (Encyclopaedia of philosophy, 2004). Duran (1993) adds that feminism and pragmatism point us in a new direction and speak to the experience of women’s lives.



Finally, pragmatists are suspicious of rigid distinctions and claims of epistemic finality (Rooney, 1993) and this supports Richard Rorty's argument for feminists to turn to pragmatism because it relies on being open to the creation of a new vocabulary which is better future envisioned, to achieve social progress (Dieleman, 2010). Seigfried (1993) argues then that feminists should not be searching for some massive intellectual change but instead to "continue to deal piecemeal with historical facts in which masculinist power is entrenched" (p.9). Grappling with notions of purpose and leadership in ECEC over the course of history are the focus here and more exploration of the foundations of this work is needed to build on these epistemological foundations to set out my methodological approach more fully.

### **3.3 Ontological Perspective**

Pascal and Bertram (2012) introduced praxeology into ECEC as it "leads not to the singularity and comparative hierarchy of 'best' practice models but promotes Goodman's (2001) notion of 'wise practice,' that is, "a selection of professional responses which are considered, flexible and chosen as appropriate to context" (p.4). Praxeology fits with the feminist-pragmatism epistemology adopted here as it aims "to produce knowledge and actions which are directly useful to a group of people" and "seeks to empower people to seek social transformation through a process of constructing and using their own knowledge" (Pascal and Bertram, 2012, p. 482).

The usefulness of praxeology has been highlighted for exploring experiences in inherently messy and chaotic contexts (McNiff, 2010) which accurately depicts the ECEC context as the literature review demonstrated. Further appropriateness for praxeological research in line with my research aims comes from the central issue of social justice. Pascal and Bertram (2012) believe social and political transformation are at the heart of praxeological research, they are also part of the social inequality drivers perpetuating the social justice issues present in the ECEC landscape currently (Hoskins *et al.*, 2020).

Pascal and Bertram (2012, p. 477) suggest that this paradigm "is more profound and intensely participatory, and thus more authentically democratic than work around praxis alone", which is subsumed within this approach. Papadopoulou and Sidorenko

(2022, p. 368) suggest that the “participatory space is deeply political where all participants engage in co-construction of meanings and negotiation of goals, of norms and the sharing of power” and go on to describe this type of engagement as ‘praxis’.

Pascal and Bertram (2012) however go on to argue that praxis alone is not enough, and that a worldview needs to involve both reflection (phronesis) and action (praxis) in tandem as well as the need “to be immersed within a more astute awareness about power (politics) and a sharpened focus on values (ethics)” (Pascal and Bertram, 2012 p. 477). Where Palaiologou and Male (2018) suggest phronesis is practical wisdom, Pascal, and Bertram (2012) suggest it is reflection. It can be suggested that both terms are useful for the purpose of this research and combine well with the pragmatic notion of knowing, which would require both reflection and practical wisdom as well as an importance placed on relationships. Pascal and Bertram (2012) do not go into detail about what falls within these parts of praxeology and therefore their work leaves some work to be done before adopting this perspective for my research. Therefore, for the purpose of my research, I have adopted more specifically the pragmatic notion of knowing being entwined in several iterations of praxis, namely feminist, pedagogical and leadership praxis, and embedded in concern for ethics and power.

Issues around power and ethics for my research are considered elsewhere (see section 2.3), therefore, the remainder of this section will focus on the iterations of praxis. Pascal and Bertram (2012) state that praxis is “not simply about everyday practicalities, professional development, competencies, skills or outcomes, but about deeper concepts, reflexivity, processes, actions and interactions whilst being deeply cognoscente of environments of power and values” (p. 481). I will now consider praxis for ECEC personnel as a concomitant of the three forms of praxis in detail.

Bignell (1996) suggests that feminist praxis can be built from the experiences where feminist theory becomes action by informing wider feminist scholarship, in this case within the everyday experiences of ECEC professionals informing the transformative aims of my research. Praxis has also been described as “a basic tenet of feminist research that sets it apart from other paradigms of inquiry” (Gringeri *et al.*, 2010, p. 393). Hesse-Biber (2007) adds that feminist praxis builds on the tolerance of difference and underlines the importance of issues like power, ethics, and reflexivity being

carefully considered in social research (see sections 2.3.3.7, 2.3.3.8 and 3.8 for consideration of this in my research). Through this approach, as a researcher, I am challenged to remain mindful of the context of my research and the lives of individuals in it, as well as the impact of my research on their lives.

Palaiologou and Male (2018) are the pre-eminent contributors to the pedagogical praxis discourse that they suggest will allow for successful engagement by practitioners in this core activity. Palaiologou and Male, (2018) claim:

“In rethinking leadership as pedagogical praxis we do not seek for prior knowledge of the right ways of doing things but seek instead to examine the active conditions in any given environment (hexis). When we attempt to understand the essence of leadership in the neoliberal managerialist nature of ECEC in England, such an examination will lead to epistemological constructs that might lead to home grown constructions of leadership in ECEC.” (p.8)

Palaiologou and Male (2018) also claim that “pedagogical praxis opens up some excellent methodological options, namely praxeological research which is fundamentally focused on finding out more about practice and exploring what works and why from the front line” (p. 24). Therefore, this not only echoes the work of Pascal and Bertram (2012), which is central to my methodological approach, it also recognises the transient nature of ECEC contexts and similarly to my research strives for a collaborative construction of leadership, with those working in the sector.

The third praxis to be considered is that more broadly of leadership praxis. Suggested by the same Palaiologou and Male (2018) study, formal leaders have a “wealth of responsibility that stretches beyond leadership of pedagogy” (p. 6) although they previously argued that pedagogical leadership is what leaders in ECEC should strive for.

Hoy and Miskel (2005) add to the discourse that leadership is a big role and requires more than mindlessly applying existing rules, regulations, and various levels of policy. Therefore, exercising value judgements is central to leadership praxis. Frick (2008) refers to this as ‘satisficing’, meaning negotiating compromises, as a central skill for leaders. Additionally, in support of one of my central notions that leadership is everyone’s responsibility, it has been suggested that to identify a point of

accountability in the sector is a challenge as so many others (other than formal leaders) also have a leadership role (Male and Nicholson, 2016). Therefore, in my research all participants, no matter their formal title, will be asked a very similar set of questions with some variations to ensure positional spaces are built, maintained, and respected. In short, positional spaces are transitory spaces created by the researcher and the participants used to gain understanding of lived realities (see section 3.8 for more on this).

In summary, Praxeology embraces a polyphony of approaches which Pascal and Bertram (2012) argue are phronesis, praxis, ethics, and power. I have built on this to argue that for this research, phronesis refers to the pragmatic notion of knowing and praxis subsumes complexities of feminist, pedagogical and leadership praxis, within ethical and power considerations explored later in this chapter. Overall, this places emphasis on a multi-perspective approach which, “in the study of early childhood and families leads to perceiving practitioners, workers, parents, children and policy makers as co-constructors of knowledge about the services and their development” (Pascal and Bertram, 2012, p. 483).

### **3.4 A Phenomenological Connection**

To contribute new knowledge about ECEC in this research, I intend to explore the lived experiences of those working in the sector. Whilst the feminist-pragmatism and praxeological paradigms offer important epistemological and ontological foundations, phenomenology is also drawn on to support the methodological framework. The key focus of this research is to explore the perspectives of the ECEC workforce regarding the purpose and leadership in ECEC. Schwandt (2001) suggests that throughout phenomenological research, one can get as close as possible to the lens of reality through constructions from the subjective experiences of participants. Phenomenology seeks a focus not on observing the everyday experiences, but rather to reflect on perceptions of those experiences (Offer, 2013), which is central in all three of my research questions.

Aldridge (2015) considers the extent to which phenomenology can ‘play well’ with other methodologies. He introduces van Manen’s presentation of phenomenology as

a form of research into lived experiences, which suggests that phenomenology can 'play' with praxeology as the theoretical underpinnings are striving to explore practice, namely the lived experiences of purpose and leadership in ECEC. Furthermore, Paley (2018) suggests that the phenomenological questions of the meaning of phenomenon of a subject is how the subject is experienced. In this instance the subject is purpose and leadership, and I set out to explore how these are experienced.

Finally, phenomenology can be described as the systematic attempt to discover the internal meaning structures of lived experiences that are intuited through the study of instances in lived experiences (van Manen, 2017). I am interested in the different layers of meaning from different stakeholders and bringing them into dialogue together (Andrews *et al.*, 2013). Through this dialogue I hope to broaden thought through activism to empower the ECEC workforce to determine their own contexts, in line with the feminist-pragmatism epistemology and contribute knowledge that is directly useful to people, in line with the praxeology paradigm.

### **3.5 Research Methodology**

To generate this dialogue, I employed the experience-centred form of narrative research. According to Andrews *et al.* (2013, p. 5) in experience-centred narrative research "there are assumed to be individual, internal representations of phenomena - events, thoughts and feelings - to which narratives give external expression." As mentioned, I am interested in the phenomena of lived experiences of purpose and leadership in ECEC. Narrative inquiry more broadly is "the study of experience as story [and] is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience" (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 375). Dieleman (2010) adds that this can bring to light experiences of individuals previously marginalised, complementing Rorty's suggestion that social progress requires linguistic innovation which will be explored in my findings later (see section 5.3). Similarly, Huber, Caine, Huber, and Steves (2013) indicated narrative inquiry can reveal "particularly the experiences of people and communities whose experiences are most often invisible, silent, composed, and lived on the margins," (p. 236) fitting the context of ECEC individuals well. Connected to this, my positionality will be considered in detail subsequently (see section 3.8).

Narrative inquiry has roots in pragmatic conceptions of reality, particularly Dewey's theory of experience that is relational, temporal, and continuous. From this, the narrative researcher arrives at a conception of knowledge that remains within the stream of human lives (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007). This also compliments the praxeology dimension of this methodology as McNiff (2010, p.1) states, praxeology involves an "intellectual story of adventurers, encouraging leaders, explorers and risk takers working at the cutting edge of understanding". I plan to focus on the story aspect of this paradigm, listening to and capturing stories of lived experiences from those in the workforce using semi-structured interviews. Before exploring my methods more closely, the notions of experience and stories require further exploration.

According to Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2013, p. 2) "researchers do [narrative] research because they believe that by doing so, they are able to see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to bring them into useful dialogue with each other." This is how I intend to explore factors influencing good leadership in ECEC. As previously demonstrated, praxeology is also useful for foregrounding issues of power and the nature of narrative research builds on the discourse of power, embedded in social justice issues surrounding the ECEC workforce. When working with marginalised groups like the high proportion of females in ECEC (and the workforce as a whole), narratives can be treated as "modes of resistance to existing structures of power" (Andrews *et al.*, 2013, p.3). Narratives also will be likely to include unconscious emotions, hidden from individual's everyday practice, which may relate to the impact of policy on individual's reality. Andrews *et al.* (2013) state that researchers may not get the whole story which raises concerns around experience, subjectivity, anxiety, or desire falling outside the narrative. I would argue that researchers may never be able to get the whole story and what is most important is that I hear what participants had to say about their experiences. Some of what participants do not say can be as informative as what they do say for the lived experiences of ECEC personnel, reflected in the work of Dowling-Næss (2001).

Through my first research question I hope to contribute to the knowledge landscape of ECEC in England that informs the sectors purpose, which Clandinin and Connelly (1996, p.24) suggest is the "way in which this landscape relates to public policy and theory." Conceptualising the professional knowledge context as a landscape has a second benefit for my purposes in that it allows me to talk about space, time, and place

which undoubtedly contribute to individuals' lived experiences. It also provides a sense of expansiveness regarding people, things, events, and relationships as an intellectual and moral landscape (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996).

Clandinin and Connelly (1996) suggest a range of stories that may be heard through a narrative approach to research including teachers' stories, namely secret stories told by teachers in safe places, sacred stories that are theory-driven and shared by stakeholders and cover stories which may lead individuals to portray themselves as experts or something other than themselves for acceptance, as well as stories about teachers. In my research context, I intend to apply these ideas to build a trusting relationship with participants as a researcher (which is considered in detail in the later positionality section – see section 3.8) to reveal the stories that are closest to their realities, in line with phenomenological research. Clandinin and Connelly (1996, p. 25) suggest that “cover stories enable teachers whose teacher stories are marginalised by whatever the current story of [their provision] is to continue to practice and to sustain their teacher stories.” This could be the reality for the ECEC workforce who have been marginalised and have had negative experiences in their work.

Clandinin and Connelly (1999) build on the concept of landscapes that aptly captures the extant complexity, applicable to the ECEC landscape. They do this with their previously coined term "personal practical knowledge" defined as:

“a term designed to capture the idea of experience in a way that allows us to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons. Personal practical knowledge is in the teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions. Personal practical knowledge is found in the person's practice. It is, for any one teacher, a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation”. (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988, p. 25)

Personal practical knowledge is closely interwoven with lived experiences and if brought to the narrative, can open the possibility of understanding the immense complexity of the context that impacts on the lived experiences of individuals and contribute to the creation of positional spaces. To consider the localised ways of knowing of individuals in the field is to turn towards a focus on the particular and a recognition of the value of a particular experience of an individual (Pinnegar and

Daynes, 2007). This too links to pragmatism in that I am co-constructing knowing with multiple individuals as a way of signalling acceptance of multiple ways of knowing regarding purpose and leadership in ECEC. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe this as a turn toward establishing findings through authenticity, resonance, and trustworthiness.

This focus on the particular involves “hearing storied phenomenon of lives as they are lived, told, retold and relived in storied ways on storied landscapes” (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007, p.30). This form of inquiry allows participants to reveal the accounts of their experience as they wish, with their own theorised subjectivity (see positionality section for further explanation of this term – section 3.8) and therefore supporting the authenticity of the data. Given the Deweyan view of experience, I see it is as ongoing, fluid and changing as the researcher-researched relationship and the active construction of knowing is lived out in situations shaped by social, cultural, institutional, and linguistic narratives (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007).

“We cannot understand why people do what they do... without grasping how those involved make sense of their world” (Hammersley, 2012, p.27) and narratives are a way of human sense-making. Therefore, through adopting narrative research I aim to understand personal experience, but I also must remember that narratives are never repeated exactly or never mean the same this twice, (Squire, 2008) and thus, newly constructed ways of knowing are always tentative. In other words, some experience-centred narrative researchers view individual stories as just one of many narratable ‘truths’ and therefore they are seen as an imperfect ‘practical wisdom’ that can both settle and innovate (Squire, 2008). Before I can discuss any settling or innovating, I must explain how my research was designed with all of this in mind.

### **3.6 Research Design**

Praxeology demands researcher commitment to a deep involvement in the context of their study (see positionality section 3.8). This context is one which I am close to due to my position within it, which has stimulated an “authentic desire to redistribute power



in favour of the silenced and domesticated, in order that they might actively participate in its transformation” (Pascal and Bertram (2012, p.488). I am conscious of possible concerns around the use of the term silences and domesticated here by Pascal and Bertram (2012) and given my positionality (see section 3.8 for this more fully) I need to foreground my awareness that I do not play a disinterested mediator on the side of the oppressed group (Aronowitz, 1987) and cannot do any of this work unproblematically as there are things that “I could never know about the experiences, oppressions and understandings of participants” (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 310). In this section I will set out specifically who my participants were, what I did with them, and why, to justify and explicate my chosen research process and explore the problematic connotations of my choices.

### **3.6.1 Participants**

To recruit participants (n=15), I sent out requests through social media and my professional networks to attract volunteers to select from, to make up a purposive sample. This sample needed to have participants from all parts of the sector to capture voices from all types of places to work in ECEC (type of provision). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) describe purposive sampling as a method used to target specific individuals against a set of predetermined criteria, also referred to as inclusion criteria. I strived for a representative sample of the ECEC workforce, in terms of place of work, gender, age, experience, role and qualification, to help explore an intersubjective understanding of lived experiences. I achieved this spread of provisions as indicated below in table five where ‘small private’ is determined as a group of 3 or less provisions and ‘large private’ with more than 3 provisions. It was also important that whilst I targeted a purposive sample that they were still volunteers to maintain a power sensitive and respectful approach to recruiting participants (McMahon, 2016). This must be an approach that does not engender a feeling of being forced to do something against ones will. This sample is captured in the demographic table five below along with more detailed descriptions subsequently.

*Table Five: Demographic overview of participants*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age (years)</b>	<b>Provision</b>	<b>Length of service in sector</b>	<b>Qualification level</b>	<b>Role</b>
Whitney	F	40-50	Independent School	20 years +	7	Teacher
Niyati*	F	30-40	Small Private	10-20 years	6	Manager/owner
Margaret	F	40-50	Small Private	20 years +	7	Manager/owner
Shaima	F	30-40	Small Private	10-20 years	6	Room leader
Tammy	F	20-30	Small Private	5-10 years	6	Room leader
Sally	F	40-50	Small Private	20 years +	4	Senior leader
Evie	F	20-30	Small Private	3 years	Unqualified	Deputy Manager
Tulip	F	20-30	Small Private	2 years	3	Teacher
Mark	M	50-60	Large Private	10-20 years	6	Owner
Mandy*	F	30-40	Large Private	4 years	5	Teacher
Bernice	F	20-30	State School	5-10 years	4	Teaching assistant
Audrey	F	50-60	Other (consultant)	20 years +	6	Consultant
Shelly	F	40-50	Home-based	10-20 years	6	Manager/owner
Evelyn	F	40-50	Nursery School/children's centre	20 years +	6	Headteacher
Kelly*	F	30-40	Voluntary pre-school	20 years +	3	Deputy Manager

As can be seen in table four, although participants had a range of levels of qualifications, given 12 of 15 (75%) had a qualification above level 3 (which is explained more in the section 4.2.6), this is not representative of the sector where typically only 5% of the sector have a qualification above level 3 (NDNA, 2019). This will be considered in my limitations later. However, participants were also representative of the gender demographic of the sector with only 1 male of 15 participants. Furthermore, there was a spread of both years of experience in the sector and type of role, the role descriptors are set out in detail in Appendix L.

### **3.6.2 Data Collection and Interview Design**

The data collection part of my methods will be considered here as a three-part process. This began with a pilot study that allowed for some important tweaks in my approach, particularly my interview questions. I then did my first stage of data collection that involved semi-structured interviews with all participants (n=15) (Appendix A), followed by stage two of data collection where a large percentage of the same participants (n=12) completed a questionnaire made from questions that were generated from stage one of data collection (Appendix D). Those with an \* in table five above did not contribute to stage two of data collection. These three participants who did not complete the second part did not respond to my request or indicate a reason, but the ongoing pandemic likely placed them under immense work pressures and time constraints. I will now explain these stages in more detail along with why I adopted this three-part process and my reflections along the way.

#### **3.6.2.1 Piloting**

Piloting my interview questions proved to be a very valuable part of the initial research process. This involved speaking with my business partner, with a working knowledge of the sector, about my interview questions and with my wife, who is a teacher, and therefore has an excellent understanding of the daily lives of teachers, as well as my supervisors. The purpose of doing this was to ensure my questions were fit for purpose and were set out in a way that would enable participants to partake in a conversation with me about their story and professional lives. As suggested by Silverman (2010) piloting questions is a logical way to test the reliability of data collection methods and McMahon (2016) adds that it allowed me as the researcher to test my approach and technique for interviewing.

The main influence this process had on my subsequent data collection was firstly to change the flow of questions to flow more naturally in the order it is in now rather than to ask about personal trajectory first (See Appendix A for the interview questions used). It was suggested individuals may well feel more comfortable not talking about themselves first and that teachers are usually passionate about their classrooms and feel more comfortable discussing them, therefore I started there. Secondly it was

suggested that I may be overlooking some important points of what leading in ECEC is all about which led me to refine the prompts under my interview questions to ensure I gave participants the opportunity to speak about the breadth of the role more comprehensively. Allowing participants to speak freely and contribute actively is an important hallmark of narrative research (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007).

### **3.6.2.2 Stage One Design**

Stage one of data collection was centred around interview questions that were carefully constructed in line with existing literature and the methodological paradigms set out previously in this chapter. I wanted to hear participants' stories around a complex set of issues in ECEC. Therefore, whilst I kept my questions open, I needed prompts to ensure a comprehensive spread of detail was covered, meaning semi-structured interviews were most suitable for my research. Additionally, Squire (2008) states that most experience-centred narrative researchers employ semi-structured interviews, supported by the suggestion that this form of interviewing can elicit empathy (Elliot, 2005) which can help build a reciprocal relationship between researcher and participant (McMahon, 2016).

Furthermore, I engaged in active listening and offered appropriate non-verbal responses periodically to encourage participants' contributions. This active listening also involved some tailoring of the interview questions between participants to ensure the questions remained appropriate and did not make participants feel uncomfortable. This sort of approach is supported by the work of Barr (2010) who suggests that semi-structured narrative interviews shift the interview to a more conversational state and are sensitive to power imbalances, King, and Horrocks (2010) add that this approach can preserve the dignity of participants and reduce their anxiety.

Furthermore, I anticipated certain questions and prompts being disconcerting for some individuals and adapted accordingly. This is because I spoke with a range of individuals (see table four) who may have never been asked questions like this. More specifically, I would highlight questions 1.e, 1.g, 3.d, 4.e and 5.a.v as exemplifying questions of this nature (see Appendix A for details).

To continue, the interview was split into three broad sections with the first section headlined by the question – “What are individuals lived experience of the purpose of ECEC?” The three sub-questions here were asking about individuals’ working environments, the professional conversations that happen in these environments and how they have arrived where they are in their careers (Appendix A). Several additional probing questions were generated from initial interviews which occurred at different times during the interview process. These are identified as labels in the interview schedule (Appendix A) and were helpful prompts to elicit more rich information from participants.

Interviews with these participants lasted for between 34 and 58 minutes and all took place remotely using Zoom software. All participants were either at home or in their workplace during their interview, which was held at a time convenient for them. This supported the strongest possible sense of physical and psychological comfort for participants and as I could be at my home or workplace as well, I could feel a strong level of comfort too (Kings and Horrocks, 2010). I was able to use the built-in recording option on Zoom for all interviews and subsequently generate transcripts using the online service Otter.ai. Hopper, Fu, Sanford and Hinkel (2021) commented on the emerging group of literature around using technology for handling data. They stated that not only is it cost-effective but also for researcher without funding the cost and/or time implications of transcription can be a daunting endeavour. Services like Otter.ai provide transcripts with an acceptable level of accuracy (depending on the clarity of speech and the presence of any accents) within minutes.

### **3.6.2.3 Stage Two Design**

McNamara (2009) suggests that researchers must build in debriefing mechanisms into the research process. Stage two of my data collection was not designed to be solely a debriefing protocol, but by its very nature of capturing core elements of stage one of data collection, it enabled participants to get a greater sense of what was discernible from their interviews and further awareness of the importance of their voice in this research. More importantly, transcripts from stage one of data collection contained a wealth of insightful information that once I had begun analysing led to the development of a set of factors pertaining to what participants valued regarding the purpose of the

ECEC sector and a set of values pertaining to what they valued regarding good leadership in ECEC (see sections 4.2 and 4.4 respectively for exploration of these).

These sets of factors and values warranted further exploration to get a sense of importance and order from participants to generate more meaningful insights, hence the need for a second stage of data collection. Therefore, I received approval for an amendment (Appendix B) to my original ethics application approval (Appendix C) and was able to refine what I was asking participants to do (Appendix D) and collect more data. Specifically, I emailed a two-page document (Appendix D) to participants requesting around 15 minutes of their time to complete. They were tasked with trying to rank the sets of factors and values with justifications, one pertaining to the purpose of ECEC and the other to good leadership in ECEC, these factors and values were taken from interview transcripts in stage one of data collection. I received an 80% (n=12) response rate as explained previously and therefore was able to generate another layer of meaning and enhance the validity of my result, which I discuss in more detail in the data analysis section of this chapter.

### **3.6.3 Data Analysis**

My methods of analysis can be considered as an amalgamation of two parts. One part, more traditionally, employs thematic analysis with strongly reflexive elements to consider my theorised subjectivity and positional spaces (see section 3.8 for more on this) and to demonstrate enhanced trustworthiness. The other part embraces the storytelling element of narrative research more and draws on the flexibility of thematic analysis to offer an interpretive tale that builds on participants' original story to stimulate further thinking. In addition to highlighting key stories in participant data, I also recognise the importance of fragments

I will now explicate the first part of my analytical approach alongside which I will draw on Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017) to demonstrate how I have operated to establish trustworthiness at each step emphasising the appropriateness of thematic analysis. Demonstration of my thoroughness of data analysis is presented in Appendix M. Phase one was all about me becoming familiar with the data, in its simplest form I

needed to review the entirety of transcripts repeatedly, both individually and collectively (Braun and Clarke, 2019). At this stage I needed to ensure I had prolonged engagement with the data, where I documented my reflective thoughts (see Appendix E for a snapshot of this) and kept all data stored in an organised manner (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Appendix F demonstrates the prolonged engagement I had with my data in constructing that analytical map, showing themes identified and with what level of support in the data. I showed not only how many times the theme or sub-theme was mentioned but also by how many individuals in the study. Connected to this, Appendix K takes this further to show the consideration I gave to everyone that contributed to this study being heard. Whilst some participants connected to the main themes more than others, all individual's data were drawn upon to show the level of support for the prevailing arguments.

Also drawing on the guidance from Nowell *et al.* (2017) on trustworthiness, I began to generate initial codes in close discussion with my supervisors which was helpful in keeping me on my reflexive journey towards the generation of themes. Part of my deliberate process is the importance of generating themes, as Braun and Clarke (2019) suggest, themes are not in the data or able to emerge passively, they are “creative and interpretive stories...produced at the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves” (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p.594). Although the data themselves drive the analysis, as I adopt the inductive approach to thematic analysis, where there is no attempt being made to fit the data into a pre-existing theoretical frame (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). As Ho, Chiang, and Leung (2017) explain it, “An inductive approach demands that the researcher immerses him/herself in the data by ‘dwelling’ in the language of the participants.” (p. 1760).

To be clear when I talk of themes, I think of their conceptualisation as “stories about particular patterns of shared meaning across the dataset” (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p.592) and present them as factors of influence and values participants have regarding each element of my research. This allows for complexity inherent in peoples experiences that supports the establishment of shared meaning of data around the purpose of ECEC (research question 1, for example) rather than a summary of individuals perceptions on the purpose of ECEC. In other words, together it tells a

story, it does not produce a table of information. Furthermore, thematic analysis has been shown to be useful for phenomenological analysis to enable researchers to interpret phenomenon out of daily taken-for-granted thinking which is a layer of the narrative I seek to explore further (Ho *et al.*, 2017).

To enhance the trustworthiness of this integral part of analysis I continued to speak regularly with my supervisors and used diagrams to make sense of the connections I was making. I went on to review the themes several times before defining and naming them finally before producing an analytical map (Appendix F), which included sets of factors and values that were formed based on a plurality of perspectives given by participants, regarding the purpose of ECEC and good leadership in ECEC. The importance individuals may or may not attribute to each value was something I felt worthy of revisiting participants to ask about. This is important as Frick (2008) suggests that any decision or actions leaders take that are purported as value-free are a misnomer as they are embedded in what Hodgkinson (1978, p.122) defines as “value-laden, even value-saturated enterprises”. Frick (2008) goes on to suggest that the careful location of purpose is underpinned by these values in everyone as moral leadership. Therefore, to home in on what individuals think about a hierarchy developed from a range of narratives that they were part of is a valuable dimension of this story. This reinforces the notion that to increase the validity of my research, I must be mindful that in a pragmatic view of knowledge the nature of inquiry must not be separate from the participant nor their environment.

I have demonstrated the thoughtful and trustworthy dimensions of my analysis to this point, and I am mindful that in the second part of my analysis I take heed of Hollway and Jefferson’s (2004) suggestion that you do not need to invite participant input into interpretation as they may not know what they are ‘saying’ in the story. I also aim for a sense of coherence by offering my own comments on and iterations of participants stories whilst being aware of the challenges to this. For example, Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) argue that narrative texts do not need to be synthesised for coherence and go on to say that the seduction and related imposition of coherence by the researcher is something to be wary of. However, I argue that this coherence-developing approach is an essential layer in promoting action following my thesis and I do not, as Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) suggest, sacrifice my ethical commitments



in doing this. This is partly due to my work around theorised subjectivity explained more in the positionality section and my commitment to trustworthiness explained more previously in this section. I instead intend for this expressive activity to enrich the research and provide complexity and depth.

Participant experience-centred narrative analysis allows for consideration of that which is not clearly represented in narratives to be included in interpretations (Squire, 2008). In other words, “a concern not just with what people said, but with contradictions, silences, hesitations and emotionally marked aspects of the interviews” (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 276). Precedence has been set for this sort of analysis in the work of Dowling-Næss (2001) who’s work offers an interpretive tale that builds on their participant’s original story. The new tale emphasises elements that Dowling-Næss, as the researcher, felt were downplayed, yet significant, in the lived experiences of her participant. She was clear that this redescription did not “deny the personal truth of her [participant’s original] story” (Dowling-Næss, 2001, p. 53) which is important to keep at the forefront in my analysis.

This is also in line with suggestions in Ellsworth (1989) who “saw the necessity to take the voices of [participants] at their word - as ‘valid’ – but not without response” (p.303) and as there were clear contextual comparisons in Dowling-Næss’s (2001) work and my own, I felt it was a powerful tool to support a response because voices are partial and partisan and therefore problematic (Ellsworth, 1989). Much like with participants in my research, Dowling-Næss (2001) questioned whether her participant had the autonomy she believed she did over her professional life when ‘choices’ made are determined so heavily by an individual’s position in terms of social class, gender, and cultural and historical worlds we inhabit.

To look deeper into the connections to power from this approach I can draw on the work of Papadoulou and Sidorenko (2022) who offer five paradoxes of power, one of which is particularly applicable here, this is their third paradox, the freedom of choice. Where Dowling-Næss (2001) may seem to be taking power from participants this notion of power as a property attributed to individuals presumes freedom of choice, autonomy and independent decision making (Papadoulou and Sidorenko, 2022, p. 357). Lukes (2005) suggests this makes the notion of power contested and offers

three-dimensions that power can be deployed to understand how participatory narrative itself can set agendas. These include decision making power, the power to control the agenda and the power to form influential ideologies (Lukes, 2005). These can in turn either secure the consent of willing subjects or could be resisted, refused, and contested (Papadoulou and Sidorenko, 2022). The resultant precariousness connects well to the constant thread of provisionality that will be offered in my findings and discussion. I will now step back out of this deeper exploration to look at other factors relevant to the use of Dowling-Næss's (2001) work.

Gender is of particular importance given the feminist foundations of this work and the high proportion of females in the ECEC sector. Like Dowling-Næss's (2001) participant, many participants in my research as will be seen in the subsequent chapter, do not engage with the significance of gender in imposing constraints on them as individuals, or at least the gendered nature of the sector within which they work. As Dowling-Næss (2001) states, the individual "does not live and teach in a vacuum" (p. 56). This is the context that ECEC individuals work in that threatens to continue to repeat itself until an alternative tale is told and disseminated. Like Dowling-Næss (2001), I also know that "recognising that these constraints exist and being able to do something to remove them are two very different stories" (p. 56).

I am very aware that I am taking the words of participants and analysing them from my own political, personal, and intellectual perspective (Letherby, Scott and Williams, 2014). Thayer-Bacon (2010) suggests that any 'truths' offered within research will be better described as assertions supported by as much evidence as possible from transcripts but will always be considered corrigible and worthy of further exploration. Like Letherby (2002), I have attempted to be sensitive to power imbalances and control throughout and I also stress that any interpretation I offer is provisional and incomplete (Andrews, 2007). To generate my outputs, I have employed thematic analysis as it is a useful method for "examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights" (Nowell *et al.*, 2017, p.2). The advantages of this approach are that it permits the study of identity and a focus on local practices, it attends both to life stories and material that appears incoherent. I would add to this that stories may also be partial, and my study has generated stories that are at varying levels of partialness and are

all set in the incoherent context of ECEC, but the stories themselves are not necessarily incoherent. Making this suitable for my data set that does seem to be complex and lack common threads. This approach foregrounds the context within which these narratives are produced which has been lacking in existing literature around leadership in ECEC. Finally, this analysis is about telling stories through interpretation and creation, not discovering, and finding ‘truth’ that is ‘out there’ (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

Rooney (1993) states that the philosophical task has clearly moved on from truth being spelled out as correspondence between mind and reality and is more focused on thoughts and beliefs in relationship with experienced reality. In line with this, Thayer-Bacon (2010) suggests that truth and knowledge can only be spoken about with quotation marks around them as none of us know what is ‘true’ or ‘real’, instead we can strive to understand power relations by privileging marginalised speech of collective subjects who have shared experiences. Thayer-Bacon (2010) went on to suggest that any ‘truths’ offered within research will be better described as assertions supported by as much evidence as possible from transcripts but will always be considered corrigible and worthy of further exploration. This is because the emphasis is on “building up confirmation through interpersonal relationships and ongoing discourse practice” (Duran, 1993, p.164). More specifically, by offering some coherence from the outputs of participants, I intend to build up a picture that more effectively explores what good leadership in ECEC is, although I have not done this without limitations which are explored at the end of this chapter. Before that I intend to outline my ethical and reflexive considerations for further transparency of my research process.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

Before approaching participants, I applied for and received ethical approval from Brunel University’s Ethics Committee (BREO) (Appendix C), through that process I had to adhere to three broad principles as suggested by Thomson and Walker (2010) as ensuring informed consent (Appendix G), confidentiality, and doing no harm. Klavins (2015) adds two further considerations important in receiving ethical approval, namely providing accurate information about the research ensuring an open and

accountable research process is made clear (Appendix H) and seeking findings that can be used to improve practice. Furthermore, as suggested by Williams (2010) receiving University approval does not complete the ethical obligations of a researcher and more considerations need to be made, throughout the research process, as this section will now set out.

Part of an open research process is ensuring participants are aware of their right to withdraw and this was explicitly detailed through participant information (Appendix H) and consent form (Appendix G) that adhered to the guidance set out in BERA's most recent ethical guidance (BERA, 2018) at the time of collecting data. Participant information forms (see Appendix H) included that all research data will be kept securely on a password protected device and anonymised, meaning I used pseudonyms to protect individual's identity. Conveying this to participants prior to the research commencing is essential for them to know their personal data will be anonymised from the outset and any identifying features will be omitted from outputs. Also, prior to the research commencing as mentioned, I shared consent forms (Appendix G) with participants to obtain their informed consent. However, as noted by McMahon (2016), given the fluid nature of semi-structured interviews it is impossible to know exactly the direction interviews will go, how long it will take and what will be revealed. Therefore, it is essential participants know they have the right to withdraw at any time, including withdrawing their data after the interview has been completed. This is all part of the considerations of intending to do no harm to your participants throughout the research process. However, there will always remain the suggestion that the research process is an intrusion into someone's life and language can never contain the whole person, so even by trying to sum up parts of an individual's life could be seen as a violation (McMahon, 2016).

Helgeson (1990) offered eight principles of leadership found in woman leaders that include notions of calmness and care, with a focus on relationships and a recognition of a worker beyond the tasks they perform for their organisation, all of which are applicable to the inherent values of the ECEC workforce. Therefore, I gave further ethical considerations around both virtue ethics and the ethics of care. Virtue ethics pertain to the moral and intellectual virtues linked to my work. The ethics of care has been articulated by Noddings (1984) who suggests that caring is properly understood

as a dynamic interaction between the “one-caring” and the “cared-for” and this provides “the very wellspring of ethical behaviour” (Noddings 1984, p. 3). Noddings (2013) went further with this to suggest that there is also a need for care for strangers, the community, and ideas. Wals (2017) applied these ideas to notions of sustainability in ECEC and suggest four important elements for this regarding the workforce’s action. These include living by example by being caring in how they act; promoting dialogical engagement that invites empathy and appreciation, space for experimentation and giving positive feedback. Not only does this relate to importance of a high level of transparency in my research process as well as the need to be mindful of the issues of empowerment and voice, which are set out here, it also alludes to the importance of collective action, shared language, and positive relationships.

To talk about empowerment and voice in a context with embedded power and gender issues cannot be done so unproblematically. Cornwall (2016) suggests empowerment has become a buzzword for corporations and is now significantly distanced from its roots in “struggles to confront and transform unjust and unequal power relations” (Cornwall, 2016, p. 342). This discourse is inevitably entangled with power, and the complications that come with this term. Empowerment is not something that can be done to or for anyone else and therefore empowerment must lead people to know that they themselves are able and entitled to occupy decision making space and with the capacity and the right to act and have influence, which is a central facet of leadership (Rowlands, 1997). Ethical empowerment can “engage people in making sense of their worlds, their relationships, their assumptions and beliefs, practices and values with potentially transformational effects” (Cornwall, 2016, p. 344) however, connected to this, empowerment is a key concept that treats the symptoms but leaves the disease unnamed and untouched (Ellsworth, 1989).

As previously stated, empowerment cannot be done to, or for, someone else. Therefore, when conducting narrative research around individual’s stories, as I do so in this research, I must ethically consider the role of my voice and the voice of participants and note that the notion of ‘giving’ or ‘hearing’ the voice of those marginalised is not synonymous with empowerment. In striving to *hear* the voice of ECEC practitioners I am recognising that this group has been “alienated from the process of knowledge creation and may feel caught in a culture of silence” (Pascal

and Bertram 2012, p. 488). With statements like these in mind it has been posited that feminist and pro-feminist researchers have “an implicit and inappropriate wish for heroism” (Coddington, 2017, p.315). This casts a spotlight on me and my relationship to this research. As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, I occupy a role as Director of an ECEC provision and as an academic teaching leadership that could cast me in an asymmetrical power relationship with participants given that many of them were not in formal leadership positions. This could lead to my domination of the researcher-researched interactions and to questioning the validity of any findings. Therefore, I want to foreground my positionality and reflexive measures to argue for, and enhance, the validity and ethical strength of this research.

### **3.8 Positionality and reflexivity**

The starting point for me in this research process was my interest in “the productive role of the irritation of doubt and uncertainty,” (Rooney, 1993, p.21), that I experienced in my role as an owner of an ECEC provision and in literature used to inform my teaching in higher education. Pascal and Bertram (2012) believe that research like this needs to be fundamentally participatory and democratic, and therefore is best practiced “by those who are committed and close to the real world of children and families” (p. 484). This research aims to explore purpose and leadership in ECEC which is valuable because extant iterations of leadership in ECEC have shortcomings, as explicated previously (see section 2.3.2), that I seek to overcome by adopting a reflexive and rigorous methodological approach (see figure one). Importantly, Rooney (1993) suggests that a feminist-pragmatism form of inquiry is one that compels us forwards whilst giving explicit consideration for how the past has contributed to the current context, and this thoughtfulness is something that remains with me throughout this research process and promotes my authenticity throughout.

I do not have a privileged nor a spectator view on the reality for ECEC practitioners, I am embedded within it and am therefore situated and limited in my viewpoint (Thayer-Bacon, 2010). Adopting research in a feminised field compels me to significantly theorise my reflexivity, which is to say that I acknowledge that the act of knowing in this research will be affected by both the social conditions under which it is produced

and my relationship with the research context (Mann and Kelley, 1997). Furthermore, as Stake (1995, p. 95) states, “research is not helped by making it appear value free” instead “it is better to give the reader a good look at the researcher”. I am “tied to all aspects of [this] research” (Lichtman, 2013, p.32) due to my professional roles as an academic in the field of leadership and as an owner of a nursery group, therefore adopting a reflexive approach consistently was essential to ensure ethical and appropriate approaches were adopted and followed throughout this research process. Reflexivity is understood here in terms suggested by Finlay (2014) in that it is disciplined self-reflection for the purpose of explicit self-awareness and reflection towards increasing the richness and integrity of understanding.

Drawing on the work of Scacchi (2021) I too can draw on three different types of reflexivity in my research in response to this legitimate point of note. Firstly, personal reflexivity, to be aware of my own potential influence on the research process because of my own viewpoints and assumptions. This was particularly important when working with my data, so I can see the voices of the participants without the noise of my own viewpoints and assumptions (as mentioned in section 3.6.3). Secondly, epistemological reflexivity to understand my view of how I see the world and context, which was particularly important throughout my literature review and when framing this research which I have done by drawing on an extensive range of literature to help mitigate this. Thirdly, ethical reflexivity when thinking about correctness of research with my participants specifically, particularly in the sampling and data collection elements of this research, for example by adding on stage two of data collection to revisit my participants. Together this triad of reflexivity compels me towards research that is conscious of my connectedness to it to strive to ensure the research integrity is not compromised as a result. As Mason (1996) implores, reflexive research requires me as the researcher to take stock of my actions and role in the research process and place these factors under the same critical scrutiny as the rest of my data.

To further address my position as a male researcher in a vastly female workforce, as well as being in a position of leadership in the sector and an academic researcher, I adopt the notion of theorised subjectivity (Letherby *et al.*, 2014) and carefully consider positional spaces, which relate to previous points around ethics. Fundamentally feminists have underscored the necessity for “men to do their own work at unlearning

sexism and male privilege, rather than looking to women for answers” (p.312) and this is part of my motivation here too. Whilst still problematic, positional spaces can be used to gain an understanding of women’s lived realities (Nazeen and Sultan, 2014) and are referred to as “transitory spaces that are created by researcher and the participants, where the situated knowledge of both parties generates trust and co-operation” (Mullings, 1999, p.340) Additionally, Gacoin (2016) states that social identities are not fixed when individuals meet in the researched-researcher relationship, instead the ‘reality’ of those identities are both reproduced and contested in that encounter. In other words, as the research process developed and contact between myself and my participants increased, the relationship became friendlier and transitory spaces become stronger and open as trust grew too. Connected to this, by revisiting my participants with a presentation of influential factors in stage one of data collection individuals had the opportunity to “affirm certain themes” (Finlay, 2014, p.6) and this is part of Finlay’s (2014) five lenses of reflexivity, namely the strategic lens.

Subjectivity is often reported as problematic and something to avoid and control (Letherby *et al.*, 2014). Theorised subjectivity acknowledges the inevitability of subjectivity as well as the inherent power-laden and the necessity of constantly and critically interrogating my own personhood, intellectually and personally (Letherby *et al.*, 2014). Mills (1959) describes this as being the craftsmanship in the centre of yourself being personally involved in every intellectual product you contribute to and Letherby *et al.* (2014, p.90) suggest that “theorised subjectivity is a reflexive approach that acknowledges the significance of both intellectual and personal auto/biography of researchers and of respondents”. Feminist researchers support this need to consider how the researcher is positioned and related to the research process. This is in part due to feminist research being concerned with the relationship between the process and the product, and the inextricable link existing between the process and the researcher (Letherby *et al.*, 2014).

I need to be mindful in this analysis process that Mayall (2002) argued that within the field of childhood, both the children and the women and men who look after them, have great difficulty in having their points of view heard and respected due largely to power imbalances entrenched in the history of discourse around care, stemming from the maternalistic connotations of that word. Theorised subjectivity relies on both the



recognition of this importance and how impracticable it is to theorise without your own personhood impacting on your interpretations (Letherby *et al.*, 2014).

Like Cahill, Cerecer and Bradley (2010), I write strategically as 'we', "placing emphasis on our shared standpoint working together toward social change" (p.407). This is to refer to the pragmatic notion of knowing in that all knowledge is collectively produced and, in this case, the 'we' is myself as the researcher interpreting and representing the data shared by participants, that make up a representative sample of the ECEC sector. In forming this notion of 'we', like Scacchi (2021), I never forced myself upon participants and always played the role of focused listener with research aims in mind during data collection, whilst carefully considering my experiences and expectations for this research and the perceptions participants had of my role.

Letherby (2003) suggests researchers must acknowledge a multiplicity of standpoints with the possibility of alternative ways of knowing always being constructed from different contexts and other perspectives. Therefore, like Letherby *et al.* (2014), I do not believe I am able to generate the final 'true' story of experiences of purpose and leadership in ECEC, or on what good leadership is. However, I can an analysis of an exploration that seeks to challenge existing stories whilst building a persuasive case with participant data. By working with under-researched, marginalised groups and asking questions in a different way, as explicated in this chapter, I can open new ways of thinking. Through this methodology I see myself enacting my own social justice leadership, as this is about how leaders use their power to create equity (Miller *et al.*, 2019). Power relations are integral as they can determine what is said and to whom in this research context and impact the energy individuals have on a particular day, this is both conscious and unconscious (Ellsworth, 1989). I also cannot act as if my alliance with this oppressed group exempts me from the need to confront the grey areas which we all have in us (Min-ha, 1989, p.6) as there are no positions exempt from becoming oppressive as specific roles, contexts and situations change (Ellsworth, 1989). Importantly, my integrity as a researcher depends on my respect for the 'gift' of time, text and understanding of the individuals in my study, because this research is our story of their story (Oakley, 2016). Connected to the points made earlier in this paragraph, "gifts made by research participants take place within the context of inescapable unequal power" (Oakley, 2016), and researchers must take this

responsibility seriously. The usefulness of this research rests on my integrity as a researcher and the rigour of my methods to respond to the issues raised here and it also rests on the resultant validity, where my focus will now turn.

### **3.9 Validity**

As mentioned in the analysis section of this chapter, I have drawn on the work of Nowell *et al.* (2017) to demonstrate how I have operated to establish trustworthiness and how this is strengthened by going back to participants to offer further clarity around initial findings in stage two of my data collection. I have also made further considerations during this research process to respond to the challenge of validity.

Firstly, Lincoln and Guba's (1987) concept of stepwise replication that ensures each data set is treated separate and distinct from each other attempts to minimise the influence that interpretation of one has on another. My analysis process spanned across months of work, given the nature of my research being to fulfil a part-time Education Doctorate. Therefore, the space between analysis meant I was beginning each participant with 'new' eyes that were not muddled by going consistently from one set of data to the next. Once this individual, distinct, analysis took place I could then look for patterns knowing that each were considered in isolation.

Secondly, there are justifiable concerns around the "applicability of the data to other like cases" (Brewer, 2000, p.46) given the relatively small number of participants. Despite this, there is evidence to support the value of small-scale studies as part of the process of accumulating new knowledge, producing depth rather than breadth (Riessman, 2008). More specifically related to narrative research, Riessman (2008) goes on to suggest that the beauty of this type of research is that it can reveal the many sided, complex, and often conflicting stories of participants in the same field. This type of external validity is entangled with challenges around 'truth' as I have grappled with throughout this chapter. Riessman (2008) suggests that narrative work has two levels of validity to be considered, that of the stories told by participants and the stories told by the researcher. This research process brings in another perspective or collection of perspectives and a new interpretation that acts as a kind of triangulation as suggested by Riessman (2008). This is aided by my authenticity the thoughtfulness

of my interpretation given my positionality and reflexive measures as I set out in the previous section, however, there are still limitations in my research process.

### 3.10 Limitations

There is a paradox around the fact that “social transformation requires leadership and in the early stages, this leadership may need to be drawn from what is perceived as an elite group who can straddle both old and new practices and cultures” (Pascal and Bertram, 2012, p.487). Furthermore, it has been pointed out that “participation cannot occur without the initiative of someone with time, skill and commitment, and that someone will almost inevitably be a member of a privileged educated group” (Reason and Bradbury, 2008, p.324).

Needing a member of a privileged educated group challenges the notion of participatory practice at its core and makes it more notable that “ethics and power have to be central aspects of any human process and need to be visible and handled with integrity and morality” (Pascal and Bertram, 2012, p. 487). As Papadopoulou and Sidorenko (2022) argue “participatory space should rather be seen as a political arena, where different and often competing agendas are at play, where roles and relationships...are far from fixed, and where the capacity for agentic actions is always socially mediated”, (p. 354). I will, to the best of my ability, exercise my power within the research ethically cognisant of my intention to impact subsequent action. As I am therefore, in part, going to be responsible for the realities experienced because of that impact. This is integral to my work as Cahill *et al.* (2010) suggest, to make meaningful contribution to social change then the impact of our research – action - is of critical concern. Related to this, I had a pre-existing relationship with several participants which McMahon (2016) suggests can bring significant advantage to the research process as there is an established level of intimacy and reciprocity, although this does not remove the possibility of these individuals feeling pressure to not let me down, possibly obscuring my findings.

This is to say that although I collected data remotely, “video interviewing still involves respondent–interviewer interaction that introduces the possibility of interviewer effects” (West, Ong, Conrad, Schober, Larsen and Hupp, 2021). In their

comprehensive overview of interviewer effects in video interviewing, West *et al.* (2021) draw on a range of literature to identify mechanisms of potential interviewer effects that include responsive nonverbal behaviours such as gazing, laughing, and nodding, probing, not reading the questions exactly as worded, attempts to establish rapport and characteristics of voice. Whilst I am not immune to these mechanisms, I attempted to be as consistent as humanly possible throughout my interviews, having said that, this is a possible source of limitation in my findings that needs to be acknowledged. Aside from these behaviours, West *et al.* (2021) draw again on an extensive range of literature to suggest there are inferred interviewer characteristics that could lead to interviewer effects such as gender, age, race, and physical appearance. In this instance, I did all interviews myself so whilst a possible effect must be acknowledged, I did what I could to ensure the most consistent effect as possible.

Furthermore, a well-articulated critique of the participatory approach, led by Cooke and Kothari (2001), has suggested this approach can lead to “the unjust and illegitimate exercise of power” (p.4). Additionally, Atkinson (2019) suggests that power and agency have been significantly under-theorised in participatory research. Whilst I cannot change my positionality coming into the research, I can, and have been, thoughtful of the significant effect of power relations and my positionality on the data generated, which relates to previous points around ethics too. My intention to acknowledge theorised subjectivity and form positional spaces is evidence of my commitment to considering power and agency fully.

My original plan, which would have enhanced my challenge to this imbalance, was not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore is a limitation of my study too. I had planned originally to conduct walking interviews in participants working environment, foreign to myself, which I hoped would place them in a more comfortable position than removing them from this known environment and even more comfortable than was achievable over Zoom. It also would have allowed participants to take an active role in shaping the interview, aiding their feeling of power and control, with the intention of hearing more authentic and deep stories. These walking interviews would have encouraged collaborative participation that is conducive to participant openness and frankness (Anderson, 2004), given the additional level of comfort and control the participant would have likely experienced given I was in their workplace. Additionally,

Carpiano (2009) found walking interviews to be a rapport builder that would have allowed me to interact with individuals on a deeper level.

Furthermore, walking interviews take interviewing out of a 'safe' environment and are ideal for exploring issues around people's relationship with space (Jones, Bunce, Evans, Gibbs, and Ricketts-Hein, 2008). They have been reported as a unique approach to understanding phenomena by obtaining contextualised real-time perspectives as well as being consistent with participatory research methods (Garcia *et al.*, 2012), for example narrative research, allowing deep exploration. Some notable reasons for wanting to adopt the walking interview approach is the advantage it provides the power dynamic. which has been mentioned already, but also it would have meant that the environment could have acted as a prompt to discussions (Anderson, 2004). This would have enabled discussions to be opened to another layer to understanding their lived experiences. At least through not adopting this approach, I did not need to be concerned about later participants seeing and hearing what previous participants did and said, as this could have impacted on what narratives individuals decided to share; not to mention that this would also be distracting and potentially lead to superficiality in responses. This also allowed me to be able to attract participants from a wider range of locations and made working over Zoom feel relatively normal for most.

Regarding my analysis, it has been claimed that a simple thematic analysis does not allow researchers to make claims about language use (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, I would argue that I have not adopted *just* a thematic analysis considering my reflexive and experience-centred elements, as well as its two-part output available in the next chapter. There is further suggestion that the flexibility of thematic analysis that I have fully embraced can lead to inconsistency and incoherence, which is why I have demonstrated my deliberate approach to analysis and will continue to do that as I critically discuss my findings.

One final limitation for my research is that my interpretations of my data are always, and can only ever be, connected to my positionality and unique perspective of the world (Andrews, 2007). This world and I as an individual, along with the participants, are in a constant state of flux. Therefore, my interviews represent choices my

participants made at a certain moment and the analysis of them represent choices I have made at a certain moment, and I must remain mindful of tentative status of this decisions and the fragility of any new or reconstruction I offer.

### **3.11 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I have explored in detail the methodological approach I have employed to investigate the complex nature of purpose and leadership, as experienced by a representative sample of individuals from ECEC. The context of my research led me to a feminist-pragmatism epistemology, to embrace the plurality and underlining marginalised status of the sector. Adopting praxeology as my ontological stance adequately focuses my approach on action with thoughtful consideration of the power and ethical tensions in this milieu and the phenomenological element encourages me to get as close as possible to the lived experiences of participants. Narrative research and analysis were appropriate for generating new and reconstructions of knowing that can empower the sector and strengthen participant voice. Combining these elements with the important notions of theorised subjectivity, positional spaces and ethical considerations are all important parts of building towards a persuasive case. This persuasive case has the possibility of nurturing “new imaginings of the ideal and the possible” (Barone, 2001, p. 736) and to promote changes to the dominant narratives (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007) through new and reconstructions. I will now offer and explore these new and reconstructions in my findings and discussion chapter.

# Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter is presented in four parts. In the first part, I set out a new notion of professional confidence as it was presented in my participant narratives. I do this first as it is a powerful indicator for how individuals in ECEC see their worlds. More specifically, how they see the purpose of ECEC, leadership challenges in ECEC and good leadership in ECEC. In the subsequent three parts I explicitly respond to each research question in turn, drawing on both participant data and previous literature for theorisation. These research questions are as follows:

1. What are individuals working in ECEC lived experiences of the purpose of the sector?
2. What are individuals working in ECEC lived experiences of leadership in the sector?
3. What are individuals working in ECEC lived experiences of good leadership in the sector?

Drawing on the work of Thayer-Bacon (2010) I will go on to set out my main findings which are not ‘truths’, but assertions supported by as much evidence as possible from transcripts but should always be considered corrigible and worthy of further exploration (Thayer-Bacon, 2010). These findings are borne from individual stories and the theorisation around them, they as just one of many narratable ‘truths’ and therefore can be seen as an imperfect practical wisdom that can both settle and innovate (Squire, 2008). In places lengthy quotes have been utilised in line with suggestions from Sakr and O’Sullivan (2022a), this is testament to my intention to hear the voices of participants to “develop a stronger sense of what the participants think, feel and wish to express” (p. 7). These lengthier quotes are the stories participants shared through the interviews and are discussed in relation to the key findings. They are presented in italics to ensure they are suitably highlighted as they offer important summaries to points of view. Additionally, when I present data from participants, I have added a word describing their context and role, to ensure everyone is considered as an

individual. This is also to emphasise the contextual nuances in these findings and the attempt represent voices from all participants.

## **4.2 Professional Confidence in ECEC**

### **4.2.1 Introduction**

The concept of professional confidence has been generated from my analysis of all data produced in this research, along with theorisation of relevant literature and my reflections on it. Professional confidence has been referred to by Bradbury, Hoskins, and Fogarty (2021) as a characteristic needed to question the impact of policy, related to the status of specialist early years teacher and leaders. In this thesis, participant data indicated a more expansive use of the term, relating it to how they perceive the status of ECEC individuals, as well their competence and readiness to challenge and support the beliefs and behaviour of others in the sector. This perception is in accordance with their own values of the purpose of ECEC and how they enact their own leadership responsibility, which will be explored in subsequent sections in this chapter.

In this section I will now set out a detailed breakdown of what Professional Confidence is, with occasional reference to different levels of Professional Confidence indicated by the layers of meaning presented in participant data. Namely, participants appeared to either have 'high', 'good', 'some', 'contrived' or 'low' levels of Professional Confidence, and this seemed to be transient depending on the area of focus, role, experience levels and other features too.

### **4.2.2 Defining Professional Confidence**

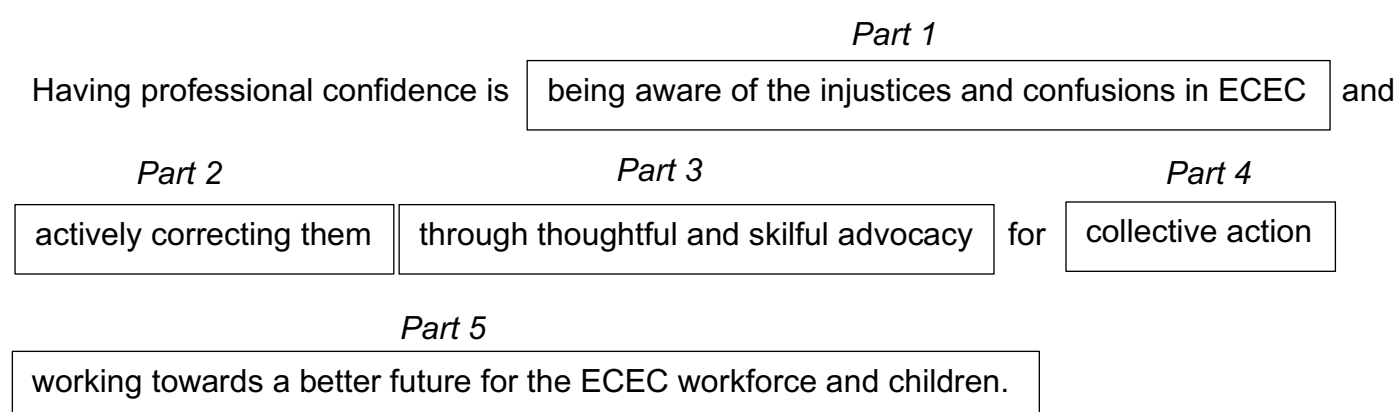
The working definition of professional confidence has been contributed to by participant data as explicated in this section, and is written as follows:

Having professional confidence is being aware of the injustices and confusions in ECEC, and actively correcting them through thoughtful and skilful advocacy for collective action, working towards a better future for the ECEC workforce and children.



The definition can be broken down into five parts, each linked to participant narratives and reflections on existing literature. Notably, there is no reference to hierarchy or whose responsibility this is. This is integral to an underlying point in this thesis in that a more inclusive approach to leadership, drawing on Helgeson's (1990) web of inclusion understanding of leadership and leadership being everyone's responsibility. I will now offer a detailed breakdown of what professional confidence is and how this relates to participant data.

*Figure Two – An expanded definition of professional confidence*



#### **4.2.2.1 Part One – be aware of the context**

To be “aware of injustices and confusions in ECEC” individuals need to be curious and communicate clearly to demonstrate a full awareness of the complexity of the professional knowledge landscape (see figure three presented subsequently). Sakr and O’Sullivan (2022a, p.252) importantly note that “Leadership is waking up to context without allowing it to dominate”. This relies on a strong sense of social purpose and resilience as well as clear communication and continuous curiosity (Fogarty, 2020), which can be expanded to mean “a level of candour and empathy that conveyed genuine care and respect for our nursery community” and “an eagerness to learn more” (Fogarty, 2020, p.48) this is reflected in participant data below too.

“It’s important that everybody gets those messages all together. So, we reinforce those. They’re also reinforced in staff team meetings. But other training sessions that we put on, latterly, I’ve been doing some of those on zoom and recording them just so that they can get that but again, it’s just repeating and reminding them of what is important” (Mark – Large Private - Owner)

“I like a bit of guidance, but I also like to interpret that and break it down for people. And I think that that's what people need, because there are many myths that that that, you know, evolve very quickly. People don't actually take some time to read and interpret the guidance. Now that's because either they don't know where to access the guidance. They haven't been told. They are scared of the guidance and the terminology that's in there is come from the government, my God, how am I going to interpret that?”  
(Audrey – Other - Consultant)

Here, Audrey and Mark are both exhibiting high levels of professional confidence, sharing the importance of awareness, and desire to reinforce and instil vital information in the people they work with and the importance of doing this on a continuous basis. Neither explicitly mention support for qualifications to generate awareness but further qualifications are one way to inspire more curiosity and better communication skills, as well as perhaps increase individuals' ability to navigate government information, but it comes with its own risks too. As Chalke (2013) suggests higher education qualifications may help graduates to resist policy initiatives that limit ECEC professionalism, but they may also pigeon-hole it in a technical way.

Furthermore, Osgood (2009) warns that graduates recruited into ECEC settings based on their status as graduates could be the embodiment of government constructions of professionalism, whilst lacking experiential expertise in the field. Consequently, a portion of the sector may meet these graduates “with suspicion and hostility” (Osgood 2009, p.744). Therefore, on one hand, this awareness can result in individuals being more likely to understand those that work with them, their individual personalities, challenges, and trajectories and therefore better enable them to empower them through development an appropriate shared language in their current context. However, particularly if this first part is not done well, greater awareness could lead to alienation and an element of preaching that is not well received or impactful.

Examining the active conditions in the ECEC environment allows this awareness to form and this is central to the pedagogical praxis element of this research, Palaiologou and Male (2018) claim this awareness “will lead to epistemological constructs that might lead to home grown constructions of leadership in ECEC” (p. 8). This better enables leaders to rise to the challenge suggested by Done and Murphy (2018) to enact “discourses of social justice against a wider discursive backdrop of national

economic priorities” (p. 148). This awareness will also bring issues of stereotyping and discrimination raised by Miller (2019) to the foreground and Woodrow and Busch (2008) add that consciousness-raising can become the starting point for a meaningful leadership response, encourage an action-centred orientation, relating closely to the next part of professional confidence. Finally, it is important to stress that this awareness is not about promoting sameness but about preparation for subsequent parts of this definition that embrace what Martin and Mohanty (1986) suggest, in that there needs to be an acknowledgement that unity is necessarily fragmented, unstable, not given, but chosen and struggled for. Connected to this, as Tulip states “I think, obviously, we're like, quite not undermined, maybe underappreciated quite a lot. I think we do need to fight for it” which requires action.

Also central to contextual awareness is the gender dimension. Whilst gender did not appear as much as expected, the three stories below capture how some participants feel regarding gender and ECEC.

*“At the nursery that I met Tuesday, there was a very young guy. Clearly, he has been through a very different difficult schooling experience. He really wants to work in a setting. And what he what he felt confident enough to say in in a staff meeting, the other day was, I always really wanted to work with children, but I could never tell anybody. So sad. The way that he could work children was to go to university and do sports science. He's now a bank member of staff and he's put off his university year and has now feels confident to swap courses. Brilliant. Yeah, but that just made me say, God, we've got a lot to do.” (Audrey – Consultant)*

*“Well, I think we're struggling because of those thoughts around gender gendered roles in society. There are some very strong cultural influences there. You know, around this is what men do. This is what women do. And I think the benefits of having a mixed gender workforce is it's more reflective of society, that children need to interact with people of all genders that provide a wider spectrum of character types. I think there's a danger in stereotyping men and women. And, you know, we need more men because they're going to be disciplinaries they're gonna be outdoor sporty types. They're going to be role models for boys. I think that's a dangerous road to go down.” (Mark – Owner - Entrepreneur)*

*“This kind of all female society creates a circle for that pettiness, especially in the early years for some reason as kind of that like everybody is fighting with each other. Everybody's trying to be better than each other. Yeah. It's a horrible atmosphere” (Evie – Deputy Manager – Narrator)*

These stories of gender suggest the need for further research into the role gender in relation to professional confidence and leadership in ECEC, this would be integral to respond to the call to action to respond to the “struggles to confront and transform unjust and unequal power relations” (Cornwall, 2016, p. 342), and is commented on in section 5.7 later in this thesis. In relation to gender, whilst a short comment below, it is worth connecting to the stories above as it captures a historical issue of choices presented to young people that continues to occur in colleges and secondary schools today, making the call for further research even stronger.

“Do we start with the secondary schools, who are still doing hair or care?”  
(Audrey – Consultant)

#### **4.2.2.2 Part Two – be active**

To be “actively working towards correcting” injustices and confusions individuals need to be willing to stand up for themselves and their sector. This activity works towards changes in ‘institutional habitus’ which Miller (2019, p.29) defines as “planned and deliberate changes to institutional structures, practiced and cultures” and is essential for social justice leadership. This takes time and requires professional confidence in relation to the original conception by Bradbury *et al.* (2021) “to question the impact of policy” (p.10) with regards to daily responsibilities and recruitment issues amongst other issues.

“In some ways we are our own worst enemies. Because we don't stand up and go, actually, that's not how it should be.” (Whitney – Independent School - Teacher)

“I mean, I just feel that just for like, for myself to become like, more confident, like, in myself as well, because sometimes I feel like, even when I was like, when I first started, I didn't necessarily have the confidence just to speak out or challenge ideas. I don't know if I want to be like a teacher, like a reception class teacher, it's too much paperwork. I just, like the paperwork, why is there so much paperwork?” (Bernice – State School - Teaching Assistant)

Whitney’s words here of the sector being their own worst enemy set the tone for the issues expressed by Bernice. Similarly, Niyati shares the story below about the challenges of leadership that is worthy of being highlighted.

*“I just had five staff resign from me. With regards to a change in direction that I'm going, I'm actually asking them to be more involved in their own CPD, I want them to update themselves because it's ever changing, and I can't, I can't do the updating, it has to come from yourself, I will give you the pointers, but you need to do that. That was one issue. And the second issue was hours. And I needed them to do different hours, I'm going to actually do more hours than they were originally because of the new regulation, cleaning, and extra, and they couldn't fit it around their lifestyle. And so, the challenges are recruitment and retention.” (Niyati – Small Private - Manager/owner)*

The idea is that for the sector to not be their own worst enemy, they must be active and be proactive in our own development, unlike Niyati's team and be sure to speak out when you have a viewpoint unlike Bernice currently feels able to do. As argued by Simpson (2010) the workforce must have ownership of the discourses, standards, and qualities to work towards an internally constructed activist approach.

The issues that Bernice and Niyati talk about above in particular lead into concerns about a portion of the workforce getting left behind in the face of more recent changes in expectations on the sector. It has therefore been suggested that the ECEC workforce needs to be 'professionalised' to cope with increasing requirements and extensive challenges in the sector (Chalke, 2013). This suggests the need for leaders to make judgements which is central to the leadership praxis in my work, with Frick (2008) noting the term 'satisficing' meaning negotiating compromises is a central skill in leadership.

My data suggests that leaders instilling, developing, and unleashing professional confidence is an integral part of this professionalisation, which as Friedson (2013) suggests, is more a process than a structure. He adds that “to speak about the process of professionalisation requires one to define the direction of the process” (p. 15) and this end-place is likely to be transient, just like the notion of professional confidence is transient both contextually and subjectively. The importance of speaking about this notion is central as is the important to recognise the different actions from a leader to either instil, develop, or unleash professional confidence. This is intentional and relates to Hoskins and Smedley's (2020) point about developmental professionalism.

In that it must be a bottom-up rather than top-down approach beginning where the individuals are, not there they ought to be.

#### **4.2.2.3 Part Three – thoughtful and skilful advocacy**

Doing this work is about being willing to be seen and heard and it requires individuals to have a voice and use it to inspire others, before that though, it requires openness to collaboration and support, which is not always the case in the sector as Audrey describes below.

“Believe you me, there's many settings that wouldn't invite me in that I know of because they couldn't deal with that level of critical friendship, they just couldn't. But those people that do, they know me well now. So, they come back to me and say, we've done that it's been great, tell me more.” (Audrey – Other – Consultant)

Several other participants recognise the need for individuals to speak up with Bernice (State School – Teaching Assistant) stating good leaders allow “their team to have their say, value their needs and make time for their overall well-being”. Evie (Small Private- Deputy Manager) added that “if a leader has good personal characteristics, it makes them more personable and approachable. This enables staff to have a voice and make changes where they feel appropriate.” Finally, Evelyn (Nursery School - Headteacher) highlighted importantly that, “we have to make our voices heard because we are in the Forgotten sector” and added that she “definitely feels like an activist” showing attributes of someone with high levels of professional confidence.

Interestingly, there are three forms of activism offered by Miller, Hill-Berry, Hylton-Fraser, and Powell, (2019) and in conflict with values previously most prominent, activism centred around staff well-being seem to be more central to discussion here than that around the child, this quietened activism was pedagogic activism centred around seeking better outcomes for children. The second form of activism from Miller, *et al.* (2019) is emancipatory activism which is working to eradicate oppression and create opportunities for all stakeholders to be empowered, this is captured below from participants:

“We want to encourage people to speak up” (Mark – Large Private - Owner)

“You need to be very, very strong in voicing your what you think the right things are to do, and to be able to justify those.” (Whitney – Independent School - Teacher)

“I just need to get the others to speak more. And then I can listen more.” (Sally –Small Private - Senior Leader)

The third form of activism from Miller, *et al.* (2019) is regulatory activism which is working to ameliorate structural and procedural injustices caused by inconsistent and policy initiatives and this relates to the participant statement here and is central in notions of good and high levels of professional confidence:

“I think it's as conforming to societal expectations, and societal norms. That puts us in that position. We do need to have the confidence to stand up and be counted. And, and I think there is a lot to be said, for having a profession in which it is seen to be valuable by society. And at the moment is not.” (Whitney – Independent School - Teacher)

The participants views are indicative of what Lloyd and Hallet (2010) called for over 10 years ago, a collective personal identity in a cohesive group with a shared vision and understanding and a shared voice, to support change and be a tool for networking and business development. This requires less of an impetus placed with competition, instead more focus on collaboration between providers and personnel (Kagan and Hallmark, 2001). This could lead to more individuals in the sector using their voice, as Moss (2010) makes it clear that the workforce must have a voice in shaping policy by drawing on their expertise, and it is also suggested here that individuals voices will be stronger if brought together.

#### **4.2.2.4 Part Four - be collaborative, not competitive**

Advocating for “collective action” fosters togetherness which is an integral dilemma for the sector to overcome and this is about being able to recognise that as part of the sector you belong to something and being collaborative rather than competitive. This is central to the feminist praxis in this work, as Cahill *et al.* (2010) suggest, feminist praxis is sustained by relationships between stakeholders and that collaboration is key to creating a better reality and can also increase feminine capital too. Where the caring nature of individuals is embraced as well as democratic decision-making processes

(Powney and Weiner, 1991) and an emphasis on inclusive approaches (Adler, Laney, and Packer, 1993). According to the individuals in my study, this can happen both inside the workplace, day to day, and outside through team-building events.

“I think one of the one of the key things is respect in terms of, me respecting team ideas, and a team being able to share and me, you know, being receptive of that, to recognise each other's views on what is going on and sometimes, that can be quite a challenge” (Shaima – Small Private - Room Leader)

“It is easy for everyone to kind of have input and we also ask people to record their views and recording so that we could then share those and reflect with them in their professional development as well” (Evelyn – Nursery School - Headteacher)

“Yeah, and also, I think it's quite important to be able to have a regular non-work-related team building activity or a discussion. And that helps blend the teams together.” (Shaima – Small Private - Room Leader)

This element of professional confidence links to a concept within professionalism captured by Brock's (2012) categorisation of 'rewards', which includes personal satisfaction from roles, meaningful relationships with parents and children and a strong commitment to the professional role. This suggests the formation of what Wenger (2006) calls communities of practice which need to have a shared domain of interest, membership of a collaborative community and a developing shared repertoire of resources and experiences, strengthening individuals and the sector.

Furthermore, not only is fostering togetherness something that can reward individuals in the workforce and increase their sense of professionalism, but it can also lead to collaborative professional working which in turn can improve the quality of ECEC more widely (Simpson, 2011). This is to suggest that we cannot ignore the entrepreneurial elements of ECEC, there is a need to provide the best service possibly for children and families, but the integral point here is that this can be achieved through collaboration and growth together, possibly in distinct ways, whilst supporting and challenging development. To do this, individuals must not, as Tulip states, be “their own worst enemy in a way” and believe they can work together and achieve change.



#### **4.2.2.5 Part Five – be purposeful**

All this professional confidence work should be done with a purposeful passion for the “better future for the ECEC workforce and children”, these children are viewed as precious and there should be a sense of gratitude for being able to work with them as suggested by the data below.

“So actually, the level of experience, the years of experience they've got had nothing on the passion and the drive that I had to make a change.” (Evie – Small Private - Deputy Manager)

“And we are very lucky to work with children because we just see them grow and develop. It's probably the best job in the world. But when people say it's an easy job, they're not actually understanding what we do for them, children, how we make them look like they're our own. And we care for them, but also teach them.” (Tammy – Small Private - Room Leader)

This passion and care can go too far though and lead to individuals doing more than can be reasonably expected with situations like Tammy describes below:

“So that's what provision leader I noticed what doesn't work and what does work. So, I do tend to purchase things for that before that room to help support them. But I don't know, I just I just loves treating the children” (Tammy – Small Private - Room Leader)

This is a situation repeated across the sector, where underpaid and undervalued individuals put their hands in their own pockets all in the name of the children. Whilst this is admirable, it forms an important dilemma in leader's development professional confidence. Leaders need to know this reality for their team, leaders then need to empower their teams to use their voice to ask for what they need, with clear rationale, rather than spend their own hard-earned money. This is despite possible financial challenges settings face as by doing this, team members are removing a leader's ability to support. This also muffles the funding challenges in the sector and lessens the sustainability issue the sector is facing and exemplifies how the ECEC workforce may be “colluding in their own oppression” (Powell and Goouch, 2012, p. 133).

Instead, as Osgood (2006) suggests, the ECEC workforce and other stakeholders should be engaging in constructing an improved view of professionalism of the sector, “women must lead it and constitute its core” (Crotty, 1999, p. 174). This complements

Simpson's (2010) suggestion of an internally constructed activist approach, in which the workforce has ownership of the discourses, standards and qualities. This is to allude to what Miller (2019) refers to as a change in institutional habitus based on planned and deliberate changes to structures, practices, and cultures.

For this to be possible, individuals need to operate with purposeful passion, as a collective, advocating with their voice skilfully and thoughtfully towards correcting the injustices and confusions in the sector. In other words, they need to operate with professional confidence. As Niyati states aptly:

"It's a continuous fight, which is really unfair. But unfortunately, that's what it is. You can either complain, and do nothing, or get on with it and make your mark slowly." (Niyati – Small Private - Manager/Owner)

Promoting high levels of professional confidence as Niyati does above is central to what good leadership in ECEC is all about. As expanded here, leadership is everyone's responsibility and it requires the choice to be aware of the reality, to be active, to be willing to be seen and heard, to be collaborative not competitive and to be purposeful. This is to resist the notion of imposed purpose set by policy, funding and regulation set out in the first part of the literature. The call to leadership according to East (2019, p.1) is "always being our best selves in our day-to-day work, is a transformational journey and an examination of ourselves and our personal ways of being".

### **4.2.3 Making Sense of Professional Confidence**

To make sense of professional confidence I have tentatively linked each of participants to a level of Professional Confidence informed by their semi-structured interviews. I present this below in table six and then offer some more detailed narratives exemplifying levels of professional confidence further and foreground insights from participants in this exploration. It is important to note that this is the classification of professional confidence that participants presented with most of the time, but that they are not wedded solely to that level. Professional confidence is transient, and this is

reflected in the way the data has been considered throughout the findings and conclusion sections.

*Table Six – Profile of participants' levels of Professional Confidence*

Participant	Professional Confidence (PC) Rationale and Context	PC Level
Whitney	Professional contexts were drawn upon a lot, and this seemed to centre Whitney and led to the impression of her being professionally confident. She showed great awareness of injustices and emphasised the importance of being active against them, although didn't clearly set out details around this action. Finally, she spoke about internal competition as being a problem and was encouraging a more collaborative way of working. These experiences are set within the context of an independent school that seemingly did not value ECEC in the way Whitney felt it should. It was more of an add on at the bottom of the garden, often expected to fall in line with wider school expectations. Whitney did fantastic job to promote ECEC in her context and resist the drive of the independent that did not appear to be rooted in strong ECEC pedagogy but rather centred on foci outside of children at this foundational change.	Good
Niyati	She did not let a challenging situation context dominate her narrative in anyway and emphasised the importance of being creative and open to new knowledge for her career journey. She showed great awareness of a range of other contextual issues and emphasised her willingness to work against them as much as she could to improve the sector. These experiences are set within some very recent challenges in terms of staffing for Niyati. She had seen wholesale changes in her team due to them not wanting to raise their game as she discussed in her interview. Despite this obvious challenge, Niyati was unwavering in her commitment to ECEC, not accepting a drop in standards to appease her team. Recruitment was central to Niyati's mind as a one-site owner/manager, the only thing that this seemed to be centred on was what is best for the children in her care, this is why she displayed high professional confidence.	High
Margaret	Margaret was focused on doing the work she needed to do for her setting but the foundations, whilst centred on further qualification, did not seem to be deeply embedded in any awareness of injustices or counter-discourses and there was little room for creativity or interpretation by her, government initiatives were taken at face value. These experiences directly related to the recent opening of one small pack away setting, which is an impressive achievement in itself. Prior to this Margaret worked at an after-school club but took her entrepreneurship and passion for young children to create a provision from nothing. Perhaps this newness has translated into misplaced confidence, but this could be reflective of the context of an interview as part of Doctoral research as much as other factors too.	Contrived
Shaima	Shaima demonstrated a broad awareness of all contextual dimensions, but her actions always bring her back to the children and she did not let external pressures get to her. Shaima is very much engaged on the ground and is a role model for best practice but did not do enough in a wider sense to be consider highly professional context, action was limited to a narrow sense with only some interpretation connected to action. These experiences come from a collection of roles in ECEC over a long time. Shaima has experienced a breadth of settings and therefore was able to draw on these to give an excellent picture of what life has been life in ECEC. To move settings shows good professional confidence, an unwillingness to lower one's standards and a constant desire to have a role where positive impact on children is the main driver.	Good
Tammy	Tammy has some professional confidence which is exhibited in relatively short-term thinking with a dependency on static information that isn't systematically interpreted, challenged, or applied. She does show an excellent awareness of challenges but is only	Some

	<p>somewhat open to partnership and monitoring as ways to work against them. These experiences come from a mixed bag of experiences in ECEC, working in a school-based setting then a small group of private nurseries. Whilst these contexts are of course different they share the sparsity of resources challenge and therefore Tammy has been used to working with less than was needed to do everything possible for the children in her care. Whilst she has caused some dissolution and lack of optimism for a better a future, it has changed the unwavering desire to provide the children in her care with the best education and care that is possible.</p>	
Sally	<p>Sally clearly favours the PRF over the ORF and wants to lead the teaching she is responsible for herself, but actions reported did not exhibit elements of interpretation, counter-discourses and action that would be connected to someone with higher levels of professional confidence. These experiences come from a multitude of roles in ECEC over many years, including the widest range possible from pack away settings to a corporate nursery and then now a small private provider. This has enabled Sally to see the full spectrum of challenges experiences in the sector and an incredibly talented early years teacher. This knowledge and expertise meant she knew what needed to be done but years of experiences the decline of the sector has left her feeling like positive changes is becoming harder and harder.</p>	Some
Evie	<p>Evie spoke creatively and positively, with high levels of interpretation as well reports of connected action. She talks of investing in her own development to help maintain passion in an everchanging sector. She articulated counter-discourses well and did not settle for a lack of creativity and positive action in others. These experiences come from a relatively short period of time in ECEC and in a small private set up but that was unique in that it was within a military base. Evie had a strong mindset and passion not only for the children in her care but for high standards for her and her colleagues. She was not willing to except the status quo and readily reported on walking the walk with her colleagues. Not only was she able to articulate what needed to be done, she was able to report on examples of when she did it in her day-to-day practice.</p>	High
Tulip	<p>Tulip's purpose was centred on children in a long-term sense, meaning she is engaged well with her own development and had a willingness to embrace the challenges of the role but was not able to articulate how anything could be done about them in any depth. There was a reliance on information being given to her without elements of interpretation or creativity. These experiences stem from Tulip's relatively short time in the sector and at only one setting. It was clear that Tulip thought she needed to learn more before having too much of a view on the direction of her setting and ECEC more broadly, hence some professional is appropriate. It is clear though that given her child-centered purpose that she has a strong base to build high professional confidence from in the future.</p>	Some
Mark	<p>Mark had a unique perspective on CPD and a long-term view of what the sector needed and was willing to speak up for this whilst being very sceptical of external narratives around ECEC. Not only was he creative in his interpretations of information he was able to articulate and demonstrate action against prominent challenges too. These experiences come from a long history of working with his wife in ECEC growing a relatively large group of private nurseries with doing social good as its core, for example he spoke fondly of the wide range of cultures, often from deprived backgrounds, that attended his settings. Mark demonstrated a unique ability to be aware of the reality of ECEC but to also navigate a way through this that meant there was a sense of togetherness and optimism.</p>	High
Mandy	<p>Mandy showed an awareness of challenges in the sector and was clearly engaged in her own learning and development. Her desire to offer counter-discourses was only in a narrow sense and connected action was not clear. There were elements of interpretation but only limited and still there was a great reliance on receiving information and following it to the letter. These experiences are centred on a relatively short period of time in the ECEDC sector and in one large group of private nurseries under one manager. This manager was very supportive but also provides a very clear framework for their team to</p>	Some

	work in. Whilst this framework was appreciated it also limited the amount of professional confidence that could be developed.	
Bernice	Bernice emphasised the process of receiving guidance and policy from above without any recognition of her own interpretation of this. She did express an interest in personal development but emphasised the lack of confidence she has in putting any learning into practice and showed little awareness of counter-discourses or the room for creativity. These experiences come from a couple of different contexts but mostly a school-based setting, where she felt she was not appreciated or valued, much like many ECEC individuals that participated in this research. This understandably limited the possibilities for professional confidence to be developed.	Low
Audrey	Audrey speaks to a range of contextual factors and positions responsibility for change firmly with the workforce and their ability to interpret and creative implement all directives in policy. This shows the willingness to believe in the workforce to be the change the sector needs and shows high professional confidence levels. These experiences come from a vast range of experiences in ECEC going back decades. It was a culmination of these experiences that led Audrey to create her own consultancy, a move that requires great professional confidence on its own What came through more that this with Audrey was a desire to help others carve their own path on ECEC centred on doing what is best for children, not for government policy or other influencers. Not only did Audrey talk this talk but she walked the walk too.	High
Shelly	Shelly spoke a lot about the development of herself and others and gave clear examples of how she has stood up and spoke out to be heard and lead the way when there may be a sense of injustice. Shelly takes the long-term view of things and takes the time to understand and mediate policy and guidance. This means she draws on many elements of policy acting from narrating through to being a critic that ultimately demonstrates a high level of professional confidence. Interestingly, a lot of Shelly's confidence seemed to stem from experiences outside of ECEC in her previous role in banking. These experiences enabled her to translate a sense of passion and confidence backed up but clear rationale into her own setting as a home-based educator. Similarly to other high =-PC individuals, Shelly walked the walk with her team and didn't just talk the talk.	High
Evelyn	Evelyn offered a range of comments connecting to all contextual dimensions to be both critical and supportive of the sector in different ways. She demonstrates passion for developing the sector and a natural curiosity to learn more and understand the broadness of leading in the sector. This awareness and a clear desire to improve realities along with actions that back them up suggest Evelyn is a highly professionally confident individual. These experiences are mainly centred on Evelyn's role as headteacher of a maintained nursery setting, often seen as the top of ECEC in terms of status. This could have contributed to this sense of high PC that was also evident in the way she articulated her view of the ECEC sector as a whole and was able to share insights into how she is demonstrate a desire for a better future in her daily work.	High
Kelly	The conversations with Kelly stayed quite close to practice and descriptive, without verging too deeply to demonstrate her own interpretation or creativity despite her reporting confidence in her role. There was a tension between what was being said and the impression it gave in relation to professional confidence thus it has been identified as contrived. These experiences are centred on a career of working in charity-led pre-schools which were pack away settings and often seen as the bottom of the ECEC hierarchy in terms of status. There is often a scarcity of resources, CPD and strategic support in these settings which could reflect Kelly displaying contrived PC.	Contrived

Table six above provides insight into the lived experiences of each participant and draws on their narratives present in the data to do so, this results in five levels of professional confidence being demonstrated from the group of participants in this

study, although these are not fixed it is helpful to understand more detail about each level in relation to participant data, as presented above. When exhibiting high levels of professional confidence, individuals showed not only great awareness of challenges in the sector but were able to draw on specific examples of how they stood up and spoke up against them with counter-narratives and saw this as central to their roles. When individuals presented with good, or some professional confidence they may have had an awareness of the challenges but were less able to formulate suitable responses to them or see this as their responsibility. When individuals presented as having contrived levels of professional confidence, they demonstrated elements of confidence in their work, but this was coupled with unawareness of some vital issues and an uncritical reliance on information presented to them from a range of sources. Low professional confidence related to individuals explicitly stating having low confidence and through the awareness and action reported in the participant data.

To continue, below there are two separate stories from two different participants, capturing the importance of having a voice (Sakr and O'Sullivan, 2022a) and providing summary insights into the type of difficulties faced widely around the sector. Shaima captures how she resisted the introduction of uniform to her setting drawing on a range of informed reasons and Shelly talks about standing up for what she believed in regarding the language used to describe her work.

*"We didn't have a uniform, and we had somebody come in, and they wanted to put uniform in, where we have odds and you know, that that formality and, and that was really hard work to fight for that if you that's not what we're here for. And that's not, you know, and we're trying to create an environment that's linked making it homely for the children. And actually, by putting these barriers in place, you're actually making it quite formal and uncomfortable, especially open environment. And, and an equally like you say, you know, we should be proud of the fact that we are educating these young children. And that's, yeah, it is. And those things need to be recognised. And, and again, not about status about but there's values." (Shaima – Small Private - Room Leader)*

*"I also think, and this will be unique to home-based settings, I find the term child minder derogatory to what we do. I'm really angry. I've actually written to Pacey my professional bodies several times saying, you know, you've got the power to change this. Why don't you and it is something they've looked at, but they've never done it. And I'm thinking you're actually doing us a dis-dis-justice, fuelling it, aren't they?" (Shelly – Home-based Educator - Manager/Owner)*

I build further on Shelly's narrative in a concluding section (see section 5.4) further exemplifying high levels of professional confidence and the impact this can have if embodied by more individuals working in ECEC, possibly propelling the workforce from the margins. Connected to this, Osgood (2009) talked about the workforce being seen as invisible individually, yet collectively responsible for the failings of neo-liberal government. These stories indicate that this may well be the default position, but the workforce can stand their ground and make steps in the right direction, if it can be done here, it can be done elsewhere. However, this won't be easy as Bernice (State School – Teaching Assistant) captures "I just feel that just for like, for myself to become like, more confident, like, in myself as well, because sometimes I feel like, even when I was like, when I first started, I didn't necessarily have the confidence to like, to speak out or challenge ideas".

There are already expectations that the ECEC workforce will be 'like' teachers, so why not take this one step further? As O'Keefe and Tait (2004) states, although the ECEC workforce is generally viewed as non-teaching it requires a similar repertoire of skills to teaching. So, the workforce can take strength from this and move away from being positioned in a role of servitude with working-class women looking after middle-class children (Osgood, 2009). Whilst it is not surprising individuals have perceived themselves as powerless against authority (Moyle, 2001), through this voice being shared and fostering togetherness, more steps in the right direction can be taken.

#### **4.2.4 Conclusion**

The new conceptualisation of professional confidence has been identified here as central in the journey towards an enhanced lived experience for the ECEC workforce. Leaders in a formal sense may hold the key to unlock professional confidence in the workforce and individuals in this study have suggested this focus is central for leaders to overcome leadership challenges and to enact good leadership. Particularly to enact good leadership in the contextually specific ways needed to respond to the needs of those working in the complex professional knowledge landscape of ECEC. Thus, it informs all research question discussions and provides the foundations from which they will each now be explored in turn.

## **4.3 The Purpose of ECEC – a transient set of factors**

### **4.3.1 Introduction**

My first research question asked, what are individuals working in ECEC lived experience of the purpose of the sector? In response to this I collected data at two stages. Participant data in stage one highlighted a collection of factors, and then in stage two of data collection I asked participants to rank these factors in order of influence on their daily lives and to offer further insight into how they arranged these factors, in their own individual way. The hierarchies of factors are supported by Moss and Petrie (2002) who stated: "There is no one 'best practice' or 'standard of quality' to be found since such concepts are always value laden and relative" (p. 11). As will be seen, all participants varied in the way they organised these sets of factors. This arrangement is influenced by their professional confidence (as explored on in the previous section), personal experiences and the context in which they work. This triad is essential to understand to capture what the purpose of ECEC is, from the perspective of a range of individuals working on the frontline and the spread of participants contributions is captured in Appendix K as a table for reference. Whilst context and role are pre-determined, professional confidence has been attributed to them from the narratives they gave throughout this research as set out previously. This is essential for this research focus as leadership requires a direction, and this direction is inextricably influenced by factors influencing individual's perspectives of the purpose of ECEC.

As there is no universally agreed definition of the purpose of ECEC, due to the sector's complexity and variation across contexts, this flexible set of factors could be an important tool for individuals to draw on to make sense of the wide range of influences on their daily lives. Specifically, this set of factors contains eight different parts as seen below in table seven that can be said to contribute to the "professional knowledge landscape" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996, p.24) in ECEC.

For stage one of data collection the factor position was determined by my analysis of how often the factor was raised by participants, and how many different participants it was raised by, during interviews. For stage two, each participant ranked the factors



themselves explicitly, and an average of these placements determined the order presented below. Throughout this discussion, I draw on data from stage one first followed by stage two as stage two provides data that are generally extensions of that provided from stage one.

*Table Seven: Presence of factors in order in each stage of data collection*

Position	Stage one	Stage two	Change
1 <sup>st</sup>	Pedagogical influences	Pedagogical influences	=
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Childcare market	Vision	+4
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Qualifications	Parent power	+1
4 <sup>th</sup>	Parent power	Policy	+1
5 <sup>th</sup>	Policy	Qualifications	-2
6 <sup>th</sup>	Vision	Childcare market	-4
7 <sup>th</sup>	Ofsted	Ofsted	=
8 <sup>th</sup>	Money	Money	=

Looking at table seven as a whole and given 'Pedagogical influences' are rooted in child-centredness, it is reassuring yet unsurprising to see it consistently placed at the top of the list, suggesting it is most prominent in the minds of participants. Interestingly, the value of 'Vision' was the biggest mover when comparing stage one to stage two. As in stage one data collection I was not explicitly asking about these factors, they were implied through participant data and what they chose to focus on in the answers, stage two was explicitly ranking them. The reverse can be said for the 'Childcare market' factor, as the joint biggest mover with value, as it featured highly in the tacit data stage but less so in the direct stage, dropping down to 6<sup>th</sup>, some participants may not be comfortable with this conception of their sector though and therefore strive to reduce its significance when faced head on with it, or perhaps the childcare market is not an inevitability according to my participants. In between these two factors there is 'Parent Power' and 'Policy', both of which were identified as more influential than 'Qualifications' in stage two data. Given parents pay the money, their voices are considered important and similarly individuals recognise the importance of policies in protecting them and governing what they do given the preciousness of the children in their care. 'Qualifications' are more divisive though, which I think stems back to the

way participants have qualified themselves and the interactions they have with current entry level training.

Finally, both 'Ofsted' and 'Money' were consistently placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. Perhaps people push the influence of Ofsted out their mind to focus on the part of their job they love and matters most? This wasn't conclusively found in the data though. When you consider the fundamental importance of money to operations - are people in denial regarding the placement of money? Perhaps this is part of a wider issue where the workforce does not value money as much as they should? All these factors will now be explored in more detail to respond to the overarching research questions more fully.

It is worth noting that table seven can also suggest the level of representativeness of the data in that the higher the factor was the more widely held the value is therefore it is more representative of the sector as a whole – a detailed overview of the strength of themes is set out in Appendix F where the brackets indicate how many times the factor was mentioned and by how many participants for stage one data and stage two data captured a direct ordering of the factors and that is the order in which the sections are now represented – the explicit order of factors (from stage two) rather than the implied (from stage one).

### **4.3.2 Pedagogical Influences**

Pedagogical influences have been identified as the most influential factor for determining the purpose of ECEC in my data with all 15 participants commenting on them in 37 separate instances (see Appendix F), comments specifically referred to the education vs care debate, looking at practice through the children's eyes and a tension between passion and knowledge.

Pedagogical influences were described in this research as the pedagogy of ones setting, the child-centredness and a focus on teaching, learning and care. Whilst all provisions would consider themselves child-centred with good intentions around child-development, what does this look and feel like? Even Ofsted state that: "No one questions the importance of investing early in a child's education" (Ofsted, 2014a, p.

2), but the majority of what is discussed here is the concern with what this investment should be. The drive towards school-readiness is becoming more and more dominant, at the expense of play and with the support of Ofsted, therefore, we must keep in mind "good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence if they lack understanding" (Stewart, 2011, unpaginated). Tulip captures the essence of these theme with their statement "the children is what like motivates me the most, because I want to learn more about them and how they work".

## **Education vs care**

This all contributes to the ongoing education vs care debate which is exemplified by two leaders in my study. On the one hand, Mark suggests:

"I think that underpinning knowledge of why you're doing what you're doing is important. Because otherwise, you know, you can fall back to the default of, you know, I need to nurture and care for these children... there can be that danger of over-caring." (Mark – Large Private, Owner)

On the other hand, Niyati said:

"We've got a government that's so focused on education. And they forget that these are our youngest children. And if children haven't got care... it doesn't matter what education you give them". (Niyati – Small Private, Manager/Owner)

There is a clear complexity here around the level of care and level of education that is considered appropriate in ECEC pedagogy. This echoes the long-standing divide in ECEC being care and education that has contributed to the inherent confused nature of the sector (Jarvis and Liebovich 2015). Although, participants do agree on the importance of keeping children at the centre.

"Your role is here to support and encourage those children and be, you know, that co-creator in their development, because within each child, there is that potential that is unique." (Mark – Large Private, Owner )

"The environment was set up to promote independence for the children". (Sally – Small Private – Senior Leader)

It could be said that whilst participants agree on a level of “responsibilisation”, which Torrance (2017, p, 91) coined to mean the positioning of individuals as responsible for working to solve collective societal problems, they do not seem to agree on how the ECEC workforce should enact this responsibility. Suggesting the existence of a transient set of factors that are being constructed in this section could be valuable for individuals to draw on in their own unique contexts. Furthermore, many recognised the power of play to centre responsibilisation, underlining the importance of looking at ECEC settings through a child’s eyes and respecting the time it takes for different children to learn, but this too came with undertones of confusion.

### **Through the children’s eyes**

“It’s all about play. It’s a four-letter word, but it’s so powerful. And it’s also misunderstood. And, and it’s also underplayed because it’s such a small word, you know, the power of play with children”. (Niyati – Small Private - Manager/Owner)

This misunderstanding is exemplified in government literature previously referenced, “for young children, purposeful play is an essential and rich part of the learning process” (DES, 1990, p.7). As Rogers and Lapping (2012) suggest, to talk of purposeful play could be seen as a collocation of the words play and purpose and muddy what this means for children and the workforce day to day, in the setting.

“If they can’t pick up a pencil, if the hands haven’t developed, and they haven’t got the right bones in there, they can’t make that progress and let them learn their pace”. (Whitney – Independent School – Teacher)

This all contributes to the play vs school readiness tension that sits alongside the education vs care tensions in ECEC pedagogy. Broadhead (2006) suggests that the value of play-based approaches to learning has been ‘sacrificed’ at the altar of ‘outstanding’ Ofsted grading so that the enactment of performance data became a professional necessity. This is exemplified in the above data, and the importance of play has long been recognised in the literature support participants standpoint. For example, “play is a child’s life and the means by which they come to understand the world around them” (Isaacs, 1971, p.133). Before play even, Mandy (Large Private - Private - Teacher) reminds us simply “Children need to feel safe”.

Whilst the principle of following a specific pedagogy can support cohesion and consistency in teaching, the focus could also be for the wrong reasons and not with the child at the centre. This challenge is something that the workforce must grapple with, and leaders must work to prevent, ensuring their purpose does remain child centred.

“We’re following the Curiosity approach at the moment. And we have just joined up to be accredited as part of the Curiosity approach, basically anything that we do can be copyrighted by the curiosity approach and we can promote it” (Evie – Small Private - Deputy Manager)

In this instance, the desire to be accredited with the Curiosity approach stamp seems to be in line with marketing purposes rather than child centred. This is an example of the presence of market driven forces in ECEC replacing progressive child-centredness (Powell, 2007; Penn, 2012) and demonstrates the need to resist the market influence of practice to resist the erosion of child-centred pedagogy. Similarly, below, Kelly “suspects” having a range of cooking equipment is an Ofsted requirement, it doesn’t seem to be about the children at all and Bernice refers to data on progress being used to go to the Council, not to inform next steps. These stories exemplify notions of contrived and low professional confidence and the risks of this to pedagogy and child-centredness.

*“Our home corner, we’ve got a range of different cooking equipment, and the little ones like woks and chopsticks and things like that. Just think, just to learn about the different the other cultures, and I suspect they’re Ofsted requirements”. (Kelly Voluntary pre-school - Deputy Manager)*

*“The children have to reach these early learning goals for the, because it gets it goes into a data or something for the county council or something they have to do a lot of work at home as well. And that’s quite tough (Bernice - State School – Teaching Assistant)*

## **Passion and knowledge tension**

Building on this with an amalgamation of insights from stage two data leads me to suggest the following understanding of how participants in this study see pedagogy influence on their day. Margaret (Small Manager/owner) stated that “this provides

opportunities to develop children's learning skills and interactions" and Evie (Small Private - Deputy Manager) emphasised the passion and drive for play and quality interactions and engagement". Evelyn (Nursery School - Headteacher) suggested pedagogy "underpins everything you do and will link to vision and policy but this link, if not clear, could present a challenge". According to Sally (Small Private - Senior Leader) "it is very hard to work in a setting where you do not believe in the pedagogy or when staff are not following it through". As Shaima (Small Private - Room leader) underlines, "pedagogy brings the passion and the knowledge together to deliver and make a difference".

The tension between knowledge and passion within teams is an iteration of long-standing tension in ECEC pedagogical choices, right back to McMillan vs Owens in the 1920s. Jarvis and Liebovich (2015) reported that there was a stark contrast between Owen's professional, pedagogic orientation, and McMillan's emotional, spiritually driven conviction. This has more recently come out through Bernstein's professional recontextualising field (PRF), promoted through play by educational practitioners and official recontextualising field (ORF) promoted through school readiness by the state and its representatives (Bernstein, 2000). It is suggested now that neither the ORF or PRF are an absolute good and completely appropriate to improve outcomes for children (Moss, 2010). Although, it can be argued that policy has moved the purpose of ECEC too far away from nurturing childhood (care) to raising educational achievement (education) as the main goal (Nutbrown and Clough, 2013). Therefore, resistance through localised activism may bring the focus back more towards play as well as a broader understanding of the purpose of ECEC, that keeps care central alongside education.

Overall, data here suggests that from my participants' perspective, *care* remains most important in ECEC pedagogy and within this there are a mix of influences that effect different stakeholders in different ways, depending on their level of experience, qualification, and perspective. This suggests resistance against the government line on offering 30 hours free childcare, 15 hours of free early education and 15 hours childcare (DfE, 2018b), and exemplifies the extant confusions as in reality providers are expected to provide both for the entirety of a child's time with them.

Audrey suggests that foundations of pedagogy are the coming together of several important components that contribute to the “way we care, teach and connect with children and families” (Other – Consultant) and how this links to individual’s passion and provisions ethos and values. My data shows participants identify this as being child-centred, research-informed, and considerate of the surrounding community. Although sometimes this is not done considering all children as individuals and other factors can be more influential than they should be, for example local policies and Ofsted (Ball and Vincent, 2005).

If even among the professionals that participated in this study, there cannot be coherence in what matters most, within the most widely agreed upon, most important factor that influences their purpose. The lack of harmony exemplifies confusion and mis-conceptions rife around and within the sector (Archer, 2021) and may also be why that sometimes a broad focus on a certain pedagogy or initiative that overall is ‘child-centred’, is not centred on the individual children in settings.

### **4.3.3 Setting Vision**

Vision, as the second factor, was described in this research as the vision set out by your organisation. This didn’t feature that often in stage one data collection (7 participants with 21 instances) but was placed second on average in the hierarchy placement in stage two data. Settings all have their own way of presenting their vision through mission or purpose statements and it is desirable for these need to be shared thoughtfully with all stakeholders, with a good foundation centred on children and their community. This is recognised by both seminal thinkers around child-centred play and central government over many years, with Isaacs (1971) stating “play is a child’s life and the means by which they come to understand the world around them” (p.133) and more recently the DCSF (2008) stating “play underpins the delivery of all EYFS...play underpins all development and learning for young children” (p.19).

One participant exemplified how the vision in a setting must be set out from the start and shared a story around how this operates in their setting:

*“Our motto is love, laughter and learning. Part of that is number one, they watch a video, which used to be done in person, but there's just too many people to do that with, particularly in the current circumstances. And that tells people who are joining us who we are as people, as owners and leaders of the organisation, how we got to where we are, what motivates us, and what's important. So, they get a very clear understanding from the minute they join the company, what's important to us.” (Mark – Large Private – Owner - High)*

You need to get others on board with vision too, as suggested by Henderson (2017), with vision emerging from relational work involving coming together with other professionals, and as suggested by a participant below:

“You also need to trust that other people know what they're doing and are on board with your vision. So that they can you can give them the message and they can go out and do the work because ultimately head teachers have very little to do with the real teaching part.” (Evelyn – Nursery School – Headteacher)

Some participants commented about how their visions were linked with, and informed by, research:

“Maslow’s hierarchy is all about if you don't, if a child, I mean, I will say to my staff, I said if the child's not slept, they're not fed, and they're not happy. Forget about trying to teach them ABC or anything like that. Yeah, it's not going to happen. So, care is so important.” (Margaret – Small Private - Manager/owner)

“I think it was the research around attachment that confirmed what we'd always held as our beliefs anyway, and I think that's been validated as time has gone on with neuroscience”. (Mark – Large Private - Owner)

“When you go to theory and you learn and you know, what you need to do, is much easy to apply it even. It's not like you're playing very easy, but you know, what you should do you have like a guidance.” Mandy – Large Private – Teacher)

Vision has been said to be about seeing what is beyond others grasp and articulating it (Caryol, 2017). Drawing on research can help challenge established or pervading beliefs for a more child-centred vision to remain central (Henderson, 2017). Participants in my study felt that vision is about leadership and that this vision is about the direction in which the setting is going, ensuring everyone is on the same journey



(Sally – Senior Leader – Enthusiast). There is a cross over here into leadership literature and this is important to get right as it:

“Ensures staff morale and wellbeing is high. It also ensures everyone is on the same page and working towards the same goal ensuring again that children in our care have the best time and interactions are of a high standard” (Evie – Small Private - Deputy Manager).

It is important to consider both short-term thinking with regards to vision as:

“Having a clear vision is important and influences my day to day as we need to know what our aim is for that day; we need to have a clear vision of what we have set out to do or how we want the day to run.” (Tulip – Small Private - Teacher).

As well as long-term thinking particularly when linked to pedagogy as this creates the ‘big picture’ view for not only the current year but years ahead is vital. This is also important with changes to curriculum and Ofsted expectations so that a school can learn to evolve and adapt but not lose their core purpose.

Having a clear vision sets the tone for everything in ECEC settings and is a window into the owners’ mind about what truly matters to them, when you strip it all back a core question is – money or children, what matters most? Having a clear vision and then striving towards that sets staff on their way towards high well-being and morale according to Evie (Deputy Manager – Narrator), and these are precursors for having professional confidence as explored later in section 4.5. My data here became more about participants’ individual purpose in some ways rather than their settings vision, which may speak volumes about the disparate and siloed nature of the sector. Whilst it was stated explicitly by nearly all participants that the vision needs to be clear and communicated well, Margaret (Small Private - Manager/owner) went on to reference policies and procedures and Evelyn (Nursery School - Headteacher) referred to Ofsted’s expectations in this whereas Audrey (Other - Consultant) referred to community membership and cultural needs, Evie (Small Private - Deputy Manager) emphasised the importance of staff harmony and similarly Tammy (Small Private - Room leader) spoke about staff shared understanding.

This relates to Neaum's (2016) comparison between the competence model which is learner-centred with a keen eye for the context and content of learning requiring a high level of personalisation versus performance models, with much lower levels of professional autonomy that place an emphasis on specific outcomes requiring specialised skills. Although, this is the direction Ofsted want to head in comments like in their first annual report on ECEC (2014, p.2) stating that: "too much [ECEC provision] is being delivered without a strong enough focus on the essential skills that a child needs to start school.... A child who is ready for school must have the physical, social, and emotional tools to deal with the classroom, as well as the basic groundwork to begin to develop academically." This is, as Neaum (2016) argues, too strong of a focus on Bernstein's ORF, with a call for a strengthening of the PRF, which requires the workforce to construct a rich image of children and childhood, where they can make meaning from their daily lives and experiences, placing great emphasis on relationships (Neaum, 2016).

Without a clear vision, individuals may not understand what matters most when making decisions throughout their day, as referred to by Sally, Mark and Evelyn in the previous section specific to pedagogy, consequently, there could be inconsistencies and other, unwanted, drivers of decisions. This sets out the challenges of negotiating between a vision centred on romanticism (Campbell-Barr, 2014), entrepreneurialism (Campbell-Barr, 2014; Penn, 2019) or bringing parents back to work (Ball and Vincent, 2005). When stripped back, these tensions emphasise the influence of money on ECEC which was sometimes done overtly too, for example with Childminder agencies being created to offer business support for home-based childcare individuals (Lewis and West, 2017) but is certainly always present in some way when you look more closely.

Whitney made it clear that the children must be the centre of a settings vision, and this will need to be clear, meaningful, and not lost in challenges of different viewpoints from different stakeholders.

"The children have to be our priority, it's our job to make sure that they are getting what they need. And the way that means that we often must have more difficult conversations with the parents." (Whitney – Independent School - Teacher)

This alludes to the power of parents influence on the purpose and vision of the sector and underlines the need for forming secure partnerships with them, this is the next factor that will be explored.

#### **4.3.4 Parent Power and Partnership**

The previous concluding comment suggests that parents may have influence the vision and core purpose of the ECEC sector. Parents unquestionably have power in the ECEC context as they contribute to the vast majority of ECEC revenue (Ball and Vincent, 2005), and parent power was the third value that featured similarly in both the first and second round of data collection. This was described as the relationship practitioners have with parents, and most notably it seems parents have power related to market forces at work in the ECEC sector, as summarised below in the story from Mark about wellies.

*“You stand or fall by the last interaction you had with that parent, you know, and they're your best advocates. They're the ones who are going out to say to other people go to our nursery is a great place, or they lost my son's wellies last week, don't ever touch them again, you know. And, and I think that's quite a challenge sometimes for managers.” (Mark – Small Private - Owner)*

*“I think you have that and they're meeting the needs of the parents is always a priority and independent school, because obviously, they're paying the fees. In an independent school, obviously, finance is always going to win.” (Whitney – Independent School - Teacher)*

Related to this, ECEC personnel need a partnership with parents to be able to resist the pull of market forces and could also be a critical education remedy to a multiplicity of issues (Knapp, Landers, Liang, and Jefferson, 2017), and the participants recognised this:

*“So, I love trying to influence parents that they really have got work in partnership with me, and I think we do that quite well here. Because they do work with me.” (Shelly – Home-based Educator - Manager/Owner)*

“As an early year’s teacher, it’s your job to educate the parents as much as it is to educate the children.” (Whitney – Independent School - Teacher)

“The power and the influence that we can have, and especially on bringing parents much more into the arena, and, and much more into that triangle of learning and development and linking then linking them together.” (Audrey – Other – Consultant)

This is in line with Pascal and Bertram (2012) suggesting that parents are among those with a responsibility as a co-constructor of knowledge about ECEC services and their development and speaks to the importance of collective action central to notions of high professional confidence. Downey and Condon (2013) provide an extensive overview of the positive effects parental involvement can have on outcomes and educational achievement. The workforce, of course, has this power too and one participant felt that this power was lessened in the eyes of parents if you did not have children yourself and if you were a younger member of the team.

“Parents can be quite challenging on understanding why we do things, especially some parents see workers with no children, oh well you don’t actually understand.” (Tammy – Small Private - Room Leader)

“I think age is an important factor and I also think that it’s just a general experience. So that comes not just linked with age, but they like to see that. No, actually, we’re not actually that young and we might have started when we were in school.” (Tammy – Small Private - Room Leader)

It is interesting to explore what participants perceive to be the key parts to the parent power value. Whilst it is noted by several participants in that a positive relationship with the children’s parents is integral for children and young people’s learning and development, and in literature too (Devlieghere, Li and Vandenbroek, 2020), settings are in business to meet the needs of children *and* their parents because parents pay the bills and create reputation (Ball and Vincent, 2005). This strongly relates to the value they give on the sector’s work. Evelyn captures this well in the second stage of data-collection:

“Parents are the first educators of their children and know them best. Having their trust and confidence in the school is essential, they also help drive all of the bigger changes in their child by working collaboratively with the school.” (Evelyn – Nursery School - Headteacher)

It is unhelpful when parents lack respect for the workforce, which Shelly (Home-based Educator – Manager/Owner) captures by saying parent power “is strongly limited to the value they give on our work” and several participants including Tammy (Small Private - Room Leader), Tulip (Small Private - Teacher) and Evelyn (Nursery School - Headteacher) emphasise the importance of trust being built up in relationships with parents. Related to this Kelly (Voluntary Pre-School – Deputy Manager) stated that “we try and involve the parents as much as we can” and Mandy (Large Private – Teacher) stated “I think child parents and practitioners need to work together to be sure that they can develop the child, you know very well,”

Furthermore, if there can be mutual respect and trust a meaningful relationship can be built up. Evelyn (Nursery School - Headteacher) reminds us that “parents are the first education of their children” and as Devlieghere *et al.* (2020) suggest, there needs to be a shift away from silencing parents towards a reciprocal and symmetrical dialogic relationship between parents and teachers. What matters most is the child, not personal differences between the adults. Some individuals, maybe those not in management, see parents very differently to those who understand that they pay the bills too. Some participants seem to let personal differences (even if they’re stereotyping) get in the way of forming more secure and meaningful relationships with parents. Some (more confident) participants recognise that parents have a voice but that they remain the expert on this topic and therefore do not let parents influence them day-to-day. This suggests that parental involvement should be recognised as one aspect ECEC workforce professional development (Walker and Dotger, 2012), for individual confidence to grow and to support more beneficial partnerships to form. There is also a need for development on the side of the parents with Kelly commenting that “it just felt like it was almost we were just babysitters while they went off and did their proper job. We were just minding the children they didn’t. And we’ve had parents’ events where we’ve gone through everything with them. And they sort of sit there in amazement and say, well, we didn’t realise you did this. And we didn’t know you did that. And there’s so much more involved” (Kelly - Voluntary Pre-School – Deputy Manager).

This theme did not feature strongly in the literature review and therefore was a surprising feature to be identified in stage one of data collection. Literature instead

focused more on an erroneous assumption that parents choose settings based on performance indicators like Ofsted, contributing to market forces in the sector and improving quality. Lewis and West (2017) ask the question, “even when there is knowledge of quality, what choice does this give parents? Particularly from deprived backgrounds. They go on to say that this ‘choice’ is likely to be constrained by “cost, location, lack of information, by parents valuing characteristics not rated highly by child development experts and by the need for continuity of provision” (Lewis and West, 2017). With more autonomy and professionalism, quality could be developed without the need for interference from neo-liberal mechanisms and a more professional relationship with parents could form, more like what is seen elsewhere in education. This alternate approach to raising quality is more in line with Moss, *et al.* (2000) who claim that all stakeholders should be “active participants in the process, engaged in relationships with others in meaning making” (p.11). As this all indicates, there are conflicting elements of the power of parents’, from giving positive or negative reviews about settings, or supporting strategies implemented at nursery or trying to undermine them, parents can have great influence in ECEC.

To make this a more positive situation partnership needs to be formed through building relationships, communicating clearly, educating one another and respecting home/nursery environments. (Rodd, 1997) suggested this makes up nearly 25% of a leader’s role in ECEC. If parents are not on board with the efforts of the ECEC personnel, then they will often be working against them, and this is energy better spent focused on the child. In other words, parents can be the sectors best advocates and our harshest critics. This is not only because they foot on average 75-85% of the bill (Ball and Vincent, 2005), which is relatively high across Europe, but also because there has been a development of a “poverty of expectation arising from years of [policy maker] neglect and indifference” (Moss and Penn, 2003, p.24).

The ‘power’ of policy also contributes, like parent power, to the uneven playing field in the sector and as a notion itself is contentious as policy does not have power by itself, individuals must enact policy to bring it to life, as I will now explore in more detail.

#### 4.3.5 Policy 'Power'

Policies in and of themselves, do not have power. Individuals in ECEC give policies power through the enactment of policy guidance. Policies do however encourage a certain direction and can be either aspirational or accountability. Aspirational policies may be strived for like encouraging social mobility for example, whereas accountability policies would be non-negotiables like policies around safeguarding.

Participants highlighted the need to resist policy when it did not fit with children's needs. Particularly because although policy is likely to be well-intentioned, as Stewart (2011, unpaginated) underlines, "good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence if they lack understanding". The frustration and need for resisting policy seem to come from a conception that those making policy changes do not understand what is happening on the ground, but some participants were vocal about resisting this in their daily lives and this is an exemplification of good and high professional confidence as offered in the story below from Evie.

*"We find ourselves challenging things daily, we go, we don't agree with that. It doesn't work for us. So yes, we're meeting the same guidelines is what you want us to meet. We're following the curriculum. We're following every child is meeting their development, but we're doing it our way. And it works, because it's almost like somebody sitting high up in an office is making those decisions, and they're not actually on the floor seeing the work that goes into the education". (Evie Small Private – Deputy Manager)*

There is disagreement in the data as seen below and literature about whether more recent changes are for the better or worse. For example, in literature, whilst Ofsted (2014, p.2) state that "no one questions the importance of investing early in a child's education", there is disagreement on where this investment should be. Although, there are historical issues with policy changes, more recent changes are seen as largely positive by the participants, apart from the baseline assessment. In the data:

*"So, I think, you know, we talked about having to do a baseline assessment on children as they go into reception. Why? Yeah, why do I need to sit with one child for 45 minutes to tell you what I can tell you what I already know. Because I've spent time with them in the classroom, and I know, the children in my group. So, you know, I think I think it's become so formalised that,*

actually, it's lost its way... do we need a curriculum or should we be following their interests to allow them to develop and then to lead, and then to learn. And I think that you understand we go to child centred". (Whitney – Independent School – Teacher)

Whilst Shelly sees changes as positive:

"I am very happy with the majority of the way that the industry is going. I think that certainly from an education point of view, and the way that we teach early years, I think things have to improve the good at the child.... And I love the way the Department of Education is now pushing things to be much deeper in terms of our teaching. And then practitioners hopefully are going to come through this next phase, understanding how important it is to really scaffold the learning." (Shelly – Home-based Educator - Manager/Owner)

This exemplifies the need to more thoughtfully understand how the ECEC workforce "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" (Coburn, 2005, p. 477), which individuals do differently. Niyati highlighted concerns that less confident practitioners will leave due to the increase expectations in policy, as this has already happened in her provision:

"I think what's happened is because of the new system, everything's new now. I think they [existing staff] probably saw it, it's time for us to move on because they didn't want to, they didn't want to develop themselves in this field. So, they didn't want to do level four or five degrees. They were quite happy where they were." (Niyati – Small Private - Manager/owner)

This was referring to several members of her team who recently left her organisation and the sector, because whilst it can be seen as positive that things are being pushed to be much deeper, if the existing workforce aren't supported to update and develop themselves, Niyati's situation may well be repeated around the country. Evelyn notices this too and feels more changes should be implemented by government policy to influence professionalism as captured below. Although, and as Chalke (2013) states, higher qualifications may help graduates to resist policy initiatives that limit ECEC professionalism, we also do not want this to be pigeon-holed in a technical way. Leading to a reluctance to turn to government for this support.



“I do think a degree of professionalism, and that should come from the government actually, that they should see that the role itself, like in Sweden, and in Norway, where you're called a pedagogue, and you're given everyone has a degree, it's, you know, that's how that's the expectation, and you really do understand child development. I think that is the way we should move forwards; I think that would be much better”.  
(Evelyn – Nursery School - Headteacher)

Some individuals see the strength of policy ‘power’ different to others with Shelly (Home-based Educator – Manager/Owner) stated, “these have the lowest influence I guess although vital day in day out”. This may suggest that because she has exemplary professional confidence in her role, she does not need to give policy regular consideration as she knows naturally that she will, and therefore can focus on the children and doing the best for them. This contrasts with how Margaret saw policies, as she stated that we've got the policy in place that everyone needs to follow and the main role is to take over responsibility for all the setting, put the policy in place and the procedures and enable this setting to achieve its aim.

Literature revealed the overall drivers of policy in ECEC have been motivated by three goals (for a detailed exploration of this see section 2.2.2), originally the increase of quantity of places for children, then joined by a focus on quality of provision (Lewis and West, 2017). Whilst the focus on quantity is less prevalent in policy in England now, the focus on quality has been joined by a focus on access, ensuring that children from all backgrounds can have a place at a setting at the age of three (West and Noden, 2019). Moss and Penn (2003) capture the history of policy in ECEC as “a poverty of expectation and a low level of awareness of issues arising from years of [policy makers’] neglect and indifference” (p.24) and although there has been a more recent barrage of policy production (see table one – fourteen critical policy periods), there is still a poverty of expectation and seemingly low level of awareness from government. There certainly has not been the longer term thinking that may be needed, as Palmer (2016) suggests that only when politicians can see beyond the end of their term in office will we finally achieve the logical and fair system that is of the quality that young children and families deserve.

As discussed in the literature review, policies are a source of tension for the sector. As professionals are ultimately responsible for putting policy into concrete and day-to-

day practice (Evans, 2011), they can be seen as a government tool to implement control. This can be under the guise of guidance when enforcing changes that are not always for the better, likely to become handcuffs and are not fit for purpose. It can be said then that this requires thoughtful resistance. However, to do this, there needs to be shared language around policy and a collective understand of purpose in ECEC. This is also true when it comes to qualifications in the sector as they can divide opinion on whether they are a good thing or not.

#### **4.3.6 The Threat or Opportunity of Qualifications**

Qualifications, the fifth factor, was referred to as the qualification and experiences that practitioners have accumulated over time and was more present in the first set of data compared to stage two data. There is a feeling coming from the participants that qualifications do not guarantee high quality professionals, excluding the National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB) qualification (which is no longer available).

“We weren’t taught by teachers [on the NNEB], I was taught by a nurse who taught us the child development side, I was taught by a drama teacher, who taught us about drama, I was taught by an artist who taught us about art, I was taught by social worker who provided our understanding of social work, we recognised how to help us support children holistically.” (Audrey – Other – Consultant)

“I don’t think having a qualification makes you an expert, or even a good practitioner, actually. Now with some of the level three qualifications is the quality isn’t as good, the course quality, I don’t mean the quality of students, the course quality isn’t as good. And that then impacts on what people then bring with them to that job.” (Evelyn – Nursery School - Headteacher)

Below Niyati offers a potent story that captures what many nursery leaders are likely to be going through with their teams in ECEC currently too.

*“I’ve had to carry my staff with me because a lot of my staff have come from the background of just getting a level three, but not actually being educated to a level 3. 10 years ago, we had a really awful time. I mean, in this sector with regards to training companies just putting people through, because they needed to get those numbers. And what’s happened is we’ve then resulted in a batch of people that have got their level three but actually, they don’t understand what that level three is. And I don’t understand that in childcare, you have to keep developing yourself because things change all the time.” (Niyati – Small Private - Manager/owner)*

As can be seen, an increase in professional attitudes hoped for in relation to a more qualified workforce are in discord with current realities (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010) and particularly the place of graduates in organisations was never fully articulated (Murray, 2013). Consequently, the workforce is left to make their own minds up and unfortunately with policy wording referring to highly qualified staff as “well-skilled and highly motivated” it could be read to imply those who are not highly qualified are not well-skilled or motivated (Osgood, 2009). This tension between qualifications and experience is further exemplified below:

“For me anything I want to know, it's not going to hold me back. I will research and be as up to date as early as teacher.” (Shelly – home-based educator - Manager/Owner)

“I think qualifications are important. But I think experience is just as much important. So that we have to have a level three, which is where we learn most are like knowledge. But then I think experience is just as important. And I think that's the main thing, or just being a natural good for the children. You might not even have experience, but you're naturally good for the children. And then you'll learn.” (Tammy – Small Private - Room Leader)

Some went further to see qualifications as a possible threat to the sustainability of the sector:

“I'm starting to feel like we have had some really good people influencing the shape of what's going to happen next. I feel like it's gonna be really tough for a lot of EY practitioners to be what's being described. Because of education and background, I think they're gonna struggle, because a lot of the reduced to being like, little carers. And I think they're not used to proper education, proper analysing the situation. And there's so much involved in creating that right situation for learning to happen. And I think that some of them are going to find that very challenging. And a big change from where they're at now is to change that. It's great that we're going that way.” (Shelly Home-based Educator - Manager/Owner)

“If individuals are not willing to engage meaningfully in CPD then I do not think they have a place being a teacher.” (Whitney – Independent School – Teacher)

This is not however, a new concern, as Chalke (2013) suggested that the ECEC workforce needs to be ‘professionalised’ so they can cope with increasing requirements and extensive challenges in the sector. However, Hoskins and Smedley

(2020) also note that “a qualification does not always translate into a professional who is able to provide high-quality education and care for young children by being a warm, supportive and nurturing practitioner who is able to relate to children and their needs” (p. 191). Whilst requirements and challenges have increased, qualification levels have fallen (NDNA, 2019) This could all be linked to money, which also is not a new issue (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010; Simpson, 2011; Brock, 2012; Kay *et al.* 2019):

“there's a feeling with those people that don't have a degree, they sort of think that doesn't matter, I don't need that I can still do my job, you're on not much pay than me anyway, what's the point. And, and they're right, to a certain extent, which is very sad.” (Audrey – Other – Consultant)

Stage two data affirmed what was said in stage one, for example Mark (Large Private - Owner) stated that whilst “high quality is underpinned by qualified staff, official qualifications are not necessarily a guarantee of high quality”. Similarly, it was suggested that passion and drive trump qualification because “if you are passionate about something, you will learn as you go and read everything to make you better at it” (Evie – Small Private - Deputy Manager). Therefore, although there is a statutory requirement for qualified staff to work within ECEC, it is important not to overlook talent and skills in those who may not be highly qualified (Osgood, 2009). Furthermore, Evelyn (Nursery School – Headteacher) stated that “qualifications themselves are not always an indicator of someone with best practice and regardless, as made clear by Shelly (Home-based Educator - Manager/Owner) “you need to be constantly learning”, which is why some graduates may be met with “suspicion and hostility” (Osgood, 2009, p. 744). This is supported in existing literature from Hoskins and Smedley (2020) who also detected a ‘them and us’ discourse in their participants perceptions of experienced, unexperienced, and graduate practitioners.

‘More Great Childcare’ (DfE, 2013c) captured the threat or opportunity tension of qualifications as it has led to fear that altering ratios will lessen the quality of provision and that this won’t be counteracted by improving qualifications of the workforce, largely advocated for in the Nutbrown Review of ECEC qualifications (2012). In other words, there is an ORF (official recontextualisation field) (Bernstein, 2000) drive towards less staff being needed in settings whilst at the same time less of a drive to increase the level of qualifications staff have, most probably resulting in less qualified staff

responsible for even more children. Whilst this might be good for the bottom line, it is less clear if it will be in the children's best interests. What comes through in my data here is that participants here do not feel as strongly about the positive remedial impacts of qualifications as advocated for in the Nutbrown Review (2012), and although more recent attempts to alter ratios in the sector has been met with fierce concerns, this was more from the care perspective than the education perspective more frequently alluded to when discussing qualification levels (Harle, 2022). Money also has a role to play here in relation to qualification level and this is also inextricably linked to a settings position within the childcare market, which can present both opportunities and challenges too, as I now go on to explore.

#### **4.3.7 Opportunities and Challenges of the Childcare Market**

The sixth factor is the childcare market which refers to the specific part of the sector participants work in and the challenges and opportunities that come with that. Notably, this featured heavily in stage one of data collection (2<sup>nd</sup> most) but much less so in stage two (6<sup>th</sup>). This suggests that the link between the market and the daily lived experiences of the participants is tacit rather than explicit, and therefore participants did not consider the childcare market as much when asked directly. Although Lewis and West (2017) suggest that since 2010, the emphasis has been on the childcare market first and foremost with matters of quality being left to its influence, which is divisive at best and completely unfair at worst, fuelling a hierarchy within the sector which is exemplified by the data below:

“Working as part of the maintained sector is just not having that sort of feeling about the local authority that we matter, because we're not a primary school. So I go to meetings, and they're always very much about primary and early years sort of tacked on at the end. And I'd love that the status of early years to be higher than it is.” (Evelyn – Nursery School - Headteacher)

This is significant because whilst Evelyn feels like her part of the sector doesn't matter, the maintained portion of the sector that she works in is the only part of it that has the following sorts of efforts (until very recently through a new grass roots movement Early Years Equality) put into it that she goes on to refer to:

“I go March every year, as part of the APPG. They take their letter to the Treasury and to the government every year we go and wave our banners and shout a lot. Yes, I definitely feel like an activist. And I think that I did I feel as though we have to make our voices heard because we are in the forgotten sector. It was run by the NEU and the NUT together, which has never happened before. So, two unions work collaboratively to get the more and more members involved in marching in Parliament and just being you know, a voice for the maintained nursery sector. So definitely the movement has grown in the last few years.” (Evelyn – Nursery School - Headteacher)

This sort of effort is central to the active correction component of professional confidence. Whilst it is an integral part of Evelyn’s responsibilities as Done and Murphy (2018) state that leaders in ECEC (graduate or otherwise) are tasked with “enacting discourses of social justice against a wider discursive backdrop of national economic priorities” (p. 148), it also serves to marginalise portions of the sector further, namely the PVI part, which is reported in literature too. Palmer (2016) suggested that PVI provide childcare services that should support working families and nursery education in the maintained portion of the sector should be focused more on meeting development needs. Palmer (2016) rejects the ‘educare’ concept but to do this is to reject the reality for both the maintained and PVI portions of the sector as set out in mandatory government guidance and funding regulations, it also serves to worsen the perception of the PVI workforce. Shelly below captures how they feel about being in the PVI part of the sector, which is generally (if not unsurprisingly) seen as beneath the maintained part.

“They don't see us as fellow professionals. I think I've addressed that locally with my school. And now my background is I've not got an EY teacher qualification. I'm only up to level four in early years.” (Shelly – Home-based Educator - Manager/Owner)

Similarly, Whitney shares an interesting story of division below. Whilst I have spoken about the importance of collective action and connectedness for professional confidence to thrive, this story captures some of the very visible challenges to this in ECEC settings.

*“The nursery classes, and sometimes the reception classes are in separate areas. So even in state schools and nurseries, often in a little building across the other side that's got its own outside play area attached to it and things like that. And I think that in itself, creates the physical divide. But I do, I think, you know, I think it starts earlier than that. I think that starts in the teacher*

*training that it's training, the PGCE and everything else where early years is treated as an alternative setting.” (Whitney – Independent School - Teacher)*

Kay *et al.* (2019) captures another element of this division by suggesting there is a huge disparity between pay and professional development opportunities between those in schools compared to working elsewhere in ECEC. Chalke (2013) even suggests that there is further divide between those who are working with children over 3 vs under 3 regardless of where they work. The quote below connects well from this position to the need to move past this division and sense of competition to see the whole sector as teachers and work towards collaboration.

*“I think, for my opinion, there shouldn't be a difference on nursery teacher nursery, primary school or secondary school, because in the end of it all, we are teachers.” (Mandy – Large Private - Teacher)*

Opportunities to move from competition to collaboration are not only desired among participants as seen below, but also perhaps essential as the market is becoming increasingly dominated by large PVI nursery groups with more autonomy to react to policy changes whereas maintained settings are being confronted with possible closures (Hoskins *et al.*, 2020), this is therefore a social justice issue and one that is captured well by the story shared by Shelly below.

*“So, it is just home-based settings, we literally WhatsApp several times week ideas share a best practice. Since I've been here in this industry, I basically said to them, you know, we don't need to be in competition. Let's look after one another and pass work between us. And that has grown and grown and grown. So now we share best practice, we go on training together, we set up events for the children together, you know, like we're doing something a bit wowsey. We can't at the moment like going to London, but we often used to go up to Stratford to discover the story centre, go and see the Bank of England Museum. We did things like that to get there for safety reasons, it was quite nice. Now you've got a practitioner at the back of the train. And yeah, it was good to work together. And it was really nice to get to that stage.” (Shelly – Home-based Educator - Manager/Owner)*

Whitney underlines a very concerning related point if others are not willing to work towards what Shelly is describing:

“It’s going to take a lot of collaboration across the sector, and not just, you know, not just, I’m alright in my little bubble, but actually working as whole communities to make sure that they move forward in the right direction for everybody. Because I think there is a very real danger, that we’re going to lose an awful lot of early years provision.” (Whitney – Independent School - Teacher)

This concern is echoed in literature around the challenges of adopting a collaborative notion of leadership being not well suited to application within the ECEC context due to the stronger impetus placed with competition rather than collaboration between providers and personnel (Kagan and Hallmark, 2001). Also, with Nicholson *et al.* (2018) advocating for relationship-orientated facets of ECEC leadership in relationships, collaboration, and family engagement rather than focusing on competition. This is also a key component of professional confidence, as it is about bringing people together for collective action towards a better future for the sector.

When this concern is unpacked further it leads to money, as exemplified below by several participants.

“In the UK, we’ve got this mixed model, mostly based on small private providers, and the government just wants to buy that as cheaply as possible as an expedient for childcare, you know, somewhere to put child children while we do other things.” (Mark – Large Private - Owner)

“My big bugbear in is definitely with council run nurseries. And compared to private run nurseries their own personal development doesn’t seem to be something really at the heart of what they’re doing. They’re just that Oh, they sent me on this training, so I need to be here. What is that when I want to train and I’m like, nope, we fight over training.” (Evie – Small Private - Deputy Manager)

This is one of the biggest changes from occurrence in stage one data to stage two data which suggests to me that participants did not demonstrate explicit awareness of the influence that the childcare market has on their role when asked directly in stage two as indicated below.

“I don’t consider [the childcare market] as influential” (Sally – Small Private - Senior Leader)



“The childcare market does not have a big influence on my day-to-day role because it is not something I think about everyday”. (Tulip – Small Private - Teacher)

“This is only important if working with fee paying families, for a school unless needing to create income it is the least important part of the way it operates as education is NOT childcare! It is education. This must always be kept distinct and not to be confused which unfortunately 30 hours has done as families want childcare, not education.” (Evelyn – Nursery School - Headteacher)

It seems Evelyn feels being associated with PVI's through funding arrangements dilutes the educational claim of school-based settings and ECEC as a sector. This is supported by Hoskins *et al.* (2020) who reported on the maintained nursery school being the ‘jewel in the crown’ of early years provisions with a higher quality and wider range of services available anywhere else in the sector. Despite this, there are benefits to working in PVI settings, particularly connected to individuals exhibiting higher levels of professional confidence:

“Working in the private sector we have the ability to make our own rules in respect of the curriculum guidance we are given. We can seek out our own training opportunities and enable and empower our staff to seek their own training opportunities with the ability to fund these. We can work our own hours, and this increases flexibility for funding and business therefore having money continuing to flow through the business.” (Evie – Small Private - Deputy Manager)

The maintained part of the sector is faced with possible closures, mostly due to financial constraints (Hoskins *et al.*, 2020) and this is echoed across the rest of the sector too, although that is less considered in available research. This exemplifies the potential influence of the childcare market that can be divisive within the sector emphasised by Palmer (2016) who suggests that the childcare services (PVI) part of ECEC should support families to look after children when parents work and nursery education (maintained sector) should be focused more on meeting core development needs of the child, marginalising PVI part of the sector further. This is concerning considering that PVI provisions have grown from providing 19% of the sector (Gillie and Allen, 1996) to 82% in the space of just 24 years, whilst at the same time, two nursery 'super' groups, now account for 8% of the whole childcare market. A consequence of this is that individual nurseries have declined by 20% and home-

based childcare individuals have declined by 27% (LaingBuisson, 2018). Therefore, a greater concentration of the ECEC sector is being organised by the PVI portion of the sector that are increasingly marginalised, with consequences for their professional confidence amongst other consequences, resulting in an increasingly challenging recruitment and retention issue for the sector.

This issue is taken further by West (2006) who stated that provision should be modelled on policy and practice in nursery schools, nursery classes and integrated centres providing education and care. Then further still by Penn (2019) claiming private nurseries are not concerned to share good practice and instead see this as a market advantage and less inclined to support the development of the sector more widely. This is all despite the data showing that more than 9 in 10 providers were judged good or outstanding which is 10% more than 5 years ago (DfE, 2019). This also is not supported by my data presented here that makes it very challenging to distinguish between sub-sections of the sector in terms of their focus on good practice over market advantage, with pedagogical influences that are child-centred being unanimously agreed upon as the most important value the sector has, as reported on previously. On a related point, Ofsted seems influence individuals in a similar way to the marker, in that patterns of influence are not discernible depending on what setting they work in, and it is there I now turn the focus to.

#### **4.3.8 Regulatory Dissonance**

Ofsted is the penultimate factor to explore from the data and could also be referred to as regulatory dissonance, as that came through in stage one of data collection consistently. It featured low in both stages of data collection and was seen as a “necessary evil” (Evelyn – Nursery School - Headteacher) given the amount of public money in the sector and the importance of getting it right for children and being accountable for that. It was felt that Ofsted strategies and initiatives are heading in the right direction too although there are still flaws in the system that need to be addressed. Participants believe that there needs to be more consistency and a partnership approach so there is less fear around Ofsted visiting settings so when they do, individuals can shine and be the best versions of themselves.

There was support for recent regulatory changes, arguably from the two most professionally confident participants in the study based on their stories that have been drawn upon throughout this chapter so far, and will continue to be:

“As far as Ofsted is concerned, I don’t have a huge issue with the direction of travel in terms of the inspection framework. You know, and we’ve aligned what we do to match Ofsted. And in general, we have very good experiences, particularly with the new framework coming through that they can see that it’s about relationship. It’s about those interactions between the teachers and the children. And I think that is exactly where it needs to be. So, I don’t see there’s a conflict there.” (Mark – Large Private - Owner)

“I think what I’m getting from where we’re going next is that everything is really quite shallow before and the whole tick boxy, can I do this? Can I do that? Was just developing a child that can come? Yeah, they can turn up at school, maybe they can undo the zip on my coat. And maybe they can get ready for PE but the depth of the child, you know, with that to be there, can they reason can they think for themselves.” (Shelly – Home-based Educator. - Manager/Owner)

There is, however, still confusion and divided opinion with Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) commenting on the datification issue brought in with recent regulatory foci and Broadhead (2006) suggesting that the value of play-based approaches to learning has been ‘sacrificed’ at the altar of ‘outstanding’ grading so that the enactment of performance data became a professional necessity. There is also exemplification in my data:

“You use Ofsted as a bit of a guideline... I know what the requirements are, I know what they’re looking at. But that pressure, I don’t really apply in my headspace, when I’m actually working.” (Shaima – Small Private - Room Leader)

“I think Ofsted are quite they do play a massive role in a nursery. And there are so many like things you have to be careful of. So, things that you might think are okay, they don’t. I think Ofsted are very much they like to ask the questions but not watch what we do as much. Yeah, and it’s very much that they take you away from the children. So, we can’t shine.” (Tammy – Room Leader)

Here Tammy is suggesting a restrictive consequence of Ofsted which goes against previous aims of the government who want to support providers to offer more flexibility as well as more quality (DfE, 2013b).

"It's ultimately, its government funded, and therefore the government wants to see, want to know that they're getting results. As with all of education, you know, if we're going to put money in, you've got to tick our boxes. So, I think it sort of comes from there. But it's de skilling a lot of early years practitioners, because they're, you know, I've got to tick that box." (Whitney – Independent School – Teacher)

"I think it's a necessary evil. I do actually think that we need Ofsted. We need something that makes schools accountable. We are paid by public money. And we also have a duty to children for the very, very best for them. So maybe Ofsted isn't the right thing, but something needs to be making sure that that happens for children and that we are accountable. So, I, thankfully all my Ofsted experiences have been positive." (Evelyn – Nursery School - Headteacher)

Stage two data gives a clear picture of how participants feel about Ofsted, and this reflect varying levels of professional confidence exemplifying the transient nature of professional confidence. Nearly all participants recognised the need to be mindful of the regulatory body and inspection and were aware of the rules that they put in place around ratios, assessments, recording of information. However, Sally (Small Private - Senior Leader) captures a common theme well by stating that Ofsted influence a lot of her day but without her thinking about. Importantly, Evelyn (Nursery School - Headteacher) adds that whilst the regulatory body is important to ensure safety, safeguarding and excellent outcomes are achieved for children, it shouldn't be the driver for good practice but instead sit beside it. Although Evie (Small private - Deputy Manager) recognises the possible motivation for this as Ofsted ratings can guide people's choice as to which nursery they send their child to, which, in turn, can have a huge impact on the finances of the organisation, this is the focus of the next session.

#### **4.3.9 The Cacophony of Money**

The final factor to explore is money. Interestingly, it features last in both stages of data collection despite some very strong comments about it. I referred to it as money both coming into your setting and into your pocket in stage two of data collection. As in many sectors, money is a barrier to further development, both of individuals own careers and the settings themselves. Many individuals seem to mitigate their lack of financial value with a focus on the value they add to children's lives. There is, however,

a risk that individuals working tirelessly counter acts (somewhat) the impact of austerity on the sector only masking or lessening its impact. Resulting in an ongoing struggle to recruit the best people and keep them in the sector. Linking to continuing challenges of a lack of qualified workforce and high staff turnover. This effort from the sector may account for literature suggesting that despite the severe cuts to local authority budgets and to tax credits and benefits (Stewart and Obolenskava, 2015), the overall impact on participation in ECEC in England, has been relatively small (Kvist, 2013).

Money needs to be considered both as coming into the setting and coming into the individuals' pockets, as the two are entwined and can have a negative impact which participants were very vocal in getting across as this set of quotes below exemplify.

"This is why you've got the high turnover of staff, and it's why you've got a nursery closing down, and you've got businesses that just can't survive" (Whitney – Independent School - Teacher)

"So, somebody with a master's could be earning less than somebody working at Tesco, and you'd have to pay for it. When you weigh it like that. You think, well, what's the point, you know, ultimately, your degree is not going to feed you that piece of paper. That, that a job will so it is it is the fact that early is just underfunded. It's because the government doesn't respect them." (Niyati – Small Private - Manager/owner )

"The pay issue is massive. And that's why a lot of the sector are leaving, it's not because they don't want to develop themselves, it's not because they, they don't see it's worth for them, because everybody has to live, you have to pay your bills, and you have to move on." (Niyati – Small Private - Manager/owner)

The participants in this study are aware of these constraints, and this has also been well documented in literature too. Notably, Moyles (2001) states that this then limits self-confidence and self-esteem of the workforce which is an issue that perpetuates today. Stage two allowed more questioning around the details of this ongoing challenge. Sally suggested that:

“Whilst it is widely known that there has never been a great deal of money in childcare either for wages or for resources, so this doesn’t influence me, there are some great settings around the world who have very little resources – you learn to adapt. With that being said, we need to ensure sustainability.” (Sally – Small Private - Senior Leader).

The sustainability issue is particularly pertinent now, consider the work of Hoskins *et al.* (2020) underscoring the need for action to support the most disadvantaged children to not be disadvantaged further. These warnings are echoed in the words of Powell (2019) still an issue three years later with much needed resources not forthcoming and sustainability under threat for so much of the sector. This leaves leaders in a perilous position, as one leader:

“Currently the government does not financially support my setting. Furthermore, as I have opened less than 1 year ago, I do not have wage from the nursery as the building is very expensive.” (Margaret – Small Private - Manager/owner)

This discourse highlights a feeling of hierarchy in the sector as Evie says:

“Working in the private sector the money is nowhere near the same as what it would be in a local authority funded nursery. Therefore you don’t work in a private nursery for the money.” (Evie – Small Private - Deputy Manager)

Similarly, Tammy is not optimistic about the future as:

“Unfortunately, this sector is generally low paid so it’s either do a job you enjoy for less money or do something for more money and be unhappy. I believe this won’t change because of the little respect within society for nurseries and what they do.” (Tammy – Small Private - Room Leader)

It is beginning to transpire that money has a two-pronged impact. For settings, there is often not enough money due to funding issues and for individuals this is often not the reason they do their job. Money should matter, not just for example for support for children with SEND as argued by Boddison (2020), but also for individuals to be paid better. If individuals continue to love their job enough there will be people working in ECEC, but numbers may dwindle, and consequently quality too, if money is not invested. Morton (2020) suggests that for too long we have relied on the goodwill of early years practitioners and that we are losing generations of talent through lack of investment in the workforce. Then the need to assess the use of public money (Hevey,

2010) is set to only highlight a worsening situation. Before individuals can be paid more provisions and the workforce need to work collaboratively together to lobby for change at a national level through activism. This offers support for long standing concerns in the literature that the growing PVI section of childcare market main interests is return on investment, with little attention being given to the quality staff and innovation (Goodfellow, 2005) and that the growth in large corporate chains in the provision of ECEC could result in a loss of an underlying ethic of care (Campbell-Barr, 2014).

Money is important but seems somewhat invisible in the sector and this invisibility is also captured in existing literature, by Brind *et al.* (2012) who coined the invisibility of entrepreneurialism by referring to the 'unknown quantity' when it comes to profit in ECEC, particularly for the big chains that dominate the sector. They are not willing to cooperate with government attempts to explore this information (DfE, 2015, p. 78). Therefore, there is an unnerving reality now where there is a price on the happiness and development of our nation's children (Lewis and West 2017). This price on the head of children ultimately means that leaders and leadership in ECEC are responsible ensuring this price can get the best possible outcomes for all children.

#### **4.3.10 Professional Knowledge Landscape in ECEC**

In this concluding section to the first part of my findings and discussion, I present an overview of the transient factors that inform the purpose of the sector, forming a complex professional knowledge landscape for leaders to operate from. This directly responds to the first research question in this research and informs research question two and three that will be explored subsequently.

This section gives insight into the layers of personal practical knowledge (and collective personal identity) that captures the extant complexity of the ECEC landscape (Clandinin and Connelly, 1999) and underline the need to ensure that context is taken seriously. This is important as Braun *et al.* (2011) argue policies are intimately shaped and influenced by localised contextual factors.

*Figure Three: Balanced professional knowledge landscape in ECEC*

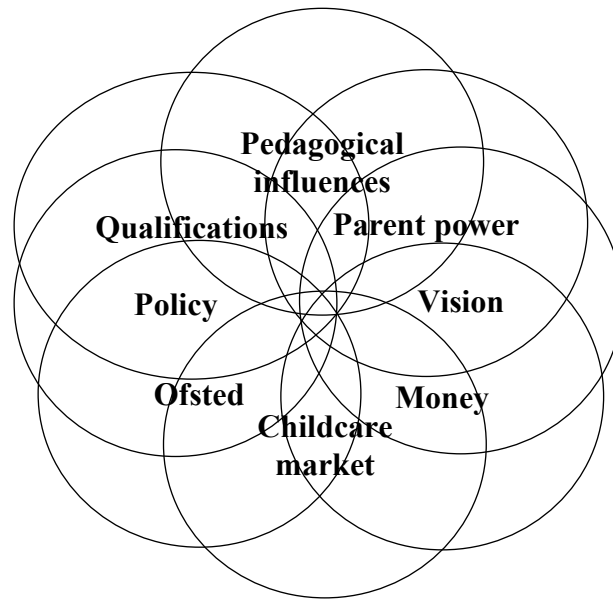


Figure three presents a view of the professional knowledge landscape that brings together the eight influencing factors from participant data, previously explored when striving to better understand the lived experiences of purpose in ECEC from participant data. For different individuals, each circle would be different sizes, at different times, to represent the amount of influence each one has on the practise of an individual at a certain time. Therefore, this figure would be in almost constant flux, this idea is motivated by the staunch difference observed in my participant hierarchy of factors in stage one and stage two data collection.

There is intentional overlap between these factors too as they all can impact one another. The result is twenty-eight connections that are inherent in the purpose and practice in the daily lives of the ECEC workforce, for example, both Ofsted and money can have a restricting influence on pedagogical influences whereas positive parent power and good levels of qualifications could help to mitigate against this restriction.

Some of the twenty-eight connections between each of these factors will now be explored further with the data and literature to strengthen the argument for figure three above. The interconnectedness of each value was made clear by several participants, Shelly (Home-based Educator - Manager/Owner) stated that policies “have the lowest



influence I guess although vital day in day out” and stated that they “love the way the Department of Education is now pushing things to be much deeper in terms of our teaching”, recognising the influence of policy on pedagogical practice too. Sometimes Ofsted can also influence pedagogical practice in an undesirable way too, meaning all children are not considered as individuals. Broadhead (2006) captures this powerfully in a discussion of the value of play-based approaches to learning being ‘sacrificed’ at the altar of ‘outstanding’ grading.

Ofsted’s first annual report on ECEC (2014, p.2) stated that: “too much [ECEC provision] is being delivered without a strong enough focus on the essential skills that a child needs to start school,” their motivations for vision of ECEC are clear, but is this what matters most? Two participants in this study supported Ofsted’s recent shift in focus with Mark (Large Private - Owner) stating he “do[es] not have an issue with the direction of travel in terms of the inspection framework. You know, and we’ve aligned what we do to match Ofsted” and Margaret (Small Private - Manager/owner) saying, “Ofsted has strong policy for supporting nurseries, schools and childminders to promote high quality learning” and “my planning is more about what Ofsted is looking for what the government looking for the safety in the EY”, whereas Evelyn (Nursery School - Headteacher) said that Ofsted “shouldn’t be a driver for good practice, instead sit beside it” and Sally (Small Private – Senior Leader) said “I don’t think about how much they influence my day” exemplifying the dissonance coming from the sector.

Parent power can also divide the sector, and this is influenced by other factors too, for example, Whitney (Independent School - Teacher) stated that “meeting the needs of the parents is always a priority and independent school, because obviously, they’re paying the fees. In an independent school, obviously, finance is always going to win”, so that just seems to be the way it is. For the workforce to resist this, they need to have a sense of autonomy and professionalism which generally would require greater qualifications and experience. With greater qualification and experience quality could be developed without the need for interference from neo-liberal mechanisms and a more professional relationship with parents could form. A more professional relationship would be more like what is seen elsewhere in education with teachers’ professional status in primary and secondary schools being more widely recognised than in the ECEC sector and could help navigate the challenging balance between

autonomy and accountability. This relationship could better inform the 'choice' parents make which is likely to be constrained by "cost, location, lack of information, by parents valuing characteristics not rated highly by child development experts and by the need for continuity of provision" (Lewis and West, 2017).

There is also crossover between parents, money and Ofsted based around Evelyn's (Nursery School – Headteacher) suggestion that "unfortunately the new funding arrangements have lost the distinction between the care and education elements of the sector, which have confused parents". This has in turn led to erroneous assumptions that parents choose settings based on performance indicators like Ofsted, contributing to market forces in the sector and improving quality. Lewis and West (2017) ask an important question, "even when there is knowledge of quality, what choice does this actually give parents?"

Palmer (2016) rejects the 'educare' concept, related to Evelyn's concerns about confusing the education and care elements of the sector, she stated that:

"The childcare market is only important if working with fee paying families, for a school unless needing to create income it is the least important part of the way it operates as education is NOT childcare! It is education. This must always be kept distinct and not to be confused." (Evelyn – Nursery School - Headteacher)

To reject this overlap though is to reject the reality for both the maintained and PVI portions of the sector as set out in mandatory government guidance and funding regulations, as they all need to provide both elements. Conversely, Evie speaks of the benefits of being in the private sector compared to the maintained regarding qualifications:

Working in the private sector we have the ability to make our own rules in respect of the curriculum guidance we are given. We can seek out our own training opportunities and enable and empower our staff to seek their own training opportunities with the ability to fund these. We can work our own hours, and this increases flexibility for funding and business therefore having money continuing to flow through the business. (Evie – Small Private - Deputy Manager)

Both conflicting viewpoints presented, serve to worsen the divide within the sector and make collaboration less likely, positioning the PVI part of the workforce beneath the maintained part. Qualifications are another source of tension, and this is impactful before an individual has even joined the sector fully. Whitney (Independent School - Teacher) suggests issues “start in the teacher training that it's training the PGCE and everything else where early years is treated as an alternative setting.” Evie (Small Private - Deputy Manager) was frustrated with the division in attitude between those in the PVI portion of the sector and maintained sector's attitude to training. She said “my big bugbear in is definitely with council run nurseries and compared to private run nurseries their own personal development doesn't seem to be something really at the heart of what they're doing. They're just like Oh, they sent me on this training, so I need to be here. What is that when I want to train and I'm like, nope, we fight over training.”

Qualification tension is closely related to money both of which are vital in the broader picture of the context of the sector. Audrey (Other - Consultant) commented that “there's a feeling with those people that don't have a degree, they sort of think that doesn't matter, I don't need that I can still do my job, you're on not much pay than me anyway, what's the point. And, and they're right, to a certain extent, which is very sad.” Similarly, Niyati (Small Private - Manager/owner) stated that “The pay issue is massive. And that's why a lot of the sector are leaving, it's not because they don't want to develop themselves, it's not because they, they don't see it's worth for them, because everybody has to live, you have to pay your bills, and you have to move on.” This is also supported in literature with Kay *et al.* (2019) suggesting there is a huge disparity between pay and professional development opportunities between those in schools compared to working elsewhere in ECEC. There needs to be more support with qualifications and/or training for individuals to keep up with changes in the sector in terms of regulation and expectations, otherwise some practitioners will be left behind. This raises challenges for leadership, and this is where this exploration will now focus.

### **4.3.11 Conclusion**

To respond to research question one, I explored and analysed participant data around purpose and context. This revealed a transient of factors that were presented in figure three which depicts a core starting piece of the complex puzzle of understanding not only how individuals make sense of the purpose of ECEC, but how they come to make meaning of policy in their specific context. What has been suggested here is that participants in this study, as a representation of the workforce, have different understandings of the purpose of ECEC and any sense of pattern is challenging to discern. I will now explore the research questions related to directly to leadership before making connections between these findings in the conclusion chapter.

## **4.4 Leadership Realities in ECEC**

### **4.4.1 Introduction**

My second research question asked, what are individuals working in ECEC lived experiences of leadership in the sector? Data collected in response to this from participants showed that leadership is experienced by individuals in a range of difference ways with varying leadership realities in ECEC. This variety of experiences was commented on in previous literature, Nicholson *et al.*, (2018) suggested different experiences are fuelled by the tension between greater impetus placed on performance, competition, and authority, going against the inherent nature of the ECEC sector, to develop children. Cohen *et al.* (2018) adds that there is a wide range of roles and responsibilities that leaders in ECEC must fill, and Rodd (1996) suggests that there is a challenging vagueness around what is meant by leadership in ECEC.

I will present data in two sections, firstly exploring how leadership was seen as everyone's responsibility most of the time, followed by an exploration of the challenges for leaders in ECEC.

#### 4.4.2 Leadership is Everyone's Responsibility, Most of the Time

The data presented below suggests that leading is stronger when shared and with clear accountability, particularly for certain roles, and if leadership is wholeheartedly embraced by all, more meaningful, sustainable, and necessary change and development can occur.

“And in terms of looking at where we're going, and everything else is very shared, because we do debate and discuss and create together a lot.”  
(Shelly – Home-based Educator - Manager/Owner)

“I think going back to what I was talking about agency, and empowerment for individuals within there, you know, everybody has a personal responsibility for their own leadership. And we want to have a flat kind of structure that isn't hierarchical, because then there's a danger for well, I'm the leader. And you'll do what I say and actually, you know, it's we're all in this together, it's a collegial approach to decision making, you know, ultimately, somebody has to make those plans.” (Mark – Large Private - Owner)

The idea of leadership responsibility being shared among everyone in ECEC is not that new and its contribution towards higher levels of professional confidence has great potential. Aubrey (2007) commented that there are head teachers that conduct budgeting work allowing foundation stage leaders to focus on pedagogical leadership. This is just one example of having more than one individual with clearly defined leadership responsibility can allow for a more focused approach. Miller *et al.* (2019) adds that distributed leadership can be instrumental for capacity building and social justice and Smith (2013) goes on to state that this means there is a larger pool of leadership capacity to draw from within the organisation, enhancing sustainability of the sector. The essence of this collective approach is captured well by Shelly and Mark above which runs contrary to traditional notions of hierarchical leadership.

The web of inclusion (Helgeson, 1990) is an implementable approach to distributed leadership as it promotes multiple interactions of individuals and situations (Spillane *et al.*, 2004). This is also supported by the findings of Sakr and O'Sullivan (2022a) who stated that “there was often no clear demarcation between those whose were leaders and whose who were not. All were encouraged to see themselves as leaders...and get stuck in” (p.8). Furman (2012) further affirms this by stating that “leadership for

social justice is everyone's responsibility" (p.200). Part of this responsibility is to learn, as advocated for by the participant Evie:

"I suppose in a broad sense, as well, is that letting everybody have that independence to learn. So, if you go out and research and learn something, and you come to me with it." (Evie – Small Private - Deputy Manager)

This supports Helgeson's (1990) woman's way of organising her workplace which led to the 'Web of Inclusion' theory of leadership, with no hierarchy, that is instead connected and integrated. Helgeson (1990) went on to suggest that this structure could have significance that also goes beyond the bounds of gender, making it more appropriate considering research promoting gender consciousness and fluidity. Typically, Helgeson (1990) found her participants describing their leadership as being in the middle of things in the centre, not at the top, where they can reach out to their team, as opposed to reach down to them. This notion of leaders being in the centre places great importance leaders being well connected in all directions, as this is where power comes from, naturally advocating for teamwork. Approach leadership in this collaborative way provides a welcome move away from hierarchical understandings of leadership; however, it still places role-based leadership in the centre. This may also be appropriate for good leadership ECEC because some elements of leadership specific to ECEC are not for distributing, and this is justified when you consider the context of the sector and mainly pertains to safeguarding, money and strategy as participants suggest below.

"Very much the finance of the business and all that kind of thing sits with me." (Shelly – Home-based Educator - Manager/Owner)

"Within the meetings and things with the trustees, we would always kind of speak about it. But I, there were things that I didn't always get involved with finances". (Kelly – Voluntary Pre-School – Deputy Manager)

"The big, big, big responsibility is on the head teachers' shoulder, so mine. And that's about the fact that that's my name as the head teacher. And there are certain things that only I can do. So, I'm like the designated safeguarding lead. You know, I'm the person that deals with the child protection information." (Evelyn – Nursery School - Headmaster)

"Well, strategically, that would be myself, my wife, and our son who works with us as owners of the organisation." (Mark – Large Private - Owner)

Some roles not being shared was also evident in Sakr and O'Sullivan's (2022a) findings where they commented that, not everything is shared in the same way and like Shelly's comment above none of their participants mentioned an involvement in budget management. Sakr and O'Sullivan (2022a) capture the meaning of this well and suggest that this is not a call for a "complete dismantling of power structures and systems but rather less importance placed on hierarchies and positional leadership than may be the case in other contexts." (p.8)

There is an extant concern that sharing leadership responsibility openly may reduce a leader's own authority, which may jar with their views on leadership and importance of the elements above like safeguarding and finance. This, however, is supported by Douglass (2018, p. 387) whose definition of leadership includes that leadership is "not reserved just for those with a formal hierarchy position". Despite this, leaders must avoid tokenistic efforts to distribute leadership responsibility and authentically strive for what Rodd (1998) describes as all members of staff believing they are respected and valued, with some control over factors affecting their working life, encouraging open and professional communication. Participants spoke about two examples below of how leaders have got this wrong from their perspective.

This first story is about leaders being in the centre but making it all about themselves:

*"So, this owner is hugely passionate about a nature-based curriculum and is really driven by what she knows and believes to be to be the right way to teach and support children and support families. And it's her huge individual passion. And so, she went off on a on a on a big tidal wave inflow, literally, about her passion. And, and she expected the other people to be just behind her on the journey. And but they weren't. And so, what happened was the gap got wider and wider. And because she was so involved in what she wanted to do, where she was leading her own pedagogy in our own beliefs, and gaps became wider and wider. So, so those people would be cheesed off with these listening about recycling all the time, when they, you know, they had an issue, and this person wasn't able to, to really switch back into and understand what her managers needed." (Audrey – Other - Consultant)*

In this story the leader is not empowering others or encouraging them to have a voice, they are showing a lack of awareness and an inability to distribute decisions or be collegial in anyway. This may suggest the leader is too close to the action in some sense, whereas the second story below refers more to a leader that is too far away

from the action. This story depicts what might be representative of tension in many settings, particularly those based in school settings, where those who know the children best, are not consulted on decisions. The lack of collegiality here sets out a challenge in realising Helgeson's (1990) web of inclusion that other participants seem to be embracing.

*"We're going to change the uniform. This is what the owners and the businesspeople want. And we'd looked at it and go, but those buttons are way too small for little people to learn to be independent, or, you know, the zips. That is, you can't, they can't do as they put the side of their pinafore because they can't get their arm round and open. I think there is a lack of awareness. And again, that comes back down to that understanding that so quite often decisions, although they'd like to feel that they're consulting everybody, I think quite often those decisions are made before they're bought stuff." (Whitney – Independent School – Teacher)*

This participant story relates to the "invisibility of entrepreneurialism" (Brind *et al.* (2012) with elements of money and business being hidden, hence this section highlights leadership being everyone's responsibility *most* of the time. The invisibility of entrepreneurialism story also exemplifies the unnerving reality where there is a price on the happiness and development of children (Lewis and West, 2017) and at times decisions are made in the interest of cost to the detriment of happiness and development. This also introduces one of the tensions central to the challenges leaders face too which will be set out in more detail now, with strong connection to the central point coming from participant data here that leadership is everyone's responsibility, most of the time.

#### **4.4.3 Leadership Challenges**

The most prevalent sources of challenge reported by participants were from other stakeholders (two mentions from two participants), personnel (six mentions from five participants), COVID-19 (six mentions from six participants) and the leaders themselves (12 mentions from 5 participants). The amalgamation of these challenges could set the foundations of what leaders must strive to overcome to be a good leader in ECEC as developed further in part three of this chapter. Before that though I will explicate each of these sources of challenge in turn drawing on pertinent participant data.



The need to work with other stakeholders in decision making processes was reported in a frustrating light by participants here. Other stakeholders are an integral part of a leader's role though and is centred on the importance of inclusion (Helgeson, 1990), supported more by Rodd (1997) arguing over one fifth of a leader's role is to communicate with other professionals and parents. The power of parents has already been underlined and is outlined in detail in the work of Devlieghere *et al.* (2020). It is also affirmed by a participant's comments below:

"Because you know, you stand or fall by the last interaction you had with that parent, you know, and they're your best advocates." (Mark – Large Private - Owner)

Evelyn highlights some of the issues that make working with a range of stakeholders within the setting so challenging:

"People generally are a challenge in the same way that they're also fantastic. So, managing people is hard. And that can be parents, staff, or children. That's just goes with working with anyone that's, you know, a human being really, because you have misconceptions, you have complaints, you have issues that are personal to that person. So, there could be you know, mental health issues going on. So those are all challenges. And you can never prepare for those because they'll just come up in a day. I never know, one thing I love and hate equally about my job is I never know what I'm going to be doing from one day to the next." (Evelyn – Nursery School - Headteacher)

Kelly and Tammy refer to the challenge from those that do not work in the setting, but considering claims of Noddings (2013) the care for community, supports the need for a collaborative community too and strangers even, is central to notions of care integral to the role of the ECEC sector in society:

"Yeah, it could, it could sometimes become a little bit frustrating, because things did take that much longer. Because not only did they then have to have their decision, then they'd have to go and have some of the chat. And there's if then they agreed. And so, I think in terms of that some of the cons would be that things decisions would take quite a good amount of time. The committee that we had; it was kind of I don't think they any of them really had any knowledge of the sector. Sometimes that could be a bit of a downfall." (Kelly – Voluntary Pre-School – Deputy Manager)

“The school governors and things like that. So, they look at. So, the nursery is not as important in a school. Because as long as like from reception to your sets, for example, they're meeting the targets. They're happy. And then when it comes to nursery, they're like the tail end, but I still want them to meet the targets, but not in a good way.” (Tammy – Small Private - Room Leader )

The voices of participants suggest that it can be suggested that individuals also experience leadership challenges from personnel within the setting too. For example, one participant suggested that individuals can be offended in relation to someone younger being more senior than them and if they feel they are not involved in decision making:

“So, my struggle there was being somebody who was on the floor, and very much part of the team to then come in off the floor and be in this management failure. I'm still being quite young myself; I was 23. And some of the some of the girls are kind of older than me as well. So, I think that's kind of been a struggle is balancing that level of respect as actual now I'm your manager and these kinds of things need to be done. So now it's kind of been in a big struggle.” (Evie –Small Private - Deputy Manager)

This hints at the importance of good communication and listening, more specifically what Singer (1999) calls analytical listening with is a synthesis of intellectual power and emotional response. As Helgeson (1990) suggests, with greater balance in leadership people's creativity can be unlocked as they feel more valued and empowered. Valuing and empowering others of course involved being friendly towards personnel, but Audrey highlights the importance of this not meaning you become friends with them as the manager:

“doesn't need any more friends, they have to manage professionally. And if they if they want to be their friend on Facebook, if they want to go out and get drunk with them and make fun of themselves at the Christmas party, that never works out well. Because if you've got to lead people, and you've got to manage people through some very difficult decisions, and you can't you it's very difficult to have that if someone's you know, your best mate”. (Audrey – Other - Consultant)

These challenges are coming from a range of areas outside of the leader, but they can also present challenges to themselves and get in their own way sometimes too, or inadvertently through their decision making. Previous literature calls for more investment in training for their team rather than just practical health and safety issues,

food safety, child protection or safeguarding (Powell and Goouch, 2012) and do more to offer professional recognition, respect, and rewards, as well as a forward trajectory for their teams to avoid them leaving the sector (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010).

Related to this, Kay *et al.* (2019) has set out the shortcomings of current development processes in the ECEC sector for leadership. Similarly, a lack of leadership development and understanding was present in my data in different forms. On one hand, a prevailing challenge seems to be the need for managers to control their settings in every aspect, on the other, leaders were not even present.

“I had two very different experiences at pack away. One. The last one was a very good pack away nursery, but again, very managed. You did it her way or no way. But the way the nursery was, it was a lovely nursery, it was just there was no input into how you did the planning, or what activities we could do with the children. It was she'd planned it all, you could go off and prepare it. She was in charge. And you did it the way she said.” (Sally – Small Private - Senior Leader)

“We found ourselves in a very unfortunate, unusual position, in that the teacher who was head of early years and had been teaching in reception, then went to year two. And that meant she wasn't in the same building. She wasn't on the same floor. And it wasn't just around, so ended up with me, because I was there sort of taking on that day-to-day role of leadership. And if the staff had issues, it would mean that they would come to but again, that then causes conflicts because you're, you know, without being part of your role. You're taking that responsibility.” (Whitney – Independent School - Teacher)

The individuals in this study in part exemplifies the unknown complexity of what it means to lead in ECEC, and Rodd (1997) suggests a leaders role consists of five different responsibilities, and this coupled with Kagan and Hallmarks (2001) five types of leadership needed in ECEC. This complexity and tensions are affirmed by the participant below, emphasising how leaders can be their own biggest challenge:

“I know how to work in a nursery and the idea is to run their own nursery. But they haven't got the experience of the leadership or management. And it's different managing, for example, your key children or leading a key child versus leading assessing, yes. And then going from leading a nursery to then leading a nursery dealing with the fees, the marketing the admin on top of that, as well.” (Sally – Small Private - Senior Leader)

“I think the challenges are, there's probably not enough training on leadership. Everyone just thinks, because you've been a room leader, you can sort of step up to the next level and make that transition quite easily. And but then, there were also some successes in that people can do it. And I've achieved well, doing it. But again, there may well have been horror stories and mistakes along the way.” (Sally – Small Private - Senior Leader)

The complexity of leading in ECEC has been made even more challenging by the recent pandemic. Margaret captures this succinctly by saying “I don't waste time on worrying about it [anything other than health and safety and Safeguarding], because there's enough to worry about anyway”. Whilst this may be an extreme stance to take, COVID-19 has brought unprecedented change to the world and therefore the sector, with “the ground literally shifting under the feet of the profession” (Arndt *et al.* 2021, p.407). Whilst I did not specifically ask about this, it came out in the data and there is value in presenting some of that here as they pertain to the new reality for leaders in ECEC. In this new reality people have been impacted differently, this has made transitions harder to manage, perhaps made parents more aware and understanding and brought opportunities for collaboration. This suggests there are both positive and negative consequences from the pandemic for all settings. It certainly needed some creativity to sustain high levels of education and care, some examples of which are captured in participant stories below. Particularly the first data point shared below from Shelly that captures the importance of creativity and collaboration in ECEC.

*“All of our local private and voluntary sector, we have contact with we liaised with them for transition as well. So, if their children need them and come to us, we do transition with them before COVID leaves to go and visit those settings to visit the children. Obviously, this year when it was the summer, we couldn't do that because we weren't allowed. And so, we did video calls instead with the settings so that we could at least talk to the managers or the workers there to get a good picture of the children coming up to us childminders. Yes, we used to have more contact with them because they used to have a session at the Children's Centre once a week. But now, obviously, we don't have that because we're not having the contact with them in the same way anymore. But generally, if we have shared care here, so child minder, care and for some of our families, then we have those relationships with their child minder.” (Shelly – Home-based Educator - Manager/Owner)*

“I do think there is an element of parents being more aware of what teachers and EY teachers and nursery nurses are actually doing. Because they've had to do it all themselves. So, I think that has raised the awareness,

perhaps a little bit. And, you know, you see sort of the adverts on the telly where people go, and I'm never going to criticise how much teachers are paid again, and all those sorts of things. And I think there is that sort of awareness, a raising of awareness as to actually what's involved in this role.” (Whitney – Independent School - Teacher)

Both Whitney and Shelly highlight the importance of raising awareness and communicating across the sector, central to high levels of professional confidence. These challenges were not widely recognised across participants, suggesting an even more challenging task for those leaders in ECEC who want to collaborate, as some do not even consider this. Kelly did make it clear how the pandemic made her reflect on the importance of her role though however “this whole COVID thing, I think it highlighted the key workers and how they were the ones who were probably the lowest paid out, like the nurses, their childcare where we all seem to be on the lower pay. And yet, were the ones who actually, probably the ones were most needed in all of this”, (Kelly – Voluntary Pre-School – Deputy Manager). Simpson (2011) highlights an improvement in quality is possible through promoting collaborative professional working (Moss, *et al.* 2000) and Wenger (2006) supports the need for a collaborative community too. The challenges of achieving this have been made clear throughout this findings and discussion chapter so far.

#### **4.4.4 Conclusion**

Even before COVID-19 challenges were rife in the sector, and I have presented a range of these in this section. These include individuals’ formal leaders are responsible for, other stakeholders and the leaders themselves and these needs all need to be balanced. Therefore, the role of a leader is a complex, confusing, and challenging one and perhaps one that is best distributed among as many competent people as possible, a claim that has been echoed frequently in literature throughout recent history (Helgeson, 1990; Spillane *et al.*, 2004; Rodd, 2006; Furman, 2012; Smith, 2013; Bøe and Hognestad, 2017; East, 2019, Miller *et al.*, 2019 Heikka *et al.*, 2021). With the reality for leadership in ECEC explicated through participant data, as well as a new understanding of purpose previously laid out, attention must now turn to a contemporary understanding of good leadership, constructed with a combination of participant data and theorisation around that. Whilst this is to respond directly to my

third research question, it also considers how sense can be made of the tension-laden professional knowledge landscape (figure three) by leaders in their own specific context as well as how leadership in ECEC can navigate the challenging reality set out here.

## **4.4 Good Leadership in ECEC**

### **4.5.1 Introduction**

This section responds to my third research question which more explicitly asked, what are individuals working in ECEC lived experience of good leadership in the sector? I transition from what the reality of leadership in ECEC is, to try to construct the layers of meaning around what good leadership in ECEC is, from my participant data. In line with the work of Drath *et al.* (2008) participants saw it as essential to allow individuals to be involved in leadership and to find a balance between autonomy and being controlled, as well as having a clear vision and offering appropriate ongoing training and sufficient remuneration. Here in only two quotes, the complexity of good leadership related to this is discernible.

“I think good leadership is about having a clear vision about what you want to provide. I think it's about getting the right people on board, and valuing those people, whether it's financially, whether it's through additional training, or whatever, groups.” (Whitney – Independent School – Teacher)

“So really allowing them to research and allowing people to have their own say in what goes on. And I think also, to a certain extent, as well than not letting people just do whatever they want. Finding balance.” (Evie – Small Private - Deputy Manager)

Whilst these suggestions might seem common sense and obvious, they are necessary to underline core elements of good leadership highlighted by my participants that promote getting the right people on board, valuing them appropriately and listening to their views properly whilst holding them to account too. Existing literature underlines this point further with Rodd (1997), for example, attempting to demarcate portions of the leader's role in ECEC and demonstrate how thinly spread they are by identifying the following division of the role: managing and supervising staff (34%); contact with

parents and other professionals (22%); staff support and development (16%); managing the budget (11%); and coordinating role (11%). These elements of leadership are now over 20 years old and do not fully capture the nature of leadership in ECEC today. There is some kinship with those raised from participant data in my research presented in table eight below. Like the factors presented in the first part of this chapter, these values of good leadership are presented in relation to their occurrence rates in my data.

*Table Eight: Average positioning of good leadership values from stage two of data collection*

Position	Value	Description
1 <sup>st</sup>	Child-centred	A leader being focused on children and their development
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Personal characteristics	A leader having personal characteristics such as empathy, good listener, open-minded, solution-focused, personable, and humble
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Staff-centred	A leader being focused on the staff in their team, their well-being, development, and voice
4 <sup>th</sup>	Knowledge orientated	A leader having a working knowledge of the setting and role modelling life-long learning
5 <sup>th</sup>	Community focused	A leader being focused on the community within which they operate and how they can best support its needs
6 <sup>th</sup>	Business minded	A leader being focused on finances, operations, and development of the setting

The unique context of ECEC calls for unique leadership styles (Nivala and Hujala, 2002) and Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000) found through interviewing childcare centre directors that traditional leadership theories did not resonate with them, they suggested the need for a new and unique language of leadership built on feminist models. Although further details of this were not forthcoming in that research, Lau Chin *et al.* (2007) suggests that the existing language of leadership contributes to constraining the models and meanings.

My findings suggest that good leadership is a unique iteration of a flexible web of leadership values, presented in table eight, that depend on an individual's personal experiences and the context in which they work. These experiences are centred around relationship-orientated elements of ECEC which Nicholson *et al.* (2018) suggest challenge traditional assumptions around leadership and instead promote

values such as wide-spread collaboration and engagement. In other words, this is more about how those working in the sector make sense of good leadership in ECEC rather than traditional understandings of quality leadership. This is in line with the work of Gibbins (1998) that claims this approach is a response to understanding a world that embraces the realities of uncertainty and postmodernity. Similarly, in this approach all stakeholders are active participants in making meaning rather than seeking the truth (Moss *et al.*, 2000).

The good leadership values presented in table 8 require a complex and fragile balancing act as well as what Frick (2008) refers to as satisficing, which is exercising value judgements and negotiating compromises as a central skill for leadership. Therefore, to enact good leadership, individuals should have a clear sense of purpose and understanding of this range of values that may influence them, this enactment needs to be closely wedded the professional knowledge landscape shared previously in this chapter and will be built upon throughout this section.

As was evident in the professional knowledge landscape, there was not always harmony in participant data when asked to rank these factors, which highlights Andrews *et al.* (2013) comments that through narrative research researchers can see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning. The following sections are, in part, exposing layers of meaning in useful dialogue with each other to better explicate what good leadership means to those working in the sector. This is a turn towards establishing findings through authenticity, resonance, and trustworthiness (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The following sections are also about the formations of patterns of shared meaning across participants data (Braun and Clarke, 2019) which are brought together in the concluding section of this part.

#### **4.5.2 Child-centred**

It was no surprise that being child-centred was the value that topped the hierarchy here for nearly all participants, with strong messages coming through:

“we're there for the children's environments for the children, so, and everything that we do is based on their learning needs, in the differentiating between ages and stages.” (Shaima – Small Private - Room Leader)



“Not being afraid to make mistakes, and not being afraid to take on other people's ideas and other people's opinions. But ultimately, having the children at the centre of what they're doing.” (Whitney – Independent School - Teacher)

The argument coming through this data is that children need to be at the centre of what leaders do in their provisions, this also relates to the importance of professional confidence being all about working towards a better future for the children and workforce. This is reflected in the literature too, for example Woodrow and Busch (2008) suggest that strong leadership is especially important in advocating for children, families, and social justice in the face of neo-liberal policy initiatives and marketisation of education continuing. This reality is what the first two parts of this analysis has focused on and the child-centredness of this is reflected in participants comments.

In stage two of data collection, Mark (Large Private - Owner) was unwavering in stating “Early Years practice must be child-centred” and was supported by all participants. Audrey (Other - Consultant) captured the type of relationship that leaders should nourish between their team and the children “Learning from the child, with the child. A play partner, a knowledgeable other and relationship based on mutual respect. Professional love.” This is akin to Male and Palaiologou's (2012) iteration of pedagogical leadership that places learning and development at the forefront and “address[es] more fully the challenges facing educational leaders and provides a more holistic approach in creation and content of effective learning environments” (p. 107)

Participants seem to know that it is right for this to be the top focus but at the same time are acutely aware that it is not always the case. If leaders are to not focus on the children, then they are less important than something else, most likely money, and this is an uncomfortable tension to manage. This though is reflected in the literature agreeing that good leadership needs to be more than *just* child centred. Heikka and Waniganayake (2011) stated that given the overly narrowness of pedagogical leadership, that is akin to child-centeredness, cannot be considered on its own and Rodd (1997) suggests there are many other elements that impact on leadership in ECEC, it is now time to explore those in more detail.

### 4.5.3 Personal Characteristics

Personal characteristics were the second most prominent value reported for good leadership. More specifically, individuals said they look for leadership to be enacted empathetically, with an open mind that is solution focused, and that this can be achieved through being a good listener, personable, humble, and acting as a role-model.

“I think you need to have some qualities like first to know people to adapt to everybody’s personal needs. When the first time when I first start doing my placement in [a setting]. I met an amazing manager; she knew how to talk with everybody. She knew how to speak with them without make them embarrassed, she knew how to lead.” (Mandy – Large Private – Teacher)

“I think you've got to be open minded, and you've got to be ready for a challenge, and supportive and just be blunt. Well, just to be there for the children, the team, the parents, and continue your development, because there's always new things that get thrown at us. Yeah, just to be just to be willing to continue to learn all the time”. (Kelly – Voluntary pre-school – Deputy Manager)

“You have to be, you have to be emphatic, and you have to be understanding and a good leader, but at the same time, you have to be clear as to what is it you want as a leader because if you’re confusing your staff, you’re not going to get anything.” (Niyati – Small Private – Manager/Owner)

“I think good leadership in the EY sector is the same as good leadership in any sector. You need to have empathy. You need to have vision. You need to have good ears that listen and less talking.” (Evelyn – Nursery School – Headteacher)

These notions connect well to facets of leadership recently constructed by Sakr and O’Sullivan (2022a). Empathy connects to their suggestion of being hands on and warm, role-modelling a commitment to a strong sense of social purpose and optimism in difficult contexts is pivotal and being a good listener and personable will be integral to renewing passion through a culture of sharing.

Not all these notions are new, Singer (1999) describes analytical listening as a synthesis of intellectual power and emotional response which is a skill that bridges the dichotomy between the ‘bottom line’ (entrepreneurial) and concern for people

(pedagogical). This is the balance that Helgeson (1990) advocated for to unlock people's creativity, as they feel more valued and empowered. Similarly, Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) emphasise the importance of relationships, communication, being motivating and the privileging of democracy and participation in leadership. There will of course be challenges and times for leaders to say no and this is reflected in the data below.

"The reading I do. I'm driven by problems and challenges. Yeah, quite right. I'd love to dig in solve it." (Shelly – Home-based Educator - Manager/Owner)

"Knowing where you're going and having your ears and eyes open along the way. And just trying to take it you're trying to take everybody's feelings and opinions on board, but also knowing that you can't accommodate everybody. Hmm, all at the same? At the same time, you're gonna upset somebody along that along the way." (Sally – Small Private – Senior Leader)

In stage two of data collection, participants offered further insight into what they felt the personal characteristics for good leadership were and notably, not all felt personal characteristics were as important as other values of good leadership, but there was harmony in this being an important value.

Sally (Small Private - Senior Leader) suggested a good leader is someone who you could turn to in a crisis that would respond not just with their business head on, similarly Tulip (Small – Private - Teacher) stated that "you need to be a good person who has good intentions and wants to help both the business and the staff". These points suggest that the notion of the "invisibility of entrepreneurialism" (Brind *et al.* (2012) with elements of money and business being hidden, is perhaps outdated with the lived experiences of those in the centre now feeling the presence of entrepreneurialism. Four participants, Mark (Large Private - Owner), Shaima (Small Private - Room Leader) and Tulip (Small Private - Teacher) placed personal characteristics as the most important value for leaders suggesting that characteristics of integrity and motivation flow from these characteristics and embodies leadership. These personal characteristics can also lead to a staff-centred approach to leadership which is the next most important value in good leadership according to participants.

#### 4.5.4 Staff-Centredness

Staff-centredness is the third most recognised value for good leadership and according to my data, this means valuing staff highly resulting in them feeling valued and respected and their well-being is more likely to be higher, Margaret (Small Private - Manager/Owner) captured this well by stating that she “treats [her] staff with dignity respect and compassion.” This all starts with having the right relationship which seems to be a recurring theme from participant data. In short, by valuing staff so highly, they can be at their best for the children in your care. This also is to instil leadership responsibility in the team, adopting the emergent view that leadership is everyone’s responsibility (Bolden *et al.*, 2008; East, 2019). Whilst this is an excellent aim to strive for, there are times when leaders, in a formal sense, must make trade-offs that test how staff-centred they truly are. This is captured in a fundamental issue for ECEC leaders by Audrey below:

“That conversation (about money/income) always boils down to the CPD that they provide for their staff team, because if they don't invest in their staff team, they've had it, if they don't then staff will leave, and they'll have to replace them. All of that takes X number of hours. So, I'm very good at saying that this person has cost you a lot already, don't just do it, spend some time on thorough supervision and nurturing that person and it will pay off”. (Other – Consultant)

After relationships, communication has come up in data attributed to several participants which echoes previous comments from Hard and Jónsdóttir (2013) who emphasise the importance of communication as well as relationships as part of their conception of *feminine* leadership. Which is an attempt to be less restrictive than *female* leadership, based on the idea that men can be feminine, and women can be masculine. Communication is captured in participant data below too.

“Communication is quite a fundamental thing. And in that communication, you have things like, again, like I said, like sharing, respecting each other's views and ideas. And I think trust is a really big one. And so, you know, I've trusted my team members to be able to make active decisions”. (Shaima – Small Private - Room Leader)

Niyati took staff-centredness one step further in the data shown below by suggesting her job is not only to care about their staff members well-being but the well-being of

those that are important to the team member too. This adds to the complex and challenging reality that leaders must navigate to be a good leader. Gaunt (2021) exemplifies this by reporting that more than eight in ten settings are struggling to recruit staff and called for the need to value and promote the ECEC sector as a profession.

“I mean, I'm responsible for my staff's well-being, and I'm actually responsible for their family lives as well as one, you know, I need to know what's going on in their family. So, they do tell me, because if they're happy, they're, they're going to be happy at work. So, the well-being is, it's a bit like the child not disassociated from their family, you know, it's everything the same as your staff, not as well.” (Niyati – Small Private - Manager/Owner)

Staff-centredness was described in stage two of data collection in a similar way to child-centredness and Mark sees an important connection between the two. He said that:

“Effective Early Years services require warm personal relationships between adults and children. Early Years organisations need to be staff centred to ensure team members are child focused, committed and empowered to make a difference in the lives of children.” (Large Private – Owner)

The workforce being empowered is essential in ECEC for social justice efforts to be genuine as Furman (2012) states, “leadership for social justice is everyone's responsibility” (p. 200) and Helgeson (1990) suggests, with greater balance in leadership people's creativity can be unlocked as they feel more valued and empowered. The participant Sally (Small Private - Senior Leader) suggests a possible pre-requisite to this, which is the importance of understanding one's team, in terms of their dynamics, family situation as well as strengths and weaknesses. This is captured by Audrey's (Other - Consultant) idea of “holistic support”, which she linked to staff well-being, continued professional and personal development. Of course, As Tammy (Small Private - Room Leader) says:

“There should be support for staff's wellbeing wherever they are in the company structure as this will support the smooth running of the Nursery.”

Interestingly, Tulip (Small Private - Teacher) connects this to business in that:

“Staff who feel valued and supported within a business perform much better within their role and work to the best of their abilities at all times. This allows the business to be a positive place to work with staff who are passionate in helping the business to succeed.”

The hope is that this will not only develop more leaders but more types of leaders. As Kagan and Hallmark (2001) suggest, the demands facing early childhood workers require the cultivation of not only more leaders but also more kinds of leaders. Through this focus on staff, empowering and valuing them, there could be an increased likelihood of the use of active dialogue in the sector to breakdown embedded notions and co-construct a form of leadership that can be enacted through “reciprocal relationships and participative pedagogy”, as advocated for by Murray and MacDowall (2013, p. 299). Therefore, it can be suggested that good leadership should be staff centred. It should also be orientated around relevant knowledge, which is the next value I will focus on.

#### **4.5.5 Knowledge Orientated**

Being knowledge orientated was the fourth most important value identified by participants. It was emphasised by Tulip (Small Private - Teacher) that leaders need the “right type of knowledge”, which was best characterised as a broad and working knowledge of the frontline of ECEC. Working knowledge is about both the need to engage in extensive learning *before* practicing (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010) as well as reflecting upon and *developing* knowledge continuously (Chalke, 2013). Participants below captured the issues of too much distance between the reality on the frontline and leaders. The story below from Mandy is particularly noteworthy in relation to the importance of leaders having contextual knowledge:

*“I think a manager in a nursery needs to know how to be a practitioner to you know, in case of something he needs to replace, or one of his staff if he has only management skills, and he doesn't have the experience of being a practitioner, and something happens in his team, and he needs to back up the team. And he doesn't have the experience, and he doesn't know nothing about being a practitioner. I think he's gonna be a little bit overtook?” (Mandy Large Private – Teacher)*

“If you want to be a manager that wants to be sat in the chair and in an office, and more have a dictating approach, where you don't really have much knowledge to be able to go and experience it, then I don't think you're in the right frame of mind to be able to like, support your staff.” (Shaima – Small Private - Room Leader)

The importance of this working knowledge advocates for professionalism in the sector and this is highlighted in Friedson (2013) who suggests that we must shift away from a static conception of professions and see it more as a process than a structure. That is to say that this knowledge is always developing alongside other elements that contribute to the process of professionalisation. Chalke (2013) support the need for this movement and states that the ECEC workforce needs to be ‘professionalised’ so they can cope with increasing requirements and extensive challenges in the sector (Chalke, 2013). The need for a working knowledge relates to issues of sustainability too.

“I'm very lucky. She's an excellent business manager and I, but I'm also very interested in that part of the school too. She says, I'm unusual. Because I actually do not understand I understand budgets, and I understand which questions to ask, I do think, as a leader, you do need to have a good overview of everything that's happening within your school, and what you don't want to become as too heavy reliant on any one person. Because, especially in a small school, it doesn't take much to upset that balance.” (Evelyn – Nursery School - Headteacher)

Without a broad working knowledge, it is challenging to have a meaningful impact on staff development as well as the professional status of the sector. This challenge is captured by Friedman (2007) as the “untangling of the knotted ball of string that is professionalism” (p.126). Without the right knowledge, this untangling is impossible, as Shaima alludes to below.

“But my knowledge base and all those other things might give me that head-start to be able to like that, you know, what, I can have this conversation or, you know, actually, I'm going to throw one of our members off the deep end, because I know that's what she needs.” (Shaima – Small Private - Room Leader)

In stage two of data collection, Audrey (Other - Consultant) makes an excellent point about the approach leaders should have to knowledge, she says that “more than one perspective should be considered and that leaders need the ability to learn and

unlearn". This is not the only tension present around knowledge as indicated by Osgood (2009) in that, intrinsic tenets of professional conduct are against government initiatives in the form of curriculum prescription and standards, limiting the scope of professional autonomy. Consequently, Moyles (2001) suggests this can lead to practitioner learning from prescribed practice rather than from reflecting on their own practice to learn, lessening their capabilities to contribute to the specialist body of knowledge integral to a profession. This reiterates that good leadership requires skills and knowledge in everyone – not just the formal leader and may be what Audrey is referring to when saying leaders need to be able to unlearn too.

Also, from stage two of data collection, further insight into the type of knowledge participants feel are essential for good leadership was offered. Tammy (Small Private - Room Leader) and Sally (Small Private - Senior Leader) emphasised that having a good understanding of everything about the setting means the leader can act as a role model to staff and visitors that come in. Also, to show parents the passion practitioners have for teaching their child and the resourcefulness they show, for example Bernice (State School – Teaching Assistant) stated "I know like for myself if I just tried to improvise, improvise for them if we haven't got it, or just the use of what we've got for the minute, and They love that". Similarly, Mark (Large Private - Owner) suggested that "leaders of any organisation must have and maintain knowledge of the industry in which they operate and must take personal responsibility for their own development". Sally (Small Private - Senior Leader) went on to draw on ratios as an excellent example for why working knowledge of how a setting works is so important where she says, "ratios don't always tell the full story". Evie (Small Private - Deputy Manager ) adds that:

"a leader being knowledgeable is key to helping staff feel secure and empowered to ask questions and feel secure in the answers they get,"

There is also a connection between Evie and Sally's comments here as for leaders to support staff to feel secure and empowered, they need to respond when issues around ratios are raised. Despite a recent change in guidance allowing ratios to be reduced considering COVID sickness, leaders should respect the views of staff and the impact this will have on them, and understand ratios do not consider additional needs,



challenging conditions, interpersonal challenges and so on. A good leader would have the knowledge of this, and it would be reflected in their actions.

There is a need for balance though, for example, the notion of answering things for others is something one participant expressed an interesting concern with. They said:

“Although having the right knowledge can sometimes be helpful, I feel sometimes a leader with ‘too much’ knowledge can think they are ‘better’ than everyone else they are working with. I feel other values are a lot more important than having the right knowledge as I think being a good leader comes with how you are as a person etc.” (Tulip – Small Private - Teacher)

Relating to the need to distribute leadership as indicated throughout the literature and notably Rodd (1998) suggests this can lead to the workforce feeling respected and valued, with some control over factors affecting their working life, encouraging open and professional communication. This open and professional communication is particularly important when you consider leaders also should strive to be community focused, which is an even wider area to consider than their own organisation and team, and this is explored now.

#### **4.5.6 Community Focused**

Being community focused was not something that emerged strongly from the literature review but was identified by participants as integral for good leadership. Some settings more than others valued the importance of the community around them, that they serve, despite this not being a new idea. Mujis *et al.* (2004) did suggest there is a greater need for effective leadership with a strong sense of advocacy and community. This can be seen as an extension to being children centred as it is the community in which the child grows outside of their time in the setting. Audrey pointed out that to her:

“That means really, really tuned in to your community. Now, I think that I've got that from I'm not a big fan of large providers, so people like busy bees and bright horizon, things like that, because I just don't think they have that community emphasis and fail what I believe EY settings are really good at.” (Other – Consultant)

Stage two data collection brought out much more explicit reference to the importance of community, affirming the importance of Noddings (2013) ethics of care extending to the community around you and supporting Wenger's (2006) claim for the importance of community.

"Ensuring the community is supported is a high priority for us as we are in an area in need of a lot of support for families. Due to covid this is something we are aware has been limited to what we can do to support however something we are keen to put a push on going forward." (Evie – Small Private – Deputy Manager)

Some referred to parents as being central to this community and this is supported in existing literature with the work of Devlieghere *et al.* (2021) advocating for meaning parental involvement and this is reflected by Margaret below demonstrating an important component of professional confidence.

"Working with the community is one of the principal relationships with the setting to support the parents' needs." (Margaret – Small Private - Manager/Owner)

Walker, and Dotger (2012) go further to suggest that in fact parental involvement should be recognised as one aspect ECEC workforce professional development, but professional development is not well invested in anyway as reported extensively here previously, therefore it is unlikely that a relatively unknown and under-research element of professional development will be invested in.

This exemplifies the point that forming a connection between this section focusing on being community-focused and the next section which is business-minded is challenging on the one hand but when these elements are considered as integral layers to understanding what good leadership is in the context of ECEC. Together, these sections capture the centrality of context well. Being business-minded must connect closely to context and allows for sustainability which makes other elements, like being community-focused, to be possible and this business minded characteristic will be explored more now.

#### 4.5.7 Business Minded

Being business minded was a value less focused upon by participants although because it is largely centred around money, there is no escaping it for leadership in ECEC. Business focus is mostly associated with finances and are an essential part of formal leaders thinking, to ensure the sustainability of their provision. Without a sustainable business approach staff will not have a job and children will not have a provision to go to. Entrepreneurial leadership recognises childhood as a site for consumption with a commercialised view of a child (Woodrow and Press, 2007), which must be balanced against the consequences for quality, development, and the work of individuals in the sector which is prized by pedagogical leadership. Most notably, two participants capture these elements from their own experiences:

“One was very corporate business related, but still had a personal side to her. One was purely business no time for have an awareness of what people were like outside work.” (Sally – Small Private – Senior Leader)

“We had a business partner who was actually based in HR, but those people are working in that department managing some of those things, they didn't know that much about early years. They're just thinking about, oh, how the fees being paid, you know, that kind of thing. And whereas we're thinking actually, you know, what, if we can accommodate a family that can come in and or reduce a day due to these needs, we can actually accommodate that we can make it work, but the trustor might not see that they're thinking that we're losing out on money they need to go.” (Shaima – Small Private)

Campbell-Barr (2014) suggests that this discourse is based on economic rationale where accountability is privileged and reflected in a managerialist agenda. As demonstrated in earlier sections, the reality for ECEC is rife in performative structures and systems and moves to professionalise the workforce in harmony with the entrepreneurial discourse (Campbell-Barr, 2014). Stage two of data collection brought in interesting elements that connect to other values, for example the important of knowledge and business knowledge being part of this:

“Early Years leaders have to maintain a balance between sector knowledge and business acumen in order to survive and to continue to provide quality provision.” (Mark – Small Private – Owner)

This provides evidence for the need to embrace a complex understanding of leadership akin to the work of Rodd (1997) although she only apportioned 10% of the leader's role to financial issues. This is not reflective to the level of influence Campbell-Barr (2014) assigns to this part of a leader's role, as mentioned earlier, she places economic rationale central to and reflective of a managerialist agenda. In line with this, leaders must have objectives of sustainability and viability that underpin investment and support in provisions. Although, this is referred to as the 'childcare paradox' of tension between economic and humanistic drivers of ECEC (Goodfellow, 2005). As uncomfortable as it may be, there would seem to be a need for both.

This data from Mark above also continued the discord between business and personal growth, which support's Audrey's (Other - Consultant) earlier comment where she stated, "that conversation (about money/income) always boils down to the CPD that they provide for their staff team, because if they don't invest in their staff team, they've had it". This connects well to a comment from Evie who stated:

"A leader who has drive and vision for business development ensures not only business growth but personal growth within the staff team ensuring leadership opportunities become available throughout a staff members journey." (Evie – Small Private - Deputy Manager)

Interestingly, Evelyn and Shelly both imply this value, although considered least important overall, is the value that must reflect all others.

"All of the other values should reflect this and create a flow of how as a leader I function." (Shelly – Home-based Educator - Manager/Owner)

"A leader who has the development of the business in its best interests will allow them to help the business. If the leader is not focused on ensuring the business is the best it can possibly be taking all factors into consideration, e.g. staff, customers, then the business will not reach its full potential." (Evelyn – Nursery School - Headteacher)

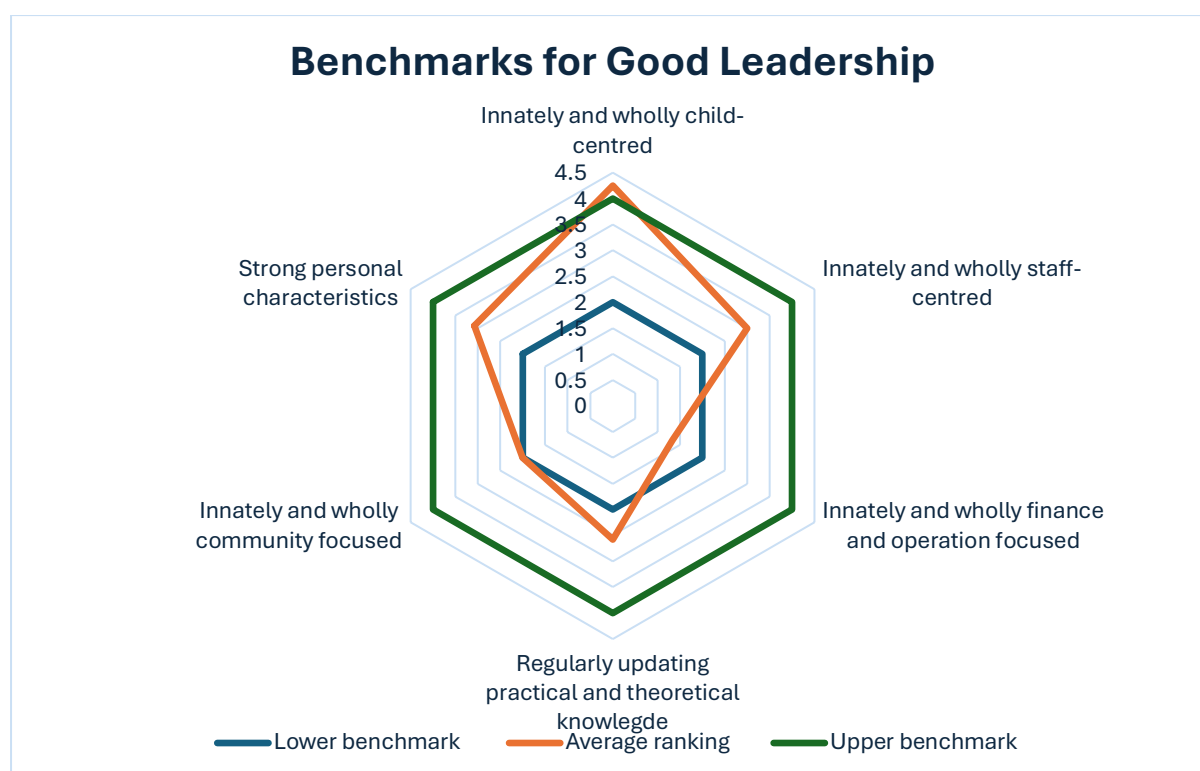
Both these comments allude to the inextricable need to always have an eye on the business side of operations, with pedagogical leadership not being enough, as explicated in the literature review. The sections presented here provide a story of leadership values full of complexity and challenge for good leadership in ECEC. Capturing this neatly is difficult, but attempts need to be made to make sense of this,

which I do now to provide some sense of meaning from this exploration of good leadership in ECEC.

#### **4.5.8 Good leadership as captured by participants**

Figure four below, sets out the reality for striving for good leadership in ECEC based on participant data. Stage one of data collection when analysed led to the five values, then the ranking of these values took place in stage two of data collection. As can be seen below, the orange line represents where participants ranked each value which depicts one collection of views on leadership enactment in ECEC from my participants. I have then used this data to add the blue line which I have suggested is a lower benchmark for good leadership, at which point leadership cannot be said to be sufficiently valuing that value, therefore it will be under nourished. This is in contrast with the grey line which I have posited is the upper benchmark for good leadership, beyond which a sense of narrowness of thought may emerge to its detriment. This is of course, depending on the context and individuals involved in any setting at any time, relating back to figures three, meaning this is an ever-changing set of priorities for responsive and good leadership. This is in line with Helgeson (1990) who states that leadership must facilitate “free-flowing and loose structures” (p.45) that open possibilities for different tenets to be in focus at different times depending on the context.

Figure Four: Good leadership from current priorities



This ever-changing set of values in figure four have never been more active than in recent months with the COVID-19 pandemic and when trying to consider what the most important values were during this time, it is hard to disregard any as being less important than the others. The reality of COVID-19 required strong personal characteristics that ensure individuals felt listened to (as reported above as an essential facet of good leadership) and enabled leaders to demonstrate the ability to solve evolving problems meaning the leader ensures their team were supported given their own individual situations. To do this, leaders needed to keep up to date with almost daily updates and changes to guidance in an ever-evolving situation. The crisis caused by the pandemic naturally meant leaders were looking out into their community to see where they can support too. This is all whilst ensuring the business could operate, with furlough schemes and grants or loans available, leaders needed to do what they needed to do to ensure the longevity of their setting.

Depicting good leadership in this way in figure four captures the paradox of feminine leadership in a masculine context (see section 2.3.6 for an explanation of this) and makes way for a non-hierarchical management structure with democratic decision-

making processes (Powney and Weiner, 1991) and less emphasis on individualism and more on inclusive approaches (Adler, Laney, and Packer, 1993), recognising practically that leadership is everyone's responsibility (East, 2019). This is all insinuating leaders in ECEC need to perform a continuous balancing act and this is broken down and explored in more detail to bring this section on good leadership to a close.

#### **4.5.9 Competing constructions of Good Leadership in the ever-changing ECEC context**

Whilst the values presented in figure four are each important, a leader must make judgment calls and trade-offs and therefore leaders must balance a complex set of values when enacting their leadership responsibilities. This emphasises how difficult and nuanced leadership is in ECEC, it is not only about doing the right things, but doing things right, and at the right time considering the context and the professional knowledge landscape capture this well (see section 4.2.10). Participants understandably had different views on how to do this and reported different tensions present in their working lives. This section supports the notion of the hierarchy of values and the rationale for exploring this more in the second stage of data collection to discern patterns of meaning making across participant stories.

The word 'attempt' is indicative here as when exploring the data, patterns of shared meaning were not forthcoming and there were competing constructions of what good leadership in ECEC could be, with participants placing many values in different places on their own hierarchy as presented previously and exemplified in Appendix J. Therefore, trying to use participant's stories to respond to my third research question is challenging.

Appendix J illustrates the complexity of this challenge and shows the competing constructions of good leadership according to my participants. The nature of narratives is often going to be individualised, and this is exemplified in the data. Whilst there are points of commonality between participants, for example most did not highly value a focus solely on operations and finance and most did highly value a child-centred focus, the individuality is inescapable.

Therefore, the most notable sense-making that can be made is that good leadership is an intensely individual notion that depends on the individual and their history as well as their context and how they understand the purpose of the sector. This understanding is constantly changing too. Also, within Appendix J, the complexity of participants' conceptions of purpose of ECEC is offered visually, which like understandings of good leadership, offers a multitude of iterations of purpose, with only a notional agreement that money is least important and child-centred pedagogy is most important. This is to reiterate the challenge to lead drawing on changeable values in a context that is constantly changing too. This understandably results in competition ideas of what good leadership is and supports Ellsworth's (1989, p.396) concerns that it is "impossible to speak from all voices at once, or from anyone, without the traces of the others being present and interruptive. Pluralising the concept as voices implies correction through addition. This loses sight of the contradictory and partial nature of all voices."

Most commonly, valuing business (the finance and operations) was reported as being at odds with other values. Mark speaks about the tensions between business and parent perspectives whereas Whitney depicts business at odds with teaching and child-centredness.

"I think our team always have the two hats on. Yes, I'm here to care for and educate the children. But I'm also conscious that we are providing a service, and we need to be seen to be doing that. And that has benefits both ways, I think, both in terms of satisfying the parents, but also, you know, from a business point of view." (Mark – Large Private - Owner)

"You do end up with a bit of a battle, I think, if you're not careful between leadership and between the class teachers, and you said that, you end up with this, you know, pulling, the leadership's pulling the business side of things, and even if they are good, and even if they do understand where they've come from, they're still having to do that balancing act. And from the business side of things, in an independent school, the leadership and the business are almost right, this is where we're going. We've agreed that's where we're going. But then to translate that down to the staff in the ideas department, for them to understand why rather than just saying, well, that's not right, for my children." (Whitney – Independent School - Teacher)



Similarly, as captured in Evelyn's story below, there are often financial tensions that leaders need to face when balancing the needs of stakeholders in their settings.

*"But finances are absolutely a huge challenge, particularly in our sector, we're not well funded, we're not funded adequately at all. So always trying to, you know, make money, and make everything meet. We we've had to make savings; I don't compromise on quality. So sometimes my business manager will say, we can't really afford this. And I'll say, yes, we can find a way. Because I, you know, I don't I never want to lose things like ratios, I never want to lose, you know, quality resources for children." (Evelyn – Nursery School - Headteacher)*

Set against the complex backdrop (Appendix J), these tensions emerge to demonstrate some of the judgments needed by the ECEC workforce daily. Wheelahan (2007) suggests that the most effective way of sustaining types of 'powerful knowledge' that can offer insight and meaningful engagement into the human condition, is the notion of professional communities which collectively make judgments on the quality of knowledge claims based on past and present knowledge. Captured above are just some examples of these judgements that could possibly lead to different actions tomorrow from what they are today. Each story unique whilst sharing the overriding need to stand up for what you believe in and fight to make it happen, despite the multiple barriers to this.

Niyati and Shaima go deeper into tensions within personal characteristics of leaders with the desire to be empathetic being at odds with being professional and being firm.

*"So as a manager need to, we need to be empathetic to that we need to understand and at the same time, keep the professional level as well, because you don't want to be too sympathetic to it, because then then that that's that line between professions, and it's gonna be broken, hence why I don't make friends with my staff here. They're not my friends. And I don't go out and I don't go out partying with them. Not that I don't want to, but it's that professional boundary, because I think I've got to manage you and you must draw the line, otherwise it can get very murky." (Niyati – Small Private - Manager/Owner)*

*"I think it depends on what, what sort of like, aspect, or perspective that you actually look at that. And in terms of like, say it being females, and you know, we're quite emotional beings and in that element, we can use that part to support those learning journeys, whereas it depends how, you know, how you take that on board, for example, for myself, like, I feel, I feel as if I use*

a fair but firm approach, and then it's just having to weigh those things out.”  
(Shaima – Small Private - Room Leader)

Kim Scott (2018) in her book ‘Radical Candour’ suggests that you don’t need to be either ruinously empathetic or obnoxiously aggressive, you can instead be radically candid. Scott (2018) suggests being radically candid is not about brutal honesty, but about sharing your honest and humble opinions to help someone develop, rather than talking being someone’s back, being rude, or worse, doing nothing. A simple message that can have a large impact, particularly in a context like ECEC with interpersonal challenges as presented previously.

This data analysis exemplifies a tension that I think is established in the sector and with existing literature, namely entrepreneurial vs pedagogical leadership, and the participants seem to get that albeit under different guises of money/business/child-centred and so on. Considering the reference above to the work of Kim Scott, organisations could consider embracing both sides of leadership and ensure the role is distributed to the right people for each of the roles and responsibilities that come with it and the appropriate challenge and care is offered along the way. In line with this, Bøe and Hognestad (2017) advocate for distributed pedagogical leadership approaches that are more collaborative in nature which harmonises with Rodd’s (2006) support for a collaborative team approach to leadership in ECEC.

This is in line with what Simpson (2011) describes as a need for a new emphasis on collaborative inter-professional approaches to reform, but as seen here, there is no magic formula for raising quality (Penn, 2011). Urban (2008) argues for an alternative paradigm of “relational, systematic professionalism that embraces openness and uncertainty and encourages co-construction of professional knowledges and practices” (p. 135) much like the hierarchy of values I have presented here. Connected to this, Hoskins and Smedley (2020) suggest that perhaps there are other ways to view the professionalisation of early years that “could include those who are not, for a variety of reasons, willing to undertake a degree, to refresh and build on their professional practice” (p.193). Finally, there is a need for the workforce to be empowered in these processes, which is echoed by Moss (2010) who also goes onto say that they must have a voice in shaping policy by drawing on their expertise,

particularly considering the extent of the competing elements of leadership shared here. The broadness and complexity of the role of the leader connects well to the broadest extant notion of pedagogical leadership available in literature exemplified in the work of Sakr and O'Sullivan (2022b). There is support here for their conceptualisation of pedagogical leadership as a bundle of practice relating to relationship building, professional development among teams, support for collaborative working environments and community, family, and cross-sector partnerships, therefore it is worth reiterating that here.

#### **4.5.10 Conclusion**

In this section I have drawn largely on the two-stages of participant data to offer a depiction of good leadership values that operate in tension with each other as presented through participant data. These values are not fixed, they are always changing as is the context around them (see section 4.2.10) and they are influenced by multiple factors impacting on the perceived purpose of ECEC. This means that to understand good leadership is an active task and that good leadership must be an ongoing and active endeavour, that involves more than one individual. This also suggests that there is not one iteration of what good leadership is. Instead, good leadership is a transient and ongoing endeavour that must embrace and navigate the inherent complexities of it and make pertinent judgements, when necessary, which is most likely going to be frequently throughout their working day.

I previously stated Douglass's (2018) definition of leadership as a concise, thoughtful, and relevant offer. She stated that "leadership [is] a process of influencing change to improve early care and education and is not reserved just for those with a formal leadership position" (p. 387). This has been echoed throughout the data I have drawn on here and I have added detail to the values around which change, and improvement might focus as well as the importance of this being a team effort. This includes understanding how individuals make meaning of leadership which has hitherto not been adequately explored in the literature. I tentatively assert a new definition of good leadership in ECEC that acknowledges the professional confidence element too, and that is:

Showing personal characteristics of empathy, open-mindedness, and being solution-focused, and drawing on a range of up-to-date knowledge to navigate tensions between all stakeholders' interests and needs, to promote professional confidence in all as well as contextually relevant development in the widest possible sense.

This is much more than 'just' leadership in a role modelling and instructional sense, and it is a tentative offering. I will now explore a new notion of professional confidence coming from participant data which is a complex notion and contains additional dilemmas that add to previously reported challenges and tensions of leadership. It therefore underlines further the need for individuals to be supported in their journey towards being good leaders and will need to be considered when developing this tentative definition of good leadership.

## **4.6 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have drawn on participant data as well as relevant literature to respond to each of my research questions in turn. This importantly included highlighting participant stories throughout that offered summaries of points of view. I went on to offer a new notion of professional confidence that could be integral when promoting good leadership in the ECEC sector reliant on a shared purpose, collaboration, and collective action. From here I explored understandings of the purpose of ECEC which appeared to be based on transient factors that influence the professional knowledge landscape which is in a constant state of flux in response to my first research question. The resultant turbulence and complexity were shown to connect to the main challenges for leadership in ECEC in response to my second research questions with a focus on the source of challenge spanning from a wide range of stakeholders and the leaders themselves.

I then finally explored what good leadership in ECEC is, in response to my third research question. Figure four presented the values coming from participant in response and this emphasised the important of context further and the need for leaders to make nuanced judgements in their own specific context, highlighting the complexity of leadership further.

# Chapter 5: Conclusion

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter will bring together my whole thesis, to allow me to offer clarity and further meaning to each of my research question findings and to explicate how I have addressed my aims and objectives and contributed new knowledge. This new knowledge is centred on the exploration of good leadership in ECEC strongly linked to the purpose of ECEC with the professional knowledge landscape and of leadership challenges in ECEC. This led to a tentative new understanding of what good leadership in ECEC could be:

Showing personal characteristics of empathy, open-mindedness, and being solution-focused, and drawing on a range of up-to-date knowledge to navigate tensions between all stakeholders' interests and needs, to promote professional confidence in all as well as contextually relevant development in the widest possible sense.

Central to this new construction is the new concept professional confidence, defined here as:

Having professional confidence is being aware of the injustices and confusions in ECEC, and actively correcting them through thoughtful and skilful advocacy for collective action, working towards a better future for the ECEC workforce and children.

In this concluding chapter, I will build on these core findings to strengthen my contributions to new knowledge. This will begin by capturing the current state of ECEC in relation to the professional knowledge landscape, and how sustained good leadership and professional confidence could be a positive change for the sector towards a more desired state, centred on the power of language and overcoming dilemmas of leadership linked to leadership challenges. This section will also include commentary on the limitations of my work along with its significance and implications for practice, policy, and future research.

## 5.2 Current State: Barriers and complexity

The professional knowledge landscape presented previously (see section X) promotes a collective personal identity that celebrates the nuances of purpose, seeing them as a strength of the sector rather than a limiting factor. Consequently, it is also suggestive of what could form individual and contextual barriers in relation to the multiple factors influencing context.

The professional knowledge landscape (figure three) is the collection of factors influencing individuals working in the ECEC daily. In that sense, this figure simplifies the incredible challenge of the workforce being able to form a shared collective identity, seen as desirable for good leadership in ECEC. Sims and Waniganayake (2015) suggest this could be impossible due to the ubiquitous low status and pay construction of the workforce in tandem with the confusions and complexities of the sector. I do concede that some elements are out of the workforce's control, and even out of their awareness, but positive steps can be taken and individuals in this research have exemplified some of the practice needed for this.

Working towards breaking down individual and contextual barriers in the sector is desirable and previous efforts around a graduate workforce affirmed this desire, as Lloyd and Hallet (2010) reported graduates wanted a collective personal identity in a cohesive group with a shared vision, understanding and shared voice. Even before this, Wenger (2006) called for communities of practice to have a shared domain of interest, be part of a collaborative community and develop and shared repertoire of resources and experiences. Simpson (2011) adds to this, that is, calls for a move away from hierarchies of power towards more fluid structures that bring together groups of practitioners. This "new emphasis on collaborative inter-professional approaches is a key feature of workforce reform" (Simpson, 2011, p. 703) and is central to the motivations behind this reconstruction of purpose in ECEC.

Reframing purpose like this, is central to the feminist-pragmatism paradigm this research sits within. It allows a redressing of false distinctions within individuals and across differing contexts within the sector that can support a move closer together for all. To be clear, individuals and contextual differences should not be a barrier to

collaboration on a local and global level. They should be a reason for sharing knowledge to enhance the sector and learn from one another. For this to be more effective, a shared language would be beneficial as will be explored explicitly. This is in line with feminist research (Seigfried 1993), as the central element of language and leadership challenge captures the slow and difficult process of this change.

The slow and difficult process of change was alluded to when defining the notion of professional confidence too, with regards to the active element which promotes changes in institutional habitus defined by Miller (2019, p.29) as “planned and deliberate changes to institutional structures practices and cultures”. This slowness and difficulty also connect to elements of feminist research drawn on in this thesis previously with Seigfried (1993) arguing that feminists should not be searching for some massive intellectual change but instead to “continue to deal piecemeal with historical facts in which masculinist power is entrenched” (p. 9). A closer look at the language central to this follows here.

### **5.3 A Desired State: Language for good leadership and a slow and difficult journey**

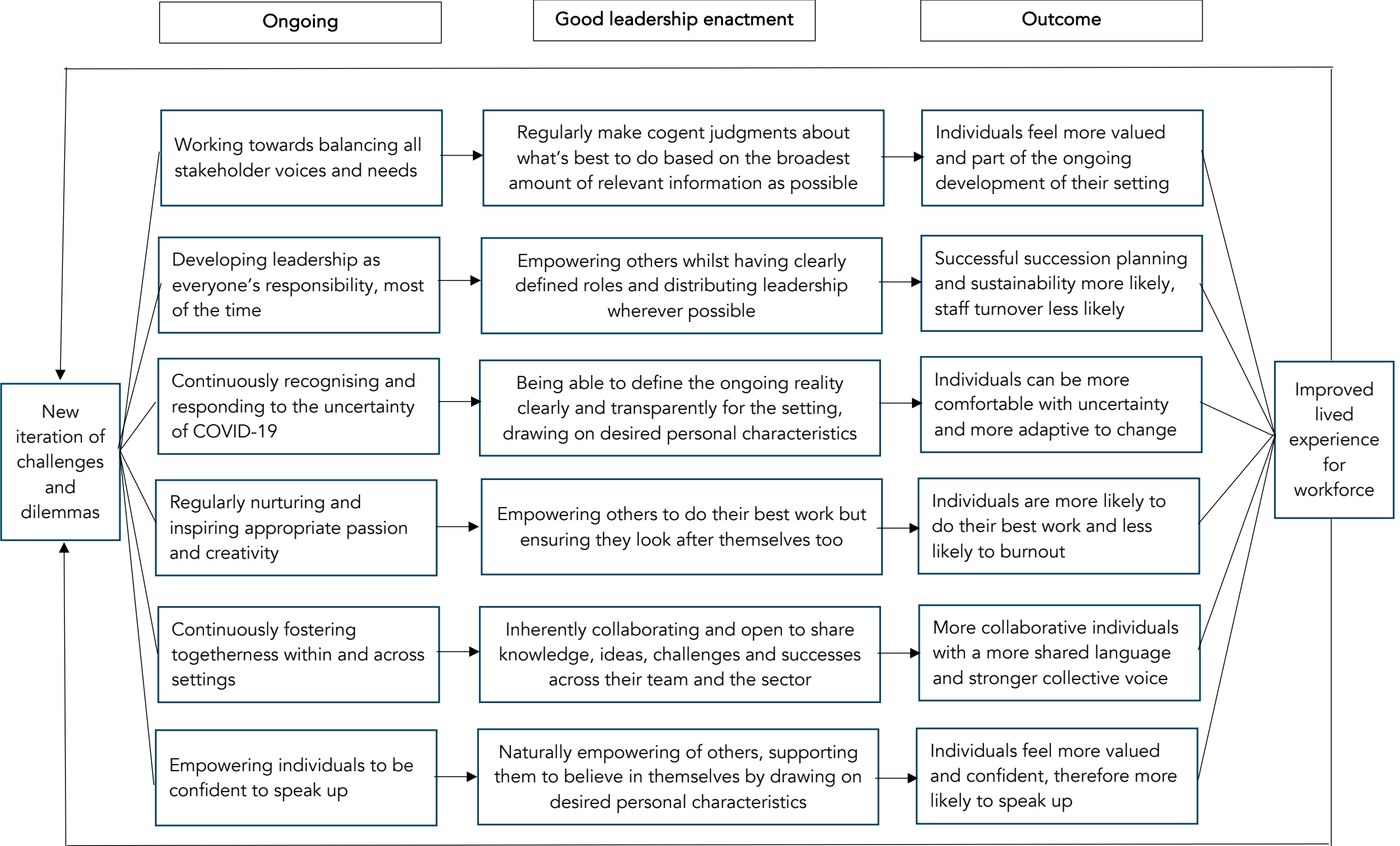
A further exploration of language is framed around the gradual reduction of leadership challenges through good leadership (explored fully in section 4.4), whilst recognising that challenges will always exist, but will become more manageable and better handled. The implication that challenges and dilemmas will never end is reflected in the complex reality of working in ECEC and the professional knowledge landscape (captured fully in section 4.3.10).

The development around the reduction of leadership challenges being ongoing and collaborative, sets the tone for the shifts in language required and offers a sense of coherence and comfort in the challenges, meaning the challenges and dilemmas can lessen over time. These challenges and dilemmas require constant work, that can hopefully lead to a more desirable reality. This again relates to the tentative and slow nature of progress as captured earlier in this chapter. Figure five zooms into the leadership challenges and depicts the iterative cycles of the outcomes from good

leadership in response to six difference challenges and dilemmas, all of which were discerned from participant data. The framing of these challenges and dilemmas is important. It positions both responsibility and agency within the workforce, and it is from this position a deeper exploration of language can begin. This is an essential part of this thesis, as Henderson-Kelly (2000) suggested “Leadership practices must ultimately construct an effective 'voice' for childcare services” (p.9).



Figure Five: Ongoing challenges and dilemmas feedback loop



Previously, figure four outlined the tensions leaders must negotiate between, figure five gives a greater sense of action and outcome and therefore offers a potentially helpful contribution to new knowledge. This intentionally uses directional arrows to underline the relationship between this and the work of Drath *et al.* (2008), embracing an ontological turn in leadership that they advocate for. This turn moves away from a traditional leader, follower and shared goals understanding of leadership, to one of a broader leadership culture that generates to a shared direction, alignment, and commitment which consequentially facilitates a more empowered workforce with increased autonomy over their work and may lead to shifts in the type of policy actor work individuals conduct. This good leadership ultimately responds to Done and Murphy (2018) stating that there is a need for a confident, self-assured, respected and valued professional workforce to emerge. Lau Chin *et al.* (2007) suggests that the current language of leadership contributes to constraining existing models and meanings and this is what I seek to address here.

Despite this, there is a place for existing understandings of leadership for example entrepreneurial and pedagogical leadership, alongside findings from the exploration in this research. For clarity, entrepreneurial leadership recognises childhood as a site for consumption with a commercialised view of a child (Woodrow and Press, 2007), whereas a synthesis of pedagogical leadership definitions highlights elements of sharing knowledge and working together, as well as having an increased focus on care, learning, and encouraging of a more distributed leadership mindset. Moving from this position of there being an important place for both entrepreneurial and pedagogical leadership, I can purposefully explore Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon's (2000) four wisdoms in relation to them to highlight important language elements within each.

Firstly, people wisdom, which refers to interpersonal and communication skills, knowledge and the application of personality and learning theories. This emphasises the personal characteristic elements of my new construction of good leadership and the importance of knowledge, a broad base of which is needed to enact both entrepreneurial and pedagogical leadership. Secondly, emotional wisdom, which is centred around understanding and being attuned to the emotional needs of self and

others. This wisdom also makes an individual motivated and able to intuitively respond to situations. Together, these two facets of wisdom underscore the need for language that promotes both clear communication and reassuring relationships. This also is closely connected to notions of care and should be seen in its reframed form moving forwards when considering the purpose and leadership in ECEC.

The third wisdom is role wisdom, this is about knowing and being able to perform in several roles simultaneously, a reality ECEC leaders are enacting daily and are therefore aware of. Finally, resource wisdom is being able to do a lot with very little and being creative with solving a range of problems. Together, these wisdoms aptly suit the ECEC context and capture well the need for an appropriate understanding of leadership and language that recognises with reality. This responds to Nicholson and Kroll's (2014) call for a move "beyond theories of leadership styles, towards conceptualising leadership that can encompass the diversity of contexts and experiences that characterise early childhood education. As well as contribute to more nuanced theorisation about early childhood leadership for contemporary times" (p. 30) this nuanced theorisation needs to be better connected to the language required to enact good leadership.

More specifically, this language is tentative, innately collaborative, empowering, and open to the presence of ongoing, transient judgments and subsequent new and reconstructions based on evidence and theorisation that is inextricable from contemporary contextual factors. This is further exemplified in figure six, which demonstrates a desired state in ECEC with the intention towards improving lived experience of the workforce. This is contributed to by outcomes of six elements of good leadership which respond to six dilemmas and challenges in participant data in this research.

This language section would not be complete without mention of social purpose, as an extension to social justice, as a more applicable term when conceptualising leadership in ECEC as it stays close to the ground and works "in language that makes sense to EY professionals in their everyday context" (Sakr and O'Sullivan, 2022a, p.11). It is integral to the success of any new contribution to knowledge that any

suggestion of language for progress considers those that will be living with this language to ensure it is empowering and not confusing.

Further support for my approach comes from Nicholson and Kroll (2014) who suggest that the four wisdoms offered by Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000) could be helpful in shifting the understanding and language of effective leadership for ECEC. Through interviewing childcare centre directors, Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000) suggested that traditional leadership theories did not resonate with them, and although they did not offer a clear framework for ECEC leadership to move forwards with, they did suggest that leaders in the field are developing a new and unique language of leadership built on feminist models. Although further details of this language were not forthcoming from Henderson-Kelly and Pamphilon (2000) they did offer a model of four useful wisdoms, explored previously, that have connotations for the importance of valuing both entrepreneurial and pedagogical leadership. My research is distinctive as I do offer further insights for ECEC leadership to move forwards, and language is central to that.

This language is embedded within the assertions I have made to this point in my thesis that I capture succinctly together here for clarification, with the language of focus to further articulate what language can help develop the sector moving forwards:

Assertion 1 – Individual's purpose in ECEC is driven by a multitude of factors presented as tensions in literature including the ORF/PRF, education/care, short/long-term thinking, collaboration/competition, and the level of engagement in their own development. This combines with a changeable set of eight factors reported in participant data in this research that can alter one's purpose depending on context, the nuances of which change throughout the daily lives of the workforce, possibly hour by hour or even minute by minute.

Assertion 2 – Leading in this context is very challenging, and these challenges include the need to balance the needs of all stakeholders, promote leadership in everyone, recognise and respond to uncertainty, regularly nurturing and inspiring passion, and creativity, fostering togetherness and empowering individuals to be confident and speak up.

Assertion 3 – Care must remain central to language around ECEC purpose and leadership. This does not mean to silence the entrepreneurial language embedded in ECEC discourse, but to ensure there is constructive tension between them and that care and feminine capital is seen as a positive element essential for individuals to grow and children to flourish in the sector.

Assertion 4 – Good leadership is showing personal characteristics of empathy, open-mindedness, and being solution-focused, and drawing on a range of up-to-date knowledge to navigate tensions between all stakeholders' interests and needs, to promote professional confidence in all as well as contextually relevant development in the widest possible sense.

Assertion 5 – Having professional confidence is being aware of the injustices and confusions in ECEC, and actively correcting them through thoughtful and skilful advocacy for collective action, working towards a better future for the ECEC workforce and children.

It is important to restate here that these assertions whilst arguably suggesting the right thing to do, they will always be partial. As Ellsworth (1989, p.303) reminds, if it can be shown that “the ‘right thing to do’ will always be partial, interested and potentially oppressive to others, and if I can do the same, then we can work together on shaping and reshaping alliances for constructing circumstances in which [everyone] of difference can thrive”.

Furthermore, narratives are never repeated exactly or never mean the same this twice, (Squire, 2008) and thus, newly constructed ways of knowing are always tentative. In line with this, to build my persuasive case (Squire, 2008), I have intended to privilege the marginalised speech of collective subjects who have shared experiences, to develop a new understanding. Therefore, based on these I have offered assertions supported by as much evidence as possible from transcripts, but they will always be provisional, corrigible, and contextual.

## 5.4 Competence systems based on Professional Confidence

The participants in my study demonstrated different levels of professional confidence and there were limited indicators of what lead to these levels although some attempt to capture this is evident in table six. As shown in Appendix K and based on my data, gender, role, years of experience or qualifications were not a good indicator of professional confidence. One participant particularly, Shelly (Home-based Educator - Manager/Owner), stands out as being the embodiment of professional confidence and exploring this embodiment in detail offers practical connections and detail to further exemplify professional confidence. A culmination of the data from her led to me learning that she represents the following statements and the relevant stories that support this claim are in (Appendix I). From this data, I discerned that Shelly reports:

- Not letting things get in her way.
- Always has the children at the centre of her mind.
- Is not afraid to admit her own shortcomings and work on them, she is motivated by them.
- Is open with her team and has infectious passion.
- Recognises the business needs of her setting.
- Is always trying to better herself, being open to new information and ideas.
- Is not afraid to go to the heart of the issue and ask difficult questions where they need to be asked.

This example helped form a tentative definition of professional confidence previously offered which not only advocates for competence development in individuals but also the development of a competent system which according to Urban et al. (2012, p.21). who drew on findings from the 'competence requirements in early childhood education and care' (CoRe Study) which was based on a review of literature in several European languages and data from a 15-country survey and seven in-depth case studies, is an entire ECEC system that:

1. Develops in reciprocal relationships between individuals, teams, institutions, and the wider socio-political context.
2. Offers support for individuals to realise their capability to develop responsible and responsive practices that respond to the needs of children and families in ever-changing societal contexts.
3. Promotes at the level of the individual practitioner, being and becoming 'competent' is a continuous process that comprises the capability and ability to build on a body of professional knowledge, practice and develop and show professional values.
4. Provides possibilities for all staff to engage in joint learning and critical reflection.
5. Encourages collaborations between individuals and teams, institutions (pre-schools, schools, support services for children and families...) as well as 'competent' governance at policy level.

This competent system, to use language from Urban *et al.* (2012), can be constructed by professionally confident individuals. The five parts above exemplify a competent system and the five parts previously set out are elements of professional confidence, there is no intended connection between part 1 of the ECEC system and part 1 of professional confidence previously set out. Instead, part 1, 4 and 5 of a competent system are broadly about collective action and collaboration and this compliments most of the elements of professional confidence. These relational elements are also reflected in a recent new leadership paradigm (Sakr and O'Sullivan, 2022a) which has a focus on advocacy and action. Similarly, part 2 and 3 of the competent system are evident in being aware of the reality in ECEC and thoughtfully skilfully advocating for improvements, central to professional confidence. Therefore, it can be said that having a professionally confident ECEC workforce will support the development of a competent ECEC sector, and this will be a sector where conforming will be more critical, and individuals will be less likely to blame themselves for performativity related challenges and less likely to feel not up to the task (Lather, 2012).

Professional confidence, therefore, could be a pre-cursor for good leadership and can occur through the workforce hearing narratives like those presented in this research and this can contribute to competent systems forming in ECEC. This narrative draws

on language that has both trapped and can liberate the workforce (Crotty, 1998) and can prevent the workforce from “colluding in their own oppression” (Powell and Goouch, 2012, p.113). This term is a way of embracing the pragmatic routes of my work as this framework relies on the creation of a new vocabulary which is better future envisioned to achieve social progress (Dieleman, 2010). In turn, the workforce can begin to retell their own story to the wider society to turn the tide on the perceptions of others have of them and more importantly that they often have of themselves, this can lead to leadership development which Douglass (2018) states “is the next frontier of advancing ECE quality and the workforce” (p. 389) and a move towards the professional recontextualising field (Bernstein, 2000) and responsive accountability (Sachs, 2016).

Figure six is a depiction of the potential impact of good leadership in ECEC on the workforce and the sector, which is at the centre of the model. Figure six starts with the current state of ECEC as experienced by the workforce and captured in section 5.2. An awareness of this state is an essential precursor to breaking into stage two, where the hard work of continuous good leadership (see section 5.3) and enhancing the workforce’s professional confidence can begin. Through many iterations and most likely a slow and challenging journey, working through leadership challenges and dilemmas repeatedly, many versions of an improved state may occur. Competent systems, whilst outside the individuals’ control, would greatly enhance the likelihood of progressing past this level.

This next level is a desired state can be reached at stage three. Moving to stage three is only possible though if good leadership is consistent across individuals, but first with the leader in a formal sense with a sense of curiosity and openness. The key this will develop is intended to unlock the professional confidence across the workforce. This is an integral part of the journey that leads to barriers being broken down and stimulating more desirable lived experiences for the sector. This then leads to lesser challenges, more good leadership, increased professional confidence and better lived experiences, and so on. This needs to be continually worked on to avoid moving backwards in the stages, which is always a possibility, and the porous lines depict this and ultimately centres on the formation of a stronger collective personal identity



(strong individual networks) and more competent systems (strong networks across contexts).

Figure Six – The potential impact of good leadership on the sector

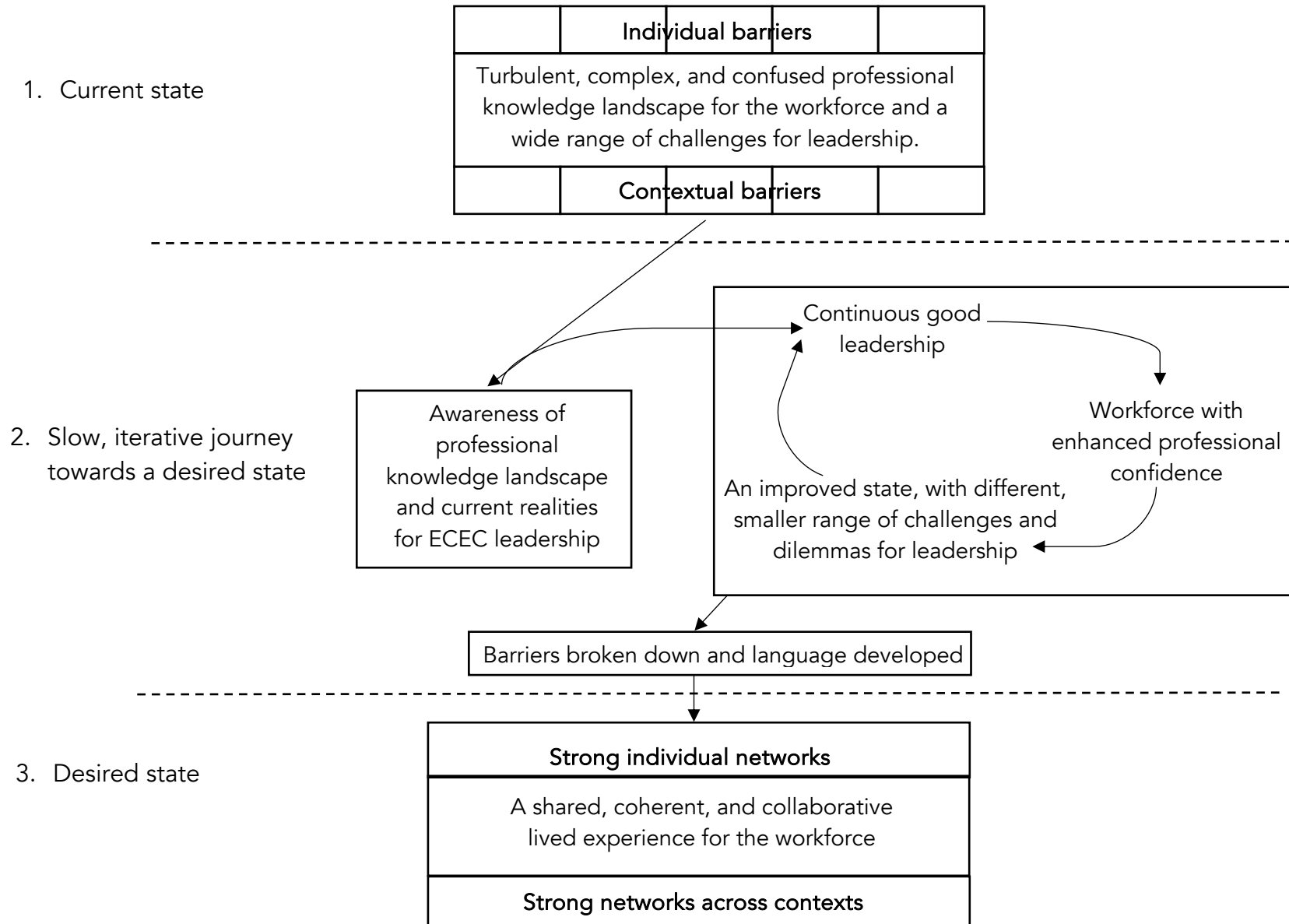


Figure six responds to the challenge offered in the work of Leeson *et al.* (2012) that a main difficulty for leaders in ECEC is the lack of theoretical models keeping pace with educational policy reform requirements and contextual changes, this model attempts to offer a framework for that. Figure six also invites individuals in the workforce to redefine their own realities, giving a stronger sense of self-determinations and empowerment that promotes trust and belief in capabilities throughout the workforce. This also encourages a more collaborative and positive sense of accountability. Sachs (2016) distinguished between responsive accountability (RA), where decision making is by educators and is process orientated making it more inclusive and encompassing of collective wisdom, and contractual accountability (CA) which is measurement driven and related to standards, surveillance, and compliance. Whilst both do have a place in ECEC, the element of interest in figure six greatly emphasises the need for RA.

As individuals' professional confidence grows, there may be less and less need for CA, and RA can be relied upon. As a result of the growth in professional confidence there is a possibility created for more autonomy and professionalism, despite the unabating influence of policy (Lewis and West, 2017). The context for the opportunity for professional confidence is created through good leadership and will require different iterations of context setting, translation, implementation then re-setting of context, as indicated in figure six.

Furthermore, there has historically been an inability for the sector to work together which has contributed to a lack of collective strength. By reversing the degradation caused by neo-liberal agendas (explored fully throughout Chapter 2) and empowering the individuals in the workforce, barriers could come down within and between settings. This could, in turn, result in a more activist mentality of those in the sector. More specifically drawing on Miller, *et al.* (2019) and his three forms of activism as previously explicated (see section 4.2.2.3).

In summary, figure six supports what has been suggested for some time, the ECEC community themselves should be engaging in constructing an improved view of professionalism of the workforce (Osgood, 2006) and needs to have ownership over an internally constructed activist approach centred on relevant and shared discourses, standards, and qualities. (Simpson, 2010). Ultimately resulting in a form of leadership

that can be through “reciprocal relationships and participative pedagogy”, as advocated for by Murray and MacDowall (2013, p. 299). What sets this thesis apart is the level of detail this analysis has gone into using a participatory methodology to offer practical insights. This circles back to the feminist-pragmatism epistemological standpoint central to my methodology that offers a relational way of knowing that is provisional, and through allying feminism and pragmatism, there is an emerging philosophical theory grounded in practice with a goal of empowering all members (Seigfried, 1993). This, of course, is not all done without limitations, which I will now turn my attention to.

## **5.6 Limitations**

Several limitations were reported on in the methodology chapter of this thesis along with how I minimised them, and here I explore some limitations of my analysis and conclusions. I have commented extensively about my positionality, but it needs to be said in this section that my position as a Director of a nursery group, presented advantages of knowledge of the sector also presented the risk that participants responses were influenced by my presence. This may be intensified by my role as an academic too. However, I attempted to mitigate against this risk and limitation like Offer (2013) by emphasising the importance of openness and confidentiality to participants as well as through carefully considering theorised subjectivity and reflexivity. Additionally other elements of interviewer effects have been considered more extensively in my methodology section. Most notably, I said that my interpretations of my data are always, and can only ever be, connected to my positionality and unique perspective of the world (Andrews, 2007), which could be seen as a limitation. That is due to this world and me as an individual, along with participants, being in a constant state of flux. Therefore, my transcriptions of interviews represent choices I have made in my interpretations, as well as participants, at a certain moment. Therefore, I must remain mindful of the tentative status of such decisions and the fragility of any new construction offered. I have taken steps to counteract any possible weakness in my findings and have been consistently transparent, particularly by having an extensive appendix list to support claims made and action taken.

Whilst I did capture data such as gender and age in my interviews, I did not focus on these matters of social difference such as gender, age and career stage in analysis and discussion. My interest in this data was more from a representative sample standpoint, which I achieved. I was more interested in individual experience and like Chappell (2014) I did not want to impose particular social categories to guide the analysis process as I felt it would alter the focus away from the data itself. This did on the one hand mean I have not commented on possible intersections in the data nor discussed the possible links between these social differences and the lived experiences gathered and this is a limitation that needs to be addressed with further research.

Furthermore, it is not surprising that participants in this study presented with good or high levels of professional confidence more frequently as those individuals are more likely to put themselves forward to speak up in a research paper and this should be considered with my arguments here and in future research. Similarly, whilst there was overlap in participant contributions, I was still learning new things from new individuals even up to my last interview, therefore, I would like to have spoken to more individuals and for longer. This may have helped to discern the type of stories I was hearing more whether it was secret, sacred or cover stories. This may have also been more possible if interviews were in person and consequently may have also led to greater insight into “not just with what people said, but [the] contradictions, silences, hesitations and emotionally marked aspects of the interviews” (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p.276). This relates to a limitation reported by Chappell (2014) in that to what extent can the words of participants be taken as a legitimate record of their experiences. This is a troubling thought that may benefit from further exploration in future research. In addition, I was not able to get my full set of participants comments for stage two of my data analysis, therefore it could be argued in some sense that their stores are more partial than others. This may have been due to the immense pressure these individuals are under and the workload they have meaning they had no more time to give to this research.

One other limitation to consider pertains to a comment from the work of Leeson et al. (2012) that underlines the point that the capabilities of a leader to enact good

leadership will be dictated (at least in part) by external drivers such as social policy, market forces, management structures and Ofsted, therefore, my recommendations and arguments must not ignore the role these factors will continue to play, even though they are not given extensive consideration in my findings and analysis.

One final possible limitation was the disparity between length of interviews of nearly 40 minutes, which perhaps could create an uneven playing field between participants (Envy, 2018). However, given like Envy (2018) I adopted a feminist approach to my research, for me to interject or terminate or insist on further information beyond what the participant was comfortable with would be erroneous. Therefore, I had to allow participants to speak as much as they felt able to and this could be just a consequence of the nature of human individuality.

## **5.7 Implications for Future Research**

My methodological framework may contribute to this field of research and other fields of research looking to break down barriers between groups of people, particularly marginalised ones. Researchers may be able to create positional spaces to dive in deeper to understanding individual's narratives. Specifically for researchers looking to research ECEC individuals, given as Mayall (2002) argues, both the children and the women (and the men) who look after them, have great difficulty in having their points of view heard and respected, this approach could bridge a path over this issue.

Also inherent in this methodological approach is the use of the term 'we', which not only could also support with the previously mentioned issue, but it also places "emphasis on a shared standpoint working together toward social change" (Cahill *et al.*, 2010, p.407). This is affirmed in the pragmatic notion of knowing where knowledge is collectively produced and better research is conducted when the endeavour can be transparently framed as something 'we' strive for, where 'we' means both the researcher and the researched.

Connected to this new methodological approach is the possibility to explore more deeply the notions identified in my research. Most notably this could be to explore

professional confidence more and what this means to the sector, as well as to look more closely at the barriers that hopefully begin to erode as professional confidence is increased through continuous good leadership. I have suggested connections between types of policy work and professional confidence but detected no connection between demographic information and professional confidence, perhaps a larger sample will lead to this. Further work could also be done to refine the connection between the levels of professional confidence and more explicitly explore the transient nature of this to help refine the different levels of professional confidence and identify options to develop professional confidence in individuals. This is also to explore root causes of issues presented here in response to Ellsworth's (1989) concern that empowerment work may treat the symptoms but leaves the disease unnamed and untouched. This research may also be bolstered with an explicit gender dimension in the attempt to identify the role gender plays in professional confidence and leadership in ECEC.

This is where it is important to reiterate that given the tentative nature of all my findings, further refining will always be necessary around how the workforce understand good leadership and the challenges and dilemmas of leadership in the sector. This is important work though to ensure the extant understanding of purpose of the sector is accurately understood will be integral to ensure as the sector evolves leadership continuous to evolve with it. Therefore, further exploration of the professional knowledge landscape (figure three) and the drivers behind it would benefit from further refinement. This may allow further delineation of how the purpose of ECEC is understood by those working in the sector and could also explore the same issue with other stakeholders like parents, children, and the community. In addition, building on figure three and investigating its tenets more may contribute to the production of a clearer knowledge-based professionalism.

As my research and hitherto suggestions for future research have been focused on the individuals working in the sector. Pascal and Bertram (2012) helpfully identify practitioners, workers, parents, children, and policy makers as co-constructors of knowledge about the services and their development, therefore it would be remiss of me to not suggest some further research should engage with other stakeholders in the sector. They could add useful perspectives on key notions such as what are their lived

experiences of the sector and their understanding of leadership challenges and good leadership. Also, to explore what they feel improved professional confidence could do for the sector more widely. Relating to this, a wider exploration will also need to consider a broader range of intersectionality issues possibly including race and class.

Finally, I have presented here a tentative language for the sector to thrive in ongoing challenges and dilemmas. This draws on a range of work including the recent work of Sakr and O'Sullivan (2022a) and like them I feel that further research and reflection is needed to understand whether social purpose, and indeed pedagogical and business, are appropriate headlines to capture the language of ECEC leadership moving forwards and to then consider how leadership can be developed within each strand. In a more recent publication Sakr and O'Sullivan (2022c, p.1) state that "we need a model of leadership that has at its core the commitment to leading with a social purpose". Whilst the model I have presented does not have explicit mention of a social purpose. The inclusive, collaborative, and developmental nature of it is in line with principles Sakr and O'Sullivan (2022c) advocate for in their new model. Work needs to be done to explore how this new understanding and the one I suggest here can be impactful in the sector in complimentary ways.

## **5.8 Implications for Leadership Practice and Policy**

Leeson *et al.* (2012) stated 10 years ago that a strong leadership identity is essential as increased government attention, the pressures towards globalisation, and neo-liberal agendas have led to an increased business responsibility for ECEC leaders who need to be clear sighted and visionary and make a stand for the communities they serve. This attention, pressure and agenda has only increased in the past decade therefore the need is even greater. There are several key points from this thesis that, if considered in leadership practice and policy purposefully, will improve the likelihood of any intended benefits from this research being realised and this strong leadership identity being achieved. These can broadly be grouped under advancing a purpose, protecting people and financial constraints. This draws on the work of Sinek (2019) who argues that leaders must have an infinite mindset when it comes to leading their organisations, otherwise they will damage their chances of success and fulfilment.



In English policy to date, there is not a clear focus or 'just cause' which Sinek (2019) describes as a specific vision of a future state that does not yet exist. As has been commented, current governments do not look far enough into the future and there is a far too disparate nature engrained in ECEC. This could be a positive change as I have set out in section 5.3 and there should be commitment to a 'just cause' that is above any shared purpose that is to educate and/or care for children, support mothers to get back to work, help disadvantaged children to catch up before starting school or all of these and more.

Protecting people refers to the government's ability to show they value the sector on a national level and company owners or setting leaders to do the same on a more local level. This could include consideration for how you compensate, educate, and appreciate the workforce, again on both national and local levels which more directly may address issues raised in the previous session about this empowerment work treating the symptoms but leaving the disease unnamed and untouched (Ellsworth, 1989). This is where details captured in figure six could influence the journey the sector should embark on to better protect the individuals within it on the frontline.

In terms of compensation, a national or local published pay scale that imitates that in place for primary and secondary school teachers could help. This connects to the third pillar from Sinek's (2019) work commented on subsequently more fully. Given the extant financial constraints there are other options that policy could support. For example, better initial ongoing and continuous education for the sector, all individuals should be supported in their own personal journey towards professional confidence. New leaders need to be developed more thoughtfully, and experienced leaders need to be supported to enact leadership effectively in the face of ongoing challenges and respond to and enact policy more thoughtfully. This acknowledges the original use of the term professional confidence from Bradbury *et al.* (2020) in that these individuals will have "the professional confidence to question the impact of policy" (p.10) and embraces the new iteration I have offered from my analysis of data here fully.

There is also strength in networking that does not have to drain financial resources but can both educate and make individuals feel appreciated. Leaders from all parts of

the sector should come together around issues of enhancing professional confidence of the workforce, tackling challenges and dilemmas for leadership, and ensuring an up to date understanding of good leadership. In addition to this, all individuals should be encouraged to come together to lobby for change, with a shared language and purpose. This could be something the recent COVID-19 Recovery Programme will contribute to.

Enhanced professional confidence has been transformative for me personally as I have journeyed through this doctorate and with the right support can be transformative for other individuals in ECEC too. Important work this area could include workshops to promote self-awareness around levels of professional confidence and then supportive strategies to develop more higher levels of professional confidence more consistently. The implications for practice shared here will take time, but with increasing awareness and bringing the sector together, thoughtfully, I believe we can all work towards a better future for the children and workforce. This will not be easy though, and there will be barriers to this progress.

Financial constraints are a perpetuating problem, and current discussions around increasing staff to children ratio is not going to support the bigger picture long term, this is a finite mindset as Sinek (2019) would say. There is already great resistance to this in the sector (Lawler, 2022a, Lawler, 2022b, Savage, 2022). There is recent literature and government initiatives coming out of Ireland that are very interesting and encouraging (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2022). With an unprecedented and protected investment into ECEC in Ireland to ensure staff get paid more and work in better conditions and that ECEC is more affordable for parents. The statement includes the following point: “The development of Core Funding is a significant milestone on the journey towards a new funding model. It aims to transform the sector and establish a new type of partnership between providers and the State that reflects the importance of [ECEC] for the public good” (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2022, unpaginated). This is worthy of further exploration by the government in tandem with the findings presented in this research, with greater contextual relevance to England. I hope with this research to be part of encouraging the government in England to

engage with research and the sector, then learn from it and influence similarly positive change.

## 5.9 Concluding Remarks

Working in the ECEC sector and seeing first-hand the reality for those on the frontline, compelled me to conduct this research. I strived to conduct thoughtful research, so I embarked on a collaborative journey with participants to explore what leadership looks like, from their perspective, by asking them about their lived experiences in the sector. In gathering stories in response to these questions, insight has been gained into the purpose of ECEC and what good leadership looks like, as well as a new notion of professional confidence. I believe this new notion could be the key that leaders hold to unleash the potential of the workforce that will stimulate a more collaborative, sustainable, and prosperous sector. I feel a huge sense of responsibility given the trust participants have put in me, and this is strengthened by the journey of growth I have been on personally throughout this research.

My main reflection as a nursery owner on this research process is captured by the participant Whitney when she responded to what good leadership is. This is what I strive for in my daily life as a nursery owner:

“It's about having that clear vision, and communicating that clear vision, so that everybody knows what it is that you're doing and why you're doing it. And not being afraid to make mistakes, and not being afraid to take on other people's ideas and other people's opinions. But ultimately, having the children at the centre of what they're doing.” (Whitney – Independent School - Teacher)

This notion of good leadership relates closely to individuals needing to develop professional confidence. Related to professional confidence I now feel more strongly than ever that the ECEC sector needs to come together and support one another to be the best versions of themselves. To be good leaders of ourselves and others to help form a professionally confident workforce that can work through the challenging context we work in. I hope engaging in this research will help individuals to contribute positively towards this and ultimately improve what we can do for the children in our

care. This is captured beautifully by Tammy below by underscoring what should be central in the mind and hearts of all Early Years advocates:

“We are very lucky to work with children because we just see them grow and develop. It's probably the best job in the world. But when people say it's an easy job, they're not actually understanding what we do for them, children, how we make them look like they're our own. And we care for them, but also teach them.” (Tammy – Small Private - Room Leader).

This is why all ECEC professionals should be celebrated and why this is an appropriate message to end this thesis with.

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## Appendices

### 7.1 Appendix A – Interview questions

#### Constructing a Shared Understanding of Leadership in ECEC

Constructing new understandings of the reality of business vs pedagogical tensions in ECEC for purpose, pedagogy, provision, personnel, and leadership

[ ] indicated a prompt added through the interview process

##### RQ1 – What are individuals lived experiences of the purpose of ECEC?

###### Unstructured Interview

*Imagine walking around your provision [expecting to hear sacred and cover stories]*

[Dig a bit deeper for the secret stories]

1. Tell me about your environment and its purpose...
  - a. WWW/EBI
  - b. Ofsted
  - c. Marketisation
  - d. Business
  - e. Pedagogy
  - f. Purpose
  - g. Value – money, love, education
2. What professional conversations happen in your provision?
  - a. Planning
  - b. Developmental/supportive
  - c. Reflective
  - d. Decision making
  - e. Assessment
  - f. Challenging
  - g. With who?

[Tell me about you]
3. Tell me about your personnel trajectory to this point and your next steps...
  - a. Status/esteem/pay/professionalism
  - b. Qualifications/CPD/training [What does it mean to not be a graduate?]
  - c. Motivation/attrition
  - d. Social justice – gender/perceptions
  - e. Regulation
  - f. Roles and responsibilities

##### RQ2 – What are individuals lived experiences of leadership in ECEC?

###### Unstructured Interview

*Starting with the insinuation that they are all leaders, I want to understand the phenomenon of leadership in ECEC, hearing meaningful reflections on participants' meaningful reflections. Identifying moments of recognition across transcripts*

4. What are your leadership responsibilities?
  - a. Planning
  - b. Key person
  - c. Teaching and learning
  - d. Finance
  - e. Sustainability [Is activism and social justice seen as part of their role?]
  - f. Supporting personnel
5. What is it like to lead in ECEC?
  - a. Challenges from where?
    - i. Ofsted [Do you collude in your own oppression? / Are you your own worst enemy?]
    - ii. Parents
    - iii. Children
    - iv. Staff
    - v. Policy
    - vi. Competition
  - b. Successes
  - c. Autonomy
  - d. Professionalism

##### RQ3 – What leadership expertise is needed for ECEC provision?

###### Unstructured Interview

*Going beyond phenomenological exploration, to construct a narrative around leadership in ECEC with the personnel that will help leadership in ECEC.*

What is good leadership in ECEC?

[What gives them the right to influence you?]

*Could this be a construction of effective, exemplary, powerful, thoughtful, emancipatory, activist, resonant, distributed leadership in ECEC? Or something else entirely?*

*Demographic questions and ask how they found the interview over zoom as oppose to in person. Maybe I can publish in a methodology journal after?*

## 7.2 Appendix B – Amendments Ethical approval



College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Brunel University London  
Kingston Lane  
Uxbridge  
UB8 3PH  
United Kingdom  
[www.brunel.ac.uk](http://www.brunel.ac.uk)

19 February 2021

### LETTER OF APPROVAL

APPROVAL HAS BEEN GRANTED FOR THIS STUDY TO BE CARRIED OUT BETWEEN 19/02/2021 AND 01/12/2021

Applicant (s): Lewis Fogarty

Project Title: A Shared Understanding of Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care

Reference: 23845-A-Feb/2021- 31448-1

Dear Lewis Fogarty

The Research Ethics Committee has considered the above application recently submitted by you.

The Chair, acting under delegated authority has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. Approval is given on the understanding that the conditions of approval set out below are followed:

- **Approval is given for remote (online/telephone) research activity only. Face-to-face activity and/or travel will require approval by way of an amendment.**
- **The agreed protocol must be followed. Any changes to the protocol will require prior approval from the Committee by way of an application for an amendment.**
- In addition to the above, please ensure that you monitor and adhere to all up-to-date local and national Government health advice for the duration of your project.

#### Please note that:

- Research Participant Information Sheets and (where relevant) flyers, posters, and consent forms should include a clear statement that research ethics approval has been obtained from the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- The Research Participant Information Sheets should include a clear statement that queries should be directed, in the first instance, to the Supervisor (where relevant), or the researcher. Complaints, on the other hand, should be directed, in the first instance, to the Chair of the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- Approval to proceed with the study is granted subject to receipt by the Committee of satisfactory responses to any conditions that may appear above, in addition to any subsequent changes to the protocol.
- The Research Ethics Committee reserves the right to sample and review documentation, including raw data, relevant to the study.
- You may not undertake any research activity if you are not a registered student of Brunel University or if you cease to become registered, including abeyance or temporary withdrawal. As a deregistered student you would not be insured to undertake research activity. Research activity includes the recruitment of participants, undertaking consent procedures and collection of data. Breach of this requirement constitutes research misconduct and is a disciplinary offence.

Professor David Gallear

Chair of the College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Brunel University London

## 7.3 Appendix C – Brunel ethical approval letter



College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Brunel University London  
Kingston Lane  
Uxbridge  
UB8 3PH  
United Kingdom  
[www.brunel.ac.uk](http://www.brunel.ac.uk)

16 July 2020

### LETTER OF APPROVAL

APPROVAL HAS BEEN GRANTED FOR THIS STUDY TO BE CARRIED OUT BETWEEN 20/07/2020 AND 01/12/2021

Applicant (s): Lewis Fogarty

Project Title: A Shared Understanding of Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care

Reference: 23845-LR-Jun/2020- 26119-1

Dear Lewis Fogarty

The Research Ethics Committee has considered the above application recently submitted by you.

The Chair, acting under delegated authority has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. Approval is given on the understanding that the conditions of approval set out below are followed:

- **Please ensure that you monitor and adhere to all up-to-date Government health advice for the duration of your project.**
- The agreed protocol must be followed. Any changes to the protocol will require prior approval from the Committee by way of an application for an amendment.

#### Please note that:

- Research Participant Information Sheets and (where relevant) flyers, posters, and consent forms should include a clear statement that research ethics approval has been obtained from the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- The Research Participant Information Sheets should include a clear statement that queries should be directed, in the first instance, to the Supervisor (where relevant), or the researcher. Complaints, on the other hand, should be directed, in the first instance, to the Chair of the relevant Research Ethics Committee.
- Approval to proceed with the study is granted subject to receipt by the Committee of satisfactory responses to any conditions that may appear above, in addition to any subsequent changes to the protocol.
- The Research Ethics Committee reserves the right to sample and review documentation, including raw data, relevant to the study.
- You may not undertake any research activity if you are not a registered student of Brunel University or if you cease to become registered, including abeyance or temporary withdrawal. As a deregistered student you would not be insured to undertake research activity. Research activity includes the recruitment of participants, undertaking consent procedures and collection of data. Breach of this requirement constitutes research misconduct and is a disciplinary offence.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. Gallear'.

Professor David Gallear

Chair of the College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Brunel University London

## 7.4 Appendix D – Follow up interview questions

From initial interviews, several values emerged that I would appreciate you revisiting. I would like you to try to rank these values in order of how important they are to you, and why. This will provide essential further insight into what the purpose of our sector is and how good leadership can be achieved. I appreciate your additional time and please go into as much detail as possible and note there is a space below the tables for you to do this.

### Hierarchy of values 1 – Purpose of Early Years

What influences you most day to day in your role?

Value	My explanation
Pedagogy	The pedagogy of your setting, child-centredness and a focus on teaching, learning and care.
Childcare market	The specific part of the sector you work in and the challenges and opportunities that come with that
Qualifications	Your qualification and experiences that you have accumulated over time
Parent power	The relationship you have with parents
Clear vision	The vision set out by your organisation
Policies	Both setting specific and national
Ofsted	The regulatory body for the sector
Money	Both coming into your setting and into your pocket

Your ranking - from most influential	Your justification

Do you see your daily role reflected in these values?

Do you have any additional comments you would like to make?

### Hierarchy of values 2 – Good leadership in Early Years

What values do you think are most important for good leadership in Early Years?

Value	My explanation
Child-centred	A leader being focused on children and their development
Community	A leader being focused on the community within which they operate and how they can best support its needs
Business	A leader being focused on finances, operations, and development of the setting
Knowledge	A leader having a working knowledge of the setting and role modelling life-long learning
Staff-centred	A leader being focused on the staff in their team, their well-being, development, and voice
Personal characteristics	Having personal characteristics such as empathy, good listener, open-minded, solution-focused, personable, and humble

Your ranking - from most influential	Your justification

Do you see what you value in leaders reflected in these values?

Do you have any additional comments you would like to make?

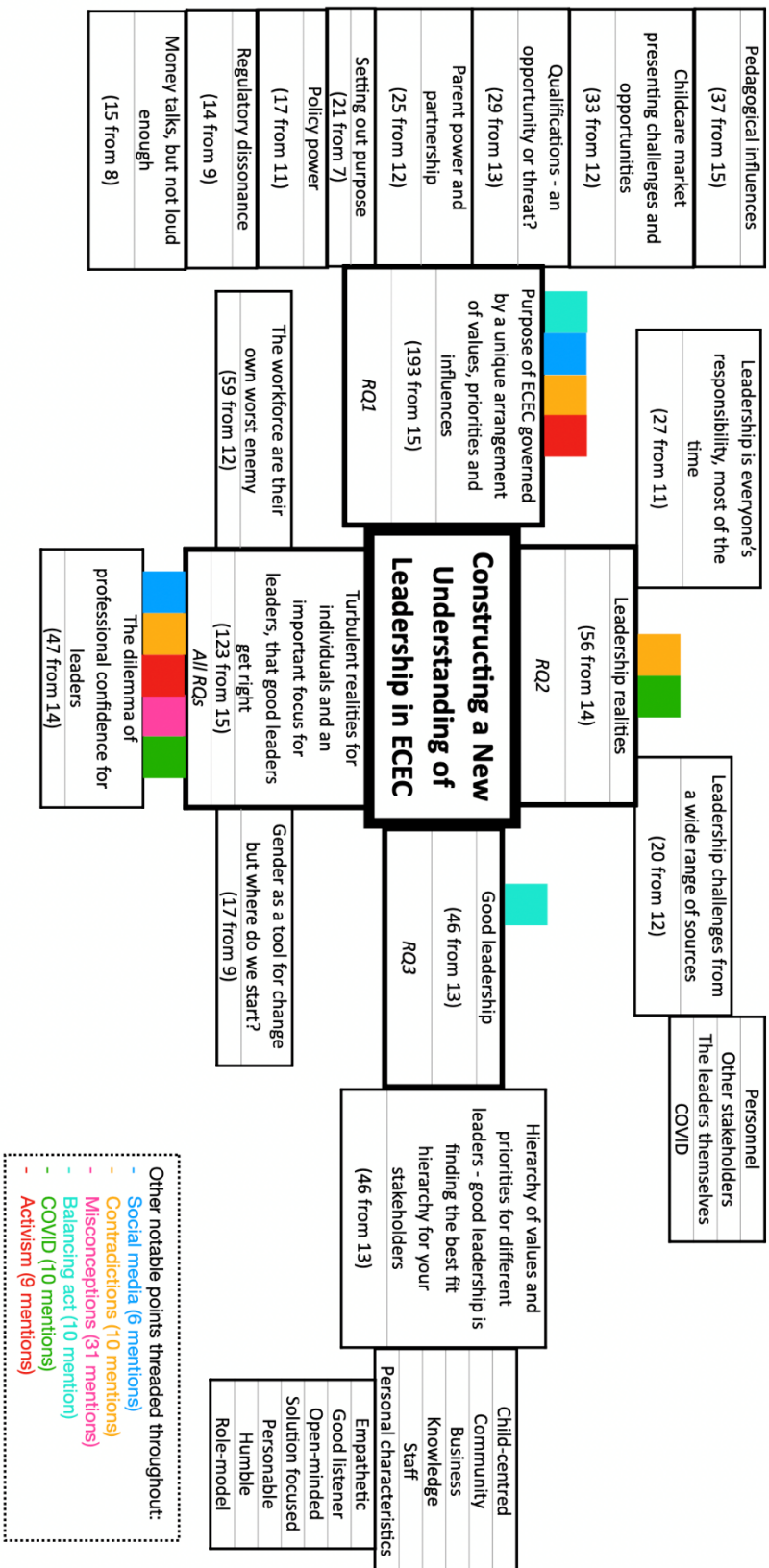
## 7.5 Appendix E – Snapshot of reflective work with data



Major theme/main RQ link (but there is elements of crossover) [themes?]	Minor theme (add number to indicate the weight behind each point) (do some demographic mapping too) [Patterns]	Sub-theme (add number to indicate the weight behind each point) (do some demographic mapping too) [categories?]	Element of interest (codes?)	Data
Turbulent realities for individuals and an important focus for leaders, that good leaders get right (all RQs)	The dilemma of professional confidence for leaders - does this relate to personnel?	Inspiring, nurturing and role modelling passion and creativity as a prerequisite to professional confidence	Going above and beyond	So every week we actually go out and even with COVID restrictions at the moment, we're still able to get out to the woods and the beach and stuff like that. We tend not to do anything that parents probably do their kids. So yesterday, we went to the park and we were doing bubbles in puddles. They were investigating the science of that and it was just magical, really to see them working it all out and pouring it and stamp on it and stuff like that. So it's kind of like the world's our oyster.
(123 from 15)	(47 from 14)	(14 from 6)	To keep informed and up to date with policy	So with the launch of the new development matters, and a new EYFS thing, I've been reading it or thinking, oh my goodness, I need to up my game. That challenges me, that drives me because I like to be quick to like to be doing the right thing for children. I want to make sure that parents that come here know that they're getting the best that they can get right now that that does have a bit of a you know what, I want to really see success of my little kiddies, you know, yeah, whatever that success looks like, you know, is different for each child.
			For providing children with opportunities	, because I need to know that my kids are equipped in that early hears to aspire to be whatever they want to be. And I hope for the very, very best for all of them, you know, and it will look different for all of them. But, you know, I look at this little two year old I've got at the moment and oh my god, she blows me away every day. And I look at her and I think you know what, she could be a top consultant in our country. And that's what really makes me want to go deeper with them because I'm thinking if I don't build those links in our brain now, she might not have opportunities.
			For professional dialogue	And so we will debate and discuss if I've just researched something, or I've just read something or have been on a webinar. I kind of get really excited about it. So get that for breakfast the next morning. Yeah, quite good, fun and the same for them. So it's a real open dialogue. I will get stuff sent to it's mainly evening. Look what I found, and it's wonderful. And I really encourage that it's not because I want them to be working outside of work, but it's passion, I think Yeah. Which I have to say, I don't know many industries. I know loads of school teachers, and I don't see them getting as excited as we do in early years.
			Manger/owner position To overcome financial hurdles	It is my business, it is my reputation. I try not to let finance certainly ever stand in my way, if that's what you're saying, yeah. Find another way through it, try and use my creative brain to think what what is it I want to achieve? and kind of go another way about it?
			Makes them their own worst enemies	, I do believe that the reason we're so underpaid, funding wise, is because they know we're so passionate about our jobs, and that we'll be doing the jobs, we're doing it as a charity.
			Needed to be adaptable	And so I had it, when you're in early years, you have to be very adaptable, and you have to be very creative. So you deal with what you've got at the time.
			The power of passion	I think passionate. So one thing is see if you've got the passion to check to make change. And that's the one thing that I would say that I do have is that I've got a passion for what I do and a passion and a definite interest and changing things in for myself as well as for changing things. And it has come from my want to change me that actually I've gone Wait, hold on a minute, what is what has triggered all these things for me? Are we that happens for so many other kids and for so many other people? So fine? No, got to the stage what actually I've done pretty well wait, why can't I go and then give those kids the support that I never got? So that and I then had to fend for myself, which is really good. And really kind of interesting, I suppose.
			More powerful than experience	So actually the level of experience, the years of experience they've got had nothing on the the passion and the drive that I had to make a change. And I think that's a big kind of impact in a big change.
			Needed in the absence of money	And obviously, there's things that everyone would love to have in their environment. But yeah, I know like for myself if I just tried to improvise, improvise for them if we haven't got it, or just the use of what we've got for the minute and They love that.
			Power of passion	And we are very lucky to work with children, because we just see them grow and develop. It's probably the best job in the world. But when people say it's an easy job, they're not actually understanding what we do for them, children, how we make them look like they're our own. And we care for them, but also teach them.
			Passion – using own money to buy things doesn't help in the long run	So that's what provision leader I noticed what doesn't work and what does work. So I do tend to purchase things for that before that room to help support them. But I don't know, I just I just loves treating the children.
			Needs to transfer this from leaders to the team	Communication, confidence to be able to, you know, approach each other have discussions and barriers. I think the barriers are biggest thing that actually stopped some of these things happening due to many reasons. I mean, like confidence. Yeah, yeah. And I think that it's like, for example with me, like, I'm not at the moment and we've grown I'm actually making a conscious effort where I'm trying to transfer as much information that I know of, to the team.



## 7.6 Appendix F – Analytic map



## 7.7 Appendix G – Consent form sample

### Constructing a Shared Understanding of Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care Lewis Fogarty

APPROVAL HAS BEEN GRANTED FOR THIS STUDY TO BE CARRIED OUT BETWEEN 20/07/2020 AND 20/12/2020

The participant (or their legal representative) should complete the whole of this sheet.		
	YES	NO
Have you read the Participant Information Sheet?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? (via email/phone for electronic surveys)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? (via email/phone for electronic surveys)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you understand that you will not be referred to by name in any report concerning this study?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you understand that:		
• You are free to withdraw from this study at any time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• You don't have to give any reason for withdrawing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Choosing not to participate or withdrawing will not affect your rights?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• You can withdraw your data any time up to 20/02/2021	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to my interview being audio and video recorded	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to the use of non-attributable quotes when the study is written up or published	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The procedures regarding confidentiality have been explained to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree that my anonymised data can be stored and shared with other researchers for use in future projects.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in this study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signature of research participant:	
Print name:	Date:
Witness Statement	
I am satisfied that the above-named has given informed consent.	
Witness signature:	

Print name:	Date:
-------------	-------

## **7.8 Appendix H – Participant information form**

### **Study title**

Constructing a Shared Understanding of Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

### **Invitation Paragraph**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of this study is to speak with a representative sample of the ECEC workforce to understand how they perceive the purpose of and leadership in the sector. I hope to understand a range of perspectives on lived experiences of ECEC workforce are this. This research is part of my Education Doctoral thesis that I aim to submit in the summer of 2021 for a December 2021 graduation.

### **Why have I been invited to participate?**

You have been invited to participate as you currently work in ECEC and are over the age of 18. There will be approximately 30 other participants fitting these characteristics too in order to make a representative sample of the sector.

### **Do I have to take part?**

As participation is entirely voluntary, it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time up until 20/02/2021 and without having to give a reason.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will be asked to take part in one video interview over Zoom that will take place between 20/07/2020 and 20/12/2020 and last for approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour. You are responsible for answering the questions I ask in a way that you feel comfortable with that reflects your experiences from working in ECEC. I will ask you 6 interview questions, each of which will lead to a conversation where I will ask further questions when necessary for clarification and elaboration. I want to understand your experiences of and perspectives on leadership.

### **Are there any lifestyle restrictions?**

There are no lifestyle restrictions as part of participating in this study.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no anticipated disadvantages or risks associated with taking part in this study.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

There is no intended benefit to the participant for taking part in this study.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If something goes wrong during this study and the participant would like to make a complaint, they can do this by contacting Professor Mark Gallear, who is the College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee Chair, on [Mark.Gallear@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Mark.Gallear@brunel.ac.uk)

**Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential until December 2021, when my course will be completed. Any information about you which leaves the University will have all your identifying information removed. With your permission, anonymised data will be stored and may be used in future research – you can indicate whether or not you give permission for this by way of the Consent Form.

If during the course of the research evidence of harm or misconduct come to light, then it may be necessary to break confidentiality. We will tell you at the time if we think we need to do this, and let you know what will happen next.

**Will I be recorded, and how will the recording be used?**

The interview will be recorded through Zoom for transcription purposes. The recording itself will be deleted once transcribed and anonymised.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of this research study will be used as part of my Doctoral thesis and a copy will be available to you my emailing request to me, if you so wish. Just to reiterate, you will not be identifiable in this piece of research or any subsequent use of your data. You will be made aware of future publications that your data is used for.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

This research is organised by myself, Lewis Fogarty, in conjunction with Brunel University London.

**What are the indemnity arrangements?**

Brunel University London provides appropriate insurance cover for research which has received ethical approval.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

This study has been reviewed by the College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, chaired by Professor Mark Gallear.

**Research Integrity**

Brunel University London is committed to compliance with the Universities UK [Research Integrity Concordat](#). You are entitled to expect the highest level of integrity from the researchers during the course of this research

**Contact for further information and complaints**

**Researcher name and details:** Lewis Fogarty: lewis.fogarty2@brunel.ac.uk

**Principal Supervisor:** Dr Mark Aldridge: Mark.aldridge@brunel.ac.uk

**For complaints, Chair of the Research Ethics Committee:** Professor Mark Gallear: Mark.Gallear@brunel.ac.uk

**Thank you very much for taking the time to read this participant information form**

## 7.10 Appendix I – Shelly’s Professional Confidence support

A selection of quotes that evidence my claims about Shelly’s professional confidence.

“So, every week we actually go out and even with COVID restrictions at the moment, we’re still able to get out to the woods and the beach and stuff like that. We tend not to do anything that parents probably do their kids. So yesterday, we went to the park, and we were doing bubbles in puddles. They were investigating the science of that, and it was just magical, really to see them working it all out and pouring it and stamp on it and stuff like that. So, it’s kind of like the world’s our oyster.”

“So, with the launch of the new development matters, and a new EYFS thing, I’ve been reading it or thinking, oh my goodness, I need to up my game. That challenges me, that drives me because I like to be quick to like to be doing the right thing for children. I want to make sure that parents that come here know that they’re getting the best that they can get right now that that does have a bit of a you know what, I want to really see success of my little kiddies, you know, yeah, whatever that success looks like, you know, is different for each child.”

“Because I need to know that my kids are equipped in that early years to aspire to be whatever they want to be. And I hope for the very, very best for all of them, you know, and it will look different for all of them. But, you know, I look at this little two-year-old I’ve got at the moment and oh my god, she blows me away every day. And I look at her and I think you know what, she could be a top consultant in our country. And that’s what really makes me want to go deeper with them because I’m thinking if I don’t build those links in our brain now, she might not have opportunities.”

“And so, we will debate and discuss if I’ve just researched something, or I’ve just read something or have been on a webinar. I kind of get really excited about it. So, get that for breakfast the next morning. Yeah, quite good, fun and the same for them. So, it’s a real open dialogue. I will get stuff sent to it’s mainly evening. Look what I found, and it’s wonderful. And I really encourage that it’s not because I want them to be working outside of work, but it’s passion, I think Yeah. Which I have to say. I don’t know many industries. I know loads of schoolteachers, and I don’t see them getting as excited as we do in early years.”

“It is my business; it is my reputation.”

“I try not to let finance certainly ever stand in my way, if that’s what you’re saying, yeah. Find another way through it, try and use my creative brain to think what it is I want to achieve? and kind of go another way about it?”

“I do believe that the reason we’re so underpaid, funding wise, is because they know we’re so passionate about our jobs, and that we’ll be doing the jobs, we’re doing it as a charity.

“Gosh, so I am constantly reading, and I was on the school run today, and I didn't have any children to interact with, it was pouring with rain. And so I left the children with an assistant here, and I was reading on my phone, an update from somebody all on, you know, the core books that you there's a set of core books that I have not, I've not really looked at any list of core books before I find books for the children that I think will engage them at that time.”

“I go on webinars, probably at least every other week, if not weekly. So, I'm constantly on of getting a drive of new motion that's going on in our industry, and I love it. I mean, I am passionate about lift forms. And like, if I get a child, they're also different if I get a child and I think it's not right, I spend ages researching and trying things out with them until I make a little breakthrough for that child”.

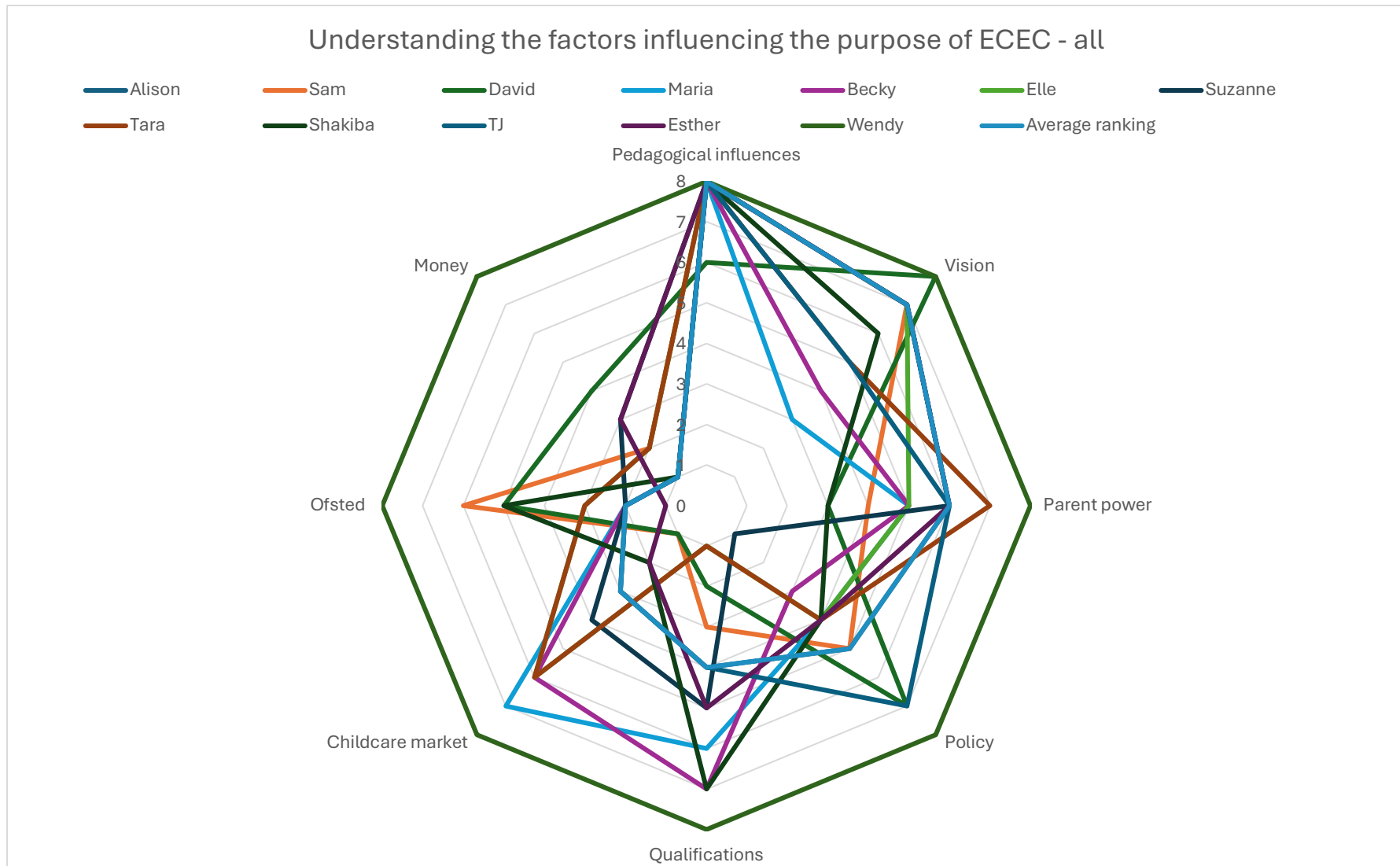
“I think it's my background. And you don't get many come from my background. So, when my first my first Ofsted inspection, correct with respect to sit there go, What? Literally, I've been in this three month when they first come out, and they expect you at the beginning. And she said, What's your background? And I said, banking? And my last job was I said, I was an operations manager, I said, I've been an Engagement Manager for 6000 people.”

“But I guess it's that background that I'm able to bring in. And that's why I won't let anything go by securing COVID I was sending questions into the Department of Education. And I was, if I didn't get an answer, I'd send them in to Essex County Council and get them to raise them up for education. So, there were things they weren't answering, like, I was really angry that I was getting my local school site, would I have a student back that was halfway through a placement? I actually felt we could take the risk of one student, but I couldn't say yes, because nowhere in that Public Health England document that came out in August time to do anything about that. And yet they were all saying education should go back to normal in September. So, for me, that was education. And I kept sending the question through and in the interface. Below this, we're going to go through Essex County Council, and I got reply much quicker. So, it worked. But I wouldn't hesitate to go through to the heart of where the question needs to be asked if I needed to (summarise COVID issue above)”

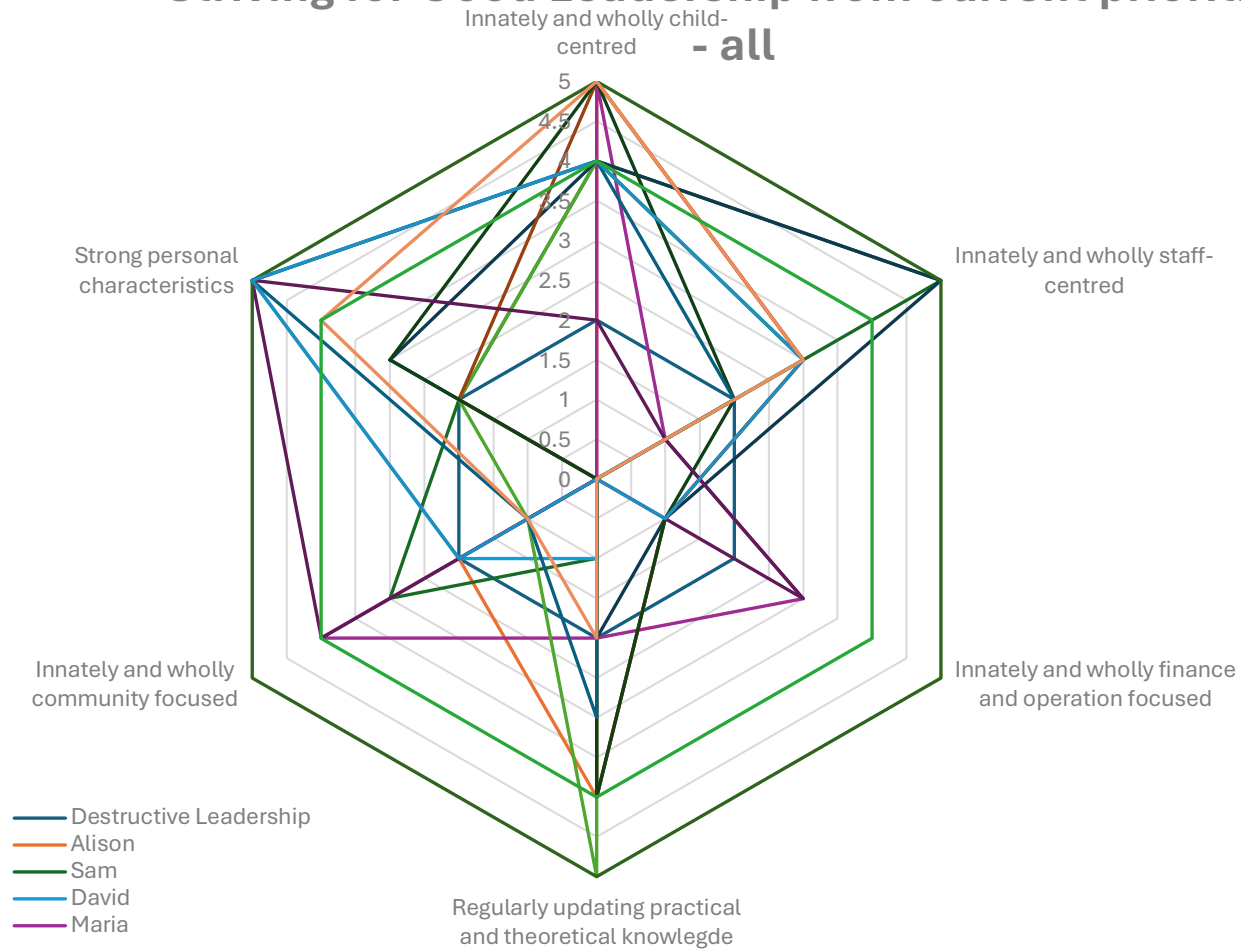




## 7.10 Appendix J – Illustration of the complexity of ECEC



## Striving for Good Leadership from current priorities



### 7.11 Appendix K – Enhanced demographic table including contributions to discussion and levels of professional confidence

Participant	Gender	Age	Provision	Length of service	Qualification	Role	Contribution % (mentions)	PC
Evelyn	F	40-50	Nursery school	20 or more	6	Headteacher	12% (26)	High
Whitney	F	40-50	Independent	20 or more	7	Teacher	10% (21)	Good
Evie	F	20-30	Small private	3	Unqualified	Deputy Manager	10% (20)	High
Mark	M	50-60	Large private	10-20	6	Owner	9% (19)	High
Shelly	F	40-50	Home-based	10-20	6	Manager/owner	8% (17)	High
Audrey	F	50-60	Consultant	20 or more	6	Consultant	8% (16)	High
Sally	F	40-50	Small private	20 or more	4	Senior leader	8% (16)	Some
Niyati	F	30-40	Small private	10-20	6	Manager/owner	6% (12)	High
Shaima	F	30-40	Small private	10-20	6	Room leader	6% (12)	Good
Tammy	F	20-30	Small private	5-10	6	Room leader	6% (12)	Some
Tulip	F	20-30	Small private	2	3	Teacher	5% (11)	Some
Margaret	F	40-50	Small private	20 or more	7	Manager/owner	4% (9)	Contrived
Kelly	F	30-40	Voluntary pre-school	20 or more	3	Deputy Manager	3% (7)	Contrived
Mandy	F	30-40	Large private	4	5	Teacher	3% (6)	Some
Bernice	F	20-30	State school	5-10	4	Teaching assistant	2% (5)	Low

## **7.12 Appendix L – Roles of participants and common synonyms**

1. Owner: Also called CEO/Manager/Director - Depending on the size of the organisation this person could also be the manager and work in staff:children ratios. In larger organisations they are likely to be based in a head office and rarely have on person interactions with staff members let alone children. Whilst this person doesn't need to have any relevant qualifications, they usually would have at least a level 3 as they often have worked their way up through organisations and then taken the decision to operate their own setting.
2. Manager: Also called Headteacher/Leader – The most senior person on site in a setting, usually the named person with Ofsted and again often not in the staff:children ratios in their settings except for small private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) settings and with home-based childcare. This person must have at least a level 3 qualification.
3. Deputy Manager: Also called Deputy Leader – The next in charge after the manager and always in staff:children ratios in the setting, often also a room leader too and have some shared formal responsibility with the leader/manager/owner. This person will also most likely have at least a level 3 qualification.
4. Room Leader: Responsible for leading a room in the setting, typically for a specific age range of children. If this is the under 2 age range, they will need relevant experience with that age group and almost certainly will have a level 3 qualification. They will be in the staff:children ratios.
5. Teacher: Also called Nursery Nurse, Early Years practitioner, Nursery Practitioner, Level 3 – Generally qualified with a level 2 or 3 qualification, sometimes higher (particularly in school-based settings) and expected to play an important role in the planning and support of all children's development as part of the daily operations and will always be in staff:children ratios.
6. Teaching Assistant: Also called and Nursery Assistant – Often unqualified although not always. Support teachers who are more directly responsible for the children and do more preparation activities to support the children's learning. Depending on their age and experience their settings may not count them in ratios.

7. Consultant – works with a range of settings and individuals to support the development of their whole provision in a range of different ways.

## 7.13 Appendix M – Snapshot of Analysis

I started looking for elements of interest, linked directly to data that helped articulate the stories of my participants, all referenced to the right of this snapshot to help see representativeness of individuals. These grouped together to form many sub-themes that grouped together to form 14 minor themes and then 4 major themes. Other notable threads were identified too and displayed on the analytical map.

RQ	Occurrence in responses
What are individuals lived experiences of the purpose of ECEC?	60
What are individuals lived experiences of leadership in ECEC?	65
What are individuals lived experiences of leadership expertise in ECEC provision?	4

Other notable points threaded throughout:

- Social media (6 mentions)
- Contradictions (10 mentions)
- Misconceptions (31 mentions)
- Balancing act (10 mention)
- COVID (10 mentions)
- Activism (9 mentions)

Major theme/main RQ link (but there is elements of crossover) [themes?]	Minor theme (add number to indicate the weight behind each point) (do some demographic mapping too) [Patterns]	Sub-theme (add number to indicate the weight behind each point) (do some demographic mapping too) [categories?]	Element of interest (codes?)	Data	RQ
Turbulent realities for individuals and an important focus for leaders, that good leaders get right (all RQs)	The dilemma of professional confidence for leaders - does this relate to personnel?	Inspiring, nurturing and role modelling passion and creativity as a prerequisite to professional confidence	Going above and beyond	So every week we actually go out and even with COVID restrictions at the moment, we're still able to get out to the woods and the beach and stuff like that. We tend not to do anything that parents probably do their kids. So yesterday, we went to the park and we were doing bubbles in puddles. They were investigating the science of that and it was just magical, really to see them working it all out and pouring it and stamp on it and stuff like that. So it's kind of like the world's our oyster.	2
(123 from 15)	(47 from 14)	(14 from 6)	To keep informed and up to date with policy	So with the launch of the new development matters, and a new EYFS thing, I've been reading it or thinking, oh my goodness, I need to up my game. That challenges me, that drives me because I like to be quick to like to be doing the right thing for children. I want to make sure that parents that come here know that they're getting the best that they can get right now that that does have a bit of a you know what, I want to really see success of my little kiddies, you know, yeah, whatever that success looks like, you know, is different for each child.	2
			For providing children with opportunities	, because I need to know that my kids are equipped in that early years to aspire to be whatever they want to be. And I hope for the very, very best for all of them, you know, and it will look different for all of them. But, you know, I look at this little two year old I've got at the moment and oh my god, she blows me away every day. And I look at her and I think you know what, she could be a top consultant in our country. And that's what really makes me want to go deeper with them because I'm thinking if I don't build those links in our brain now, she might not have opportunities.	2
			For professional dialogue	And so we will debate and discuss if I've just researched something, or I've just read something or have been on a webinar. I kind of get really excited about it. So get that for breakfast the next morning. Yeah, quite good, fun and the same for them. So it's a real open dialogue. I will get stuff sent to it's mainly evening. Look what I found, and it's wonderful. And I really encourage that it's not because I want them to be working outside of work, but it's passion, I think Yeah. Which I have to say. I don't know many industries. I know loads of school teachers, and I don't see them getting as excited as we do in early years.	2

