The Policy-to-Practice Context of Male Practitioners in Early Childhood Education and Care within England

by

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Abstract

High-quality outcomes for children as well as the quality of the workforce, has become early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy priority. Although gender equality is a feature of social policy and the role of men in promoting it is recognised across the European Union, this has not translated into an increase in men's work with the youngest members of society.

Across Europe, men's participation in ECEC remains undeniably low. This mixed-methods case study aimed to explore the policy-to-practice context of men working with young children within ECEC in England. In so doing, it brought together structural, macro-level analysis of ECEC systems and policies, as well as the micro-level practices of men within the field, using surveys, élite and group interviews, life-history accounts and observations from a 'day in the life' of one male practitioner.

Participating men were of different ages, had different roles and responsibilities in ECEC and worked across private, voluntary and state provision. They tended to be well-qualified, occupying senior management positions and they were confident and largely satisfied in their caring role. However, they experienced discrimination, with suspicion of abuse from colleagues, employers and parents and were faced with a public who questioned their sexual orientation. Young trainees meanwhile faced pressure to fit in with peer group norms and experienced backlash as a result of their career choice.

The study concluded that there is a need to recognise the complexities and contradictions of gendered power relations and the particular challenges men face in their work with children. The study also concludes that the lack of connection between social and early education policy means that structural inequalities across the ECEC workforce persist. As such, in practice, the early construction of gender capital through the reinforcement of dominant gender stereotypes remains a central feature of the hidden curriculum.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis presents a mixed-method case study conducted by an early childhood researcher and educator that focused upon the policy-to-practice context of male practitioners working within early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings for children from birth to five years, in England.

Since 1997 wide-ranging social welfare policy initiatives have attempted to replace fragmented ECEC services with a better co-ordinated, delivered and inspected system for private, state and voluntary provision in England. Investing in ECEC has been influenced by a broader political agenda associated with increasing women's participation in the labour market (Baldock, Manning and Vickerstaff, 2007), the increase in service economy and parents' capacity to reconcile work and family responsibilities with more equity to be achieved for women, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2006, 2010).

As noted by the (OECD, 2006: 19), ECEC has now become a central issue for governments in many countries as economic and social changes have transformed traditional family and child-rearing patterns. Across the European Union (EU) countries vary significantly in their historical, socio-economic and cultural traditions and in their educational and pedagogical approaches that have led to distinct structures of ECEC.

There has also been a growing acknowledgement that access to quality care and education services offers young children, particularly those from poor and disadvantaged groups, "a good start in life" (OECD, 2006:12). The OECD emphasised the need to focus on recruitment, qualifications and ECEC work conditions that were deemed to be "key to quality services" (p. 17). The quality of ECEC services has been a prominent, global policy meme that has also become a central feature of

educational research; quality of services has been associated with staff qualifications as well as quality of training. For instance, the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project (EPPE) (Sylva *et al.,* 2004) conducted in Britain, concluded that an indicator of the overall quality of provision was the level of staff qualification. This triggered the decision to focus on increasing the number of graduates in the profession, which was supported by the introduction of the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) in 2005, now discontinued, and a Postgraduate General Certificate of Education (Early Years) in 2014.

In addition to a focus on quality, children's rights and needs to participate as young citizens have been increasingly recognised, United Nations (UN, 1989). However, of particular relevance to the present study is the proposal by some that, alongside career advancement, status and pay of ECEC services, lack of men in ECEC is considered a current professional issue across EU countries (Oberhuemer *et al.,* 2010). With this in mind, the next section will provide the rational for the study.

1.2 Rationale

It has been reported that between 1 and 2% of the current ECEC workforce in England is male (Nutbrown, 2012), a figure that has remained relatively unchanged for decades (see Cameron, Moss and Owen, 1999; Warin, 2006; Rolfe, 2006). This figure is also reflective of the participation of men within this field across Europe, with the highest percentage of men in ECEC in Denmark and Norway, both at approximately 10% and the lowest in countries including Austria where, for instance, 0.8% of those working in kindergartens are male (Oberhuemer *et al.,* 2010). A more localised view of male participation in ECEC settings in Europe reveals many settings within which men are entirely absent. As Oberhuemer *et al.* (2010) noted, in the Czech Republic, men were not permitted to enter the profession at all until the mid-1990s. In Portugal, the traditional roles of men and women within the home, labour market and society remain the same, with many mothers taking on the role of primary caregiver, whilst men participate in the labour market.

In 2006, the OECD referred to the need for strategies "to recruit and retain a well-qualified, diverse, mixed-gender workforce" (p.158) and this was followed in 2011 by the "pressing need to make a career in early childhood education and care sector more attractive to men in all European Union countries" (European Commission, 2011:7). In 2013, a strategy funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and managed by the Fatherhood Institute was introduced, in order to increase the number of men working in ECEC settings within four Local Authorities (LAs), with a target of 10%. Despite this, the work of men within ECEC provision has only recently received attention within educational research, with samples of men in the field often being small (Cameron, 2006).

A visit to Norway as an Early Childhood undergraduate student revealed a significant contrast to the English situation in the number of men who participated in ECEC of young children. Personal experience of working within one kindergarten alongside two male practitioners and one female practitioner also stimulated a wider consideration of men in preschool care and education with young children in England. This alerted the researcher to the impact of national policy on provision and the need to consider the relationship between policy and practice.

1.3 Analytical Framework

Within this study, policy was understood to emerge and operate within a trajectory that reflected specific contexts of policy-making and took the form of legislation, policy texts and guidance that specify the nature and organisation of ECEC within England. Legislation provides mandatory regulations that LAs must ensure are undertaken in order to cater for the children in their care. Legislation often informs policy and policy texts that outline how specific regulations should be adopted in practice. Similarly guidance provides practitioners with additional information and recommendations in their acquisition of the associated policy and legislation in practice.

The policy trajectory model of Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) was particularly useful to aid analysis of policy-making and policy interpretations as well as resultant practices and experiences. The

model was utilised not only to analyse policy but it also provided a framework within which research questions and research methods were generated and then mapped on to. The policy trajectory model was particularly distinctive in that it drew attention to educational policy processes and emphasised the significance of influences and control of policy texts and the recontextualisation of them within practice (Bowe *et al.*, 1992).

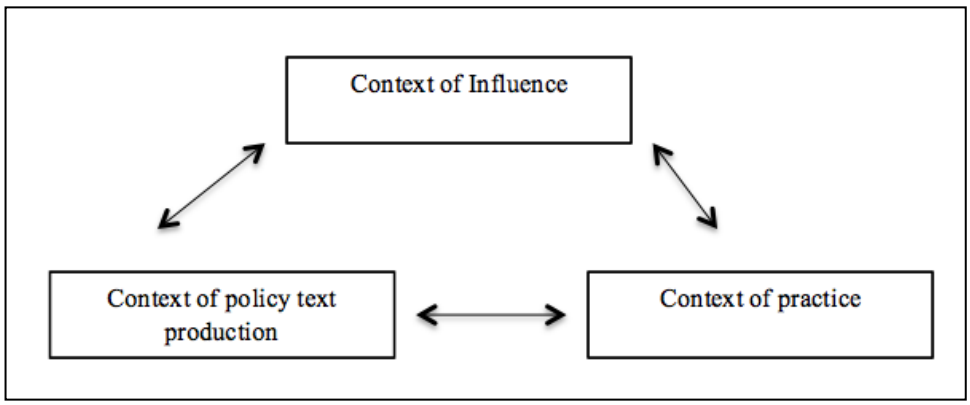


Figure 1 Contexts of policy making (Bowe et al., 1992:20)

Within the model, the *context of influence* is where policy is initiated and discourses are constructed. It is within this context that interested parties in and around political bodies, government agencies and legislative processes struggle to influence definitions, purposes and priorities (Bowe *et al.*, 1992; Jones, 2013: 2). Of particular relevance to this study were the dominant gender and inequality discourses that ultimately influence the nature, content and purpose of associated policy. The *context of policy text production* is where texts, reflective of policy discourses, are constructed for use. The production of the formal and informal social and ECEC policy texts reflect a compromise of views and influences on the policy formulations, just as the context of influence represents competing interests (Bowe *et al.*, 1992; Jones, 2013: 2). The *context of practice* is where policy is interpreted and enacted by ECEC practitioners. Struggles and tensions at the level of influence, represented by policy texts, are met with individual histories, world-views and attitudes surrounding the very concepts that policy discourses appear to shape.

In utilising a toolbox of key sociological concepts, as well as the policy trajectory model of Bowe *et al.* (1992), the researcher aimed to answer the following research questions.

1.4 Research questions

1. What is the policy-to-practice context of male professionals in ECEC?

2. How, if at all, does policy guidance influence the recruitment of men in ECEC?

3. What are the values and beliefs of a range of stakeholders with regards to the role of men in ECEC?

4. What are the reported practices and experiences of a range of male practitioners in ECEC?

5. What do male practitioners do within day-to-day interactions and transactions in ECEC?

1.5 Structure of the thesis

In order to answer the research questions, the thesis was divided into eleven chapters.

Chapter 1 has introduced the study. It has presented the context and rationale, the research questions, analytical framework of Bowe *et al.* (1992) and structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical influences underpinning the study, namely the sociological approach to the study of education. Chapter 2 also introduces the key concepts of *sociology of education*, *social class*, *gender* and *masculinities* and *policy*.

Chapter 3 reintroduces the reader to the analytical framework of Bowe *et al.* (1992) that provided a useful tool for policy analysis. The contexts of the framework have been utilised in order to present a review of literature including theoretical and empirical perspectives.

Chapter 4 introduces the methodology of the study including the inquiry paradigm, sampling strategy, efforts to overcome issues of reliability, validity and credibility as well as ethical considerations.

Chapter 5 focuses upon the three context of the policy trajectory model. The views of élites presented within this chapter, provide an insight into the context of influence, policy text production and practice within which male ECEC practitioners work.

Chapter 6 considers the findings of a group interview with five male trainees currently enrolled on a childcare course at a Midlands college. The interviews provided not only an insight in to the views of the next generation of practitioners, but also reflected wider discourses relating to the roles of men within society. In doing so, the interviews indicate the influence of policy on the recruitment of men into ECEC.

Chapter 7 presents the findings from an online survey that was completed by male practitioners in order to determine their values and beliefs regarding the role of men in the field as well as their own reported practices and experiences.

Chapter 8 presents the findings from life-history interviews with six male practitioners who had previously completed the online survey. Emergent themes from the online survey were explored in more detail within the interviews in order to provide an in-depth insight into related practices and experiences as well as values and beliefs relating to the role of men within ECEC.

Chapter 9 presents the findings from observations made in the form of field notes, video recordings and a non-participant time-sampling observation, as well as interviews with five children who interacted with the male practitioner on a daily basis and a questionnaire completed by colleagues. The findings provide a detailed insight into a typical ‘day in the life’ of a male ECEC practitioner.

Chapter 10 draws together the empirical findings in order to answer the research questions. Each of the research questions is answered in turn with reference made, where appropriate, to relevant literature and theory.

Chapter 11 provides a review of the research design; it considers the limitations of the study and the steps taken to address these. Implications and suggestions for further research are also provided.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the context within which men in ECEC are situated and set the scene for a more focused examination of key concepts and theories. The influences of gender, men and masculinities as well as social class and social policy (how social policy changes, develops and is delivered and enacted) will form the focus for Chapter 2.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Influences

2.1 Introduction

Chapter one has introduced the context of the study, provided the rationale as well as introducing the policy-trajectory model of Bowe *et al.* (1992) as a tool of policy analysis and as the framework onto which the research questions and data collection methods were placed. The present chapter aims to introduce the key concepts and theoretical influences that underpinned the study.

This study is located within the field of sociology of education and by which means, major topics are highlighted, namely gender, men and masculinities as well as social class and social policy, particularly in relation to the way that they are embedded in education organisations.

2.2 A sociology of education

These topics are central to the sociology of education and by placing them under the spotlight, an attempt will be made to adopt a theoretically-informed approach, whilst at the same time acknowledging, in line with Ball (2004: x), that sociology itself is "bounded and divided by its forms and styles of writing as it is by theories and methods". The sociology of education cannot therefore be viewed as an isolated discipline, encased within a single framework or approach, with prescribed analytical tools or theoretical viewpoints.

Ball (2004 cited by Race, 2006: 133) saw "development and discontinuities within the sociology of education" produced by varying patterns of interaction between education and other adjoining disciplines. This can be characterised by theoretical and methodological debate in which distinct fields of study have developed their own distinct 'discourse communities' that produce knowledge, determine who gets to speak and indeed who is heard (Bratlinger, 1997, Apple *et al.*, 2010: 2). An

influential figure has been Foucault (1981) who has investigated the conditions (the discourses) through which knowledge and ideas are created.

By the study of the discursive practices within institutional settings, such as clinics, prisons and asylums, he was able to reveal the history and operation of their power through the 'truth-claims' of some that dominate those of others. Foucault's (1991) ideas about the operation of power through knowledge and discourse are important to understanding the key topics introduced in this chapter. Foucault saw power produced and distributed through institutional ideas and practices. Here, discourses shift and multiple systems of knowledge make claims for truth (Youdell, 2010).

The way that policy discourses reinforce truth-claims, that represent social reality, will be developed in more depth below. Suffice it to say, for the purpose of this study, analytical tools and their theoretical bases have reworked the field of sociology of education (Apple *et al.,* 2010:2) that relates to making sense of social policy, unequal social roles, relationships and practices.

Through these changing theoretical bases and their related analytical tools, boundary-reworking has taken, and continues to take place at key 'turning points' or 'disputational moments' (Ball, 2004:3-8). As examples of such turning points, Ball drew attention to:

- opposition between positivist and interpretivist research traditions;
- feminist approaches to understanding the nature of gender and the ideology of patriarchy and social order;
- the postmodernist turn that challenges 'modernist' sociology with its unexamined assumptions and practices.

In different ways, each of these 'turns' has a relevance for Ball's own work and equally for this study. For example, within these 'moments', critiques of 'oppression' related to:

- social class;

- gender inequality; as well as
- public policy as it is contested, interpreted, reworked and enacted in a range of practice contexts, all have resonance.

That said, although Ball has shown a reluctance to present too fixed a position in relation to substantive or methodological theory, his approach to policy sociology is one that aligns closely with post-structuralist thinking of such writers as Foucault (1981) and Derrida (see Codd, 1988) who may be characterised as offering a way of studying how knowledge is produced by taking into consideration its underlying biases and misinterpretations. The post-structural approach argues that in order to understand a cultural product (such as a text), it is important to explore both the product itself and the systems (or structures) of knowledge from which it emerged. Acknowledgement of the impossibility of fully escaping these structures leads to a more fundamental critical analysis of sociology. Hence Apple *et al.* (2010:4) have preferred to adopt a more eclectic and integrationalist approach to the unresolved "cross-play of tensions and disputes" within the field in which critical analysis uncovers the contradictions in the current political framework. It was through these complex cross-currents that the researcher had to steer the current study.

2.3 Social class

Fundamental to sociology and indeed to this study has been the exploration of relationships between the life chances of the individual in the wider social context. Social class has been a central concept in this effort and Bourdieu's view of social class and reproduction has been particularly illuminating. In this respect, Bourdieu (1986a) reintroduced the notion of capital that he regarded as accumulated labour in a material sense and embodied form. This suggested to him a structure of different types of capital, representing inherent structures or constraints that determined chances of success in the social world. From this has emerged the notion that material forms of economic capital can also present in immaterial form as cultural or social capital. Accordingly, capital presents itself in three main forms: as *economic capital*, convertible immediately into money or

property; as *cultural capital*, which embodies cultural or artistic practices and can be embodied for instance in specific educational qualifications; and as *social capital*, relating to mutual acquaintance and recognition.

As an extension of Bourdieu's (1986a) forms of capital, Ashall (2004) referred to the notion of *gender capital* that, gained during early childhood, has implications and repercussions for later life. Specifically, as the gender capital of men and women is based upon a social division/opposition, Ashall indicated that men were more likely to convert their gender capital into the other forms of capital (ultimately economic). It was suggested that women might utilise their capital when making career decisions, which goes some way to explaining why they may pursue careers that are in line with socially accepted skills.

Whilst at first sight, these ideas of class and capital may not appear to have much direct applicability to men in ECEC, there is a significant feminist literature that has focused on 'learning to labour' by working-class girls' early career choices in caring work. This has focused in particular on structures of class and gender in further education training and care work (for example, Bates, 1990, 1991,1994; Colley, 2003 a and b; 2006; Skeggs, 1988). After leaving school with few qualifications and rejected for their preferred option, childcare, Bates (1991) found that working-class girls were trained in 'care for the elderly'. Colley (2006) drew attention to the fact that most of such girls had higher career aspirations to become nurses or teachers but poor examination performance meant that aspirations had to be lowered. Bates (1991) and Colley (2006) highlighted subtle class distinctions to be made between those 'nice' upper working-class girls who became nursery nurse students, being slightly higher achievers than the 'care for the elderly' group, many of whom had been rejected for childcare. At the same time, the girls themselves were aware of those they regarded as less advantaged 'rough' care girls.

Colley (2006) noted a dual social and cultural process in which the girls were first recruited and then socialised for this particular occupational role. They brought to the training a classed and gendered predisposition, whilst their training culture and experience required further adjustments calling for a caring, yet controlled disposition. Skeggs (1988) also studied working-class girls in further-education general care courses. They too brought classed and gendered predispositions to the emotional demands of the work placements they experienced that, in turn, required further modification to achieve the appropriate disposition. In exploring the learning experiences of her group of trainee nursery nurses, Colley (2003 a and b; 2006) drew on theories of Reay's (2000) work on emotional capital. Reay, also influenced by the work of Bourdieu, had highlighted the dual notion of disposition and predisposition (Bourdieu, 1986b). *Habitus* incorporates the disposition of individual's personal feelings and choices and the predisposition derived from gender and class. Adapting the notion of habitus, Colley *et al.* (2003c) developed the idea of *vocational habitus* as a means to indicate the way vocational culture represented the students' idealised and realised dispositions, merged in order for them to become the 'right' kind of person for the job. In utilising this concept, Vincent and Braun (2013:765) explored the acquisition of vocational habitus by forty-two students enrolled on Level 2 and 3 childcare courses in the UK. Whilst students identified the 'right person for the job' as someone who could be 'warm' and 'positive', Vincent and Braun concluded that the ECEC worker was most likely to be a working class woman with limited access to employment. Although the participants reported rewarding experiences in their placements within ECEC settings, the authors emphasised the poor employment conditions surrounding work within this field (also see Osgood, 2012).

Reay (2000) drew on Bourdieu's forms of capital (economic, cultural and social) in order to analyse feelings and emotional involvement of mothers from different classes in their children's education. To do this, she appropriated Nowotny's (1981) extension of Bourdieu's forms of capital to include *emotional capital*. From this perspective, emotions may be regarded as resources to deploy, though

as Hochschild (1983) pointed out in a patriarchal society, women may have limited access to other forms of capital. Colley's nursery nurses brought habitus to their training that she regarded as necessary, but not enough. They had to bring to bear not only existing dispositions and predisposition but also to cultivate further resources (emotional capital) facilitated by the vocational culture in which they trained in order to develop the appropriate emotional engagement.

Whilst Colley (2003 a and b; 2006) acknowledged one boy among her nursery nurse trainees and put this down to local recruitment strategies, she stressed that lack of male recruits reflected the fact that childcare in England is a heavily gender-stereotyped occupation with the vast majority of nursery nurses being female. This serves as a reminder of the barriers that male entrants face in training for an overwhelmingly feminised job, in the broader context of work that is low-status and low-paid. A review of girls' career choices by Francis (2002) also showed a convergence of class and gender in social learning which favours 'domestic' identities and 'feminine' caring work that further accentuate the constraints that young men face who choose to train for work in care.

2.4 Men in the workforce

Just as the notion of the *right* person for the job implies particular characteristics that are aligned with particular occupations, Alvesson and Billing (2009: 70) advised that occupations too are surrounded by and associated with broader meanings that lead to specific ideas about what the work involves and who would be most suitable for it (Cockburn, 1991; Burris 1996). Interestingly, as concern regarding boys' underachievement has increased, Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, 2008), as well as a suggestion that more often than girls, they are identified as having special educational needs, attention has turned to the feminisation of education as the possible culprit (Shaw, 1995; Penn and McQuail, 1996). In fact, in 2005, the OECD (2005: 140) advised that schooling was indeed becoming increasingly feminised.

Theorising of class, gender and emotional labour provides few clues as to what directs working-class men towards a female-dominated occupation that is low-paid and low-status and to enter a socially constructed and gendered role of nurturing and caring for young children. It points however to the strength of social barriers associated with making such a career choice that such young men encounter.

In detailing the experiences of men within female-dominated occupations (namely primary school teaching, flight attendant, librarian-ship and nursing), Simpson (2005: 363-4) drew upon Williams and Villemez's (1993) typology of men within these occupations. Men were referred to as 'seekers', meaning those who deliberately sought work within as female-dominated occupation, 'finders' who enter into these occupations having initially intended on entering more traditional male jobs, as well as 'settlers' who enter these fields as a result of dissatisfaction with previous jobs. The last of these is similar to the 'rethought' careers detailed by Cameron *et al.* (1999).

In consideration of Kanter's (1977) research on women in male-dominated occupations, within which differences between male and female workers were exaggerated, Holter (2005:25) drew attention in social theory to distinctions to be made between male dominance, specifically, men's use of gender-power and patriarchy (societal and social structures of oppression) in order to explore a structural gender equality/inequality perspective. He noted that historical changes in forms of patriarchy have led over time to a current decrease in discrimination, particularly in contexts such as the United Kingdom (UK) that have equality legislation though still with 'hidden' power structures. Thus, whilst a minority of men at the top may still benefit from patriarchal privileges, non-privileged men seek to compensate by emulating their dominant gendered behaviour. Applied to men's position in female-associated work, Holter identified a 'hegemonic femininity' where women actively create gender segregation and turn men into 'stereotypical (male) representatives'.

Men, meanwhile may ‘distance’ themselves from feminine standards yet enjoy ‘role freedom’ to take on caregiving activities and express feeling (Holter, 2005: 25).

Alternatively, they may adopt the same overall pattern of dominance, reflected in the ‘glass escalator mechanisms’ that lead men up through the work hierarchy but leave women to shatter the glass ceiling (Williams, 1995, 2000). As Snyder (2008) pointed out, men who enter occupations that have traditionally been associated with women, are likely to receive higher salaries and experience career progression earlier than their female colleagues and in doing so, bring their gender privilege with them (also see Aspinwall and Drummon, 1989).

Overall, taking into account variation *within* genders, a mixed picture emerges. Links between masculinity and structural inequality are unclear. Even where national policies concerning gender equality are in force, inequalities such as wage-gap and male dominance in business management continue and issues of class merge into matters of gender.

2.5 Masculinising practices

So far, this chapter has emphasised the difficulty in separating class from gender in analyses of the emotional labour of childcare. Exploration of gender has to be located within the broader context of debate by feminist sociologists who have pointed to a long history of absence of women in the sociology of education and, as Ball (2004) has noted, the more serious questioning about the nature of gender and social identity.

Early literature drew attention to gender stereotyping in schools and the reproduction of traditional demarcations between masculinity and femininity through the curriculum and classroom practices. Life-history and ethnographic research uncovered multiple and complex masculinities (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Survey research in Norway (Holter, 2005) and the UK (O’Donnell and Sharpe, 2000) has exposed the diversity of men’s life patterns within the gender system. The concept of gender as a social construction in feminist theory, that “masculinity and femininity are loosely defined,

historically variable, and interrelated social ascriptions to persons with certain kinds of bodies" (Gardiner 2005: 35) has been central to the debate for at least the last twenty years.

Social structure as a context for the formation of particular masculinities and femininities has been emphasised (Kimmel *et al.,* 2005). More recently, notions of female 'oppression' and inequality have become subsumed under the broader concept of diversity alongside race, and disability that is characteristic of postmodern theorising (Blackmore, 2010). Gardiner (2005:45) however has emphasised that intersectional and multicultural feminist theories have retained gender as a central element in complex and shifting social hierarchies around the world. Poststructural feminists such as Butler (1993) have stressed gender as fluid, negotiable, created and recreated through repeated performance and neither static nor innate. From the men and masculinities' perspective, there has been some acknowledgement of masculinities as constructed within specific discourses but overall poststructuralist thinking has been less prominent.

As a review of O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000: 39) pointed out, however, no assumption can be made that masculinity and patriarchy, ethnicity or class is necessarily the main influence in shaping youth culture. Research has documented the emergence of new forms of masculinities, dominant and resistant, in the educational institutions in which they arise. Much attention has been devoted to establishing why working-class boys achieved less academic and career success in comparison to boys of middle-class origin. Emphasis in the literature was placed on the social construction of youthful masculinities in peer-group sub-cultures as an important influence, among other things, on attitudes to education as a classic study of Willis, (1977: 29) revealed. In an attempt to establish and maintain dominant forms of male identity and escape from the restraints of school, participants or 'lads' in Willis's study engaged in a number of behaviours including 'piss-taking', 'dossing' and 'having a laff'. These practices were echoed with adult males in Collinson's study (1988:197), of men in a lorry-making factory, workers were observed to swear, be "dismissive of women and

retain their domestic authority" and hence establish and maintain their masculine working class identity.

Methodologies of this time were predominantly qualitative and focused on participant classroom observation. The potential implications of relationships between class and ethnicity, peer group and educational failure for young people's school-to-work transitions however were illuminating. Sub-cultural labelling theory suggested that groups of people of similar structural positions formed deviant sub-cultures that, over time, adopted deviant norms and values.

Brown (1987) was critical of Willis's polarised account of working-class boys and suggested that the majority of 'ordinary' boys and girls were more likely to display 'getting-by' behaviour than seek for excitement or aggression. He characterised working-class boys in three ways: as low-achievers 'getting in' to remedial educational groups, 'getting on' (that is, being 'ordinary') or 'getting out' (becoming the 'swots'). Brown's differential analysis suggested that working-class boys might construct a variety of masculine identities, the 'macho' being just one. For Holter (2005) even if theories of masculinities are important for understanding the gender system, the relationship between types of masculinity and degrees of inequality experienced is much more complex.

Mac an Ghaill (1988; 1994) also explored aspects of the contribution of schooling to the construction of masculine gender and sexual identities, ethnicity and class. His identification of 'modes' of masculinity among working-class youths in his study presented a more nuanced account. The modes of masculinity were the 'macho lads' who related school work to effeminacy, the 'academic achievers' who related academic achievement with increased opportunities and the 'new enterprisers' who valued work experience opportunities and held interests in technology and business studies - and one mode among middle-class lads – the 'real Englishmen' who considered themselves as superior to their fellow students. Whilst he placed strong emphasis on the effect of

ethnicity in the formation of black masculinities, attributing behaviour of the 'rasta-heads' and 'warriors' to labelling and their response to this, he recognised them as 'multi-dimensional social subjects' (Mac an Ghaill, 1996:1).

In this regard, Morrell (2005) highlighted black masculine identity and ethnicity in complex interaction with state institutions, historical and racial discourses. Black boys as a group in British schooling may choose subordinate masculinities that recognise their exclusion from hegemonic masculine power (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Mac an Ghaill also drew particular attention to a crisis of white working-class masculinity for students of the time who either did not want or could not find traditional working-class jobs and his categories, as noted by O'Donnell and Sharpe, more satisfactorily represented the changing educational and vocational aspirations of students through a period of major social and economic change in the last decades of the last millennium.

A survey conducted by O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000) also suggested that ethnicity could play as strong a role, or stronger in the case of African-Caribbean and Asian boys, in the construction of masculinities since the relationship between class and masculinities may have been weakening through post-war immigration. They also pointed out that young people behaved differently in school, in the home and in the space between home and school. Interestingly, whilst a range of masculine orientations have been available to young men, they concluded that many young men still had a desire to dominate and that 'new man' attitudes drawn from gender equality policies were likely to be combined with patriarchal and sexist attitudes and behaviour. This also harks back to Willis's classic study.

2.6 Analyses of gender

In line with Foucault's (1977) 'régime of truth', Walkerdine (1981) and Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) considered the régime of truth in relation to gender identity that is taken to be static and fixed across time and space (and therefore continuously present within the early-years setting). In

viewing men in childcare through this lens, it is possible to understand how historical images of men that have positioned them within the public sphere may be embedded within education discourses that maintain patriarchal practices.

Continuing with poststructural analyses, Davies (1989:229) considered the unitary person as individual male (or female) less as a fixed product of a social construction process than as a shifting personal identity depending on the different discursive practices in which he or she participated. Production of the self from this perspective involved:

- learning social categories (such as male/female);
- participating in discursive practices that attribute meaning to those categories;
- positioning of the self in terms of those categories and their elaborations; and
- developing a personal identity from the perspective of the adopted position that involves emotional commitment to that position and adherence to a moral code attached to belonging.

This perspective offered some explanatory power to the vocational choices made by Colley's (2006) nursery nurses and also to the variety of male orientations that O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000) identified. Female characters may choose to take up feminised and gendered work in the nursery. Meanwhile, male characters may equally choose *not* to take up dominant forms of masculinity and learn the emotional value of care work that involve them in multiple and contradictory positionings.

Davies (1989) stated that whilst the majority of teachers believed that there should be equitable treatment of the sexes, what this meant in practice might be open to interpretation. Davies (1997) later advised that even when teachers and practitioners attempted to unsettle traditional perceptions of gender (for instance, in drawing upon critical literacy), this might not be sufficiently challenged.

Teachers may try to test the boundaries of what will be acknowledged as masculine or feminine in the interests of non-sexist practices though, as Davies (1989) and Lowe (1998) have pointed out,

they must also understand that the children in their charge should have access to many forms of discursive practice. For Davies and Banks (1995: 67) children must be "liberated from the burden of the unitary self and the limiting story lines that some of them are caught up in".

However, recognising the possibility of refusing that positioning or discursive practice depends upon both having opportunities to articulate their own ideas that do not match the teacher's ideas and being offered alternatives to the discourse the teacher is using. This will equally be the case for males intending to embark on training as nursery nurses or ECEC teachers.

Butler also drew on poststructural strands in sociology of education in order to generate new ways of thinking about gender in educational institutions. Like Davies, she doubted the notion of a fixed identity or unitary subject and like Davies, she recognised the limits and constraints of who this subject might be. Notions of *performativity, subjectivation* and *intelligibility* play a significant part in Butler's (1993:107) work and hold a significant place in this thesis in relation to preschool children as well as male ECEC workers.

Discursive *performativity* in simple terms "produces that which it names" (Butler, 1993: 13). To Butler attributions such as 'boy', 'girl' or 'man' are performative and to Thorne (1993: 3) these offer a 'verbal marking of gender'. By appearing to be descriptive, they suggest a prior existence and knowledge of gender, creating a performative effect of gender categorisation. The idea of performatives has been used to make sense of the way discourses of gender, sexuality, social class or ability running through schools or colleges might operate as performatives. Just as Colley's (2006) nursery nurses described themselves as 'nice' girls and distinguished themselves from 'rough' girls with even fewer qualifications that meant the 'rough' were designated as carers for the elderly rather than childcare workers. This reveals how notions of childcare are constituted and regulated through everyday performative practices, in this case, of the young women themselves.

As noted earlier, however, in practice a range of interrelated performatives may be involved, including gender, class and ability that come together in the discursive practices of ECEC workers.

Subjectivation is particularly useful in that it helps us to understand the ways and processes of becoming a subject such as a 'boy' (Butler, 1993). This 'performative constitution of gender' (Youdell, 2006: 43), in this case, calling a boy a 'boy' is successful in creating the subject it names because the meaning is based upon prior knowledge (discourses) of what it means to be a 'boy'. Yet for 'boy' to retain meaning, repetition is required (Butler, 1990), hence gender performatives must be repeated and reproduced again and again. It is only when discourse makes sense within specific contexts (such as ECEC) that the performatives work and that meaning is retained. In creating the subject it names, gender performatives also restrict what those subjects might be. For instance, the 'boy' becomes a subject as a result of gender discourses and in turn, the boy recognises the particular codes or rules of being a 'boy', referred to by Pollack (1998) as the 'boy code' and by Kimmel (2008) as the 'guy code'.

The notion of *intelligibility* helps understanding of the way performative constitutions are constrained or make sense. Butler (1997) stressed that discursive processes of subjectivation and discursive performatives involved have to be recognisable in the situations in which they are deployed. Nursery nurse girls who are 'nice', for instance, came from nice homes and supportive parents. They regarded themselves as different from those from a totally different background, one-parent families who are "really rough…different places and have different upbringings" (Colley, 2003b: 8) that were instantly recognisable to other students. This demonstrates how inequalities are produced through performative practices of male and female students and raises questions about whether and how such practices might be resisted or challenged by ECEC staff. Moreover, it raises interesting questions about the way men in training in childcare must be positioning themselves in ways that distinguish them from those who opt for 'macho' occupations.

Educational organisations and gender

Blackmore (2010:309) summed up the importance of the gender role of educational institutions as a primary institution of individual socialisation and collective mobility and social change, whilst at the same time serving to maintain social and economic reproduction. This function will maintain from the pre-school stage, through formal education and into post-compulsory education:

> Understanding organisations as contested cultures and products of historical legacy of male heterosexual privilege helps understanding of the failure of imposed organisational reforms, including gender equity.

In relation to organisational cultures, Kessler *et al.* (1985:42) spoke of the 'gender régime' used to refer to the "pattern of practices that constructs various kinds of masculinity and femininity among staff and students, orders them in terms of prestige and power, and constructs a sexual division of labour within the institution". By reinforcing the gender order of society, hegemonic masculinities of working class 'macho lads' as well as 'real Englishmen' position other 'caring' masculinities as weaker and in relation to femininities.

2.7 Policy

Ball (2004) has argued that policy analysis requires a toolbox of diverse concepts and theories. In line with his own acknowledged theoretical uncertainties, Ball has two very different conceptualisations of policy and hence the need to investigate: policy as *text* and policy as *discourse*.

First policy as text, under the influence of literary theory, required 'deconstruction' in order to expose the instability of meaning, which the text tries to hide (Derrida, 1967). It takes the reader into other aspects of meaning construction by revealing how the text is internally conflicted and thus, far from definite in meaning. From this perspective, Ball saw policy as representing the struggles, compromises, multiple interpretations and reinterpretation since any text will have a plurality of readers and hence readings that will change and be contested. In line with Derrida's

view, texts are described as incomplete and the product of compromise at various points, subject to micro-politics of legislative formulation and parliamentary process. They represent different actors and different interest groups each with different histories. Significant for this study, policy is embedded in existing patterns of inequality and as Ball (1993:12) noted although it may change them, it is also "affected, inflected and deflected by them".

Nevertheless, policies such as those surrounding ECEC are textual interventions and pose problems to stakeholders and practitioners that must be resolved in context. Education policy must be acted upon and translated into practice with account taken of other existing policies and their prior enactment. Indeed policy texts change things or they may stay the same (Ball, 2006). Hence, the context in which the policy is received influences the nature of change that may be rather different from policy-authors' intentions.

In viewing policy as discourse, related to power/knowledge and truth claims, that determine who gets to speak, practitioners encounter a variety of contradictory discourses, yet there is also a need to recognise the existence of dominant discourses. The implications of this for critical exploration of policy related to men in ECEC are that a cross-sectional level of analysis will be required that takes account of policy formulation, text production and contexts of practice as well as potential struggle and compromise at each level. It will also require acknowledgement that the definition of policy adopted will encompass both formal and legislated policy (big-P policy) and formulation of little-p policy. Not all policy needs to be legislated for, for instance, revised proposals may lead directly to guidelines for LAs, voluntary sector and other agencies where many little-p policies are formed and implemented within local sites and institutions. Policy as used in this study will therefore be taken as a process, interactive and shifting, in a variety of arenas.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced a number of key concepts and theories. There is a large and interesting body of theory, conceptualisations and empirical research that helps to illuminate the role and constructions of men and masculinities. This varies across disciplines and employs a variety of methodologies and methods. Gender research initially addressed questions by women about women. In so doing, roles and positions of men were made visible and problematised. Connecting wider areas of society and the role of powerful societal institutions to the individual and groups of social actors was then required to extend research on direct and indirect structural inequality. Similarly education policy analysis requires the bringing together of macro-level investigation of the education system as well as micro-level analysis that encompasses people's perception and experience (Ozga, 1990). Accordingly the next chapter will move forward to a more detailed analysis of the policy-to-practice context of men in childcare.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

It is difficult to consider men in childcare without wider acknowledgement of Western masculinities that are located within a social theory of gender (the focus of chapter 2) on the one hand, and in the context of political expression and political strategies related to gender equality, on the other (that this chapter will address). It is the purpose of this chapter to provide a full account of gender as a social structure as applied to men's role in childcare, using the framework of Bowe *et al.* (1992) as a structure and tool of analysis. As Connell (2002) has noted, however, large-scale institutions such as the state, its corporations and institutions are gendered and thus reflect a structure of relationships that interconnect gender régimes of home, school and workplace. This is the context in which the lives of men in childcare are situated, in which their masculinities are constructed and enacted. They are also shaped by differences such as age, race and class.

It is also difficult to consider the role and processes of men in childcare without recognition of the pre-school institutions in which they are enmeshed and the wider educational system. In England and other parts of Europe such as Finland and Germany there are state policies concerning gender equalities, even though a variety of gender inequalities continue in the wage gap and men's domination of leadership roles.

Of particular relevance to this chapter and to inequality in English education is Holter's (2005) structural inequality perspective that focuses on overall discrimination or inequality in society and some of its causes that may be hidden. A structural inequality perspective treats gender both as an agent of social differentiation and as a form of social stratification; it draws distinctions and constructs hierarchies between men and women. From this perspective inequality is a matter of society and men's and women's *role* in society, not men and women themselves (Holter, 2005).

Changing forms of patriarchy or gender-unequal societal structures create certain masculinities and in doing so, highlight the ways that power becomes linked to them.

Holter (2005) argued that men at the top of the social hierarchy with economic or political privilege benefit from patriarchal privileges. Concepts of 'compensation' and 'emulation' were proposed whereby non-privileged men may emulate gendered behaviour of dominant men. Others may reject patriarchy to adopt 'fratriarchy' or more friendly 'brotherly' ways of behaving. In other words, gender is formed by an adaptation or even a response to power structures. Holter's suggestion that gender has two dimensions: a system of meaning and a structure of power, indicates a need for more context- and process-orientated research approaches to analyse dynamics of gender equality and men in potentially more caregiving roles. The policy trajectory model of Bowe *et al.* (1992) was thus particularly suitable as a tool of analysis within the present study of men in low-status work such as childcare and provides the structure for this chapter.

3.2 The Policy Trajectory Model

The present chapter will examine key policy ideas, as influenced by international and national policy, that are yet to be translated into policy texts. It will consider the roles of men in the labour market and more specifically, focus upon the policy context of men in society and men who work with young children in ECEC provision. Within this study, male ECEC professionals were considered and their practice located within multiple, nested contexts that are driven by 'arenas of influence' (Bowe *et al.,* 1992) such as ideologies, political motivations and social attitudes. The notion of policy trajectories was particularly useful to aid the analysis of policy-making and policy interpretation as well as resultant behaviours and practices. According to Bowe *et al.* (1992) policy can be understood within three contexts: context of influence, policy text production and of practice as outlined in Chapter 1.

The cycle (Figure 2) should be read from the context of influence and then anti-clockwise. This is not to suggest that there is an end-point. Instead, the cycle is reflective of an ongoing process.

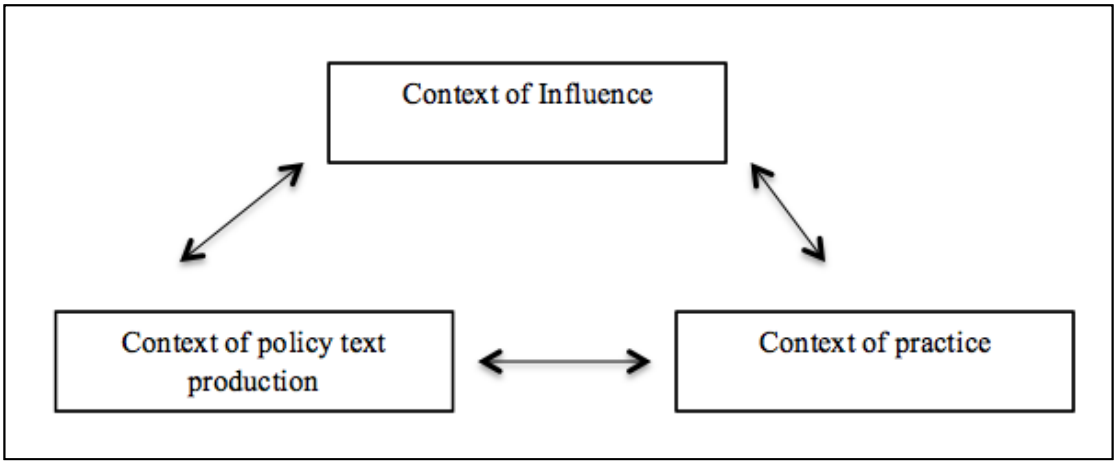


Figure 2 Policy trajectory model of Bowe et al. (1992:20)

In order to examine the context within which male practitioners currently work, key themes will now be examined within each of the three areas of the policy cycle. Specifically:

- the *context of influence* will focus upon macro-level influences, including discourses of gender and social inequality within society as well as social policy influence;

- the *context of policy text production* will examine policy texts that have directly referred to social inequality including gender, race and class and specific guidance from 2011 on the role of men in the education and care of young children within formal provision;

- the *context of practice* will explore empirical research from 1999 to 2014 relating to male practitioners within ECEC within England, Europe and beyond Europe.

i) Context of influence

Gender equality

In terms of structural inequalities in England, Ball (2013) has argued that it is only in the last forty years that gender and education has been regarded as a policy issue. Until the 1960s, differences in

educational provision, opportunity and attainment were regarded as unproblematic. The bringing in of the *Equal Pay Act* (Department for Employment, 1970), the *Sex Discrimination Act* (Department for Employment, 1975) and the creation of an *Equal Opportunities Commission* were indicative of a changing policy climate and a recognition that differences in educational opportunity between the sexes were not 'natural' or a mere reflection of future roles in the home and workplace. In contrast to the increasing awareness of inequalities between the sexes, the introduction of the *Education Reform Act* (Department for Education and Science, 1988) saw strands of inequality, specifically social class, disappear off the political and policy agenda.

Ball (2013) drew attention to the fact that many policy changes that occurred during the 1970s resulted from grassroots policy change, that is, small 'p' as much as big 'P' national policy in response to poor performance of girls at secondary school level and ethnic minority students. This was manifested at the local community and pressure-group level in schools' development of anti-racist and anti-sexist programmes and strategies.

The women's movement in the 1970s reflected a bottom-up cycle of influence that sought to promote women's participation in the labour market, the echoes of which are visible within policies that focus on gender equality in education. Though through the late 1980s and 1990s initiatives remained local and 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down' national policy (Ball, 2013). Riddell and Salisbury (2000) have noted that formal recognition came from the influence of Europe. Of particular relevance are the developments across Europe with regards to men's participation in gender equality efforts.

Over the last twenty years there has been widespread recognition across the EU regarding men and the promotion of gender equality that has, for example, taken the form of men's anti-violence activism since the 1970s (as initiated by feminist efforts during this time) and characterised by a raft of global campaigns instigated and supported by men. In addition, the European Commission

between 2000 and 2003 provided funding for an EU Network on Men in Europe, which led to a surge in critical research on men and masculinities. A *Men in Equality* EU conference in Sweden during 2001 was the first of its kind to emphasise a focus on men in any gender equality efforts. Similarly in 2006, a *'Conference on Men and Gender Equalities: Towards Progressive Policies'* took place in Finland, once again with the aim of emphasising a need to recognise that gender equality efforts were relevant to women *and* men. These efforts were further supported by the release of *'Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men 2006-2010'* by the European Commission (2006) that supported the earlier *'Towards a Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality 2001-2005'* (European Commission, 2000). The *2006-2010 Roadmap* introduced six priority areas including reconciliation of private and professional life, promotion of gender equality outside the EU, equal representation of men and women within decision-making, economic independence for men and women, eradication of gender-based violence and focus on eliminating gender stereotypes within education, training and the media (European Commission, 2006). Whilst a recommendation was made to explore non-traditional career options, 'women' were specified as the target of this as women, rather than men were understood to occupy low-status roles within the labour market.

Most recently, the *'Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015'* was released with a focus on women's participation in the labour market (European Commission, 2010). This was followed in 2012 by *'The Role of Men in Gender Equality: European Strategies and Insights'* (Belghiti-Mahut *et al.,* 2012) which was based upon research conducted across thirty-one countries during 2011-2012 as part of the *European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity*. Key themes of the research included men's participation in gender equality, domestic and work responsibilities as well as gender segregation in education.

Critical research conducted across Europe has illuminated varying forms of masculinity and identified a number of significant patterns relating to home and work, men's occupational advantage, men's violence as well as their health (see Pringle, 1998). The participation of men in the private sphere, in terms of childcare and domestic responsibilities, has gained greater political attention for instance in the allocation of paternity leave, as fathers' unique contributions to children's learning and development have been emphasised (Marsiglio and Pleck, 2005).

In terms of education, gendered patterns of achievement were particularly exposed with the introduction of school league tables in the 1990s. Gaps between groups have remained and, as noted by Gillborn and Mirza (2000), the gender inequality gap was significantly smaller than inequalities of attainment related to ethnic origin and social class. Data gathered from the *Progress in International Reading in Literacy Study* (OECD, 2011) and OECD *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) (2014) also indicated that girls were progressing particularly in mathematics and were outperforming boys in literacy. The OECD PISA study has specifically referred to the influence of the social and economic conditions of the family in predicting outcomes for these particular subject areas.

What began as a problem of under-achievement of girls became a problem of under-achievement of boys, a situation referred to by Kimmel (2000) as a false opposition between the sexes. Moreover, Raphael Reed (1999) warned that the language of 'boys' underachievement' could in itself reproduce the gender inequality that it served to highlight. Nonetheless, concern regarding boys' underachievement has triggered increased focus within central Government on gender, reflected for instance with the launch of the DfES *'Gender and achievement'* website and funding made available from the *Best Practice Scholarship Scheme Schools* to find solutions to boys' underachievement. Gender then, was being associated with achievement. Yet, as Hammersley

(2001) warned, any attempt to make generalisations regarding perceived gender-gaps in achievement have the potential to be misleading.

It could be argued that in fact the most significant differences in educational achievement can be seen *amongst* boys as opposed to between boys and girls with greater attention needing to be paid to the influence of variables such as ethnicity and social class.

For more than two decades, Steve Strand has been investigating complex interrelationships of social class, ethnic origin and gender in relation to patterns of educational performance across the formal school years. More recently, Strand's (2012) longitudinal study of student achievement that controlled for socio-economic and a range of contextual variables such as parental education, home-ownership, single-parent household and entitlement to free school meals revealed under-achievement of Black Caribbean students and raised questions of school-level production of such a gap. Suffice it to say that despite significant problems of under-achievement, as Ball (2013: 191) noted, "national policies for 'race' and gender equality and for equal opportunities have been few".

Men and masculinities in society

When educational or academic capital is converted into jobs, whatever level of qualification or class of degree female graduates achieve, males with equivalent qualifications earn more and occupy the powerful positions in the job hierarchy (Arnot and Phipps, 2003; Ball, 2013). As 'class agents' (Morgan 2005:168), reflecting men's central involvement in class practices and the gendered nature of class, men have been located in the highest positions within economic and political organisations (Kimmel *et al.,* 2005). Accordingly, occupations traditionally associated with men have been viewed as more dominant and of higher status. The persistent ideology of men as 'providers' has further helped to maintain the dominant construction of men and masculine identity. As Adams and Coltrane (2005) indicated, domestic labour within the home could be viewed as an example of actively doing gender. Hence the cultural ideal of separate spheres that is, the gendered division of

domestic labour has maintained the positioning of men and women within public and private arenas. Having said this, the decreasing availability of manufacturing jobs that often require few qualifications and decline in industrial cities in England, has left fewer career possibilities for young men who leave school with minimal qualifications.

In addition to concerns of underachievement, a number of problem behaviours including sexual activity, aggression, use of drugs and school suspension have become associated with traditional masculine ideologies and young boys (Frosh *et al.,* 2002). Boys and men who attempt to challenge expectations and norms of masculinity, according to Hanlon (2012: 130), face the risk of being considered as 'unmanly'. Similarly, Epstein (1998) considered boys' own constructions of masculinity and concluded that educational achievement was associated with being a 'sissy'. This was echoed by participants in a study by Francis (2000: 99) conducted in three inner city secondary schools in London. Boys who were considered as hard-working were reportedly unpopular as "they're not sort of one of the lads". There was a sense in which participants were actively strengthening the collective practices of masculinity and thus reinforcing masculine personality ideals in order to maintain a 'boy code' (Pollack, 1998). In abiding by the 'boy code' Thornton (1997) advised that boys were to be knowledgeable about peer-group norms including awareness of appropriate discussion subjects, language and vocabulary used as well as personal style. Despite global developments for women, authors have referred to educational institutions as masculinity factories (Heward 1996: 39) and "masculinity-making devices" (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003: 79) within which dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity are formed and reproduced.

This reflects the context in which policy, related to issues of social equity, is received. According to Bowe *et al.* (1992) discourses, in this instance, relating to gender and social inequality, influence the nature, content and purpose of associated policy texts. The following section will call upon

policy texts and guidance that have directly referred to social inequality, as well as Government-funded reviews of ECEC that have directly referred to men in ECEC.

ii) Context of policy text production

As the previous section has indicated, current policy related to issues of social equity in education have been addressed through broader strategies geared towards raising attainment levels and linked to global policy highlighting educational achievement as central to ensuring economic productivity and competitiveness (Ball, 2013). This has been true both of the previous New Labour and current Coalition party. New Labour social policy focus on under-achievement was part of a broader 'social exclusion' and child poverty agenda, overseen by the Social Exclusion Unit initially set up in 1997 as part of the Cabinet Office but now abolished (Ball, 2013). The emphasis was on under-achievement, particularly in inner-city areas, in line with the intention of bringing excluded groups back into education and employment. This also included the ambition to eradicate child poverty, with the introduction of the *National Childcare Strategy* (DfEE, 1998) and the *Sure Start* initiative launched in 1999, hence social and economic goals were intertwined. The 'problem' was presented as social rather than economic, and lying with socially disadvantaged families and communities themselves rather than resulting from structural inequality. The overall approach to pre-school provision was a mix of private, voluntary and state-funded Sure Start children's centres, together with child tax credits for low-income families. Sure Start children's centres were set up to provide multi-agency health, education, care and welfare services for children under three of low-income families (Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay, 2013). The Coalition approach has not been radically different with numerous reports stressing the key was early intervention and 'good' parenting such as Marmot (2010) related to health inequalities; Field (2010) linked to poverty and life chances; Allen (2011) focused on early intervention to break cycles of disadvantage; Tickell (2011) linking ECEC to goals of parental engagement and family responsibility; and Munro (2011) on child protection and safeguarding. The same assumption was made – that raised education performance

would break cycles of disadvantage. Meanwhile in 2010, the Coalition cut Sure Start funding by 9% and many sites have since closed (*4Children*, 2012).

In this context, the Coalition Government passed the *Equality Act*, Government Equalities Office (GEO, 2010) that replaced all previous equality legislation. The Act legally protects individuals within society and the workplace and also encourages employers to take positive action if the participation of individuals with one or more of the protected characteristics, including age, sex and sexual orientation, is low. The legislation is to be embedded within ECEC provision policies including policies for recruitment and selection and is monitored and regulated through OFSTED inspections. In 2014 the DfE introduced non-statutory guidance entitled '*The Equality Act 2010 and Schools'* (DfE, 2014b) and the *Equality and Human Rights Commission* has also released guidance for schools, further and higher education institutions.

Unsurprisingly the area of participation and performance, relevant to this study incorporated issues of race and gender. Social inequality was to be addressed through educational performance or standards of achievement in tests and examinations and participation in terms of rates of school attendance. Fresh attention has been directed to standards of literacy and numeracy, teaching methods such as synthetic phonics and the introduction of a new national curriculum has ensured the central role of a traditional knowledge approach to the curriculum (Ball, 2013).

In this climate, focus of attention for preschool provision has been on EYFS curriculum, teaching and assessment and raised professionalism of EY teachers rather than concern with increasing the number of men as recommended across Europe. Despite this, gaps remain in the overall achievement and distribution of boys and girls. Whilst the recent *Statistical First Release* for the EYFS profile results (DfE, 2014c:8) proudly announced that gender gaps had narrowed since 2012/13, it was reported that girls continue to outperform boys in all areas of learning and indeed a

higher percentage of girls are achieving the expected level. Hence, social and economic inequalities continue to grow (OECD, 2011).

Given the increased political attention given to tackling social and economic disadvantage, it was unsurprising that the DfE proposed a reform of ECEC services in England for children from birth to five years of age, which sought to support families as well as the ECEC workforce. The key components of the reform included a focus on increasing the quality of provision as well as improving children's social, emotional and educational outcomes. As part of the reform, two reviews were conducted, firstly the *Tickell Review of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum* (Tickell, 2011) and secondly the *Nutbrown Review of Early Education and Childcare Qualifications* (Nutbrown, 2012). These were followed in 2013 by the DfE proposals outlined in *More Great Childcare: Raising Quality and Giving Parents More Choice* (DfE, 2013).

For example the *Tickell Review of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum* (Tickell, 2011:43) brought together the key components of the current ECEC workforce and recognised that the demographics of ECEC staff had a role to play in high quality ECEC work. In particular, Tickell directly referred to the current lack of diversity within the ECEC workforce in light of wider issues relating to lack of qualifications and the low status associated with ECEC work:

> Young people with fewer academic qualifications, particularly girls, are the ones who tend to be steered towards careers in the sector. This creates a young female workforce, often without many qualifications who often end up working with the very youngest children. It also reinforces views of the early years as being easier or of lower status.

Tickell (2011:43) also emphasised that "...gender bias must be challenged and ways found to promote the early years as a rewarding career and attract a wider range of applicants". In order to promote ECEC as a rewarding career, Tickell recommended that the Government collaborate with the Careers Profession Alliance. In particular, Tickell referred to the need to ensure that careers advisors are knowledgeable about the range of careers possible within ECEC in order to ensure that

individuals are well-informed when making decisions that will determine their initial career path.

A year later, the *Nutbrown Review of Early Education and Childcare Qualifications* (Nutbrown, 2012) extended arguments outlined within the Tickell Review (Tickell, 2011) relating to workforce conditions and the central role these played in development of high-quality childcare. The Nutbrown Review not only drew attention to the imbalance between male and female ECEC practitioners but also referred to the lack of male staff within the workforce in light of current workforce conditions. Nutbrown acknowledged the historical association between childcare and women and also referred to the social perceptions relating to the nature of ECEC work. Nutbrown (2012:50) considered the potential impact of a more balanced workforce and argued that "young children benefit from spending time with men as well as women" and suggested that the barriers currently deterring men from entering ECEC needed to be understood and addressed. However the need for more men in ECEC was not considered in relation to broader calls for gender equality, indeed it was unclear exactly on what grounds, or in relation to what agenda, men's participation should be increased.

In order to increase men's participation, Nutbrown (2012:50) suggested:

> The more general approach of raising quality and standards through qualifications, establishing clearer career routes and improving the perceived status of the early years workforce will help more men see the value of the profession, and encourage them to consider working with children.

This review reflected the progression made in understanding the nature of ECEC work, the barriers that currently deter individuals, in this instance, men, from entering the workforce and the key factors that influence the quality of ECEC. The review considered the current early years qualifications system within the context of providing high-quality childcare as well as offering a series of recommendations in order to improve and enhance the current system.

In January 2013, the Government published its proposals within *More Great Childcare* to "build a

stronger and more professional workforce" (DfE, 2013:4). This document also provided a response to the various recommendations outlined within the Nutbrown Review (Nutbrown, 2012). Within the report (DfE, 2013:6), specific reforms were outlined in order to present the Government's strategy to "deliver more great childcare" by enhancing the status and thus quality of ECEC work, provide more childcare places and provide greater choice for parents.

Of particular relevance to this research was the mention given to the current low pay and low status associated with ECEC work. Interestingly, the DfE (2013:18) directly compared the current salaries of UK ECEC staff with the comparably higher salaries of the workforce across Europe. For instance, the current annual salary for the workforce in England was £13,300 compared with Denmark at the equivalent of £21,500. Thus, the DfE recognised many of the current challenges outlined within the Nutbrown Review. However, no reference was made to increasing men's participation in ECEC services.

The key themes of pay, status and career progression within ECEC work also emerged within the review of the context of practice (presented below) and were understood to have a significant influence on men's participation in ECEC.

iii) Context of practice

As noted by Ball (2013), both New Labour and the succeeding Coalition Government have placed emphasis on inequality, disadvantage and social justice but equity issues have tended to be subsumed within wider goals related to workforce skills and effectiveness of schools (or pre-schools) and teachers. Emphasis has been placed on inadequate parenting and underperforming schools as causes of social and educational problems but there has been less willingness to acknowledge issues of structural inequality and poverty as sources of under-achievement.

Meanwhile, as noted earlier, in light of political attention given to matters of EYFS teaching, curriculum and assessment of children and the professionalism of staff who work with them,

empirical research investigating the composition of the workforce, particularly the experiences of male ECEC practitioners has been limited. Many studies have been small-scale and qualitative though in the period reviewed from 1999 to 2014, investigation into the topic has increased. Studies have varied in terms of scale and research methods employed, as well as the aims and research questions addressed. Moreover, the studies arose from different social and political contexts of England, Europe, and other parts of the world. Despite this, analysis of the findings revealed common themes and similarities that offer an insight into the context of practice within which male ECEC practitioners work in England and elsewhere. An initial consideration of the disparate research projects allowed common themes to emerge.

Outline of research studies

England

English studies of practice ranged from a large-scale, multi-method study of Cameron *et al.* (1999), through to national polls and interviews of IPSOS MORI (2003). Literature reviews of Rolfe (2006), Cameron (2013a) and Roberts-Holmes and Brownhill (2012), as well as surveys and interviews of Cook (2005) and Warin (2006) were also relevant. Smaller scale, multi-method studies of Foreman (2008), O'Sullivan and Chambers (2012) and Brownhill (2014) were illuminative.

Cameron *et al.'s* multi-method study (1999) was conducted as part of a larger investigation of men and women working in daycare. The larger study explored the characteristics of staffing in ECEC in England and was inspired by the *EU Commission Childcare Network* focus on achieving gender equality in employment within which men as carers for young children was a central theme. Acknowledgement was made that different approaches were employed in different countries to attend to the lack of men in ECEC. Whilst Scandinavian countries reflected an acceptance of men's participation, Britain was said still to hold a feeling of ambivalence and uncertainty. The

overarching aim of the study was therefore to understand these national differences and to unravel gendered understandings of ECEC work. The first survey examined the views of two hundred and sixty-nine childcare college lecturers who taught on nursery nursing and early childhood courses and a second survey was conducted on child protection policies of ninety-six LAs to determine what was included and whether reference was made to the protection of workers. The study also involved the analysis of the Labour Force Survey (nd.) and characteristics of childcare occupations included within it. Interviews were conducted with twenty-one ECEC workers from ten institutions, focusing on practice and reflections of practice as well as the general views of male practitioners. Interviews were conducted with seventy-seven parents (fifty-two mothers and twenty-five fathers). The study was further enhanced by a review of international literature on the ECEC workforce and incorporated exchanges with colleagues in Scandinavia and Britain and the proceedings of an international seminar on the topic.

Meanwhile, IPSOS MORI (2003) conducted a national poll to gather the views of the British public with regards to men in ECEC. This was conducted in the form of face-to-face interviews with two thousand and twenty-one members of the British adult public, from the age of fifteen. The focus of the interviews was upon the perceived benefits of men's participation in ECEC, barriers that might deter men from working in the field and the strategies required to increase participation.

Rolfe (2006) aimed to identify benefits to men's participation, the barriers to entry and how these might be overcome within a review of existing literature and recent policy and practice in relation to men in ECEC. Similarly, Cameron (2013a) drew upon the findings of previous studies in order to explore the contexts surrounding the recruitment of men into ECEC, reasons given for the underrepresentation of men in the field as well as the notion of men as role models. Roberts-Holmes and Brownhill (2012) reviewed and critically analysed literature related to the gender imbalance of the workforce.

Cook (2005) investigated the views of current Year 10 secondary-school male and female pupils within a questionnaire that listed forty-two careers and required them to select which of these they would be interested in. A total of three secondary schools in one LA were approached and two hundred and twelve questionnaires were returned. Using interviews, Warin (2006) explored the practices and beliefs of one male nursery teacher, his colleagues and the fathers from a Government initiative he was carrying out at the time to increase fathers' and/or male carers' involvement in ECEC.

Foreman (2008) gathered the views and experiences of children regarding male practitioners within two setting types: one after-school club and two child-minder settings. A total of twenty-two children, eight boys and fourteen girls, were interviewed. Seventeen participants were drawn from the after-school club and five from the child-minder setting. Two of the children from the child-minder setting were the son and daughter of the child-minder. 'Diary room' interviews were conducted with the aim of making the interviews more fun, participants sat in a chair facing a camera and microphone, although the researcher was able to speak with the children through the speakers, the researcher was located in a different room away from the participants. The study also included interviews with two male workers, one in each of the child-minder settings.

O'Sullivan and Chambers (2012) investigated the benefits and issues around male practitioners working in ECEC, from children's perspective. The study focused on London Early Years Foundation settings with a total number of two hundred and sixty-three practitioners, within which 3.4% of practitioners were male whilst 29.4% of staff working in Head Office were male. Fifty-six male and female staff working across the eight nurseries completed a questionnaire and one-to-one interviews led by female practitioners were conducted with twenty-three children aged three years and above. Fourteen of the children were boys and nine were girls. Of this sample, each staff member was asked to select four confident children, two boys and two girls. Brownhill (2014)

surveyed the perceived characteristics and qualities associated with male role models in ECEC. One hundred and seventy-four questionnaires were completed by male practitioners, a focus group interview with members of a senior management team and six semi-structured interviews with men working with children from birth to eight years were held.

Themes of professionalism and reform, recruitment and retention, gender distribution, allocation of tasks and views on men's roles and professional practice by the public, other professionals, parents and children themselves, dominated. Analysis by themes revealed the attitudes and experiences of male professionals in the context of practice.

Professionalism and reform

Salaries of participants within the study of Cameron *et al.* (1999:65) ranged from £8,200 for nursery workers to £29,000 for senior management staff. Four out of the twenty-one practitioners interviewed, worked part-time, whilst the remaining participants worked full-time, on average for forty hours per week. Participants shared dissatisfaction with their salaries with a male practitioner stating that he "couldn't exist" on his salary and was therefore reliant on additional funding from his pension. The participant in Warin's study (2006:534) advised, "if the Government want more men to work in this area they'll have to pay them more".

In terms of potential future employees in early years settings, Cook (2005) reported equal concern between male and female school pupils regarding the low pay, lack of career opportunities and low status associated with ECEC work. These concerns were echoed within Rolfe's study (2006) with barriers to men entering the workforce including concern regarding low pay and low status of an occupation that has been traditionally associated with women. This was supported by the views of members of the public in the IPSOS MORI study (2003). In the study of O'Sullivan and Chambers (2012) however, 60% of respondents reported that men remained underrepresented within the field

due to a lack of support and encouragement from family and friends, only 12.5% thought that work conditions were a deterrent to men's participation in the field.

Recruitment and retention

The early career decisions of male practitioners remain a relatively unexplored element of this topic. Nevertheless, reference has been made to the recruitment of male practitioners within ECEC, specifically circumstances surrounding the decision to enter the field. Stages of entrance into the workforce as well as the reasons for doing so provide the focus for this section.

Participants within the study of Cameron *et al.* (1999:52) had varied job histories, with only a small number of female participants following linear career paths into ECEC. Instead, reference was made to "chequered" or "lattice" career paths during which, participants engaged in related and non-related occupations, with male participants likely to enter ECEC as a career change. One male practitioner made reference to his interest in a childcare course available at his school, although this opportunity was offered to female pupils first. At the time of entry into ECEC, participants were reported to face a series of barriers during recruitment, including one male participant who faced discrimination as a man entering the field.

In contrast, Rolfe (2006:103) referred to men's disinterest in ECEC and therefore disregarded employer discrimination during recruitment as a deterrent to men's participation. Instead, reference was made to issues regarding recruitment and retention of men into ECEC as influenced by the focus on employment of "young white women", hence the percentage of male workers has remained the same for decades despite local-level initiatives.

In line with the findings of Rolfe (2006), Cook (2005) reported male school pupils' disinterest in employment within ECEC. A total of 38% of the sample of male and female pupils intended to work with young children, with only 12.5% of the male pupils reporting an interest in this occupation. Whilst 40% of female pupils reported "liking children" as the reason for interest in the

field, boys were more likely to offer negative views on work with young children who were reported to be “annoying” and the work of an ECEC practitioner “stressful” (Cook, 2005:57). Similarly, 70% of male respondents in the IPSOS MORI study reported that they would not consider a career in ECEC.

The male practitioner within Warin’s study (2006) referred to the influence of redundancies and male unemployment on the recruitment of men into ECEC settings across the country. Retraining of men within these areas was reported to challenge traditional roles of men and women within the home and in the ECEC of young children. Prior to the study, the participant had worked within the field as a nursery practitioner for ten years.

Interviews with two male practitioners within Foreman’s study (2008) revealed the influence of female family members on men’s decision to enter the ECEC workforce. For one participant, the need for his wife to return to work and hence his decision to remain at home with his young children, resulted in him becoming registered as a child-minder. The partner of the second participant had identified a vacancy within her place of employment (an after-school club), taking this on meant that he could combine part-time work with gaining qualifications at a local college. The two participants also referred to their own experiences during childhood, specifically experiences with younger siblings and attendance at an afterschool club as being influential on later career choices.

The retention of male practitioners has received far less attention than recruitment, with the focus being predominantly on how to promote participation. This is particularly surprising given concerns regarding the high turnover of ECEC staff (Osgood, 2012). As well as inquiring into practitioners’ entrance into the field, Cameron *et al.* (1999) determined that, out of twenty-one practitioners, eleven intended to remain either within their current role or in a related job role. In contrast, nine

practitioners intended to progress into roles of seniority associated with higher-status occupations including social work, of which six were male and three were female.

Gender distribution

During 2011, it was reported that there were approximately 426,500 ECEC workers in England (Brind *et al.,* 2011). As noted by Cameron *et al.,* 1999, this is a female-dominated profession, within which male professionals make up 2% of the workforce in diverse centre-based provision for children aged birth to five years and only 1% within out-of-school provision (Oberhuemer *et al.,* 2010). In O'Sullivan and Chambers' study (2012) the majority of survey respondents estimated men to make up 10 or 20% of the ECEC workforce.

There is a tendency for men to occupy teaching positions and thus work with older children in primary and secondary schools; male practitioners working with children under the age of three are particularly rare (Cameron, 2013a). The two male practitioners in Foreman's study (2008) both worked with older children. The nature of the after-school worker's role meant engagement for one with older children, whilst the second practitioner had made a conscious decision to work with older children in order to avoid duties that involved children's toileting and to safeguard himself against accusations of abuse.

Due to the skewed gender distribution of the ECEC workforce, male practitioners reported isolation within their working environment. The male practitioner within Warin's study (2006:527) felt particularly threatened within his role and also referred to the difficulties in engaging fathers within an environment characterised by "pink pastel colours and flowers and women walking around everywhere". Hence, for the participant, the environment of ECEC was highly feminised in terms of both the décor and indeed the practitioners that he felt would have a detrimental effect on men's experiences of the provision.

Allocation of tasks and roles

Cameron *et al.* (1999) advised that in order to investigate the experiences of male and female practitioners, one must recognise that ECEC is an example of a gendered organisation, not only in the composition of the workforce but also in the roles and expectations surrounding practitioners in this field. In relation to men's roles within ECEC, often the job titles of "nursery nurse" or "nursery practitioner" did not apply to the male practitioners within this study. In contrast to their female colleagues, once in the role, male practitioners were reported to explore career progression opportunities with the intention of moving upwards in their job roles into positions of seniority.

Despite greater political attention given to the equal roles of men and women within the labour market, studies indicated that the allocation of tasks between male and female practitioners were based upon a traditional division of labour. Day-to-day experiences of male practitioners reflected a difference in the roles of men and women, with the suggestion that men would engage in specific play activities with children and with the expectation from female practitioners that they would fix items within the setting such as changing light bulbs. At the same time, ECEC practitioners referred to a commitment to equality in roles of men and women within the workforce. The majority of practitioners within Cameron *et al.'s* study (1999:78) referred to the equal distribution of jobs between male and female practitioners, yet additional comments revealed underlying assumptions regarding the roles of men and women in relation to ECEC work. Male participants spoke, for instance, of expectations from female colleagues regarding their preference for ball games and rough play.

Similarly, in O'Sullivan and Chambers' survey of male and female practitioners, 76.7% understood there to be differences in the activities offered by practitioners based on their gender, with male practitioners reported to engage in football and rough-and-tumble play with children. In contrast, Cameron (2013a) reported the findings of Brandes *et al.'s* (2012) study conducted in German

kindergartens where minimal difference was observed in the pedagogical practices and interactions of male and female staff.

Meanwhile, the participant in Warin's study (2006:534) held a very different role from his female colleagues that had been assigned specifically to him as a male member of the workforce. As well as working directly with the children attending the provision, the participant managed a 'Dad's work project' which saw an extension of his role within the setting. Accordingly, the status of his role increased and associated work conditions improved. The participant emphasised that his primary role was working directly with the children, yet the financial limitations of this role meant he sought additional sources of income.

Out of the twenty-two participants in Foreman's study (2008), six girls and five boys understood there to be a difference in the way they were cared for by men and women, whilst only two boys and two girls reported no difference between male and female practitioners. Of the differences that were noticed, physical attributes, such as men being taller than women were referred to as well as the tendency for men to engage in physical activity with the children because as one participant commented "they are the only people that will play sports with you" (Foreman, 2008:13). When asked about the different roles of male and female staff, participants associated caring roles with female practitioners who tended to work inside the setting whilst male practitioners were believed to spend a greater amount of time outside and, reportedly, engaged in active, participatory activities with the children.

Views of men's role and professional practice

The reactions of family members and peers to men's decision to enter the field provides an insight into the views of men's role and professional practice in ECEC. Whilst parents of children attending provision in the study of Cameron *et al.* (1999) approved of men's participation, male practitioners' own family members appeared less willing to accept their career choices. There were,

however, unique cases of support for male participants, with one participant receiving support from family members who were employed within similar professions. Two male participants also referred to the influence of the church on reactions received from family members. Occasional work in Sunday schools and a trip to Romania paved the way for a career in ECEC and elicited a positive response from family. Yet, whilst female participants within Cameron's study received largely positive reactions from family members and peers to their career choices, the majority of male participants received mixed reactions ranging from surprise to distress.

This finding was surprising given that 71% of participants within the IPSOS MORI study suggested that more men should be employed within ECEC, with 57% of participants referring to the benefit of children experiencing a mixed-gender environment and 53% of participants referring to the opportunity to provide children with male role models.

In detailing their views of male practitioners, participants within the study of Cameron *et al.* (1999) referred to a variety of benefits including the capacity to reflect society as a whole. However, the most commonly cited benefit to men's participation in ECEC across the studies was the opportunity to provide children with male role models. Yet practitioners' views on the responsibilities associated with role models were inconsistent and varied. Participants referred to role models "setting standards" (Cameron *et al.*, 1999:84) for children to aspire to, whilst others considered "good moral values and beliefs" (p. 85) as part of being a good role model. Interestingly, six male participants associated the term role model with gender and reported being labeled as a role model simply because they were men, whilst another participant referred to the responsibility of a role model to demonstrate that you can "be a man without being a bully or using physical strength". In drawing upon the findings of this earlier study, Cameron (2013a) considered 'role model' as a problematic term (as did Rolfe, 2006 and Roberts-Holmes and Brownhill, 2012) and warned that this implied children's passivity as recipients of social roles and behavior within the ECEC

environment. Similarly, Cameron (2013a) called for recognition of children as agents and co-constructors of knowledge, in a collaborative endeavor with the practitioners they encountered.

In order to explore definitions of the term 'role model' and its association with male practitioners, Brownhill's (2014) questionnaire asked respondents to rank order (from a list of twenty) five characteristics that they felt were most important for male role models to have. The characteristics were drawn from a range of academic literature and included terms such as "a father figure", "kind" and "emotional" and "aggressive". Brownhill created a male role-model profile from the characteristics identified by respondents as being the most important, these were "reliable", "able to demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning", "trustworthy", "kind", "respectful" and "a good sense of humour". The qualities and characteristics of a male role model were also explored within interviews, particularly in relation to the participants' views about the characteristics of male role models for boys. These were categorised into masculine, feminine and "natural" (meaning authentic) characteristics (Brownhill, 2014:254). It is unclear how the concept of role models was introduced to respondents within the questionnaire and interviews apart from the suggestion that respondents were asked to rank twenty characteristics that they felt were most important for male role models to possess. This, however, assumes that respondents held a common understanding of the term 'role model' to begin with.

The findings indicated a desire for male role models to challenge traditional, dominant notions of masculinity, in favour of an approach that demonstrated men's ability to undertake roles historically associated with women. This was echoed within the O'Sullivan and Chambers study (2012: 14) where the benefit of having male practitioners was associated with their ability to provide "nurturing, sensitive and positive role models".

Outline of research studies

Europe

Analysis of findings from a number of European studies also demonstrated a commitment to highlighting male practitioners' work in ECEC and contributed to the illumination of the context of practice from locations in Scandinavia, Germany and Greece. Studies ranged from a literature review and discussion by Peeters (2007) to mixed-method investigations of Sataøen (2010), Emilsen and Koch (2010), Cremers *et al.* (2010), Wohlgemuth (2011), Nentwich *et al.* (2013) and Buschmeyer (2013). An observation study conducted by Brandes *et al.* (2012), surveys conducted by Rentzou (2013) and Sakellariou and Rentzou (2010) and interviews of Vandenbroeck and Peeters (2013), Rentzou and Ziganitidou (2009) and Hedlin and Åberg (2013) were included.

Peeters (2007) examined recruitment strategies for male practitioners across Europe, including specific policy measures, recruitment approaches and mentoring for male ECEC students as well as men-only ECEC courses. The aim was to determine what might be done to increase men's presence within the workforce.

Rentzou and Ziganitidou (2009) explored the reactions of male practitioners, aged between twenty-six and forty-five years, to their career choice as well as societal attitudes towards male ECEC workers in Greece by conducting semi-structured interviews with five men working in the field. Meanwhile, Sataøen (2010) explored the experiences of male ECEC workers beyond their graduation from preschool training in Norway. The study involved an online survey with ninety-six male ECEC graduates, followed by interviews with a selection of men who graduated as preschool teachers. The study was based on the researcher's personal belief that children have the right to experience men and women within caring roles in ECEC.

In the same year, Emilsen and Koch (2010) investigated the views of male and female ECEC practitioners in Norway and Austria, in relation to outdoor play and its potential to increase men's recruitment into the field. The Norwegian research was conducted between 2004 and 2007 within which one hundred and twenty-one men and one hundred and fifty-one women from a range of

traditional as well as outdoor preschools were surveyed. Ten men and four women working within outdoor preschools were also interviewed. In Austria, the research project was conducted from 2008 to 2010 and involved a survey of four hundred and eighty-six school pupils aged between fourteen and nineteen, four hundred and sixty-five students in vocational ECEC training and two hundred and sixty-six male and female practitioners. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with twenty-nine male and twenty female workers and thirteen male and eight female students.

The Ministry of Family Affairs in Germany funded a research project to explore whether various stakeholders in ECEC perceived a need to increase the participation of men in the field (Cremers *et al.*, 2010). In addition, the researchers explored the preferred training routes and conditions for men. Forty group and individual interviews were conducted with male and female teachers, students as well as directors in ECEC provision and funding organisation officers. One thousand parents, six hundred directors of provision and one hundred funding organisation officers also took part in a telephone survey.

Meanwhile, Sakellariou and Rentzou (2010) conducted a smaller-scale survey in Greece to obtain the views of thirty female practitioners aged between twenty-six and fifty-one years, on the perceived benefits, barriers and societal attitudes towards male practitioners.

A macro-to-micro study of men in ECEC is being conducted by Wohlgemuth (2011) in Denmark, the findings for which were only partially available at the time of writing. Textual analysis was conducted of national political objectives across Europe. An analysis was also undertaken of the strategies applied in order to recruit more men into the workforce as well as a survey with a sample size of four hundred and twenty respondents across fourteen university colleges and interviews with men who had completed or were interested in relevant training as well as those who currently worked in ECEC.

The initial results of an on-going study of the pedagogical activity of male and female workers were presented by Brandes *et al.* (2012). Supported by the German Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, this three-year study, running from 2010-2013, aimed to compare the behaviours of twenty male and twenty female ECEC practitioners. Within this study, a number of standardised play sequences were organised, recorded and rated by the researchers in relation to the behaviour of the practitioners. During these sequences, the practitioner and child engaged in a creative activity using various materials, such as pens, coloured paper and tools, including scissors and glue in order to create a model.

Rentzou (2013) explored the attitudes and perceptions of thirty-seven Greek male secondary-school pupils aged between sixteen and eighteen years, regarding the profession of ECEC. Questionnaire data provided demographic information and also respondents' career intentions. Hedlin and Åberg (2013) investigated preschool student teachers' views regarding the recruitment of men in ECEC with interviews conducted with ten male and ten female student teachers enrolled on preschool education programmes in Sweden.

In order to explore gendered culture within overt and covert curricula and the impact this might have on men who wish to work in ECEC, Vandenbroeck and Peeters (2013) interviewed forty-six male students in Belgium. Sixteen of the participants (aged between eighteen and twenty-five years) attended adult courses for ECEC and the remaining thirty (aged between sixteen and twenty years) studied ECEC in secondary schools.

Nentwich *et al.* (2013) sought to investigate the experiences of male practitioners within ECEC in Switzerland. Multiple qualitative methods were employed although at the time of writing, only the findings of interviews with nine male participants were available. The interviews focused on how the men came to work within the field, practices "of sharing labor" and individual preferences in

relation to daily activities. Interviews were conducted with nursery managers and sixteen male and female ECEC workers. Observations of practitioners were also conducted in four nurseries.

Buschmeyer's (2013) study explored male practitioners' identity, specifically in relation to their constructions of masculinity while working with children and within interactions with female colleagues and parents. A total of ten male kindergarten teachers, who worked with children aged six months to six years in Germany were interviewed and observed. The age range of participants was between twenty-three and fifty years and they were reported to be from a variety of different professional backgrounds and represented different levels of education and qualification.

As with the studies in England, these European studies were also examined theme- by -theme in order to explore attitudes, experiences and practices within the context. Whilst these European studies emerged from different policy contexts and must thus be understood from that perspective, analysis revealed similar themes to the English studies - of professionalism and reform, recruitment and retention, allocation of tasks and roles and views of men's role and professional practice.

Professionalism and reform

Participants in the Cremers *et al.* study (2010) referred to the poor work conditions associated with ECEC, including limited opportunity for successful career advancement that they considered a barrier to men's participation. The majority of participants in Sataøen's study (2010) were thus working as preschool teachers, whilst the others worked within public kindergartens. It was indicated that 78% of students had continued to work in ECEC with children aged between one to sixteen years of age, suggesting that staff turnover was low. Despite this, when asked whether, if given the chance to choose their career again, they would work in ECEC, 56% reported that they would and 44% would not. Participants spoke of their interest in leaving the field due to poor work conditions, including low pay and limited opportunity for career progression, thus providing little incentive to stay in the field. In addition to a lack of financial and professional incentive, 70% of

participants also referred to the lack of male colleagues and resultant difficulty in fitting in to a predominantly female workforce as a reason for wanting alternative work.

Recruitment and retention

Peeters (2007) advocated a multi-level approach to the recruitment of men into ECEC settings, involving policy measures to increase the status of ECEC work, organisational changes including employers and training institutions, media campaigns and initiatives aimed at female practitioners and parents of children attending ECEC provision. Peeters specifically referred to 'men-only' ECEC courses in Edinburgh that had attracted nine hundred men into relevant training, as well as networks of male practitioners in Norway, with a focus on outdoor activities within training for male students in Denmark. In light of the tendency for men to enter ECEC as part of a career change, reference was also made to the importance of careers advice for improved recruitment.

Of the sixteen participants who attended adult education in ECEC within Vandenbroeck and Peeters' study (2013:51), all had completed their secondary education in fields unrelated to ECEC including agriculture, construction and automechanics. The majority of these respondents referred to the significant influence of family members, specifically friends, girl friends, mothers or sisters, on their career choices. Participants also referred to their experience of training on ECEC courses and whilst the majority were content with being the only male on the course, five missed having conversations that weren't the usual "women's talk".

Out of the five participants in the Rentzou and Ziganitidou study (2009), two participants worked directly with toddlers whilst the remaining three worked within preschool classrooms. Only one appeared to have worked in ECEC as a first career choice and four had entered ECEC as a career change. As such, this field had not initially been on the agenda for the majority of participants, but an interest in and love of childhood had inspired them to work with children in formal provision. Having chosen their career path, participants faced mixed reactions from family and friends. Whilst

the former were reported to react strangely, with suspicion and concern, all participants referred to the positive and supportive reactions from their friends, with one participant commenting "my friends would never judge me negatively" (p. 275). This, they felt, was due to a generational difference in understanding in terms of the purpose and nature of ECEC and indeed the profile of the ECEC worker.

Only one participant preferred working with the youngest children as "you can help them start right" (Rentzou and Ziganitidou, 2009:274). Whereas four out of the five participants spoke of a preference for working with older children due to the ability to provide them with educational activities and experiences. They saw this in stark contrast to work with the youngest children for which they felt they lacked sufficient experience of children who needed only "sleep and food" (p. 274). Therefore, their work was seen largely in association with *education*, as opposed to caring responsibilities that formed part of ECEC services. Three out of the five participants stated that they preferred activities with children that involved the opportunity to "move freely, to experiment, to run" and "to be boisterous"' (p. 276). This was considered in contrast to female practitioners who, according to the participants, were more likely to be involved in disciplining the children and preferred activities such as reading fairytales.

The findings from each stage of data collection in the Cremers *et al.* study (2010) indicated that participants felt it important for men to work within ECEC and that ECEC provision should attempt to increase men's participation. Participants were asked whether they had engaged with any strategies to increase men's recruitment. A total of 57% of funding-organisation officers had already participated in such strategies, whilst only 32% of ECEC managers had and of this sample, 30% had neither thought about nor engaged with such strategies. The researchers' recommendation, based upon the findings, was the creation of a nationwide *Men in Kitas* office to focus on networking opportunities, conferences and consultancy work. Furthermore, participants suggested

that “male job applicants are always invited for interviews” (p. 12), yet as the authors indicated there were no compulsory strategies in place to specifically recruit male practitioners.

In speaking with male preschool teachers, Sataøen (2010) identified that although 78% of the sample remained in the field since their preschool training, 44% reported that if they were able to choose their career again, they would not choose to work in ECEC. Reported reasons for remaining in the field included the day-to-day challenges and variation of working with young children as well as opportunities for career development. However, many of the participants had considered resigning from their roles due to poor work conditions. Participants also referred to difficulty in working within a highly female-populated organisation where “the topics of their conversations are too often linked to their own children, illness, difficult husbands, crocheting and knitting. I very often feel on the sideline – more like a lonely bird” (Sataøen, 2010:8).

Within the context of a significant increase in preschool provision in Norway, a great deal of which is based outdoors, an association has been made between outdoor preschools and the recruitment of male practitioners (Cameron, 2013b). For example, the majority of participants in Emilsen and Koch’s study in Norway (2010) referred to a perceived difference between the interactions of male and female practitioners with children attending provision in both traditional kindergarten environments as well as outdoor settings. The researchers concluded, “we find that outdoor pre-schools correspond better to many of men’s interests and many are more comfortable working outdoors” (p. 546). Moreover, specific differences were identified including a tendency for men, as opposed to women, to engage in physical play with the children though they were also reported to be less concerned with the safety and security of children in their day-to-day work. The findings from the school pupils in Emilsen and Koch’s study in Austria (2010) highlighted the nature of ECEC work, with male school pupils suggesting that preschool provision that involved outdoor play and physical education would be particularly appealing to them. Of the respondents, 56% of

male and 29% of female respondents reported that men preferred to work outdoors. It is therefore unsurprising that, when asked about how ECEC could be made a more attractive career option, the majority of male and female respondents referred to the need for more time to be spent outdoors. The findings of these studies are particularly interesting as countries such as Denmark and Norway that heavily promote outdoor play provision, for instance in the form of forest schools, also have the highest percentage of male practitioners across Europe (Oberhuemer *et al.,* 2010).

Participants within Sakellariou and Rentzou's study (2010) identified dissatisfaction with a low salary as a potential barrier to men's recruitment into the field. Instead of entering the field through financial incentives, female practitioners reported the influence of men's experiences with children as a reason for their decision to enter the ECEC workforce. Respondents also reported isolation of male practitioners as a barrier to their participation, as well as men's preference for higher-status work. The majority of respondents reported parents' positive reactions to men's presence, however they also indicated that men's motives for working with young children were still questioned by society. In terms of recruitment, respondents reported the need to provide young men with opportunities to work in ECEC and also to provide media campaigns and targeted advertising to recruit men into the field.

In terms of training for ECEC, there appeared to have been an increase in the number of men attending the Bachelor in Social Education three-and-a-half years course in Denmark. According to Wohlgemuth (2011) out of four thousand, six hundred new students enrolling on this course, 28% were male. Wohlgemuth emphasised the diversity of male practitioners in terms of their reasons for choosing to pursue a career that involved working with young children. These included the opportunity for the career to lead to academic and professional progression, the assumption of a guaranteed job upon completion of training as well as the offer to men of a "new and better beginning" (p. 1) and the desire to participate in "meaningful and significant work" (p. 5).

When asked about the recruitment of male practitioners, seven students (male and female) within Hedlin and Åberg's study (2013) shared concern about over-simplification of men's role within the field. Students called for a workforce that reflected diversity not only in terms of biological sex but also in age and cultural background because "it is not men that are needed in preschools, but good teachers" (Hedlin and Åberg, 2013:155). Moreover, an unspecified number of students challenged the role model argument and questioned exactly what role men were expected to model. The potential increase in the gendered division of labour, due to men's increased participation in ECEC, was also a concern. One student referred to the sexism often present in educational organisations with males, often instigated by female practitioners, who think "oh, how nice that there is a guy, someone who can play football with the boys and climb trees, those things that we women don't do," (p. 156).

The majority of participants within Rentzou's study (2013) intended to work in the armed forces upon leaving school with other suggested interests including computing and engineering. Out of the thirty-seven participants, thirty-one were not intending to become ECEC practitioners. Participants were divided in their opinion of men's participation in ECEC, with twenty-two participants emphasising the importance of men in ECEC and fifteen suggesting that men should not participate in ECEC. Reasons for this included association between the profession and women, the suggestion that men were not patient enough to work with young children as well as men's preference for higher status occupations. Asked whether there ought to be more male practitioners, whilst seven participants stated that there should be, twenty-one participants stated that there should not be.

Allocation of tasks and roles

The findings of Nentwich *et al.* (2013) highlighted a series of discursive practices that male practitioners were engaged in, in order to position themselves within a predominantly female working environment. Male practitioners were understood to be actively constructing 'male niches'

(p. 327), that is, they engaged in stereotypical practices such as playing football and rough-and-tumble with the children in their care. Such practices emphasised stereotypically-masculine activities and interests that were considered the polar opposite of femininity also evident in other reported studies (Warin, 2006; Rentzou and Ziganitidou, 2009; and O'Sullivan and Chambers, 2012). Practices associated with hegemonic masculinity were also identified in the form of breadwinner roles that male practitioners were understood to occupy. One male practitioner spoke of opportunities for career advancement as well as the bread-winning role being the inspiration for entering the field, whilst another emphasised the importance of working full-time within ECEC in order to support his future family. The findings also highlighted concern regarding men's role in supporting children with more 'intimate' activities. One participant, referred to as 'Peter' reported that he was no longer allowed to change children's nappies "that really got to me. I was very, very upset and also felt insulted" (Nentwich *et al.*, 2013: 254).

Similar concerns regarding suspicion of male practitioners were reported within Vandenbroeck and Peeters' study (2013:50). Participants agreed that the engagement of men and women in ECEC was beneficial for children as male and female practitioners complemented eachother. However, a highly publicised case of paedophilia in Belgium led to concerns "when I cuddled them [the children] or gave them a kiss, I always wondered, is it OK to do so? Will people not get wrong ideas about me?"

During interviews and observations of male practitioners in Germany, Buschmeyer (2013: 304) also identified participants' avoidance of particular tasks involving physical closeness or intimate activity such as taking children to the toilet or changing nappies. Instead of engaging in these activities, the male practitioners focused on planning activities or taking lunch breaks.

Views of men's role and professional practice

Although a small number of participants within Vandenbroeck and Peeters' study (2013: 49) referred to initial negativity from their parents, the majority of participants referred to positive reactions from family and friends. This was especially the case with participants who had previous experience of working with children (and therefore had rather predictable career choices). Reactions from children's parents were also largely positive, with particular reference made to increased engagement of children's fathers with male practitioners.

Although the participants spoke of positive experiences within their professional practice, the reported views of their colleagues indicated that the practitioners were being assigned to stereotypical tasks including outdoor play and construction activities. Whilst one participant suggested that he was viewed as a "visitor rather than a colleague", another felt that he was there "for amusement of the children, not for the care" (Vandenbroeck and Peeters, 2013: 51).

Reasons put forward for the need to increase the number of men in ECEC within the Cremers *et al.* study (2010) included the potential for them to offer a different range of activities and ideas from their female colleagues as well as the importance of role models for girls and boys. Arguably, in the light of children's views of male and female practitioners as reported within Foreman's (2008) study, the recruitment of men and women in ECEC does little to challenge traditional gender roles. Although men's participation in the field may have the potential to challenge gendered, occupational segregation, the actual practices of male and female practitioners potentially may serve simply as a reminder of the roles of men and women traditionally occupy within the home.

Initial findings from the Brandes *et al.'s* study (2012) suggested that the biological sex of the practitioners did not have a significant impact upon their interaction with the children. However, it did appear to be an influence on what the practitioner chose to do with the child as part of the creative activity, the materials used and the interests that informed their discussion. For example, in terms of the use of materials, male practitioners were more likely to use nails and wooden panels

during their activities (at 45.5% of men in comparison to 28.6% of women), whilst female practitioners were more likely to use beads and pearls as well as coloured paper (used by 52.4% of female practitioners in comparison to only 4.5% of men). It would be particularly interesting to examine the behaviours of male and female practitioners with the children throughout day-to-day practice. This might provide more reliable insight into the *roles* of male and female practitioners as well as their interactions and relationships with children.

The findings of interviews and an observation of male ECEC teachers in Buschmeyer's study (2013) revealed their ability to provide children with role models as a central feature of professional practice, understood from two different viewpoints. On the one hand, one male practitioner understood a role model to be someone who demonstrated how to manage conflict "for a peaceful way of living", thus avoiding reference to gender, whilst another participant drew directly upon gender in relation to his ability to act as a role model to the children in his care as "some families do not have fathers" (p. 298). Similarly, many of the participants in Hedlin and Åberg's (2013) study spoke of a difference between the roles of men and women within the field with reference made to the likelihood for male practitioners to engage in sporting activities as well as "rough" play with children. One female participant commented "I think it gets rougher with guys [male practitioners] and the kids like it much more than the things they do with us" (Hedlin and Åberg, 2013:153) therefore suggesting that the male practitioners offered something different from their female colleagues. Indeed participants also spoke of male practitioners' ability to understand male children, whilst female practitioners were better suited to the needs of female children because "the teachers know how it was in their own childhood, when they were girls" (p. 153). The notion of men as role models was also a popular reason for increasing their presence in the field, not least because of the increased divorce rates at the time of the study. Men, in this instance, were understood to take on a fatherly role.

Outline of research studies

Beyond Europe

Having made reference to European studies, the following will present a selection of international research that illuminates how other societies have responded to policy influences. In particular, studies ranged from interviews of Sumsion (1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2005), Anliak and Beyazkurk (2008), Harris and Barnes (2009) and Erden *et al.* (2011) to the experiences of male practitioners captured within written statements in the study of Farquhar *et al.* (2006). Reference will also be made to the large-scale survey of Farquhar (2012) and the mixed-method, international study of Brody (2014).

Sumsion (1999) documented the experiences of one male director of a day care centre in Australia through a series of three in-depth interviews, with particular attention given to his career trajectory. Having conducted interviews with thirteen male students enrolled on an early years course at an Australian university, Sumsion (2000a) then conducted in-depth interviews with six of the participants with the aim of exploring their reasons for wanting to work in the field, the reactions of family members and peers to their career decision as well as their experiences. Sumsion also (2000b) interviewed another male practitioner in Australia, regarding his experiences in the field. In 2005, Sumsion interviewed sixty-three children (thirty-six boys and twenty-seven girls) aged between three and five years, regarding their perceptions of the male practitioner who worked with them. The findings were drawn from children's drawings of the male practitioner as well as their verbal accounts and descriptions of him.

Anliak and Beyazkurk (2008:313) held two focus group interviews with seven male students on a preschool training programme in Turkey in order to explore their perceptions and thoughts on men working with young children as well as their experiences on a course where the remaining fifty-two students were female. Harris and Barnes (2009) investigated the impact of a teacher's gender on

four-year old children's perspectives of their teaching role within the provision by interviewing thirty-seven children (sixteen boys, twenty-one girls) as well as semi-structured interviews with four kindergarten teachers (two male, two female) in Australia. Erden *et al.* (2011) interviewed eight male preschool teachers regarding their experience of working with young children in Turkey. Farquhar *et al.* (2006) consulted with four male practitioners currently working in the field, in order to gain an insight into their experiences. The male practitioners each created an article outlining their experience in ECEC. In 2012, Farquhar conducted a national survey of ECEC services and practitioners with the aim of determining the level of acceptance of men in ECEC from those already working in the field. A total of eight hundred and thirty-four respondents from a variety of ECEC services participated. Brody (2014) presented the biographies of six male practitioners working in Britain, Norway, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United States regarding the influences they encountered in their career decisions, their own philosophies of early learning as well as the participants' own constructions of masculinity. Data were collected from one non-participant observation of each practitioner as well as one-to-one, unstructured interviews with them.

Recruitment and retention

Sumsion's (1999) participant was completing a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education degree and had worked within the field for approximately ten years within senior leadership roles. He revealed his family's expectation that he would follow the same career path as other male members of his family who worked within the mining industry. Whilst his father appeared largely supportive of his decision to work with young children, remaining family members were reportedly suspicious as he was a "red-blooded bloke. So why the hell is he doing this?" (Sumsion, 1999: 458). This expectation revealed the participant's decision to enter a field that was entirely opposite to the traditionally masculine environment of the mining industry.

Interestingly, the case of men in ECEC provides an insight into a situation in which men actively challenge these cultural ideals. Although negative reactions had been experienced, this had not deterred the participant from pursuing a career in ECEC, thus suggesting a commitment to the field. He completed a Diploma of Teaching (early childhood) and was rapidly promoted to a managerial job role. Despite his enjoyment of working with children, the participant referred to the consequences of challenging cultural ideals. He reported unease at surveillance of his practice and suspicion of his intentions and described his situation as "a time bomb which is ticking away" (Sumsion, 1999: 462). Thus the participant was not referring to concerns regarding the safeguarding of children, but instead emphasised his awareness of the need to safeguard himself against allegations of abuse.

The participant within Sumsion's study (2000b) had entered the workforce in his twenties. Due to his enjoyment of looking after his own children, the participant worked as a teaching director of an urban preschool setting that catered for approximately forty children. Within his role, the participant was responsible for twenty children aged between two and four years of age and at the time of the research he had been a member of the workforce for five years. When speaking of the recruitment of men into the field he commented that, given the choice between a highly qualified female or male practitioner, settings were likely to employ the latter candidate due to the opportunity to have "a decent early childhood worker *plus* a man" (Sumsion, 2000b:135).

When describing attitudes surrounding men's work within ECEC, one participant within Anliak and Beyazkurk's study (2008:312) stated that he avoided speaking about his career choice due to societal perceptions and suspicions of men in the field. Hence when asked about his job role he spoke of being in "primary teaching" that was deemed to be a more suitable role than working with very young children. The remaining students also reported concerns and anxiety regarding their participation in ECEC and similarly referred to their job roles in such a way that implied a focus on

children's educational development and learning. Reported roles included "teacher of child development", "child development and education" as well as "education specialist" (Anliak and Beyazkurk, 2008:312) and thus participants appeared to distance themselves from the *care* of young children, in favour of roles that reflected seniority.

Reported advantages of men's participation in ECEC included the potential benefits of their qualifications and work experience on their relationships with their own children as well as the potential to enhance the quality of ECEC due to increased competition between male and female staff. One participant suggested that, as men may feel unfulfilled by their experiences in ECEC work, they were likely to seek career progression. This was reflected in participants' career intentions. Only one intended to work in ECEC as a preschool teacher on completion of the course, whilst the remaining participants preferred the idea of working with older children, becoming directors or owners of private preschool provision and also shared their aspirations of designing learning resources and toys for young children. One participant predicted that if male practitioners became more successful than their female colleagues, increased competition between the sexes would take place and thus raise the standards of ECEC. This reflects a situation in which traditional roles of men and women are reproduced and men's role in the field is associated with increased standards and quality. However, a barrier to men's participation in ECEC included concern regarding relationships and interactions with female colleagues that, they felt, might lead to them feeling isolated. One participant specifically referred to the possibility of female colleagues being jealous of male practitioners due to their advancement into positions of seniority.

When asked to describe their reasons for entering the field, the preschool teachers within Erden *et al.'s* study (2011:3201) referred to a genuine interest in ECEC work, whilst one participant entered the field due to an interest in progressing onto a university course as well as his perception that "it would be easier to find a job". The reactions of family members, to their career decision, revealed

that five of the families found their son's career choice strange and unusual, whilst the remaining three participants reported largely positive reactions. The friends of five of the participants reacted negatively to their career choice due to attitudes surrounding the nature of ECEC work, with one respondent commenting "they thought that pre-school education was the lowest among teaching departments" (p. 3203) whilst another commented that his friends had assumed he was a babysitter.

A total of 64% of respondents within Farquhar's study (2012) felt that New Zealand Government ought to attempt to increase the number of men working with young children and 12% advised against Government action. Instead, these participants suggested that responsibility was up to men themselves and reliance was upon their individual career choices, interests and awareness of the jobs available within the workforce, whilst other respondents warned of the potential to trigger positive discrimination by direct Government intervention. Respondents offered a range of strategies to increase the number of men working with children including scholarships and incentive grants to support the education and training of future male employees, media campaigns to promote the role of men in ECEC, setting performance targets to encourage settings to assess their ability to encourage a diverse workforce and also efforts to make ECEC a more attractive career option.

Of the six professionals in Brody's study (2014), four had begun their work in ECEC as student teachers with an average age of entry into the field of twenty-four years, whilst one participant had previously worked as an officer in the Israeli army and the other worked in international customer services. As Brody had targeted men who were established within their roles, participants on average had worked in ECEC for twelve years and were aged between thirty to fifty years. Four participants worked with children aged between five and seven years and referred to themselves as "kindergarten teachers". Two participants worked with children aged between one and two years as a "nursery care giver" and "pedagogic leader" (p. 21). Only two of the participants were understood to have actively sought work in a field traditionally associated with women, whilst the remaining

participants entered ECEC work unintentionally. Having said this, they all intended on staying within this occupation. Unlike the mixed reactions to male practitioners' career choices reported in previous studies, four participants in Brody's study had received approval from their family members. The remaining two had entered the field later in life and therefore did not refer to parents' reactions to their career choices. In terms of reactions from children's parents at the setting within which they worked participants all reported positive experiences and relationships. Two participants, however, had experienced skepticism from parents and there was indication that trust and respect had to be gained from them over a period of time.

Allocation of tasks and roles

In terms of experiences with children, the participant in Sumsion's study (1999) reported children's reactions to male and female practitioners as "completely different" and he shared his enjoyment of engaging them in carpentry and "handyperson activities" (Sumsion, 1999: 461) that female practitioners did not tend to instigate. Participants within Sumsion's study (2000a: 90) referred to the desire to make a difference in their roles in ECEC, specifically to challenge gender stereotypes and provide children with "good male role models". Yet, participants identified the highly gendered professional culture of ECEC, whereby emphasis was on "sitting around, giving hugs" as opposed to "rough and tumble" play (p. 92). The participant within Sumsion's study (2000b: 132) also reported a difference between men and women in the "way that they interpret things and express themselves" and advocated a balance of men and women in ECEC as influenced by his belief in "a Yin and a Yang".

In relation to the potential advantages of working within this sector, an ECEC teacher within Farquhar *et al.'s* study (2006) commented that the presence of a male practitioner "provides parents with a greater choice of staff to approach and talk with". He continued "as a male teacher I am more physically active and boisterous, and more involved in outdoor play" (p. 15). Whilst this respondent

appeared to follow more traditional notions of gender, another respondent (an ECEC centre manager and teacher) attempted to move away from this. In fact, within his practice, this respondent aimed to challenge what he deemed to be stereotypically masculine behaviours:

> I show the children that men can be sensitive and are not tied into the stereotypical macho roles…I have worked with women who are much better at carpentry and ball kicking than me, I encourage them to show and share their skills with the children, and even to teach me in front of the children so that the female stereotype as well as the male one is questioned by children (Farquhar *et al.*, 2006: 17)

Views of men's role and professional practice

Observations of the day-to-day practices of participants within Brody's study (2014) reflected an emphasis on play and an understanding of the practitioner and child as equal participants in the play experiences. For three participants, perceived differences between male and female practitioners were identified in relation to child safety; whilst female practitioners reportedly gave "emotionally indulgent responses" to children who injured themselves their male colleagues referred to "addressing the injury objectively" and considered it an "opportunity to learn to be strong in the face of pain" (p. 131). Different discipline styles between men and women were also referred to with male practitioners reported to have a natural authority and more authoritative voice than their female counterparts. Concern was raised by three participants, regarding accusations of abuse, meaning that they actively avoided taking children to the toilet or changing them without another adult present.

The children within Harris and Barnes' study (2009: 172) reported minimal difference in the roles of male and female kindergarten teachers with both being seen as "someone who cares" and "someone who teaches". However, perceived differences were revealed when children were asked about specific activities. Whilst there was an equal number of responses regarding male and female teachers engaging in play with the children, physical sports and games were associated with men on

sixteen occasions, in comparison to only nine occasions where these activities were associated with female teachers.

Children within Sumsion's study (2005: 118) most commonly reported the male practitioner's role involving monitoring and regulating, shortly followed by reference to the teaching role of the practitioner. Reference was also made to the participants' enjoyment of physical play and outdoor activities. The participants viewed the practitioner as a teacher first and foremost, whilst reference to gender was largely absent.

Participants within Sumsion's study (2000a: 93) spoke of the rewards of working within ECEC, yet also spoke of their experiences of practice that reflected surrounding views of male practitioners. Uncertainty of the reactions of children's parents as well as colleagues was reported, with one practitioner suggesting, "there's just not the trust there…especially when you're working with 0-3 year olds". Although participants spoke of gaining the trust of parents and colleagues eventually, they reported experiencing subtle discrimination within their day-to-day practices. For instance, whilst one participant spoke of feeling unwelcome within his place of employment, reference was also made to the repeated comments received from female staff "isn't it nice to have a male in the centre" (Sumsion, 2000a: 95) that had an impact on the participants' self-esteem; instead of being recognised first and foremost as male, the participant wanted to be recognised as a professional who had achieved his position due to his academic experience. Participants, all of whom referred to other male practitioners who had been falsly accused of abusing children in their care, also reported constant self-monitoring "…i'm bouncing this little girl on my knee…why does that feeling of guilt come into your head?" (p. 95).

The context of practice was characterised by poor work conditions, specifically low salaries, poor career progression and low status of ECEC work. Concern regarding work conditions was reported to deter men from entering the field and also encouraged male practitioners to consider alternative

career options with more favourable conditions. Whilst male school pupils reported disinterest in a job within ECEC, those who did work in the field had entered the workforce later on in their career trajectories, sometimes influenced by family members' occupations. Once in their roles, male practitioners tended to work with older children, with only a minority working directly with very young children. Reported practices of male practitioners were considered as different to their female colleagues, with reference repeatedly made to the tendency for men to engage in physical activities and interactions with the children in their care. In emphasising difference between male and female practitioners, based on essentialist notions of gender, allocation of tasks and roles was reflective of the traditional division of labour between men and women. As such, the value of male practitioners as role models was emphasised, yet there were inconsistencies regarding what this might entail.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter has employed the policy trajectory model of Bowe *et al.* (1992) and has made visible the complexity of gender. Although interest in men's role in the promotion of gender equality has increased, application of the structural inequality approach highlighted overall inequalities and unequal power structures between boys and girls, men and women. This approach also emphasised societal and cultural contexts surrounding gender inequalities. Moreover, focus within state politics on tackling disadvantage by raising attainment reflected a rather narrow view of equality. Although the attainment gap between boys and girls has been recognised at the level of policy text, the research studies revealed that this was not necessarily translated into economic privilege and greater access to capital at the level of practice. Indeed, the studies served to highlight the persistent inequalities that reinforce ECEC work as low status and associated to women, not men.

However, the case of men in ECEC provides an insight into potential developments, albeit gradual, towards equality, where emerging diversity is apparent and connected to women and children. The following chapter will present the methodology employed throughout the study in order to explore

this case further, and will in particular, draw attention to the methods used, ethical considerations of the study as well as consideration of reliability, validity and trustworthiness.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The use of the policy trajectory model formulated by Bowe *et al.* (1992), as a way of examining the literature, reflected that the interplay and exchange between the top-down trajectory of policy implementation and the re-interpretation and implementation of policy by ECEC professionals is a complex process that requires careful examination.

This chapter details and justifies the choice of research design and methods of data collection that have been selected to address the research questions. It will also address threats to reliability and objectivity, and validity and credibility, ethical considerations and will detail particular challenges relating to the role of the researcher.

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the policy-to-practice context of male professionals working within ECEC. Accordingly, focus upon the micro, meso and macro contexts of male professionals within ECEC stimulated the development and design of research questions.

4.2 Research Questions

1. What is the policy- to-practice context of male professionals in ECEC?

2. How, if at all, does policy guidance influence the recruitment of men in ECEC?

3. What are the values and beliefs of a range of stakeholders with regards to the role of men in ECEC?

4. What are the reported practices and experiences of a range of male practitioners in ECEC?

5. What do male practitioners do within day-to-day interactions and transactions in ECEC?

The research questions have each been assigned to the three areas of the policy trajectory model of Bowe *et al.* (1992). The context of influence, policy text production and practice was examined

within élite interviews. The context of policy text production was explored within the group interviews with young male students and the context of practice was captured by an online survey, life-history interviews as well as interviews with children, a practitioner questionnaire and an observation of practice within one ECEC setting.

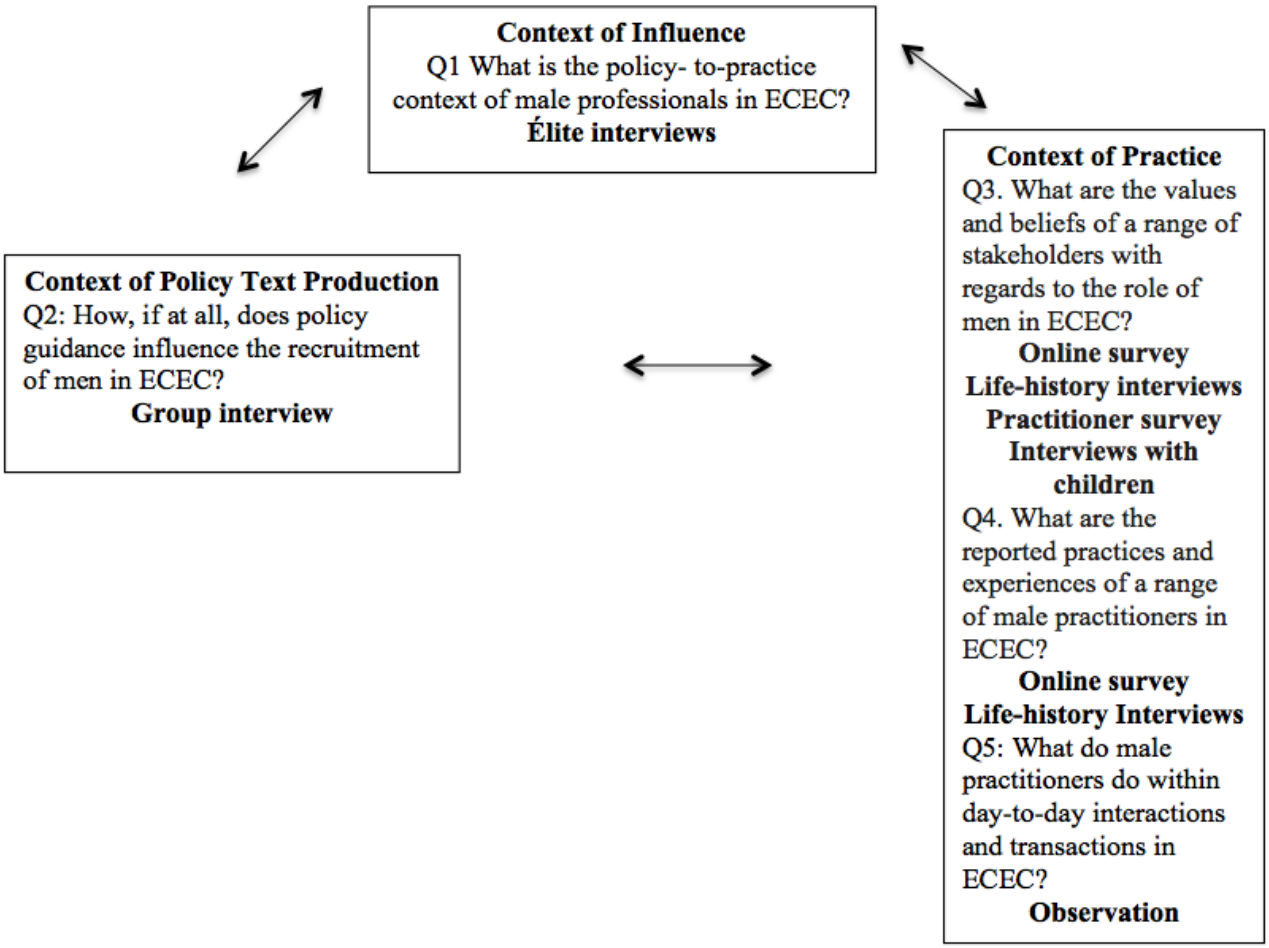


Figure 3 Research questions and methods within the policy trajectory model formulated by Bowe et al. (1992)

4.3 Inquiry paradigm

Critical sociological perspectives underpinned this mixed-method case study. Several changing strands of critical literature have contributed to the methodology for this study that, taken together, provide an additional synergy to the research approach adopted.

In the 1980s, critical thought reflecting a post-structural approach, influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, turned attention to the discipline of sociology itself with significant attention given to social-historical contexts. As noted earlier in the thesis, an example of the time was the matching of work needs to family structure and roles with a male-dominated paid-labour force, supported by a more-or-less full-time, home-based maternal caregiver. The post-structuralist position opened the debate to a diversity of voices and emphasised the need to ensure that these voices were heard and contextualised by the research methods chosen.

Around the same time, sociology was seeing a growth in interest in the child as a social construct, for instance, Jenks' (1982) *The Sociology of Childhood: Essential Reading*. This heralded a new sociology of childhood understood as a social construction and as a process of reconstructing childhood in society. Culture, context and diversity were thus central to a number of different critical strands and informed by feminist, post-structural and post-modern theories by the 1990s that, at the same time, stressed the limitations of a positivist approach.

i) Ontology and epistemology

In terms of ontological, epistemological and methodological bases, as noted by Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011), with plurality of theories comes contestation. However, simple debates about paradigms and methods have evolved into "rich conversations" about what it means to do qualitative or, in this case, mixed-method work (Lincoln *et al.,* 2011). Hence, with respect to ontology, the study adhered to a notion of historical realism conceived broadly by Lincoln *et al.* (2011) as shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values. Burr (2003: 3-4) argued that the ways we understand the categories and concepts used in this study, are historically and culturally specific, not only specific to particular cultures and periods of history but are seen as products of that culture and history and thus dependent upon the particular circumstances prevailing at the time. Particular forms of knowledge are thus a reflection of the time. This leads to an epistemology that is transactional and value-mediated. Whilst the mixed-method used may be the

most contentious, as noted by Lincoln *et al.* (2011: 98), it creates "the intellectual, theoretical and practical space for dialogue, consensus and confluence to occur. There is great potential for interweaving of viewpoints, for the incorporation of multiple perspectives".

The result is, that many strands of research come together and boundaries between paradigms shift. As Lincoln *et al.* (2011:97) noted, the legitimacy of postpositivist and postmodern paradigms is now well established and Geertz's (1988; 1993) notion of a 'blurring of genres' suggests "inquiry methodology can no longer be treated as a set of universally applicable rules or abstractions" (also see Lincoln and Guba, 2000). It also indicates that paradigm pluralism is now widely endorsed (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2011).

ii) Mixed-methods research

As Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) have defined it, mixed-methods research brings together elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches to gain a breadth of understanding. Paradigm pluralism reflects recognition that researchers may use multiple frameworks in the same study and whilst this may appear to be methodological eclecticism, it allows the selection of the best tools to address the research questions. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) have recently explored the idea that common analytical processes may be used to bring together disparate elements of the study, such as the constant comparative method to examine findings from different aspects of the study or indeed contrasting components of the research design.

Whilst acknowledging controversies in the meaning and definition of mixed-methods research, Creswell (2011:271) emphasised its popularity in many disciplines. Reference is made to *core characteristics* that incorporate:

- collecting and analysing both qualitative and quantitative data persuasively and rigorously;
- mixing the two forms, initially sequentially with one form building on another but with a final merging in order to address the research questions;

- using these procedures in multiple phases of the same study;
- framing these procedures with philosophical world views and a theoretical lens; and
- combining the procedures into a specific research design that directs the plan for conducting the study.

By these means, mixed-method research becomes a recognition of an orientation towards the social world (Greene 2007: 20) that suited the purpose of the study.

iii) Social constructionism

Constructionism can be understood as an assemblage of research processes and actions that are influenced by the philosophical, methodological and empirical considerations of the researcher. As Schwandt (2000: 197) stated "we do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language and so forth". This is the key principle for the constructionist perspective on qualitative inquiry.

This perspective is very compatible with Ball's (1993) view that policy analysis requires a toolbox of diverse concepts and theories in order to incorporate different meanings for policy. He cites Ozga (1990: 359) who, as noted earlier, suggests that it is important to "bring together structural, macro level analysis of education systems and education policies and micro level investigation, especially that which takes account of people's perception and experiences". Social constructionism has carried different meanings but is best and most popularly associated with Berger and Luckmann's (1966) sociology of knowledge.

As Holstein and Gubrium (2005) indicate, current applications of social constructionism are examining the broad cultural and institutional contexts of meaning-making and social order. Methodologically, the study was focused on processes that are broadly viewed as 'interpretive practice'. This required a mixed-method range of procedures, contexts and resources to capture how male practitioners construct and are constructed by experiences in their worlds and the contexts of

the policy text and pre-school institutional life that inform and shape the social construction process.

The philosophical foundation of the study meant that men could be considered as social constructions generated from the perceptions and actions of other social actors. Men are considered a social category in this study and indeed are seen to have an external reality, however gendered meanings are generated in social interactions between people (see for instance, Davies, 1989 and Butler, 1990). People (such as ECEC practitioners) thus could be understood to construct common understandings and meanings. Within this study, men in childcare are constructed in organisations, structures and positions. Accordingly, inquiry into this was approached by examining their reported characteristics, experiences and actions within the field.

In acknowledging the existence of an external reality, the study does not adhere to the radical constructionist position that claims that external realities of men and women as a category do not exist. The study instead claims that men and women exist in a complex web of meaning, social actions and organisations. Adopting a social constructionist stance allowed the researcher to learn about the enactments/performances, as well as reports of these, by men working within ECEC by listening to them, reading the literature surrounding their experiences and observing their practice. Men (and gender) in childcare was approached through reported and observed practices that provided an insight into the social reality of the lives of participants. The findings were therefore understood as participants' constructions of those experiences.

4.4 Case Study

The case study approach offered the opportunity to focus upon the particularity and complexity of the current context of male professionals working in ECEC (see Stake, 1995: xi). Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) offered different approaches to the case study. Yin (2003) identified it as a form of inquiry that could be used to examine the contextual conditions surrounding a particular case within

its real-life context, through the use of multiple sources of evidence. Similarly, Stake indicated that the case study allowed the researcher "to catch the complexity of a single case" (Stake, 1995: 2) using multiple sources. However, unlike Yin, Stake indicated that the case study operated within a series of nested contexts. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) also referred to the idea that a single method can be nested within another in order to illuminate the varying layers of analysis. Of particular relevance to the present study was the notion of a case study as a 'bounded system' (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995) that encompasses the central features that are positioned within the immediate sphere of the case itself, as well as additional features that are on the periphery. The policy trajectory model of Bowe *et al.* (1992) ensured that these features were uncovered and accounted for.

Whilst Yin (2003) did not detail the various layers that needed to be examined within the case study, Stake (1995:2) asserted that this approach to inquiry requires an examination of the historical context surrounding the case (in this instance, male professionals working in ECEC). Within this investigation, it was important to contextualise male professionals and their practice by examining the context of men and masculinities and patriarchal power relations between the sexes (see Chapter 2). Stake also emphasised the importance of recognising the physical setting within which the case study is set. At the outset of this case study, it was decided that the research would take place within England as the whole area of the EY professional is under review by the current Government. Due to the focus upon the current situation within England and also the decision to examine the policy-to-practice context of the case, it was inevitable that data would be gathered that illuminated economic and political properties surrounding the topic (relating to an additional component of the case study approach).

Stake also encouraged the case study researcher to acknowledge other cases relating to the case under study. In particular, it was important to acknowledge the methods used in the examination of

similar cases. More specifically, it emerged that similar studies (see Rentzou and Ziganitidou, 2009) had employed the interview method within a case study to examine the role of male professionals within ECEC. However, in order to capture policy-to-practice context of male professionals within this study it was important to triangulate qualitative interviews with an observation and online survey.

Yin (2003: 6) referred to *explanatory*, *exploratory* and *descriptive* case studies. Firstly, Yin described the explanatory case study, employed when the researcher is interested in the specifics of a case at surface and deep-level. This type of case study can be used when emphasis is upon the generation of causal links that are to be examined in-depth as opposed to the simplistic generation of frequencies or incidence. Conversely, the exploratory case study is used in order to generate research questions or to test theory that could be used within further study. This investigation focused upon the complexity of male professionals in ECEC thus suggesting the exploratory case study as described had characteristics in common with Stake's intrinsic case study (1995). Lastly, Yin identified the descriptive case study, employed in order to identify the incidence or prevalence of a case, among others; interest is therefore distributed across several cases.

In contrast to the types of case study offered by Yin, Stake (1995) identified the *intrinsic, instrumental* or *collective* case study. The intrinsic case study focuses upon the particularity and uniqueness of a specific case in order to better understand it, whilst an instrumental case study focuses less upon the particularity and specific characteristics of a case and is more suitable when the researcher intends to gain an insight into an issue or to refine a theory. Unlike the intrinsic case study, the instrumental case study can be used to examine whether the case is typical of other, similar cases. However, due to the limited number of male professionals working in ECEC, the focus for this investigation was not to determine the typicality of this case amongst others but to examine the uniqueness of its context. Finally, Stake described the collective case study that can be

employed when the researcher intends to examine several cases to determine the differences within and between them.

For the benefit of this investigation, the intrinsic case study was employed due to the emphasis upon the complexity and uniqueness of the context surrounding male professionals in ECEC.

The case study design provided the opportunity to examine a wide variety of evidence and therefore captured the multiple perspectives of participants in order to clarify meaning (Stake, 1995). It was important to consider the methods used within the case study design (their individual characteristics and how they would combine within one study) and the sources used. Case studies have been criticised for lack of rigour particularly relating to the quality and trustworthiness of the findings and conclusions drawn. In particular, concerns have been raised as the case study may provide findings based on ambiguous and biased views of the researcher (see Yin, 2003).

However, the value of the case study design relates to the purpose of the investigation. This study focused upon gathering in-depth, interpretive data that could be contextualised; the case study was therefore of great value. Within this investigation, rigour was enhanced by the use of the sampling strategy, methodological triangulation, accurate transcription of data and on-going attention given to the data collected and conclusions generated.

A key strength of the case study design is its ability to capture the complexity of a single case (Stake, 1995: 2). This is particularly important within this investigation as the focus was upon an under-represented group of male professionals in ECEC. The methods of data-gathering therefore sought to uncover the complexities of this particular group within policy-to-practice contexts.

Having explored the case study design, the focus will now shift to the sampling strategy.

4.5 Participants and sampling strategy

This research used non-probability, purposive sampling. ECEC networks of Early Years Professionals, Children's Centres and Early Years Teachers were identified with the hope of attracting men who had different job roles and responsibilities and who worked in different types of ECEC setting. A purposive sampling strategy was particularly beneficial for this study as there are few male professionals working within the field. Patton (1987) argued that the ability to determine any degree of heterogeneity is difficult as individual situations differ dramatically. However, the use of purposive sampling allowed any common patterns to emerge from a degree of variation, which was valuable in illuminating core experiences as well as values and practices of participants.

i) Élite Interviews

Élite participants were targeted due to their direct influence and different perspectives on policy and subsequent policy documents that surround the role of male professionals within ECEC. For the élite interviews a total of six participants were identified and initially contacted via email. An overview of the study as well as the nature of their participation in it was provided. A more detailed insight into the profiles of the élite participants is provided in the following chapter.

ii) Group and life-history interviews

Access to key professional networks was useful in the identification of male professionals and the settings within which they worked. Sample sizes for life-history interviews are generally small (Goodson and Sikes, 2010), as the aim is to collect data that provides depth and richness.

Group interview participants emerged as an opportunistic sample from previous contact with a course director at one college in the Midlands. A total of five participants, who represented different levels on the same college course volunteered to participate in the study and allowed a glimpse into the next generation of educators.

iii) Online survey

Access to key professional electronic networks gave best access to as representative a sample of male professionals within ECEC as possible. Networks were associated with EYP's, Children's Centres and Early Years Teachers within which a total of thirty-one male professionals responded.

iv) A 'day in the life'

The researcher was interested in the population of male practitioners, however recognised that they were under-represented within the ECEC field. One male practitioner from a private nursery in the southern area was identified through opportunistic sampling. At the time of data collection, the practitioner worked alongside approximately three female colleagues within the preschool room with children aged thirty-three months and above. A questionnaire was conducted with the male practitioner's colleagues who reflected a range of job titles, including at the level of senior management through to bank staff and worked with children across the birth to five age range attending the provision. This could also be regarded as an opportunity sample as the nursery owner volunteered on behalf of his staff.

Five children (two girls and three boys) aged between three and four years who attended the setting and who had daily contact with the male practitioner volunteered to be interviewed. In terms of sampling, the researcher wished to avoid the tendency, within educational research, to interview only the most confident children (who are often chosen by practitioners). Instead, as the children were able to informally volunteer by simply raising their interest with the male practitioner, it was hoped that children at varying developmental stages would participate.

4.6 Methods

i) Surveys

Both online and hard-copy questionnaires were employed to examine the values and beliefs of a range of stakeholders with regards to the role of male professionals in ECEC, as well as the

reported practices and experiences of male practitioners. Conducting an online survey meant that the questions could be distributed to a range of male professionals currently working in the field via key electronic networks instantly with no monetary cost for the researcher. In contrast, hard-copy questionnaires were more suitable for colleagues of the male practitioner within one ECEC setting as they only had access to one computer and advised the researcher that completion of a paper copy was more feasible.

Online surveys increased the potential for high-speed returns and were relatively quick to construct using an online survey builder (see Fowler, 2002). Due to the time invested in their job role and the nature of ECEC professionals, the online survey offered a quick and step-by-step format that could be completed at a time to suit the participants. However, Fowler (2002:73) suggested that the online survey method limited the ability of the researcher to "exercise quality control with respect to answering all questions, meeting question objectives, or the quality of answers provided" (also see Schmidt, 1997). De Vaus (2002:131) disagreed, suggesting that in relation to the quality of answers given "mail and internet questionnaires are likely to be best in this regard". Within this investigation, question content, wording and forms of response to the questions were carefully constructed (see Gorard, 2001; Valerie and Ritter, 2012). The online survey reduced item non-response by prompting the respondent to complete a missed question before proceeding further. In addition, the size of the answer box indicated to the respondents the level of detail required for each answer. Follow-up questions were also created to probe further into initial answers given thus ensuring that respondents were able to meet question objectives. In the case of the hard-copy questionnaire, the researcher was on hand throughout the day to ensure that any difficulties in completing the questionnaire were dealt with.

The online survey provided the opportunity to gain access to a larger population from which the sample was drawn (see Schmidt, 1997). However, this can also be considered a limitation of the

survey method. Whilst this enables the researcher to target a large sample, it does not necessarily generate detailed answers to the questions asked (Gorard, 2001). As the survey was a precursor to in-depth interviews, ambiguities, mixed responses and themes could be discussed and explored later. The aim of the hard-copy questionnaire was not to target a large population but to directly target the colleagues working alongside the male practitioner. Themes that emerged within hard-copy questionnaires were triangulated with observation data as well as interviews with children.

Neither the online nor hard-copy questionnaires revealed to the researcher non-verbal cues such as emotions, behaviours and intricacies that may provide greater depth to the responses by either supporting or contradicting the verbal responses participants provide. However, as Robson (2002) stated, this relates to the purpose of the survey. Within this study, the aim was to obtain both descriptive and interpretive data, to allow for the emergence of values, beliefs and reported practices and experiences. Interviews with respondents allowed the opportunity to probe their views further and to supplement any observations with non-verbal cues.

Piloting the questionnaires used within this research was also of great importance. Doing this at an early stage of the investigation provided the researcher with the opportunity to make amendments. As there is often only one chance to collect genuine data, it was imperative that the researcher tested the instruments to ensure they would work as intended. The online survey was piloted by male students studying a *Postgraduate Certificate in Education* (PGCE), as well as men who had previously worked within the ECEC field. Oppenheim (1992) referred to the various stages of the piloting process: composing questions, testing these questions, improving questions on the basis of feedback given during testing stage and finally trying the questions again. Each of these stages was completed in order to ensure correct sequencing, wording and content of questions. A paper copy of the survey was sent to the nursery owner prior to the survey being sent to practitioners, in order to ensure that the language used was appropriate and clear for respondents to answer the questions.

ii) Interviews

Élite Interviews

Élites are defined as individuals who have been identified specifically because of the position they occupy (Walford, 2011; Hochschild, 2009; Kezar, 2003). Participants who had influenced, initiated or participated in policy that surrounded the role of male professionals within ECEC were interviewed. As a form of policy research (Walford, 2011), élite interviews provided an insight into the views of academic and political élites in relation to social policy at macro-level and the impact of government guidance on practice at micro-level.

As with more traditional interview methods, élite interviews offer both advantages and disadvantages. It could be argued that élites, who have influenced and/or initiated policy and subsequent policy documents may only provide the researcher with 'official' responses due to the position they occupy (Robson, 2002). This may only offer a partial view into the policy context. However, triangulation with data gathered from a 'day in the life' of one male practitioner as well as group and life-history interviews with individuals at micro-level ensured that the policy trajectory could be traced from macro to micro-level. A literature review that explored the contexts of influence, policy text production and practice offered an additional dimension to support the findings of the élite interviews.

Recognition of the researcher's conduct was of utmost importance especially in relation to the technical and personal skills required when conducting these interviews (Robson, 2002). Due to the position that the élite participants occupied within social policy and educational institutions, it was important to ensure that they had been provided with the necessary information regarding the purpose and content of the interviews. Élites were also sent the interview questions that had been piloted beforehand, prior to attending the interview. Furthermore, it was important to approach

participants at an early stage of the study, as élites can be difficult to locate and, due to the nature of their roles, are often busy.

Group Interview

A group interview was conducted with male college students enrolled on an ECEC course at the beginning of their career trajectories. Interview questions were inspired by the responses related to recollection of early-career experiences of life-history participants. The interview provided an opportunity to generate a wider range of responses from early- through to mid- and late- career experiences. The involvement of a group of students allowed for people with varied opinions to join together and reflect upon their views.

Arksey and Knight (1999) indicated, when collecting participants together there might be cause for concern regarding the power dynamics within the group. However, within these interviews, the researcher was able to oversee the entire process; ensuring that equal attention was given to all responses and individuals who were quiet were gently encouraged to speak. Arksey and Knight (1999) also suggested that within a group interview, participants might offer an official statement as a means of response, which may not reflect their individual views. For example, when asked about their experiences of and attitudes towards the college course, participants may have provided a particular response, had the interviewer worked within the college or have been known to the participants within that context. Therefore, prior to the interview, the participants had been made aware that the researcher had no association with the college.

In order to gather genuine answers to the interview questions being asked, it was important to ensure that participants felt supported and comfortable in order to share personal opinions within the interview room. This meant that the interviewer encouraged participants to elaborate on their responses and provide additional detail that moved the conversation away from generic and official

statements to more personalised and individual responses relating to that specific college course and that particular group of students.

Life-history Interviews

In line with the social constructionist stance taken within this study, that emphasised varying interpretations of the social world, there was a need to explore and address the multiple interpretations of the lived realities of men who worked with young children. In particular, the researcher was keen to capture the multiple realities of practitioners, who had unique life histories and therefore different interpretations of themselves and their work within the field.

Having increased in popularity within sociology and educational research as a result of the 'postmodernist turn' (Ball, 2004:3-8), life-history research recognises the value of individualistic and personal accounts of experiences (Bateson, 1989). The depth of investigation made possible by this form of interview provided a valuable opportunity to capture how lives are lived and expressed and this type of data could not be drawn from large-scale observational or survey methods.

Life-history data were collected from 'grounded conversation' (Goodson, 2001) in the form of one-to-one interviews. Accordingly, the interview did not follow a direct question and answer sequence, but instead, themes were explored through a dialogue between the interviewer, who at times, shared her own experiences, with a focus on establishing common ground in terms of professional interests and areas of expertise and developing a positive relationship with the interviwee. Whilst the approach taken by the interviewer within the élite and group interviews was to ask questions, seek responses and maintain a level of distance, the life-history interviews aimed to gather accounts of the life experiences of the participants; it was therefore important that the participants felt comfortable to share these experiences with the researcher.

Goodson and Sikes (2010:xi) argued for "research which explores and takes account of different objective experiences and subjective perspectives". Whilst the élite interviews provided an insight

into the context of influence surrounding ECEC government policy and the group interview explored the views of male students at the beginning of their careers, the life-history interviews focused on the life choices, values and experiences leading male professionals into a career in ECEC. The interviews were particularly useful in capturing the key processes of change, particularly the entrances into and exits out of employment as well as highlighting periods of career path stagnation and uncertainty. Life-history interviews enable individuals to discuss their own lives within particular social, cultural and political contexts. Thus, as well as detailing the career trajectories of male practitioners, the life-history interviews can be read in conjunction with the wider contextual picture provided within Chapter 3.

There are two key interview styles that focus upon the life experience of participants, namely, *life story* and *life-history* interviews (Goodson and Sikes, 2010). Life story interviews focus upon the story the participant narrates about the events and experiences within their lives as a reflexive process. However, within the present study, it was important to avoid simple narration of past events and experiences, as this may have limited the potential for in-depth data collection. Due to the case-study design that was adopted, it was important to obtain data that provided rich, contextualised accounts of the values, beliefs and reported practices and experiences of participants. Consequently, life-history interviews unearthed the motivations, attitudes and views within the individual contexts of the participants. Emphasis here was upon understanding the life-history within the wider context of practice.

Instead of obtaining simple narratives regarding the life-history of participants, the focus was upon situating the life story within the political, social and historical context of the individual, thus extending this from a story to a life-history interview. The life-history method was particularly powerful when used in conjunction with the additional data collection techniques and provided a wealth of data that enriched initial findings from the survey.

There are, however, well-founded concerns relating to the responses that participants give during life-history interviews. The researcher recognised the potential difference between what participants reported and actual practice and social experience (see Goodson and Sikes, 2010). For example, when asking participants to reflect upon their own educational experiences and training, what they recalled and what actually happened, especially in relation to factual information such as specific dates, may have been distorted. As Bateson (1989:33) noted, accounts provided during these interviews are based upon the participant's choice and selective memory. Within the present study, participants were provided with an overview of the themes to be explored in order to allow them the opportunity to think about their responses prior to the interview. This also allowed participants the chance to check specific dates and details that they were then able to bring to the interview to support their responses.

The researcher recognised that although the life-history interviews provided in-depth data, they could not be considered as complete histories. Instead, the interviews offered a snapshot of the critical moments selected by the participants and hence although there may have been gaps, their histories were personal and unique and had a significant place within this study.

Life-history interview questions were piloted in advance within a mock interview with the research supervisor to ensure that they were appropriate and covered the key themes and stages within the life-history.

Interviews with children

Five children aged between three and four years participated in structured, one-to-one interviews. It was the researcher's belief that children were the best and most accurate sources of data regarding their experiences and interactions with practitioners in ECEC settings, as supported by Article 12 of the UNCRC (UN, 1989). This denotes respect for the views and thus voices of children in matters concerning them. The focus of this element of the study was specifically on the children's

experiences with male and female practitioners. Whilst observation data provided an insight into their interactions and transactions on one day within ECEC, interviews allowed for an insight into their values and beliefs.

Concern is often raised regarding the most appropriate way of interviewing children for the purpose of research, as influenced by increased understanding of their cognitive and social development. The researcher recognised that care needed to be taken in generating and constructing the interview questions, as well as ensuring that the participants were comfortable and familiar with the interview location. However, these were considerations that were consistent for all interview participants, throughout data-collection. Essentially, participants across all interviews were treated in the same way throughout the study. All potential participants were approached, introduced to the researchers, provided with an overview of the study and asked to provide either verbal or written consent if they wished to participate.

Whilst group interviews with children are often valued for their perceived ability to increase participants' confidence (Arksey and Knight, 1999), one-to-one interviews were conducted due to an emphasis on individual values and beliefs regarding experiences with two practitioners in ECEC as opposed to generating discussion amongst a group of children. In terms of ensuring participants' confidence in speaking with the interviewer, the interview was conducted at the end of the visit, meaning that the children were able to get to know the interviewer prior to the interview. All children present within the preschool group on the day of the visit were told of the researchers' interest in their experiences within the nursery and consequently all were given the opportunity to participate.

The researcher's previous experience, in working with children from birth to five years within nursery provision proved useful in terms of familiarity with the children's routines and style of interaction during the interview. Key themes to be explored within the interview, relating to

perceived differences and similarities between practitioners as well as activities enjoyed by the children and practitioners, were generated prior to the interviews and arose as a result of emergent themes obtained from previous data collection. A chance to observe the children's interactions with the practitioners and each other during the morning of the visit enabled the researcher to construct interview questions accordingly. Although interview questions could have been generated prior to the interview, the researcher was very much aware that simply creating 'appropriate' questions for children would not have taken account of individual cognitive and social abilities as well as preferred styles of interaction.

iii) Observation

For the benefit of this study, a structured, systematic and mixed-method observation was conducted. As Marshall and Rossman (1995) suggested, observation is not simply about looking, but about systematically noting events, behaviours, people, routines as well as interactions. As the values and beliefs, as well as reported practices and experiences had been obtained from questionnaires and interviews, the observations enabled the researcher to conduct what Robson (2002:310) referred to as a 'reality check'. Hence, an observation that captured a typical 'day in the life' of one male practitioner within an ECEC setting was conducted. This provided a unique opportunity not only to collect data regarding actual practices, interactions and transactions, but also enabled the researcher to triangulate these with the reported practices and experiences of participants as obtained from additional data collection.

Qualitative field notes were made against a timeline to record the context of the observation, whilst a video recording of the observed activity allowed for repeated viewing and time-sampling. As the intention was to capture a highly-structured observation, as well as a running record of the events observed, an additional researcher was required. As Silverman (2005) noted, it can be difficult to work as a lone researcher and conduct observations without missing significant aspects of activity.

In contrast to 'participant observation' that involves prolonged engagement of the researcher in the setting within which the observation is taking place (Bryman, 2008), 'non-participant' observation was deemed most appropriate for this study to avoid disturbing ongoing practice as far as possible. In this instance, the observers did not participate in the activity being observed, thus enhancing the directness of the data obtained (Robson, 2002). The role of the researcher was not to speak directly with the participants, but to watch and listen to the behaviours and events unfolding, first-hand. The intentions of the researchers were overt to all members of staff and children attending the preschool room. The observation of an ECEC worker took place in his natural setting and focused upon the activities and interactions that occurred within it. As Morrison (1993:80) advised, observations provide an opportunity to gather information regarding the physical setting, specifically the organisation of the nursery environment, human setting, meaning the organisation of practitioners within the preschool room, the interactional setting, in particular the frequency and nature of interactions between staff and children and finally, the programme setting including any resources and routines. The use of multiple, mixed-methods of recording the observation data enabled the researchers to capture each aspect of the activity and environment, as described above.

However, as with all social research methods, observations present particular challenges, specifically relating to the potential for bias. Cohen *et al.* (2011:473) indicated that there may be the potential for 'reactivity' of participants, that is, those being observed may alter their behaviour if they know they are being observed. Within the present study, the researcher felt it important to visit the setting for the day in order to ensure that children and adults became familiar with the observers, so that the effect that their presence might have on interactions and practices was minimised. In addition, there is the potential for 'attention deficit' (Cohen *et al.,* 2011) whereby the researcher is distracted and may miss moments of activity, however the recording of events within a structured schedule and within a video recording ensured that all activity and interactions were captured. Simpson and Tuson (2003:51) advised that video recording provides a more 'unfiltered'

observational record than simply relying on human observation. The playback facility on the video recorder allowed the researcher to rewind the recording to capture any key moments of activity that might have been missed on the first viewing. This also helps to overcome 'selective memory' that involves forgetting or overlooking data (Cohen *et al.,* 2011). However, the researcher considered the impact of the presence of the video-recorder on the practitioners and children. The proximity between the participants and the video recorder was considered at all times and it was ensured that practice was captured from as wide an angle as possible to avoid participants feeling pin-pointed.

4.7 Data Analysis

Like Tesch (1990), the researcher sought to distinguish between the linguistic tradition, that is, the treatment of text as an object of analysis that includes conversation (discourse) analysis, and the sociological tradition that sees text "as a window into human experience" (Ryan and Bernard, 2000: 769) and draws upon work across the social sciences. Within this study, emphasis was on free-flowing texts, such as narratives in the life-history interviews as well as responses to open-ended interview questions. Analysis thus involved grounded theory, analytic induction and the analysis of specific sections of text, of which the process of coding, finding themes and building a conceptual model was central (Charmaz, 2000).

The online survey generated predominantly quantitative data through the use of closed and fixed choice questions and ratings. Data sets were analysed in order to generate descriptive data and present frequencies. The time-sampling observation schedule of Clarke and Cheyne (see Aubrey *et al.,* 2000) was utilised for the observation of ECEC practice (see Appendix 6), which consisted of thirty-second observation intervals over a period of twenty-minutes. During this time, the interaction between the children and practitioner was recorded, the activity being observed was also noted down as was the location of the activity.

Qualitative data were obtained from the responses to open questions within the survey, interview data as well as the observation field notes made against a timeline of activities and were analysed through the use of the qualitative grounded theory approach (Newby, 2010; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Bryman, 2008; Charmaz, 2000, 2005; Glaser, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). For all qualitative data sets, a priori themes were generated from and in order to address the research questions at the first stage; emergent themes were then identified at the second stage.

i) Grounded theory

Charmaz (2011) reminds us that the grounded theory method employed within this study is also a contested method, especially when mixed-method research is adopted to which she notes researchers in education are most attuned. As she concedes, researchers who bring multiple types of data to their analysis render their reports less easy to dismiss, the test of mixed-methods studies lies in "doing credible work in all adopted methods to answer the research questions" (p. 367).

The researcher was mindful throughout this process that it was important for the theory to remain true to the data collected, in order for it to be meaningful to the individuals that it related to. As Locke (2001:59) advised "a good theory is one that will be practically useful in the course of daily events, not only to social scientists".

In this endeavour, the researcher engaged in the process of grounded theory, namely theoretical sampling, coding of data, theoretical saturation and constant comparative. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) theories should be grounded, emerge directly from the data and be part of a continuous process of inquiry. Theoretical sampling involving the collection, coding and analysis of incoming data helped determine the need for further data to be collected in order to contribute to the development of theory (Bryman, 2008). Coding involved the categorisation of raw data (from interview transcripts and open questions in the questionnaires), through which commonalities and surprises emerged. Thereotical saturation occurred at the stage in which no additional data were

required and key concepts in the theory had been sufficiently developed. The constant comparative method involved the comparison of existing and new codes and categories in order to refine and generate new themes that were grounded in the data (Bryman, 2008).

4.8 Reliability, Validity and Credibility

Steps were taken throughout the study to enhance reliability, validity and trustworthiness. Reliability relates to whether the study is repeatable and whether the measure would obtain the same results each time. Validity is the extent to which a research instrument measures what it sets out to measure (Mason, 1996; Cohen *et al.*, 2011) and trustworthiness refers to the quality of a study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Issues of reliability and validity were first addressed through careful piloting of all instruments (questionnaires and interview schedules) to check that questions were clear and intelligible to participant groups, comprehensive and could be completed within a reasonable time frame. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Participants were given the opportunity to validate transcripts.

Reliability and validity was particularly relevant to the quantitative data gathered from the closed questions of the online survey and structured, time-sampling observation. Validity and trustworthiness related to the qualitative data drawn from the élite, life-history, group and child interviews as well as the open questions within the online and practitioner surveys.

The observation involved two researchers, using two forms of observation (field notes and video recording) therefore enhancing inter-observer reliability. The structured observation schedule had been used in a number of previous national studies e.g Robson (1989), providing good grounds for considering that it could be administered efficiently and that the low-inference categories could be easily identified and quantified in frequencies. Moreover, repeated viewing was a particular advantage in checking the judgements by two observers.

Research questions provided a structure to the analysis and a priori themes were easily extracted with reference to these. Once the research questions had been addressed thoroughly, data could then be re-examined for emergent themes as well as consideration given to the extent to which these emergent themes were shared across groups.

Overall, the researcher recognised that, as this was a small-scale study, the findings could not be generalised and applied more generally to male practitioners across England, however the research was considered to be taking a step towards generalisability (Stake, 2000:439). It was the researcher's intention to provide 'naturalistic generalisation' so that the findings of the study would encourage readers to reflect on their own interests and experiences (Stake, 2000). The observation enhanced ecological validity, in that it captured the every-day practices of practitioners in ECEC without altering the environment in which they worked.

As a central requirement of trustworthiness, validity was enhanced through the depth and scope of the qualitative data that provided thick and rich descriptions (Cohen *et al.*, 2011) of the experiences and practices of practitioners. For example, within the online survey, opportunities were provided for participants to elaborate on their answers within open-questions and comment boxes and similar opportunities were also provided within the practitioner survey.

Lincoln and Guba (1985), Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006) as well as Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) identified several benchmarks or criteria in order to achieve rigorous standards of inquiry. In line with their principles, enhancing trustworthiness and validity involved taking steps to increase the credibility qualitative data collection. For instance, well-established research methods were utilised, methodological and participant triangulation was also achieved and regular peer-debriefing occurred between the researcher and supervisor. Peer-reviewing at each stage of analysis took the form of national conference presentations and the publication of a peer-reviewed journal article. In

addition, records in the form of an audit trail detailed the development and details of the study from the beginning to end and therefore provided a transparent trail of the research path.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) also emphasised the importance of prolonged engagement. Within this study, data collection began at an early stage in the research timeframe, allowing for the scope of male practitioners' voices to be captured over a sufficient period of time. Persistent observation complemented the scope enabled by prolonged engagement, by providing a depth of understanding regarding the research topic, in order to allow the researcher to focus in depth on the most relevant aspects of the study. The ability to transfer the findings to other contexts was an important factor in achieving trustworthiness.

4.9 Role of the Researcher

Within qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument. Due to the epistemological foundations of the research it was essential to recognise the role of the researcher as part of the reflective and reflexive process in order to enhance the credibility of the study. The study was conducted and the thesis written from the perspective of a young, female researcher who had previously worked in the field of ECEC.

i) Women researching men

There have been concerns identifying methodological issues associated with female researchers researching men, specifically how gender is performed by the researcher and the researched that also intersects for instance, with social class, age and professional status (Pini and Pease, 2013). In particular, the power relations between men and women that the present study speaks of are equally the power relations present between the female researcher and male participants that Pini and Pease (2013) drew attention to. Bagilhole and Cross (2006) warned that this might influence what is disclosed or what is neglected during conversations between interviewer and interviewee. Pini and Pease (2013:9) questioned whether the researcher should be seeking to achieve an empathetic

relationship with the participants or maintain a critical distance. However, the question was not one of whether empathy or distance ought to be ensured but instead related to the engagement with partipants as an early childhood researcher and educator.

As one would expect, perspectives of men and masculinities in social science research have reflected variations in commentators' orientation in relation to men as influenced by epistemological, geopolitical and personal contexts (Kimmel *et al.*, 2005:4). Accordingly, a researcher might consider the topic of men and masculinities as unproblematic or with sympathetic alliance to men. Yet, explicit mention and theorising of men has remained somewhat neglected within gender social theory. In consideration of men's theorising of men, Hearn (1998:786) for example, proposed a series of discursive practices that might be used by researchers. Although the researcher within this study was female, the approach taken to researching men was understood to share similarities with the approaches offered by Hearn. The topic of men within research may be *avoided*, perhaps considered as unproblematic in which case, men are implicitly, rather than explicitly referred to and their positioning taken for granted. Alternatively, *attachment* or indeed *detachment* between the researcher and the topic may imply ambivilance, with treatment of the topic regarded as unproblematic. Whilst explicit reference may be made to men, this is attempted without critique. *Alterity*, by contrast, is the process through which forms of 'otherness' are created, for instance by the researcher's labelling of male practitioners as 'other'. Social developments and changes have also stimulated *critical* examination of men and masculinities, the features of which have been detailed by Hearn (2014:422). Within the present study, a critical approach to men and masculinities meant:

- explicit, not implicit focus on men and masculinities;
- acknowledgement of feminist, gay and/or additional critical gender studies;

- recognition of the gendering of men and masculinities;
- understanding that men and masculinities are socially constructed concepts that are produced and reproduced, thus rejection of essentialist arguments;
- as socially constructed terms, men and masculinities should be understood to evolve and change over time, as well as within social, cultural and life-history contexts;
- recognition of the association between men and gendered power;
- recognition of the intersection between gender and other forms of social division (such as social class).

In taking account of these processes, the researcher within the present study engaged in a *critical exploration* of men as gendered individuals located within a number of societal institutions, including the family and ECEC provision. No position was adopted as to whether men's presence in ECEC should or should not be increased as this was considered a false debate. Indeed there was a need to avoid entering into polarised arguments, as any conclusions drawn from these arguments would be likely to have a limited lifespan, due to theor lack of acknowledgement of the significance of wider and more complex social, political and economic contexts of practice.

ii) Interviewing élites

Data collection involved interviews with élites who influenced, initiated and/or participated in policy and subsequent policy documents. Élites may have acknowledged the researcher as providing a credible contribution to the research topic, however, the power difference could also have reduced the likelihood of them agreeing to participate due to their authoritative roles. The senior roles and responsibilities of this group also had the potential to affect the researcher's

confidence during the interviews. However, the doctoral experience was such that the researcher was often in contact with individuals from various contexts and within varying roles of seniority.

iii) Reflexivity

Qualitative research has been criticised due to the subjectivity of research findings (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Here, concerns may be raised regarding the intense and intimate connection between the researcher and the topic of inquiry that can result in tensions between the researcher's interpretation, values and ethical position and may have an impact on the data collected. It was therefore important to maintain a reflexive diary throughout the entire research process, from the decision to focus on this topic, to the generation of research questions, the collection of data and the analysis and reporting phase in order to avoid what Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 501) refer to as 'the interpretive crisis'. This can, for instance, take the form of researcher bias that is particularly pertinent when conducting interviews (Ortlipp 2008). To avoid this, it was important within the reflexive diary, to recognise the researcher's personal choices and experiences throughout the entire research process.

Furthermore, the researcher recognised that individuals actively participated in the construction of the social world via the interactions between themselves and others and resultant understandings that were created. Neither subjective nor objective approaches were tenable for this investigation, with preference instead for intersubjectivity. Taylor (1971) suggested that the divide between objective and subjective practices can be overcome if recognition is given to the potential for intersubjectivity. Within this, emphasis is upon the exploration of social reality co-created with the members/ agents within that reality as "implicit in these practices is a certain vision of the agent and his relation to others and to society" (Taylor, 1971:35).

4.10 Ethical Issues

Within social research, ethical awareness underpins the entire research process from planning and implementing, to reporting and publishing. When conducting research, the researcher becomes a guest in the unique and private spaces of the participants (Stake, 2000:477). It was therefore vital to employ sensitivity to emerging issues and participant responses throughout the process. This research complied with the British Psychological Society's (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009). Procedures here related specifically to conduct, confidentiality and consent.

So far as possible, the situated approach to ethics was adopted within this investigation. Simons and Usher (2000) stated that instead of viewing ethics as a set of general principles that are subsequently applied to all research, the researcher should recognise that "...ethical principles are mediated within different research practices and thus take on different significances" (Simons and Usher, 2000:1). Ethical considerations (ongoing and unanticipated) were therefore context-specific, not just bound by universal codes, hence they were the opposite of universalisation and directed more towards local contexts and specific to practices. As Small (2002:89) advised, "new and unfamiliar situations require us to extend our existing abilities, not to return to first principles and set up formal codes". Hence, as opposed to focusing solely on ethics within the general research process, focus was more on the ongoing inquiry.

The ethical statements of the BPS (2009) emphasised the importance of informed consent, specifically participants' right to freedom and self-determination. It was important to obtain either verbal or written informed consent, in advance, by providing all potential participants with a detailed overview of the research, including details regarding its purposes and their role as participants. It was felt that only at this stage could they agree to their involvement in the research. Participants were told that they were free to withdraw consent and to remove themselves from the study at any stage, without difficulty or prejudice. In order to make an informed decision about their involvement in the study, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about any part of

the research and their potential involvement in it and were provided with the relevant contact details to do so. Ownership of recordings and transcripts was also discussed with the participants. They were assured that they had the right to change, amend and comment upon their transcripts and that they may withdraw themselves from the research at any point.

Within this study, confidentiality referred to the protection of participants' right to privacy. To successfully achieve this, participants were assured that at no point in the study was their personal information passed onto a third party or could be traced back to them. In relation to confidentiality, participants were assured that their responses to questions would remain anonymous throughout the study to protect their identity. This was achieved by providing participants with pseudonyms and ensuring that any personal details were stored within password protected files. These were deleted soon after the data collection in order to protect participants' identity further.

Data sets from the interviews and surveys were stored within a locked filing cabinet that only the researcher had access to. Storage of video recordings that were made during the visit to an early years setting was also considered. The researcher was notified of any children who could not be recorded and was mindful of this at all times. Video recordings were only saved onto the video camera whilst the researcher analysed the data and were then deleted at the end of the study.

Whilst the researcher deemed it important to speak with the children about their experiences within the early years setting, the best interests of the participants were paramount. Hence, all of the children within the preschool room were introduced to the researchers at the beginning of the visit and also had time, prior to the interviews, to become familiar with them. There has been suggestion that children, especially those under the age of five years, are unable to give consent (see Coady 2001) thus consent should be sought from parents. Whilst the owner of the setting had obtained this prior to the interviews, it was deemed equally important to gain assent from the children as the

interviews focused on *their* experiences in the setting. Once they had been told of the nature of the researchers' visit, the children were then able to volunteer to participate in the interviews.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the chosen stance of inquiry and also discussed the case study approach that was taken. Individual methods utilised within the study have been considered, as well as the role of the researcher. Steps take to address reliability, validity and credibility have been addressed and ethical considerations have also been presented.

Within the following chapter, the findings from the first data-gathering method, that provided an insight into the three policy contexts, will be introduced.

Chapter 5

Élite Interviews

5.1 Introduction

In line with the Bowe *et al.* (1992) trajectory model of policy contexts that framed the research, it was important to conduct élite interviews with the intention of capturing the context of policy influence, text and practice. The six participants were either involved in developing and informing policy texts or relevant guidance, closely involved with the public promotion of men in ECEC or had conducted research in relation to the topic (see Table 1).

5.2 Research Question

This chapter presents the findings from élite interviews and in doing so, answers the following research question:

- What is the policy-to-practice context of male professionals in ECEC?

5.3 Methods

i) Participants

At the time of data collection, the field of ECEC was undergoing significant change specifically in terms of the quality of provision and the role of ECEC practitioners. In addition to this, the composition of the workforce had also been briefly considered within both the Tickell Review (Tickell, 2011) that focused on the quality and range of ECEC and also the Nutbrown Review (Nutbrown, 2012) of early education and childcare. It was therefore important to investigate the views of individuals who were associated with the field and its policy and guidance in addition to the views of the academician who was associated more broadly with gender in primary education. The participants had varying levels of involvement in different areas of the early years sector. For instance, one participant had previously been an advisor on global, national and government committees, whilst another was the chief executive of an early years educational charity. Their

participation therefore provided an overview of the policy-to-practice context currently surrounding male professionals within ECEC. In total, six élites were interviewed; an overview of their characteristics is presented below.

Table 1 Élite participants' characteristics

Name	Organisation	Characteristics
Élite 1	Voluntary sector nursery provider and educational charity	The chief executive of a voluntary sector nursery provider and educational charity. Élite 1 has been involved in several campaigns relating to early years issues including the recent ratios proposal. As part of his role, élite 1 has also been involved in research specifically focusing on the experiences of men in ECEC.
Élite 2	Training and resource centre and a leading provider of early years services	Supporter of early years practitioners and settings (in relation to practice and provision) and has previous experience working within a range of ECEC settings across England. Élite 2 has also written widely on many aspects of early years and worked at a strategic level with policy makers.
Élite 3	University/Researcher	An academician with expertise in gender and education. Élite 3 has been involved in a number of research projects and has investigated the experiences of male teachers within primary schools.
Élite 4	Chair of several early childhood research committees in the UK	He has a great deal of experience within ECEC globally. Particularly

		interested in childhood socialisation and has been an advisor on national and government committees.
Élite 5	University	He began his teaching career as an early years practitioner, specifically working with children aged three to eight years. More recently, élite 5 has worked within various posts in higher education.
Élite 6	Private sector nursery provider	The chief executive of a private sector nursery provider. Élite 6 is responsible for over thirty early years settings across England.

Due to the emphasis on the policy-to-practice context of male professionals, it was intended that participants would be drawn from a range of organisations. Table 1 indicates that élites were from both private and voluntary sectors, as well as those tasked with providing training and resources for state settings. In addition, one élite, who had significant experience within ECEC, worldwide at policy and practice-level, was also chosen as well as a researcher who had investigated the broader topic of gender and education. Five élites were male, with one female participant.

ii) Materials

Investigation into the policy-to-practice context of male professionals in ECEC was achieved by the use of a structured interview schedule that was prepared prior to the interview. Questions focused on the context of policy influence, text and practice surrounding male professionals within ECEC. Whilst a structured interview schedule was used, it was important that the interviews focused on the élites' positions and specific areas of interest, thus additional questions were asked, that emerged from the conversation. Therefore élites were able to elaborate on relevant topics as a natural development of conversation between interviewee and interviewer.

iii) Procedure

Élites were sent an email detailing the nature of the investigation, its aims and the reason for interest in their involvement within the interviews. It was important to acknowledge the time restraints of élites; therefore there was a degree of flexibility in terms of the time, date and location of the interviews. All élites responded positively to the invitation and were then provided with the interview schedule so that they could begin to prepare for the interview (see Appendix 1). Élites were assured that their identity would remain anonymous and that the interview was to be recorded and then transcribed to ensure completeness and fidelity. The interviews were conducted at a time and place to suit participants. Generally, the interviews lasted one hour.

5.4 Analysis

As outlined within Chapter 4, data sets were analysed based on a priori categories that were drawn from the interview questions. Data were analysed at the level of influence, policy text production and practice in keeping with the policy trajectory model underpinning the study, the research question and the structure of the interview schedule itself. Then, grounded categories were developed based on emerging themes that were common within the data. For example, at the level of influence, élites spoke of the attitudes towards male practitioners in the last ten years, which indicated positive and negative developments. The grounded categories of 'attitudes towards paedophilia', 'changes in gender equality' as well as 'reactions to male practitioners within ECEC settings' were then developed.

5.5 Results

i) Context of influence

Élites all spoke of the attitudes towards male practitioners in ECEC over the last ten years. Of the six élites, five (1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) referred to minimal change in societal attitudes towards male ECEC practitioners in the last ten years. Having said that, élite 2 felt that previously, as an early years teacher, "you were kind of a freak-show novelty" whereas he reported that this was less so within the current context. Having said this, élite 2 also shared concern that there were "different ways that

some boys learn and that's not always acknowledged and understood partly because the staffing is entirely female and full of people who have never been boys". Élite 4 commented "change in the last ten years in actual reported numbers [of men in ECEC] has been miniscule" whilst élite 3 suggested that "society is just as it always has been, it would be nice to have a mix [of men and women in ECEC] but there are always going to be reservations". Élite 6 spoke of the "most obvious change" in attitudes, and suggested "male practitioners are more likely than not to be considered an asset in ECEC". Furthermore, élite 6 suggested that male practitioners were now seen as "positive role models that fill perceived gaps in family life".

In addition to these general responses, élites identified three key themes in relation to attitudes towards men in ECEC: attitudes towards paedophilia, changes in gender equality; and reactions to male practitioners within ECEC settings.

Élites made reference to the surveillance of men in society in general and the heightened awareness of men working with young children in ECEC settings. Five élites (1, 2, 3, 5 and 6) directly referred to the abuse of children by men when reflecting on current attitudes towards male practitioners. For example, élite 1 specifically referred to the sexual abuse of children within England but also within a European context. Élite 1 referred to a recent visit to an ECEC setting in Denmark during which, a manager suggested that the Criminal Records Bureau checks or the equivalent were not required for female practitioners, only men, because "data showed that it was men that were involved in the sexual abuse of children". Within England, élite 1 referred to past female perpetrators of child sexual abuse and suggested that such crimes were "unthinkable" because "we have historically been conditioned to expect a nurturing role from women". However he also felt that a recent accusation of child sexual abuse by a high-profile television presenter and media personalities would further impact upon the surveillance of men who want to work with young children. Similarly, élite 2 also

referred to the same case of child abuse and suggested that this "raises awareness of male paedophilia which is inevitably in people's sub-conscious".

Élite 3 referred to a particular instance within her own research on male early years teachers where she encountered a male practitioner who was later accused of sexually abusing children within his care. Particularly interesting was her initial reaction to him as a male practitioner "he demonstrated all the characteristics that you would expect to see, that would be regarded as feminine characteristics – empathetic, gentle, warm, caring". Élite 5 considered the current "hysteria" surrounding the sexual abuse of children by men and commented "men are more likely to be perpetrators than women but that doesn't mean all men are child abusers but men are looked at with suspicion if they want to work with children". Finally, élite 6 felt that the media had "contributed to suspicions about men in childcare", however suggested that this had served to highlight an issue that "has enabled providers to address parent concerns openly and frankly".

Four élites (1, 3, 4 and 6) made reference to wider changes in gender equality when considering attitudes towards men in ECEC. In particular, élite 1 felt that "people want to be more equal, people want to come across as equal, they support the position that holds men in the same regard as women when they are looking after children". However he felt that this had not necessarily impacted on the experiences of men in ECEC. Instead, he commented "when you dig down into the nitty-gritty of it, there is still a high level of prejudice when it comes to the day-to-day practicalities of things".

Meanwhile, élite 3 spoke of a "sudden shift" in the last ten years in what was considered to be a "very heavily [gender] stereotypical" context. Élite 3 referred to Government resource material that was previously used to encourage men into education, that she felt was "reinforcing the gender boundaries rather than trying to dismantle them". Élite 3 felt that more recently, there had been progress in the strategies used to encourage men as well as women to consider a career within education; attention has shifted towards employing "the best person for the job rather than just

somebody who looks like a man". Élite 4 spoke of "the gradual equalisation of gender rights and entitlements" that he felt "added to the democratisation of knowledge and ideas and may have provided a slightly more sympathetic context overall [for men in ECEC]". Élite 6 felt that positive publicity surrounding "moves to correct gender balance" had "enabled providers to more confidently and robustly challenge misconceptions and stereotypes in, for example, refusing to accept some parent preferences regarding nappy changing".

Three élites (1, 2 and 5) considered their own experience of reactions to male practitioners within ECEC. For example, élite 1 specifically referred to the reactions from parents of children who attended their settings (voluntary sector provision). Élite 1 referred to letters received from parents regarding male practitioners. One parent wrote, "it's great that we've got a guy working in our setting, I just ask that he isn't allowed to change our babies' nappy". Élite 1 suggested (as a result of findings from research he had previously conducted) that parents were more accepting of male practitioners within ECEC group settings and less so with male practitioners who were working from home as child-minders. Élite 2 referred to reactions that he had received when applying for a job within a school. At interview he was asked "how would you get away from the disadvantage of being a man teaching in a nursery?" Élite 2 also referred to the interviewer's change in attitude when she noticed he was wearing a wedding ring "she had obviously assumed I was gay and for some reason that was going to be a big deal". Similarly, élite 5 attended an interview for a reception teacher post and was asked by the Head teacher "do you have a problem with little girls?"

Alongside attitudes towards men in ECEC, élites also considered the value associated with a balanced workforce. Élite 1 believed it was important to try and achieve a more gender-balanced profession and commented that developments were occurring in other areas of ECEC, such as the terminology of parental leave rather than maternity leave. However, children are still attending female-dominated ECEC settings "so it seems odd that the rhetoric is in one direction and the

reality is in another". Élite 2 also felt that it was important to develop a more gender-balanced workforce and likened it to the struggle to have female politicians or female business leaders. He stated, "I think all roles should be open to both genders because otherwise you suppress and inhibit human potential". Élite 3 wanted to move away from a focus on achieving a gender-balanced profession and instead called for greater diversity of the workforce. Élite 4 felt that it was important to have more men in ECEC for three reasons:

1) it demonstrates that men can have association with child-rearing, attachment and emotions;
2) it shows that both genders are involved in balanced modeling and concerns with children;
3) it helps dispel the 'macho', somewhat violent, testosterone-laden view of masculinity.

Élite 5 also felt that it was important to have a more gender-balanced profession because "you need to have people in those roles demonstrating that actually, they can make a real contribution to children's lives, whilst simultaneously trying to tackle some of the perceptions [of men]". Élite 6 commented "we must at least try to achieve a workforce that reflects society and offers positive role models to children at what is the most important, formative period of their lives".

Two élites (1 and 2) referred to the lack of influence on recruitment of men in ECEC. Élite 1 felt that society had "failed miserably" to influence the recruitment of men in ECEC and suggested that there was disinterest in their role. He also commented that he had seen the topic "drift further and further off the political agenda". Élite 2 felt that there was nothing that had significantly influenced the recruitment of men in ECEC.

Élites 3 and 6 identified the influence of the economic climate on the recruitment of men in ECEC. Élite 3 referred to the influence of the recession on the number of people applying for jobs in education, whilst élite 6 commented that the prolonged economic downturn had made "jobs for life" a thing of the past – with more men looking at less traditional "second career options". In addition

to this, élite 6 also suggested that redundancy and unemployment had the potential to influence the career choices of men.

Élites 4 and 5 referred to the nature of ECEC work as a potential influence on the recruitment of men in ECEC. Élite 4 referred to ECEC work within an international context and suggested that in Australia, the recruitment of men in ECEC is influenced by the notion that the career "offers a profession". Furthermore, élite 6 referred to his own experience within ECEC in Finland where it is "a fairly high status profession and one where there are clear, high-level academic and professional skills"; it was this he felt that influenced the recruitment of men in this context. Élite 5 considered his own experience of career progression as a possible influence on the recruitment of men in ECEC "I suspect it [work in ECEC] may well have enabled me to move more quickly than I would have done had I gone into secondary education".

Two élites (5 and 6) also spoke of the potential for attitudes towards men to influence recruitment into ECEC. Élite 5 emphasised the paranoia surrounding men and young children "that is potentially quite damaging". Élite 5 suggested, "we don't tend to have a rational, sensible conversation about it. What we do is have a whole lot of hysteria and people running around vandalising pediatricians' offices because they don't know the difference between pediatrician and paedophile, that's the level of debate we have". Élite 6 referred to the role of fathers when considering changing attitudes towards men. He advised that fathers are "actively engaged in children's care and development and, as a result, a more visible and regular presence in nursery". Élite 6 also referred to a shift in attitudes towards men and fathers reflected within Government policy and guidance, as well as "the creation of children's services departments and proliferation of Sure Start early years schemes". Élite 6 felt that this had "created an energy and enthusiasm in and outside the sector", that had the potential to influence the recruitment of men in ECEC.

ii) Context of Policy Text Production

Élites considered the potential impact of the Tickell (2011) and Nutbrown (2012) reviews of ECEC with respect to men entering the profession. All élites felt that these reviews were likely to have minimal impact on the participation of men in ECEC. Élite 1 felt that although the recommendations within the reviews were solid, less emphasis had been placed on the solutions to the concerns raised. This, he felt, was a similar situation to the *'More Great Childcare'* document (DfE, 2013) "where all of the aspirations are laid out but what we don't have now is a single solution coming from Government". In addition, élite 1 had conducted research as part of Government reform for young children and their families. Having "finally got a meeting with the minister", élite 1 was appalled that the minister had not read his report and did not appear prepared for the meeting "we thought we were going to discuss our proposals and solutions but we basically had to present it all over again because she hadn't even bothered to read the analysis, so that's how important it really was and the follow-up was zero". Élite 2 felt that there was nothing within the reviews that would particularly encourage men into the profession and thus suggested that there would be no impact at all. Élite 2 considered the cultural context surrounding men in ECEC and suggested that this would have a more significant impact on men in ECEC than government reviews.

Élite 3 felt strongly that the reviews were unlikely to have any impact as "these are not people who have researched it so how would they know what recommendations to come out with?" Furthermore, élite 3 suggested, "they [Nutbrown and Tickell] didn't deal with the issues at all, but just said yes we need more men" and also called for the Government to stop highlighting gender within policy and guidance because "they are flagging up the dualistic nature of it" and should "stop banging on" about the need to increase the number of men in ECEC. Élite 3 also felt that little attention was paid to the Nutbrown (2012) and Tickell (2011) reviews due to a lack of attention given to research in the UK. For élite 3, "research and reports have little impact on ideology and

cultural assumptions" however, as cultural assumptions change, "expectations and dispositions gradually change with them". Élite 5 felt that Nutbrown was "trying very hard to get them [the Government] to accept that an early years practitioner was every bit in that status as any other practitioner. Have they accepted it? Have they hell". Finally élite 6 suggested that any measures that focus on the professional status of the sector practitioners, access to quality training and meaningful qualifications were likely to have a positive impact on the recruitment of men. However, élite 6 emphasised the lack of sustained commitment from Government that is yet to be "backed by adequate and targeted funding".

Élites also considered the European policy context, which offers a more targeted approach to the composition of the workforce. Specifically, conversation focused upon the potential impact of a targeted gender equality action plan in England.

Élites' views on the impact of this were mixed. Élite 1 suggested that this was the only way to promote ECEC as a viable career option for men, however felt that there was a tendency to assume that higher salaries would encourage men into the workforce. Instead of this, élite 1 suggested that "proactive intervention" was required because "we've had Government rhetoric for the last fifteen years in terms of wanting to get more men into childcare and the shift has been negligible". Élite 2 felt that it would be a good time to introduce a targeted action plan given current positive attitudes towards the role of men and fathers in the lives of young children. Élite 2 suggested that if a successful action plan was introduced, "the momentum would build itself and it would stop being unusual [for men to work in ECEC]". However, for élite 2, the impact of a targeted action plan would be dependent on the cultural context within which it was introduced.

Élite 3 highlighted the difference between Nordic attitudes towards men in ECEC, considered within the context of 'equal opportunities' as opposed to attitudes in the UK that are related to sexuality, specifically "are they [male practitioners] going to be child abusers? Are they gay?"

Instead of a "blinkered approach" that focuses on gender specifically, élite 3 suggested the need for a targeted approach within leadership and management that centered on knowledge and understanding of social justice and gender equity issues. Élite 4 "had no faith in a targeted action plan for England" and did "not think the political context is right for such an approach" at this moment in time. In this élites' opinion, such a plan would be "undermined by other aspects of social expectation". Instead, élite 4 felt that "the fundamentals of professional registration and training need to be addressed from the start". He warned:

> as long as we have a highly turbulent supply system, a poorly paid group of professionals, sometimes even a denial that "profession" is an appropriate term, no clear in-service entitlement and an imposition of conditions from "outside", then the recruitment of males will be slight.

Élite 5 felt that although an action plan may be useful, it would be equally beneficial to do something in parallel "because it's hard to address those underlying prejudices without being able to demonstrate that there are lots of potential benefits to this". However, élite 5 suggested "just because David Cameron stands up and says men in early years is a good idea, doesn't mean that's going to solve it, it's going to have to be a long, hard slog". Élite 6 was yet to witness a national gender equality action plan that had been successful and felt that in order to do this, it required "concerted, sustained and consistent action in leading, supporting and appropriately funding initiatives, if significant cultural changes are to be achieved". Élite 6 felt that "tackling gender imbalance in the sector is about improving quality and the opportunities available to young children and not a cosmetic exercise". Élite 6 therefore advised that targeted support and funding for existing initiatives was likely to be more effective than a gender equality action plan.

Élites considered potential goals for the recruitment of men in ECEC. Élite 1 was unsure about the value of setting a target for the number of men in ECEC settings and instead, felt that all avenues should be explored in terms of how the number of men working within the field might be increased. Élite 1 suggested that a form of "social engineering" was required to increase the focus on men in

ECEC as well as a monetary reward or incentive for settings to recruit men. In addition, élite 1 felt that "progression within the infrastructure" was needed at the earliest stage in career decision-making. Élite 2 emphasised the need for a plan that had "concrete measures" and therefore felt that the idea of a target was useful, as opposed to "some supportive words that aren't really going to make a difference". Élite 2 suggested that a goal could be that every ECEC setting has a male member of staff, however warned of the potential for that to become tokenistic, due to the pressure of having to have one male practitioner. In addition to this, élite 2 suggested that the lack of male practitioners could be something that was commented on within OFSTED inspections, for those settings that have no male members of staff. Élite 3 struggled to answer this question, due to a desire to move away from "this notion of male professionals as being kind of different from female professionals". Instead of suggesting goals for recruitment of men, élite 3 suggested goals for the representative nature of professionals and greater awareness of the need for an "eclectic mix". Élite 4 did not answer this question, however was strongly averse to the idea of a targeted action plan. Élite 5 advised caution when setting specific goals however suggested a focus on doubling the number of men in ECEC over four or five years. Élite 6 identified three goals for the recruitment of male professionals in ECEC. Firstly, active and sustained promotion and information dissemination, secondly increased volunteer and work experience opportunities in nurseries and thirdly, training and career development.

iii) Context of Practice

All élites referred to ECEC work conditions as potential barriers to retention of men within the field. For example, élite 1 suggested that men can no longer survive on current ECEC salaries and therefore seek work elsewhere, whilst élite 5 referred to the tendency for male professionals to be "promoted out [of their job in ECEC] to other opportunities". In contrast to this, élite 3 felt that there were no longer issues relating to low pay and instead felt that levels of pay were "pretty good now". Three élites (1, 2 and 3) considered the interactions with female staff as a potential barrier to

retention. Élite 1 referred to conversations with male practitioners who "felt that women would talk about subject matter that the man was not interested in and therefore he would be excluded". He quoted from a conversation with a male practitioner "they would talk about their relationships, the Ann Summers party they went to the night before, but nobody would ever talk about whether Manchester United beat Liverpool because it wasn't in their portfolio of interest and the men felt separated, segregated". Meanwhile, élite 2 suggested that men enter "a feminised culture" that can become "over-bearing". Élite 3 suggested that male practitioners might experience isolation "if you haven't got people around that you can relate to". In addition to this, 3 élites (3, 4 and 5) considered the nature of ECEC work as a potential barrier to retention. Élite 3 referred to increased accountability and surveillance of practitioners and suggested that "constantly being monitored and having to set targets is draining and debilitating". Similarly, élite 4 spoke of the increased emphasis on accountability, blame and the negation of risk that he felt had "serious hindrances". Élite 5 referred to the intensity of day-to-day work in ECEC as a potential barrier to retention and shared concern about the lack of attention given to the importance of ECEC work:

> It (ECEC) seems a bit of a Cinderella, in the workforce we are still seen as "they just play, it's us in the secondary sector, we do all the serious stuff" but actually the reverse is true – you get it right from the start and you are in with a chance for everything that comes afterwards.

In addition, élite 5 reflected upon his own experience within ECEC, specifically the tendency for female teachers to ask for his assistance with discipline:

> It wasn't uncommon for someone to come down the corridor and ask "can you go along to Mrs X's class, there has been a bit of bother" and I'm wondering what on earth am I supposed to do? I'd probably be the last person you would call if there was a bit of bother, I'm sure Mrs X is the best person to deal with it.

Élite 2 also considered his own experience of practice within ECEC and remembered, "in my entire career as a practitioner, I have never, ever worked with any other male. I mean sometimes we had work experience boys visit the setting but I have never worked with another man". Élite 2 felt that

to have male colleagues might add to "a sense of solidarity" and therefore may impact upon the retention of male practitioners. Élite 5 also referred to the lack of male colleagues he had encountered during his ECEC training "I was the only man on the course, I'm not sure if they had ever had a man on that course before and they certainly didn't have one for a few years after me".

Élites also spoke of the successes in terms of recruitment of male professionals in ECEC over the last ten years. All élites felt that there had been successes, however not all élites felt that these had been significant. Each élite referred to different elements of success. Élite 1 suggested that there had been success in terms of the number of men in management positions "when you get into the higher salaries, higher status, not necessarily working at the sharp end there is quite a high level of male involvement now than compared to 15 years ago". Élite 2 considered there to be better understanding and awareness within communities of the role of men in the care and education of young children. In contrast to élite 1, élite 3 suggested that men were now more likely to be spread across the profession, in terms of job roles and seniority. Élite 4 considered there to be "much more intellectually competent men in the classroom, thereby acknowledging that there is real intellectual substance in what goes on there". Élite 5 suggested that significant progress had not been made with regards to the recruitment of men in ECEC and commented that any developments that had occurred, such as a cultural shift in attitudes towards men in ECEC, had been "painfully slow" and happened "organically".

Élite 6 considered there to be increased awareness of the profession and more opportunities for men to have active roles in children's development. Élite 6 also referred to success of schemes that had been created to promote the role of men in ECEC and suggested that these "clearly demonstrate that opportunity, information and targeted support is a successful formula in addressing gender imbalance in the workplace". Élite 6 also considered the success and impact of increased research "that keeps the focus on male recruitment".

The future challenges for the increased recruitment of male professionals within the field were also discussed. All élites thought that there were specific challenges for the future and each referred to different aspects of this. Élite 1 considered low pay to be a challenge for the future recruitment of men in ECEC, however felt that a more significant challenge were the perceptions relating to the roles of men and women and social fear of paedophiles. In addition to this, he raised concern regarding current perceptions of ECEC and suggested that the field "was the perfect solution for those who have been deemed as the more failing students". Moreover, the lack of value associated with ECEC work "is contrary to everything that the Government has said in its recent rhetoric about the value of early years and how it needs to be professionalised". Élite 2 suggested that analysis and evaluation was required to measure the impact of any strategies that have been put in place to encourage men into the sector and that a future challenge was to ensure that men were not recruited on the basis of being male, but instead were recruited because of their ability to work with children. Élite 2 also spoke of the feminisation of ECEC and suggested "you become feminised because you work within that culture, so I know all about hot flushes, dieting, Brad Pitt versus George Clooney, the sorts of things I wouldn't know about if I was a plumber because that's what the conversation is about". Élite 3 also raised concern about the tendency to move away from the creativity of teaching, towards more of a box-ticking approach that limits flexibility. In addition, élite 3 emphasised the importance of training staff about issues of social justice and felt it would be a challenge to increase the diversity of the workforce without this element of training.

Élite 4 felt that there were many challenges that needed to be considered within the context of "an economically depressed time" characterised by "less-willingness to spend on ECEC". In addition to this, élite 4 referred to the challenge of dealing with "blame culture" that is influenced by "a curriculum-tied approach to ECEC". Élite 5 raised concern about the fear and hysteria surrounding men who work with young children "you whip up a kind of hysteria and frenzy where it is

completely indiscriminate". This, he considered, was a significant challenge for the future. Élite 5 also raised concern about the identity of male practitioners in ECEC:

> You feel like a chameleon on a piece of tartan and you don't know what colour to be. Should you try and establish a rapport with colleagues and families by the similarities that you have…I'm not a complete nut-job, not a sexual predator or gay. Or, do you go for the other approach to actually play up to the male stereotype and emphasise that because you are offering something different that the other practitioners aren't offering?

Élite 6 felt that the lack of Government funding presented a challenge to the future training possibilities of practitioners, as well as the new qualification requirements. He felt this would impact upon the recruitment and apprenticeship opportunities for both men and women. Élite 6 suggested that a sector-wide commitment to diversity in the workplace was required to help overcome the challenges previously mentioned.

5.6 Discussion

i) Context of Influence

The findings of the élite interviews reflected minimal change in the attitudes surrounding the role of men in ECEC. This was particularly evident in relation to the safeguarding of young children. Participants referred to persistent suspicion of men who choose to work in the sector and three reported their own experiences of this within their practice, with one élite being asked by a potential employer "do you have a problem with little girls?" The suspicion of male workers in ECEC has also remained a persistent finding in empirical research conducted over the last sixteen years, for instance in the case of Sumsion's (1999: 462) male practitioner who referred to accusation of child abuse as "a ticking time bomb". In addition, concern regarding men's role in supporting children with toileting has also been documented by Nentwich *et al.* (2013).

Within the present study, élite 1 referred to letters received from parents regarding male practitioners "it's great that we've got a guy working in our setting, I just ask that he isn't allowed to change our babies' nappy". Meanwhile, élite 6 commented that greater political attention given

to gender equality provided the support required when "refusing to accept some parent preferences regarding nappy changing". It is clear that acknowledgement of the recurring association between men and the abuse of young children is required before attempting to increase their presence. It would be valuable to deconstruct current suspicions and safeguarding strategies in order to ensure that those who abuse children are prosecuted, parents are reassured, children are safe, and practitioners are safeguarded against false accusation. Unless this is done, it is clear that reactions to men (such as those mentioned above) are likely not only to deter men from entering ECEC for fear of accusation, but also influence the experiences of those already in the field.

Previous political attention given to inequality has been linked to social disadvantage and whilst equity issues of gender, race and disability have been considered, general strategies to raise educational attainment have taken precedence. As such, whilst one élite spoke of "the gradual equalisation of gender rights and entitlements", another suggested that there was "still a high level of prejudice". The findings described above provide a reflection of the persistent inequalities of men who enter traditionally feminine occupations, which as Holter (2003) warned, may lead to experiences of gender discrimination.

Despite this, élites spoke of the value of male practitioners in ECEC and all but one referred to the need to increase their presence within the field. Reasons for this included opportunity to challenge the "testosterone-laden view of masculinity" and to "develop a more gender-balanced workforce". One élite warned that, if roles were not open to both men and women, there was the potential to "suppress and inhibit human potential". Similarly, previous studies have reported the perceived need to increase the number of men working with young children (see Cremers *et al.,* 2010; Farquhar, 2012). Yet in light of the discussion above, there appears to be a great deal of investigation required into the experiences of current male practitioners and surrounding attitudes and values associated with their work.

Two élites specifically identified the recession and associated unemployment of men as having a significant influence on their participation in the field. This echoed the context of Warin's study (2006) that reflected an unsettling of traditional gender roles as a result of local redundancies. Although Morgan (2005: 168) referred to men as "class agents" who maintain the highest positions within organisations, widespread economic recession was reported to have influenced men's career choices and increased their presence within occupations associated with less-favourable work conditions.

ii) Context of Policy Text Production

All élites referred to the minimal impact of the Tickell (2011) and Nutbrown (2012) recommendations on the participation of men in ECEC. Élite 3 suggested "they [Nutbrown and Tickell] didn't deal with the issues [surrounding men in ECEC] at all, but just said yes we need more men". Thus emphasising the need to question the current roles of men and women within the field, in order to unpick in greater detail the ideologies and mores of society.

Only one élite identified a figure for the number of men in ECEC and advised that each setting ought to have one male practitioner present; a targeted approach he believed would have greater value if it was formed as part of an OFSTED requirement. The remaining élites held mixed views about the value of such an approach. Although élites had previously referred to the value of men in ECEC they were cautious to identify specific targets and instead spoke of focusing attention on more fundamental features of ECEC work such as diversity of the workforce, staff training and qualifications as well as careers advice. In order to increase the number of men in the workforce, Nutbrown (2012) advised a workforce reform involving the restructuring of qualifications and increase in professionalism, status and work conditions. These views appeared in contrast to the introduction of a strategy, funded by the DfE and managed by the Fatherhood Institute, to increase the number of men working in ECEC settings within four LAs, with a target of 10%. Although the strategy made reference to training and career opportunities for young boys, men and fathers, it was

unclear how a target of 10% was established or on what empirical grounds it was deemed necessary.

iii) Context of Practice

All élites referred to ECEC work conditions, such as low-pay and low-status of the sector as a potential barrier to retention of men within the field. The lack of value associated with ECEC work was considered by one élite as "contrary to everything that the Government has said in its recent rhetoric about the value of early years and how it needs to be professionalised". Unlike male-dominated occupations, traditionally associated with greater access to and conversion of capital, ECEC work conditions (Penn, 1995; Nutbrown, 2012) have been reported to greatly reduce such opportunities. Nevertheless, élite 1 suggested that there had been an increase in the number of men in management positions. In contrast, élite 3 suggested that men were now more likely to be spread across the profession, in terms of job roles and seniority.

The perceived difference between men and women was referred to in relation to female practitioners' reactions to male staff, for example élite 5 reported that "it wasn't uncommon for someone to come down the corridor and ask "can you go along to Mrs X's class, there has been a bit of bother"". The positioning of the male practitioner as disciplinarian reflected the influence of hegemonic femininity and traditional patriarchal relations on the roles of men and women within ECEC services. Differences were also referred to in terms of the interests of male and female staff. In relation to men's positioning within the field élite 5 commented, "you feel like a chameleon on a piece of tartan and you don't know what colour to be". Hence male practitioners were understood to constantly be in a process of negotiation, differentiation and identification. For élite 2, this process of identification was heavily influenced by the feminised nature of ECEC work so much so that "you become feminised because you work within that culture". This implied a blurring between masculinity and femininity as well as indicating that different organisational contexts may involve different male identities; that is, ECEC as a gendered institution, generates particular forms of

masculinity and femininity. The dominance of femininity described by élites was powerful enough to influence masculinity that interestingly, élite 2 did not appear to resist. However, a different picture was painted by élite 5 who appeared to have been left in a state of uncertainty regarding the appropriateness and applicability of his masculinity.

From this, one can envisage the way that masculinity is performed as a result of and in relation to femininity; one cannot be, without the other. From the reported experiences of élites, this is not necessarily about compromise or balance between the two, but instead, involves men fitting in to the dominant workplace culture, a culture that in itself, has been generated as a result of structural inequalities.

5.7 Conclusion

The élite interviews provided an insight into the policy-to-practice context of male practitioners within the ECEC field and uncovered the impact of policy influences and texts on the everyday practices of men within ECEC. At the level of influence, minimal change in the attitudes surrounding male practitioners was reported, with the persistent suspicion and surveillance of men in relation to young children, seen to influence the day-to-day experiences of male practitioners. It was therefore unsurprising that the Tickell (2011) and Nutbrown (2012) Reviews were expected to have minimal impact on recruitment of men in the field.

Experiences of male practitioners at the context of practice were reportedly characterised by differentiation. Hegemonic femininity appeared to pave the way for complicit masculinity and thus influenced the gendered division of roles. Moreover, the perceived difference in the interests of men and women appeared so ingrained that it generated a divide amongst practitioners, leading to feelings of isolation.

Having provided an insight into the contexts surrounding the ECEC field, the following chapter seeks to explore the values and beliefs of students who are about to enter into it.

Chapter 6

Group interview

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses specifically on five young men at the beginning of their career trajectories. The findings presented here are significant in that they provide a greater insight into both the current context of influence and context of practice, but they also illuminate the potential impact of policy guidance on the recruitment of men into the field.

6.2 Research Question

The chapter will present the findings from a group interview with five male college students currently enrolled on a *'Children's Care, Learning and Development'* Level 2 Diploma course at a college in the Midlands, in order to answer the following research question:

- How, if at all, does policy guidance influence the recruitment of men in ECEC?

6.3 Methods

i) Participants

A Head of School for Early Years and Childhood Studies at a college in the Midlands invited the researcher would like to speak with male students currently enrolled on an ECEC course, hence this was an opportunist sample. A total of five male college students were selected and approached by the Head of School and invited to attend the group interview. Participants were informed of the purpose of the interview as well as the focus of the study. Of the five male students that were approached, all agreed to participate. The participants were enrolled on a Level 2 Diploma course entitled *'Children's Care, Learning and Development'*, were at varying stages of the course and were all under the age of twenty-five.

ii) Materials

The interview schedule (see Appendix 2) consisted of open questions in order to encourage flexibility within the interview and to allow for emerging themes to be explored during the natural

development of conversation between group members. Key themes addressed within the interview schedule emerged from a review of literature presented within Chapter 3 and specifically related to reactions from peers and family members to career choice, perceived reasons for the lack of men in ECEC and future career intentions.

iii) Procedure

Having confirmed their willingness to participate in the group interview, the Head of School liaised with the male students in order to find a suitable time for all of them to attend the interview at the same time. Although the participants were given an overview of the study prior to the interview, the interview questions were not sent beforehand as the researcher wished to avoid discussion amongst the students prior to the interview. It was hoped that this would reduce any prior influence on answers to interview questions through discussion. The interview was conducted face-to-face within a quiet room located within the college. At the beginning of the interview, the participants were reminded of the focus of the study as well as their role within it. Participants were also advised that they would remain anonymous throughout the study and no comments would be traced back to them. The interview lasted for approximately one hour and thirty minutes.

6.4 Analysis

At the first stage of analysis, a priori categories were used to ensure that the research question was addressed. At the second stage, emergent themes, common issues and surprises were uncovered from the data. For instance, at the first stage, focus was upon the experiences of participants within the field, at second stage, this revealed participants' experience of reactions from others to their career choice and therefore represented a grounded category.

6.5 Results

i) Opportunities to experience ECEC

When asked to recall previous experience gained in the ECEC field, prior to enrolling on the *'Children's Care, Learning and Development'* course, none of the participants reported formal experience of working with young children. Instead, Participant 1 spoke of experience gained with young children within his family:

> I was helping my little cousins and went to babysit…I had been teaching them for so long and it finally clicked in their heads and I just thought, this is brilliant, maybe I can work with children.

Participants 2, 3 and 5 recalled a lack of work experience opportunities during secondary school. Participant 2 did not have the opportunity to engage in work experience during secondary school, however worked in a school as part of work experience during Sixth Form. Participant 3 commented that within the all-boys school that he attended, there was not an option to gain experience in childcare. When referring to GCSE options, Participant 3 stated "there was design technology, art, woodwork, engineering, building, electrics, there wasn't an option for childcare". Participant 5 reported engagement in work experience (during Year 11) in a school, whilst at school himself. Although Participant 5 enjoyed the experience, he ended up working with his father as a builder. Participant 4 did not refer to any work experience gained prior to enrolling on the course.

In addition to a lack of work experience opportunities in ECEC, Participants 2 and 5 also referred to lack of opportunity within school careers events. When speaking of his own experience of careers advice during secondary school, Participant 2 commented "the careers advisor was useless in secondary school, it's like they just want to get rid of you basically".

Participant 5 specifically referred to a careers event at his secondary school:

> At our school, we had a careers day and they had different sections like in one area it would be all childcare and hair and beauty and the 'boys one' on the opposite side would be mechanics, building, construction. You didn't even get to see it, even if you were interested you couldn't actually go and talk about it as an option.

ii) Initial career choices

Participants were asked to consider their initial career choices. Of the five participants, four referred to alternative initial career choices. Participant 1 had originally wanted a career in engineering, however did not enjoy early experiences of this, so focused on design technology. Participant 1 eventually enrolled on an art course at the college and "was really unsure what I wanted to do". Participant 2 had completed a BTEC course in sport upon leaving Sixth Form because "most of my mates went into BTEC in sport". Participant 3 originally wanted to be a veterinarian, whilst Participant 5 initially worked for his father as a builder, however "I thought I don't want to do this, I quite like working with kids so I will try and be a teacher". When asked to elaborate on his decision to enter education Participant 5 commented "I don't want to be doing this [building work] until retirement so I wanted a bit of a change where I can get money coming in and retire and with teaching you get a decent pension". He continued:

> You need to look after yourself. When I was doing building work I thought, i'm going to be stuck with that same wage for a long time. My mates take the piss and say, why aren't you coming out tonight? I say, well because I've got no money, but I think in a couple of years I will be earning double what they've got and they will be asking me for money instead.

Participant 4 did not refer to initial career choices.

iii) Reactions

Reactions from peers and parents of children attending placement schools was a significant theme that emerged as a result of the participants' discussions with each other during the interview. All of the participants referred to reactions to their decision to work with children. Four participants (1, 2, 3 and 4) commented on reactions from others to their career decision and one participant (5) spoke of his own reactions to enrolling on the Diploma course. Participant 1 referred to reactions from parents of children attending the setting within which he was placed during the college course "I didn't feel comfortable in the nursery just because parents looked at me funny and they were like,

what is this man doing here? But in the school I felt more comfortable". In addition, Participant 1 reported reactions from school peers:

> We have learnt to cope with the stick they give you. I got a bit of stick off the Sports Science lot as well and I said to them, what would you rather be doing? I'm in a class full of gorgeous girls and you're going to be massaging football players.

Participant 2 referred to reactions from his school peers to his career choice and suggested "[it's] like banter, they try and take the Mick out of me" and suggested "I reckon you've got to be strong-headed to do this course and take some stick". Participant 3 also referred to reactions from school peers, however commented "everyone who used to take the piss out of me has stopped because they thought hang on, he isn't interested anymore but they do it to get a reaction and they think hang on, he's a lad doing childcare, usually it's only women so they find that a sticking point". Participants 1 and 4 both referred to the reactions of female students on the same course at college. Participant 4 commented "I think the girls like having men around" and Participant 1 stated, "I think girls are more accommodating to have a lad in the class than lads would be if there was a girl in the class. I think a girl would feel pressured to try and fit in but I don't feel I have to talk about shopping, shoes or anything like that". Conversely, Participant 5 spoke of his uncertainty on the first day of the Diploma course, where there was a predominantly female student population "on my first day here, I was sat in a room and all the girls were talking and I didn't know what to talk about because they were talking about shoes".

iv) Attitudes towards current Level 2 Diploma

Participants' attitudes towards the Diploma course that they were enrolled on also emerged as a result of conversation during the interview. All participants were keen to express their reactions to the course. They all referred to concerns regarding workload and preference for a practice-based course. Participant 1 emphasised his preference for engaging in physical work as opposed to spending time sat at a computer "I'd rather be lifting something like tables upstairs or doing stuff like that, physical things, rather than typing on a computer for hours". Participant 1 disliked that the

coursework had to be done outside of college hours, within the students' own time "if we see there is lots of work, we don't want to do it and that's what males are like". He continued "with the stigma and coursework that you have to do, people just look at alternative ways of getting into these jobs. People think oh maybe I will go into early years but there's not enough leading in towards this course, there's a lot leading away from it". Similarly, Participant 2 spoke of a desire to have more practical experience of working with children whilst on the course "you hear about the courses where you go into placement and there are some people I know who did four days at placement and one day just at college and it just sounded so much better because you are more at placement". Participant 3 commented "it's all work, work and work and it puts you off. Eventually you are just going to sit down and not pay attention". Similarly, Participant 4 suggested "I don't feel I am accomplishing anything just by sitting and writing where as we could be out there, earning money actually doing the work". Lastly, Participant 5 stated:

> I have learnt a lot more from being on placement than I have being in college. They [the college] can tell you how to do it but it's how you use it. I learnt that each child is different and that's something you need to figure out for yourself, while working with them directly. So, you can talk about the theories but I have never used the theories once in placement

Moreover, Participant 5 suggested, "parts of theory are important but other parts, I just can't see myself using it at all. It's [the course] just not challenging".

v) Perceived reasons for the lack of men in ECEC

The researcher informed the participants that men currently make up 2% of the ECEC workforce and asked them to consider why this might be the case. Four participants (2,3,4,5) responded. Participant 5 replied first "they are not really pushed towards doing it, men are really pushed to do other jobs". When the researcher asked who men were pushed by, Participant 4 replied "by society" whilst Participant 5 commented "I think schools do it as well". Participant 4 then stated that there was "pressure to fit in with everyone, the only way to fit in is to do what everyone else is doing". Participant 2 added "because most girls follow their mates so girls go into childcare whereas lads

will go into other stuff. Most of my mates went into BTEC sport, so I went into BTEC sport". Participant 3 responded that he also followed the same path as his peers.

In addition to the suggestions that emerged out of the above conversation, Participant 1 also referred to the stigma associated with men working with young children "you are seen as gay and that's the issue, it's a huge stigma" as well as the workload as a potential deterrent "whenever you go on the course, you don't want to do the work because there is a lot of work so that's what pushes lads away I think". Participant 1 referred to the lack of male colleagues in ECEC as a potential reason for the lack of men entering the field "we are once in a blue moon, you don't see many lads doing this course because it's not seen as something that a lad would do". Participant 3 suggested that:

> you never find men in reception or below because the children aren't misbehaving so that's more about taking care of the child, looking after the child and that's why you don't really find many men in there because men are more on the side of teaching or the practical side, you don't really have to do that in reception or below, that's why you find female staff in nurseries. I have noticed that male staff don't really get put down in the lower years.

Participants 2 and 5 also referred to the tendency for men to work with older children. For example, Participant 2 commented "a lot of women are deemed to be better with working with young children and more affectionate and we are seen as not and therefore we are put in higher [school] years".

vi) Perceived benefits of men in ECEC

Of the five participants, four (1, 3, 4, 5) spoke of the potential benefits of male practitioners in ECEC. Participant 2 did not participate in this particular conversation. All four suggested that men in ECEC provided role models for children. For instance, Participant 3 suggested "because there are only female staff, the male children aren't getting a role model". Participant 4 not only referred to the potential for men to provide role models but also associated this to his understanding that "they haven't got two parents at home so they are not getting any men". Similarly, Participant 5

commented “a lot of kids don’t grow up with their Dads so they look to other male role models, so if you had a male teacher from an early age that would be like their role model at that time. They can probably go for years without having one”.

vii) Perceived differences between men and women

When asked about their experiences on placement during the course, four participants (1, 2, 4, 5) spoke of the differences that they believed there were between men and women within ECEC. Participant 1 suggested that male teachers “have a mutual understanding [of boys], we have been there, we understand and we know how to discipline that child. If a girl was misbehaving in a class, a female teacher would know how to discipline that child”. Participant 2 referred to the different discipline styles of men and women “I think men see it more that I was a child once and they don’t take it too far they just take it to the right level and then tell the child off where as women…I don’t really see them thinking I was a child once”. Participant 4 felt that “women are constantly competing to be the best because there are so many of them. Where as with men, there’s not so many of them, they can go and get a hard job straight away because there is not enough of them”. Participant 5 suggested that men in ECEC were “more laid back”. Participant 3 did not comment on this topic.

viii) Suggested strategies to increase the number of men in ECEC

Participants spoke of potential strategies to increase the number of men working in ECEC. Participant 1 spoke of a need to promote different routes into ECEC “people just assume you are going to work in a nursery. The view of it [ECEC] is really narrow, people just see it as, you are going to work in a nursery, but a lot of us aren’t going to do that, we want to be teachers or maybe social workers”. Participant 1 also referred to the possibility of a financial incentive to help overcome the dislike of coursework “if we are getting money for it then we might look at it a bit differently”. Participant 2 did not refer to any strategies to increase the number of men in ECEC. Participant 3 commented “we need to get around prejudice”. When the researcher asked how this

might be achieved, Participant 3 replied "with more encouragement for men to go into it". Participant 3 also referred to the role of schools in providing opportunities to explore the ECEC field. He advised "once or twice a year the schools get the classes together and the teachers actually talk about what they do, how they do it, why they do it. Not only would it encourage children to behave better in school but it would also encourage the children to have a better understanding of what teachers do". Participants 3, 4 and 5 emphasised the need to increase advertising of ECEC. Participant 3 suggested:

> Anything I have seen for childcare in college or outside of college is from a female point of view and that's all we see when it comes to childcare. If the advertising was more mixed for males and females or if they did different things like talking about the male side of it I think it would encourage more males to do the course and go into childcare.

Participant 4 suggested that there was a need to make advertising "clear that it isn't just a job for females, make it clear that men can do it as well and it can lead to other things, not just childcare". Participant 5 agreed and commented "the courses aren't really advertised for men".

ix) Future career intentions (including intention of working in ECEC)

None of the participants intended to work within ECEC on completion of the course. When asked about their future career intentions, Participant 1 commented that he would like to be "a primary school teacher but if it leads to being a Head teacher role I will accept that". He intended to work here as opposed to ECEC because there was "more structure in a school". He continued "at the nursery I went to, the children were all climbing up me, I think it's because I am tall and they wanted a view over my shoulders. I definitely prefer a classroom environment where they are all sitting in their seats rather than climbing all over me". Participant 2 also wanted to be a primary school teacher because "I couldn't handle a day nursery. The nursery I was at was more young girls and I just didn't like it there". Participant 3 had a particular interest in "the physical side of education" and specifically wanted to be a Physical Education teacher for Year 5 pupils. Participant 4 wanted to be a Head teacher, whilst Participant 5 intended to be a primary school teacher.

6.6 Discussion

Prior to enrolment on a *'Children's Care, Learning and Development'* Level 2 Diploma course, three out of five participants within the group interviews had intended to work in male-dominated sectors. Due to uncertainty and/or dissatisfaction with their initial choices, participants chose to gain an ECEC qualification.

All participants reported a lack of opportunity to engage in formal work experience during secondary school and reference was also made to unhelpful careers events. Participant 2 reported that "the careers advisor was useless", whilst Participant 5 commented "at our school, we had a careers day and they had different sections". These sections were divided into the stereotypical career choices associated with women and those associated with men. Although Gordon *et al.* (2000) spoke of schools as sites of social change, armed with the potential of facilitating progression towards a more equitable society, schools have been driven by discourses of assessment, attainment, raising standards and boys' underachievement.

But schools are located within a highly competitive marketplace (Power and Whitty, 1999) that requires high-quality teaching and delivery of the curriculum; however as the findings indicated, this operates within a gender régime whereby constructions of masculinity and femininity reinforce a sexual division of labour.

Participants' reference to their experiences of careers advice indicated that they were unable to make informed choices regarding their occupation. This would support Tickell's (2011) suggestion of the Careers Profession Alliance as a way of improving information given to young people regarding possible career choices. However, such an approach enters existing power and gender structures, hence any attempt to provide support through the Careers Profession Alliance will be interpreted in different ways and be used for different purposes within educational institutions.

Participants reported being mocked for wanting to work in the field by those around them, although this did not deter them from continuing on the course they were enrolled on. Instead participants spoke of their ability to disregard comments made by peers having got used to being teased for their career preferences. These findings are reminiscent of Willis's study, where working class 'lads' engaged in a number of behaviours including 'piss taking' in an attempt to establish and maintain dominant forms of male identity. Hence, the findings from the group interviews in the present study, offer a glimpse into the maintenance of dominant forms of male identity as well as backlash from school peers, experienced by young men who engaged in what might be perceived as resistant masculinity. One participant referred to his experience of getting "a bit of stick off the Sports Science lot". Alternative forms of masculinity thus challenged the gender scripts subscribed to within schools, or "masculinity factories" (Heward, 1996: 39).

Despite this, the participants were careful to maintain the cultural ideal of separate spheres and none of them intended to work with the youngest members of society, instead intending to work as teachers or Head teachers. Participants believed ECEC to be more in line with notions of femininity. Women were understood to *care* for very young children, whilst men often worked with older children. Experiences of some of the participants on placement in an ECEC setting, had further cemented their decision to work with older children.

The notion of trying to fit in with traditional career pathways appeared important for the participants when making early career decisions, whilst "most girls follow their mates so girls go into childcare", "my mates went into BTEC sport, so I went into BTEC sport"; indeed one participant had initially entered the building trade with his father.

Participants also considered the potential for men to act as role models to children. Participant 3 stated "because there are only female staff, the male children aren't getting a role model". Meanwhile, Participant 5 directly referred to the potential for men to act as role models for children

from single parent families. When considered in light of the perceived differences between themselves and female practitioners, specifically the assertion that “men are more laid back” (Participant 4) and women “are constantly competing to be the best because there are so many of them” (Participant 4), it would appear that participants’ understanding of role models was based upon traditional notions of gender and behaviour. These findings are entirely in contrast to those presented within Hedlin and Åberg’s study (2013) where preschool student teachers challenged the oversimplification of role models and shared concern regarding the emphasis on biological sex as the main defining characteristic.

Participants reported a preference for practical, hands-on training in the field as opposed to a focus on pedagogies and theories of child development that they felt their current course contained. In her review of current ECEC qualifications, Nutbrown (2012) also referred to the need for practitioners and those in training to experience work with young children:

> To be effective, early years practitioners must be able to make careful observations of children, and interact with them to form an understanding of each individual child, applying what they know about how children develop and play in a reflective and considered way

The reader is reminded that the participants reported no previous, formal work experience within the field, thus potentially justifying their desire to engage in proactive experiences during their training at the college.

In order to enhance the role of men in the field, participants suggested a need to provide more information on the possibilities to be had within ECEC, in order to provide greater knowledge of the range of career options available. Additionally, it was advised that opportunity needed to be provided within schools to network with practitioners already working with young children.

Whilst the traditional views of participants, with regards to the roles of men and women in the field, indicated a need for challenging, thought-provoking and reflexive training, participants wanted to

avoid theoretical, class-based experiences, instead wishing for placement-based modules. However, the findings indicate that without this element in ECEC training, the next generation are likely to reinforce the status quo. Indeed the notion of reflexive training is very much in line with wider, EU policy memes that focus on quality and professionalism (Oberhuemer *et al.*, 2010). The findings indicate that there is a need for critical reflection within training in relation to practitioners' understanding of and approach to gender equality within the early years environment. The processes of socialisation into caring roles, for instance within Colley's (2006) study, where girls were first recruited and then socialised for this particular occupational role, were not in evidence. The purpose and nature of training therefore is a key area of consideration for the generation of future policy texts and guidance in England.

6.7 Conclusion

The interviews with male college students provided an insight into the influence of peer-group norms, in spite of college adherence to recent guidance on the recruitment of male practitioners. Furthermore, the experiences of the next generation indicated particular areas of tension and points for consideration within future policy and guidance. The findings revealed that although participants were enrolled on an ECEC course, a career in the field was not their initial choice, nor was it what they intend to do on completion of the course. Instead participants referred to alternative, initial career choices and the intention to work with older children.

The findings also reflected the persistent notion of ECEC as women's work, as was evident by participants' reports of being mocked by peers for their decision to enter the field as well as their allocation of distinctive roles for male and female practitioners. The findings revealed limited change in peer-group attitudes surrounding men who choose to work with children, evident by the views of the participants as well as their reported school experiences. Participants followed the early qualification choices of peers/family members of the same sex, whilst girls were reported to follow the qualification choices of their female friends, meanwhile a career choice event was pre-

structured into male and female occupations. The strength of influence of peer-group culture emerged as a central feature to the construction of masculinities with attempts to fit into and abide by peer-group norms. Schools and students appeared to be reinforcing, not challenging.

Having considered the potential influence of policy guidance on the *recruitment* of men into ECEC, attention will now turn to the values and beliefs, as well as reported practices and experiences of men currently employed in the field, at varying stages of their career.

Chapter 7

Online Survey

7.1 Introduction

The present chapter focuses on the online survey that was conducted with a range of male practitioners who occupied a variety of roles within ECEC. In line with the model of Bowe *et al.* (1992), the findings of the survey provide an insight into the context of practice within which men in ECEC work.

7.2 Research Questions

The aim of this chapter is to provide an insight into the values, beliefs and reported practices and experiences of a range of male professionals in ECEC. In addition to this, it will present findings relating to the demographics of thirty-one male ECEC professionals, their inspiration for entering the field, subsequent experiences and future intentions. Specifically, the online survey aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What are the values and beliefs of a range of stakeholders with regards to the role of men in ECEC?
- What are the reported practices and experiences of a range of male practitioners in ECEC?

7.3 Methods

i) Participants

Access to key professional electronic networks aimed to give best access to as large a sample of male professionals within ECEC as possible. Networks were associated with EYPs, children's centre leaders and staff as well as early years teachers. This allowed, so far as possible, for a representative sample, which provided participants from a range of professional groups, who worked within different types of ECEC setting and who had different job roles. A total of thirty-one male professionals completed the questionnaire, which provided an adequate insight into the values,

beliefs and reported practices and experiences of male professionals in ECEC, considering that the sample was drawn from an under-represented population. As such, the questionnaire responses provided a fair number of potential participants to address the research question and also secured volunteers for the next stage of data collection.

ii) Materials

The questionnaire consisted of thirty-one questions (see Appendix 3). Twenty-three of which were closed questions (ratings and fixed-choice) and eight were open questions (in the form of a comment box) that focused on beliefs, values and reported practices of male practitioners. In order to ensure that the questions were clear and unambiguous, the questionnaire was piloted with seven male students who were currently participating in ECEC training, including *Early Years Practitioner Status* (EYPs), *Post Graduate Certificate in Education* (PGCE) with an early years focus and *Bachelor of Arts with Honours Degree in Early Childhood Studies*. Feedback from respondents highlighted the need to provide more comment boxes for specific questions to allow for participants to elaborate on their answers to fixed-choice questions. The questionnaire was therefore edited and necessary adjustments were made.

In order to answer the research questions, the questionnaire focused on seven key themes relating to the context of practice within which male practitioners worked. Figure 4 displays the key areas and focus of questions that were explored within the questionnaire.

Demographics	• Age • Qualifications and Educational Background • Current job role • Working hours • Age of the children they work with • Number of male colleagues • Number of female colleagues • Opportunities to gain additional qualifications • Attitude towards level of training received
Roles	• Age of entry into ECEC workforce • Length of time working in ECEC • Inspiration for working in ECEC • Opportunities for career advancement
Experiences	• Current salary • Level of satisfaction with current salary • Most rewarding part of their job • Least rewarding part of their job
Staff relationships in the workplace	• Attendance at formal meetings • Attendance at informal meetings • Use of staffroom
Safeguarding	• Training received • Knowledge of safeguarding protocol • Level of satisfaction for their own safeguarding
Impact	• Attitudes towards the dominance of female practitioners in ECEC • Benefits associated with men in ECEC • Barriers associated with men in ECEC • Importance of men in ECEC
Future	• Future work intentions • Strategies to improve the imbalance of male and female staff • Awareness of employers' strategies • Willingness to participate in a follow-up interview

Figure 4 Key themes in the online survey

iii) Procedure

Having identified key ECEC electronic networks, an introductory email was sent to network members. Within this, the researcher was introduced, an outline of the research was provided and the intended outcomes of the study were detailed. Participants were advised that all data collected within the questionnaire would be held anonymously and securely. Having agreed to participate in the questionnaire, participants were then sent the website address for the questionnaire and asked to complete it in their own time within a fixed period of five months.

7.4 Analysis

In relation to the analysis of open questions, at the first stage, a priori categories were derived from the research questions and related to the key themes explored within the questionnaire. At the second stage, emergent themes and common issues were uncovered (providing the grounded categories). Descriptive statistics were provided for frequencies derived from responses to closed questions. Analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data illuminated general trends relating to the practices and experiences of male practitioners as well as their values and beliefs about the role of men in ECEC.

7.5 Results

i) Demographics

Respondents were first asked to answer a fixed-choice question relating to their age.

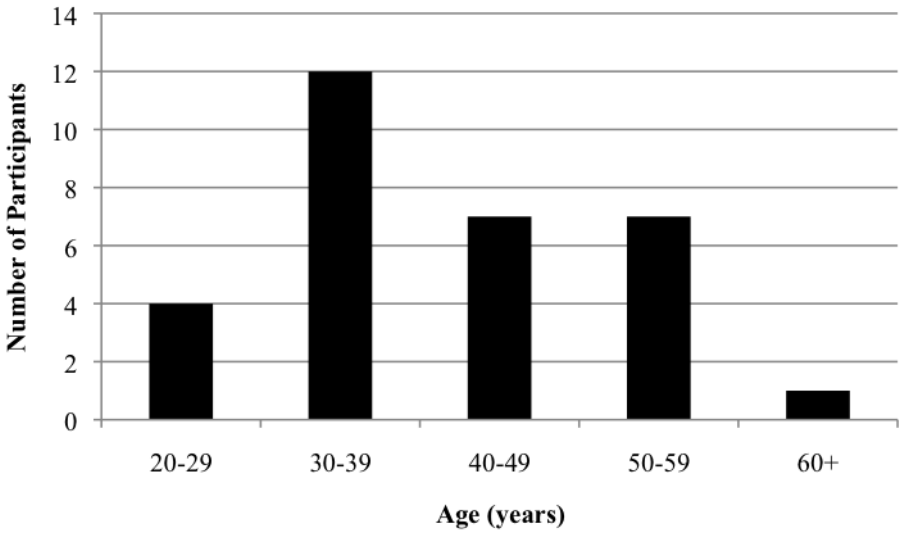


Figure 5 The age of respondents

Twelve participants were aged between 30-39 years, seven participants were aged 40-49 years and seven respondents were aged 50-59 years. Four were aged between 20-29 years and one participant was aged 60+.

The questionnaire then focused on respondents' qualifications and educational background. Respondents were asked to identify their highest qualification from a series of fixed-choice answers.

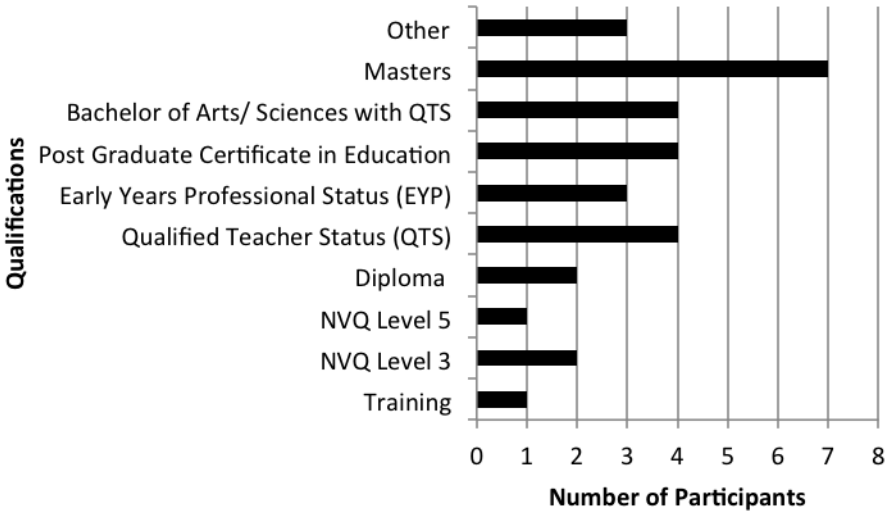


Figure 6 Qualifications and educational background

A total of seven practitioners had achieved a Master's qualification. Four respondents had Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and another four had completed a PGCE. Three practitioners had achieved EYPS and three respondents had completed Bachelor of Arts/Sciences with QTS. Two respondents reported that they had achieved NVQ Level 3, whilst two had achieved a Diploma (one in Leadership and Management, Adult Education, Business and Finance and the other respondent in Special Education). Two respondents referred to qualifications gained during their experience of working with children whilst abroad. For example, one participant referred to himself as 'Diploma qualified' whilst the second participant had achieved a Bachelor of Arts Degree and Waldorf Teacher Certification. One respondent was currently in training, whilst another achieved a voluntary sector qualification. One practitioner held an NVQ Level 5 qualification and one respondent had achieved Bachelor of Arts with Honours Degree. Overall, a range of qualifications was reported.

Respondents were then asked (within an open question) to state their current job title.

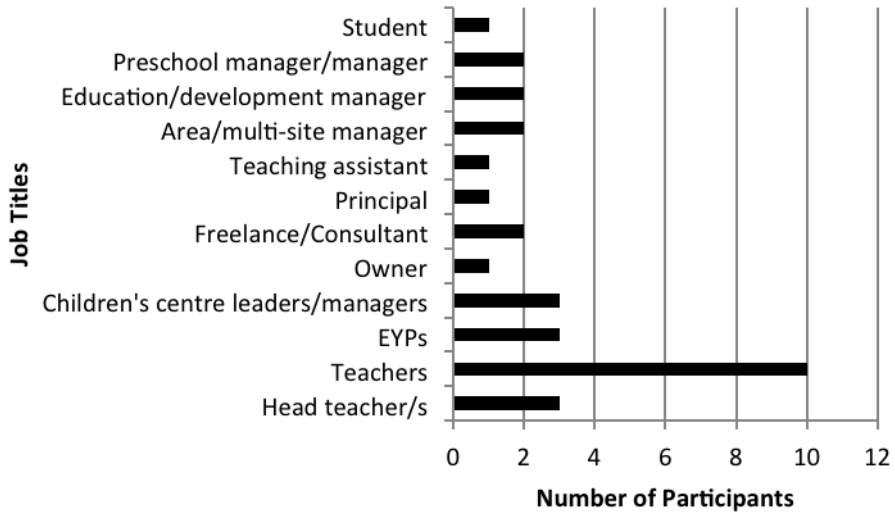


Figure 7 Respondents' job titles

Ten respondents referred to themselves as teachers, three respondents were head teachers, three were EYPs and three were children's centre leaders/managers. Two respondents referred to themselves as preschool managers/managers, two were education/development managers, two were area/multi-site managers and two worked within freelance/consultant roles. Of the four remaining respondents, one was a student, one was a teaching assistant, one respondent referred to himself as a principal and one respondent was a nursery owner.

Respondents were then asked to identify the age range of the children they currently worked with.

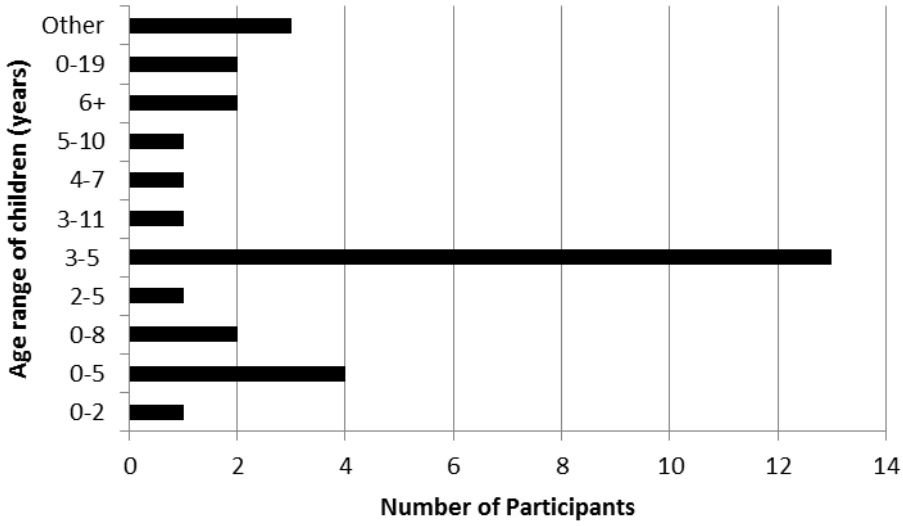


Figure 8 The age range of children that respondents worked with

Thirteen respondents worked with children aged three to five years, four reported working with children from birth to five years and three reported that whilst they worked within children's

services, they no longer had direct contact with children due to their job role. In addition to this, two reported working with children from birth to eight years and two reported working with children and young people from birth to nineteen years. Two respondents reported working with children aged six and above, one reported working with children aged three to eleven years and one respondent reported working with children aged two to five years. One respondent reported working with children aged four to seven years, one reported five to ten years and another worked with children from birth to two years.

The questionnaire then focused on respondents' working hours in the form of a fixed-choice question. A total of twenty-six respondents reported working full-time. Three respondents referred to more flexible hours of work. The first respondent reported working "80% of the time", the second respondent worked three days a week and the third respondent reported working one full day within a school. Two respondents reported working part-time.

Respondents were then asked to report the number of male colleagues who worked in the same ECEC setting as them.

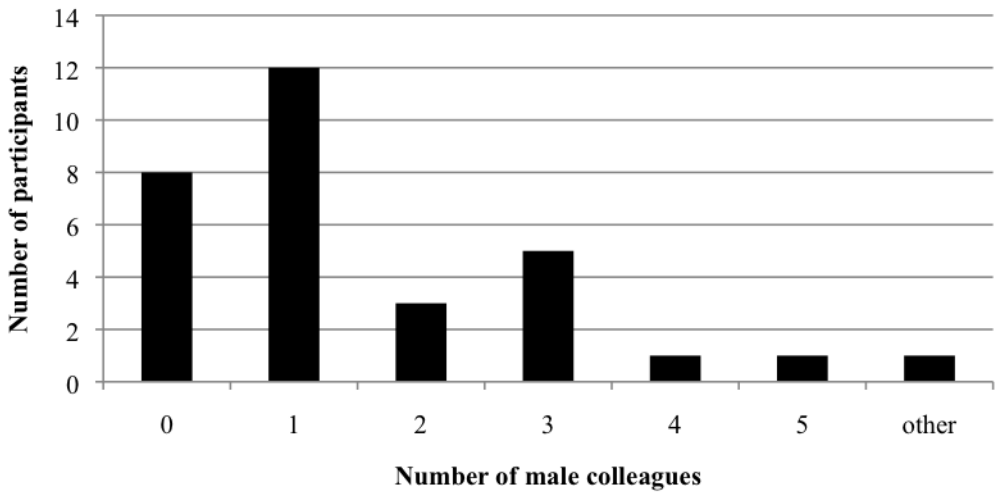


Figure 9 Number of male colleagues that respondents worked with

Twelve respondents worked with one male colleague. Eight respondents reported working with no male colleagues, whilst five reported working with three male colleagues. Three respondents

reported working with two male colleagues and one respondent reported working with four male colleagues. One respondent reported working with five male colleagues. Thus, the number of male colleagues that respondents were working with ranged from zero male colleagues to five. One respondent commented "I work in teams. There are very few men". Respondents were then asked to detail the number of female colleagues that they currently work with.

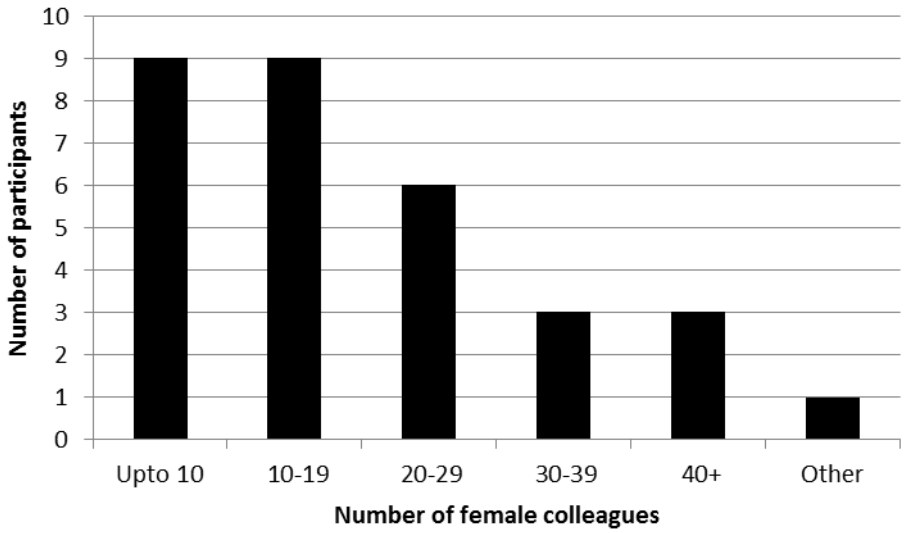


Figure 10 Number of female colleagues that respondents worked with

When asked to report the number of female colleagues within their ECEC setting, nine respondents reported working with up to ten female colleagues, whilst nine respondents worked with between ten to nineteen female colleagues. Six respondents reported working with twenty to twenty-nine female colleagues and three worked with thirty to thirty-nine female colleagues. Three respondents reported working with more than forty female colleagues. Finally, one respondent commented "most of my work includes very few men". The number of female colleagues respondents worked with ranged from two to one hundred and fifty.

Respondents were then asked to answer a fixed-choice question in order to determine whether they had completed additional qualifications (relating to ECEC) since their original training. Of the thirty-one respondents, seventeen had not completed any additional qualifications since their original training, whilst fourteen had completed or were working towards additional training. There

were fifteen responses to this question.

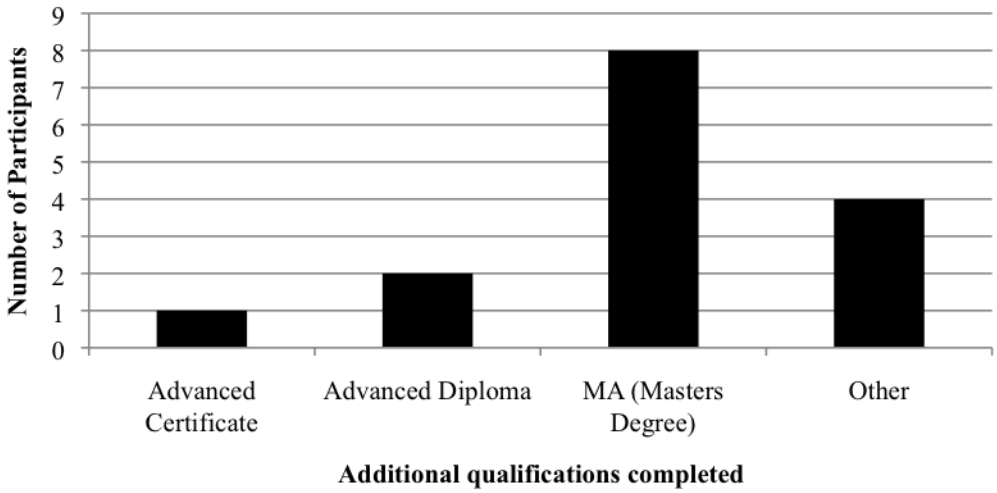


Figure 11 Additional qualifications completed since respondents' original training

Of the fifteen respondents who had answered this question, eight had undertaken a Master's degree. One reported achievement of a Foundation Degree, one a leadership course and two completed National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership training. Two respondents reported completing an advanced diploma, whilst one respondent had completed an advanced certificate.

Respondents were then asked if they had attended any short courses relating to ECEC. Twenty-four respondents reported that they had completed courses. Having answered the fixed-choice question, respondents were then asked to elaborate on the type of training received (respondents were able to refer to more than one topic). Respondents who had completed short courses referred to training on topics including safeguarding (nine respondents), child development (five respondents), the EYFS framework (five respondents), first aid (four participants), management and leadership (three respondents), special educational needs (three respondents), equality and diversity (two respondents) and outdoor learning (two respondents). Seven respondents had not completed short courses.

The questionnaire then focused on respondents' views about the level of training received during their ECEC career in the form of a fixed-choice question.

Training in ECEC	Frequency	Percentage
Enough training	20	64.5
Nearly enough training but a bit more would be helpful	11	35.5
Total	31	100

Table 2 Respondents' views about the level of training received

Twenty respondents felt that they had received enough training. Eleven respondents reported that they had received nearly enough training but felt that a bit more would be helpful. Respondents were then prompted to answer an additional open question if they felt that they had not received enough training. Respondents were asked to detail the type of training they required. Eleven respondents answered this question. Four respondents felt that they constantly needed to update their skills and receive on-going training. For example, one respondent commented "a good professional is always looking to improve". Three respondents referred to a desire to receive additional training about child development. One respondent referred to a desire to learn more about "paternal care…dealing with affectionate children, especially considering gender", whilst another was interested in receiving training about "theories of early childhood education". One respondent referred to a desire to receive training on the regulations within the EYFS and another commented that he was still working towards his qualifications within a setting.

ii) Roles

The questionnaire then focused on the current job roles of respondents. Firstly, respondents were asked to answer a fixed-choice question relating to the age at which they had entered the ECEC workforce.

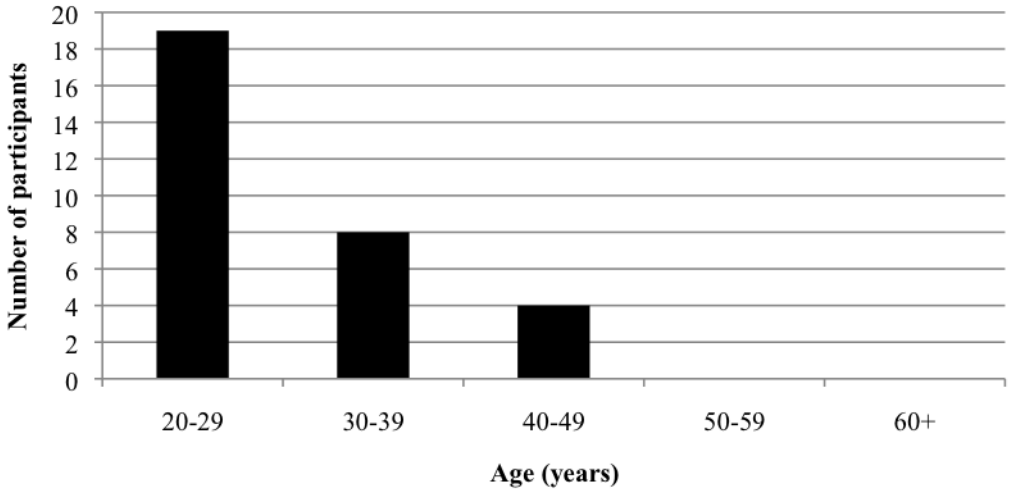


Figure 12 Respondents' age of entrance into ECEC

A total of nineteen respondents reported that they had entered the ECEC profession between twenty and twenty-nine years of age. Eight respondents entered the ECEC workforce aged thirty to thirty-nine, with four men beginning their career in ECEC between forty to forty-nine years of age. Respondents were then asked how long they had been working within ECEC.

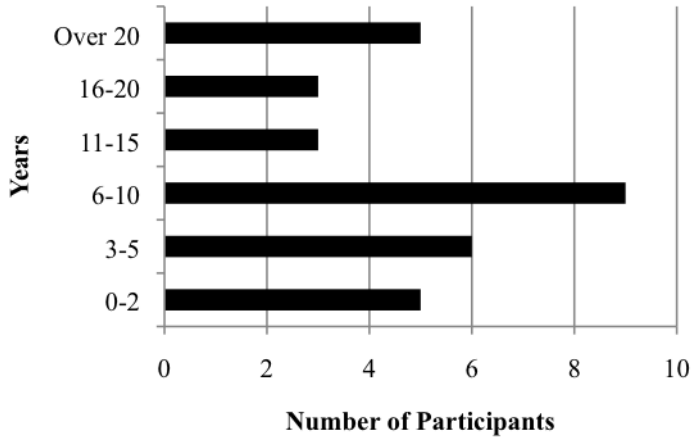


Figure 13 Number of years that respondents had worked in ECEC

A total of nine respondents reported working in ECEC for six to ten years, six respondents had worked in ECEC for three to five years. Five respondents reported working in ECEC for less than two years and another five had worked in the field for over twenty years. Three respondents reported working in ECEC for sixteen to twenty years, whilst another three worked in ECEC for eleven to fifteen years.

Having considered the length of time respondents had worked in ECEC, they were then asked to detail their reasons for entering the field by answering an open question. Respondents were inspired to enter ECEC for a variety of reasons including the desire to make a difference for children and families (fourteen respondents). For example, in answer to this question, one respondent was inspired to enter ECEC because of "wanting to make a difference to the quality of lives of children, families and communities" and referred to "seeing how small interventions could make significant improvements". In addition to this, another respondent commented "I enjoyed teaching all age ranges but thought it would be nice to be a) a rarity b) a role-model for maleless families".

Four respondents referred to the nature of ECEC work and environment as a source of inspiration. For example, one respondent referred to ECEC as an "exciting environment" whilst another respondent was inspired to work in ECEC due to "the need to be creative within my work". A total of four respondents referred to opportunities for career progression as inspiration for entering the field. For example, one respondent commented "I had an understanding of the role and importance of children's centres prior to gaining employment. I had previously been employed as a primary school teacher and therefore have always been involved in trying to improve outcomes for children and families. I saw this as a good career progression". Three respondents referred to a love of children as their inspiration for working in ECEC, for example one respondent suggested that his inspiration for wanting to work in ECEC was due to his "love of children and the joy of childhood". Three respondents were inspired to enter ECEC due to experiences with their own family members. For example, a respondent referred to the birth of his grandchildren as a source of inspiration. Two reported that they had not intended to work within ECEC. For example, one respondent commented:

> I was put in the Foundation Stage by my school. I was initially unhappy with the move. I had previously worked in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 and wished at the time to stay in Key Stage 2. However now as leader of the Early Years I am more inspired within the role.

Finally, the remaining respondent commented that he had "always wanted to work with children".

Respondents were then asked to answer a fixed-choice question relating to opportunities for career advancement offered by their current employer. A total of twenty-one respondents reported being provided with the opportunity for career progression within their current role, whilst ten stated that they were not offered career advancement opportunities. The twenty-one respondents who had been given opportunities for career progression were then asked to elaborate on the opportunities available to them. Eleven respondents referred to opportunities to progress into leadership and management roles with their current employer. In addition to this, six respondents referred to career advancement provided by training opportunities, specifically relating to child development and their own professional development. One commented that there were "lots of opportunities to develop professionally but not a step up in salary!" Two respondents did not elaborate on opportunities for career progression, one respondent did not provide an answer, whilst another commented that he was "open to support wherever identified progression".

iii) Experiences

Respondents were then asked about their experiences in ECEC, specifically, their work conditions. Respondents were asked to identify their salary range within a fixed-choice question.

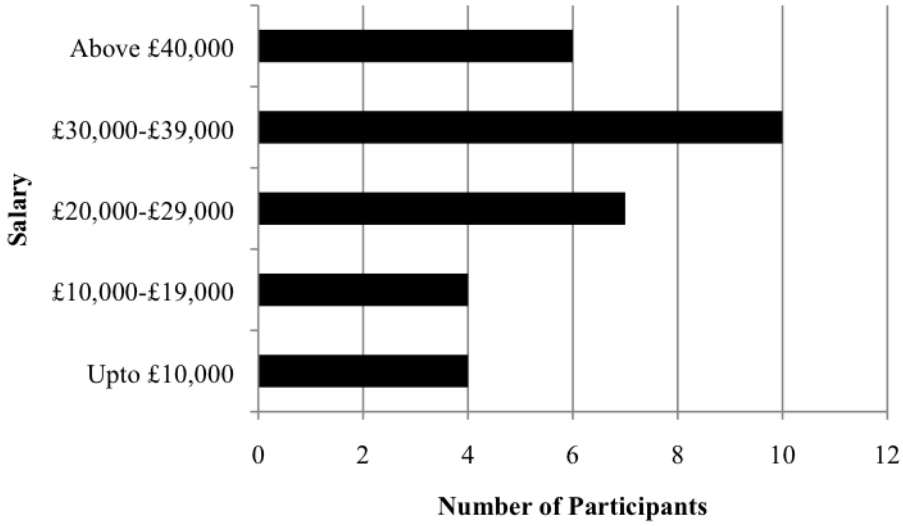


Figure 14 Participants' salaries

Salaries varied with ten respondents earning £30,000-£39,000, seven respondents reported earning

£20,000-£29,000, whilst six earned above £40,000. Four respondents reported earning £10,000-£19,000 and four earned up to £10,000. Respondents were then asked to describe their level of satisfaction with their current salary.

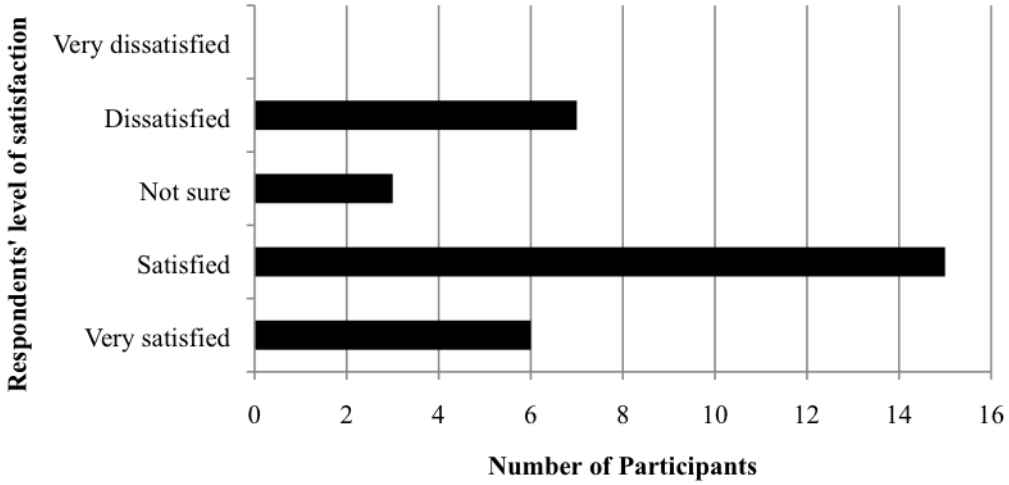


Figure 15 Participants' level of satisfaction with their current salary

A total of six respondents were 'very satisfied' with their current salary, fifteen reported that they were 'satisfied' with their current salary, three were unsure about their level of satisfaction, seven respondents were 'dissatisfied', whilst none of the respondents were 'very dissatisfied' with their current salary. Given the range of salaries, this was unsurprising.

Respondents were then asked to answer an open question in order to determine what they perceived as the most rewarding part of their current role. A total of twenty-two respondents commented on the reward of witnessing the impact they had upon the lives of children and families and nine referred to rewards relating to the relationships they were able to create with children, parents and the community.

Respondents were then asked to comment upon what they considered to be least rewarding about their current job role. A total of thirteen respondents referred to job insecurity and low status associated with ECEC work. Eight respondents referred to concerns regarding administration, all of them specifically referring to their workload and the amount of paperwork. Five respondents

referred to staffing issues, including staff morale and staff tension as the least rewarding part of their current job role. Four respondents felt that there were no aspects of their work in ECEC that they would describe as unrewarding, whilst one respondent did not provide an answer to this question.

iv) Staff relationships in the workplace

In order to determine how and to what extent the roles of male practitioners brought them into other social contexts with other practitioners and parents, the questionnaire then focused on a fixed-choice question enquiring about attendance at different types of meetings associated with the job. These were staff meetings, team meetings, meetings with parents and meetings with extended services. Firstly, they were asked to identify their frequency of attendance at staff meetings.

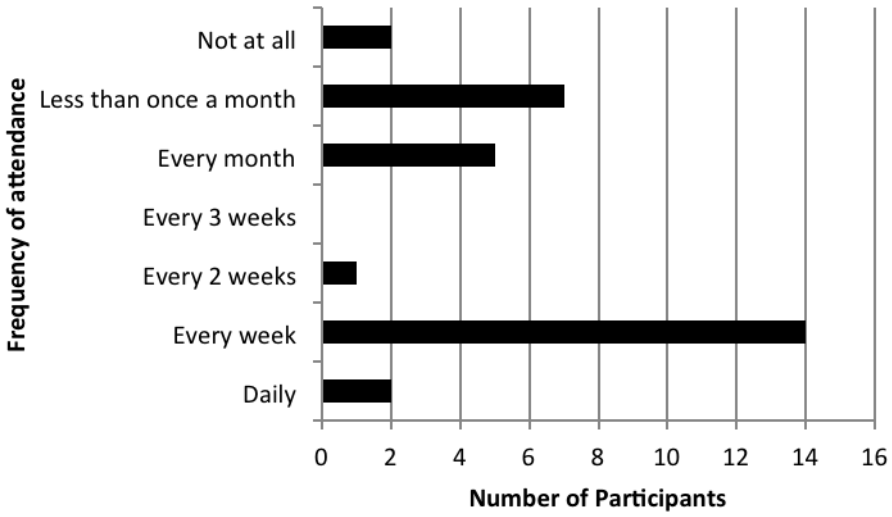


Figure 16 Respondents' frequency of attendance at staff meetings

Of the thirty-one responses to this question, fourteen reported attendance at staff meetings every week, seven attended staff meetings less frequently than once a month and five respondents attended staff meetings every month. Two respondents did not attend staff meetings at all (due to the nature of their job role) and two respondents reported their attendance at this type of meeting daily, whilst one respondent attended staff meetings every two weeks. Respondents were then asked to identify the frequency of their attendance at team meetings.

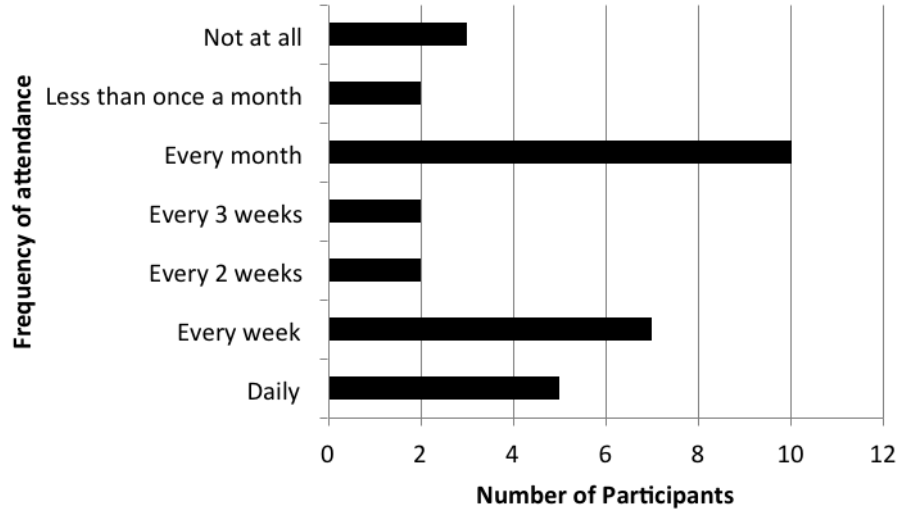


Figure 17 Respondents' frequency of attendance at team meetings

A total of ten respondents reported attendance at team meetings every month, seven respondents reported attendance every week. In addition to this, five respondents attended team meetings daily, whilst three did not attend team meetings at all and two attended team meetings less frequently than once a month. Two respondents attended team meetings every three weeks, whilst another two respondents attended these meetings every two weeks. Respondents were then asked to identify their attendance at meetings with parents.

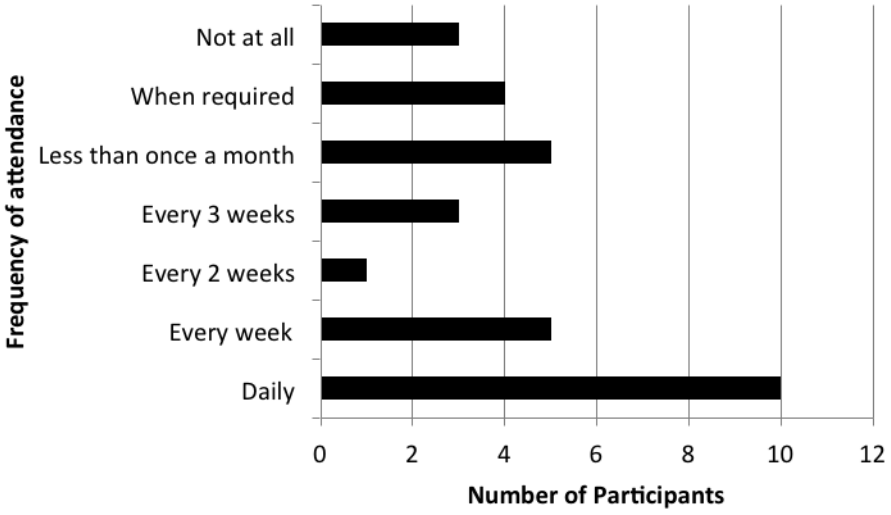


Figure 18 Respondents' frequency of attendance at meetings with parents

Ten respondents attended meetings with parents daily, five commented that their attendance at meetings with parents happened less frequently than once a month whilst five attended these meetings every week. Four respondents commented that meetings with parents occurred when required, three respondents commented that this did not happen at all, three reported attendance every three weeks and one respondent reported attendance at meetings with parents every two weeks. Having reported their frequency of attendance at meetings with parents, respondents were then asked to report their frequency of attendance at meetings with extended services.

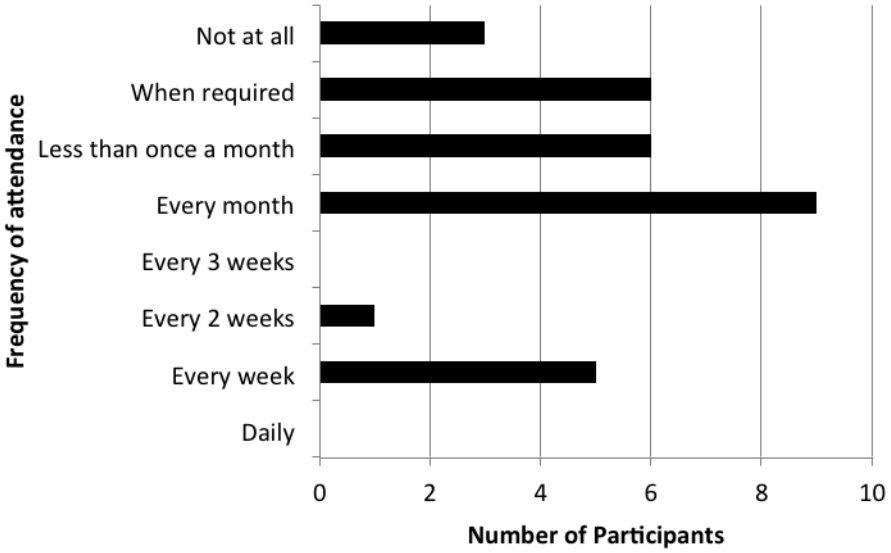


Figure 19 Respondents' frequency of attendance at meetings with extended services

Nine respondents reported attendance at meetings with extended services every month, six reported attendance when required, whilst six attended these meetings less than once a month. Five respondents reported attendance at meetings every week and three reported that their job role did not involve meetings with extended services. One respondent reported attendance every two weeks and one respondent did not provide an answer to this question.

v) Safeguarding

In order to determine respondents' experiences of safeguarding within their current practice, they were asked, within a fixed-choice question, whether they had received child protection training during their current employment within ECEC, to which twenty-eight answered 'yes' and three

answered ‘no’. Respondents who had received training were then asked to specify the type of training completed and when this occurred. Fifteen respondents referred to general child protection training they had received and did not specify the formal title for this. For example, when asked to elaborate on the training completed, one respondent commented “I can't remember!” and suggested that what he had received was “part of training and guidance from handbooks when joining school”, whilst another respondent stated that he had received information about child protection two weeks prior to completing the questionnaire “we had a child protection team come in and talk with us, and explain their role”. Six respondents answered this question by referring to the specific level of training they had completed. Three had completed Level 1 child protection training, three had completed Level 2 training and two respondents had completed Level 3 training, although none specified the course title. Three referred to completion of “designated senior person” training and three referred to their participation within whole-staff/school training. One respondent did not provide an answer to this question.

Respondents were then asked within an open question how children were safeguarded within their current setting. They provided multiple examples of how this might be ensured. Of the thirty-one respondents, fifteen referred to the regulations detailed in the child protection policy within their setting, thirteen respondents provided information regarding the strategies utilised within their setting in order to ensure children were safeguarded. For example, one respondent referred to:

> rigorous safer recruitment procedures – criminal records bureau check, gaps in employment history and references. A proactive and continuous culture of keeping children safe - all staff committed to shared values.

Nine respondents referred to the importance of staff training and five referred to criminal records bureau checks.

The questionnaire then focused upon respondents’ own safeguarding within their current setting. Respondents were asked whether they felt personally safeguarded against allegations relating to child abuse. Twenty-seven respondents reported that they felt personally safeguarded against

allegations relating to child abuse within their current setting, whilst four did not. All respondents were then asked to elaborate on this answer and a mixed response was obtained. Nineteen respondents felt personally safeguarded due to the strategies utilised within their current setting, including the policies, practices of staff and support systems in place should they feel they require additional information on safeguarding themselves. Six respondents were unsure whether they could be personally safeguarded within their setting and three referred to the challenges they face within their current setting in relation to their own safeguarding. For example, one respondent referred to his awareness of "mothers' distrust of men" meaning that the mothers "tend to steer clear" of him. Finally, three respondents did not answer the question.

vi) Impact

Having investigated the experiences of men in ECEC, the questionnaire then focused on their values and beliefs relating to the participation of men within the field. Respondents were asked to respond to the statement 'women still comprise 97% of the early years workforce'.

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
This seems about right	8	25.8
I am not sure about this	1	3.2
A more even mix of men and women would be desirable	17	54.8
Other	5	16.1
Total	31	100

Table 3 Respondents' reactions to the sex composition of the workforce

A total of seventeen respondents reported that a more even mix of men and women would be desirable, whilst eight felt that the current situation seemed about right. One respondent was unsure about the statement. Five respondents provided an alternative response. For example, one

respondent felt that “achieving this mix is very challenging indeed”, whilst another commented “care and good teaching can come from male or female teachers. I did not have a male teacher until secondary school and I feel that this didn't have a negative impact on my learning or schooling”.

The third respondent commented:

> I don't think men are openly accepted as working in Early Years settings by parents, teachers or management with differing amounts. Being male you are expected to work higher in schools. However I think arguably in today's society it is more important we have MORE males than females in EY as many children don't experience males until they are Year 5/6 having come from single mum families.

The fourth respondent reported that he had “seen many men come into child care but then leave after a few years, mostly due to the financial side of the job. Parents are mostly accepting to men in child care these days”. Finally, the fifth responded, “sounds like my experience. I do think that more men working in Early Childhood would be of great benefit to the children in our care. It is a great gift to them to be in the presence of nurturing, capable, caring male role models”.

Respondents were asked to rate statements (on a scale of 1 to 5) relating to the potential benefits associated with men in ECEC (a rating of ‘5’ for the greatest benefit).

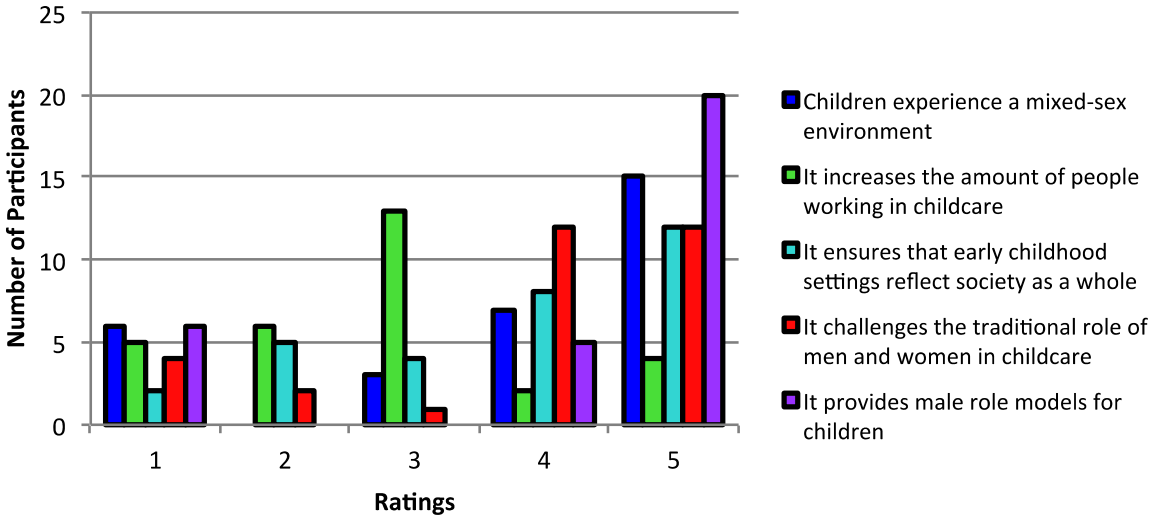


Figure 20 Respondents' views on the benefits associated with men in ECEC

A total of twenty respondents felt that the opportunity to provide a male role model for children was the greatest benefit. Fifteen respondents felt that the greatest benefit associated with men in ECEC was for children to experience a mixed-sex environment, twelve felt that men in ECEC had the potential to challenge traditional stereotypes associated with men and women in childcare, whilst twelve believed that the participation of men in ECEC helped to reflect society as a whole. Four respondents felt that the greatest benefit of having men in ECEC was to increase the amount of people working in childcare.

Six respondents considered the potential for children to experience a mixed-sex environment the least beneficial reason for men to work in ECEC, six felt that the opportunity to provide male role models was least beneficial, five felt that the opportunity to increase the amount of people working in childcare as least beneficial, four considered the opportunity to challenge the traditional role of men and women in childcare as least beneficial and two respondents considered the opportunity to reflect society as a whole as least beneficial.

Respondents were then asked if they could think of any other potential benefits to having male professionals in ECEC. Seventeen responded 'yes', fourteen responded 'no'. Of the seventeen respondents that answered 'yes', nine referred to the different perspectives and life experiences of men and women and the potential benefits this may have for ECEC. Four respondents specifically referred to the opportunity for male role models within ECEC settings. One respondent felt that the participation of men in ECEC could support boys' literacy and numeracy development, whilst another respondent felt that men in ECEC could be beneficial for engaging fathers of children attending the setting.

Having considered the potential benefits associated with male professionals in ECEC, respondents were then asked to rate the potential barriers that prevent men from entering the field. Respondents were asked to rate statements relating to the potential barriers associated with men in ECEC and could select more than one statement. In order to determine the statement that reflected the greatest

barrier associated with men in ECEC, the number of respondents that selected a rating of '5' for each statement is presented within Figure 21.

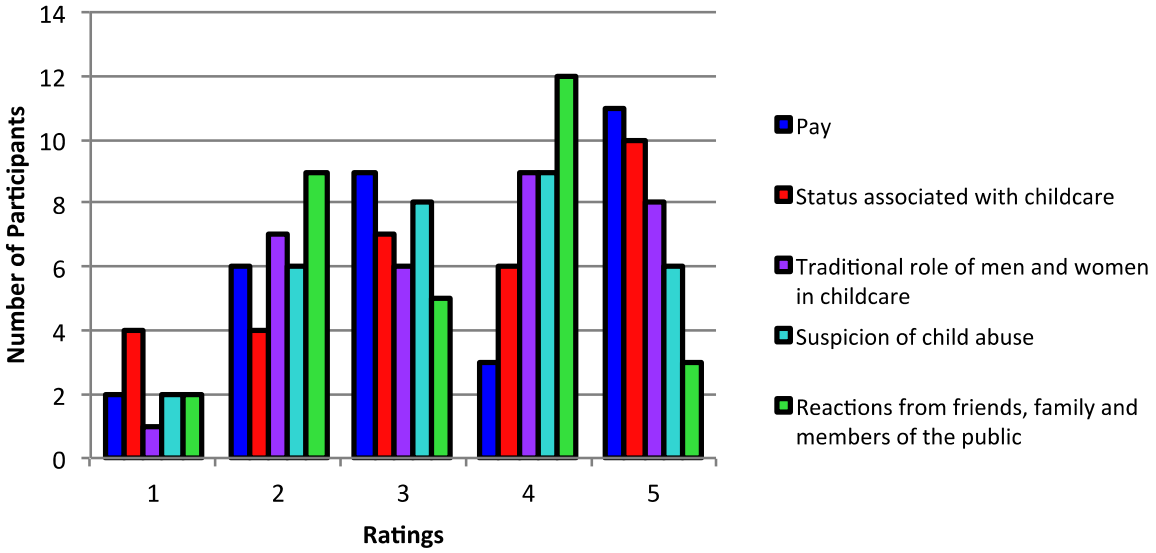


Figure 21 Respondents' views on the obstacles associated with men in ECEC

Of the statements provided, eleven respondents reported that pay was the most significant obstacle to men entering ECEC, ten felt that the status associated with childcare was the greatest barrier, eight respondents considered the traditional role of men and women in childcare to be the greatest barrier, for six respondents, suspicion of child abuse was the greatest barrier. Finally, three responders considered reactions from friends, family and members of the public to be the greatest barrier.

Four respondents felt that status associated with childcare was the smallest barrier associated with men in ECEC, two respondents considered pay to be the smallest barrier, two felt that suspicion of child abuse was the smallest barrier and another two felt that reactions from friends, family and members of the public present the smallest barrier associated with men in ECEC. Finally, one respondent considered the traditional role of men and women in childcare to be the smallest barrier.

Respondents were then asked if they could think of any other potential barriers associated with male professionals in ECEC. Three respondents answered 'yes', whilst twenty-eight answered 'no'. Of

the three respondents who did provide additional comments, one respondent referred to parents' preference for female staff. Another commented that "social isolation of working in an all-female environment" deterred men from entering the field. The third respondent commented that "men and women work in different ways with different qualities" and also argued that gender segregated occupations were rarely challenged.

Respondents were then asked whether they believed it was important for men to work in ECEC. All respondents believed that it was important for men to work in ECEC.

vii) Future

Respondents were asked to answer a fixed-choice question relating to their future career intentions. Twenty-eight respondents stated that they did intend to continue working within their current job role, whilst three answered 'no'.

Respondents were then provided with the statement 'currently there are under 3% men in early childhood education and care' and asked how the imbalance of men and women in ECEC could be improved. Ten respondents referred to the importance of improving job conditions, with specific reference to status and pay. Nine respondents felt that advertising and promotion of men in ECEC could help address the imbalance of men to women. One respondent emphasised the need for "Government incentives and also better recruitment through colleges and universities". Two respondents were unable to comment on how the imbalance could be improved.

The respondents were then asked if they were aware of any strategies in place with their current employer that promotes the profession to men. Twenty-eight answered 'no', three respondents answered 'yes'.

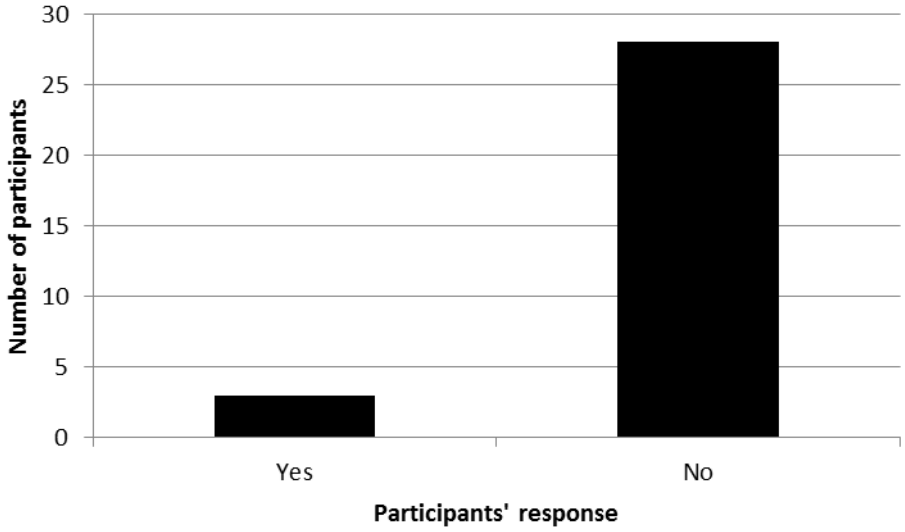


Figure 22 Respondents' response to the question "are you aware of any strategies in place with your current employer that promotes the profession to men?"

Of the three respondents who were aware of strategies with their current employer, one commented "the employers I work for have open policies and appoint on merit" whilst the second respondent answered "we actively invite applications from men, work with local schools and colleges and campaign nationally". The third respondent commented "we have recently promoted the nursery as being managed by a male professional in the local newspaper".

Finally, respondents were asked whether they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview, twenty-four answered 'yes', whilst seven respondents answered 'no'. Respondents who were willing to participate in a follow-up interview were then asked to provide their email address.

7.6 Discussion

Reasons for lack of men in ECEC included concerns regarding current work conditions, including low pay, low status associated with ECEC work, lack of proper career progression. The findings of Cameron *et al.* (1999), Rolfe (2006), Cremers *et al.* (2010), Sataøen (2010) Emilsen and Koch (2010) indicate that this has continued to be a significant deterrent to men's participation for years.

During analysis of the findings, a profile of the male ECEC worker emerged. Despite taking account of the fact that there were a small number of exceptions to the case, the majority of

respondents were highly-qualified, provided with opportunities for career progression into leadership and management roles by their employer and intended to stay within the field. They were relatively well-paid (and therefore satisfied with their salaries) indeed the majority of salaries were between £30,000 to £39,000, far greater than the average annual salary of childcare workers reported by the DfE (2013) at £13,300.

Bourdieu's (1986a) explanation of economic, social and cultural capital offers a useful lens through which to view the conditions described above. As the root of cultural and social capital, economic capital can be converted directly into money, cultural capital convertible and institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications and social capital based on the social connections of individuals and social status within groups. Despite their minority positioning within their field of work, the questionnaire respondents indicated access to and conversion of all forms of capital upon entrance into the ECEC field. The findings indicated that it was not only the institutional structures that they referred to that caused inequalities, but also the capital (power) of agents within of these institutions. Whilst convertibility may be problematic for individuals with limited supply of capital or those positioned as inferior to other societal members and groups, male practitioners' were able to manage and exchange different forms of capital as a result of the persistent gender order.

Respondents were inspired to work in ECEC due to an interest in children and childhood. Whilst respondents referred to workforce conditions as a potential barrier to men in ECEC, none of the respondents referred to the conditions of ECEC work such as pay as a reason for entering the workforce. As was evident in Rentzou and Ziganitidou's (2009) study investigating the experiences of male ECEC workers in Greece, the findings of the present study suggest that respondents' reasons for working with children were not associated with extrinsic motivations but instead due to a love of childhood, the ability to create relationships and the potential to impact the lives of those they work with. Respondents from the present study spoke of the need to improve qualifications,

career routes and work conditions in order to encourage men into the field, as supported by the Nutbrown Review (2012).

A total of twenty out of the thirty-one respondents reported the potential benefits of providing children with male role models. In particular, one respondent referred to the benefit of providing children with "nurturing, capable, caring" role models, a very similar expectation of participants in O'Sullivan and Chambers' study (2012:14) who spoke of "nurturing, sensitive and positive role models". Thus the findings from both studies indicate a desire to provide children with alternative masculinities. Holter (2005:29) spoke of new, diverse gender forms and masculinities, related to "unmanliness", that could provide children with alternative discursive practices. However, the positions of seniority and consequently, more favourable work conditions that many respondents were reported to occupy, suggest an underlying commitment to traditional, patriarchal structures.

7.7 Conclusion

Bourdieu (1977) recognised that gender relations and child socialisation in the domestic and public sphere are a reflection of continuities and changes in cultural meanings and values. Judging by the seniority of roles occupied by the participants in this study, as well as their educational and salary levels, one might argue that it is timely to reconsider the extent to which our cultural conceptions of gender roles and identities have changed in the sphere of ECEC in the twenty-first century.

The following chapter will consider the values and beliefs, as well as practices and experiences of male practitioners in greater detail and will specifically focus upon the life-histories of six men within established roles in ECEC.

Chapter 8

Life-history Interviews

8.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reported the findings from the online survey that was completed by male ECEC professionals. In doing so, Chapter 7 gave an insight into a range of experiences and practices, as well as values and beliefs, reported by thirty-one respondents. In order to enrich the findings of the survey, six of the respondents participated in a life-history interview.

8.2 Research Questions

The life-history interviews aimed to provide an extended insight into the career trajectories of six male practitioners and thus addressed the following research questions:

- What are the values and beliefs of a range of stakeholders with regards to the role of men in ECEC?
- What are the reported practices and experiences of a range of male practitioners in ECEC?

8.3 Methods

i) Participants

Participants from the survey were asked whether they would be willing to participate in an interview, of which twenty-four agreed. Having approached all the volunteer participants, a total of six confirmed willingness to participate in the life-history interviews. The six participants were drawn from a range of professional groups, different types of ECEC setting and each had different job roles within the field of ECEC. Table 4 presents a profile of the six male professionals who participated in the life-history interviews.

Participant	*Age range (years)*	*Highest Qualification Achieved*	*Age of entry into ECEC (years)*	*Length of time working in ECEC (years)*	*Current Job Title*	*Working Hours Full-time (FT)/Part-time(PT)*	*Intention to continue work in ECEC*
1	**30-39**	**NPQICL**	**30-39**	**0-2**	**Education manager**	**FT**	**Yes (since changed profession to freelance early years associate)**
2	**50-59**	**EYP**	**40-49**	**6-10**	**Owner of a nursery group**	**FT**	**Yes**
3	**20-29**	**No relevant ECEC qualifications**	**20-29**	**0-2**	**Nursery assistant**	**FT**	**No (but would consider a career in education)**
4	**Under 20**	**NVQ Level 3**	**Under 20**	**0-2**	**Nursery nurse**	**FT**	**Yes (but interested in cruise ship entertainment)** **The researcher was informed by the nursery owner that participant 4 had since been asked to leave the setting**
5	**60+**	**Masters**	**20-29**	**Over 20**	**Self-employed early years consultant**	**FT**	**Yes**
6	**30-39**	**Masters**	**20-29**	**Over 20**	**Children's centre area manager**	**FT**	**Yes**

Table 4 Profiles of life-history participants

ii) Materials

The nature of life-history interviews is such that there is general preference for informal and relatively unstructured conversations between the interviewer and the interviewee (Goodson, and Sikes, 2010). Therefore, the researcher did not create a research schedule based on particular questions, but instead identified specific themes from a review of literature as well as the findings of the online survey. This ensured that whilst there was a level of structure to the interviews, the interviewees had the opportunity to steer the interviews in their own direction. If the interview schedule had been too tight and restrictive, particular moments within the life histories that held particular relevance to the participants may have been neglected. Hence, whilst the key themes referred to specific stages within participants' careers, there was a degree of flexibility within the

schedule to account for individualistic narratives and emerging themes to be explored (see Appendix 4).

iii) Procedure

Participants were sent an introductory email that provided an overview of the life-history approach, the intended timeframe and overview of the key themes that were to be explored within the interview schedule. Participants were assured that they would remain anonymous throughout the research process and were asked whether they would agree to the interview being recorded in order to ensure completeness and fidelity of transcripts. It was acknowledged that participants had many commitments during their working day therefore the interviews were conducted at a time and place to suit them. Participants were provided with a timeframe of one month to participate in the interviews. Five of the interviews were conducted within participants' workplace and one was conducted in an accessible location for both the participant and the researcher. The interviews all lasted approximately one hour and thirty minutes.

8.4 Analysis

The data sets were entirely qualitative, thus at the first stage of analysis, a priori categories were used to ensure that the research questions were addressed. At the second stage, emergent themes, common issues and surprises were uncovered from the data. For instance, at the first stage, the category of early childhood experiences was drawn from the interview themes. At second stage, the common theme relating to significant people within this stage of the lifespan emerged from the data and therefore represented a grounded category.

8.5 Ethical considerations

Due to the uniqueness of these interviews, the researcher encountered specific, situated ethical considerations throughout the data collection process but specifically when writing up and displaying the life-histories within the thesis. These ethical considerations also had to be thought through carefully, in order to ensure that the participants' stories were being told in accordance with confidentiality and anonymity. When providing an account of the life-histories of individuals, it is

possible that the researcher, in seeking to make the story as engaging as possible, can exaggerate the differences and experiences of participants (Goodson and Sikes, 2010).

During analysis it was therefore important to remain true to the accounts provided. Consequently, the following presents the findings from the life-history interviews in relation to the grounded categories that emerged during analysis. This ensured that the accounts were not manipulated, misinterpreted or sensationalised but instead, the life histories of participants illuminated particular themes that have been supported below by reference to the participants' exact words.

During the life-history interviews, participants provided accounts of their personal life experiences from their own early education and care through to their current practice. As Stake (2000) advised, disclosure of too much personal detail may lead to participants feeling exposed or embarrassed. Thus it was important for participants to receive the interview schedule prior to the interview to enable them to decide on their level of participation and to determine the direction and depth of the interviews.

8.6 Results

i) Significant people

Participants referred to a number of significant people that may have influenced their decision to enter ECEC when detailing their life-histories: their parents and additional family members mainly wives or sisters. When discussing early life experiences, participants referred to their parents' occupations and were also asked if there were additional family members who had recently or currently worked within education and/or the field of early childhood.

	Mothers' Occupation	Fathers' Occupation	Additional Family Members
Participant 1	Carer for the elderly currently runs after-school clubs	Engineer	Ex-wife - nursery nurse and teaching assistant
Participant 2	Primary teacher	Secondary school mathematics teacher and primary school head teacher	Wife- Previously a nursery nurse and children's nanny. Now co-owns nursery with Participant 2
Participant 3	Ran preschools with the church	Chartered surveyor	Wife- Currently works as a nursery nurse in the same setting as Participant 3
Participant 4	Ran a toddlers group	Picture-framer	N/A
Participant 5	Hospital sister	Doctor	Wife - Applied for teacher training with Participant 5
Participant 6	Physical education teacher	Craftsman	Sister - Recently retrained to be a teacher

Table 5 Family members' occupations

Table 5 indicates that the mothers of five participants worked within teaching or preschool provision, whilst the mother of Participant 5 worked within a hospital. In addition to this, four participants (1, 2, 3, 5) referred to their wives' experience of working within education and participant 6 referred to his sisters' recent decision to retrain as a teacher. In addition to this, two participants (3 and 4) attended their mothers' provision during early childhood. Three participants (2, 5 and 6) directly referred to their parents' occupations as an early influence on their own career aspirations. For example, Participant 2 commented "I suppose you look at your parents and say well I'm going to do something like that". Meanwhile, when Participant 5 was asked about his early career aspirations, he replied "well I wanted to be like Dad, didn't I?" Participant 6 had decided he

wanted to be a teacher because his mother was training to be a teacher of physical education during his early childhood. Interestingly, as opposed to being influenced by his parents' career choices, Participant 1 referred to his recent influence on his mothers' career choice. When referring to his mother, he commented "she's followed in my footsteps, she would have been employed into after-school clubs about the time I was working in a very similar role".

Only two participants (4 and 6) referred to their early career aspiration of working within education. Participant 4 referred to a desire to work in ECEC towards the end of his junior school experience whilst Participant 6 referred to a love of "playing teachers" with peers during his childhood. The remaining four participants referred to early career aspirations that were entirely unrelated to ECEC. For example, Participant 1 referred to a desire to be a bank manager, Participant 2 remembered being unsure about his early career aspirations, Participant 3 wanted to be a footballer and disk jockey and finally, Participant 5 wanted to be a doctor like his father.

ii) Significant experiences

Participants described whether they had been given opportunities to participate in work experience within the context of teaching young children, during secondary school. Only two participants (3 and 4) referred to opportunities for work experience with young children, both of which were as a result of their own networks and connections. Participant 3 referred to work experience that occurred as a result of the valuable connection with the church he regularly attended "my first week at the church, they said we need some help, there is a parenting course and we need some help with babies and toddlers to get the mums and dads to come along to it". Participant 4 referred to informal work experience within a holiday club, whilst on holiday with his parents. Although this was only a relatively short experience, Participant 4 commented "from that moment on, I wanted to work with young children".

Participants 1, 5 and 6 also engaged in work experience as a result of their own networks however this experience was not related to ECEC. Having said this, Participant 1 and 6 did engage in

experience with children in a primary school. Participant 1 spoke of his work experience within a primary school classroom for two weeks and Participant 6 enjoyed work experience within a primary school as a receptionist that had been initiated by his mother who also worked in the school. Participant 5 engaged in work experience as a result of his fathers' connections to a solicitor in the local area and Participant 2 did not refer to any opportunities to engage in related work experience.

None of the participants engaged in work experience offered by their secondary school that was relevant to ECEC, nor did they describe any promotion of ECEC as an option for work experience. In fact, Participant 1 emphasised the lack of opportunity provided by his secondary school to engage in a variety of work experience.

iii) Significant events

Participants referred to significant events that they felt had potentially impacted upon their later life choices and decision to work in ECEC. During discussion about their own educational experiences, all participants referred to difficulties in obtaining either GCSE or 'A' Level qualifications that had impacted upon their decision to enter further or higher education. Two participants (1 and 4) described disappointment at their GCSE grades, whilst four participants (2, 3, 5 and 6) had a similar reaction to their 'A' Level grades. At this stage, only one participant decided to enroll for training in childcare, specifically Participant 4 achieved an NVQ Level 3 course in childcare at a college, whilst the remaining participants enrolled on courses that were unrelated to ECEC.

Difficulty in obtaining either GCSE or 'A' Level qualifications did not deter the participants from seeking qualifications relating to ECEC or education at a later stage. Since completing school, five participants gained a range of qualifications directly relating to ECEC. Participant 1 enrolled on a part-time degree programme – *Professional Studies in Education*. Having successfully completed the degree, Participant 1 then enrolled on a *Graduate Teacher Programme*. Participant 2 completed an NVQ Level 3 qualification in childcare, however commented "without being dismissive of

people who have a Level 3 qualification, there is quite a lot on there that you can just tick off on a list so it's not a difficult thing to do". He then gained EYPS. Participant 3 had no relevant ECEC qualifications. Attempts have been made to ensure that children encounter a highly-qualified workforce within ECEC settings (DfE, 2013, 2014), however Participant 3 did not intend to gain any qualifications. Participant 4 had not completed any additional training since gaining the NVQ Level 3 in childcare. Participant 5 achieved a Masters and Participant 6 completed NPQICL training and had also achieved a Master's qualification.

Four participants (1, 2, 5 and 6) also referred to the birth of their own children and experiences of fatherhood as significant events that influenced their work within ECEC. The remaining participants (3 and 4) had not yet had children (however intended to in the future). In reference to his role as a father, Participant 1 described the extent to which this had changed since he separated from his partner. In particular, although he was no longer living with his daughter, he referred to the importance of being involved in her schooling to ensure she was successful and happy. Participant 2 felt that it was important that he provided his children with unconditional love and commented "as a father, you need to be a funny person, you need to be somebody that is respected but appreciated and loved". Participant 5 highlighted his role as a father when he had encouraged his wife to return to part-time work after the birth of their first child. He "found the whole thing fascinating, here was an opportunity to study first-hand the learning that went on". He also suggested that his experiences with his own father had ensured that he "never tried to protect children from the realities and messiness of life". Participant 6 referred to his role as a father, specifically in relation to the time spent with his children "reading stories in bed, having discussions and making up stories".

iv) Views on ECEC

In addition to their role as fathers, participants 1, 2, 5 and 6 also described their views about education and care. Participant 1 felt that his background within the field of education had impacted on a desire for his daughter to achieve. As a result, he was directly involved in all aspects of his daughter's education and was a parent governor at her school. He felt that not only did it provide

an opportunity to gain information regarding his daughter's education but also to retain a link with the school environment, its procedures and future plans. Participant 2 referred to the need to be involved in children's lives regardless of their background. Participant 5 also reflected on his views of education and care and commented "there is no such thing as babies, they are little people from the moment they are born and they are conscious and can communicate". Participant 6 was closely involved with his children's education and care and, as with Participant 1, had become a parent governor at his son's school.

In relation to attitudes towards education and care, participants felt that their experience as fathers had influenced their decision to work with young children. Participant 1 believed that his experience as a father had influenced his day-to-day work within the field and vice versa. He believed that he was able to utilise experiences of fatherhood within his work because he had not previously worked with children under the age of five. Participant 2 believed that his experience of fatherhood was directly related to his decision to work with children, in partnership with his wife. He commented that both him and his wife had always loved children. On reflection of his values relating to fatherhood and ECEC, he commented "it just shows you that our background to thinking about children is something very precious and special for us, that's how we feel about all of the children in our settings". In addition to this, he commented "I suppose that passion for children has just grown within us as an extension of family life". Participant 5 felt that his experience as a father "adds a dimension to your understanding within work". Participant 6 believed that his experience within ECEC settings had certainly impacted upon his experience of fatherhood and vice versa. He commented "as you develop your experiences through your career and do training you learn more about children and you appreciate what it is that you do".

v) Transitions

When describing their career trajectories, five participants (1, 2, 4, 5 and 6) referred to a number of job transitions (all full-time employment) that resulted in experiences within a range of job roles, within and outside of ECEC. Participant 1 reported previous work as a hotel receptionist and

customer service assistant in a bank, however became bored and enrolled on a *Graduate Teacher Programme*. His experience here resulted in his application for a primary teacher position. His application was successful and Participant 1 worked within a variety of roles in a primary school. He continued to work there for five and a half years working in a variety of job roles, including physical education coordinator and information and communication technology coordinator. However, he commented "I didn't see any progression because of the small size of the school". Participant 1 commented that although he felt he was part of a stable workforce, he also recognised that many of his (predominantly female) colleagues had worked there for over twenty-five years and they therefore had "no plans to leave". This was evident when Participant 1 intended to apply for a Deputy Head Teacher position within this school. Due to the intentions of a female colleague to remain within the school (and to consider the position herself) he resigned from his job there.

Participant 2 initially worked as a computer programmer for the county council and also was employed by International Business Machines (IBM). However, during this time his wife was registered as a child-minder within their family home. Due to the nature of his job, Participant 2 began working from home and "was very much part and parcel of what was going on there". In the year 2000, sixteen children attended his wife's provision within their home throughout the week, thus to cater for the increased demand, they bought a building which they could run as a day nursery. Participant 2 was becoming increasingly involved in their nursery business. He commented "we both wanted to work together, we both had this feeling that we wanted to do something with children and that became more of a passion". Consequently, Participant 2 resigned from his job at IBM and quickly progressed from the role of nursery practitioner straight into a management position within the nursery having gained EYPS.

Participant 3 had been particularly interested in gap-year experiences that were offered by youth work organisations in Europe and worked at a preschool in Poland as a result of this. Having enjoyed his initial experience here, he applied to teach English for a year within summer camps for

children from six years of age. On completion of his gap year, Participant 3 worked within a supermarket. During this time, he enrolled on a two-year foundation degree in Music Production at college. In the second year of his course, Participant 3 decided to return to Poland for a year to continue his previous work with children, however met his wife during this time and returned home to plan for their wedding. During this time, Participant 3 and his wife were unemployed and therefore began applying for jobs within education, specifically teaching assistant roles. In addition to this, Participant 3 also applied for jobs within outdoor education centres due to his previous experiences of this within training. Both Participant 3 and his wife applied for the same nursery assistant position within a day nursery and were both offered a job. During this time, Participant 3 thought "there's a job, it's not sat in front of a computer screen for eight hours a day and I don't have to wear a suit – sign me up".

On completion of his college course, Participant 4 applied for jobs within day nurseries. He was successfully appointed as a nursery nurse within three months and worked within a setting for a short period of time. However, Participant 4 resigned from his job "because they were just getting me to do handy-man jobs like a bit of gardening, a bit of DIY and I thought well that's not childcare so I left". Subsequently, Participant 4 was appointed as a nursery nurse at another day nursery.

Participant 5 enrolled on a three-year course at a teacher training college with his wife. Having completed his course, Participant 5 entered his first teaching practice at a primary school "in a very rough area" and thus contemplated resigning after a week. Participant 5 remained within this job for longer than initially anticipated and later, was appointed as a drama teacher in a newly formed secondary school. Participant 5 was later appointed at another secondary school, specifically teaching children with additional needs. As well as his interest in children's additional needs and development, Participant 5 "got interested in working with younger and younger children".

Later, he was appointed for a senior post as a Deputy Head Teacher of a primary school. Within this role "there was a good mixture of genders and a good social mix". However, Participant 5 was

"quite young to be in that position" and therefore encountered varying reactions from his colleagues, all of whom were female. During his work here, Participant 5 was trained for a Head Teacher position; this proved useful when an acting Head Teacher role was advertised. Participant 5 was successfully appointed for this role, which lasted one term. During the 1990s Participant 5 felt that "education just started changing and becoming something I no longer recognised and I no longer wanted to be a part of it". Participant 5 eventually left his career in teaching and instead began to work within an educational research team.

Participant 6 worked as a primary school lunchtime supervisor at the age of nineteen and later, was a play-worker within after-school clubs. His role as a play-worker lasted for twelve months before he helped to set up a new after-school club within a school. He eventually became the manager of this provision. After three years within this role, Participant 6 worked for the LA as a nursery officer in a maintained school. At the same time, he applied for a position as a child development worker and resigned from his job as nursery officer. Participant 6 decided to resign from his job at the after-school club. After nine months into his new job as a child development worker, he realised that it was "dreadfully dull and didn't offer the same areas of interest and stimulation". Later, Participant 6 applied for a job as director of a charity and worked within this role for eighteen months. During his experience here, Participant 6 engaged in community-focused and community-led programmes with the intention of reducing stress and isolation of vulnerable children and families. However, Participant 6 was less confident about obtaining financial support for the charity and subsequently resigned due to decreasing funds. In 2005, he was successfully appointed in a Sure Start Children's Centre, where he was employed at the time of the life-history interview.

vi) Current job roles and responsibilities

Having described various job transitions, participants detailed their current job roles and associated responsibilities within ECEC. Of the six participants, three (participants 2, 3 and 4) directly worked with children on a daily basis, all of whom worked within nursery provision. Participant 2 referred to himself as a nursery owner and was responsible for five hundred to six hundred children and

ninety staff. Participant 3 referred to himself as a nursery assistant and worked with preschool children on a daily basis, however considered his job role as a secondary category to his role and responsibility as a "Christian who works with children". Participant 4 also worked with preschool children although had recently worked with children from birth to two years of age within the setting in order to gain experience of working with children of all ages. During his early experiences with children, he reported that he was perhaps a little too enthusiastic and had to be calmed down by the female staff.

The three remaining participants worked indirectly with children and instead worked alongside adults on a regular basis. Two participants worked within children's centres, Participant 1 referred to himself as an education manager, whilst Participant 6 reported his job title as a children's centre area manager. They both described complex roles that involved multiple responsibilities. For example, Participant 1 felt that his job was split into two distinct parts, he explained "we've got a nursery on site so my main role is overseeing that, so I ensure that the curriculum is in place, the staff are deployed properly and in terms of setting the vision, the priorities, the targets". Participant 1 then described the second part of his current job "the other side is, I sit on the senior management team, setting priorities for the Centre". Within his role, Participant 1 managed "twenty-five children and twenty-five staff who are predominantly female" which is "a lot harder than I expected". Participant 6 described himself as an Area Manager with the responsibility of ensuring statutory obligations and targets are met and the Centre is prepared for OFSTED. He also referred to himself as the Lead Role in Early Health with a focus on public health transition work. Overall, Participant 6 considered himself to have citywide, strategic responsibility within his current job.

Lastly, Participant 5 also referred to his indirect work with children and as with Participant 1 and 6, worked alongside adults regularly, as opposed to children. Participant 5 referred to his role as a Self-Employed Early Years Consultant and commented that he was no longer working directly with young children because "hearing has deteriorated and I'm in situations where they can't

communicate with me and that's frustrating for them as much as it is for me so rather than do that, I would rather take myself out of that and work with adults". Thus within his current role, Participant 5 engaged in strategic planning with senior officers in LAs and was also involved in "training and helping people to extend their experience or to do what they do, better".

In terms of future career intentions, five participants shared their intentions to remain within the field of ECEC, however two participants suggested that they were unlikely to remain within their current job role. For example, Participant 1 suggested that there was "a lot of uncertainty going on around Children's Centres at the moment and future careers so I am in the process of looking at other options". This was said within the context of ongoing children's centre closures as a result of significant budget cuts. Participant 3 intended to explore alternative options to ECEC work. When asked if he was referring to alternative career options, he replied "not even a career, just a job" and suggested that whilst he may consider a job within education, he did not intend to remain within ECEC. Specifically, he felt able to utilise his ability to speak Polish (and previous experience within Poland) in order to work with children who had English as an additional language within primary schools.

Participant 4 had not worked within ECEC for very long and intended to remain within his current job, however, "there is a part of me that wants to look at working within entertainment as my friends are entertainers on cruise ships". Participant 4 was unsure about this when his friends informed him about the working hours and conditions. When asked about his future career intentions, Participant 5 replied "I won't go anywhere else, there is too much I am still interested in. Why would I want to? I'm just fascinated by the whole sphere really". Participant 6 was unsure about his future intentions. He stated that he was "fairly de-motivated at the moment" due to approaching a certain age and asked himself "do I want to do this for another twenty-five years? Where is it going to lead me? What's it going to give to me?" When asked if he definitely intended to remain within the field of ECEC he replied "well that's what I thought but I don't know now, I'm

looking at other things". He then reflected on earlier interests in teaching and stated that he "had an itch that never quite went away" and therefore wished he had pursued a career in schools and become a Head Teacher.

vii) Membership to networks for men in ECEC

Participants were then asked if they had links to networks associated with male practitioners in ECEC or were members of any such facility. During the period of study, the *London Early Years Foundation* created a network dedicated to the work of male professionals in ECEC. Out of the six participants, only Participant 1 was a member of a network associated with male ECEC practitioners. The remaining practitioners had no awareness of networks for men in the field and were unsure about the purpose or benefit of this facility. Two of the participants referred to the potential opportunity to socialise with other male practitioners however felt that they were able to achieve this by their own informal networks with male friends who also worked with young children.

viii) Male ECEC practitioners talking about the role of men in ECEC

Surveillance

Participants considered the role of men in society and the positive aspects and challenges of working with young children. In relation to challenges, all participants directly referred to the stigma surrounding men who choose to work with young children. During the interviews, participants emphasised concern regarding societal reactions to their career choice, specifically within the context of increased surveillance of men in relation to young children.

For example, Participant 5 referred to the "social fear" of men working with young children, which is "fanned by the wretched newspapers" and creates a "social badge that says you are strange if you want to work with young children". He also reported the impact that this has had on his own work in ECEC "at my infant school, I actually said to my staff every time I comfort a child, every time I am saying well done to a child I risk my job". Participants also spoke of the relatively recent case of

child sexual abuse within an ECEC setting conducted by a woman, however referred to the reactions of parents to their presence within the setting. For example, on noticing that Participant 4 was working within the nursery that their child attended, a parent became uneasy and asked the manager "is he [the male practitioner]…ok?"

Traditional roles of men and women

Five participants referred to the traditional roles of men and women when reporting the challenges of working in ECEC. Specifically, these participants identified the traditional association between women (as mothers) and the education and care of young children. Participant 2 suggested that "historically, man is the breadwinner, goes out to work whilst Mum is at home looking after the children, cleaning, cooking, washing", whilst Participant 1 referred to the traditional notion that "men go out to work and pay the bills and the women stay at home and are the ones who have to readjust their lives to suit the needs of the family".

Work conditions

In addition to this, five participants out of six identified the current work conditions as a challenge to working in ECEC. Participant 1 considered ECEC to be a "poor industry to work in" and regarded this as a significant issue for men who are "the main support of the family". In addition to this, two of the five participants referred to the low status associated with ECEC work. For instance, Participant 5 felt that "society has forgotten how important childhood is and how important old age is. We have been seduced by the delights of the ages in between". Whilst participants emphasised the importance of the early years in relation to children's later life development, they were aware of the wider, societal perceptions of early childhood that challenged the value associated with ECEC work.

In addition to this, two participants reported a lack of career progression as a challenge to working in ECEC. Participant 3 commented "I'm not sure if it's something that is able to get the most out of

me, it takes what I'm good at and uses that, but doesn't then stretch it on", whilst Participant 1 considered potential career progression and commented that there was "no fluid pathway into anything".

ix) The benefits of working in ECEC

The difference between men and women

Participants were also asked to consider the possible benefits of working in ECEC. Four participants suggested that men brought something different to ECEC work. For example, Participant 1 commented:

> everyone can bring something to the table but I do think that men do offer something different to women, like men's interests and hobbies and things that are different than females, I think their outlook on life is different than females, their personalities.

For Participant 2, the differences between male and female practitioners related to the language used within settings:

> men and women interact differently, men use language differently to women. Without stereotyping, women tend to have a more nurturing manner which talks down to children in that way, they keep the language lower but also in the way that they interact with them.

Participant 4 considered men and women to have different interests within ECEC settings, whilst Participant 5 stated, "everybody is an individual we are all different, there may be similarities but even identical twins are different".

Single-parent families

In addition to this, three participants referred to the role of both male and female practitioners within the context of single-parent families. For example, Participant 1 commented "in this day and age when there are more and more separations and divorces happening children are not seeing father figures as much…I think the more males that they come into contact with for positive reasons the better really". Meanwhile, Participant 2 also referred to a lack of father figures within families

in England and Participant 5 referred to a lack of consistent father figures in children's lives in comparison to experiences within his own childhood.

x) Strategies

Participants also considered strategies to encourage and support the participation of men in ECEC. Participant 1 felt that a clear development pathway for practitioners would encourage men to enter the workforce. Participant 2 considered the benefits of men in ECEC within the wider concept of diversity however shared concern regarding previous approaches to this. He commented:

> it very much annoys me when we get held to account for somebody to come and count the number of pictures of black people on the wall and say that's fine, it's just tokenism, it's absolutely ridiculous so that's where my passions come for having men involved in the workforce and it is about diversity.

Participant 2 also identified the need to influence culture and change attitudes within society (and inside the ECEC sector itself). Specifically he suggested that "we try and build is a culture that says it's normal for men to be part of the workforce and it is expected that men and women work together to provide care for children and families understand that and so do the staff". Participant 2 also called for the increased promotion of success stories of male professionals particularly within schools and appropriate careers advice:

> let's get some proper careers advice, let's get into schools and talk to children about what they may or may not want to do and the fantastic opportunity they have got to use their skills and talents with children and then to build courses that are appropriate for boys to go into, get them support in a work place and mentors and experience of working in places that are going to support them and make them succeed rather than excluding them so they drop out along the way.

Furthermore, Participant 2 called for increased government priority given to increasing the number of men in ECEC. Specifically:

> someone needs to draw up an action plan to say we will address the culture inside the sector, outside the sector, look at men, look at young men, look at older men, look at training, look at all of those bits and pieces put it together and run some models and just say do it here as a pilot. It's not rocket science.

Participant 3 focused specifically on the need for funding to support strategies to promote ECEC and felt that any efforts to increase the number of men in ECEC would be limited without this. Participant 3 also considered the idea of male-only ECEC training courses. He commented "I think men-only things, classes is brilliant and it's really, really working but I think there needs to be more, I think even in colleges when the girls are doing their childcare course, that there is a boys' childcare course as well". However, Participant 4 warned against such courses "it's making out that the guys need more because it makes it sound like it's stereotyping all females because they already know how to work in childcare". Participant 5 referred to the importance of raising the salary and qualification levels in order to "make people aware of the importance of ECEC'. He also reflected on the current European and international context of ECEC, specifically he stated "in Scandinavian countries, you have high taxes, a huge amount of which goes into early childhood education and the family, for example paternity leave, making it possible for families to spend time together when the children are young". Furthermore he concluded:

> If you look at a society that has a strong community and family ethic, there is less of an issue around men being involved in ECEC, I mean why wouldn't men be involved?

In response to the question of potential strategies, Participant 6 replied "it's really, really difficult". He continued "when you think back to when you are taking your options at secondary school, how many boys will take childcare?" Furthermore, Participant 6 referred to his friends' positive experience when having to study home economics within school (because the other options were closed). Having realised that the class would be made up predominantly of girls Participant 6 commented that this "was a bonus to him". Participant 6 referred to traditional, stereotypical roles of men and women however felt that as a society, we are not able to change those attitudes and beliefs. Participant 6 was unsure how to change perceptions of men in ECEC and certainly didn't consider it happening "within my lifetime". Having said this, Participant 6 suggested that during early career decisions "there has to be something there that says this is a really valid career

opportunity for you". In addition to this, he referred to the ability to progress from roles such as a nursery assistant to leadership roles within ECEC and the need to promote these opportunities.

Participant 6 also commented "we need to do something to reduce that inequity in skill expectation and we need to be working with children as early as we can and influencing them for the future yet we only invest in such a small part of the training". In relation to training, Participant 6 felt that the opportunity to experience mandatory placements within ECEC settings (as part of a training package) was "an easy option" to encourage men to consider a career within ECEC. He reflected on his own career trajectory and particularly emphasised the role of opportunities for placement and his subsequent decision to work in ECEC. He commented "if you haven't tried something, you are making your judgment based on what someone else has told you and what you've seen or what you know of it as a recipient of that service". When asked at what stage he thought a placement would be most useful he replied "it's got to be in school, it could be done with young children as giving them an experience within their community, like transition opportunities as you go through school".

8.7 Discussion

All participants demonstrated a commitment to ECEC and all participants referred to the significant influence of family members on their life choices and experiences, thus supporting the findings of Vandenbroeck and Peeters (2013). The findings of the life-history interviews reflected men's roles as well as their values within a number of different contexts, including work and home life and also highlighted men's involvement in gendered organisations within different social contexts. Ultimately, this chapter offers an insight into why some men choose to engage with children in caring roles within an educational context.

There was a tendency for participants' mothers to have worked within education; participants also referred to the influence of parents' occupations on their own early career aspirations. Bourdieu (1986b) emphasised the central role of the family and early life conditions in shaping the individual's habitus. Of particular relevance to the life-history interviews is the suggestion that

early socialisation has the potential to influence dispositions, relating for instance to career choice. As Participant 2 commented “I suppose you look at your parents and say well I’m going to do something like that”. Similarly, when Participant 5 was asked about his early career aspirations, he replied “I wanted to be like Dad, didn’t I?" Although parents’ occupations reflected traditional roles of men and women within the labour market, circumstances occurring in later life, such as dissatisfaction with a previous job, resulted in participants’ entrance into a field more commonly associated with women (as evident by the roles of their mothers and/or female family members). Thus although early socialisation of sex roles within the home mirrored traditional ideologies, their current career path challenged this.

All participants referred to difficulties in obtaining either GCSE or ‘A’ Level qualifications; when participants entered ECEC they did so with relatively few qualifications. Nevertheless, the findings from Participant 1, 2, 5 and 6 demonstrated that once in the field, higher-level, leadership qualifications were gained. Participants’ acceleration into management and leadership roles was reminiscent of Williams’ (1995) ‘glass escalator’, used to describe men’s experiences as tokens in female-dominated occupations. In particular, Williams (1995:108) suggested that ‘subtle mechanisms’ including behaviours, attitudes and beliefs as well as gendered perceptions of men’s roles within society, facilitate men’s advancement within occupations such as ECEC (also see Aspinwall and Drummon, 1989; Snyder, 2008). The participants were based in different areas relating to ECEC including early childhood research, children’s centre work and ownership of private provision. They did not appear to be clustered within specific areas of the field, but instead, the majority had gained senior positions across varying ECEC sectors. Men’s advancement was therefore seen to occur within various ECEC contexts.

Only one participant had entered the field as their first-choice occupation, similar to the findings of Rentzou and Ziganitidou (2009). Instead participants reflected Cameron *et al.’s* (1999: 52) ‘lattice’ or ‘chequered’ career paths that were characterised by employment within a variety of unrelated

fields. Thus, on the whole, membership to the ECEC workforce emerged as an employment option due to dissatisfaction with previous job roles, not as part of a pre-planned career trajectory.

In drawing upon their day-to-day experiences within ECEC, four out of the six participants referred to the perceived difference between themselves and female practitioners. For example, Participant 1 felt that "men do offer something different to women, like men's interests and hobbies", thus supporting the findings of Nentwich *et al.* (2013), Buschmeyer (2013) and Rentzou and Ziganitidou (2009). Participant 4 referred to female practitioners' perception of difference between the roles of men and women "they were just getting me to do handy-man jobs like a bit of gardening, a bit of DIY and I thought well that's not childcare so I left". In this case, the participant's colleagues were seen to actively create and *do* gender segregation. As the minority within the ECEC workplace, the findings indicate that Participant 4 was considered as a stereotypical male representative, a process that was fuelled by hegemonic femininity.

8.8 Conclusion

The life-history interviews provided an opportunity to address the complex and diverse realities of men in relation to their work with young children. In doing so, this chapter has captured the dynamics through which the participants moved in and out of particular situations, made choices and reacted to opportunities presented to them during their career trajectories. Of equal value was the opportunity to explore the cultural expectations regarding men's career choices reported by participants, as well as the nature and force of their individual, private interpretation of the social world and their role within it.

Having considered the values and beliefs as well as reported practices and experiences of men in ECEC, the following chapter seeks to provide an account of the actual practices, interactions and transactions of one male ECEC practitioner and in doing so, draws upon the values and beliefs of his colleagues and the preschool children he worked with.

Chapter 9

A ‘day in the life’

9.1 Introduction

Having obtained the values and beliefs as well as reported practices and experiences of male practitioners, it was deemed important and valuable to explore what they actually did. In other words, the aim was to uncover the day-to-day practices of male practitioners currently working with young children in pre-school provision, as well as to capture local meanings associated with men in ECEC. Accordingly, this chapter attempted to capture a typical ‘day in the life’ of one male ECEC practitioner within the wider context of practices, attitudes and views of colleagues and children. It was intended that this would provide a first-hand insight into the context of practice that he inhabited and within which he worked.

The chapter will present the findings from a survey of the male practitioner’s colleagues, structured and unstructured observations of his practice, and one-to-one interviews with five children aged between three and four years who were enrolled in the preschool room where the male practitioner was based. The three main elements of data collection will be reported in turn and then key themes will be brought together within the discussion and concluding section.

9.2 Research Questions

The focus within this part of the study was specifically upon the actual practices of one male practitioner within the wider context of an ECEC setting in order to answer the following research questions:

- What are the values and beliefs of a range of stakeholders with regards to the role of men in ECEC?
- What do male practitioners do in their day-to-day transactions and interactions within ECEC provision?

9.3 Methods

i) Participants

Initially, a 'day in the life' of three male practitioners was recorded. Two of the settings were private day nurseries and one was a foundation-stage unit attached to a state infant school. The practitioners had different roles in their respective settings: one was a qualified EYP; one was Early Years post-graduate teacher trained who was planning to transfer to preschool work; and one was an assistant practitioner who was gaining NVQs whilst working. The original intention had been to include three male practitioners working in different roles in different settings. In practice, the supportive and hence subordinate role of two of the practitioners led to a decision to focus on one male EYP and his colleagues working in a private day nursery in a large city in southern England. It catered for children from birth to age four years and the male owner had taken part in the life-history interviews. Hereafter the male practitioner will be titled 'P'.

At the time of the recording, there was just one male EYP working within this setting. A total of six female colleagues and the nursery owner, working with children from the baby and toddler age range through to four years of age, completed a questionnaire. Qualifications ranged from graduate status through to NVQ level 3.

Whilst views on the roles of men and women in ECEC provision were being elicited from staff and the owner of the nursery this omitted one other stakeholder group in the setting - the children themselves. It was therefore important to speak with children directly in order to determine *their* views on the roles of male and female practitioners.

A total of five children (two girls and three boys) aged between three and four years (from a total of twenty-three) and attending the preschool provision were interviewed. These children were based in the room that P managed.

ii) Materials

a) Survey

A short questionnaire (see Appendix 5) was designed that consisted of twelve open questions: six focused upon gathering demographic information from the respondents and six questions aimed to obtain respondents' views on the roles of men and women in ECEC. The questions were constructed from themes that emerged during the online survey and the life-history interviews relating to the perceived difference between men and women within the field and the reported reactions of children and parents to their presence.

b) Observations

Field notes were made across the day against a timeline (see Appendix 6) of observed organisation, activities, resources available and the behaviour of children and practitioners. Interactions between these individuals were also noted and expanded upon by the transcription of recordings made on a video recorder by a second researcher that was used to record the observations. A total of five hours of footage was captured overall, from the corner of the preschool room, the art room and the outdoor area. This provided as wide a view as possible of practice and also reduced the possibility of distraction of the male practitioner, his colleagues and the children attending the setting.

c) Interviews

Volunteer child participants were provided with a photograph of one male and one female practitioner from their nursery with whom they were very familiar. They were invited to discuss the two practitioners and were asked open questions that aimed to establish perceived similarities and differences between the male and female practitioners. The questions (see Appendix 7) were generated prior to the interviews though the language used was repeated or adjusted as appropriate in order to ensure that the questions were understood, appropriate, clear and unambiguous.

iii) Procedure

a) Survey

Questionnaires were distributed to staff electronically and in hard-copy form so that the working day was not disrupted and staff could choose when to complete them. Some were returned on the day, others were returned electronically by the nursery owner.

b) Observation

The owner had previously approached P and provided him with an overview of the study as well as emphasising that the observations were being conducted in order to gain an insight into his interactions with the children and female colleagues. The male practitioner responded positively and agreed to be observed.

The researcher was already familiar with the nursery setting as the nursery owner had taken part in the life-history interviews. Once the second researcher had been introduced to staff and become familiar with the setting, one researcher began video-recording observations of P from 9.30am until 2.30pm. The second researcher attempted to gain an overview of the context, activities and interactions through the field notes across the day.

c) Interviews

The nursery owner had been advised in advance of the intention to interview volunteering children attending the preschool provision. His role was to act as gatekeeper and to inform parents. It was agreed that, during circle time when all of the children were gathered together, they would be informed that the researcher might like to speak with them in order to find out about the nursery. The children were told that if they wished to be involved, they were to tell P. Once the five children had informed the male practitioner that they volunteered to speak with the researcher, another practitioner took them aside to a familiar corner in the art room, one-by-one, where it was thought that they would be most comfortable and relaxed. A member of staff was present throughout the interviews as a safeguarding procedure, although remained distant in order to ensure that the children were not influenced or distracted by her presence. The participants were asked again whether they would like to speak with the researcher and once they had agreed, were reminded of

the researcher's name and why she was visiting the setting. Participants were then shown the photograph of a male and female practitioner that worked with them on a daily basis. The discussions lasted approximately five minutes.

9.4 Analysis

a) Survey

Qualitative data were extracted from the questionnaire answers relating to respondents' demographics as well as their views on the role of men and women within ECEC. At the first stage of analysis, a priori categories were used to ensure that the research questions were addressed. At the second stage, emergent themes, common issues and surprises were uncovered from the data. For instance, at the first stage, focus was upon the reported difference between male and female practitioners' responses to children within the field, whilst the second stage revealed participants' understandings of gender, thereby constituting a grounded category.

b) Observations

Analysis of field notes

The field notes provided valuable, contextual information regarding the organisation, resources available in the preschool room and the interactions between the children as well as the practitioners. For the purpose of analysis, notes were organised into specific themes: structure and organisation of the setting; and activity of the children.

Analysis of video recordings

Initially, verbatim transcripts were created within a Microsoft Word document in order to analyse the video recordings. The transcripts recorded both verbal and non-verbal behaviour. The coding scheme focused upon the direct interactions as initiation/statement and response sequences, between the male practitioner, his female colleagues and the children he worked with. Then the video recordings were viewed for a second time, during which an observation schedule of Clarke and Cheyne (see Aubrey *et al.* 2000) was utilised in order to capture the nature and frequencies of interactions between P and the children he worked with. The researcher time-sampled one

structured large-group activity, one structured small-group activity, and one unstructured outdoor activity from the video recording, each one lasted for approximately twenty minutes. Interaction, activity and location were recorded every thirty seconds during these periods.

c) Interviews

Verbatim transcripts were created within a Microsoft Word document from the audio recordings taken of the interview. Emergent themes, commonalities and differences across the interviews were recorded.

9.5 Ethics

Observation and interview of young children took place with parental consent that was obtained through the nursery owner. As gatekeeper, he preferred to keep this a low-key affair and not to seek written consent. Children were informed that the 'visitors' were interested in the way children played and learned and that they would have a chance later in the day to have a special talk with the visitor but only if they chose to do so.

A process of ongoing monitoring of children's awareness and response to the presence of visitors was maintained in order to check continuously for any potential signs of unease or discomfort that could then be assessed with the help of a practitioner. In the event, no signs of distress were observed that might warrant review with a member of staff.

9.6 Results

i) Survey

Demographics

A summary of staff training and current responsibilities is provided in Table 6.

Code	**Sex**	**Current job title**	**Age-range of children**	**Length of time working in nursery**	**Relevant qualifications**	**Key responsibilities in current role**
A	Female	Nursery nurse, baby room deputy	Babies 3 months to 16 months	2 years, 6 months	NVQ Level 2 and 3	Make sure children are, safe, healthy and happy
B	Female	Nursery nurse	2 years, 4 months to 2 years 9 months	11 years	NVQ Level 2 and 3	Core routine, planning for development and learning, carrying out activities
C	Female	Room leader	Babies, 3 months to 16 months	7 years	NVQ Level 2 and 3	No response
D	Female	Room leader	16 to 18 months	7 years	NVQ Level 2 and 3	Caring for children; team worker; nappies; delegation
E	Female	Nursery manager	Birth to 5 years	6 months	BA Child development and early education EYP	No response
F	Female	Bank staff	Younger toddlers (16 to 28 months)	2 months	National Diploma in Health and Social Care (distinction)	No response
G	Male	Nursery owner	Birth to 5 years	10 years	EYP	Strategic leadership; early years and childcare enterprise

Table 6 Profile of respondents

Respondents were initially asked to provide information regarding their current job role and highest qualification to date. Table 6 provides a summary of the respondents' exact words that they used to answer the questions. These were presented in such a way so as to ensure that the individuality of responses was reflected and reportedly accurately.

The perceived importance of having both male and female practitioners

All seven respondents reported that it was important to have both men and women within the workforce. Both 'B' and 'D' specifically referred to the importance of providing children with male role models. Respondents 'E' and 'F' thought it important to have male and female practitioners in ECEC due to a difference they perceived in their approaches to education and care. For example, 'E' commented "male and female staff bring a different dimension to the care and education of children and therefore have equally important influences on a child's upbringing". Respondent 'A' commented that it was important to have both male and female practitioners in ECEC "because if there aren't both, the children may become scared and upset around the men and women". Respondent 'C' felt that the participation of men in ECEC was particularly important for children who "may not have a male figure outside of the setting". Lastly, respondent 'G' felt that it was important for men and women to work in ECEC in order to provide children with a workforce that "represents their community".

The roles and responsibilities of male and female practitioners

Respondents were then asked whether they thought male and female practitioners took on similar or different roles and responsibilities in ECEC, drawing upon their own experience. A mixed response was obtained. Three respondents ('A', 'B' and 'E') believed men and women took on the same roles and responsibilities in the education and care of young children. Respondents 'C' and 'F' believed men and women to take on different roles and responsibilities. Respondent 'D' reported that the roles of male and female practitioners were similar but "shown in different ways".

Respondent ‘G’ believed each practitioner to have his or her own characteristics that were not necessarily related to gender roles.

Male and female practitioners’ responses to children’s care and educational needs

Respondents were asked whether they believed male and female practitioners to respond similarly or differently to children’s preschool care and educational needs. A mixed response was obtained. Three respondents (‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘C’) reported that the responses of male and female practitioners were the same. Meanwhile, respondents ‘D’, ‘E’ and ‘G’ felt that male and female practitioners responded in different ways to children’s education and care. For example, respondent ‘G’ commented:

> my experience is that females tend to be more nurturing and risk averse. Males and females tend to have differing expectations regarding behaviour and can exhibit different interactions with children in terms of language, use of humour, etc. As an example, I have sometimes observed males being accused of winding the children up; of being over-boisterous or taking unnecessary risks.

Respondent ‘F’ believed that male and female practitioners did not respond in different ways but acted in different ways “male teachers are more likely to get involved, get down and dirty and messy whereas females are more likely to comfort”.

Children’s responses to male and female practitioners

Six respondents believed children responded differently to male and female practitioners, with particular emphasis on discipline. Respondents ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘E’ specifically identified the differences in children’s behaviour towards male and female practitioners, for example respondent ‘A’ suggested that children responded differently as “a child may listen to a male voice more as they have a deeper voice and it may remind them of parents at home”. Conversely, respondent ‘B’ felt that it took children longer to listen to instructions from men, “they can push boundaries because they are not used to having them [men] here”. Respondent ‘E’ suggested that children can be less responsive to discipline from male staff “perhaps thinking that the women mean what they say more and are more likely to carry out sanctions”. The remaining three respondents (‘C’, ‘D’ and

'F') also believed children to respond differently, whilst respondent 'G' suggested that children generally responded to adults who showed an interest in them, whether they were male or female.

The value parents associate with having male and female staff

Respondents were then asked whether they thought parents valued the participation of men and women within the ECEC provision. Four respondents ('A', 'B', 'C' and 'F') felt that parents did value having male and female staff caring for their children. Respondent 'F' suggested:

> the majority of parents are mums and dads and they know that males and females provide different care. I think parents with sons appreciate male teachers more than parents with daughters.

Meanwhile, respondents 'D', 'E' and 'G' provided a mixed response to the question. As respondent 'E' explained "some parents welcome men into the childcare setting, however I have had angry and nasty responses with parents who are suspicious of male staff". Respondent 'G' stated:

> We strive to create an environment where it is normal for boys and girls to be cared for by men and women. The vast majority of parents are supportive of this and explicitly note their satisfaction that we have a mixed gender workforce. In rare cases there have been objections to males performing intimate care routines on young children e.g. babies. Our response is that all our staff perform the same tasks regardless of gender.

Additional comments

Three respondents wished to provide additional comments regarding the topic at the end of the questionnaire. Respondent 'G' was particularly concerned about ongoing protection of male staff from accusations and suspicions of inappropriate behaviour or abuse. He commented "this is a problem for males working in early years and society's attitudes (from both males and females) and is a barrier to increased recruitment of males". Respondent 'E' also provided additional comments:

> as a manager I like to see a mix of gender in the setting. We have a high proportion of children with separated parents who live with their mother and these are often the children who benefit from a positive male interaction.

Lastly, respondent 'A' advised "men are just as good at their job in childcare as women".

ii) Observations

Field notes

a) Structure and organisation of the setting

The nursery was housed in a Victorian house. It operated from 8.00am until 6.00pm and catered for children aged four months to five years. The nursery received an overall 'Outstanding' grade from OFSTED within the latest inspection. The setting had a large garden with dens, a climbing frame, balls, hoops and pedal toys as well as natural materials for exploration such as rotting logs full of bugs and soil with spades for digging up worms and millipedes. Once sun hats were donned and sun cream applied, free-flow play continued throughout the day between indoor and outdoor spaces. The structure for morning and afternoon followed a similar pattern with:

- Registration and introduction to the session, followed by free choice of child-initiated activity or adult-led craft activity;
- Snacks in small groups supervised by adults (and after hands had been washed);
- Continuation of small-group activity and free choice;
- Clear up and whole-group story;
- Lunch-time in the morning and collection by parents or guardians in the afternoon from 3. 00 pm onwards.

P co-ordinated registration, introduction to the sessions and story-time, in both the morning and the afternoon sessions. He also led small-group craft activities: picture consequences and building with straws in the morning and kite-making in the afternoon. A female practitioner assisted with large-group organisation and also led an individual father's day card-making activity. Two additional nursery assistants supported the activities of the male and female practitioners.

b) Activities

A range of activities was observed as outlined in the previous section. These included:

- fine perceptual-motor (creative) activity with no rigid rules, for instance, painting, *Lego*, small construction, sand and water play, cutting and gluing;
- fine perceptual-motor (structured) activity with right and wrong rules, goals, and limited acceptable outcomes were also observed, such as table games, picture bingo, cutting shapes and activities involving sellotape;
- gross motor activities with movement over ground, without toys and other equipment, including running, jumping, hopping and walking occurred;
- gross motor-perceptual involving equipment or toys, climbing frame, swings, vehicles and a chute;

- imaginative play, where children engaged in ‘pretend’ or role play, acting a part or adopting a role, such as princess, pirate, superman or superwoman;
- book or story activity;
- small-group activity, with or without a leading adult;
- looking, listening or waiting for another child or an adult to start an activity
- other activities, such as helping an adult to fetch or tidy away equipment or a snack;
- toileting and hand-washing activities.

Book/story activity was observed prior to lunchtime although this only occurred as an adult-led, adult-initiated activity. The story being read was ‘The Worst Princess’ by Anna Kemp and Sarah Ogilvie though no liberating messages of gender were identified or remarked upon since the story was used as a ploy to maintain children’s attention whilst individuals were extracted in an orderly manner for toileting and hand-washing before lunch.

There was a tendency for boys and girls to gather informally in sex-specific groups, for example, a group of girls clustered together indoors to ‘chat’ in a carpeted area and, later, to practice standing on one leg (which the manager warned against). The ‘home’ corner attracted girls for whom making tea and cooking meals was popular. Dressing-up baskets were also popular with girls in particular who took turns to put on a pink fluffy princess headband with dresses and floating cloaks. This was reinforced by one female practitioner who commented – “oh, you’re a princess!” – as girls shared the wearing of a crown and – “oh, you’re a pirate!” - to a boy who had found a sword to wave in the air. No challenge to gender stereotypes in story books and dressing up was observed.

More ‘gender neutral’ activity took place outside than indoors, with girls and boys using climbing frames, bikes, cars, scooters, chasing and blowing bubbles; hiding in enclosed ‘dens’ inside and out, where the purpose was not explicitly ‘domestic’. A new dinner lady organised ‘hide and seek’ in the garden that was very popular with both girls and boys. P also pump-primed imaginative play of being dinosaurs.

Male and female practitioners were not distinguishable by their biological sex but by seniority. As room leader, P monitored and kept an overview of the group; female practitioners supported and worked under the direction of the room leader. Children were variously called ‘girls’, ‘boys’ or ‘guys’ informally and formally addressed as ‘preschool’ throughout the visit.

Results of video-recording transcripts

As noted in an earlier section, the researcher time-sampled one structured large-group activity, one structured small-group activity, and one unstructured outdoor activity from the video recording, each one lasted for approximately twenty minutes. The focus was on the interaction with thirty-second time-sampling that identified:

- initiation (INI) – record of the person;
- response (RES) – record of the person who responded or made the second move in the interaction; and
- person engaged in the interaction or being observed – male practitioner (P) or children (CH).

Also coded was the nature of the interaction:

- positive verbal (+V) – a remark from one person to another which is friendly and non-threatening;
- positive mixed verbal/non-verbal (+M) - physical contact and simultaneous verbalisation
- positive non-verbal (+NV) – physical contact that is friendly and non-hostile, such as cuddling or carrying out an instruction and obeying a request
- negative verbal (-V) - a remark from one person to another that is hostile or aggressive, or disciplinary
- negative mixed verbal/non-verbal (-M) – physical contact and simultaneous verbalisation
- negative non-verbal (-NV) – physical contact that is hostile or aggressive
- no interaction has occurred (0)

a) Adult-led, whole group interaction

Structured, large group and adult-initiated activity was captured during the 'welcome registration' session in the morning. The morning session began between 9.00 – 9. 30am and was observed for approximately twenty minutes. This involved the whole preschool group with P leading the activity and a female practitioner who supported this, both of whom sat on a sofa in front of the children. In addition, two female practitioners sat on the floor with the children and ensured that they remained quiet whilst a register was taken. The interaction categories are provided above and the nature and frequency of the interactions is recorded in Table 7.

FEMALE PRACTITIONER: P is going to explain what we're doing today

P: [to female practitioner] Are you going to come and join me on the sofa? Actually I'm just going to grab…

FEMALE PRACTITIONER: Oh, what did P forget?

P: I'm back. I have a special game for preschool

CHILD: and for you?

P: and for me, because I've got my monster book from when I was little and this is a game from when I was little so I'm going to get you to join in with the game that I used to play with my mummy and daddy and my brother when I was little and it's going to involve a piece of paper

CHILD: what's your brother called?

P: who was here on Friday? Can anyone remember what my brother was called?

CHILD: Keith!

P: well done 'O'

CHILD: yeah because you told us the other day

P: so he's called Keith and he's a little bit smaller than me

CHILD: Keith!

P: so this morning I'm going to do a special drawing game with some of you.

	+ V	+ M	+ NV	- V	0
INIP	23	0	0	0	0
RESCH	15	0	1	0	7
INICH	2	0	0	0	0
RESP	2	0	0	0	0

Table 7 Frequencies of interaction in large group activities

During this activity, positive verbal interaction was most frequently initiated by the observed practitioner and directed towards the children within the preschool group. The children responded most often with positive verbal interaction. The positive verbal interactions were particularly friendly and relaxed. The purpose of the observed introduction was to provide children with information regarding the planned activity and instructions for the day. On seven occasions, children did not respond at all to the practitioner's positive verbal interaction. Two individual children initiated interaction with the practitioner. One child asked him the name of his brother, as the practitioner was describing a game he and his brother used to play during their childhood and at the end of the registration another asked the practitioner if the children could play at the end of the activity.

No occasions of mixed-verbal/non-verbal interaction were observed, possibly as the practitioner positioned himself away from direct contact with the children by sitting on the sofa. Similarly, negative verbal interactions and/or response by the practitioner or children were not observed. This activity was followed by free-choice (child-initiated) or adult-led craft activity.

b) Small-group craft activity

Children were told that there would be opportunity to engage in a 'consequences' game with the practitioner, which involved drawing parts of the body on a piece of paper. A twenty-minute

observation captured an adult-led craft activity that involved P and four children. The activity occurred outside of the main preschool room, in a conservatory area that housed the art materials. Each child was given a piece of paper and a pencil. The children were instructed to first draw a head at the top of the piece of paper, fold it over and pass on to the person sitting next to them. This person was then to draw a neck, fold the piece of paper over and pass to the person next to them who would then draw the next body part. The activity continued until a head, neck, stomach, legs and feet had been drawn on each piece of paper. At the end of the activity, the children were asked to show each other their piece of paper.

	+ V	+ M	+ NV	- V	0
INI P	48	0	0	0	0
RES CH	15	0	17	0	16
INI CH	6	0	0	0	0
RES P	6	0	0	0	0

Table 8 Frequencies of interaction in small group activity

Within this small group activity, positive verbal interaction was most frequently initiated by the observed practitioner and was directed towards the children participating in the activity. The children most commonly gave positive non-verbal responses and sixteen occasions were observed where there was no response at all to the interaction initiated by the practitioner as the children were obeying the instructions given. On fifteen occasions, children gave positive verbal responses that involved the children telling the practitioner what they had drawn on the piece of paper. An extract from the verbatim transcript is provided below.

> P: can you put two lines for his neck at the bottom as well? Well done 'B'. Now, what I'd like you to do, can you fold your piece of paper over so you can only see the neck? And now I'd like you all to give your piece of paper to one of your friends. Now can you now do, without looking at the head, a body and some arms. I'm going to do a big robot body. It's going to have dinosaur spikes and little hands

CH: and what are those squares?

P: the squares? That's his top. Ok so fold it over again so the body is hidden. Are we all done? Now let's pass it round again. So we've done our head, done our bodies, what do we draw next? Legs, so we need to draw two legs. I'm going to do…I did a robot last time didn't I? I'm going to do jelly legs

CH: I'm going to do the same

P: when you've done your legs, fold your piece of paper again. The last thing, we've done our head, done our bodies, done our legs, what's next?

CH: feet

P: so you can do feet or shoes. When you've finished with your feet and shoes, fold it over one more time so it's hidden…and now, we're going to see what drawings we've made

[children open up drawings]

P: what does it look like? Does it look funny or silly?

CH: silly. Can we take it home?

P: no we're going to keep these ones so they can be part of our display

On six occasions, children initiated interaction with the practitioner that was often to clarify instructions he had given or to ask for assistance. Negative verbal interactions did not occur during the observation either from the practitioner or children.

c) Free-play activity

Between 10.15-10-30am children had snacks in small groups supervised by adults after they had washed their hands and when a seat became available. Children continued with free choice, chasing bugs and wood lice was particularly popular as well as investigating rotting logs in the garden. From approximately 10.30–10.50am another twenty-minute observation was conducted during the children's free-play in the garden area.

	+ V	+ M	+ NV	- V	0
INI P	4	1	0	0	0
RES CH	3	0	1	0	1
INI CH	6	6	0	1	0
RES P	6	6	0	1	0

Table 9 Frequencies of interaction in free play

During the free-flow activity that was observed in the garden, positive verbal interaction was initiated most often by the children and to a lesser extent by the practitioner. Positive verbal interaction initiated by the children most often occurred as they asked the practitioner to play with them and subsequently initiated conversation with him as part of that. The practitioner provided positive verbal responses to the children as he agreed to play. One occasion of negative verbal interaction was observed, as initiated by one of the children. As the children engaged in imaginative play with the practitioner, one child began hitting the practitioner with a pretend street sign. The practitioner gave a firm verbal response and disciplined the child. During the free-flow play, one of the children fell over, thus the practitioner initiated mixed verbal/non-verbal interaction.

Between 11.00-11.15am the children were instructed to clear up and a whole group story was read. During this time, children were sent to the toilet in small groups supervised by the female practitioners to wash their hands ready for lunch that was served 11.30am onwards.

iii) Interviews

At the beginning of the interview, the children were shown one picture of the male (P) and female practitioner (J) that had been taken as a staff group photograph. The researcher then pointed to P and asked the participants if they could recall his name. All of them correctly and confidently stated his name. The researcher then pointed to the female practitioner and asked the participants if they could state her name. Three of the five participants (1, 2 and 4) were able to state her name,

Participant 3 was initially unsure and Participant 5 was unable to recall her name. Having said that, when Participant 5 was asked if he knew who she was, he indicated that he did.

Having identified the names of the male and female practitioner, participants were then asked if there was anything similar or different about them. Three participants felt that the practitioners were different. Participant 1 believed that P and J were different "there is difference because when they went for a walk with each other they were really funny". Participant 2 reported that P had different hair to J, whilst Participant 4 reported them as different because they were wearing different coloured clothing in the picture and P was wearing a different style of top. Participant 3 stated that there was nothing different about the two practitioners and Participant 5 was unsure whether there were any differences or similarities.

Participants were then asked what they thought P liked to do in the nursery. Participant 2, 4 and 5 reported that P liked to play with them, with Participant 2 specifically stating P "plays princesses with me" and Participant 5 reporting that P liked to play football. Participant 3 reported P liked to "look after us" in the nursery. In contrast, Participant 1 stated that P "doesn't even like being in nursery because he doesn't like doing all his work". When asked what J liked to do in the nursery, all participants offered different responses. Participant 1 suggested that J was the same as P because "all teachers are the same as P". When asked why he felt this, Participant 1 replied "because they don't like all the work because they have to work really hard". Participant 2 did not answer the question. Participant 3 felt that, as with P, J liked to look after the children. Participant 4 stated that J liked to take the register, whilst Participant 5 suggested that J liked to run in the nursery garden.

The researcher then asked participants what they particularly enjoyed doing with P in the nursery. Once again, all participants enjoyed doing different things with P. Participant 1 responded by saying "nothing, nothing, nothing". Participant 2 stated "he just comes with me and I come with him", whilst Participant 3 liked to "play with him when there's no one else around" and particularly identified playing dinosaurs as something he enjoyed doing with P. Participant 4 enjoyed playing

with P in the garden and Participant 5 liked to play on the slide with P. Participants then referred to what they enjoyed doing with J in the nursery. Participant 1 did not refer to J but instead commented that he liked "to have peace and quiet all the time". Participant 2 stated that she liked to talk with J and 'nothing else' and Participant 3 stated that he enjoyed playing with J in the garden but he liked P "the best". When asked why, Participant 3 replied "because other kids play with him as well". Participant 4 reported playing with J in the "home corner" and when asked why, replied "because I like her". Participant 5 stated that he liked to play with J inside as opposed to outside of the nursery and that J "likes to play with the stories".

9.7 Discussion

i) Survey

Six members of staff agreed that it was important to have men and women in ECEC, as representing the wider community and providing experience to children of playing and learning with both sexes. Some responses however appeared to be underpinned by traditional views related to women and men. Further questioning about roles and relationships confirmed a mixed view of these with three members of staff stating that they were the same for men and women and three suggesting that behaviour of men and women was different. Women, for example, were viewed as "motherly" and "cuddly" by one respondent. Men were reported to over-excite children by one respondent and get them dirty by another. A similarly mixed view of men's and women's response to care and education emerged, with three saying they behaved in the same way and three stating that they behaved differently. Men were again reported to "wind children up" by one respondent and women "to be risk averse" by another. It was agreed by six staff respondents that children responded differently to men and women though for a host of different reasons related, for instance, to tone of voice and to sternness and modes of discipline. Finally, a mixed response was received to a question concerning parents' valuing of male practitioners, with four emphasising that parents did appreciate having male practitioners and the rest referring to suspicion of men in the pre-school environment.

Overall quite a mixed picture emerged from survey responses, ranging from the nursery staff who held traditional views about differences between the sexes to those who did not uphold these differences. Concerns relating to protection issues were expressed by some with the owner specifically identifying suspicion of men in the field as a barrier to recruitment.

ii) Observation

Observation provided the opportunity to contrast staff's reported views and beliefs and their day-to-day practice. There was some contrast in children's behaviour in different nursery activities. Traditional free-choice nursery activities such as domestic and role-play played out traditional sex roles with staff reinforcement of these, reminiscent of Gee's (1990:xix) suggestion that gender discourses are "are always and everywhere social". Statements from practitioners such as "you're a princess" to a child wearing a crown and "you're a pirate" to a child with a sword reflected prior knowledge of the dominant gender discourse of what it means to be a 'pirate' or 'princess'. As Butler (1997:83-84) advised, ongoing subjectivation places "restriction on production", in this case determining what children can or cannot be.

Outdoor play with both child-initiated soil digging and adult pump-priming of role play and hide-and-seek seemed to be more 'gender neutral' and enlisted large groups of boys and girls. In large-group, adult-led activity a mixed picture emerged with the male practitioner attempting to introduce anecdotes to children about himself and his brother at a similar age. Although a resource had been provided within the setting, that attempted to unsettle traditional gender roles within children's stories, no liberating messages of gender were being exploited from his reading of a potentially gender challenging tale of "The Worst Princess". Thus as Davies (1997) advised, practitioners' intentions of challenging traditional are not always translated effectively into practice.

Overall, traditional sex roles were reinforced in the hidden curriculum by one female member of staff in the role-play area and by another, male practitioner, in the formal curriculum during story-reading time. Opportunities to offer liberating messages and to challenge traditional roles were

being missed. The potential role of outdoors in providing counter discourses, roles and activities might be further exploited.

iii) Interviews

In terms of interviews with children, as with staff survey responses, answers were mixed with respect to what male and female staff "liked to do". Children reasonably noticed and pointed out differences in hair and clothing. At the same time, they also confirmed differences that they observed between the activity of the male practitioner outside and activity of the female practitioner in the home corner, in reading of stories and in talking. As with the staff survey, interviews with children served to confirm and hence triangulate what was observed in the nursery. The findings are also supported by Foreman's study (2008) within which children reported differences between male and female practitioners in relation to physical attributes, such as men being taller than women and also referred to the tendency for male practitioners to engage in physical activity with the children. In addition, children in Harris and Barnes' study (2009) reported minimal difference in the roles of male and female kindergarten teachers with both being seen as "someone who cares" and "someone who teaches" (p. 172), with similar findings from children within O'Sullivan and Chambers' study (2012) who did not associate specific types of play with particular practitioners based on their biological sex.

9.8 Conclusion

Overall, despite the owner's aspirations to increase the number of men in pre-school which he had successfully achieved in terms of providing a better representation of the community outside nursery and male role models, there was still evidence that traditional sex roles were being reinforced through both the formal and hidden curriculum. Boys and girls were not being introduced to alternative gender roles nor were they being offered alternative gender-liberating messages.

This chapter has provided an insight into a 'day in the life' of one male practitioner that involved a survey conducted with his colleagues, an observation of his interactions and transactions as well as

interviews with the children in his care. The perceived and actual roles of men and women within the ECEC setting were triangulated and often reflected stereotypical notions of men and women.

Having presented a ‘day in the life’ of one male practitioner, with attention specifically given to surrounding values and beliefs as well as actual practices, the following chapter will revisit the findings of the study in order to discuss and answer the research questions.

Chapter 10

Discussion

10.1 Introduction

The previous chapters introduced and presented the findings from each element of data collection. This chapter will revisit and discuss the findings, drawn from each of the data-gathering methods, in light of the research questions. The policy trajectory model of Bowe *et al.* (1992) that has provided a tool of analysis throughout the study will be employed as a framework for interrogation. The research questions will now be revisited and each addressed in turn, in light of the findings. Where appropriate, each question will be answered with reference to both the literature and empirical findings.

10.2 Research Questions

i) What is the policy-to-practice context of male professionals in ECEC?

The policy trajectory model of Bowe *et al.* (1992) drew attention to educational policy processes and emphasised the significance of influences and control of policy texts and the recontextualisation of these by ECEC practitioners within practice. Interviews with élite participants predominantly provide the empirical basis for the answer to this question.

Due to their level of seniority, élites were able to draw upon a wealth of experience that, for five out of the six, included their own experiences as men working within the ECEC sector. The reader is reminded that élite participants included both voluntary and private sector nursery providers, ECEC training providers as well as educational researchers and lecturers within higher education institutions. Élites were drawn from across the country, with one élite in particular, drawing on experiences in his role as a chair of early childhood research committees across the world. Thus, élites provided an opportunity to capture the bigger contextual picture of the influences on policy,

the policy texts and practices of men in ECEC. Given their professional roles, élites were able to provide an insight into each of these key areas.

Context of Influence

The key influences surrounding ECEC policy and thus men in ECEC included the notion of gender equality, persistent attitudes surrounding men in society as well as their participation in ECEC and perceptions regarding the low-value of ECEC.

i) Gender equality

Previous gender equality efforts have included the bottom-up influence of feminism in the 1970s and the more recent acknowledgement of the role of men in the promotion of gender equality across Europe (see European Commission, 2000, 2006, 2010, 2011). However, whilst bottom-up attempts in the 1970s fed back into the context of influence and thus were successful in promoting women's participation in the labour market, bottom-up attempts to increase men's participation in the ECEC workforce appear less successful.

This is unsurprising given the lack of previous association between gender and education within policy (Ball, 2013). Government attention has been given to pupil attainment and gaps between boys and girls, however the findings of this study expose an even greater gap between gender equality policy and early education policy, as well as a lack of recognition of the role of men within both areas.

Élite 3, a researcher (predominantly in primary education contexts), described a "sudden shift" in gender equality within education that had previously been a very gender-stereotypical context. Similarly, élite 4 (whose work extends across ECEC on a global scale) stated that there had been "a gradual equalisation of gender rights and entitlements". However, élite 1 painted a very different picture "when you dig down into the nitty-gritty of it, there is still a high level of prejudice when it comes to the day-to-day practicalities of things".

Although recognition across the EU of men's role in the promotion of gender equality, as well as critical research linking gendered patterns with home and work has increased, this has not been a feature of influence for ECEC policy development. So, attempts to enhance gender equality have been received and acknowledged within schools, with recognition of educational attainment as reported by élite 3, and also across global contexts reported by élite 4, they are yet to be recognised in ECEC. Hence, despite European influences, gender equality within the context of ECEC provision is yet to appear on the political agenda.

ii) Attitudes surrounding men in society and ECEC work

Although there have been attempts to encourage association between men and gender equality across the EU, attitudes relating to men in ECEC and society more broadly in England, remain powerful, influential and persistent. These attitudes influence men's decision to enter the field, the reactions of individuals to male practitioners' career choices and the day-to-day experiences of men who work in ECEC settings. The findings from the élite interviews reflected small pockets of change in attitudes as reported by three out of the six élites, including increased recognition of men as role models and increased attempts to enhance gender equality in society. However, five out of the six élites reported that, overall, there was a lack of change in societal attitudes towards male practitioners.

A significant finding of this study, which was conducted during a time of increased publicity surrounding a number of high-profile child abuse cases in the media, was the surveillance and suspicion of men who work with very young children. According to all élite participants, this has dominated attitudes towards men over the last ten years. This feature of the context of influence is not isolated to England, but was reported by male students on ECEC courses from the studies of Vandenbroeck and Peeters (2013) in Belgium as well as those in Anliak and Beyazkurk's study (2008) in Turkey.

Élite participants spoke of uncertainty from potential employers and parents of children during their experiences in ECEC, as well as particular assumptions made regarding their sexual orientation. The reactions of one parent, as experienced by a voluntary-sector nursery provider, indicated mistrust of male practitioners specifically in relation to children's toileting.

Three life-history participants spoke of equally negative experiences within their own practice, with one established participant reporting a statement he had made to his colleagues during employment within a primary school "every time I comfort a child, every time I am saying well done to a child I risk my job". A relatively new ECEC practitioner from the life-history interviews directly observed parents questioning his presence in the ECEC setting within which he worked.

In light of the findings from the élite and life history interviews, men are likely to face suspicion at any stage in their career trajectories, and at any age. Suspicion was placed directly onto practitioners as men, first and foremost, regardless of reference made to respondents in the online survey of the safeguarding strategies in place within their current place of work. For instance, fifteen referred directly to the regulations within their setting and thirteen identified the strategies used to ensure that children were safeguarded whilst at the nursery provision. Interestingly, despite participants' awareness of surveillance, twenty-seven of the online survey participants felt personally safeguarded by their employer.

Whilst societal perceptions of men in ECEC indicate a level of mistrust in their work with young children, all male élites referred to the importance of men in ECEC. These views support the findings of the IPSOS MORI study (2003) in which 77% of participants (members of the public) urged for more men to be recruited into the field. Each one of the élite participants in the present study reported different reasons for this, including the need to associate the notion of male practitioners with other developments in ECEC policy, such as attention given to the involvement of fathers in ECEC. The value associated with male practitioners was also associated with a need to tackle current perceptions of men in society, with two élites referring to the need to provide

alternative models of men in ECEC provision to "dispel that 'macho', somewhat testosterone-laden view of masculinity", as said by élite 4.

iii) The value of ECEC

Another important finding of this research was that despite élites' recognition of the high value of ECEC work, there was indication that ECEC was still considered a low-status profession. For example, having experienced ECEC services across the world, élite 4 reported "sometimes [there is] even a denial that 'profession' is an appropriate term". Élite 5 (who had worked in the field and was more recently involved in the training of undergraduate students on an early childhood course) commented that ECEC "seems a bit of a Cinderella". "In the workforce we are still seen as - they just play, it's us in the secondary sector, we do all of the serious stuff". Thus there was a clear distinction between the value of ECEC work and the value of secondary education. Despite attempts by the Government to improve the status of the ECEC profession (DfE, 2013) and reference made within the Nutbrown Review (2012) to the value of ECEC work, élite 1 felt that ECEC was perceived as the "perfect solution for those who have been deemed as the more failing students". The persistence of structural inequalities comes into view when this is considered in light of Colley's (2006) 'nice' upper working-class girls who, as slightly higher achievers, became nursery-nurse students.

Context of Policy Text Production

i) Minimal impact of policy

Élites all agreed that the Tickell (2011) and Nutbrown (2012) reviews of ECEC were unlikely to have any significant impact on the participation of men within ECEC services. A significant finding within this study was élites' lack of faith in the current political context and moreover, concern regarding the Government's lack of commitment to ECEC services. Concern was raised by élite 1 that "what we don't have now is a single solution coming from Government". Élite 1 experienced a

lack of political interest in the participation of men within ECEC when presenting research to a Government minister. Meanwhile, Élite 6 referred to a lack of sustained commitment from the Government that was yet to be "backed by adequate and targeted funding".

ii) Recruitment strategies

Élite 1 spoke of the need for a "proactive intervention", élite 2 similarly spoke of the need for a targeted action plan. However, élite 3 wanted to move away from a "blinkered approach" of just focusing on gender and instead called for a larger focus on leadership and management of issues relating to social justice and gender equity. Meanwhile, élite 4 referred to preference for a focus on registration and training, whilst élite 5 considered the need for an action plan alongside demonstration of the benefits of men in ECEC. In contrast, élite 6 wanted to avoid "cosmetic exercise" but spoke of improving quality and training.

Goals for recruitment therefore were either considered in a numerical sense (élite 2), or considered within the bigger picture of societal context (élite 1) or professional with emphasis on promotion and information of ECEC work, the need for work experience, training and career development (élite 6). Thus although élites were agreed on the lack of impact of recent reviews into ECEC practices, they appeared unclear on what an alternative approach might look like.

Context of Practice

Male professionals continue to make up 2% of the workforce and have done so for decades (Oberhuemer *et al.,* 2010). This is unsurprising, given the negative attitudes reflected within the context of influence, especially concerns relating to safeguarding of children. Moreover, the context of policy text production reflected a lack of impact within the context of policy text production and a lack of faith in the current Government's approach to ECEC services. As élite 1 stated "the rhetoric is in one direction and the reality is in another".

i) Work conditions

All of the élite participants reported poor work conditions as a deterrent to men's entrance into the field, a finding that was also reported in the large-scale research of Cameron *et al.,* (1999) as well as the large-scale survey of members of the public by IPSOS MORI (2003). This indicates widespread awareness for the need to improve work conditions of ECEC workers and in doing so, the findings of the present study support the Government reforms for ECEC provision (DfE, 2013) that included the introduction of new job titles as well as recognition of the poor pay received by ECEC staff.

ii) Workplace culture

With its rather narrow focus on the conditions of ECEC work, the reforms neglected to consider the impact of interactions between practitioners within the context of the ECEC environment. Three élites, specifically, the voluntary-sector nursery owner, leader of a training and resource centre that was also a leading provider of ECEC services and an educational researcher within higher education referred to male-female staff practitioners' interactions. For example, élite 2 referred to the "feminised culture" that could be "over-bearing" (élite 2). This would appear to support the concern of the OECD (2006) that the ECEC field was becoming increasingly feminised.

ii) How, if at all, does policy guidance influence the recruitment of men in ECEC?

Peer pressure

In speaking with young male students on an ECEC course, it became clear that their decision to work with children, albeit older children, had resulted in disapproval, particularly from school and college peers. The participants were subject to specific forms of discrimination and had "learnt to cope with the stick" received by peers, as reported by one participant. As well as experiencing peer pressure, reference was also made to the stigma associated with men in ECEC particularly in relation to assumptions regarding their sexual orientation.

The findings suggest that policy guidance does little to influence the recruitment of men into ECEC provision, as it does little to alter the deep-seated ideologies and attitudes of members of society. As élite 4 advised "research and reports have little impact on ideology and cultural assumptions".

Disinterest in ECEC

Whilst the Tickell Review (2011) directly referred to the predominantly-female ECEC workforce, Nutbrown emphasised the need to raise status of the workforce in order to encourage men to see the value of the field. Yet, the findings from the group interviews indicated a tendency for all of the young men to seek work with older children, with preference for teaching roles within primary schools, not because work conditions of ECEC were a deterrent but because they preferred to work with older children, with some holding aspirations of future school headship. Four out of the five participants had initially considered alternative career paths and none of the participants intended to work with the youngest children in ECEC. Reasons for this included preference by one participant for a structured environment that he felt a school provided, whilst another participant suggested that he "couldn't handle a day nursery" due to the presence of "young girls". Indeed it was reported by one participant that "you never find men in reception or below because the children aren't misbehaving", meanwhile two more participants referred to the tendency for men to work with older children with suggestion from one that "women are deemed to be better with working with young children and more affectionate".

Professionalism and reform

Despite indication above that more deep-seated ideologies were influencing the career choices of the next generation of practitioners, both Tickell (2011) and Nutbrown (2012) placed the solution to the composition of the workforce in the context of increased professionalism and more favourable work conditions.

This is very much reflective of the policy context surrounding ECEC in the last decade. Components of reform have included recognition of the disparate nature of numerous ECEC qualifications as well as acknowledgement of the need to increase the salaries, status and qualification levels of ECEC workers. Despite attempts to enhance professionalism, poor work conditions were considered by life-history, élite and online survey participants as a significant

barrier to men's participation, specifically low-status and low-pay associated with ECEC work. These were consistent with the findings of European studies of Cremers *et al.* (2010), Sataøen (2010) and Sakellariou and Rentzou (2010) where dissatisfaction with low salaries was identified as a potential barrier to men's recruitment into the field. Low pay was most commonly identified as the main barrier to men's participation and unsurprisingly, calls for increased pay came from participants who suggested this as a solution to men's underrepresentation in the field. These findings were supported by the views of practitioners as captured within the study of Cameron *et al.* (1999:65) with one female practitioner commenting "it's really awful the money we get paid", as well as the male participant in Warin's (2006:534) study who advised, "if the Government want more men to work in this area they'll have to pay them more".

Thus the findings support the latest Government proposals for reform. However, with the next generation of male educators reflecting preference for work with older children, it is unclear whether this will influence the future recruitment of men into the workforce. Indeed, although established practitioners referred to concerns regarding low pay, group interview participants did not refer to poor work conditions as a deterrent. As one participant, who intended to be a teacher stated "you get a decent pension…I will be earning double what they've [his friends] got and they will be asking me for money".

Recruitment and retention

Whilst élite participants did not seem optimistic that the ECEC reviews of Tickell (2011) and Nutbrown (2012) would lead to significant change, they offered their own suggestions to enhance recruitment.

Élites' suggested strategies for recruitment based upon targeted approaches at macro- and micro-level, including improvement of work conditions, targeted promotion and advertising as well as courses tailored specifically to men wishing to work with young children. These were similar to the findings of a national survey conducted by Farquhar in New Zealand (2012) within which

respondents offered a range of strategies including media campaigns as well as efforts to make ECEC a more attractive career option. The conclusions drawn from Peeters' (2007) review of literature also called for a multi-level approach in which, amongst other suggestions, media campaigns, organisational changes aimed at employers and training institutions, and improved careers' advice were called for.

An interesting finding was that only a minority of the online survey participants within the present study reported awareness of strategies for recruitment by their current employer. Hence, whilst ideas for recruitment were emerging from the practitioners themselves, the findings indicated that employers were not necessarily instigating strategies. Similarly, of the participants in Cremers *et al.* mixed-method study (2010) conducted in Germany, only 32% of managers of ECEC provision reported engagement with strategies for recruitment and 30% had neither thought about or participated in this.

The most recent indication of a recruitment strategy to increase the employment of men into ECEC has been that of the DfE-funded project in conjunction with the Fatherhood Institute (2013-2015) that set a target for men to make up 10% of the workforce. It was unclear how the percentage had been generated and in light of previously unsuccessful European attempts to increase the number of men in ECEC, the value of such an approach might be questioned. Indeed élite participants shared mixed views about the value of a targeted approach. The findings suggest that it is not simply a case of encouraging recruitment of male practitioners through Government guidance or the improvement of work conditions as élite 1 stated there is a "tendency to assume that higher salaries would encourage men into the workforce". Such an approach fails to address the wider social, political and economic forces influencing the roles of men and women in the care and education of young children.

iii) What are the values and beliefs of a range of stakeholders with regards to the role of men in ECEC?

Attitudes towards men's role

A significant finding that emerged from the study was that the role of male practitioners within ECEC was highly valued by stakeholders. Five out of the six élites spoke of the need to increase men's participation in ECEC, with dissent from this view by only one élite participant who spoke of a need for a diverse workforce and a desire to move away from focusing on gender diversity. For élite 2, it was important to recognise the "different ways that some boys learn", yet he felt that this was unlikely to happen "because the staffing is entirely female and full of people who have never been boys".

Four out of the five group-interview participants also indicated benefits of men's participation in the field. Of the thirty-one online survey respondents, seventeen advised that a more even mix of men and women within the workforce would be desirable. All of the life-history participants spoke of the benefits of recruiting men into ECEC services and finally, all seven respondents in the practitioner survey believed it important to have a mix of male and female staff. The findings of this study therefore support the widespread agreement of the value of male practitioners from male and female German teachers, students as well as directors of ECEC provision, funding organisation officers and parents within the large-scale study of Cremers *et al.* (2010).

Reactions of friends, family, parents and employers

Although the value associated with male practitioners was reported by stakeholders, an important finding of this study obtained from all of the participants in the group interviews, three out of the six élites and all of the life-history interview participants, was that male practitioners faced negative reactions from friends, family, parents or employers to their career choices. Established ECEC practitioners as well as young men at the beginning of their careers encountered this. All of the participants in the group interviews reported reactions to their decision to work with young children, particularly from peers and parents of children attending ECEC provision. Three group-interview participants were mocked by peers for their career choice, leading to the suggestion from

one that, “you’ve got to be strong-headed to do this course and take some stick”. This participant also referred to reactions from parents of children attending the provision where he was undergoing his placement. Parents’ reactions resulted in the participant feeling uncomfortable “just because parents looked at me funny and they were like, what is this man doing here?”

Whilst the findings from the present study indicated negative reactions from peers and parents of children attending provision, participants within the study of Cameron *et al.* (1999) as well as Sumsion’s male participant (1999) referred to their own family members, who were less willing to accept their career choices. The views of the relatives therefore reflected the socialisation of young boys within the family, where cultural ideals and expectations regarding masculinity are maintained and reproduced. The life-history interviews provided an interesting example of positive socialisation experiences within the family, as four out of the six participants referred to female relatives’ work within educational services. Three of the participants directly referred to the influence of parents’ occupations on their own career choices, as one participant said “well, I wanted to be like Dad didn’t I?” Whilst another suggested that “you look at your parents and say well I’m going to do something like that”.

Unlike the group-interview participants in the present study, Rentzou and Ziganitidou (2009) reported the positive and supportive reactions from male practitioners’ friends, with one participant commenting “my friends would never judge me negatively” (2009: 275). This, they felt, was due to a generational difference in understanding in terms of the purpose and nature of ECEC and indeed the profile of the ECEC worker. The participants in Rentzou and Ziganitidou’s study (2009) were aged between twenty-six and forty-five years, whilst participants in the group interview were significantly younger. Thus a generational difference in terms of the reactions of peers to such a career choices was possible.

As noted above, the nature of reactions experienced by male practitioners in the present study were different across the age groups. Whilst young males in the group interview reported being mocked

for their decision to work with children, that was viewed as a more feminine domain, established practitioners recalled increased surveillance and suspicion at their motives for wanting to work in the field (also see Sakellariou and Rentzou, 2010). Consequently, when male practitioners were seen to challenge and therefore pose a threat to the accepted, dominant gender discourses and practices, they could face backlash either in the form of increased surveillance or were ridiculed within the context of their peer group.

Allocation of tasks

Participants within the group interview were very clear about the role of male practitioners in ECEC. One participant reported "you don't find many men in there [ECEC] because men are more on the side of teaching". Indeed two group-interview participants referred to men's role in discipline, with one stating that men were better equipped due to their biological sex to discipline boys, whilst the other participant commented that men "take it [discipline] to the right level…whereas women…I don't really see them thinking, I was a child once".

In contrast, there was a level of uncertainty amongst surveyed practitioners working within one setting, with regard to the roles of male and female practitioners. Whilst three respondents considered there to be no difference between the roles and responsibilities of male and female practitioners, three believed there to be clear differences. Similarly, a mixed response was obtained regarding male and female practitioners' responses to children's care and educational needs. Three respondents spoke of practitioners' responses being the same, whilst three reported that practitioners' responses were different. Meanwhile, the private-sector male nursery owner commented "my experience is that females tend to be more nurturing and risk averse…I have sometimes observed males being accused of winding the children up; of being over-boisterous or taking unnecessary risks". Likewise, a female member of relief staff reported men getting "down and dirty and messy whereas females are more likely to comfort".

Differences between practitioners were also reported within the study of Cameron *et al.* (1999) where, male participants referred to a tendency for colleagues to assume they had a preference for ball games and rough play. Similarly, participants in O'Sullivan and Chambers' study (2012) highlighted the perception that male practitioners were reportedly more likely to engage in football and rough-and-tumble play. Emilsen and Koch's research in Norway and Austria (2010) also revealed the perception that men were more likely to engage in physical play, with similar findings in the studies of Hedlin and Aberg (2013) and Brody (2014).

In contrast to the beliefs of participants within the group and life-history interviews as well as surveyed practitioners, children interviewed as part of the current investigation, held less gender-associated beliefs about the roles of practitioners. Children's comments regarding the potential differences and similarities between practitioners appeared neutral with the small number of reported differences predominantly being related to the physical appearance of practitioners. Similarly, Foreman's (2008) child participants also referred to differences between male and female practitioners including physical attributes, such as men being taller than women. Children's lack of reference to gender-specific traits and characteristics suggested that the dominant gender discourses were not influencing judgements about the practitioners within the setting.

Role models

An important finding from the élite and group interviews as well as the online survey and practitioner survey was the potential for men to act as role models for the young children in their care. In describing the changes in attitudes towards men in ECEC in the last ten years, élite 6 referred to recognition of men as positive role models, that he felt was important as there was a need to be "certain that their [children's] roles and responsibilities in a wider world will not be defined by gender or out-dated and false notions of what is feminine or masculine". Suggestion of the increased recognition of men as role models was supported by the findings of the group interviews with the next generation of male educators, where four out of the five participants spoke

of the benefits of male practitioners in their capacity to provide role models. This was deemed important as "the male children aren't getting a role model". Moreover, twenty out of the thirty-one survey respondents drawn from across different ECEC professional groups reported opportunities to provide role models as the greatest benefit of having men in the ECEC workforce.

More specifically, online survey and group-interview participants identified a lack of male role models for young children within current ECEC provision, especially experienced by young children who came from single-mother families. Likewise, in the life-history interviews, participants referred to the opportunity to provide father figures for children who might not encounter any at home.

The perceived benefit of men as role models, as reported by participants within the present study, were consistent with the findings of Cameron *et al.* (1999), within which the most commonly-cited benefit of men's presence was their ability to act as role models. These views were further supported by the views of practitioners within O'Sullivan and Chambers' study (2012), as well as the participants from studies conducted within Europe, including that of Cremers *et al.* (2010) and Buschmeyer (2013) in Germany, as well as Sumsion's (2000) study in Australia where "good male role models" were reportedly required. The notion of the 'male role model' therefore appears to be a persistent feature associated with men's practice in ECEC across time and space.

However, although the participants within the present study identified the potential for men to act as role models in ECEC, there was less indication of exactly what this role model might be like in practice, or indeed the qualities that the male role model might have. This contrasted with Brownhill's (2014) clearly defined set of characteristics within the proposed profile of male role models.

iv) What are the reported practices and experiences of a range of male practitioners in ECEC?

Chequered career paths

Initial interest in unrelated occupations was a central feature of men's experiences prior to entrance into ECEC and was reported by men at different stages in their career, notably with all of the young male trainees stating that they had considered alternative career paths prior to enrolling on the course. Within the life-history interviews, five out of the six participants had initially worked within different fields. This is very much reflected the notion of "chequered" or "lattice" career paths referred to within the study of Cameron *et al.* (1999:52), whereby their career trajectories were characterised by a series of entrances and exits, eventually leading them into ECEC work. Using Williams and Villemez's (1993) typology of men in non-traditional occupations, the majority of participants within the life-history interviews might be considered as a mixture of 'finders', who entered ECEC after initially searching/working within traditionally male-dominated occupations and 'settlers', who enter the field due to dissatisfaction with previous employment. However of the six life-history participants, at least three were exploring alternative career options or had left the field by the end of the present study. Thus there is the need to view the experiences of men within non-traditional occupations as one component of a more complex and diverse career trajectory. Moreover, the rather limited focus on why adult men choose to enter occupations, neglects the role of the family and early life conditions in shaping the individuals' habitus and influencing dispositions, such as career choice.

Despite life-history participants' intentions to explore alternative options, unlike the participants of Cremers *et al.* (2010), who advised that, if given the chance to choose their career again, they would not have chosen ECEC, participants within the present investigation appeared largely satisfied with their current experiences in the field. Interestingly, both of the life-history participants working as leaders within children's centres were considering employment options elsewhere which was very much reflective of the current context within which cuts were being made to these services. In contrast, twenty-eight of the respondents in the online survey intended to remain within the field.

The glass escalator

In line with recommendations from Tickell (2011) and Nutbrown (2012) the focus for ECEC reform proposals outlined within *More Great Childhood* (DfE, 2013) has been on increasing the quality of provision, with the qualifications of practitioners recognised as key to this endeavour (Sylva *et al.,* 2004, OECD, 2006; Oberhuemer *et al.,* 2010). Yet at the same time, concern has been raised regarding the work conditions of less-qualified ECEC staff who have continued to receive low salaries and who work in a sector that has been perceived as having low status (Penn, 1995; DfE, 2013). The studies of Cook (2005) who gathered the views of school students regarding ECEC work and Rolfe (2006) who explored gender segregation in childcare within a review of literature, indicated that poor work conditions were a deterrent to men entering ECEC work (also see Cameron *et al.,* 1999; Cremers *et al.,* 2010; Sataøen 2010).

Within the present study, all élites advised that poor work conditions were a significant deterrent to men entering the field. Eleven out of the thirty-one early to mid-career men in the online survey considered low pay to be the biggest obstacle to men's participation in ECEC work. Thirteen of them referred to low status of ECEC work and job insecurity as the least rewarding part of their work in the field. Concerns regarding poor work conditions were also emphasised by five out of the six men in the life-history interviews, the majority of whom were well established within their ECEC roles. In contrast, none of the young men in training within the group interviews referred to poor work conditions as a barrier to men, however this was unsurprising given that their intentions were to work in schools. Indeed, one participant referred to his decision to leave the family building and construction company in order to pursue a career in teaching which would enable him to gain a higher salary.

In spite of concerns regarding work conditions, the majority of participants within the online survey and life-history interviews reported that they had good work conditions. Satisfactory salaries, high-level qualifications, leadership roles and access to career progression dominated accounts. Out of the thirty-one online survey respondents, seven had achieved a Master's qualification; ten received

an annual salary of between £30,000 and £39,000. A similar picture of male practitioners within positions of seniority emerged from the participants of the life-history interviews, with four out of the six participants reporting their roles within senior leadership and management positions, including a private-sector nursery owner, an early-years consultant, children's centre area manager and education manager within a children's centre.

v) What do male practitioners do in their day-to-day transactions and interactions within ECEC provision?

Distinguishing between 'official' and 'hidden' curriculum

The official pre-school curriculum comprises the Statutory framework of the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) that sets the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five, as well as the assessment and safeguarding and welfare arrangements. This includes the planned activities, for instance the observed 'consequences' activity that the EYP planned, organised and ensured took place. Were the researchers to have remained longer in the setting, these would have fitted into a sequence and progression of activities, designed to extend and challenge children.

The hidden curriculum may be much less overt. It refers to what is learned during activities that is not part of the curriculum and the ideas that are picked up by children, for instance, about the different ways boys and girls might role-play or behave during indoor and outdoor play. This can include reinforcement of gender stereotypes, in this case, by the practitioners with comments including "oh you're a pirate" to a boy and "oh you're a princess" to a girl during informal interactions between children in the home corner, as well as what is transmitted during the gender-neutral activity outside where boys and girls, in this case, participated in large-group imaginary play with the male practitioner.

A significant finding emerged during the reading of a gender-liberating story when the male practitioner appeared to accept the messages in the story that he read to the children, with no exploration, extension or challenge to it. Hence, the hidden curriculum was less explicit than the

official curriculum, in that it was embedded into the procedures of the preschool day. Much of this might not be intended, though gender performatives (Butler, 1993, 2004) can have a strong impact on the children's views of themselves and others. This finding supports Davies' (1997) suggestion that, despite practitioners' intentions of challenging traditional notions of gender, construction of traditional gender norms may prevail.

The findings indicated a gap between the planned and observed curriculum. The planned curriculum, that is, the structured, adult-initiated activities, was what the researchers saw and heard taking place. However, what children actually experienced, the *curriculum as experienced* was both what the researchers saw and what the children experienced and 'learned', including the hidden curriculum embedded in the culture of the setting. The repercussions of this were visible during children's free play in the home corner, during which the researchers observed girls making tea and cooking meals as well as girls' and boys' choice of outfits from the dressing-up basket that was reinforced by a female practitioner.

These findings were triangulated by the views, aims and commitments formally reported by the owner, manager and nursery staff within the nursery survey. The nursery owner strove "to create an environment where it is normal for boys and girls to be cared for by men and women", whilst the nursery manager liked to "see a mix of gender in staff in the setting". However, respondents' comments relating to practitioners' responses to children's care and educational needs reflected the dominance of traditional views of gender.

Children's expressed views of the teachers with whom they were familiar were more open-minded, with distinctions made between male and female practitioners on the basis of physical appearance. Traditional gender distinctions, however, were reflected in the comments of two children, one of whom stated that the female practitioner preferred being inside in the home corner, and the other suggesting that the female practitioner "likes to play with the stories". Meanwhile, two other participants suggested that they enjoyed playing in the nursery garden with the male practitioner.

10.3 Conclusion

This chapter has focused specifically on the research questions underpinning the study and, in drawing upon the findings from all data collection methods has answered them. Attention must now turn to the key features of the study, its design and the approach taken by the researcher in collecting the data.

Chapter 11

Conclusion

11.1 Introduction

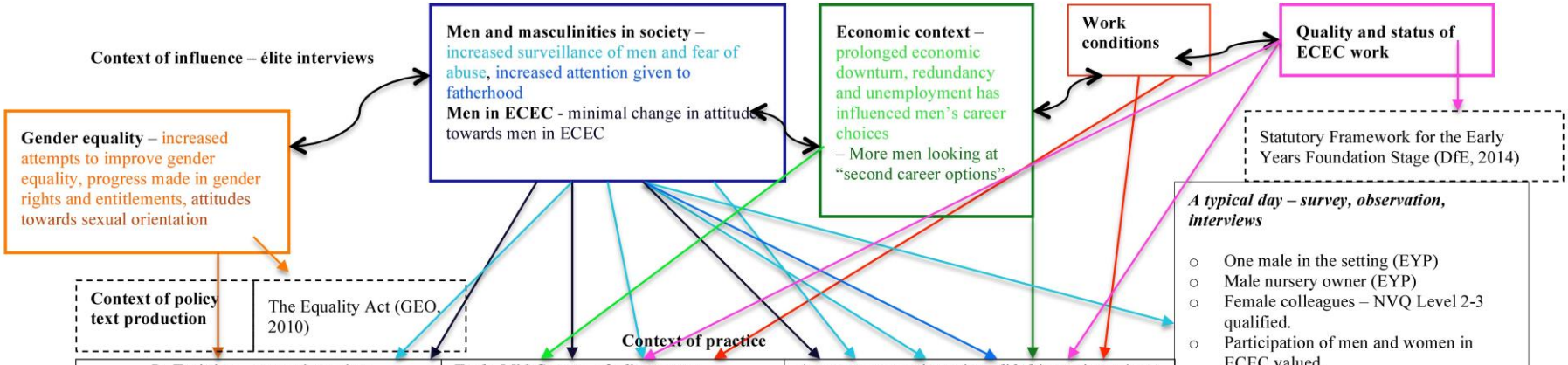
Having addressed the research questions within Chapter 10, this chapter will bring together the main findings and will then move on to consider the strengths and limitations of the study, including the policy cycle model of Bowe *et al.* (1992). Implications for policy and practice will then be considered and recommendations for future research will be provided.

11.2 The main findings

This section will bring together the main findings from the study that reflect a complex web of key categories and that have merged together to create the framework for this conceptual story (see Figure 23). It is through the construction of the conceptual story that the theories that have emerged can be unveiled and the contribution that this study makes to the research field can be considered.

By returning to the policy trajectory model of Bowe *et al.* (1992), the researcher is able to determine the key influences on policy that affects what men do, the relevant texts that determine what must be done by them in ECEC settings as well as their practices at different stages of their career, within different roles and across different areas of ECEC provision. The policy trajectory model also indicates the extent to which influences flow down into policy texts and practice, as well as the extent to which practices flow and feed back, bottom-up, into the context of influence.

It is these key areas that will now be explored.



In Training – group interview	*Early-Mid Career – Online survey*	*Across career trajectories – life history interviews*
○ Minimal impact of school careers advice and career events ○ Initial interest in alternative occupations ○ No prior work experience with children ○ Disinterest in working with very young children, thus no evidence of emotional capital (Reay, 2000), instead all shared interest in working in schools ○ Backlash experienced for not fitting into peer group norms – evidence of the 'boycode' with participants' male peers favouring Sports Science training ○ Sexual orientation questioned by others ○ Awareness of increased suspicion and surveillance of men who work with young children ○ Keen to maintain cultural ideal of separate spheres (separate roles for men and women) ○ Stereotypical notions of men and women ○ Preference for practical hands-on training, disinterest in theory and pedagogy ○ More information required of the range of roles in early education ○ Men in ECEC valued and believed to offer something different from women (especially in relation to discipline)	○ Concern regarding poor work conditions for recruitment (low pay, low status, lack of proper career progression, job insecurity) ○ Development of gender capital, satisfactory salaries, high-level qualifications achieved, provided with opportunities for career progression, worked in leadership and management roles ○ Motivations for working in the field related to building relationships and positively impacting the lives of children and their families – revealed generation of emotional capital ○ Negative reactions to men in ECEC a barrier to men's participation ○ More even mix of men and women in ECEC desirable ○ Male practitioners valued as role models for young children ○ Concerns about abuse as a deterrent to men's participation in the field ○ Motivations for working in the field related to building relationships and positively impacting the lives of children and families - revealed generation of emotional capital ○ Intention to remain in the field	○ Evidence of 'lattice' career paths (Cameron *et al.,* 1999) - initial employment in alternative careers ○ Generation of emotional capital ○ Commitment to ECEC ○ Concern regarding work conditions for recruitment ○ Significant influence of female relatives on men's career choices ○ Low achievement at secondary school ○ Majority in senior positions, different roles reported ○ Evidence of the 'glass escalator' (Williams, 1995) – mature participants held positions of seniority ○ Participants reported the persistence of traditional roles for men and women ○ Concern regarding increased surveillance ○ Intention to remain in the field (although concern raised from children's centre leaders regarding stability of future employment) ○ No membership to men in ECEC network (only one participant was aware of such a network) ○ Men in ECEC valued and believed to offer something different from women (interests and hobbies, language used with children)

A typical day – survey, observation, interviews

- One male in the setting (EYP)
- Male nursery owner (EYP)
- Female colleagues – NVQ Level 2-3 qualified.
- Participation of men and women in ECEC valued
- Stereotypical notions of men's and women's roles
- Mixed views about male and female practitioners' responses to children's care and educational needs
- Practitioners believe children respond differently to male and female practitioners
- Mixed response about parents' value of male and female practitioners
- Nursery owner's concern regarding suspicion of men
- Planned, adult-initiated activities observed, positive verbal interactions dominant
- Emotional capital of male and female practitioners observed
- Gender liberating resource available
- Hidden curriculum - traditional sex roles reinforced
- Tendency for children to gather informally in sex-specific groups
- Gender neutral activity outside (child-initiated play, adult free-play observed)
- Children spoke of physical differences between practitioners, associated 'P' with outdoor activity, female practitioner associated with indoor activity

Figure 23 The policy trajectory model revisited

i) Influences

Figure 23 is particularly valuable in illuminating how different policy contexts influence and impact on one another; hence there are internal links between gender equality, men and masculinities, the economic context, work conditions and the quality and status of ECEC work.

Gender equality is a central feature of the context of influence. Yet, whilst increased efforts to improve gender equality have been recognised and there has been progress in gender rights and entitlements, legislated for instance in the *Equality Act* (GEO, 2010) at the level of policy text production, this has not translated into equality policies and practices in provision for young children. This is unsurprising given the emphasis on gender and education in relation to attainment gaps and underachieving boys.

Although recognition across the EU of men's role in the promotion of gender equality, as well as critical research linking gendered patterns with home and work has increased, this has not been a feature of influence on early childhood education policy development. The lack of influence of gender equality promotion has (and continues to have) implications for men and masculinities in society and thus men in ECEC.

These implications are particularly visible by the increased surveillance of men as well as attitudes towards the sexual orientation of men who choose to work with young children. Despite attention given to men as fathers, men as practitioners have received far less attention and as such, there has been minimal change in societal attitudes surrounding their work in the field, as reflected by men in ECEC training through to those established in their roles.

Negative reactions from parents of children were both perceived to be a barrier to men's participation in the field, reported to occur by female practitioners and experienced first-hand by male practitioners, once again from young men in training through to mature men. Young males experienced backlash from peers, thus reflecting the dominance and power of the peer-group sub-

culture. Whilst there have been attempts to enhance gender equality by focusing on the experiences of women, for instance in gaining access to employment, this has neglected the particular forms of discrimination experienced by men, in this case, those who work with children; passive discrimination and awareness of the possibility of encountering it dominated accounts by male practitioners. Although structural inequalities faced by men remain hidden, the impact they have on the attitudes and mores of society and thus the experiences of men in the field, are anything but.

Structural inequalities and attitudes towards men in society and ECEC are influenced by the economic context within which they are viewed. At a time of economic downturn, unemployment and redundancy, men who have an interest in ECEC are presented with a moral dilemma. An intrinsic motivation to work with children may be present, but extrinsic detractors lead them into more traditional roles that are likely to provide higher salaries. As such, the early career choices of male practitioners reflect the persistence of their 'breadwinner' role within English society and, in drawing upon the connection between the economic context and work conditions, as ECEC salaries are notoriously low, we are unlikely to attract men as breadwinners.

As demonstrated in Figure 23, the economic context has implications for men's career choices but also for the work conditions experienced by ECEC practitioners. The model indicates that ECEC is unlikely to attract men at the beginning of their career trajectories, as there is little financial incentive. The continued lack of financial investment undermines the attempted move towards ECEC becoming a graduate-led profession and thus has implications for the quality and status of ECEC work. Whilst young men in training consider careers with older children in primary education, mature men are working in the field as a result of a later-in-life career change, where in ECEC, they tend to occupy roles of seniority.

The quality and status of ECEC has been a particularly prominent feature of influence on policy texts since the start of Labour's first term in 1997 (Baldock *et al.,* 2013) characterised by an overall strategy of tackling social disadvantage and the emergence of the early years curriculum. Attempts

to enhance quality of services have been supported by large-scale research such as EPPE (Sylva *et al.,* 2004). These influences have been absorbed into the context of policy text production and have also been embodied in the *Statutory Framework for the EYFS* (DfE, 2014a), the principles of which are regulated through inspections conducted by OFSTED. This is an example of how policy influence flows down into policy text production and thence into practice. ECEC practices have also fed back into contexts of influence and policy texts, with low salaries and the need to increase quality of the workforce and provision a central feature of the recent reviews of Tickell (2011), Nutbrown (2012) and subsequent Government reforms outlined in *More Great Childcare* (DfE, 2013).

ii) Key texts

A highly significant policy text, in the form of legislation that determines what ECEC employers and practitioners must do within their work, is the *Equality Act* (GEO, 2010) that replaced all previous equality legislation including the *Equal Pay Act* (Department for Employment, 1970) and the *Sex Discrimination Act* (Department of Employment, 1975). Yet, whilst the DfE non-statutory guidance the *Equality Act 2010 and Schools* (DfE, 2014b) supports the translation of this legislation into practice, what this might mean for ECEC practitioners and the children in their care has not been adequately accounted for. Whilst policy texts may be interpreted differently from policy-makers' intentions, there is uncertainty as to exactly what the *Equality Act* means for practitioners and ECEC practices. As Ball (2013:175) stated "equality talk doesn't necessarily translate straightforwardly into equality policies and practice". The repercussions of this are particularly apparent in men's access to and conversion of economic capital in the field that reflects persistent inequalities between men and women.

This demonstrates how the lack of influence in social policy specifically relating to gender equality and men and masculinities and even legislation, impacts upon the generation (or not) of policy texts and guidance specifically relating to ECEC provision.

Consequently, gender continues to be reconstituted through the values, structures, interactions and processes within ECEC and remains a key player alongside social class and race, in determining the experiences, distribution of resources and educational opportunities of boys and girls, men and women. This is not accounted for within ECEC policy. As Blackmore asks, in light of the influence of global policy communities, (2010: 315) "how will gender equity policy be mobilized, conceptualized and delivered in local educational organisations?"

iii) Practice

Despite the historical tendency for women to participate in formal ECEC provision, male practitioners demonstrated the development of emotional capital (Reay, 2000) and reflected caring masculinities (Morrell and Jewkes, 2011) in their work with young children.

However, the generation and conversion of capital cannot be considered in isolation from social, economic and cultural considerations and circumstances that are constantly surrounding men. As practitioners, men brought their gender capital into ECEC settings, constructed from their own childhoods, resulting in the increased likelihood of their converting it into other forms of capital. This was especially visible in participants' cultural capital, in the form of qualifications. Although a range of qualifications was reported, they were predominantly high-level and had been gained either prior to entry into the field or once within it. Accordingly, this resulted in reported opportunities for career progression and thus further opportunity to convert cultural and economic capital. The glass escalator continues to operate (Williams, 1992) and structural inequalities prevail.

Whilst stakeholders emphasised the importance of men and women in the ECEC workforce, they were not always conscious of deeper cultural influences on their behaviour and practice. The hidden curriculum of the ECEC setting observed, revealed the early construction of gender capital through the reinforcement of dominant gender stereotypes. Utilisation of a potentially gender-liberating resource was limited – an unsurprising finding given the contexts of influence and policy texts, as outlined above, that are translated (or not) into practice.

In sum, the Bowe *et al.* (1992) model highlighted dominant and contradictory influences acting on moves to greater gender equality and higher-quality ECEC at the level of policy text and at the level of practice where the operation of the hidden curriculum could neutralise efforts to achieve a framework for gender equality in practice. The drive to raise standards and quality in ECEC workforce and provision has dominated the feedback loop from the context of practice back to the context of influence and thence to policy text again. Strategies to increase the participation of men in the field have not been a priority. Unlike the feminist movement of the 1970s that was driven by a 'bottom-up' cycle of influence with little p as much as big P, the drive to increase men's presence in low-status jobs (in this case, ECEC) is unlikely to feed back into the context of influence which in itself is embedded within a long-term financial crisis and ongoing uncertainty about men's role in the care and education of young children outside of the home.

As Stake advised (2000:441), "many a researcher would like to tell the whole story but of course cannot; the whole story exceeds anyone's knowing, anyone's telling". This section does, however, provide a contribution to a story that has received relatively little attention at the level of influence and policy text, but that is very much present at the level of practice. The main findings outlined within this section provide parts of a very complex map. The following section will review the process through which the researcher was able to bring these parts together.

11.3 Limitations of the study

There were limitations to this study that was carried out by a single researcher in terms of time and financial resources. At the same time, recognising the complexity of policy contexts, the approach taken was that of an intrinsic case study (Stake 1995), that took account of the multi-layered and complex systems not only surrounding male practitioners, but also of the wider structures and contexts of inequality influencing their experiences within ECEC provision (Yin, 2003). In doing so, the approach allowed for multiple, mixed methods to be employed in order to capture the values and beliefs, as well as practices and experiences of different men, within different roles and at different stages of their career. The design thus provided an opportunity to identify patterns within

and across datasets (Stake, 1995), such as the tendency for men to seek work in ECEC as a career change as well as indication that men tended to work with older children. Hence the case study was employed to explore the rich descriptions (Geertz, 1993; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995) and lived experiences of practitioners as well as the wider, influential perceptions surrounding male practitioners.

The variety of methods employed also provided triangulation, for instance, the findings of an observation of one male practitioner were triangulated with the views of the children he worked with as well as his colleagues. This allowed exploration of the perceived and actual practices of the male practitioner and therefore highlighted varying interpretations of his practice. It would have been valuable if practice could have been investigated through longer-term observations. This was not feasible for one researcher in the present study, though arguably more reliable observational results would have emerged from focused observations within a more extended time-frame. Whilst triangulation through the involvement of different stakeholder groups in different data-gathering methods increased trustworthiness, the study may not have been sufficiently large-scale to permit generalisation of findings. The predominantly qualitative nature of the case study may be criticised, though its strength lies in the richness of data obtained that complemented, indeed nested within, the larger-scale and more representative accounts of men in childcare reported in Chapter 3. The intention of the present study was to illuminate by thick description the values, views and practices of male practitioners within the broader policy context. This can provide a 'naturalistic generalisation' in which the experiences of participant men are captured vividly and are thus understandable to readers with similar interests and experiences (Stake, 2000).

The main limitation within the study related to accessing and securing the involvement of an under-represented group of ECEC practitioners that, at best, occupies just 2% of the overall workforce, at different ages and at different career stages. Élites were selected carefully, taking account of their roles and willingness to take part and the group could reasonably be described as a purposive

sample. The young men in training might more fairly be described as comprising an opportunistic sample though the glimpse they provided of attitudes, and influences on young trainees added another dimension to the study. In order to achieve as representative a sample of male practitioners as possible for the online survey the researcher was led to infiltrate electronic networks, forums and email databases for primary teachers, EYPs and children's centre leaders in order to maximise the response from potential participants. Whilst a relatively small sample was achieved, a range of practitioners did respond but, perhaps inevitably, these tended to be more experienced and qualified. To balance this, the range of online-survey respondents who volunteered to take part in life-history interviews allowed the researcher to select a purposive sample, as well as secure the agreement of one private nursery owner to undertake a staff survey, observations and interviews with children in one of his settings. Selection of case sites and participants is a challenge for case study and, as noted by Stake (2000:446) for qualitative fieldwork, we aim to "draw a purposive sample, building in variety and acknowledging opportunities for intensive study". The major responsibility of the researcher was to: conceptualise the case using the Bowe *et al.* (1992) framework; select phenomena to address the research questions; seek patterns in data to uncover the issues; triangulate key observations and bases for interpretation; selecting alternative interpretations to consider; and form tentative generalisations (Stake, 2000: 448).

i) Reliability, Validity and Trustworthiness

As noted above, to achieve the macro- to micro-level investigation of men in ECEC a case-study approach was adopted. This used a framework that allowed their examination in historical, socio-cultural and political as well as physical contexts that included the diverse constructions and interpretations that people gave for their views, actions and experiences. These could not necessarily be replicated or repeated exactly as they were based on the beliefs and practices of particular stakeholders, from particular perspectives, at a particular point in time. Taking account of this, may serve to render the data less reliable, although an attempt was made to increase reliability by employing a range of data-gathering methods allowing methodological triangulation. The online

survey and time-sampled observation in particular sought to use consistent and repeatable measures in order to identify patterns that could be investigated in more depth through qualitative means, for instance, open questions that probed life-history accounts and practitioner photographs that elicited views of young children.

To strengthen reliability, the data were analysed very carefully and systematically in order to reduce bias. To achieve this, a framework was designed and used for analysis. A priori categories were constructed to address questions related to the contexts of influence, policy text and practice at the first stage, through both qualitative and quantitative data. At the second stage grounded categories were derived from emergent analysis (Charmaz, 2011).

To ensure the validity of the study, key elements revealed from online survey data were validated by eliciting participants' views expressed through life-history and élite interviews. Interviewees, in turn, were offered the option of validating their responses through transcripts. Involving different educational stakeholders, for example, from Government agencies, multi-agency services, private providers, as well as men practitioners in ECEC, their female colleagues and children, provided subject (participant) triangulation and thereby stronger grounds for accepting that participants' reported views provided an authentic reflection of practice. By such means, the researcher gained multiple opportunities to validate participants' reports and to achieve methodological triangulation as well.

The trustworthiness of the research was thus increased through the use of multiple methods of data-gathering and multiple stakeholder groups, ensuring triangulation that enhanced credibility, transferability and confirmability of the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The long period of field -work permitted the researcher to ensure prolonged engagement and persistent observation to develop her understanding of the context of the study.

Presentation of the findings at conferences and an international peer-review journal publication, provided the opportunity for peer review and at the same time strengthened the trustworthiness of the study.

11.4 Implications

A distinctive feature of this study was its employment of a macro-level analysis of male practitioners within ECEC, as well as surrounding education policies and the micro-practices of practitioners on the frontline of ECEC work (Ozga, 1990). By taking this approach the study took account of the first-hand experiences of men in the field as well as surrounding perceptions of and attitudes towards their role.

Another distinctive feature of this study was the focus on male practitioners within the context of educational policy in England, specifically policy as text that reflects struggles, compromises, interpretations and reinterpretations (Bowe *et al.*, 1992). The current context, within which ECEC policy is placed, is rightly focused on matters of quality and workforce development, at the same time, it is also characterised by moral panic about men following the succession of child abuse scandals that is sweeping British press.

Equally, the study demonstrates that policy is not exterior to social inequalities and enters existing cultures and patterns of practice that position men and women and, specifically, the male role in the persisting gender system. At the same time, with male ECEC practitioners in mind, while we have a mixed economy of state, private and voluntary ECEC, low status, low qualifications and poor work conditions, we are not going to attract men as breadwinners, nor are we going to encourage or support caring masculinities.

Greater recognition of gender equality was referred to by élite participants, yet was not clearly visible within practice. However, diverse attitudes and values mean that attempts to promote gender equality are taken up differentially. On the one hand, there are networks for male practitioners, well

positioned to create a ‘bottom-up’ influence, however this is off-set by a largely female practitioner workforce who may reinforce gender stereotypes.

In this study, the ‘day in the life’ nursery owner’s views about recruiting men in the field may be hijacked by the attitudes and ‘performances’ of female members of staff. At the same time, life history participants positioned themselves in ways that distinguished them from those who opted for ‘macho’ occupations, instead enjoying freedom to take on and ‘perform’ caregiving activities and express feeling. By contrast, the intentions of the group interview trainee participants to work with older children may demonstrate an attempt on their part to disassociate themselves from a role deemed more suitable for women.

The influence of masculinities on structures, institutions and processes that undergird the educational system, will serve to increase likelihood that men strive to occupy positions of power/leadership (Acker, 1990) in ECEC. Indeed, male dominance acts across all levels of organisational structure and whilst attempts are made to increase the number of men in the field, as evidenced by the responses given by the private nursery owner in this study and made visible in the continuing attempts at influence by the Fatherhood Institute (2013-2015), rhetoric alone cannot overcome the gendered nature of ECEC institutions, as workers themselves bring in gender attitudes and behaviours to ‘contaminate’ any supposedly ‘gender neutral’ framework.

The views, practices and experiences of the male practitioners of this study, however, were complex and contradictory. Whilst not overtly seeking male dominance, participants in the online survey and the life-history interviews revealed hidden forms of power structure or patrimony that continued to operate. Through self-improvement and higher qualifications, the male practitioners within the online survey, as well as the majority of life history participants were still seeking to occupy positions of power.

Moreover, their decision to seek membership in a predominantly-female workforce had repercussions. A significant finding within the study was the suspicion men faced when working

with young children. Participants in the online survey referred to a range of safeguarding procedures in place at their current place of employment and the majority felt personally safeguarded by their employer. Such underlying tensions however are yet to be sufficiently acknowledged never mind resolved.

11.5 Recommendations for future research

As this chapter has stressed, case study is of its very nature small-scale. A larger-scale study that ensured a more representative group of ECEC male practitioners might allow more reliably the exploration of the processes and impact of their views, actions and interactions over a period of time. Moreover, given the finding that attitudes, expectations, roles and practices change over a career, it would be important to gather data from male practitioners across the age range and at different stages of their career. One important finding from this study was the reported ambivalent attitudes of parents towards the involvement of men in ECEC. As it was beyond the scope of the current study to directly involve the parents, there is an argument for considering the roles of both ECEC and parents in creating gender, class and race equality in young children's lives.

In order to explore these areas in greater depth a more sophisticated research design might be required as well as a more representative sample. Ideally, this would require a model, such as the well-known context-input-process-production (CIPP) training evaluation model introduced by Stufflebeam (1971). Influenced by the findings of a 'day in the life' element of the study, this model would take account of *inputs* (such as staff professional knowledge and skills, provision of buildings and outdoor areas, materials and resources, supporting links and partnerships); *procedures* (such as staff training, promotional strategies and websites, meetings with parents); *processes* (such as planning, delivery of programme and evaluation); *outputs* (in terms of children's learning and safety and increased awareness of parents and community; and *outcomes* (such as sensitivity and reciprocity in staff-child, staff-parent and parent-child relations and culture).

Whilst the nature of such research might remain descriptive and analytical, small-scale interventions by practitioners themselves could be considered that allowed specific ECEC settings to collaborate together with parents to increase the effectiveness of gender equal practices in their own particular contexts. In this case, the model might serve as a guide to development.

Finally, some small-scale controlled experiments might be envisaged that centred on particular ECEC settings, controlled for men-only practitioners, female only practitioners and mixed-sex practice in turn, whilst measuring children's actions, reactions and responses.

A significant finding was the gap between the espoused views and beliefs about men in ECEC and an implicit culture where gender stereotypes are still encouraged and reinforced. This finding could provide a stimulating starting point for discussion and debate with participants questioned as to why this was the case and how ECEC practices might be changed to become more gender equal for all ages, children and staff alike.

The first task, however, will be to prepare a professional report of the findings of this study suitable for various stakeholder participants involved as a means of feeding back the main findings and ascertaining their own views about taking the research forward.

11.6 Conclusions

This thesis presents one part of a very complex picture. Although educational institutions have the potential to positively participate in gender equality practices, they are influenced by and reinforce complex social structures and processes and account needs to be taken of this.

There is a need to recognise the complexities of gendered power relations and the differences between men, who may face certain forms of gender discrimination in their endeavour to work with young children. There is also a need to think more critically about what we mean by 'men', who they are and what they do within early years settings.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Élite Interview Schedule

Élite Interviews

This sheet provides you with interview questions for the élite interviews which are due to be conducted as part of my doctoral research which focuses on the policy-to-practice context of male professionals in early childhood education and care (ECEC). These interviews are being conducted with a range of policy-makers and key stakeholders which will form a significant part of my research findings (and underpins the entire research focus from policy-to-practice). The study itself utilizes the policy trajectory model of Bowe *et al.* (1992) as a framework and analytical tool underlined by three contexts: of policy influence; policy text production; and practice. Thus, the interview questions have been assigned to each of these stages of the model. At no stage will you be referred to by name within the research - confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained throughout, from the interview through to transcription and dissemination.

Context of influence

In what ways (if at all) do you think views on male professionals in ECEC in England have changed over the last 10 years?

What do you think have been some of the influences on the recruitment of male professionals in ECEC?

What do you think, at this point in time, will be the impact (if any) of the Nutbrown (2012) proposals and the recommendations from the Tickell review (2011) with respect to men entering the profession?

Context of policy text production

In other parts of Europe, such as Norway, the Government has presented a gender equality action plan, an aspect of which specifically focuses upon the gender composition of ECEC professionals. However, within England we are yet to see a targeted action plan. In your opinion do you think this should be introduced in England? What do you think the impact of this would be?

What in your view should be the goals (if any) for the recruitment of male professionals in ECEC in England?

Recently, Jan Peeters (cited in Oberhuemer, Schreyer & Neuman, 2010) suggested that whilst men undertake ECEC training (both prior to embarking on a career in the field and during employment here), they tend to choose a different kind of employment on completion of this training. What do you believe are the main barriers to retention of male professionals within ECEC?

Context of practice

Do you believe it is important to develop a more even gender balance in ECEC? If so, why?

What would you say have been the successes in terms of the recruitment of male professionals in ECEC over the last 10 years?

What are the challenges for the increased recruitment of male professionals within this field for the future?

Thank you for your participation in this research.

Charlotte Jones

Appendix 2

Group Interview Schedule

1. Can you describe what you are currently studying here at the college?
2. At what point did you decide that you wanted to enrol on an early childhood college course?
3. What inspired you to gain an early education and care qualification?
4. Can you describe the reactions of friends and family to your career choice?
5. At the moment, women make up 98% of the workforce in ECEC and therefore men only 2% - why do you think that is?
6. What do you think are the main barriers to having more men working in ECEC?
7. There have been circumstances where men-only childcare courses have been created. How do you feel about this idea?
8. What are you future career intentions?
9. Is there anything else you'd like to say that hasn't already been covered?

Appendix 3

Online survey

Male Professionals working in Early Childhood Education and Care (copy)

Welcome

Welcome to the **Male Professionals in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Survey**. Firstly, thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. This survey aims to uncover the **values, attitudes and reported practices** of male professionals within ECEC. You will be asked to provide an email address at the end of the survey (if you are willing to participate in a focus group at a later stage), although be assured that you will remain anonymous throughout the research process. The survey will take approximately **10 minutes to complete**. Note that when you click continue at the bottom of the page, you cannot return to review or amend that page. When you arrive at the 'thank-you' page, you will know that your responses have been recorded on the database.

Male Professionals in Early Childhood Education and Care

Questions are **mandatory** unless marked otherwise.

Note that once you have clicked on the CONTINUE button your answers are submitted and you can not return to review or amend that page.

Demographics

1 AgeAre you?

- 20-29 years
- 30-39 years
- 40-49 years
- 50-59 years
- 60+ years

2 Qualifications and Educational Background

2.a If you selected Other, please specify:

3 What is your current role?

4 Do you work

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Other

4.a If you selected Other, please specify:

5 Please could you indicate your average working hours per week

6 What is the age range of the group of children you work with?

- 0-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6+ years
- Other

6.a If you selected Other, please specify:

7 Please could you indicate the number of other men who work in the same setting as you?

8 Please could you indicate the number of women who work in the same setting as you?

9 Since your original training, have you completed or are you working towards any additional qualifications which will help you to work in early childhood education and care?

- Yes
- No

9.a If yes, please tick

- Advanced Certificate

- [ ] Advanced Diploma
- [ ] MA (Master's Degree)
- [ ] Other

9.a.i If you selected Other, please specify:

10 Since your original training have you attended any short courses which help you work in early childhood education and care?

- ( ) Yes
- ( ) No

10.a If you have attended any short courses what topics were covered?

11 Do you feel that you have received sufficient training to help you work in early childhood education and care? Would you say that you have had:

- ( ) Enough training
- ( ) Nearly enough training but a bit more would be helpful

11.a If not enough training, in what areas do you feel that you need more training?

Roles

12 At what age did you enter the early childhood education and care profession?

- 20-29 years
- 30-39 years
- 40-49 years
- 50-59 years
- 60+ years

13 How long have you been working in early childhood education and care?

- 0-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- over 20 years

14 What inspired you to enter this career?

15 Does your current employment offer you opportunities for career advancement?

- Yes
- No

15.a Please detail these opportunities

Experiences

16 Please could you indicate your current salary?

- Upto £10,000
- £10,000-£19,999
- £20,000-29,999
- £30,000-£39,999
- Above £40,000

17 Please could you indicate your level of satisfaction with regards to your current salary?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Not sure
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

18 What is most rewarding about your current job?

19 What is least rewarding about your current job?

Staff Dynamics

20 Please could you indicate how often you attend the following meetings within your setting?

	Daily	Every week	Every 2 weeks	Every 3 weeks	Every month	Other	If you selected Other, please specify:
Staff meetings	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Team meetings	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Meetings with parents	○	○	○	○	○	○	
Meetings with extended services	○	○	○	○	○	○	

21 Please indicate any other formal meetings you may attend

22 Do you attend informal meetings with colleagues outside of your setting?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

22.a How often?

- Daily
- Every 2 weeks
- Every 3 weeks
- Every month
- Other

22.a.i If you selected Other, please specify:

23 Does your setting have a staffroom?

- Yes
- No

23.a How often do you spend time in the staffroom?

- Very often
- Often
- Don't know
- Not often
- Never

23.b What do you mainly use the staffroom for? As a place:

- To eat
- To attend meetings
- To complete planning and other tasks
- To socialise with colleagues
- Other

23.b.i If you selected Other, please specify:

Safeguarding

24 During your employment within early childhood education and care have you received child protection training?

- Yes
- No

24.a Please indicate the type of training completed and also when this was completed

25 How are children safeguarded against child abuse that may occur within the setting?

26 Do you believe that you are personally safeguarded against allegations relating to child abuse within your current setting?

- Yes
- No

26.a Please could you elaborate on this?

Impact

27 Women still comprise 97% of the early years workforce (Oberhuemer et al, 2010). How do you view this fact?

- This seems about right
- I am not sure about this
- A more even mix of men and women would be desirable
- Other

27.a If you selected Other, please specify:

28 What do you believe are the potential benefits of male professionals within early childhood education and care? (you may use the same rating more than once)

	Please rate from 1-5 (5 being the greatest benefit)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Children experience a mixed-sex environment					
It increases the amount of people working in childcare					
It ensures that early childhood settings reflect society as a whole					
It challenges traditional stereotypes					
It provides male role models for children					

29 Can you think of any other potential benefits to having male professionals in early childhood education and care?

- Yes
- No

29.a If yes, please specify

30 What do you believe are the potential barriers to men entering this career? (you may use the same rating more than once)

	Please rate from 1-5 (5 being the biggest barrier)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Pay	○	○	○	○	○
Status associated with childcare	○	○	○	○	○
Societal tradition	○	○	○	○	○
Suspicion of child abuse	○	○	○	○	○
Reactions from friends, family and members of the public	○	○	○	○	○

31 Can you think of any other potential barriers to men entering early childhood education and care?

○ Yes ○ No

31.a If yes, please specify

32 Do you believe it is important for men to work in early childhood education and care?

○ Yes
○ No

Future

33 Do you intend to continue to work in early childhood education and care in the future?

- Yes
- No

34 Currently, there are under 3% men in early childhood education and care (Oberhuemer, Schreyer and Neuman, 2010). How could this imbalance be improved?

35 Are you aware of any strategies in place with your current employer that promotes the profession to men?

- Yes
- No

35.a If yes, please specify

36 Would you be willing to take part in a follow-up group interview to explore these areas in greater depth?

- Yes
- No

36.a Please would you enter your email address so that we can contact you regarding the group interviews?

Appendix 4

Life-history Interviews

The life-history interview will explore but will not be constrained by the following themes.

Childhood and Education

Recollections of experiences of ECEC (in the home and out-of-home

setting)

• School subjects (subjects liked and disliked, subject options and choices)

• Career aspirations as a child

• Family member career choices

• Work experience during school

Post-school

• Qualifications and career choices/history

• Influences on those choices (if any)

• Significant friends' choices/career paths

• Initial qualifications/career experience

Relevant family experience

• Children in the family

• Fatherhood

Current role

• Position, roles, responsibilities and key staff relationships

• Describing a typical day

Future

• Career plans/aspirations

• Anticipated career progression (hopes, fears, possible opportunities)

Appendix 5

Questions for Practitioners

This questionnaire forms a significant part of a PhD study into the experiences of male practitioners within early childhood settings. We very much appreciate your participation in completing this and ask that you provide as much detail as possible within your answers. The question boxes will expand automatically as you write your answer.

The research itself will be published within a thesis alongside additional research that has already been conducted. This is an anonymous questionnaire and in no way will the information you provide be linked to you within the thesis. The questions can be answered within this word document and emailed to Charlotte Jones (the researcher) at: **charlotte.jones33@mail.bcu.ac.uk**

Please answer the following questions, drawing on current or recent first-hand experience where possible. The deadline for this to be completed and sent to Charlotte is 16th June 2014.

Preliminary Questions

1. Are you male/female? (please highlight appropriate answer)
2. What is your current job title?
3. What age range of children do you currently work with?
4. How long have you worked within this early years setting?
5. Please could you detail any relevant early childhood qualifications you currently hold?
6. Could you please describe your key responsibilities within your current job role?

1. Do you think that it is important for young children to have both male and female practitioners in their preschool care and education? Can you say more about that?

2. In your experience of men and women working together in the preschool, would you say that they take on very similar roles and responsibilities or rather different ones in the care and education of young children? Can you say more about that?

3. Do you think male and female practitioners respond in different ways to young children's preschool care and educational needs? Can you say more about that?

4. Do you think young children respond differently to male and female preschool staff? Can you say more about that?

5. Do you think that parents value having male and female staff caring for their children? Can you say more about that?

6. Is there anything else that you would like to add about this topic?

Appendix 6

Time-Sampling Observation Schedule

1.

	+	+	+	-	-	0
INI P	V	M	NV	V	M	
RES CH	1	2	3	4	5	6

ACTIVITY IN SESSION

W1A	WC	WSG	WG	WI
1	2	3	4	5

LOCATION IN SESSION

P	G	CA	RP	OU
1	2	3	4	5

2.

	+	+	+	-	-	0
INI P	V	M	NV	V	M	
RES CH	1	2	3	4	5	6

ACTIVITY IN SESSION

W1A	WC	WSG	WG	WI
1	2	3	4	5

LOCATION IN SESSION

P	G	CA	RP	OU
1	2	3	4	5

3.

	+	+	+	-	-	0
INI P	V	M	NV	V	M	
RES PA	1	2	3	4	5	6

ACTIVITY IN SESSION

W1A	WC	WSG	WG	WI
1	2	3	4	5

LOCATION IN SESSION

P	G	CA	RP	OU
1	2	3	4	5

4.

	+	+	+	-	-	0
INI P	V	M	NV	V	M	
RES PA	1	2	3	4	5	6

ACTIVITY IN SESSION

W1A	WC	WSG	WG	WI
1	2	3	4	5

LOCATION IN SESSION

P	G	CA	RP	OU
1	2	3	4	5

5.

	+	+	+	-	-	0
INI C	V	M	NV	V	M	
RES PA	1	2	3	4	5	6

ACTIVITY IN SESSION

W1A	WC	WSG	WG	WI
1	2	3	4	5

LOCATION IN SESSION

P	G	CA	RP	OU
1	2	3	4	5

6.

	+	+	+	-	-	0
INI C	V	M	NV	V	M	
RES PA	1	2	3	4	5	6

ACTIVITY IN SESSION

W1A	WC	WSG	WG	WI
1	2	3	4	5

LOCATION IN SETTING

P	G	CA	RP	OU
1	2	3	4	5

Appendix 7

Interviews with Children

1. Can you tell me who these people are?

2. Can you tell me, is there anything different about ‘P’ and ‘J’ or are they the same?

3. Can you tell me what ‘P’ likes to do in the nursery?

4. Can you tell me what ‘J’ likes to do in the nursery?

5. What do you particularly like to do with ‘P’ in the nursery?

6. What do you particularly like to do with ‘J’ in the nursery?