Title: A Foucauldian analysis of the discourses of quality and its relationship to tools of surveillance in early learning and childcare in Scotland.

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Abstract

The concept and pursuit of *quality* in the early years sector in Scotland is highly significant to the Scottish Government, wider policy actors such as the OECD, SSSC, the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland, and most importantly early years practitioners and managers. The pursuit of quality is foregrounded in the plethora of current Scottish Government guidance and frameworks and is the 'golden thread' running through core policy the Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland, Quality Action Plan (Scottish Government (2017:2).

I argue that *quality*, as presented in the policy, frameworks, standards, and inspection is something objective, real, and knowable – something that is presented, measured, regulated, and inspected through a neoliberal discourse. I am concerned that as practitioners and managers strive to be 'good' or 'excellent' their autonomy, subjectivity, and agency as professionals is diminished and the criteria and standardised categories become tools of surveillance and power. Children and childhood in this discourse becomes datafied.

Through the use of 1-1 interviews, my research explores practitioners' and managers' lived experiences of, compliance with, and possible resistance to, current policy discourses and processes of conceptualising quality. I argue that the current, dominant discourse of quality – control, predictability, measurement – disregards the complexity and plurality of early learning and childcare in Scotland.

I utilise Foucault's (1978) theory and perspectives on discourse, power, and its relationship to subjectivity as particularly apt for my study. Foucault's power/knowledge ideas help to unsettle current dominant discourses and taken-for-granted assumptions present in early learning and childcare through the speaking of other 'truths' such as those spoken by the participants in this study.

In this study I propose that there are alternative ways of being, those that value diversity and plurality, and that although the early learning and childcare sector in Scotland has undergone many recent policy changes and is considered to be in a fragile state (Audit Scotland, 2023) the practitioners and managers working in the sector know the quality they value and can find a way to have their voices heard.

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Authors declaration:

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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Abbreviations

ECEC – Early Childhood Education and Care

ELC – Early Learning and Childcare

ECNC - European Commission Network on Childcare

HGIOELCC – How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare?

HMIe – His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education

HNC – Higher National Certificate

IELS – International Early Learning Study

NC – National Certificate

NPM – New Public Management

OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

SCQF – Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

SNNEB – Scottish Nursery Nurse Examination Board

SSSC – Scottish Social Services Council

SVQ – Scottish Vocational Qualification

1. Introduction and Context

1.1 Introduction and Rationale

> Quality in early childhood services is a constructed concept, subjective in nature and based on values, beliefs and interest, rather than an objective and universal reality. Quality childcare is, to a large extent, in the eye of the beholder (Pence and Moss, 1994:172).

Over the last 30 years, interest in early years' services has expanded globally as an investment strategy that aims to provide the foundations for a child's learning in the present and across the lifespan (Dahlberg et al., 2013). In a Scottish context, this has been accompanied by facilitating parental employment through increasing early years provision in terms of almost doubling capacity and extending the number of hours available (Scottish Government, 2017a).

The care and education of young children has increasingly emerged from the 'private' space of the home into the public domain as the quantity and range of early childhood services has increased. With these developments, the Scottish Government's concern with the measurement of quality has also increased. Current Scottish Government policy such as A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland, Quality Action Plan makes clear the Government's focus on high quality as the 'golden thread' (Scottish Government, 2017a:2). Quality is presented as something – objective, real, knowable – that can be measured and adopted by practitioners and managers through the use of quality frameworks and standards such as, A Quality Framework for daycare of children, childminding and school-aged childcare (2022), Health and Social Care Standards (2017b), How Good is our Early Learning and Childcare (2016) and the Standard for Childhood Practice (2007, revised in 2015).

In this study, I will explore an issue that has troubled me for some time. My issue is that through policy, frameworks, standards, and inspection the *quality* of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) provision in Scotland is presented, measured, regulated, and inspected through a *neoliberal* discourse. I will argue that the ELC sector has become commodified under New Public Management (NPM), and this has placed practitioners and managers in a nearly impossible position. As they strive to be thought of as 'good', 'very good' or 'excellent' practitioners and managers, their autonomy, subjectivity, and agency as professionals are diminished. Also, and integral to the story of quality in ELC are the

children, the younger human beings who have decisions made for them as they are not yet considered old enough to make decisions. The younger human being is subjected to the grand narrative of developmentalism – the idea that all children pass through defined ages and stages of a measurable normative development. I am concerned that the children may not benefit from a 'scientific childhood', children who gain knowledge and whose ways of being are measured, legitimised by the older, wiser adult (Cannella, 1999:36). The young child, who like the practitioner, is tested, measured, categorised by child development norms and so becomes the datafied normal or not normal child. I argue that these ways of determining quality in ELC are limiting to the ELC professional and for the children who access the provision.

Two key terms in my research are therefore *quality* and *neoliberalism*. The term quality is described by Moss, (2019:41) 'quality is a positivist concept that serves the interests of managerialism, an essential component of a neoliberal world'. There is an assumption that quality is something rational, technical, unquestionable, real. In the neoliberal world, quality is about the technology of performativity, a culture of regulation that employs judgements and comparisons. It is essentially a story of quality ELC producing high returns for society. A justification for governments investing in ELC is based on the notion of neoliberalism and young children as an investment for the future. Rather than young children being valued for who they are as human beings, as persons right now they are valued in terms of who they will become in the future (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021). This approach is favoured by policymakers as they see it as providing certainty and for some, it becomes a very persuasive story – a dominant discourse. The question with dominant discourses is how they exercise power over our thoughts and our actions, that we accept the dominant discourse as the truth – simply the way things are, unquestionable, insisting that their way is normal and natural. Other ways of viewing the world, or in the case of my study, ways of viewing Scottish ELC are pushed outside the normative ways of being and doing as described by the dominant discourse.

Policy actors such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have demonstrated a keen interest in and exerted influence on national education agendas over the last 30 years (Verger et al., 2019; Moss et al., 2016). Their interest in ELC has been documented through a series of 'Starting Strong' reports and whilst the first two reports were sensitive to diversity across countries and approaches the third, Starting Strong 111: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care (OECD, 2012) turned to a focus on quality levers. This denoted the OECD's approach is one set within a

discourse of investment and outcomes with the first policy lever within the publication setting out the necessity to set quality goals and regulations. The latest significant development for ELC from the OECD is the International Early Learning Study (IELS), an international assessment of the young child using common early learning outcomes to be undertaken between the ages of 4.5 and 5.5 years of age. The rationale for this testing regime is stated as:

> To help countries improve the performance of their systems, to provide better outcomes for citizens and better value for money. Comparative data can show which systems are performing best, in what domains and for which groups of students. It would also provide insights on how such performance has been achieved (OECD, 2015:103).

On first reading of this quote, one may wonder what the issue is, it sounds plausible, but further reading into the meaning and as Auld and Morris (2016:226) argue, it is 'a technical process modelled on industrial benchmarking'. The pilot study for IELS took place in 2018 and although Scotland did not participate, the OECD is cited and is influential in key policy and practice guidance such as A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland (Scottish Government (2017a) and Realising the Ambition: Being Me (Scottish Government, 2020).

Research into 'quality' in ELC has been conducted globally for more than twenty years and Osgood (2006:6) argues that government policy characterised through a standards agenda with a need to regulate and control, stems from 'the discursive construct of a 'crisis in education'. Early childhood services are presented as in need of improvement, not quite 'getting it right', in meeting the needs of all children and families and therefore the rationale for the regulatory gaze to improve services and the need for such regulation becomes legitimised and strengthened. My concern is that the current policy and professional body discourse on the measurement of quality places practitioners and managers under the 'regulatory gaze' which has the potential to limit the practitioners and managers as they judge themselves and are judged as 'good', 'normal' or 'deficient' against 'satisfying dominant and externally imposed' quality standards (Osgood, 2006:5). As Ball (2003) argues, the practitioners make calculations about themselves, then strive for excellence and their personal reality becomes that of the neoliberal professional. This could result in a disempowering effect on practitioners as their professional agency becomes restricted, constrained by demands for 'technicist practice' and performativities. Campbell-Barr (2019:47) notes that ELC professionals often describe their roles in

'intangible ways' with an emphasis on the importance of an ethics of care rather than a prescribed set of characteristics. This is at odds with policy that adopts a managerialist approach with a focus on measurability and accountability. The result is an ELC profession that is pressured by a top-down reductive approach to quality (Taggart, 2015). In agreement with Ball and Olmedo (2013:89) I argue that by imposing performance criteria practitioners will strive to meet the criteria 'wanting for themselves what is wanted from them by the state'.

Ball (2020:xv in Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021) describes the effects of neoliberalism as:

> We are produced by it, animated, activated, 'made up'. It provides, for some, a sense of worth, purpose, success and improvement. For others, it is a distortion, a source of abjection – positing them as of little worth, as unproductive, in need for rectification.

I argue that in an ELC context neoliberalism affects how practitioners interact with others, such as children and parents, but also with themselves as they become the embodied, neoliberal practitioner who is governed and who governs themself as a docile and able ELC practitioner/manager. They are governed by soulless self-evaluation/self-improvement tools and grids, numerical values and inspection reports as they are encouraged to 'look inwards, look outwards, look forwards' (Scottish Government, 2016) in their journey to improvement. Ball (2020:xvi) asserts that neoliberalism is a 'visceral technology' acting on the body and the emotions of its subjects, producing unhealthy emotions such as fear, anxiety and humiliation.

In my study, I argue that there is a need for high-quality early years services in Scotland. I am in agreement with the Scottish Government's position of striving for the highest possible quality of services for the youngest and therefore vulnerable in society. It is the approaching and measuring quality as a technical issue of expert knowledge, as something that is straightforwardly measured by inspection regimes - 'the regulatory gaze' – and the negative effect of such regimes on the practitioners, managers and the children who use the ELC that concerns me.

It appears to be difficult for this dominant discourse even to acknowledge different ways of seeing or understanding Scottish ELC. This presents me with a professional concern and an important issue to research. Rather than approaching quality in ELC as a matter of truth

and certainty through performativity, standards, and measurements I am interested in exploring the concept of quality from possible multiple perspectives. In particular, and for my research, I am interested in exploring the concept of quality in Scottish ELC from the perspective of those who work in the Scottish ELC sector, those with lived experiences of the sector, those responsible for the implementation of the expansion policy with its 'golden thread' of high-quality. I agree that all early years' services should be continually striving for the highest possible quality but in agreement with Moss, (2019:42) my understanding of quality encompasses 'complexity, plurality and subjectivity'.

The importance of and search for quality in ELC services can, as discussed by Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021) and Urban (2017), be understood as a neoliberal search for objectivity and quantification that is located in a wider economic and political movement with global companies striving to build a reputation for high-quality goods. In the world of global business, quality is about reliability, dependability and predictability and is tailored to satisfy consumer expectations. Moss (2019:NP) speaking in an interview outlined that 'quality is essentially a technical practice and a tool of and for management—hence the terms quality control, quality assurance'. He continued that if one is flying in a plane the expectation would be that it is built to a high technical standard as agreed by experts and not from multiple perspectives and diverse values. However, as Moss (2019) argues early childhood education is not like constructing and flying a plane. There are and should be different perspectives and values in different cultural and social contexts and the issue with the belief in what he called a 'simple, technical fix' is highly problematic. We are living in a world of huge issues of social injustice, and I agree with Urban (2022) and Moss (2019) that ELC should be about democracy, listening, and experimentation in education, seeing early childhood education as having a contribution to make to a more democratic, sustainable, and just world.

There are choices to be made, in the words of Loris Malaguzzi, (cited in Cagliari et al., 2016:267) education is a 'political discourse whether we know it or not…[it clearly] also means working with political choices'. Neoliberal ways treat the education and care of young children and those who work with children as technical practices that ignore the fundamental values and purposes of ELC. Moss (2016:346) describes this as 'hyper-positivistic', a paradigmatic position that values what can be measured, objectively, universally, and predictably. The choices made and the quality of ELC rely on those working in ELC asking themselves core, critical questions and in conducting this study I aim to encourage practitioners and managers to consider the ways that they, as early

learning and childcare practitioners and managers, respond to discourses of quality and surveillance.

Biesta (2017:315) sets out the case for 'reclaiming a space for democratic professionality in education' and questions the validity of the 'age of measurement' as a means of developing our understanding of what makes education *good*, *excellent* or *poor*. He poses the question, is what is being measured what educators value about education. Biesta (2017) highlights a significant aspect which is the impact of the culture of measurement on the democratisation of professionalism. This is relevant to my study as the ELC sector in Scotland has been furthering a professionalisation agenda, through varied means, for almost twenty years. The methods used and the effect of professionalisation on the Scottish ELC sector are aspects that, I argue are significant to quality and I will explore them in my dissertation.

I come now to consider perspectives of power and its relationship to subjectivity in the context of ELC. If we think of relationships as the focus of power then we can never be outside power, subjected to power but also our exercising of power on others (Foucault, 1978). Much as we are all implicated in power relations there are great disparities in power relations. In my research, I will explore the effect of institutional power, that of government, regulatory, and inspection bodies on ELC practitioners and managers (MacNaughton, 2005). I am interested in the lived experiences of ELC practitioners and managers, in how particular dominant discourses, grand narratives or stories claim to be the only way to think and to be, and how these stories of quality come to be accepted as representing the incontrovertible truth, the authorised version of quality.

Moss (2019) proposes that contestation of and resistance to these dominant discourses is possible. He urges us to remember that 'today's dominant discourse was yesterday's local folk tale, a fringe narrative that had few tellers or listeners' citing the story of the Emperor's New Clothes (Moss, 2019:18). A good storyteller using confident tones to tell their story is able to make sweeping statements that dull the senses and blunt our critical faculties. I argue that there are many expert storytellers who, by telling the same story over and over again without a hint that other stories may exist, exert a powerful force and make questioning the powerful dominant discourse seem impossible. However, although it is a hurdle to overcome, I aim to consider other possibilities that place critique at the centre of ELC opening up opportunities to think about 'other discourses, other truths' (Moss,

2017:17). The possibility of resistance to the current discourse on quality - the grand narrative - and a paradigmatic shift then becomes an issue worthy of exploration. Although power is pervasive and insidious, the French philosopher Michel Foucault argued that it is eminently resistible:

> In power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all (Foucault, 1997:292)

Foucault did not undertake studies of education although there are references to schools and education in his works however, his perspectives on power and its relationship to subjectivity – our identity – and to knowledge and truth offer insights into the governance of adults and children in ELC. Although often interpreted as 'a philosopher of oppressions' I am particularly interested in Foucault as 'a philosopher of contestation and difference' who sought to:

> Undermine self-evidences and open up spaces for acting and thinking differently about our relation to ourselves and to others, and identify and refuse and transgress the horizon of silent objectification within which we are articulated (Ball, 2019:133).

In Scottish ELC, I argue there is much 'silent objectification' of practitioners and managers but there are possibilities for resistance to the dominant discourses and for those working in ELC to contest and refuse that which is seemingly imposed upon them.

1.2 Utilising Foucault

Foucault's (1978) theory and perspectives on discourse, power and its relationship to subjectivity, are particularly apt for my study. From a Foucauldian perspective, discourse relates to ways of speaking and writing about an issue and reflects ways of thinking, feeling, and valuing particular ways of being. Foucault's power/knowledge ideas help to unsettle current dominant discourses and taken-for-granted assumptions in ELC. I argue that in their struggles for recognition as professionals, ELC practitioners and managers (and children) may have become governed through processes of power steering how they think and act. MacNaughton (2005) asserts that when institutionally produced and sanctioned, truths about aspects of our lives such as gender development or normative sexuality resonate powerfully with us and through us. It is through official sanctioning that truths govern and regulate us. In the same way in ELC, truths about what is normative

child development, what is the desirable knowledge base for the practitioner and manager, and what are normal ways to think, act and feel are sanctioned and systematised by the government, regulators, inspectors, and colleges/universities.

Quality and neoliberalism are what Foucault would call dominant discourses – stories that exert power over how we weave and construct the reality of our world. The dominant discourse has influence by insisting this is the only way to be, to talk, to behave, or in other words, this represents the objective truth or to use a Foucauldian term a 'regime of truth'. Ball (2016:1132) discusses knowledge as partial and questions therefore why some regimes of truth come to govern, why some discourses dominate more than others, and how 'some things come to count as true'. ELC is complex and diverse but despite this diversity, I argue, the discourses of quality and neoliberalism have come to dominate. Power operates at a micro, everyday level and also at a macro, institutional level, and Foucault offers an understanding of how power works at both these levels.

The exercise of institutional power dates back many centuries and as far back as the 16th century (Foucault, 1977) there was a gradual shift in institutional power from the violent brute force of sovereign rule to the more effective and less violent steering and governing of people. Bodies were subjugated using a range of techniques, termed 'disciplines' that minimised resistance. These disciplines included surveillance, normalisation, classification and regulation (Foucault, 1978). Moss (2019) argues that normalisation is perhaps the most significant as it establishes what is considered normal, standard, the expected way of being that all must strive to achieve and are measured against. In a Scottish ELC context, there are many normalisation techniques in the form of standards, regulatory and self-evaluation frameworks, and inspections that practitioners and managers are measured against. Also, within this Foucauldian frame, the ELC centre becomes an enclosure for the children as they are subjected to disciplinary power to achieve institutional norms such as developmental milestones and standards of school readiness. The question is one of is this child normal rather than what might this child be able to do or to be.

As discussed by Moss (2019) Foucault used the term governmentality, to explain how people are governed and govern themselves. It is how power works in insidious ways to achieve its goal of those subjected to the power coming to embody the dominant discourse - the 'story becomes *our* story, its truth, *our* truth, its desires, *our* desires' (Moss, 2019:94). In Scottish ELC the story of quality as told to practitioners and managers through policy such as the Blueprint for 2020 becomes their story. Ball (2019:133) discusses that Foucault

offers the possibility to see a 'horizon of freedom', challenging current ways of acting and thinking to enable different self-formations. In my study, I will seek to challenge current dominant discourses and regimes of power and explore some provocations for horizons of freedom for practitioners and managers in Scottish ELC to enable them to realise 'that they are much freer than they feel' (Foucault, in Martin et al., 1998:9).

Foucault did think resistance is possible and although I argue very powerful dominant discourses of a neoliberal understanding of quality pervade Scottish ELC, I also argue that resistance is possible. If it were not possible then, as Foucault argued, the relations of power become simply one of master and slave and that is an intolerable position to contemplate. The possibilities and provocations for Scottish ELC resistance to power are, as I see it, a need for ELC practitioners and managers to develop their individual and collective powers of critical thinking. They do after all work with very young children who almost constantly ask questions to help them to make sense of their worlds. Those 'why' type questions of the two and three-year-old child – why is the sky blue? why does a rainbow appear after the rain? In a similar way, ELC practitioners and managers need to challenge the privileged position of the dominant discourse storytellers. In doing so the practitioners and managers would look beyond and beneath the veneer of the language of policy, standards, regulatory frameworks, and inspection reports to deconstruct them and wonder about other ways, other stories, other discourses. Foucault (1988:15) said that we must play 'other trumps in the game of truth' and encouraged the use of what he called 'parrhesia' – the practice of free speech to generate alternative truths to those that are officially sanctioned in the policy, regulation and inspection discourses. Finally, Foucault's work towards the end of his life shifted from how power acts on us to more emphasis on 'technologies of the self' or 'care of the self' (Ball, 2013, 2019). He attached more importance to how as individuals in our everyday lives may construct our own sense of who we are, our sense of our own identity, and in so doing we reject the image that someone else tries to impose on us to create our own image.

> A matter of flushing out…thought and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see that that which is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practising criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult…*As soon as one no longer thinks things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes very urgent, very difficult and quite possible* (Foucault, 1988:155; emphasis added).

In thinking about how they may be different from those that have been created by the dominant discourses, ELC practitioners and managers would create the image of who they are, and who they want to be.

Having discussed the rationale and context for my study and the utilisation of Foucault, as this is a Professional Doctorate, I will now outline the background to my professional context.

1.3 Researcher professional context

I have worked in Scottish education for more than 30 years in several roles. I began my career as a primary school teacher, teaching classes in the middle stages of primary school. Eager to expand and deepen my knowledge of primary school teaching and learning I requested a move to the younger ages and began teaching a Primary 1 class in the mid-1990s. I felt I had found my niche and, working alongside an experienced colleague, I spent many fulfilling and happy days in my Primary 1 and 2 classrooms. This time period was also one of great change in the education and care of children not yet of age for compulsory school. The then Scottish Executive had begun to invest funding to expand the provision of publicly-funded places for children in their pre-school year and to introduce a curriculum framework for young children, the Curriculum Framework for Children in their Preschool Year (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 1998), updated the following year to the Curriculum Framework for Children Aged 3-5 (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 1999) in recognition of funding available for three-year-old children. This curriculum offered guidance on the learning and developmental needs of younger children and effective approaches to the curriculum for children as young as three. This was a highly significant development in the ELC sector which until this point had been free of curriculum guidance with nursery nurses, the previous title for early years practitioners, deciding for themselves what were appropriate activities for children of this young age. They were after all, as Mooney and McCafferty (2005:223) described it 'only looking after the weans' with no need for a curriculum. In terms of professionalism, nursery nurses were, and perhaps remain, a marginalised group and, although at the forefront of New Labour childcare policy, by comparison to teachers like me, they were afforded little respect. Childcare was considered work that anyone could do (Joyce et al., 2023; Wingrave and McMahon, 2016; Menmuir and Hughes, 2004).

Nursery classes, as they were known then, were opening up in all primary schools with capacity and posts for nursery class teachers to work alongside early years practitioners were plentiful. As a Primary 1 teacher, I noticed a change in the children entering school and my class, they had developed skills, knowledge and understanding of a range of topics that I had not seen before in Primary 1 and I attributed this to their experiences in nursery. I wanted to find out more about the experiences offered in the nursery classes and successfully secured a post as a nursery class teacher. This began an unforeseen, challenging but very rewarding development in my career as I entered the rapidly changing and at times disparate early years sector.

My first nursery class was typical of the model utilised by local authorities in Scotland at that time. It was located in a classroom in a Primary school, next to the Primary 1 classrooms, 20 children attended the nursery class in the morning for 2.5 hours and a different group of 20 children attended on the same hourly pattern in the afternoon. The class was staffed with one nursery nurse, the title used at the time for someone trained in the care and education of babies and young children, usually having undertaken the Scottish Nursery Nurse Examination Board (SNNEB) certificate and one teacher – that was me. I consider myself very fortunate as my nursery nurse colleague was experienced in her role and she was very willing to help me and share her experiences of working with children aged 3-5, showing great patience and respect towards me. To this day when I visit early years centres I still make use of the techniques she showed me in those early days, I learned so much from her, she valued the young children and their families, treating each with respect and dignity. The school was situated in an area of high deprivation with many young, single-parent families, there were drug and alcohol abuse issues and many of the young parents were uncomfortable and distrusting of the school as an establishment, viewing it and me with suspicion, because as a teacher, I was in their eyes, an authority figure.

I learned quickly that one size did not fit all the children and their families. Their learning and emotional needs varied, often day by day. I made many mistakes, but I was fortunate and learned a lesson that has remained with me, young children and their families are forgiving if you listen to them, demonstrate that you value them and what they are telling you, and show them respect as human beings and in the case of the children not human becomings. Nurturing, caring relationships with the children and their families, and treating them with dignity and respect mattered to me. I tried to always remember that I

was in a very privileged position, as a teacher, asking parents to trust me with the care and education of their precious young child.

I moved on from that first nursery class teacher role into a promoted post as a principal teacher of a nursery class in an independent school. This was a very different experience with high parental expectations that centred around academic skills and knowledge and children being able to read and write before starting school. The Head of School and Board of Governors were aware of moves towards learning through play in local authority establishments and were keen for change. My role was to make changes to the learning environment and the experiences offered, and to develop the nursery into a 'sector-leading establishment'.

Parents gradually became persuaded of the benefits to their children of a learning-through-play approach (Palmer, 2021; Wood and Hedges, 2016; Rogers, 2011) and as the nursery numbers increased, the number of practitioners employed increased, and the nursery class became a nursery centre in partnership with the local authority. This was a significant change because it meant that any parent living within the authority could apply for a funded place at the nursery and many did, greatly increasing the social mix, which I thought was a great benefit to all children. I became the Head Teacher/Manager of by then a large and thriving nursery, a challenging but highly rewarding role. We opened one of the first outdoor nurseries in Scotland and operated both the indoor and the outdoor nurseries in tandem increasing choice for children and families. Although in this promoted role I remained very involved and 'hands-on' working with the children, always knowing that this was the part of my role I most enjoyed. I was happiest playing and learning with the children: talking, listening, building, painting, creating, reading and telling stories, role-playing – and I played them all, singing songs, counting, dancing every day, digging, planting, making and eating snacks, making marks in the sand, pouring water, just playing and having fun. I wanted the children to think critically and encouraged them to think about what might be possible, using 'I wonder' type questions, helping these little human beings to see the plurality of the world they inhabited. When I reflect now, I think I was always searching for indefinite possibilities and wanted the children to be free to think, to do and to be in an ethos of care, dignity and respect. For me, this is what I valued when I thought about quality in ELC, it is about children and educators being in spaces where, as Foucault puts it below not a limiting of knowledge but looking for and finding ways to make transformative change happen.

> It is a question of searching for another kind of critical philosophy. Not a critical philosophy that seeks to determine the conditions and the limits of our possible knowledge of the object, but a critical philosophy that seeks the conditions and indefinite possibilities of transforming the subject, transforming ourselves (Foucault, 1997:179).

The beginning of the 21st century has been a time of unprecedented change in the early years sector in Scotland. The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act (2001) was passed and the nursery I managed, like all others across Scotland, was required to be registered with the Care Commission, later to be re-named the Care Inspectorate and the National Care Standards (Care Inspectorate, 2002) were published. This was the beginning of regulation, increased inspection and scrutiny. The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) was formed in October 2001 and all early years' practitioners were required to have prescribed qualifications and to be registered in one of three categories – support worker, practitioner or manager. SSSC published its Codes of Practice and the Standard for Childhood Practice (2007). More frameworks followed, the Child at the Centre (2007) – an HMIe self-evaluation document and the Early Years Framework (2008). The first draft of a Curriculum for Excellence was published in 2006. There has been no let-up in producing revised quality frameworks, standards, and policies and in the inspection and regulation of early years services. As discussed in Section 1.1 neoliberalism has taken hold in ELC and quality is presented as something – objective, real, knowable – that can be measured and adopted by practitioners and managers. The children are also subjected to regimes of measurement and data collection based on developmental psychology and what constitutes normal development. The practitioners, managers and the children are under surveillance – disciplinary power. Foucault's work did not address ELC, but Moss (2019) describes a vivid example of the deployment of disciplinary power in the 19th-century French classroom. The desks were arranged in a rectangle to form a single great table under the constant surveillance of the teacher who set tests and performance standards and as pupils were assessed their position on the table moved – a constant exercise in normalisation and classification. Scottish ELC practitioners, managers and children may well be sitting around a metaphorical single great table as they are under constant surveillance and the next test score or inspection report serves to move their position on the table. As I have mentioned above stated in the rationale for the OECD's International Early Learning Study (IELS) – 'it will provide internationally comparable data to show which systems are best' (OECD, 2015, 103). The OECD makes a specific link to their well-known Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and researchers such as Urban (2017) and Moss et al. (2016) refer to the IELS as 'Baby Pisa'.

Whilst in my role as Head Teacher/Manager of the ELC centre I was invited by a local university to deliver a guest lecture to PGDE (Primary) students who were due to complete their early years' placement. This was the beginning of a move into higher education and a few years later I joined the university as a full-time lecturer mainly teaching on early childhood programmes including the BA Childhood Practice degree. I was Programme Leader for this degree which gave me greater insight into the degree and the validation, re-validation and quality assurance processes employed by SSSC. In my lecturing role, I have many opportunities for conversation with experienced practitioners and managers undertaking the part-time Childhood Practice degree. As the university tutor for students undertaking the Graduate Apprentice BA in Early Learning and Childcare degree, I visit students in their workplace centres and I am able to see and hear the current stories of quality being told in Scottish ELC through policy, quality and regulatory frameworks and standards and compare these to the quality of the experiences I see and hear and it concerns me.

In terms of quality in ELC my argument is that through policy, frameworks, standards, and inspection the *quality* of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) provision in Scotland is presented, measured, regulated, and inspected through a *neoliberal* discourse and this does not value difference and diversity, the plurality that I propose should be in the ELC sector. In current policy such as A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2017a) and the national practice guidance Realising the Ambition: Being Me (Scottish Government, 2020) the rhetoric of high quality within caring, nurturing relationships between practitioners/managers and children and families, children and families able to exercise choice and express their needs through their voices is presented but I argue it is being paid lip service. As Nussbaum (2010) outlines below the rhetoric of a valuing of diversity, respect for difference and democracy is something that governments like to talk about whilst at the same time projecting an agenda of education based on market profitability.

> Today we still maintain that we like democracy and self-governance, and we also think we like freedom of speech, respect for difference, and understanding of others. We give these values lip service, but we think far too little about what we need to do to transmit them to the next generation and ensure their survival…We increasingly ask our schools to turn out useful profit-makers rather than thoughtful citizens…Education based on profitability in the global market [produces] a greedy obtuseness and a technically trained docility that threatens the very life of democracy itself (Nussbaum, 2010:141-2).

My study will explore the need to resist neoliberal values in ELC, and I propose it is timely in addressing the docility that appears to have taken hold in the lived experiences of early years practitioners and managers.

1.4 Research question

Moss (2019:96) warned that reading Foucault's analysis of power and power relations may leave one:

> struggling with a sense of powerlessness when confronted by the pervasive, insidious and deeply embedded forces of regimes of truth and the potent alliance of disciplines and governmentality.

I outlined at the beginning of this chapter that my concern is that the ELC sector in Scotland has become commodified and the quality that is valued is that which can be straightforwardly measured and regulated. Through an assumption that quality is rational, technical, and real, managers and practitioners are placed under constant surveillance through policy, frameworks, standards and inspection regimes. This diminishes their professional autonomy, subjectivity and agency and as this becomes the dominant discourse it exercises power over the thoughts and actions of the ELC managers and practitioners – they comply with the dominant discourse of quality accepting it as truth. I want to explore this area with practitioners and managers with lived experience in Scottish ELC and constructed my research question to help me to do so.

Research Question:
In what ways do early learning and childcare practitioners and managers respond to discourses of quality and surveillance?

Following a review of the current literature, I devised my interview questions (Appendix 2). Through the questions, I seek to uncover what the term 'quality' means to practitioners and managers and what aspects they value in their daily experiences with children and families in the pursuit of quality. I then explore how practitioners respond to inspection and regulation and the use of standards and frameworks as tools of surveillance.

My method of data collection is by 1-1 interviews to enable me to listen to the lived experiences of practitioners and managers who are working in Scottish ELC centres. I am very familiar with the policy, frameworks, and standards story of high quality as presented by the Scottish Government, SSSC, and the Care Inspectorate but I propose that those

working in the sector may value other aspects of quality in their daily work practices with the children and families. I aim to sensitively explore these aspects in the interviews.

1.5 Overview of the Dissertation

I begin this study with a review of current literature on aspects of ELC quality, neoliberalism, and New Public Management. I consider Foucault's concepts such as power/knowledge, dominant discourses, governmentality and docility. This is followed by a chapter on my methodology which outlines my reasons for adopting an interpretivist paradigm and a post-structuralist approach, the use of semi-structured face to face 1-1 interviews as my method of data collection and a hybrid approach to the thematic analysis of the data. Chapter 4 presents my findings from this empirical study and my analysis of my findings. The thematic analysis developed four themes and the data is presented within these four themes. In Chapter 5 a discussion of the analysis of the findings is undertaken before concluding my dissertation by presenting my major conclusions, practical recommendations, and identification of future research in Chapter 6.

1.6 Conclusion

Moss (2019) states that although institutional power may exercise a very strong influence, they, in my case Scottish Government, regulators, and inspectors never have it entirely their way. It takes people prepared to think critically, to question the regimes of truth, and to refuse to be silenced to effect change. Although Foucault's work made no mention of early years education and care, I feel hope when I read his work, particularly his later work, as I read that resistance and change are possibilities through the power of struggle and activism rather than passive apathy. Researchers such as Goodley and Perryman (2022), Archer (2022), Proudfoot (2021), Ball (2019) and Moss (2019) have begun to explore the possibilities. Goodley and Perryman (2022:1), for example, re-visit Ball's (2003) seminal work with teachers exploring 'going beyond the terrors of performativity'. Proudfoot (2021:812) proposes that although the panopticon remains valid when understanding performativity there may be a 'complementary metaphor' of the 'unseen behaviours induced by a high accountability environment'. These studies are within school contexts in England. My study will contribute to this work in a Scottish context and significantly within the Early Learning and Childcare sector. My study is being undertaken following the implementation of the Blueprint for 2020 expansion policy (Scottish Government, 2017a) and I expect my research to uncover significant views regarding the

success of the implementation of the policy and its effect on quality in ELC. As the policy has become embedded in practice, practitioners and managers are under scrutiny to ensure the 'golden thread' of quality is delivered and it is my expectation that my study will produce key findings regarding how practitioners and managers experience surveillance and possible resistance and its effect on their practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

There have been many changes in the early years sector in Scotland over the past 30 years therefore this literature review seeks to provide a short diachronic outline of Scottish early learning and childcare before moving on to specific consideration of how the term 'quality' is understood. Subsequently, the discourse of quality will be discussed in the context of neoliberalism. The role and use of standards and frameworks such as the Standard for Childhood Practice, Revised Health and Social Care Standards, How Good is our Early Learning and Childcare and A Quality Framework for day care of children, in the definitions and measurements of quality will be considered (Scottish Social Services Council, 2015), (Scottish Government, 2017b), (Education Scotland, 2016), (The Care Inspectorate, 2022). Moving on, compliance with and resistance to surveillance in the form of the 'regulatory gaze' of the Care Inspectorate, Education Scotland and Scottish Social Services Council will be discussed. The study is theoretically framed in a 'Foucauldian' perspective. Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984) explored perspectives on power and, argued that, although always present, power relations can be contested and resisted. The connection between power and its relationship to knowledge, truth and subjectivity – our identity - is particularly important for this study. Foucault (1978) expressed concern with 'disciplinary technologies' that produce able but docile bodies. The importance of practitioner and manager tacit attitudinal knowledge in shaping other discourses, values and beliefs in guiding practices and the perception of quality in early years' services will be a key aspect for exploration.

2.2 Diachronic perspective

The organisation and provision of ELC has been 'constructed through various and differing narratives' (Vandenbroeck et al., 2023:15) and attempts to develop the right services and policies for children across Europe have a long history. Robert Owen's first nursery and school in New Lanark, Scotland which combined care for children of families of mill workers with an education, was opened in 1816 and as such Owen can be considered an 'early pioneer of integrated early years services, emphasising the importance of combining early education and childcare' (Cohen, 2013:211). Friedrich Froebel founded the first of

his educational institutes, the German General Education Institute, leading nearly a quarter of a century later to the opening of his first kindergarten. European pioneering initiatives such as Reggio Emilia (1946) have sought to bring together elements of care and education (Cohen and Korintus, 2017). In 1975, the National Pre-school Act in Sweden and the 1975 Kindergarten Act in Norway brought together separate elements of care and education under a common name. More recently, in 1999 the New Labour UK government committed to delivering the Sure Start programme (Bates and Foster, 2017). The intention was to transform the way services were provided for families with young children and services offered were intended to improve outcomes for children, reduce inequalities and help to bring an end to child poverty. Sure Start Scotland (Cunningham-Burley et al., 2002) was part of this broader programme to promote social inclusion through a positive start in children's lives.

At the supranational level for more than twenty-five years, the European Union (EU) has influenced early learning and childcare policy in Scotland through strategies such as the European Commission Network on Childcare (ECNC) quality targets set in 1996, the Barcelona Targets in 2002 and then in 2012 the ECNC worked with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to publish the Europe 2020 targets (Cohen and Korintus, 2017). For over a decade, the discourse has focussed on the importance of play and creativity for children and the impact that inadequate early learning and childcare has on employment and gender equality. The ECNC reports aligned with the findings of the 1970's Scandinavian Commissions legislation that emphasised the indivisibility of care and education. ECNC reports highlighted the 'complex and multidimensional' (Cohen and Korintus, 2017:236) nature of this policy area and the problems associated with split departmental responsibility between education and care. Urban (2014, 2022), Moss (2016, 2017), Moss et al. (2016) and Dahlberg et al. (2013) are critical of the World Bank, EU and OECD politicising of the upbringing, education and care of young children. Urban (2014:125) argues for alternatives to a 'language of technology and normalisation' such as a recognition of the uncertainty and relational characteristics of early childhood practice. I will return to such arguments later in this chapter.

Under the devolution arrangements the Scottish Parliament was given responsibility for a wide range of areas such as education and social work however many legislative aspects closely related to early childhood education and care (ECEC) remained with the UK Parliament including taxation, social security and equalities legislation. This division of

responsibility is significant as it in effect separated parliamentary responsibility for ECEC supply-side policies from demand-side policies. The New Labour Government which came to power in 1997 was committed to improving ECEC services and also to political devolution and in 1998 announced a commitment to free part-time education for all three- and four-year-old children and strategies to implement good quality affordable childcare alongside more integration of early education and childcare. Concerns with parenting and state intervention in parenting is a theme, which began with New Labour and was continued by later Conservative government. Ball (2017:199) discusses the idea of government interventions in parenting and the adoption of policies which have the effect of telling parents that the government knows better than them 'what's good for your child'. This theme will be further developed in a later discussion of recent Scottish policy such as the Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare (Scottish Government, 2017a).

The history of ECEC policy is complex and no more so in the context of a post-devolution Scotland. In 1997, the majority of Scottish people voted for the re-establishment of their parliament and on 1 July 1999 Scotland's Parliament reopened. Of significance in Scotland was the legislative requirement for local authorities to secure part-time places for all three and four-year-old children in 2000 and the establishment of the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care in 2001. In 2007, the Scottish National Party (SNP) formed a minority government with a manifesto promise to increase free early education by fifty percent. The SNP was returned to majority power in 2011 and committed to early years legislation designed to:

> improving and increasing high quality, flexible and integrated early learning and childcare which is accessible and affordable for all, matching the best in Europe (Cohen, 2013:216).

It is clear from examining the diachrony of early learning and childcare services in Scotland that there are a number of key policy actors involved in the framing of the discourse of quality, such as the EU, OECD, the Care Inspectorate and the Scottish Social Services Council. In the years following Scottish devolution the EU and OECD continue to exert influence on Scottish policy with clear references to both organisations in A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2017a) and in Realising the Ambition: Being Me (Education Scotland, 2020). As discussed by Moss et al. (2016) the OECD began a major international project almost

twenty years ago considering ELC services and policies across twenty countries. It was a major comparative study of ELC and resulted in a series of reports under the headings 'Starting Strong 1 and 2' (OECD, 2001, 2006). These reports appeared to demonstrate sensitivities to the complexities and diversity of international systems and pedagogies employed and as suggested by Moss et al. (2016) contributed to a better understanding of ELC services and how to achieve more equitable outcomes for children and families and wider society. However, Moss (2017:14) argues, that subsequent 'Starting Strong' reports moved towards a discourse of outcomes and investment with early childhood education and care dominated by 'the story of quality and high returns'. This is, as argued by Moss and Roberts-Holmes (2022:97):

> neo-liberalism's imaginary…what emerges is the image of a poor child, deficient and needing to be readied to become, in due course, homo economicus and (a term much in favour today) 'human capital'.

The OECD has continued to advise governments, including the Scottish Government, to increase focus on 'the quality, responsiveness and effectiveness of their early years policies for children' (OECD, 2020:11) as this is considered the most effective investment a government can make towards enhancing education generally and later life outcomes. The aptly named series of 'Starting Strong' reports published since 2001 have served to influence national policy on early learning and childcare and the Early Learning Matters (OECD, 2018) report seeks to provide information at both national and international levels which will allow countries to 'understand their commonalities but also their differences, in order to deliver better policies for children' (OECD, 2018:13).

The OECD aims to support governments' sustainable economic growth, improve employment and raise living standards. Early Learning and Childcare is viewed as the first step to lifelong learning and in their Early Learning Matters (2018:5) report the OECD states:

> Countries who fail to pay attention to the quality of children's early years are ignoring the most effective means to assure the well-being and skills of the next generation and to achieve more equitable outcomes across families and communities.

The stated aspiration of the Scottish Government is to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. As discussed by Dunlop (2015) the means to make this happen is by reducing inequality and improving outcomes for all. ELC is deemed a 'key policy

instrument' in the fight against inequalities. Dunlop (2015) argues that, in terms of young children, Scotland has excellent policy and legislation through approaches such as the Early Years Framework (Scottish Government, 2008), Getting it Right for Every Child (Scottish Government, 2008) and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014) but the challenge is putting policy into practice. A key element of the Act was to increase the annual entitlement to free early learning and childcare (ELC) from 475 hours to 600 hours for all three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-old children in Scotland. The Act made it a legal requirement for local authorities to consult parents in order to increase flexibility and choice over how funded hours are accessed. This was a significant milestone in putting the right to flexible childcare options on a statutory footing in Scotland. It demonstrated a stated commitment by the Scottish Government to expand and deliver high-quality and flexible early learning and childcare. The aspiration of closing the poverty-related attainment gap and supporting parents into work, study, or training, purported to demonstrate the intention to meet the economic and social needs of society. Also, of significance in the Act is a new concept of ELC, the artificial divide between childcare and education was removed which replaced a split early childhood education and care model and reflected the EU and OECD models of integrated education and care. The Scottish Executive (2006a) had already paved the way by introducing the 3-18 Curriculum for Excellence meaning that children from the age of three were accessing the early level of the curriculum.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014), was also the catalyst for the Blueprint for 2020 policy (Scottish Government 2017a), which provided an unprecedented investment in and expansion of entitled hours in ELC services across Scotland. Influenced by the OECD the Blueprint for 2020 policy states:

> Quality is at the very heart of this expansion. It is widely acknowledged, including by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and EU, that the provision of universally accessible and high-quality ELC enriches children with skills and confidence to carry into their schooling and is a cornerstone for closing the poverty-related attainment gap between our most and least advantaged children (Scottish Government, 2017a:2).

Following the publication of the Financial Review of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland: the current landscape (2016) and as part of Empowering teachers, parents, and communities to achieve Excellence and Equity in Education – A Governance Review (2016), the Scottish Government made the decision to increase further the entitlement and

thereby support the Government vision to close attainment and inequality gaps. The Blueprint for 2020 policy has almost doubled the entitlement to 1,140 hours annually and the then Minister for Childcare and Early Years stated:

> No other policy has such potential to transform the lives of children and their families while improving the prospects of Scotland's economy in the short and long term (Scottish Government, 2016:2).

The objectives for the expansion of ELC are built on high level themes of Quality, Flexibility, Accessibility and Affordability (Scottish Government, 2016). In terms of flexibility, parents are offered an increase in choice of settings where they can access the funded ELC with a 'provider neutral' approach being utilised 'with the focus being on the settings best placed to deliver quality outcomes for children' (Scottish Government, 2017a:4).

2.3 The concept of 'quality'

To realise the aims of the Blueprint for 2020 policy the Scottish Government will invest £969.2 million over six years to support the implementation of the policy and are clear that 'quality of the child's experience is the single most important goal and…has driven all of the decisions that have been taken' (Scottish Government, 2017a:4).

The essential characteristics of quality have been defined in the policy as:
• A high-quality workforce

• Strong pedagogical leadership

• Warm and supportive interactions with children

• A holistic curriculum

• A focus on play-based learning

• Good access to outdoor play

• Supporting parents to engage in their children's learning

• Transitions that are well managed

• Professional collaboration

• Provision that is accessible to all

• High-quality physical environments

• Clear quality standards and robust self-evaluation and quality assurance regimes (Scottish Government, 2017a:4)

The pursuit of 'quality' is foregrounded in the plethora of current Scottish Government guidance, frameworks, and plans such as the national practice guidance Realising the Ambition: Being Me which states:

> whilst the provision of 1140 hours increases the quantity and flexibility of early learning and childcare, this should not be at the expense of quality, which remains paramount (Scottish Government, 2020:81).

The Care Inspectorate, the regulatory body in Scotland that inspects and regulates ELC centres to ensure high standards of quality are being achieved, sets out their purpose in their Quality Framework for daycare of children:

> By setting out what we expect to see in high-quality care and learning provision, we can also help care and learning for children improve (Care Inspectorate, 2022:2).

Likewise, the Best Start: Strategic early learning and school-age childcare plan for Scotland 2022-26 re-states the vision 'of a high quality affordable and accessible system of childcare' (Scottish Government, 2022:3). It is clear that, for the Scottish Government, 'quality' ELC services are desirable, and I do agree that all early years' services should be aiming to provide the highest possible quality for the children in their care. However, I am concerned with how 'quality' is defined and determined and the impact of these definitions on the practice of ELC in Scotland. In agreement with Moss (2019:42) my understanding of quality encompasses 'complexity, plurality, and subjectivity' – services that value difference and diversity in children and families, but this understanding may not be shared by policymakers and others. Urban (2022) questions the ability of influential actors to embrace diversity as this requires an abandoning of the paradigm of the universal child and its development, the child who is able to be measured and compared by simplistic means.

Dahlberg et al. (2013:4) express their unease with the concept of quality although they acknowledge it is a subject that resonates in 'every conceivable type of product and service'. They assert that we live in an age of 'quality' and it is something we all want, and everyone wants to offer, there is an assumption that 'quality' is something technical,

unquestionable, and real, however, this may be problematic as quality is not neutral and as stated by Pence and Moss (1994:172):

> quality in early childhood services is a constructed concept, subjective in nature and based on values, beliefs, and interest, rather than an objective and universal reality.

Dahlberg et al. (2013) problematise quality and urge seeing beyond an Enlightenment-influenced modernist lens of quality. This discourse of quality views the ELC centre as a place of pre-determined outcomes, the child as a vessel to be filled and prepared for school and beyond. In such centres quality is usually concerned with an interplay between a number of features such as staffing levels, group size, children's activities and child development outcomes. Parental satisfaction with the service is another key aspect as parents are considered the consumers of the service. As discussed by Eadie et al. (2022) and Vandenbroeck et al. (2023) features of ELC quality have been characterised as falling between two domains: 'structural quality' – understood to include features of the learning environment, practitioner qualifications and professional learning and 'process quality' – understood as the children's experiences and interactions with adults in the centre. Torii et al. (2017) have introduced a third domain, 'system quality' to denote the role of regulatory standards and funding in determining quality in ELC.

2.4 Neoliberalism and New Public Management

This section will first consider the rise of neoliberalism and new public management in education policy and the implications for systems of education. The discussion will then move to the intrusion of neoliberalism into ELC and the impact that this has had on how 'quality' is understood.

To understand the emergence of the neoliberal dominant discourse of quality in ELC it is helpful to consider the influence of Enlightenment thinking and modernity which relies on a trust in numbers and 'impartial uniformity' (Dahlberg et al., 2013:93). In the pre-industrialised world where trade and communication were localised there was little need for standardised measures however the growth of worldwide capitalism and globalisation of trade has necessitated a need to 'simplify measures' (Porter, 1995:25). The role of personal judgement and human agency is replaced with standardised, measurable metrics.

Moss (2019) argues that standards are highly desirable in, for example, the airline industry where one would want to be re-assured that the plane one is a passenger in has been built to the highest technical standard as agreed by experts worldwide to ensure safety. He further argues that he would be disturbed by flying in a plane built by those with a wide range of perspectives and values on the manufacturing process. However, early years' education is not like building a plane. The complexity of early years' practices and environments mean that there are multiple perspectives and values embedded in the many educational, cultural and social contexts. In this, the argument is not that there should not be standards but that standards should be placed within a dialogue of professionalism based on developing and supporting practitioner dialogue and agency.

The term neoliberalism is contentious, some such as, Barnett (2020:np) writes it off as 'a boo-word signifying only the users' opposition to capitalism' and dismisses it as a vacuous delusion that does not exist. Whilst others, for example, Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021), Maloney et al. (2019), Sims (2017), and Monbiot (2017:29) disagree arguing that neoliberalism is so much a part of life that it has almost become invisible, a 'vicious ideology that pits us against each other, and weakens the social bonds that make our lives worth living'. Mirowski (2013:28) asserts that neoliberalism 'hides itself in full view'. Neoliberalism encourages fierce competition between individuals in many aspects of life and has become a 'regime of truth' that privileges one truth over another and has become incorporated into how the world is understood by many (Smith et al., 2016:127). Moss (2017:17) asserts that there is a body of research and reports that all feed into each other and are responsible for building a regime of truth that in ELC there is no 'alternative way of thinking, speaking or doing'. French philosopher Michel Foucault (1997) would consider neoliberalism as a dominant discourse, imposing a regime of truth, exercising power over how we construct the world, over thoughts and actions, ever-present, directing behaviour, and claiming subjective views as objective truths. Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021) argue that neoliberalism reduces everything to economics and the logic of the marketplace, everything can be allocated a value that is calculable and measurable, with competition, self-interest, and choice dominating all human activity. These ideas bring to the fore a key concern of this dissertation, that neoliberalism has become a powerful force in ELC which is problematic for how quality is understood but that resistance is possible.

New public management (NPM) first emerged as a term in the 1970s, as the management methods and ethos of competition used in private companies were used to reform the public sector. Vabo (2009:2) describes NPM as:

> born of a technocratic mindset. It has been driven by the demand for increased efficiency and accountability, rather than the need to maximise other values, such as fairness, equity, due process and public participation.

Hood (1991) discussed the term NPM identifying seven overlapping principles including: hands on professional management of the public sector, performance management by standards and measurement, emphasis on outputs and parsimony of resources. This has represented a way of thinking that is consistent with neoliberalism, that of the 'economisation' of public services including the interpersonal relationships that structure these services. Each service is managed to maximise output and return on investment, and it has acquired global recognition in education policy agendas. In education, this is characterised by monitoring, target setting, league tables, accountability, and distrust of professional judgement and is used by organisations such as the OECD to frame education reforms (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021; Adriany, 2018). NPM is committed to standardised measurement and therefore sits well with neoliberalism's epistemological foundation of the positivist paradigm. Through the application of systematic measurement methods knowledge is produced that is considered universal, value, and context-free - an objective *truth*. Neoliberalism and NPM claim that knowledge is certain, based on measurements and comparison (Verger and Curran, 2014; Widmalm, 2016; Muller, 2018).

Ball (2016:1047) distinguishes between neoliberalism in economic terms and the neoliberalism present within 'the head, the heart and the soul' of educators in everyday practice as the transformation into neoliberal subjects occurs. He proposes that educators become transformed into neoliberal subjects not through grand strategies, but rather, that reform becomes embedded and embodied in the vocabulary of practice, as educators engage in the completion of grids and templates, enter into mentoring relationships with colleagues, and participate in annual reviews predicated by evaluations and output indicators. It frames the practice between practitioners, children and families. Doherty (2015:395) agrees by arguing that 'neoliberal logics and managerial techniques become naturalised as common sense across educational systems'. Neoliberalism becomes the metapolicy depicting education, alongside other public services, as being in crisis and in need of solutions to fix problems such as the *problem of* quality. Government intervention that encourages free market behaviour, including quality and productivity measures, supports consumer choice and in effect renders teachers, pupils, and schools comparable and accountable. In so doing the education professional is, over the course of many incremental changes, initiatives, and programmes, robbed of claims to expertise or insight.

Ball (2016:1052) claims that put simply 'professionalism is the enemy of performance' using the term 'performativity' to refer to the powerful relationships between indicators and professionalism, with quality expressed as quantified productivity.

Ball (2016) develops the argument that neoliberal government colonises concepts, such as reflection and research-informed practice, from other traditions and effectively uses a contradictory form of power relations that are both hard and soft at the same time. These power relations may be:

> both harsh and supportive, public and personal, technocratic and emotional, that is both the hard disciplines of measurement and visibility, and the softer entreaties of mentoring, coaching, self-management and self-improvement (Ball, 2016:1050).

Within the disciplines of performativity, educators' daily practice is constructed by what can be measured, with the uniqueness and complexity of the educator reduced to a mere number – 'the ultimate reductionism of humanity to quantity' (Ball, 2016:1054). The educator certainly becomes visible in their practice but loses their sense of self, as Butler (2004:15) describes 'I am other to myself precisely at the place where I expect to be myself'. In regimes of performativity, the value of experience is disregarded with productivity – the next publication or research grant, better test scores – is important and strived for, and the value placed on the individual, is their measurable output rather than their professionalism and humanity. Autonomy and a shared moral language are closed down and with it, educators experience what Ball (2016:1054) calls 'a growing sense of ontological insecurity' as they experience a loss of what once held meaning.

In their examination of the influence of Ball's work, the detrimental effects of the introduction of managerialism and performativity on teachers' sense of professionalism and identity, as a values-based vocation, is discussed by Goodley and Perryman (2022). They describe personal experiences as former teachers and how the 'discourse of accountability and its normalising power' removed professional freedom (Goodley and Perryman, 2022:5). Although describing experiences as teachers, their descriptions could equally apply in ELC. The fear of accountability whilst teaching to a central government-sanctioned national curriculum resulted in lessons taught lacking innovation and becoming mechanistic in nature as the fear of accountability and inspection took hold. They discuss the impact of school inspection as a manifestation of Foucault's power/knowledge with the inspectors considered experts as to what constitutes an effective school and having the power to punish those who fail to meet the standard or praise those who do. This idea of

'rigorous and reductive forms of accountability' across all sectors of education is discussed by Apple (2011:22) who argues that there is a growing educator dissatisfaction with an education system that has been reduced to scores on standardised tests and curricula that bears no relationship to cultures and lives of children and young people.

A neoliberal approach that focuses on standardisation and accountability and values aspects of learning that can be easily measured does not sit well with education generally and particularly with the education and care of the young child. Sims (2017) argues that in democracies, education is a valuable tool that enables children, independent of family circumstances, to live happy, successful lives and to become valued members of society. Democracy must be protected to protect the child. However, Apple (2011:21) argued that the meaning of democracy has significantly changed and rather than being defined as life shaped by equitable and fully informed participation, democracy is defined increasingly as 'possessive individualism in the context of a (supposedly) free market economy'.

Bradbury (2019:7) argues that the use of narrow domains of learning reduces the rich diversity of early learning and childcare to a common standard measure resulting in decontextualised comparisons and ranking of countries and in so doing the young child is subject to both 'datafication and schoolification'. Ang (2014) agrees that the 'top-down' approach to ELC policy with an emphasis on performance and achievement tests is damaging and argues that while the availability of large international datasets may be useful in identifying and analysing inequalities the concern is that they will be utilised to fuel a competitive 'global race'. OECD standardised tests could be a way of objectifying the child, the child is only important in terms of his/her brain development – in this educational context, the child is reduced to its brain and capability for learning. Vandenbroeck (2020:419) highlights the references to young children's brain development that appear in every book or paper discussing the meaning of ELC with references to 'synaptogenesis, toxic stress and critical periods in development' are all underpinned by 'the need to optimise returns on investment'. Brown (2015) cited in Sims (2017) argues this neoliberal approach of preparing young children for school and placing ELC as a human capital investment of the future contrasts with established early years' practice of working with each child's strengths and viewing the young child as an autonomous, capable being. Young children's success is dependent on feeling secure and experiencing good attachments which builds self-esteem and autonomy.

Giroux (2015) suggests that critical thinking is not valued in a neoliberal view of education and the purpose of education is simply to produce work-ready students who are able to enter a neoliberal world where work and the economy are privileged over the wonders of human life. Sims (2017:1) agrees that neoliberalism has changed education and 'the capacity of teachers to shape children's critical thinking is strictly limited'. Nussbaum (2010) rejects neoliberalism claiming that democracies keen for economic gain are no longer educating children to think for themselves. She states:

> nations all over the world will soon be producing generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticise tradition, and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements (Nussbaum, 2010:2).

The OECD has a significant influence on Scottish ELC and in this next section, I will outline their core interventions and influences.

2.5 The Influence of the OECD

Adriany (2018) argues that the OECD has intervened in ELC to amplify neoliberalism with its emphasis on a knowledge economy and has resulted in policymakers and educators practicing neoliberalism as the way to achieve high quality for ELC. Under the influence of the OECD, the purpose of education appears to have changed with the focus on measuring learning by standardised tests replacing values of freedom, social justice, tolerance of others, and the flourishing of the whole child – different and unique. The importance of early learning and childcare in contributing to longer-term outcomes is clear however the foundations laid in the earliest years must be appropriate for the young child to be and to emerge as a person able to think for themself. This adds to the challenge of the conceptualisation of childhood as one which is both a state of the current and future being.

The OECD has a long tradition of providing data through large-scale international assessments aimed at measuring and comparing national education performance and is influential in Scottish education policymaking. Scotland already participates in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which assesses fifteen-year-olds in reading, mathematics, and science. In 2018 pupils were also tested in 'global competence' as the OECD (2019:11) argue 'this approach reflects the fact that modern economies reward individuals not for what they know, but for what they can do with what they know'. The OECD operates in a discourse of outcomes and investment, a neoliberal

approach that frames education as an economic enterprise. Governments across the globe, including Scotland, participate in and utilise PISA assessment to 'establish benchmarks for improvements in the education provided'. As discussed by Moss et al. (2016), the OECD began almost twenty years ago a major international project considering ELC services and policies across twenty countries. It was a major comparative study of ELC and resulted in a series of reports under the headings 'Starting Strong 1 and 2' (OECD, 2001, 2006). These reports appeared to demonstrate sensitivities to the complexities and diversity of international systems and pedagogies employed and as suggested by Moss et al. (2016) contributed to a better understanding of ELC services and how to achieve more equitable outcomes for children and families and wider society. However, Moss et al. (2016) argue that subsequent 'Starting Strong' reports moved towards a discourse of outcomes and investment.

A recent OECD development is a global testing regime for children aged four years six months to five years six months named the International Early Learning Study (IELS) with a rationale to:

> help countries improve the performance of their systems, to provide better outcomes for citizens and better value for money… (OECD, 2015:103).

The IELS focuses on a narrow set of 'domains', 'emergent literacy and numeracy, self-regulation, and socio-emotional skills' (OECD, 2020:13). Of concern in the 'Call for Tenders' for IELS (OECD, 2015) it is specified that the information gathered at the preschool age will enable comparisons to be made with PISA data. It is evident the IELS is framing early childhood education as a preparation for later educational success and an investment in the future. Three countries, (England, Estonia and USA), have already participated in the IELS pilot and the OECD report (2020:5) applauds them as they have 'recognised children's early years as critical to children's later learning and well-being'. Auld and Morris (2016:226) assert the approach taken by the OECD, as outlined above, reduces early childhood education to a 'technical process modelled on industrial benchmarking'. The IELS report (OECD, 2020) implies that countries that do not participate may be accused of neglecting the best interests of the child.

The approach taken by the OECD is one which they appear to conclude is self-evident, objective and incontestable – a hyper-positivistic stance. It values aspects that can be measured and fails to recognise alternatives. This narrow definition of context and a lack

of attention to equality and inequality, such as the impact of poverty, is problematic as it assumes that narrow 'learning outcomes' can be measured and compared internationally. Urban and Swadener (2016) argue that whilst international collaboration and learning from the diversity of ELC systems in place around the world is highly desirable, there is evidence to suggest that standardised assessment is concerning, not least because of the low reliability of such tests. This suggests that political and corporate profit are privileged over meaningful evaluation of children's achievements. Moss et al. (2016) cite Alexander (2012:5) who states, 'national education systems are embedded in national culture' and urge there needs to be an understanding of the 'web of inherited ideas and values, habits and customs, institutions and world views, that make one country distinct from another'. Knowing this may help us to understand the relative performance in the context of the characteristics of each country.

Scotland has not, for the time being, introduced IELS however the influence of the OECD is present in policy and guidance such as the Blueprint for 2020 (Scottish Government, 2016) and Realising the Ambition: Being Me (2020:52) the Scottish national practice guidance for ELC which states:

> The early childhood curriculum is holistic. It values children, recognising them as full of potential from birth. Our role in developing a flexible, enabling, and creative child-centred curriculum is to be responsive to the uniqueness of each child, their family and the context of the community in which they live.

This would suggest a focus on developing the individual child as an autonomous, critical thinking and developing citizen as an important aspect of ELC in Scotland and would initially suggest a rejection of the neoliberal in the education and care of the young child.

However, although there are numerous references to the whole child pedagogy this sits in contrast to other sections of the publication, particularly Section 7, which provides clear neoliberal discourse such as, 'reports from the OECD (2018) help us to get a wider understanding of what constitutes high-quality practice' (Realising the Ambition: Being Me, 2020:81). Section 7 is entirely given over to a discussion of the use of standards, frameworks, and external scrutiny to drive up quality. As seen in this publication the discourse of child-centered and whole-child education is present but qualified by an assessment of practice and definition of quality that is linked to uniform and narrow

measurements as defined through organisations such as the OECD. As discussed by Wilkins et al. (2019) NPM morphs itself to fit particular contexts, in this case for Scottish ELC there is an interweaving of the whole-child/child-centred education and quality discourses.

An ongoing and persistent criticism of standardised assessment and subsequent league tables is that they ignore different cultural traditions and socio-cultural and economic contexts. A criticism of IELS is the lack of value for diversity – everything is reduced to a common outcome, standard or measure. In IELS there is no accommodation of diversity – of pedagogy, culture, theory or paradigm. In using such narrowly defined and predetermined outcomes, sets of traditions, values, and forms of knowledge, particularly those western ways of knowing, doing and being are privileged over others and this privileging creates power for certain groups whilst others are oppressed. Urban and Swadener (2016:7) argue that alternatives such as 'postcolonial, critical, feminist, indigenous, transdisciplinary' understandings of what it means to educate and care for a young child are needed as IELS is ignoring pedagogical practices across social and cultural contexts. It is difficult to conceive of the IELS even acknowledging the diversity present within approaches such as Reggio Emilia in Italy, the Te Whariki approach in New Zealand, and the democratic approach utilised in Portugal. These approaches inhabit a pedagogical world far away from neoliberalism. For example, the Reggio Emilia approach, as discussed by McNally and Slutsky (2017), uses artistic expression and engaging environments to embody democracy and freedom. The predictability of standardised tests is rejected in favour of an early childhood education that strengthens democracy, cooperation, and social cohesion in a world that values surprise and wonder. Te Whariki's socio-cultural approach to curriculum nurtures learning dispositions and promotes biculturalism (Sims, 2017). Sousa et al. (2019:41) provide evidence from three diverse Portuguese ELC settings to highlight the contrast between aims and pedagogies of ELC and the 'de-contextualised discourses concerning ranking, performance and outcomes, as espoused by the OECD IELS project'. This way of seeing the child as a means to an end 'limits, controls and oppresses' children labelling them as less deserving of autonomy than an adult. Sousa et al. (2019: 44) cite Apple (2013); Freire (1996); and Giroux (2005) who argue that discourses centered on the 'global market' overlook the complexity of policy and practice.

This neoliberal approach focussed on standardisation and accountability is one Freire (1973) warned would dehumanise education. Sims (2017:2) cites Chomsky (2016) who also emphasised the need to resist neoliberal oppression:

> As long as the general population is passive, apathetic and diverted to consumerism or hatred of the vulnerable, then the powerful can do as they please, and those who survive will be left to contemplate the outcome.

ELC, whilst responding to socio-political agendas would be best served by focusing on the capability of early childhood systems to support meaningful, sustained interactions between children, families, practitioners, and communities which require a shared understanding of knowledge(s), practices and values. In Scotland, the early part of the 21st century has seen a move to child-centered, active learning and a pedagogy of play has come to the fore with uncertainty and unpredictability welcomed. However, the OECD propose that data is necessary to have a scientifically valid, objective view of pedagogy and of the child. The data is presented as fact yet what data and how it is presented as unquestionable truth prevents a discussion on what is the purpose of early childhood education and as Vandenbroeck (2020:414) discusses 'what society we dream of for our children'.

There is a choice to be made in terms of the voices to be listened to and the evidence to be looked for in what is measured and the data we choose to accept. In the context of neoliberalism, the question of what is desirable is what is profitable and supports economic growth, a suggested meritocratic system where one earns what one deserves as an individual. Vandenbroeck (2020) argues this approach gives value to some aspects of education such as developmental outcomes over wider aspects such as respect for diversity and individual human flourishing. This can be argued of education generally but, returning to Ball (2016), the concern is with the effect that neoliberalism has on educators' as they interact with practices, subjectivity, identity and self-worth. Foucault (1982:213) described the struggles as:

> Nowadays, the struggle against the forms of subjection – against the submission of subjectivity – is becoming more and more important, even though the struggles against forms of domination and exploitation have not disappeared. Quite the contrary.

This involves the educator in work on the self, re-imagining oneself as a critical thinker rather than a technician, able to define oneself according to 'our own principles, an aesthetics of the self' (Foucault, 1992:2010). There are two regimes of truth and two systems of value and values. The educator is either one who produces 'measurable teaching subjects' or the other, is 'vested in a pedagogy of context and experience' Ball (2016:1056).

2.6 Constructing Quality

Post-modernist approaches allow us to deconstruct what is believed to be a 'given reality, asking questions of knowledge and commonly held truths in order to problematise how…quality has been constructed' (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016:25). There are no certainties when it comes to quality utilising a post-structuralist approach, as quality can mean different things to different people. In contrast to a modernist approach to quality in ELC, whereby one would use a series of building blocks to build a quality service, a post-structuralist approach would suggest that there are a number of ways to connect the blocks to construct the version of quality that suits your purpose and context. Governments such as the Scottish Government who, through the Blueprint for 2020 are investing heavily in ELC services, work hard to secure their investment and require to construct a dominant way of thinking about quality in ELC. Post-structuralism enables the deconstruction of these dominant ideas about early years practice.

Foucault (1995) considered the interplay between power and knowledge. Drawing on his ideas is helpful in considering the power dynamics involved in the regulation of quality in ELC services. Government interest in ELC has increasingly been framed in a human capital agenda with ELC providing the foundation for later learning and policymakers are therefore keen to monitor their investment, which leads to the need for a system of standardisation and ultimately control through inspection regimes. It is about designing a hegemonic system with the inspection regimes acting as a 'panoptic gaze' (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016:35). Foucault (1977) discussed the panopticon, a circular building with an observation tower in the middle, which enabled those in the middle to observe everything that is happening in the circular building. Although Foucault (1977) explored this model in relation to prisons, it can be applied to the principles of inspection and monitoring of quality prevalent in ELC services in Scotland today. In seeing the symbolism of those who inspect and monitor being in the middle and the professionals working in ELC services as in the circular building one can see how this generates a

feeling of being under constant scrutiny which therefore potentially shapes behaviours and/or subjectivities through an internalisation of surveillance.

Using the school as a context Perryman et al. (2018) draw on Foucault's work (1973, 1977) on the use of inspection as a tool of surveillance and governmentality. People are not coerced to accept these inspection regimes rather they are 'educated' to accept them as part of normal and successful practice. This normalisation is a mechanism of power meaning those who are subjected simply internalise the expected behaviours and through 'panoptic performativity' (Perryman, 2006:148) subjects (teachers in this case) act as if they are constantly and relentlessly being observed and gazed at. The subject permanently modifies their behaviour 'because the constant pressure acts even before the offences, mistakes or crimes have been committed' (Foucault, 1977:206). Dahlberg et al. (2013:31) discuss Foucault's identification of 'disciplinary power' as shaping individuals with or without their consent, it normalises practices with the subject steered to a particular end without the subject thinking about what they are being asked to do. In this way ELC practitioners come to monitor themselves. Monitoring of ELC services is of course necessary as the youngest and most vulnerable children in society are using these services and the monitoring and inspection regimes assume a set of shared objectives however such objectives are often not transparent (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016). Dahlberg et al. (2013) argue that these quality assessments are neither value-neutral nor are values self-evident. This preoccupation with satisfying the regulatory gaze can be disempowering and result in early years professionals becoming constrained by the demands for 'performativity and technicist practice' (Osgood, 2006:5). Foucault was concerned with resisting the 'disciplinary technologies that produce docile bodies that yield to the discourse'. In the case of ELC services, the discourse is professionalism and quality. Osgood (2006) argues that the role of agency is important and that ELC professionals must be active in resisting the regulatory gaze by challenging and negotiating the discourses by which they are defined.

This need for regulation and control of ELC to ensure quality services is a complex area and it has been argued (Osgood, 2006:6) that this emanates from a 'discursive construct of a crisis in education', the idea that ELC services in the UK are failing to meet the needs of children and families. I argue this is not the case with the Blueprint for 2020 expansion policy and it rather comes from a need to overhaul existing ELC services in Scotland to meet the economic and social needs of Scottish society. Returning to the idea, introduced

earlier, of the state knowing 'what's good for your child' (Ball, 2017:199) the Scottish Government, supported by the OECD would have us believe, that the way to transform the lives of children and their families while improving the prospects of Scotland's economy, in the short and long term, is through the provision of extended hours of quality ELC. If this is the case, then it becomes necessary to convince parents that their child will be cared for and educated to a high standard during the extended hours offered by the policy – even from the standard provided at home. This is, in effect, a constructed discourse of ELC success, rather than a discourse of failure, but it is nonetheless a controlling discourse. Parental confidence in the service offered is a key aspect in the success of the policy and a means must be found to convince parents that this policy is what they want and that handing the care and education of their young child over to educators is best for them.

Ball (2017:201) discusses a Foucauldian term for such policy as enacting 'dividing practices' where parents are objectified as the others in the policy; socially and politically irresponsible. Their parenting is questioned and in need of saving by expert, professional interventions, parents are not 'good and proper neoliberal subjects' (Ball, 2017:201). It could be argued that parents are being manipulated and power is being exerted on parents from a distance by the government and OECD. As discussed by Urban (2017) parents should carefully consider why an organisation such as the OECD would be interested in intervening in the quality of ELC. One must consider what the justification is for systems of 'regulatory gaze' and it appears to me that it is to satisfy the need for the government to see a tangible return on their investment, to convince parents that ELC services are of 'high quality' and to ensure that the youngest and one of the most vulnerable groups in society are having their needs met. This also enables women to re-enter the workforce convinced that this will benefit them and the economy.

Osgood (2006:6) discussed Foucault's claim that policy is produced by and for the state as a means of fixing individuals 'in a web of objective codification', that this is a model of social engineering and that through the imposition of testing and standard setting, educators are reduced to mechanistic performativity which poses a threat to professional practice. There is a history of OECD interest in education, which has manifested itself in a series of international standardised tests for fifteen-year-olds in the form of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the subsequent publication of international league tables. The OECD has now extended the programme to assess five-year-old children in four 'early learning domains' of emerging literacy, emerging

numeracy, self-regulation and social-emotional skills (OECD, 2020:11). This programme extension has caused many methodological concerns around the validity and reliability of such testing in ELC not least because of the disregard for the diversity of ELC approaches, nationally and internationally.

This then leads to questioning whose interests are served by IELS and in doing so demonstrate a disregard for diversity and children's rights. It also raises fundamental questions about the concept of quality and the desire to turn it into a particular position 'inscribed with particular assumptions, values and beliefs' (Moss, 2016:8). This conceptualisation of quality assumes that it can be measured using a set of universal and objective norms and therefore ELC services can be measured as achieving quality if conforming to these norms. This concept of quality, as discussed by Moss (2016:10) has the intention of shaping the conduct of others through 'human technology…establishing norms against which performance should be assessed, thereby shaping policy and practice', which disregards approaches to ELC that recognise and value context and diversity. It also serves as a very powerful management tool to use to govern from a distance and it is then only a small step to consider 'quality' in ELC in neo-liberalist, competitive and entrepreneurialist terms as 'quality' is reduced to the technical practice of performance.

Once into the realm of thinking of ELC in terms of requiring a high return on a social and financial investment, we are then driven away from thinking about the image of the child as a self-determining person with rights and child-centred education, the ethics of education and the fundamental values of education. The child is de-humanised and becomes a commodity as the educator seeks to continuously improve outcomes and 'the interests being served by this sterile vision of learning are governments, not those of children, families and communities' (Ball, 2017:59). With an emphasis on quality as the 'golden thread' running through the Blueprint for 2020 policy and a need to ensure that 'professionals are equipped with the skills and resources they need to deliver the best possible outcomes for children' (Scottish Government, 2017a:2) educators become driven by performance testing, assessment scales, baseline testing and human capital. As Ball (2017:57) describes it 'performativity is a culture or a system of 'terror'' which acts as a means of control, exertion of pressure and a means to make change. Neo-liberal policy with its 'masculinist undertones' (Osgood, 2006:8) and an emphasis on educators adopting a rational as oppositional to an emotional approach to the care and education of young

children does not sit well with ELC services and it can be argued has resulted in reduced professional autonomy as the 'regulatory gaze' has intensified.

As outlined by Moss (2019, 2017) and Osgood (2006) Foucault is concerned with subject and power and the theoretical model of the 'disciplinary technology', that through the policy of constant monitoring and surveillance of quality, when applied to ELC educators they find ways to normalise this practice and come to accept it. Ball (2016, 2003) develops Foucault's idea of educators simply performing policy intention that they neither believe in, nor feel able to resist by passively resisting in a 'form of ventriloquism' and 'enacted fantasy'. The power exerted over thoughts and actions becomes largely invisible and of such sophistication that it is impossible to challenge. Disciplinary technologies are able to construct invisible power and silently create individuals as 'bodies to be controlled' (Cannella, 1999:40; Holligan, 1999).

Investment in ELC by national governments represents a social investment strategy however, the Blueprint for 2020 can also be understood in relation to economic investment and human capital theory. It has become an increasingly persuasive economic argument for government to invest in ELC as it is regarded as an investment in the future. Economist and Nobel Prize winner James Heckman promoted the socio-economic advantages to be gained from investing in ELC (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016). This is framed by ideas of a global knowledge economy with investment in knowledge and skills being considered advantageous at an individual but also at a national level. A knowledgeable workforce positions a country well to compete in global markets. Framed in relation to lifelong learning the OECD posits investing in ELC will provide the best return for investment than from any other stage of education. Urban (2022) discusses the global consensus over the past two decades of the importance of early childhood programmes but highlights that it is the story of quality and high returns that dominates the policy discourses emanating from the EU and OECD. This aligns with Moss (2014:3) who writes:

> Find, invest in and apply the correct human technologies – aka 'quality'- during early childhood and you will get high returns on investment including improved education, employment and earnings and reduced social problems. A simple equation beckons and beguiles: 'early intervention' + 'quality'= increased 'human capital' + national success (or at least survival) in a cut-throat global economy. Invest early and invest smartly and we will all live happily ever after in a world of more of the same – only more so.

As I state throughout this dissertation, the notion of quality for young children is not problematic but I align my thinking with that of Moss (2017:15) that it is the idea of conformity and control as applied to the education and care of young children 'a practice of applied technology' that causes me concern.

2.7 The Professional Practitioner - Compliance and Resistance

I argue, that over the last twenty-five years as ELC services have expanded in Scotland the relationship between the quality of services and quality of the practice of the practitioners and managers providing the services has come to dominate. The conceptualisation of the 'professional' early years' practitioner/manager has changed and what constitutes the professional ELC practitioner/manager has become a focus for those working in the services, policymakers and parents/carers. Policy reform is ongoing in Scotland, and it concerns me that the commitment appears to be to a particular type of 'professionalism' and ELC professional, a neoliberal subject whereby practitioners and managers comply with and are judged, and judge themselves, against an external set of criteria – a technicist approach to professionalism and to quality. In this section, I consider practitioners' and managers' compliance with and resistance to neoliberal discourses of quality.

Osgood (2010:122) suggests that there is a 'seductive power' in accepting 'externally imposed normalised and normalising constructions of professionalism'. Foucault (1978, 1980) offers a means of understanding how those, in my example ELC practitioners, become through policies and practices invested in a desire to be accepted and known as professionals. In this normalising standardisation professionals succumb to objectifying practices of standardised assessment, self-surveillance, and self-regulation which results in state power becoming invisible and left unchallenged. Yet, for Foucault (1978, 1980) alongside compliance there may exist small, localised sites of resistance and by exposing and discussing different discourses it may be possible to disrupt the current neoliberal narrative.

As outlined in Section 2.2 the concept of professionalism in ELC in Scotland and internationally is not yet well established and despite much research could yet be termed 'work in progress' (Joyce et al., 2023; Wingrave and McMahon, 2016; Harwood et al., 2013; Chalke 2013; Osgood, 2010; McGillivray, 2008; Adams 2008; Mooney and McCafferty 2005; Menmuir and Hughes, 2004). As outlined by Osgood (2010:121) there is general agreement in public discourse that 'professionalism' is understood as:

> an apolitical construct broadly defined by the acquisition of specialist knowledge/qualifications, the ability to meet high standards, to self-regulate and to exercise high levels of autonomy.

Yet, whilst this definition may appear common sense it fails to recognise the complexity of the concept in relation to ELC. There are many contradictions in what 'professionalism' means to a highly-gendered, employment sector strongly associated with care and nurture but with a strong desire for recognition as 'professional' (Joyce et al., 2023; Wingrave and McMahon, 2016). This is further complicated when set within neoliberal, masculinist values where rationalist calculations are presented as superior ways of knowing as opposed to relational, nurturing ways of knowing.

Menmuir and Hughes (2004) and Adams (2008), working in a Scottish context, discuss some of the complexity and the reasons for the lack of agreement about what 'being a professional' means in ELC. The late 1990s was a time of significant bi-partisan commitment to expand ELC provision across the UK with increased funding available to parents. In Scotland, the school population was in decline which meant physical space was available, and with funding provided, nursery classes opened in many primary schools. The increased funding available also encouraged entrepreneurial opportunities and many new private nurseries opened to meet increased demand from parents for extended day places. Whilst these developments were unfolding the Scottish Executive, later renamed as The Scottish Government, revised the Schools (Scotland) Code in 2002 which removed the statutory requirement to have a set ratio of one teacher to twenty children in nursery classes. This resulted in some establishments operating with no employees qualified at degree level, nursery teacher early years expertise was lost, and some nursery classes were nominally led by the primary school head teacher who often had little expertise in early years pedagogy (Adams, 2008). The quality of ELC provision, in these cases, became dependent on the practice of practitioners, called nursery nurses, holding a Scottish Nursery Nurse Examination Board (SNNEB) certificate or a Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Early Childcare and Education.

The ELC sector in Scotland had been relatively free of regulation and standards before 2000 and Menmuir and Hughes (2004) outline the general thrust of Scottish policy at this time, as leading in the direction of greater regulation of ELC services with the establishment in 2001 of the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care and the

Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). The Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care developed a set of national standards, as a framework to enable the assessment of ELC services, and SSSC, who were responsible for registering those working in ELC, put in place codes of conduct and practice. These developments were foregrounded by a plethora of Scottish Executive publications, such as Education in Early Childhood, the Pre-school Years (Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, 1997) and an action plan Childcare: The Training Challenge (Scottish Executive, 2000) all emphasising the need to focus on staff capabilities, training and qualifications as a means to developing high-quality ELC services. The political commitment to the expansion of ELC services provided an opportunity for Scottish universities to introduce early childhood degrees, many delivered part-time. Yet, whilst these developments were unfolding the ELC workforce felt undervalued and underpaid. They argued that they were now playing a key role in early education provision with increased Government demands to acquire additional qualifications and a greater emphasis placed on the importance of quality childcare through standards (Adams, 2008; Mooney and McCafferty, 2005). As a result of feelings of being undervalued, as Mooney and McCafferty (2005:223) describe the attitude at the time was that practitioners were 'only looking after the weans', and underpaid with an increasing workload, local unrest grew and in March 2004 local authority nursery nurses across Scotland began strike action which lasted in some authorities for almost fifteen weeks. This action did not achieve the desired outcome of a national collective pay and conditions agreement. Each local authority negotiated their own agreements and job titles such as childhood development officer, early years practitioner, early childhood worker as well as some retaining the title nursery nurse. As Adams (2008) highlights, the array of job titles has possibly further fragmented the concept of the early years' professional. Additionally, many of the job titles in use have no mention of the educative role. Since then, two reviews of the ELC workforce have been undertaken (Scottish Executive, 2006b; Siraj and Kingston, 2015), and both highlight the ongoing issues with the professionalisation of the ELC workforce. In the 2015 review, the authors, Siraj and Kingston (2015:46) make specific reference to the introduction of the Standard for Childhood Practice (QAA, 2007, 2015) and the BA (Hons) Childhood Practice degree as a means 'to professionalise the ELC workforce'. The BA (Hons) Childhood Practice degree is designed to demonstrate alignment with the Standard for Childhood Practice however the capabilities articulated in the Standard reinforce the practitioner as 'technician' by extensive reference to organisational frameworks and codes of practice. Osgood, (2006:9) argues that rigid standards have the potential to create early years professionals who judge and limit themselves 'to a normalised and conformist construction of professionalism' which in turn

could lead to a diminished conceptualisation of what it means to be an early years' professional reducing autonomy and self-regulation for the early childhood professional.

Osgood (2010:121) highlights a risk embedded within discourses of professionalism, that of the 'aim to control rather than empower' through the use of standards and a culture of audit. Within the audit and accountability culture the professional becomes de-professionalised with success measured in terms of outputs and meeting professional targets and standards. Ball and Olmedo (2013:89) agree, stating that good practitioners will 'want(ing) for themselves what is wanted from them by the state'. Foucault (1980) defines this as governmentality, a process whereby governments produce people who believe they are making rational choices based on their own desires and freedoms but are in reality tightly governed docile bodies who are constructing new managerialist-influenced identities. They are compliant with a particular mode of governance. Standards in themselves are not necessarily problematic and do have a place however, standards are normative and by creating 'norms' or 'ideals' they also create the 'abnormal' or the 'less than ideal'. Osgood (2006:6) discusses the early years' practitioner as being fixed in a Foucauldian 'web of codification' controlled by standards imposed by government agencies acting as regulators on the practitioner who is subordinate. The autonomy of the practitioner is reduced as they are compelled to comply with the standard upon which their performance is measured, and professional registration mandated. Simpson (2010) counters this argument stating that practitioners need not be passive recipients of standards and that rather than standards being inhibiting they can be enabling and contribute to a sense of professional identity. In making this argument Simpson (2010) draws on the work of Miller (2008) in presenting a more optimistic, activist approach to professionalisation with the practitioner exerting their agency in the reform process and re-positioning themselves as professionals. Dickerson and Trodd, (2020:3) focus the debate on identity through concepts of singularity and plurality of professionalism, how individual practitioners view their contribution to their profession and understand themselves as professionals 'holding, re-evaluating and reconstructing a set of professional values' as opposed to professionalism as a collective notion: shared by many. The lens through which practitioners view themselves as professionals and the stories they tell themselves reflects which identity or self-presentation is constructed. The professional identity of the practitioner is therefore one of change and dialogue with the self, with others in the profession, and with the Standards.

Calls to re-conceptualise and reframe professionalism in ELC are growing: Hordern (2016:510) argues for a commitment to 'conceptualise early childhood professionals within a wider perspective' rather than from an 'organisational professionalism' stance. Others, such as Osgood (2010:130) propose the case for a rejection of qualifications based on neoliberal principles of measurement of technical competence, in favour of 'professionalism from within' and a recognition of 'emotional capital' as critical to ELC practice. Campbell-Barr (2019) argues that specialised knowledge is the core aspect that identifies a profession, a position posited by the Scottish government in 2007, however, she expresses concern over the prevalence of 'scientific knowledge' as underpinning ELC professionalism. Common to these views is a need to address the current dominant narrative of the professional ELC practitioner who is increasingly re-envisioned as an expert technician (Campbell-Barr, 2019; Taggart, 2011; Osgood, 2010; Moss, 2006) who through regulated processes, applies a set of pre-determined and measurable outcomes to their work. These outcomes are etched with values such as the transmission of knowledge. This knowledge is valued by the practitioner through their acquisition of prescriptive competencies, as set out in, for example, the Standard for Childhood Practice. The values of the practitioner are then reflected and reproduced to the child to construct the neoliberal child. The challenge is to resist these restricted ways of professional being: the compliant professional, the productive, rather than critical practitioner. As Giroux (2015:32) states, 'The time for widespread resistance and radical democratic change has never been so urgent'. Practitioners should be free to pursue the aspects of practice they value, their professional agency. The current Standard for Childhood Practice views of professionalism are limiting because they focus on performativity and compliance, viewing professional learning in terms of compliance with externally contrived norms rather than critical engagement and professional agency. Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021), Archer (2022), Ball (2019) and Moss (2017) consider other possibilities which place critique at the centre of education opening up opportunities to think about 'other discourses, other truths' for ELC (Moss, 2017:17). The possibility of resistance to the current discourse on quality then becomes an issue worthy of exploration.

Although a more recent development for ELC practitioners, the concept of surveillance and compliance is not new to education with studies that examine performance management and inspection regimes in schools (Perryman et al., 2018; Hope, 2016; Page 2015, 2017, 2018 and Perryman, 2006). As outlined by Perryman et al. (2018) and Perryman (2006) panopticism relies on the potential for being observed, it relies on

anonymity, covertness, and the uncertain presence of an observer with teachers as technical performers and documentation formed to reflect the expected observation discourse. Teachers work in a 'context of normalised visibility' (Page, 2015:1043) where they are constantly under fear of surveillance by management and others evaluating their performance against standards through conducting learning walks, classroom observation and collection of data. Page (2015) cites Gabriel (2005, 2008) who argues that a different metaphor may be more appropriate, the glass metaphor, where surveillance is overt and transparent. Teachers are knowingly exposed to the 'critical gaze of the customer' (Gabriel, 2005:19). The open-plan school facilitates this type of surveillance, able to be seen and judged at all times by management, colleagues, parents, pupils. Proudfoot (2021), Page (2017), and Courtney (2016) extend this discussion by introducing the concept of post-panopticism. For Courtney (2016:629) post-panopticism has six main characteristics including visibility to all with instability introduced as 'norms' imposed are ever-changing, transient and 'fuzzy'. Page (2017:999) discusses traditional surveillance as something done by school leadership to subordinates, 'an exercise of hierarchical power', a means of identifying those poorly performing teachers before the official inspection visit, a result of head teachers 'risk anxiety'. As the anxiety intensifies head teachers look for new tools of surveillance within and beyond the geographic panoptic school, blurring the boundaries between official and unofficial surveillance by involving peers, pupils and parents in upward and variable categories of surveillance framed as peer support and 'student and parent voice'. Page (2017:1000) continues by discussing the notion of intrapersonal surveillance, the 'watching of the self' which begins with panopticism, the potential to be seen at any time, but as argued by Foucault (1991) the watching gaze becomes internalised and so produces the docile bodies. In the post-panoptic turn the self becomes active and willing in the self-surveillance practice. If, as Page (2017:1001) suggests surveillance is primarily about sorting and categorising people, then in this modern age of preoccupation with 'networking oneself as a brand' on sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn then arguably teachers may normalise surveillance and self-surveillance practices in their professional lives. The annual professional review and development (PRD) meeting provides an opportunity for the teacher to engage in self-reflection before attending the 'confessional' PRD meeting where the expectation is to offer up thoughts, and motivations. Teachers are able to use the surveillance to become commodities to be sold, to be rewarded with an excellent categorisation or perhaps a promoted post (Page, 2018). Proudfoot (2021:812) introduces a new concept to ideas of post-panopticism, that of 'the searchlight' metaphor, those behaviours that are hidden from the immediate view of the 'performative gaze' when the searchlight moves on. These concepts of surveillance and

compliance are described in the context of teachers in schools, but I propose the same techniques and systems are now embedded as the norm in Scottish ELC centres.

This section has focussed on the professionalism and professional identity of ELC practitioners which sits within a wider Scottish policy discourse of quality. Dahlberg et al. (2013:103) are critical of the discourse of quality as one which has been:

> constituted by a search for objective, rational and universal standards, defined by experts on a basis of indisputable knowledge and measured in ways that reduce the complexities of early childhood institutions to stable criteria of rationality.

The ELC workforce has been constructed as deficient and in need of surveillance and redemption and yet, the early years' practitioner possesses tacit and wider professional knowledge and skills which such definitions of quality appear to ignore or de-value.

Resistance to these dominant discourses may be possible and Osgood (2010:126) presents a counter-discourse to the neoliberal that of 'professionalism from within'. A range of professional traits is presented such as, compassionate, intuitive, empathetic, patient, creative, self-reflexive and non-judgemental demonstrating that although the ELC workforce is compliant to occupational standards counter-discourses can and do exist. Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021) believe resistance to neoliberalism in ELC is possible quoting Foucault's words:

> In power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all. (Foucault, 1997:292)

The form that resistance may take need not be large-scale but rather tentative and modest but it is important to be able to identify what must be resisted. de Certeau (1988) provides an interesting insight into strategies and tactics of power relationships distinguishing strategy as the manipulation of power relationships that becomes possible when the subject is isolated. Targets set by standards and quality assurance frameworks seek out their place and act as the invisible power (the Other) and 'it is an effort to delimit one's own place in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the Other' (de Certeau, 1988:36). Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021) argue that neoliberalism remains invisible to many in ELC

despite the ideology being present for decades. The main task is in making it visible so that ELC practitioners and managers may understand its consequences and effects and begin the process of critical thinking and asking questions of the seemingly dominant narrative of neoliberalism. Only then resistance may be possible. Ball (2016, 2019) discussing resistance in a school/teacher context takes the argument further by suggesting that rather than resistance it is perhaps refusal of neoliberalism that needs exploration. Ball (2016) suggests re-imaging the educational practitioner as an intellectual capable of a different subjectivity – a practice of self-formation - to that imposed by neoliberalism. Ball (2016:1136) draws on Foucault's 'care of the self' concept which, through the use of tools such as critical reading, writing, thinking, and talking with others, the teacher frees the self. In such activities, neoliberal subjectivities are contested as the teacher refuses to be and works on re-constructing or reforming the self, the subjectivity and thereby thinks differently about teaching and learning.

Archer (2022) discusses the extent to which powerful neoliberal policy has influenced ELC pedagogy and the professional identities of practitioners to form the 'ideal' professional ELC subject. Unsurprisingly, these professional identities are shaped by occupational standards and qualifications:

> As a consequence, policy texts frame the ideal early educator as a compliant technician, but also an autonomous, entrepreneurial, self-improving, subject to both vertical and horizontal surveillance (i.e. by both regulators and by peers) and engaged in self-surveillance. (Archer, 2022:3)

Like Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021), Archer (2022:1) argues that 'micro resistance in early childhood education' is possible however, very little empirical research has been undertaken to understand the relationship between compliance and how acts of resistance are being enacted by individuals and collectively in ELC centres. This dissertation seeks to begin to address this gap in the research.

2.8 Conclusion

In concluding this literature review I turn back to Ball (2019:132) who proposes using Foucault to 'think differently about education and learning' arguing that in most educational studies Foucault has been interpreted 'as a philosopher of oppressions' yet he was also 'a philosopher of contestation and difference'. Ball (2019:133) proposes using

Foucault's later work to help to identify and to understand our relations to self and to others and in so doing to identify and perhaps move beyond 'silent objectification' to see beyond to 'a horizon of freedom':

> My role – and that is too emphatic a word – is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticised and destroyed (Foucault, in Martin et al. 1988:9).

However, Ball (2019:134), in suggesting what a Foucauldian education may look like in the future points out that there is no template to follow, no guidelines and, therefore in seeking to think differently it is necessary to try to escape 'the over-used, colonised lexicon of critical education' and 'embrace the power of strangeness'. If ELC practitioners, as a largely disproportionately female workforce, want to be free of the dominance of the neoliberal paradigm they should begin to see themselves constructed and reconstructed through regimes of truth that value and recognise certain ways of being, of being 'otherwise' and of opportunities to be becomings. Ball (2019:135) argues that there is a need to refuse to accept previously accepted dominant discourses focussing instead on a 'care of the self and others' both intellectually and practically in a search for other experiences. I will argue that resistance and refusal is possible however, by moving beyond the known and well-established practices of neoliberalism which currently define ELC professionals who are instead entering:

> A worrying, indeed frightening, space in which we must 'unthink' our common sense and recognise as fragile and contingent many of our modernist certainties. In this way, we might begin to recognise that all knowledge is uncertain, that truth is unstably linked to power and that our intelligibility is constantly in question (Ball, 2019:135).

The ELC sector in Scotland has been subjected to much change, not least in the past few years since the implementation of the Blueprint for 2020 expansion policy (Scottish Government, 2017a) and the sector is 'fragile' (Audit Scotland, 2023:3) due to budgetary pressures and the sustainability of a skilled profession. Urban (2022) highlights that the Covid 19 pandemic has thrown into sharp focus the crucial role of ELC services to the functioning of society and urges influential policy actors and organisations to abandon the dominant paradigm:

universal, individual child and its development, of decontextualised knowledge and its creation, of simplistic measurement and comparison, and of policies and practices as tools for solving distinct social problems by distinct professions and academic disciplines (Urban, 2022:383).

Ball (2003) makes clear that struggles to resist the dominant discourses are often highly personal and internalised with the care of the self set against duty to others, in the case of ELC the children and their families. Through my data collection, I may uncover these lexicons of belief and commitment, professional love, and perhaps how these affect the mental health and emotional well-being of Scottish ELC practitioners and managers.

3. Methodology – Approach and Method

3.1 Introduction - Philosophical and Theoretical Approaches

My research aimed to explore practitioners' and managers' experiences of, compliance with, and possible resistance to, current policy discourses and processes of conceptualising quality. I chose to set my study within an interpretivist paradigm (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2018) as a means of exploring values, attitudes, and beliefs toward quality in early learning and childcare (ELC). In particular, I focused on the regulatory gaze and Foucault's power/knowledge construct.

In ELC in Scotland, there is a growing momentum towards standardisation from the Scottish Government and its regulatory agencies such as the Care Inspectorate and SSSC who, I have argued in this study, maintain and privilege ways of knowing and being that justify and reinforce a neoliberal agenda within ELC. The use of quality frameworks and inspection regimes as the proposed legitimate way to know and measure quality in the early years limits the agency of practitioners and managers and using these sources of knowledge advocates that there is a single reality practitioners and managers can measure themselves and their practices against. The criteria and standardised categories become the tools of power by privileging these over other ways of thinking about the concept of quality and the complexity and plurality that I believe exists in ELC is therefore marginalised. I wanted to find out the ways in which practitioners and managers experience and consider quality frameworks, standards, and inspection and if they perceive other ways of conceptualising quality.

I have argued that in ELC there are many perspectives and debates, many individuals and organisations who view and understand ELC (and the world) from different perspectives. These differing perspectives may be due to individual differences such as gender, age, disability or affinity with groups such as a profession, but they may also be due to particular paradigmatic positions that produce different perspectives and discourses (Vandenbroeck et al., 2023).

Paradigm and choice of paradigmatic position are therefore of central importance and greatly influence how the story of ELC unfolds. The social location of the researcher is important, by this I mean that our perceptions and beliefs as human beings in the social world constantly change and I believe transparency of my position in this research is a positive feature. Gray (2013:19) states:

> the choice of methods will be influenced by the research methodology chosen. This methodology, in turn, will be influenced by the theoretical perspectives adopted by the researcher, and, in turn, by the researcher's epistemological stance.

I have argued that in ELC in Scotland, the current dominant discourse is that of quality, control, measurement, predictability – a positivist paradigm – value and context-free knowledge, an objective and singular 'Truth' as defined through standards and quality frameworks. My argument is that ELC is complex and uncertain full of many perspectives in many contexts that cannot be neatly divided into discrete and measurable variables. I am in agreement with Moss (2019:37), from a post-structuralist perspective, that there are 'knowledges and truths, not Knowledge and Truth'. As I see it the dominant discourse presented in standards and frameworks is just one (singular) truth but there are other (plural) truths and stories to be told by other stakeholders in ELC – practitioners, managers, children, and parents/families.

Within the limitations of a Professional Doctorate, it has not been possible to consider the stories of all stakeholders and my dissertation is therefore limited to exploring the views and experiences of practitioners and managers. This required empirical research and the method of data collection proposed is semi-structured interviews. Our knowledge of the world is a socially constructed concept and as human beings, all of us participate actively in the process of making meaning. As stated by Lather (1991:99) the facts of knowledge are 'textual and social constructions created by us in our efforts to understand our situations'.

Using Foucauldian analysis allowed me to explore concepts of and links between knowledge and power, the regulatory gaze, and resistance.

3.2 The Interpretivist Paradigm

The term interpretive is a broad term that within the social sciences is encapsulated as concerns about how the social world is experienced and understood (King et al., 2019). The interpretivist paradigm in research involves providing a detailed account of specific social settings and relationships therein. This may seem simplistic however it is seldom straightforward as people participate in and interpret the world and events around them in many different ways. Using the interpretive paradigm enabled me to have conversations with people to try to uncover how ELC practitioners and managers experience and feel about their professional lives working in Scottish ELC centres and how they relate to processes and relationships therein, particularly as related to the concept and pursuit of quality. In using this paradigm, I was mindful of how 'facts' become open to interpretation and that rather than seeking to find one truth about reality I was seeking different interpretations or multiple realities, seen like this facts become open to different interpretations.

Schutz (1962:5 cited in Flick, 1998:31) explains that:

> All facts are from the outset facts selected from a universal context by the activities of our mind. They are, therefore, always interpreted facts, either facts looked at as detached from their context by an artificial abstraction or facts considered in their particular setting. In either case, they carry their interpretational inner and outer horizons.

The choice of the interpretivist paradigm with its recognition of multiple versions of reality fits well with a Foucauldian analysis of data however I acknowledge that as the interviewer I have the exclusive privilege to interpret and report what the interviewee meant. I upheld 'a monopoly of interpretation' (Brinkmann, in Denzin and Lincoln (Eds.) 2018:589) over the interviewee's statements. I consider my positionality and the potential, positive and negative aspects, of this later in this chapter.

3.3 Positivist and Post-modernist Approaches to Quality in ELC

Through policy such as A Blueprint for 2020 (Scottish Government, 2017) parents are encouraged to participate in the labour market or engage in study, leaving the care and education of their child for increasingly longer periods of time to the purported expertise of the professional – the ELC practitioner (Dahlberg et al., 2013). As parents increasingly rely on ELC services they also then rely on a quality system that enables them to make decisions about the services they want for their child. The discourse of quality within ELC can be understood as a search for objectivity and quantification embedded in certainty and trust in authority.

Current Scottish ELC policy aligns with OECD Starting Strong frameworks (OECD, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2021) which propose a universal solution to the complexity of quality in ELC and position the frameworks within a 'paradigm of evidence-based policies and practices' (Urban, 2015 in Cannella et al. (Eds.) 2016:97). The opening paragraph of Starting Strong 111 states:

> There is a growing body of evidence that children starting strong in their learning and well-being will have better outcomes when they grow older. Such evidence has driven policy makers to design an early intervention and re-think their education spending pattern to gain 'value for money' (OECD, 2012:3).

In this context quality in ELC is required to ensure a means to an end – better outcomes as children grow older. In both contexts quality is presented as a universal truth, a decontextualised concept and prioritises how quality is measured – a positivist or modernist perspective – which assumes that there is a reality, a thing called 'quality' that can be reduced to a series of numerical ratings and measurable outcomes. Rather than engaging in the reality of ELC – the human, social, and institutional complexity of children and adults making meaning together in the shared space of the institutional ELC - Dahlberg et al., (2013:100) describe this as 'a process of representation and normalisation', a modernist dream whereby complexity is reduced to a basic set of technocratic practices, a basic set of criteria.

Modernist approaches to understanding quality in ELC rely on the construction of an evidence base with some discourses such as staff qualifications, the curriculum and health

and safety metrics – structural quality - privileged over others. The child, childhood and indeed the practitioner is constructed through a set of classifications and practitioner pedagogy is removed from values-based considerations. Foucault (1997) refers to these as dividing practices, scientific means of classifying, whereby children and adults are measured and thereby divided from each other but also divided within themselves, to manipulate and control the child/adult to think they are either good or bad, normal or not normal.

These positivist ways of defining and classifying the child, the practitioner, the ELC centre are presented as 'truths' – right and wrong ways of being, ways of practicing. Foucault contested efforts for truths to be produced which would govern us and ultimately enslave us within a regime of truth.

> Knowledge does not slowly detach itself from its empirical roots, the initial needs from which it arose, to become pure speculation subject only to the demands of reason…Rather, it creates a progressive enslavement to its instinctive violence (Foucault, 1997:163).

This is unsurprising given that ELC in Scotland is following the path of dominant neoliberalism described by Moss (2023) in Vandenbroeck et al. (2023:9) as 'constructed through the stories we tell and the language we use'. The language used in this story of quality is of outcomes, evidence-based, indicators, assessment and testing and whilst I argue that quality as a concept is important in ELC, the ways in which quality is currently understood, measured and researched suggest that a positivist methodology is not appropriate for my dissertation.

I argue that quality in ELC in Scotland cannot be presented as an authoritative officially sanctioned truth as young children and parents do not fit neatly into dominant groups within society. Young children do not fit a grand narrative of outcomes and predictability, rather children and families have complex life experiences. There are many possible challenges to these dominant classifications – regimes of truth that exist in Scottish ELC – that are in need of disruption and resistance. Taken from a post-structuralist perspective there are many children and childhoods and no such being as the universal child waiting to be defined and classified (Vandenbroeck et al., 2023; Dahlberg et al., 2013; MacNaughton, 2005). I have positioned this study within a rejection of a methodological positivism in

favour of an interpretive stance that seeks to understand people as persons able to think, learn and know.

In this study, I have used the ideas of Foucault in considering the interplay between power and knowledge in the regulation of the quality of ELC services to argue that services provided for young children cannot be reduced to a modernist homogeneity. Post-modernist approaches to quality allow a challenging and de-constructing of the belief that there is a universal truth, a grand narrative of quality in ELC. Foucault argued that from the sixteenth-century power shifted from the sovereignty of the monarch to 'government' – in the broadest sense – with a steering of people in particular directions without the use of physical force. In modern society power is exercised in many diverse ways and everyone is subject to being governed by what Foucault called 'disciplinary power' and, as Ransom (1997:37) discusses, we govern ourselves:

> …it shapes individuals – neither with or without their consent. It does not use violence. Instead individuals are trained or moulded to serve the needs of power. In addition, this method of training – its originators and practitioners hope – will not only impart skills but will do so while reducing the political efficacy of the individuals involved (Ransom, 1997:37).

Disciplinary power normalises individuals to behave in a particular way, to believe that a norm or standard is their goal, they are steered toward the norm, embodying the disciplinary power and thereby governing themself. I argue that disciplinary power may be evident in ELC services in Scotland in the shape of policy and regulation. Practitioners have been shaped into imagining a particular truth – that of measurement, regulation and evaluation. They utilise the language of measurement and regulation in their daily work as the dominant discourses or regimes of truth. Foucault (1989) urges the practice of 'parrhesia' – free speech to free ourselves from the regimes of truth that govern us by playing 'other trumps in the game of truth' (Foucault, 1988:15). It is in urging practitioners to understand their pedagogy from multiple perspectives and freeing themselves from current dominant discourses that practitioners and managers in ELC in Scotland may move towards resistance as Foucault (1978:95) contends 'where there is power, there is resistance'. Foucault's practice of 'parrhesia' was influential in my choice of semi-structured interviews as my data collection method for this research as a way of providing opportunities for practitioners and managers to explore and understand other pedagogies, practices and other truths.

3.4 Method

3.4.1 Introduction

My method of data collection for this dissertation used semi-structured face-to-face interviews with four participants registered with SSSC as practitioners and three participants registered with SSSC as lead practitioners/managers. SSSC requires practitioners to be qualified to SCQF Level 7 (HNC) and lead practitioners/managers to SCQF Level 9 (unclassified degree). In a Scottish context, practitioners spend most of their working days with the children and families whilst lead practitioners/managers are concerned with leading and managing the ELC centre.

King et al. (2019:56) discuss the need in quantitative studies to recruit a sample that is 'statistically representative' of the study population due to the need to establish the generalisability of the conclusions. However, they point out that, as qualitative research does not seek to generalise, there is not normally a need for sampling strategies aimed at producing statistical representativeness. In discussing qualitative research participant selection King et al. (2019:57) state that:

> Researchers seek to recruit participants who represent a variety of positions in relation to the research topic, of a kind that might be expected to throw light on meaningful differences in experience.

I have worked in the ELC sector for many years, and I have informal networks and made use of these to recruit participants. One of the criteria most commonly used for sampling in qualitative studies is diversity (King et al., 2019) and the early years' sector in Scotland is a diverse sector comprising of, for example, centres under local authority control, private establishments working in partnership agreements with local authorities, and completely private centres. Each local authority has autonomy in the operation of their ELC services and the models of ELC hours offered to families in addition to the pay and conditions offered to practitioners and managers. Due to these differences, I wanted to ensure that I was interviewing, within the small sample size, participants from a range of diverse centres. The participants in my study are employed in Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) centres which are operated by three separate local authorities and one privately operated centre which works in partnership with a local authority. Other than knowing the participants are employed in the centres I have no other connection to these centres. As the

main distinguishing role for practitioners is to educate and care for young children with managers having responsibility for leading and managing the centre there may be differences in how 'quality' is understood and experienced as a practitioner or as someone in a managerial role within an ELC centre. I, therefore, considered it important to interview participants from both categories of professional registration to understand the differences, if any, between the views of each role. I also considered the experience and qualifications profile of participants to be important as the lived experiences of someone with many years working in ELC may differ from a more recently qualified practitioner. I therefore selected practitioners with under five to over twenty years of experience. The managers ranged from under five years to ten years of managerial experience. There are many qualifications accepted by SSSC for practitioner registration including SNNEB, SVQ and HNC. Some practitioners may also have chosen to study at degree level, and it was important to interview participants with a range of qualifications. The gender profile in Scottish ELC is predominantly female and whilst not wanting to appear tokenistic or to suggest that interviewing one male practitioner was representative, I did consider it important to interview a male practitioner (Appendix 4).

Having worked in early years education for many years I am very aware of the issues with professional identity and feelings of marginalisation, (Joyce et al., 2023; Wingrave and McMahon, 2016; Chalke 2013; Harwood et al., 2013; Osgood, 2010) often expressed by ELC practitioners, and this was a key consideration in my choice of method. Many factors contribute to the narrative of professional identity in ELC. There is a long-standing uneasy relationship between ELC and the compulsory education system. In addition, competing requirements for care and education and societal views of ELC professionals as little more than child carers all contribute to a workforce that feels marginalised (Joyce et al., 2023; Wingrave and McMahon, 2016; Chalke, 2013). Despite the significant changes that ELC in Scotland has undergone over the last 20 years, not least in the perception of early years practitioners from carers to professionals who are central to achieving the Scottish Government's ambitious policy goals, they continue to feel undervalued as professionals. Joyce et al. (2023) discuss that practitioners and managers continue to feel that their voices are not valued equally to other professionals who work with children, particularly the teaching profession. My truth in the story of ELC quality is from the privileged position of a former teacher and now lecturer in higher education and in this research, I was seeking to hear the truths as spoken by the practitioners and managers. I have worked alongside and with practitioners and managers for many years and know the ELC sector in Scotland very

well. I am very aware of the feelings of practitioners and managers and their struggles to be recognised as a profession and I approached this research with the knowledge that practitioners in Scottish ELC have looked for 'external validation, mainly from educational professionals, more specifically the teaching profession' for many years (Joyce et al., 2023:10). In my choice of method, I hoped to demonstrate that I do value practitioners voices and in choosing semi-structured interviews as my method I aimed to empower and enable practitioners and managers to confidently speak and tell their truths about their lived experiences of quality in Scottish ELC.

Furthermore, Campbell-Barr (2017) and Osgood (2010) argue that ELC professional identity is foregrounded by a neoliberal, managerialist approach rather than a valuing of tacit knowledge, attitudes and dispositions and therefore I wanted to explore managerial perspectives and understandings of quality in the context of the current neoliberal approach to ELC. Due to the issues of professional identity and marginalisation, I considered using focus groups, one with practitioners and a separate one with managers, as a data collection method. Liamputtong (2015) discusses focus groups as a particularly suitable method to use with marginalised groups with the aim of giving them a voice in a group of professionals with whom they feel comfortable. However, Ayrton (2018:324) discusses the interaction between participants as 'shaped by and revealing of the power relations that exist between group members'. Similarly, Caretta and Vacchelli (2015:3) in their discussion of focus groups as a participatory research method highlight the issue of power:

> Due to gender, social status and other intersectional dimensions of the participants' identity, including specific positionalities and power relations existing in the group, some might not feel at ease to share their thoughts and some voices might prevail over others.

My initial concern when considering focus groups was that if managers were present this may limit practitioner discussion and managers may be hesitant to express views in the presence of practitioners, as well as issues of power and truth-telling within a group of similar professionals. I considered the separation of groups by job role and also considered the impact of being in a focus group on the individuals within each group. As my dissertation is primarily investigating issues of power and surveillance, I carefully considered my research method and concluded that focus groups would not be appropriate due to potential issues with confidentiality and power dynamics in a group even with practitioners and managers being placed in separate groups.

The use of one-to-one interviews mitigated the issue of confidentiality in a group setting and therefore I believed this was a more appropriate method. If conducted well the interview can be a 'rare and enriching experience' (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:35) for the person being interviewed and it may give them new insights into their life situation as it is not a common experience to spend time with someone, in this case a former teacher and current lecturer, who has a deep interest in your individual lived experience. I was conscious of the possibility of power imbalance and the effect of the long-standing uneasy relationship between the ELC professional, and the teaching profession and these aspects are considered in section 3.4.3.

Much of what I have described above also has ethical considerations and implications and these are considered more fully later in the chapter.

3.4.2 Epistemological Considerations of Interviewing – contrasting metaphors

Before considering particular aspects of the semi-structured qualitative research interview, in this section, I discuss post-structuralist epistemological issues of research interviewing. As discussed by Borer and Fontana 2012 in Gubrium, et al., (Eds.) (2012) and Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) a post-structuralist approach to the qualitative research interview focuses on the interview as a knowledge-producing activity to help us to know more about a particular topic however consideration of how knowledge generated from qualitative interviews is characterised is required to aid understanding.

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) outline seven characteristics of the knowledge gained through interviews as produced, relational, conversational, contextual, linguistic, narrative and pragmatic. Knowledge, as produced, is actively created in a co-authoring process by the interviewer and interviewee through questions asked and answers given. Relational knowledge is created during the interpersonal situation of the interview with the data produced intersubjective as the interviewer and interviewee become co-constructors of knowledge. Conversational knowledge production relies on conversation as a means of gaining access and is therefore sensitive to context and knowledge obtained in one context is not necessarily commensurate and transferrable with knowledge in another situation.

Language is the tool of the interview in the form of oral statements which are then transcribed into text and attention needs to be given to how the language produced from the interview is transcribed from one linguistic mode to another.

The researcher must be aware that interviews provide an opportunity for people to tell powerful stories about their lived world life and to make sense of the knowledge as a narrative. Finally, knowledge as pragmatic concerns not whether the knowledge produced is *true* knowledge but rather is it *useful* knowledge. This of course raises issues of value and ethics which are discussed in a later section on ethics.

Two interesting and contrasting metaphors of the interviewer are introduced by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) to illustrate two different epistemological conceptions of the interview – the interviewer as a knowledge collector (miner) or knowledge constructor (traveller). In the *miner* metaphor, the interviewer is seeking to uncover knowledge by mining or extracting objective facts from the experience of the interviewee in the way of a *miner* extracting valuable nuggets. Alternatively, the interviewer as *traveller* is on a journey, meandering together with the interviewee asking questions that encourage the person to tell their own story, the story of their lived world experience. The journey may lead to new knowledge and, as the traveller reflects on the narrative, they may come to understand differently previously taken-for-granted values. The concept of data-mining assumes that the knowledge is already there to be found whereas the traveller conception fits with a post-structuralist, conversational approach to research with the focus on the interview as a 'production site of knowledge' (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:62) emphasising the narrative as constructed and produced during the interview. As the interviewer, I aimed to use the *traveller* metaphor in my approach, and although I have my truths in the story of quality, as the traveller with my participants I thereby encouraged conversation as a means to produce the knowledge and uncover the truths about my participants' lived experiences of quality in Scottish ELC.

3.4.3 The Semi-Structured Interview

The use of interviews generally in society as a means to entertain and for knowledge production is discussed by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015:15) as part of a common culture, the 'interview society' in which we live – 'the public construction of the self' through reality television and social media – the willingness to tell a stranger personal information. Although the interview has become a normative occurrence, Briggs (2007) and Brinkmann and Kvale (2015:17) urge the researcher to think carefully about the naturalisation of this 'field of communicability'.

The research interview is a conversation that goes beyond spontaneous exchanges that happen in everyday conversations, it has a defined purpose and a structure that is constructed to produce knowledge(s) about a particular subject of mutual interest. King et al. (2019) and Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) argue that the interview in qualitative research may be considered as a simple, uncomplicated exchange of ideas and views with an assumption that information is there waiting to be discovered and knowledge formed. However, to view the qualitative research interview in this way fails to recognise the key defining characteristics of the interview. These characteristics involve the interviewer adopting a flexible, open-ended style utilising non-leading questions. The focus is on the interviewees' actual lived experiences with the relationship between interviewer and interviewee of crucial importance to this method (King et al., 2019).

I chose semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection as a way of having a dialogue with the interviewee and as Brinkmann (2018) suggests semi-structured interviews allow for opportunities to follow up on ideas and opinions expressed by the interviewee. By comparison to unstructured interviews, the interviewer also has a say in the focus of conversation, orienting it towards issues of importance to the research project. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015:4) define the semi-structured research interview as:

> …where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee. An interview is literally an inter-view, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest.

I wanted to have a conversation with people to find out about their experiences as either a practitioner or a manager in ELC in Scotland and how they understand and articulate these lived experiences in the knowledge that I was entering the conversations as a teacher/lecturer with many years' experience of the grand narrative of quality and high

returns. The interviews helped me to understand the aspects of quality that practitioners and managers value.

> The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world… (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:3)

The use of the word 'subject', as in the quote above, to describe the participants in my study is relevant. I did this by viewing them as 'persons…subjects who act and are actively engaged in meaning making' (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015:3) but with the awareness that these people are subject to power relations and discourses that are not of their own making but have an influence on what they may be or become, what they say and/or how they say it.

Discourses, ways of talking and thinking about topics, may help us to make sense of our lived experiences but certain discourses may become dominant and influential and lead us to believe that this is the only reality, the only objective and unquestionable truth, the only story to be told. Dominant discourses exercise influence and power over our ideas, thoughts and actions influencing what is seen as truth in our constructions of the world. I argue in this dissertation that neoliberalism with its focus on investment, measurable quality, high returns, and regulation is a dominant discourse in ELC and as such may act as a regime of truth for practitioners and managers (Vandenbroeck et al., 2023; Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021; Moss, 2019).

A key aspect of Foucault's theory is the relationship between power, knowledge and truth. Foucault (1987:11) argued that none of us is exempt from power relations in which we are subject to power but also that we exercise power on others:

> whatever they are – whether it be a question of communicating verbally…or a question of a love relationship, an institutional or economic relationship – power is always present: I mean the relationship in which one wishes to direct the behaviour of another.

Jentoft and Olsen (2019) describe the interview from the positivist perspective with the researcher as the objective, neutral recipient of the participant's experiences however, as discussed by Moss (2014, 2019) and McNaughton (2005:22) post-structuralists challenge the idea that it is possible to discover the real truth arguing that 'all knowledge is biased,

incomplete and linked to the interests of specific groups of people…'. In using a post-structuralist approach, I argue that in the course of interaction between the researcher and the participant – the subject - power is present.

I considered there to be specifically three issues of power and control that required careful consideration when undertaking interviews with ELC practitioners and managers. Firstly, the interviews had the purpose of producing knowledge, about the quality of ELC in Scotland, the use of quality frameworks and standards as a means of measuring quality, and the role of regulation and surveillance from the perspective of the lived experience of the practitioner or manager. As such, I was aware of the potential disparities in power relations between the individual practitioner or manager and the institutional power of, for example, the Scottish Government as a producer of quality frameworks and standards and/or the Care Inspectorate as the regulator of practice. Foucault (1979:194) wrote that 'power produces, it produces reality' describing discourses as transmitters and producers of power. These discourses exercise influence and power over our ideas, thoughts and actions influencing what is seen as truth in our constructions of the world and truths that are institutionally produced usually resonate more powerfully with us and act to govern and regulate.

The second and related issue of power is what Foucault terms 'governmentality', the means by which people come to embody the dominant discourse and in so doing govern themselves. The dominant discourse becomes the person's story, its truth our truth, the self governs the self (Dahlberg et al., 2005). Ball (2016:1130, 1133) poses the question 'what kind of self, what kind of subject have we become, and how might we be otherwise?'. It was possible during the course of the interviews that interviewees may begin to reflect on such questions realising this insidious exercise of power and how it has worked on their sense of self and who they think they are as a professional.

The final issue of power relates to the power between one individual and another, in this case, the researcher and the subject. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) and Briggs (1986) are clear that there is always a power relationship between the researcher and the subject. I initiated the interviews, defined the topic and designed the questions. The interview questions were designed around open *how* type questions to find out how interviewees experience quality and surveillance in ELC and possible acts of resistance and I made

decisions during the interviews if follow-up questions were needed. As discussed by Brinkmann (2018) in Denzin and Lincoln, (Eds.) (2018) the subject and the researcher are not equal partners, the researcher has come to the interview with a defined purpose and is in control of the situation, holds power as the determiner of the topic; the interviewer questions and the interviewee answers in a one-directional dialogue. Once the interview concludes the interviewer has the power of interpretation, once the interviewee has spoken the words the interviewer then has the power to interpret those words.

However, the interviewee may also exercise power in providing consent in the knowledge that consent may also be withdrawn, and the interview ended at any point. The interview is intended as an instrument to provide the researcher with a narrative which then places the interviewer in the privileged position as the interpreter of the subject's statements. There may be a manipulative hidden agenda in the interview that of 'doing rapport' to 'get beyond the subject's defenses (Brinkmann, 2018:588 in Denzin and Lincoln, (Eds.) 2018) It is important to acknowledge the power rather than seek to eliminate it, if that were even possible, and to reflect on its role in the production of knowledge.

As the research interview is an interpersonal situation between two people the 'setting of the stage' was an important consideration. In the first few minutes of each interview, I aimed to make clear that although I was the researcher, with the purpose of gaining information for my research study, I was doing so because I was genuinely interested in what my participants had to say, and I demonstrated that I was listening attentively. I aimed to approach the interviews and later my analysis as described by Spradley, (1979:34):

> I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?

My first prompt question was intended to open the dialogue by introducing the key term 'quality' in the context of the young child (0 to 5-year-olds) and inviting the practitioner or manager to consider the term and what it meant to them – which aspects did they value and what was important to them. I maintained eye contact and used affirmative nods and smiles to demonstrate my interest, understanding and respect and to encourage my participants to talk freely exposing their experiences and feelings to me.

3.5 Analysis and Organisation of Data

Braun and Clarke's (2019, 2022) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was used to analyse the data. The key concept of this approach is reflexivity – a disciplined practice of critically reflecting on the role of the researcher, research practice and process. RTA is an analytical method involving six phases – familiarisation with the data, coding, generation of initial themes, developing and reviewing themes, refining, defining and naming themes and writing up - which work together to make sense of the data but Braun and Clarke (2022:6) point out that it exists within a 'larger set of values, assumptions and practices' which taken together constitute the method. A key aspect of my dissertation was to hear and then reflect on practitioners' and managers' understandings and experiences of quality in the context of ELC in Scotland. I considered using RTA would, as discussed by Bryne (2021), provide an opportunity to collect and analyse data respectfully, acknowledging both my own and the participants' subjectivity whilst recognising my interpretations of the data.

The first phase of RTA is becoming familiar with the data through a process of immersion, reading and re-reading the data. I collected data through the use of face-to-face semi-structured interviews which were audio recorded. To familiarise myself with the data I firstly listened to the recordings several times and manually transcribed each recording, taking notes as I did so. Although time-consuming an advantage of manual transcription is the opportunity this provides to become very familiar with the data and this gave me time to think about how the data related to my study and Foucault's theory.

Braun and Clarke (2022:35) discuss coding as a way of 'capturing single meanings or concepts' and in accordance with RTA, I approached coding as an open and evolving process attempting to code data systematically with code labels but without the use of a codebook or set ideas. The first practical stage in coding was therefore to reduce the data, interview by interview and line by line, using coloured code labels to denote something interesting and shared across the data. Braun and Clarke (2022:55) describe this as good practice as it ensures more 'nuanced' coding in addition to being able to notice meaningful patterns in the data, both similarities and differences. Coding is seen as a subjective

process with the researcher interpreting the data and bringing who they are to the process. Braun and Clarke (2022) view researcher subjectivity as the primary tool for reflexive TA and do not believe the interviewer's subjectivity to be a problem that requires to be controlled or managed rather it is a resource. As with the interview process, in my analysis, I sought to embrace the idea of the knowledge coming from the position of my participants as practitioners and managers. I had little interest in the idea of a singular universal truth to be discovered and put aside my truths as I immersed myself in the data.

Consideration was given to inductive versus deductive analysis of the data. As discussed by Bryne (2021:1396) this study could be considered deductive as it initially utilises a 'theory-driven' approach and the research title was generated using the terms 'A Foucauldian analysis of the discourses of quality'. However, although I had a theory firmly in mind, a key goal was to hear the voices of the participants, their subjective lived-experience viewpoints, and what they value in terms of quality in ELC, and therefore I also utilised an inductive approach to open-code the data to best capture the meanings presented by the participants. As discussed by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) when the approach to thematic analysis incorporates both a deductive theory-driven approach whilst allowing themes to be produced from the data using an inductive approach the overall approach is considered to be hybrid. Braun and Clarke (2022) are clear that in RTA coding may have elements of both orientations and the most important aspect is that the coding fits the purpose, describing it as a spectrum rather than a dichotomy. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006:83) agree that although data analysis is often presented as a step-by-step procedure it is an 'iterative and reflexive' process.

The level of coding was also considered and Braun and Clarke (2022) outline two levels of coding, the use of 'semantic' codes – explicit or surface meaning and 'latent' codes – implicit or conceptual meaning. As it was important for me to capture how the participants understand, value and practice quality and possibly resist surveillance of the quality of their practice, I used semantic codes remaining close to the language used by participants and capturing what was being said. However, both during the interviews and when coding the data, when there emerged a deeper meaning to the data than the content suggested I considered the use of latent coding as described by Braun and Clarke, (2022:58) to 'go beyond the data' to represent possible hidden meanings or ideas.

Good quality codes and themes result from immersion in the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2022:8) themes are 'patterns anchored by a shared idea, meaning or concept'. They do not passively emerge but rather themes are analytic outputs produced by the researcher. In Braun and Clarke's (2022) RTA the generation of themes is a process that they compare to the analogy of a sculptor taking the raw material and using their creative thinking to choose and to shape the final product. The process of developing themes from codes may be lengthy and involves clustering together potentially connected single codes into broader patterns that are meaningful to the research question. Themes may change over time, so it is suggested that the researcher does not 'get too attached to early-developed themes' (Braun and Clarke, 2022:79). To ensure rigour, three rounds of data coding were undertaken before themes were generated by combining codes with shared meanings. An example of coding has been provided in Appendix 5.

3.6 Ethics, Reflexivity and Positionality

As outlined by Bourke (2014) in preparing to conduct qualitative research the researcher's positionality is a significant consideration that can be described as, involving reflexivity as the researcher is involved in a process of self-analysis and self-scrutiny. Holmes (2020:1) describes positionality as an 'individual's world view' or in other words where the researcher is coming to the research from, and this concerns their ontological, epistemological and human nature and agency assumptions. We all have multiple and intersectional identities and as such we make meaning from different aspects of our identities. It is important to consider the identities of the researcher and the participants as research represents a shared space between researcher and participant however as a researcher one must be mindful not to make assumptions about others' perspectives on the world and thereby pigeon-hole someone based on their often (mis) perceptions of them.

> The concept of self as research instrument reflects the likelihood that the researcher's own subjectivity will come to bear on the research project and any subsequent reporting of findings (Bourke, 2014:2).

By its nature qualitative research designates the researcher as the instrument of data collection and it is therefore reasonable to assume that the multiple identities of the researcher such as gender, race, educational background, and socioeconomic status are variables that may affect the researcher process. Just as the researcher's positionality

comes to bear on the research project how the participants make meaning from their experiences is also significant. As discussed by Holmes (2020) some aspects of positionality are generally regarded as fixed such as gender, race, and sexuality, whilst others, for example, life experiences and political views are considered more fluid and subjective. My research sought to understand the concept of quality in Scottish ELC through the lived experiences of practitioners and managers and as the researcher, I do so from a standpoint of having many years of experience in Scottish ELC as a white, heterosexual, cisgender female who has lived in Scotland my entire life. Freire (2000) suggests it is perhaps naive to think that we can conduct research without subjectivity and as we strive to remain objective positionality represents a space where objectivity and subjectivity meet. My thinking aligns with that of Keenan and Lil Miss Hot Mess (2020) in that I did not attempt to hide my bias: I have made use of my unique position in coming to this research at a later point in my career and therefore with many years of ELC experience and having held different positions in both schools and ELC centres. Bourke (2014:3) describes positionality as the acknowledgment of 'who we are as individuals, and as members of groups, and as resting in and moving within social positions'. My participants drew on their lived experiences and my study engaged them in frank conversations about their experiences of quality in ELC and I have ensured to reflect their voices and tell their stories in my research.

In this next section, I outline the processes involved in ensuring that my study is conducted ethically. Research involving human participants requires careful consideration from initiation to completion of the research process as issues will exist and emerge. As discussed by King et al. (2019) it is a complex and demanding responsibility and issues of ethics will arise. Capturing the intertwining of ethics and morality involved in qualitative interviewing, Edwards and Mauthner (2002:16) state:

> Ethics concerns the morality of human conduct. In relation to social research, it refers to the moral deliberation, choice and accountability on the part of researchers throughout the research process.

Morality is not about simple dichotomies of good and bad, rather it is shaped by the experiences we have in our social and cultural lives. Individual researchers bring their individual morality to the research process, and the way general ethical principles are acted upon is dependent upon individual morality. As a researcher one has responsibility to the interviewee, for example, in the framing of the questions and as Brinkmann and Kvale

(2015) highlight the interviewer has a fundamental ethical dilemma in wanting to obtain rich, deep and meaningful data whilst at the same time being respectful to the interviewee. There is a risk of obtaining data that has only scratched the surface of the topic. I see it as a strength that my participants are coming from an oft-considered marginalised professional group, who as discussed by Joyce et al. (2023), Trodd and Dickerson (2019) and Wingrave and McMahon (2016) feel undervalued in the workplace. The practitioners and managers were invited to participate in a research study and to talk about their lived experiences of quality in Scottish ELC and I believe this opportunity to voice their views may produce the deep empirical data that I required for my study whilst at the same time enabling self-awareness and self-confidence in their professional identity (Osgood, 2006). I considered the potential for social desirability bias during the interview process as I am aware that my participants may have internalised the dominant story of quality as told through policy, standards and frameworks as the widely accepted norm (Bergen and Labonte, 2020). I made a deliberate effort to minimise social desirability bias through rapport-building and self-disclosure. Although my dissertation may not be pre-determined as a categorically sensitive topic, consideration must always be given to interviewees who may be considered vulnerable and as stated by Whitney and Evered (2022) qualitative researchers have an ethical obligation to address and seek to minimise research-related distress.

The over-arching philosophy of research should encompass respect for persons, beneficence and justice (King et al., 2019) which aligns with the University of Glasgow requirement to complete and submit an application with supporting documents, to the College Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects. To demonstrate my respect, secure the well-being, and ensure fairness for my individual participants the ethics application I submitted included participant information, a privacy statement, and a consent form. These ensured that my participants had adequate information about what was involved in their participation and the possible consequences. As part of the ethical process, participants were provided with a participant information sheet (Appendix 3) in advance of the interviews which outlined the research question before the interview began. Participants then had the freedom to choose to participate and provide their informed consent. Information was provided regarding the right to withdraw during and after the interview and the process for doing so was outlined. A Data Protection Impact Assessment was prepared and submitted outlining how personal data would be stored, used, and destroyed during and after the research project concluded. The ethics

application process also required the submission and approval of my dissertation proposal, proposed methodology, and method for data collection and analysis.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the philosophical and theoretical approaches to my methodology and justified my choice of an interpretivist paradigm for my study. As I believe that the quality of services for young children cannot be reduced to a modernist homogeneity, I have positioned my study within a post-modern perspective. My choice of semi-structured face-to-face interviews has been carefully considered taking into account the professional marginalisation felt by my participants alongside my wish to hear and understand how my participants articulate their lived experiences of quality in Scottish ELC. I have considered issues of power and control that may arise during the interviews and how I will mitigate power and social desirability bias. I submitted an ethics application and following approval (Appendix 1); this enabled me to begin the process of arranging to approach and interview my participants. The following chapter will present an analysis of my data findings using Braun and Clarke's (2019, 2022) thematic analysis and this will be followed by a chapter that discusses my data findings and makes clear links to the theory of Foucault.

4. Analysis of Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I analyse the findings of the semi-structured 1-1 interviews I conducted with four early years practitioners and three practitioners in managerial roles. In the interviews we explored how the concept of 'quality' is valued, understood, and articulated by those with lived experiences of ELC in Scotland and to determine if there are differences between these lived experiences and the dominant discourse of 'quality' as presented in policy, quality frameworks and standards. I also seek to explore possible sites of resistance to and disruption of the current dominant discourses of 'quality'. Participants therefore were aware that my aim was to ask questions to explore the concept of 'quality' in ELC services in Scotland and they had time to consider the term and what it meant to them before the interviews took place.

4.2 Thematic Analysis Orientation

I discussed in Chapter 3 that the data generated in the interviews would be analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). Braun and Clarke (2022:55) describe coding as 'a subjective process shaped by what we bring to it', a process of making meaning of the data which recognises the subjectivity of the researcher as a strength. In reflexive thematic analysis there are different orientations to the data and, as discussed in Chapter 3 I will utilise a hybrid approach (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). To ensure rigour I undertook three rounds of coding before it was possible to develop initial themes – 'a shared meaning organised around a central concept' (Braun and Clarke, 2022:77). Following an iterative process four themes relevant to my research question were developed. The themes cut across all data.

1. Human relationality
2. Professional skills and knowledge
3. Power, policy, compliance and resistance
4. Time as an allegory of attainment and quality

4.3 Themes

Theme 1: Human relationality

In this theme, I explore practitioners' and managers' understanding of the importance and value of human relationships present within ELC centres and the effect of these relationships on 'quality'. These human relationships include those of the adults working in the centre to each other, between the adults and children, and between the staff team and families. Human relationships between practitioners/managers and regulators such as the Care Inspectorate were highlighted within the interviews and I have chosen to report these findings in Theme 3: Power, Policy, Compliance and Resistance as my analysis of the data suggested this was more related to power and compliance.

A consistent finding from both managers and practitioners was that they highly valued human relationships across all stakeholders in the early years as demonstrated in the following responses:

> *Practitioner 1: It all comes down to relationships… I think if you can get a quality relationship with the children, with the families, with the other staff members, then actually that takes you a long way because I think if you've got that relationship, you can understand that child you can understand where that family's from.*

Practitioner 1 is clearly linking the term 'quality' to the relationships they and the staff team have with children and families and also the relationships the staff members have with each other. This practitioner links human relationships to developing their understanding of the child and their familial context and views these relationships as a core aspect- *'it all comes down to relationships'* - of 'quality' in ELC.

> *Manager 3: Well, yeah, relationships just looking at the positive relationships with the families and the children between the staff. I think you need that before you can build on anything else, so definitely the relationships.*

From a managerial perspective, Manager 3 is of the view that developing and building positive relationships with the children, families and staff is crucial and required as a prerequisite to any other aspect of the quality ELC experience.

> *Practitioner 4: In terms of the work I do where I am, the interactions we have with children, I think it's a big signifier of quality in what we do. I think the interactions is the big thing in my centre…we've also got quite a lot of multi-agency input from social workers, Barnardo's, speech and language therapy and health visitors quite often pop in. So, the interactions I think could be crucial.*

Practitioner 4 does not use the term 'relationships' choosing instead to highlight 'interactions' with the children as a signifier of quality. Practitioner 4 focuses on the 'interactions' with the children which suggests this practitioner is considering human relationality in a practical, everyday sense, thinking specifically about the exchanges and communication with the children on a daily basis. Practitioner 4 also highlights inputs from other professionals and may be suggesting the need and benefits to building relationships and having interactions with a wider range of professionals.

Practitioner 1 and Manager 3 highlight the three key stakeholder groups present in an ELC centre – children, families and staff and the need for the relationality of the three groups. Practitioner 4 focuses on the relationships with the children as a key 'signifier' of quality then adds to this by highlighting the relationships and interactions with external agencies. These responses are highly significant and consistent across *all* participants and indicate that the aspects of 'quality' being valued by those with lived experience in ELC is human relationality across stakeholders.

In their responses, the practitioners and managers are expressing their belief that human relationality is a core foundational and prerequisite aspect of working with young children and families, and other adults in ELC, and the establishment and development of these 'quality' relationships are crucial for quality. Practitioner 2 discusses the role of the extended family in children's lives and working in partnership with the staff team to provide experiences that reflect the children's and wider family interests. They introduce the word 'care' to their response, an aspect they return to later in the interview, as a core part of their professional role in working with others to provide a quality environment and experiences for all children and families.

> *Practitioner 2: Getting to know the children and the families and extended families. It's not just mum, dad, now, grannies and aunties and cousins, so you know, get to know them and then you know, reflecting their children and their families and their*

interests. Probably the team as well. We can work together, and we can provide rich activities for the children and experiences, and we can care. And we all care about each other. For me, this is my family. It's my extended family here.

Manager 3 explains that they value relationships, and similar to practitioner 2, they highlight aspects of the familial, valuing a feeling of family and the creation of a homely environment for the children but also for the staff team, introducing the idea of people 'feeling' cared for and valued. Manager 3 continues to stress the importance they place on children feeling safe, valued, and loved whilst attending the centre. It appears that, for participants, feelings of safety, value, and love - or the lack of them - are at the heart of all human relationships, and these are what they foreground in the definition of a 'quality' ELC centre.

Manager 3: When I came here, I valued that, the family feel, a home-from-home environment, that children are safe and comfortable, that's probably the most important thing for you is to have those relationships. It's at the top of the list. To be homely people got to, I think, feel that. That they're valued. And loved. I think you know for the kids to feel loved in the room. Yeah, that's a big thing for me.

Manager 3, having earlier spoken about the need for positive relationships and the importance of the ELC centre having a 'family feel' introduces the idea of care and having love for the children. The children experiencing and feeling loved within the centre is highly valued by Manager 3. This is a significant aspect in the data as it begins to explore the role of care and professional love within the role of the early years' profession.

This aspect is represented in other responses such as Practitioner 2 who makes a direct link between care, love, and affection, as basic needs of the young child, and their relationship to quality. Practitioner 2 uses the phrase *'being there'* for the children, to describe what quality means to them, which suggests an empathetic practitioner, one who values the connectedness and relationship they have with the children.

Practitioner 2: I do the job because I care and I want to make a difference. And I think if I can provide experiences, love, care, basic needs, you know. To, to other people's children. So as a practitioner, quality for me is just, you know, high care, love, affection. You know being there.

Aspects of quality such as process and structural quality will be discussed in Chapter 5 however it is significant to note here that the aspects of quality described above, that are being valued by both practitioners and managers, are those of process quality. Staff qualifications, professional education or regulation, those structural quality features, in this research, do not form part of participants' initial responses in the data (Edwards 2021, Eadie et al. 2022 and Vandenbroeck et al. 2023).

Practitioner 3 introduces the concept of 'belonging' as an important aspect of quality in ELC, not only for the children but also for the staff team. In this context, the practitioner appears to be valuing 'belonging' in the sense of belonging to a community of practitioners but also the wider community that is the ELC centre and includes the practitioners, children and the management team. These aspects of relationality are important in determining quality for this practitioner, and they use the plural first person pronoun 'we', and a feeling of 'belonging' as important to them. The practitioner explains that having a small personal space develops a sense of belonging for both the child and the practitioner. This aligns with human relationality and the importance of the sense of self that is seen and valued within an ELC centre.

Also of significance in this comment is the phrase 'non-judgemental' – it may be there is a deeper meaning to this comment, associated with feelings that they have felt judged by others at times, such as those they view as having power – managers, regulators, inspectors.

> *Practitioner 3: a non-judgmental environment. I think one of the other things for me was having staff having their own areas, having our own space. Yeah. One thing that we brought in for the children is that they had their own wee trays and their sense of belonging, which started conversations with the management team. What did the staff have? Yeah. We need areas to prepare, areas to plan areas where we feel like we belong.*

In this comment, the practitioner appears to be suggesting that they are thinking about their and others' professional identity in the non-judgemental workplace and their sense of belonging as a core aspect of human relationality. Practitioner 2 also uses the pronoun 'we'

in one of their responses and suggests working together to care for the children but also to 'care about each other' is important to their understanding of quality.

> *Practitioner 2: We can work together, and we can provide rich activities for the children and experiences, and we can care. And we all care about each other.*

Practitioners 2 and 3 and Manager 3 are presenting, I believe, a view of the early years' professional as a 'critically reflective emotional professional' (Osgood, 2010:119) one who highly values human relationality as an indicator of quality in ELC. This finding suggests practitioners and managers value the emotional aspects of their professional role, such as love and emotional reaction in the form of care. It appears in the data that in foregrounding human relationality as a core aspect of how quality is valued that practitioners and managers have, in effect, rejected the individual, embodied, self-interest of the individual presented in neoliberalism for a new imaginary of the complexity of human relationality and the professional self as emerging through relationality and a collective 'we' that includes children, families and the other practitioners.

Theme 2: Professional skills and knowledge

A key aspect of the data is the kinds of professional skills and knowledge that are valued, as an indicator of quality, by practitioners and managers. By way of additional context for the analysis of this theme, it should be noted that the Care Inspectorate and the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) were established following the passing into the statute of The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act (2001). Registration with SSSC is a requirement for all practitioners and managers and registration is dependent on holding or being in the process of achieving a recognised qualification. At practitioner level the most common qualifications are either a Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Childhood Practice or a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) at Level 3, or equivalent, and at manager level there is the requirement to attain the Standard for Childhood Practice usually through study for a Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 9 qualification, typically the BA Childhood Practice degree.

These qualifications are designed with specific knowledge and skills as intended outcomes deemed appropriate, by the SSSC, for practitioners and managers working in ELC in Scotland. Although I did not ask a specific question about skills and knowledge it is clearly

an area that both practitioners and managers were keen to explore, during the interviews, as an indicator of quality in ELC.

One aspect that was spoken about was the misgivings regarding the content of the current iteration of the HNC qualification.

> *Manager 2: Unfortunately, I don't value the HNCs that are coming out at the moment. I don't think they're learning about child development. Yeah, they're learning how to write up accounts of practice. So, I'm going to do an activity with the child. I'm gonna make them stick 8 legs on a spider and that's gonna be numeracy and it is gonna be art and craft. So they think they're ticking all the boxes, yeah. But that is not quality that is absolutely not quality.*

Manager 2 is expressing their regret at not valuing the current content of the practitioner qualification. The focus of their concern is that they believe those practitioners qualifying with the HNC have not learned about *'child development'* and this affects the quality of their work with the children. They think the emphasis is on writing accounts of what the children are learning in narrow curricular terms, such as numeracy and expressive arts, and therefore becomes an exercise to tick boxes rather than in really understanding how the wider aspects of what they term *'child development'* - how the young child grows, develops, and learns.

They are emphatic in dismissing this practice as *'absolutely not'* contributing to quality experiences for the children. Their perception is that over time this initial qualification and routes into the qualification have changed and the knowledge of the child as a growing and developing child has been lost in this process and has been replaced with an ability to match the curriculum to the experiences provided for children – the child has become decentred from the process. They believe this has a detrimental effect on quality.

> *Manager 2: it's a very, very different experience at the moment from maybe say even 10 years ago. I don't know when the HNC changed, but also as well you can go straight into HNC now, you don't even need to do the NC first. I don't agree with that.*

Their perception is that over the past ten years, the grounding that was provided by the completion of the national qualification (NC) prior to completing the HNC, and in their view was essential, is not so prevalent and this has been detrimental to practice and the quality of practice.

Manager 2: The people in college at the moment are not being taught that they don't know the facts. It all seems great. You're in about these theorists and oh, yeah, this scaffolding. Yeah, that's great. But actually, we need to know how that child develops first. And I'm not seeing quality from these new people coming up and people will say, oh, well, you've experienced people that have been here for 20-30 years, they're old fashioned. But they yeah, they might be in maybe terms of documents like Realising the Ambition, but that basic child development knowledge…they know what these children need to grow and develop and that can be built on. Yeah, but these new people coming in haven't got any of that. They just know how to write, write out an observation. So, I find it really frustrating.

Manager 2 expresses concern about the type and range of knowledge they believe newly qualified practitioners value on qualifying with the HNC. This participant acknowledges that newly qualified practitioners have knowledge of theorists and sees this in contrast to the *'basic child development knowledge'* and this they believe is detrimental to quality. They appear to make a clear distinction between what they call *'theorists',* highlighting *'scaffolding'* as an example, and *'basic child development'*. Their view is that *'basic child development knowledge'* is missing from the current HNC qualification and this is something they value. These distinctions will be discussed in Chapter 5, section 5.3.

In their earlier comment, '*they think they're ticking all the boxes*' the participant appears to be critical of prescriptive, standardised 'tick-box' types of learning/stages of development outcomes favouring meaningful pedagogical experiences with the children and a valuing of knowledge of the broad stages of development. Manager 2 was asked if they think the more practical aspects of the ELC practitioner role are being overlooked and the more academic aspects are considered to have greater importance. Manager 2 responded with,

Manager 2: I did my NNEB. Yeah, all those years ago, you did two full years. You did from babies before the babies were born, you spent time in maternity wards. You learned about how that child develops well, they need to. They've gotta learn to do all these things before they can pick up a pencil.

Manager 2: It's all about paperwork. PLP's personal learning plans. But these children just need to play and they'll learn through their play if you just let them with experienced practitioners who know what they're talking about. But it seems if we've got a bit of paper everything's fine. Yeah, that's fine. We'll get a bit of paper filled in and everything's fine. I mean, these people are qualified. Is that cynical?

The concerns expressed here may be directly related to the professionalisation through academicisation – the credentialising of practitioners/managers through university degree qualifications - of the ELC workforce (Wingrave and McMahon, 2016). The initial ELC qualification has undergone many changes over the last twenty-five years as the drive has continued to develop and reconstruct the ELC workforce to become a profession. Callan and Reed (2011:8) suggest that 'critical questions about how the work of an early years practitioner is understood and what values are considered important' require to be raised. These questions are certainly being raised in this interview data. Manager 2 suggests that knowledge of child development – the basic knowledge of how children grow and develop – and skills are essential for the practitioner but in their view, newly qualified practitioners lack this knowledge and skill and through the introduction of the revised HNC qualification a different form of knowledge and skillset is valorised as an indicator of quality.

> *Manager 2: If I had good practitioners I could work out of a cardboard box. ...because a good practitioner will find that cardboard box and turn it into so many different things. If they've, if they've got it, if they've got that spark for me then everything else will fall into place.*

Practitioner 1 also believes that knowledge and understanding of child development is a key aspect and, knowing how to observe children to understand the gaps in their learning, enables practitioners to help the child to progress in their development. Similar to Manager 2 this practitioner appears to value an understanding of how children develop, and they link this to the need to observe children to identify the potential of the child.

> *Practitioner 1: knowledge and understanding of child development I think is really key I think. So, it's observing. What are they doing children… doing now and what can they do? What and where's their gaps and how we can help them on in their development.*

The focus is on learning development and filling gaps in knowledge which leads to a consideration of why Practitioner 1 feels that this is a key indicator of quality. It suggests that the practitioner is aware of the need for children to have reached particular milestones in ELC, perhaps as a means of also measuring the quality of their practice and of the ELC centre.

Manager 1 contrasts entering the ELC profession twenty years ago and the very valuable experiences they believe they gained from working in the private sector. They are critical of the Blueprint for 2020 expansion policy and the recruitment of *'barely qualified'* practitioners and believe this is having a detrimental effect on quality.

Manager 1: It's been hard I think when you look at it. Well, when I qualified 20 years ago with an HNC, yeah, I went to the private sector because I couldn't get a job in a local authority. Right, it was difficult. It was hard to get into local authority. So, I went into the private sector and Nancy it is the best thing that I ever done. It made me the worker I am. It made me the person I am without a shadow of a doubt.

But, fast forward 20 years, and this expansion, and let's be honest, everybody is getting a job. People who are barely qualified coming out of college are going straight into these jobs, lots of them, and I don't like the quality of it. Cause of the experience isn't there. You need that experience and I think that 4 1/2 years of me working in a private nursery it gave me loads of experience. Now, these young girls coming into this profession…but don't have the experience and I think that has a hidden impact on the quality in young staff teams.

Manager 1 highlights the need for experience post-qualification and the impact on quality of newly qualified practitioners securing a permanent post in a local authority with very little or no experience in the role of the practitioner. This situation has arisen as a result of the Scottish Government Blueprint for 2020 ELC services expansion policy and the need to recruit many practitioners to local authorities. This point is also made by Manager 3 who discusses the need for skills but thinks practitioners who qualified during the Covid-19 pandemic and had very limited, if any, access to ELC centres to complete the practical aspects of the qualification, and therefore do not have the practical skills required to be effective ELC practitioners.

Manager 3: I think that practitioners need to be skilled, so I think people are coming through at practitioner level who have done the course through Covid who weren't able to go on placement so how can you expect to do this job which is you know, there's a lot of skills and educationally learning to be done. But the practical side of things, they weren't getting access to that. You could literally have somebody come in that's never really set foot in a centre and so therefore wouldn't have an idea of the job.

Campbell-Barr (2019) suggests reconceptualising professional knowledge in ELC in the plural to incorporate pure knowledge, skills and practical wisdom. Understanding the knowledge(s) and skills required in ELC is complex and the historical divide between education and childcare may be a factor. The data appears to suggest that knowledge of child development is essential for the practitioner/manager, as are skills such as observation. It also appears that in the accounts in the data, it is practical and experiential knowledge and understanding – the ability to perceive what is needed in a particular

moment for the young child, that is also being identified as a valorised requirement for quality.

Manager 1 and Manager 3 are consistently referring to the need for practitioners to understand the 'know-how' of working with young children, gained from the experience of the practical aspects of the job alongside the 'know-that' of ELC, as Manager 3 describes it '*educationally learning to be done*'. This may relate to comments made by Managers 2 and 3 regarding the introduction of new qualification routes into ELC. They appear to value the knowledge and skills that newer apprenticeship qualifications provide to students.

In more recent years Scotland has introduced new ELC qualifications in the form of apprenticeships such as foundation, modern and graduate apprenticeships. The underpinning concept is that training is mostly undertaken in the workplace with, in the case of the graduate apprentice, one day per week attending the university.

This route into ELC appeared to be favoured by some interviewees.

> *Manager 2: I quite like the modern apprentice qualification because they're in with you for two years. Yeah. So, you are able to teach them and they learn. Although I would like there to be a bit more maybe, bookwork for them, because they don't go to college at all. Again, to learn about that child development, but at least you've got them for two years. So, you know what's coming out at the end with the apprenticeships that you don't with the HNC's. I don't value the HNC as it currently stands. I'm trying to remember what it was like before. Maybe a different way of doing it. Yeah, but then these new ones for the last maybe five years…so what's coming out now… practice has changed.*

Manager 3 also highlighted apprenticeships as a means of gaining a practitioner qualification that she values due to the learning on-the-job aspect of the apprenticeship route.

> *Manager 3: I think looking at the training side of things as well, I think apprenticeships is a good way to go because you're learning. You know, work like on the job.*

The practice of ELC is often presented as innate and indeed gendered – the gendered ability of women to care – and located within a vocational habitus. The articulation and analysis of practical skills is challenging due to their tacit nature and in neoliberal terms cannot be measured and assessed therefore may become marginalised (Campbell-Barr,

2018; Andrew, 2015; Osgood, 2010). It may be that these participants are expressing a view that theoretical knowledge is valued more than practical wisdom and skills in the pursuit of quality. The graduate apprenticeship provides an opportunity to combine degree study with practical *'on-the-job'* learning and therefore may be viewed as an opportunity to combine the theoretical with the practical.

Practitioner 1 has many years of experience in ELC but felt somewhat pressured into studying for the Childhood Practice degree. They graduated in 2022 but now describe feeling tired and although they still have a belief that children deserve quality experiences, they feel they and others are '*exhausted'* by the demands of *'paperwork'* and are considering a future away from ELC.

> *Practitioner 1: This is what I've done all my life. And then they say I need to do a degree and I'm like okay all right. I'll do a degree fine. I'll do my degree, but then I just feel like I'm a bit tired now and yet I still love the, I mean, children are challenging, but that's okay and they're busy and that's fine. That's fine. But for society, for society going forward, we need to give them the best we can possibly do. They do deserve quality. Because actually we can't we… we're exhausted. We can't. We end with all this paperwork. Yeah, it is sad, but I'm gonna get motivation back. Yeah. Yeah. Well. Just find another path maybe.*

This data also suggests however whilst theoretical knowledge(s), particularly of child development is considered important that managers and practitioners in Scottish ELC value the practical application of skills and knowledge in their daily work with children and families. Therefore, the challenge may be in not only integrating pure knowledge with professional practice but articulating how practical skills are applied, evaluated and valued as key indicators of quality.

This theme highlights the links between the concept of quality and professional skills and knowledge(s). Within this theme there appears to be a dilemma between the approaches to knowledge(s) required in ELC and, I propose, this sits within a wider discussion of the professionalisation of the ELC workforce and the apparently opposing constructions of professionalism – the ethic of care and the technocratic. Some knowledge(s) are considered inferior to others and knowledge is not accepted from particular groups, Foucault (1979) describes this as disciplinary technologies – objectifying practices which use invisible power to produce docile bodies, objects to be shaped and moulded.

This theme has illuminated challenges to the current neoliberal discourse of professional knowledge and skills required by the ELC practitioner which appears to exclude the practical wisdom they value. Practitioner 1 mentions being *encouraged* to undertake the Childhood Practice degree and their compliance with this current dominant discourse in Scottish ELC. In undertaking a degree in an attempt to improve themselves, to be useful, practitioners and managers may simply be complying with disciplinary technology by becoming further objects of control. These aspects will be analysed in Theme 3.

Theme 3: Power, policy, compliance and resistance

This key theme will explore the effect of current discourses of power, policy, compliance and resistance on practice and on individuals. Much of the data from which this theme developed describes practitioners' and managers' fears, compliance and submission to techniques of power that rely on instruments of hierarchical observation, normalising judgements, and the examination. Foucault discussed these techniques of power as underpinned by 'obligations of truth' and through, for example, confession, a 'technique of the self', individuals transform their bodies, souls and thoughts as they seek to become better, in this case, practitioners and managers (Westerink, 2020:248).

> *Practitioner 1: I just feel really, really undervalued. I'm really sad because actually… that's why we go into childcare. Well, that's why I went into childcare. It might be different now, I don't know. But that's why I went in because I enjoy being with children and all the silly, quirky things they could just be. They're children they are so free.*

> *As adults, we are so constricted and it's getting worse. It's not getting any better. I feel everything is… Yeah, I feel really undervalued. You know my motivation, unempowered.*

Practitioner 1 describes their feelings using words such as *'undervalued, constricted, sad, unempowered'* and contrasts their feelings now to an earlier time when they entered the ELC profession and believes the situation is worsening. Practitioner 1 highlights their motivation for entering the ELC profession – they *'enjoy(s) being with children'*. They contrast how they feel with the children being *'free'* which suggests they do not feel *'free'* in their practice rather they use the word *'constricted'* to describe how they feel as an adult working in ELC.

What is being described in this quote relates to power and being constrained – not free to be with the children doing the *'silly, quirky'* things that children do and be. The practitioner suggests their wish to model childhood for the children, a time to be '*free'* to be themselves and do and be the *'silly, quirky'* things of childhood. However, the practitioner no longer feels they are able to do this as they are *'constricted'* in their practice.

Practitioner 4, a less experienced practitioner, reflects on the role of inspection in quality assurance and the regulation of practice and explains they believe they are a *'product'* of a particular time after the formation of the Care Inspectorate.

> *Practitioner 4: I think I'm very much a product of the time I trained. I think it's always there in my head because I obviously trained after the Regulation of Care Act and the Care Inspectorate was set up. So, I think I'm very much in the mould that was created for me to step into it. So, I think it is a big part of it and the influence has influenced me.*

Practitioner 4 speaks of a *'mould'* being created for them to *'step into'.* As with other interviewees, this suggests a feeling of being powerless to resist a system – '*mould'* - which was already created and waiting for them. The arrangement has already been made, the subjectivity is created and the practitioner, as a product are there to slip with ease into the system. Practitioner 4 continues,

> *Practitioner 4: I feel like sometimes there could be a wee bit more trust in professional judgement. Our professional capabilities. I have actually had one very negative experience of an inspection.*

Practitioner 4 does not elaborate on this *'very negative experience'* but it is clear that the experience has affected the practitioner. They outline that a greater degree of trust in the professional judgements and capabilities of the ELC practitioner is needed.

Practitioner 2 expresses their fears of the inspection regimes using highly emotive language – '*scary, terrified*, *we are the victims'* and describes physical effects such as their '*heart racing*' and '*sweating'.* They highlight their feelings of being terrified of saying or doing something wrong during the inspection as they believe this could result in '*bad grades'* for the centre. They believe everyone in their centre is trying to do a good job and has high standards but they claim that the inspectors' power to describe bad practice and

normativise what they see as good practice makes them feel *'terrified'* as this becomes the truth of the ELC. This is, as discussed above, an example of Foucault's (1977) techniques of power as the practitioner feels they are subject to hierarchical observation and normalising judgements.

The strong feelings expressed by Practitioner 2 suggest a tangible fear of failure in the inspectors' judgements of the quality of their practice and rather than viewing the inspection process as an opportunity for dialogue and valued reflections from all involved in the inspection. This practitioner describes it as an intolerable presence in which they have no power to dialogue, disrupt and resist.

> *Practitioner 2: Like it can be scary. Such a, such a responsibility. So you know when you're driving into the car park and you see two strange cars at that corner. You're going, oh, my goodness. We've been waiting on this. There's two strange cars. So obviously we are the victims. And you know we know we do a good job, but we know there's always room for improvement, cause everybody knows you always look at that. You know we've got high standards of care and things here.*
>
> *But they are kinda not respecting that. It is just scaremongering cause you think if you do one thing, one thing wrong when the inspectors are in or you know you forget one thing that day because you know you have 32 children to look after. Well, if you make a mistake on the day it can affect your whole team and then you have a nursery that gets bad grades. You don't have to pretend, every single person who cares, which we all do well your heart is racing. You're sweating. You're terrified when you think you say or do the wrong thing and you know you're not really doing anything wrong. But you know what it means.*

Practitioner 2 appears to have confidence in their own practice and that of the team as they say, *'we know we do a good job'* and *'we've got high standards of care and things here'* but uses the term *'victims'* to explain how they feel during the inspection process. The word *'victims'* is a particularly emotive word and suggests they feel helpless, passive, fearful and powerless. They also describe the physical effects they feel as a result of the inspectors' process of surveillance, judgement and normativisation. They do not think they are doing anything wrong but have powerful feelings that they are a victim and will be held accountable for something they may be judged as having done wrong whilst under surveillance.

For this practitioner, the inspection process appears to place them and their colleagues under a regime of truth and power. There is a clearly felt need to perform and conform to judgements of the inspectorate which may contradict their own experience and judgements that they are doing *'a good job'* and they are compliant in the process. Practitioner 2 believes if they say or do the wrong thing whilst under surveillance by the inspectors the outcome will be *'bad grades'* for the centre. In this example, the processes and standards of inspection are used as a 'normalising judgement' as an integral part of the 'disciplinary gaze' (Moss, 2019). As *'victims'* of these external judgements the practitioner feels, bodily and psychologically, the regulatory gaze and its power. The practitioner does not discuss resistance to these experiences and judgements but an inevitability, a compliance, that further highlights the use of power within early years inspection regimes.

Manager 1's comments concord with Practitioner 2 and they also express feelings that the inspection has the potential to be *'nerve-wracking'* and that they feel *'worried'* however, they do not necessarily view the inspection process as a negative experience as it may provide an element of reassurance. They highlight two key points, the first is that the inspectorate can validate practice and the other that a one size fits all approach may be unfair. This interviewee is managing a very large centre in terms of the number of children attending and the large staff team. The centre is open for extended hours (8 am until 6 pm) throughout the year and they make a comparison between the provision they manage and centres with small numbers of children and staff, that open during term time only and between the hours of 9 am and 3 pm.

> *Manager 1: I mean, obviously it makes you feel a bit... It's daunting when you see them (Care Inspectorate and HMiE) coming through that door and nerve-wracking potentially. You're worried, but I try to welcome it because I think it then, like, sometimes you need to know how you're doing. Yeah, you know because I'm here and getting on with things but when they come and ask well…maybe it is good to get that reassurance and then for them to say, well, actually you need to improve because I want to provide the best. So for me, I don't think I see it as a negative experience. I see it as it being positive as long as I think well is what happens fair? And this is something that they need to take into consideration as the different centres are getting managed differently and are providing different services so it's not one size fits all.*

Similar to Practitioner 2, Manager 1 highlights the need for continued improvement saying they want *'to provide the best'* and makes a link between the inspection regime and the

quality of provision however, this suggests that as a very experienced practitioner and manager they lack *confidence* in their own judgment, requiring *'reassurance'* from the inspectors. This contrasts with Practitioner 2 who appears more confident in their practice – *'we know we do a good job'* - despite the fear of the inspection judgements. This may indicate a potential difference and as the manager holds overall responsibility for the centre, they may feel the need for reassurance in order to comply and seek validation from the inspectorate more than the practitioner. Manager 1 also highlights issues of fairness, implying that it may be easier said than done to have a fair inspection process. They are clear that one size does not fit all.

As the manager identifies as responsible for the whole ELC centre they may be concerned that if they are not complying with external expectations then it is a public judgement on them. This is reflected in Manager 3's comments.

> *Manager 3: I sometimes think oh my it is quite a responsibility it is. And that is the job, unfortunately, you're taking on everything. The buck will stop at you. Yeah, probably that worries me a bit. That you, you know you, you hope, and you trust that everybody's doing a good job. I do take it quite like on board. I think is it not right I think, am I doing a good enough job? No, I do I do. Think all the time it's not a job it's a life. Yeah, absolutely. As you care about it, so yeah, a lot more responsibility and the worry that if anything's not right kind of reflects on me.*

In this comment Manager 3 is reflecting on the responsibility they feel for *'everything'* and how this responsibility intrudes on every aspect of their life – *'it's not a job, it's a life'* – they question if they are doing a *'good enough job'.* In the use of these words, Manager 3 appears to be in a dilemma, questioning themself and then answering their own question with *'no, I do I do'.* This manager is concerned and worried about the effect on the centre if they are not doing a good job.

Manager 3 is relatively new in the role of manager in a newly opened centre and they express feeling '*knots in my stomach every day'* waiting for the inspectors to arrive. They acknowledge the need for standards and consider that maybe the inspectors have assumed more of a supportive role recently but then conclude that even if they contact the Care Inspectorate for advice they would like the relationship to be '*better'* and a more '*simple'* relationship.

Manager 3: It makes you feel, I think of it as always in the back of your mind that they could come any day, and certainly as a new establishment they came within the first year. So, it's always in my mind, I'm always a bit on edge about making sure things are right. I think that's probably a good driver maybe. And again, I think they've become more of a support than what they used to be in more recent years. So, I think you're always kinda ready from there and then ready and willing to come and go.

It's not great though because I say we were waiting in the first year and probably from about six months onwards…but from probably six months onwards I had the knots in my stomach every day. Thinking, is it today and I think it's just that not knowing when they're coming. Yeah. And again, they're here taking a scrutinise, but again that is the job and I suppose places need to be, you know, adhering to things and you know performing to a standard. But you know there's definitely a feeling in your stomach always. Even if I'm contacting them about something and things like that and you just don't want it to feel like that. You want it to be a good relationship and a simple relationship.

Manager 3 highlights similar aspects to Practitioner 2 – the physical and panoptic effect on them, *'knots in my stomach every day'* and the negative effect of not knowing when the inspection will take place. This manager thinks that there is a role for inspection, or as she terms this, *'scrutinise'* in quality-assuring establishments and they appear to believe that the Care Inspectorate has provided a more supportive role recently. However, they describe having *'a feeling in your stomach always'* even when making non-face-to-face contact out with the inspection process, perhaps seeking advice and would prefer a different relationship. In his later work Foucault described modern forms of governmentality as measures that aim to affect the 'soul' or self-hood of the person rather than their bodies directly. However, in the interviews with Practitioner 2 and Manager 3 they are both describing physical symptoms of the mechanisms of power in the form of the inspectors. The mechanisms of power, as discussed by Foucault (1980:39) 'reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies'.

In the examples presented above it is Foucault's techniques of power that are present within practitioners and managers who 'cannot conceive of alternatives within the discursive possibilities we currently inhabit' (Ball, 2019:134). In these accounts, the interviewees appear unable or unwilling to contemplate the possibility of an alternative, a

different way of relating to and resisting the dominant discourses as presented by the inspectors and regulator.

Practitioner 1 provides insight into the internal quality assurance processes within their centre and is unhappy with the manner in which the self-evaluation is conducted by the Deputy Head.

> *Practitioner 1: The Deputy Head has given me the Care Inspectorate framework. She's filled out what she thinks. I then fill out what I think in a different colour. Completely rubbish because actually surely something like that should be a team effort where you sit down and you bounce ideas off and you talk about and you go ohh we're doing that, whereas actually it's just my opinion, her opinion.*

They would prefer more discussion as a staff team and as with others they describe their feelings using emotive language such as *'completely rubbish'*. The use of two colours in the written self-evaluation of practice is interesting as this exposes the practitioner, the process of recording in this way is a form of public confession, publicly and colourfully available for others to view.

> *Practitioner 1: ...and sometimes I don't agree with what's been said is, you know what she says. Oh, you know she says there's a really poor, poor environmental setup is poor. She says we will work on improving this, but I say please don't put it in black and white then it's so horrendous and you're pointing the finger at me.*

Practitioner 1 is, within their centre, a target for the exercise of power in the form of domination by the Deputy Head and this is being used to render them more powerless as due to their practitioner role they already lack power and status. The self-evaluation document described by Practitioner 1 is in effect an examination and is being used as an integral part of the 'disciplinary gaze' whereby the practitioner is subjected to 'normalising judgement' using a classificatory scheme – the Care Inspectorate Quality Framework (2021) and/or How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare (HGIOELC) (2016).

The data within this theme provides many powerful statements of how practitioners and managers experience and feel about the use of policy, in the form of quality frameworks and inspection, to exert power over them and the result, I propose, is largely compliance and submission to the normalising power of the policy and inspection. In the data, there is much evidence of compliance and very little evidence of resistance to the dominant

discourses of inspection and regulation. In my discussion chapter, I will consider that this may be linked to the relatively early stage of the professionalisation of the ELC workforce and a feeling that to comply with inspection and regulation may actually denote the ELC workforce as a profession, one that is regulated and inspected in common with other professions such as teachers.

Theme 4: Time as an allegory of attainment and quality

In the data, the word 'time' repeatedly appeared in relation to the daily practice of ELC. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Blueprint for 2020 expansion policy was designed to provide parents with a substantial increase to 1140 hours of funded ELC provision per year. This theme explores time as an allegory of attainment and quality – a story, as told by Scottish Government, that the provision of longer hours of high-quality funded provision will benefit all children and families and help to lessen the attainment gap. However, the story as told in the interview data is quite different from that of the Scottish Government as the Blueprint for 2020 policy has brought many challenges and the perception of the practitioners and managers is of having much less time to provide high-quality experiences for children.

Practitioners' and managers' responses make clear that although centres are open for longer hours and children are accessing an almost doubling of hours of ELC, in their view the expansion policy has resulted in a poorer quality of experience for children and staff.

Practitioner 1 introduces *'time'* and the lack of time in their daily practice as a key issue and a barrier to quality explaining that they feel they do not have time to even think. The practitioner reflects on past experiences and feels that in the past they had more time to reflect on practice with colleagues which helped them to develop their practice.

> *Practitioner1: Definitely time, time is a huge barrier to quality. Time for anything. Time to think. Time to… In the past I've had great opportunities to do good self-reflection with teams. Yeah, and that has enabled everyone to then move forward. But we got we just don't have the time to do that.*

> *Practitioner 1: I don't have the time. Time because actually, I'm always working late and then I go and pick up my children. I then have to sort my family out. Yeah, and that's it. Once I'm home, I'm sorting my family out, and then it will be like later on in the*

evening when I can do paperwork, if I can do paperwork. Time is such an issue. So,
whilst I know, what's the ideal, actually time is such a big point, you know? A huge
challenge and it's a huge challenge to go forward actually.

Practitioner 1 claims that their current working practices have changed core aspects of their practice and personal life highlighting that, despite working over their contracted hours, work is encroaching on family life as *'paperwork'* is completed at home in the evening. The word *'time'* is used by the practitioner nine times in the quotes above and they suggest that current working practices are not sustainable.

Practitioner 3 is critical of the Scottish Government's rhetoric that all is well whilst they believe, due to the expansion policy, they do not have *'time'* to deliver quality experiences.

Practitioner 3: But the biggest barrier to quality is time... when we've got all these
hours and all these children and all these spaces because the government and all their
ambassadors are on the telly waving, we've got this guys but time. Time is a huge
thing.

Practitioner 3 also claims that time is *'the biggest'* barrier to quality and makes links between the number of hours, the number of children, and the number of spaces within the centre. Prior to the expansion policy, most children would attend a centre for three hours either in the morning or the afternoon. As a result of the policy, children can attend centres for six hours per day although, to increase flexibility for parents, many centres, as a result now offer extended provision, opening at 8 am and closing at 6 pm and some children may attend for ten hours per day. This has meant that many new and considerably larger ELC centres were built to accommodate the increase in the number of children attending the centre all day. This appears to have resulted in Practitioner 3 feeling the number of children is high, the hours they attend the centre is long and the *'spaces'* are too many, the centre itself is too big.

Manager 1 also comments on the size of the establishment and the length of the day claiming that these aspects have a detrimental effect on quality.

Manager 1: What quality gets provided then? That's something I'm looking at because
I have noticed it when I've been doing the late shift because it seems to be wind down
time as well for staff they are getting to the end of the shift and maybe not feeling

motivated and I wonder I do find there's a difference in quality. I do. And that's me being honest and what I've identified. I think the space is too big.

Manager 1 comments on the space being '*too big'* but also that the extended day provision has had an effect on quality particularly later in the day. Discussing the expansion policy and how realistic the maintenance of high quality is Manager 2 comments make clear their view on the extended hours and like Manager 1 they are highly critical of the length of day and the negative effect on children and staff.

Manager 2: I don't think it's realistic at all, and I don't think it has been at all. I do not know what they were thinking when they thought that by increasing children's hours you would be increasing quality. These children are shattered. They are too tired to learn anything. Staff are shattered as well, they've got the same children all day from 8 o'clock to 6 o'clock at night. These children are doing a 10-hour shift. How is that producing quality from about 3 o'clock, the children are shattered. They just sit. They don't want to be running around. They don't want to be sitting and learning how to hold a pencil. Or read a story. No, they just want to be sitting quiet, doing their own thing, probably playing on an iPad if you let them, yeah.

Manager 2 is employed in a local authority centre that is open for extended hours and expresses very clear views on the impact of the expansion policy on quality for both staff and children. They claim the children and staff feel very tired in the later part of the day and question the Scottish Government's thinking that increasing the hours the children attend would increase the quality of the experiences.

In these preceding comments, time has become both a moral and a political allegory of attainment and quality. The policy has been designed to significantly increase the amount of time that children access high-quality ELC services in the belief that this will result in greater attainment levels however Manager 2, Manager 1 and Practitioner 3 express their concerns that this is morally unacceptable for children and for staff as both groups are suffering as a result of the policy.

To accommodate the expansion of hours, practitioner and manager contracts have, in many cases, been changed to include a shift pattern and fifty-two-week provision. These changes appear to have resulted in practitioners and managers feeling that they have less time available.

Manager 1: The extended days are difficult. It's a long day. I think there's definitely a difference in quality later in the day. We have children doing the 8 am to 6 pm model, that's 10 hours. They're doing more hours than what the staff are doing.

Manager 2 was asked if they thought quality had been negatively affected by the expansion policy and they responded.

Manager 2: Big time. Big time, yeah. Yeah, quality is suffering because staff are working these shifts you'll have staff turning up at eight o'clock, staff turning up at nine o'clock, staff turn up at 10:45. Then staff start leaving, so staff start leaving at 12 noon, staff start leaving at three, staff leave at six, so the poor little 'Jimmy' who was in at eight o'clock has got staff coming in and out all day, but poor you, you stay till six o'clock. He doesn't get to go home. And he says is this my long day today? They know they're there all day.

Manager 2 uses the emotive word *'suffering'* to describe how quality has been impacted. Their description of the effect on the child from staff shift patterns is stark and poignant when they say *'so the poor little 'Jimmy'…'poor you, you stay till six o'clock'*. The imagery used in this quote is powerful, with the Manager demonstrating empathy for the young child but seemingly powerless to change the practice.

Manager 2 continues to explain how *'wrong'* they believe the extended day model is, as implemented by Scottish local authorities. This model clearly does not fit with the Manager's beliefs about how young children should be cared for.

But Scottish councils are like…I've made these models where children are in from eight o'clock until six o'clock at night and it is wrong. I don't know any other way to put it. It is wrong and to then expect staff to be working shifts. It's just not what childcare is about at all.

Practitioner 1 also uses emotive language claiming that staff are '*really struggling*' due to the longer hours.

Practitioner 1: There's this big push, but actually when it comes back down and it drips back down to the floor of the nursery I think we're really struggling. I think practitioners are really struggling to keep it together because of the longer hours. I think it doesn't suit all the children and yet it's, we're being told to do these hours.

Practitioner 1 introduces the notion of compliance in the wording *'we're being told to do these hours'* and as a practitioner feels that they and others are *'struggling'* as a result and that the extended hours may not suit all children but perhaps families also comply with the policy – the hours are offered and therefore they must be accepted.

Manager 2 is adamant that the changes due to the expansion policy have had a detrimental effect on quality particularly in the centres that open for extended hours but there is an inevitability about it as the extended hours are a result of Government policy.

> *Manager 2: It's like it's completely changed, the whole early years sector has completely changed and not for the better. There's definitely less quality because of these hours. That's what Nicola gave us. That's what I'm running. Are these children getting great quality? The councils that are doing 8 to 6 definitely not, definitely not, quality has gone out the window.*

As an ELC manager, they do not feel they have any control over the policy. The wording, *'that's what Nicola gave us',* in reference to the then First Minister, suggests the manager feels these extended hours have been imposed upon centres and possibly families and, although they feel the policy has resulted in poorer quality for both children and staff, there is compliance with the policy.

Manager 1 describes feeling that they are on a *'hamster wheel'* with no time to reflect on practice as a staff team. They believe *'time'* is a barrier that prevents discussion of practice.

> *Manager 1: Time is such a barrier, you know, to actually to really, actually to use it and then you could say the in-service day is a great time to do it because you've got everybody there. But again, there's always something else. If I go back to a normal run-of-the-mill day in here and I'm doing meetings and stuff like that there's no time, you're clock watching the whole time Nancy. So, I suppose I'm going back to that time. Do we actually get the time to properly sit down and reflect and be like, where are we?*

> *No, cause you're constantly going onto the hamster wheel who is constantly going and you never take that time to actually have those discussions.*

The words *'hamster wheel'* are indicative of someone feeling they have been placed in a situation from which there is no escape, and they must keep going. Manager 1 describes feeling they are *'constantly going'* and of *'clock watching the whole time'*.

It appears from these comments that both Practitioner 1 and Manager 1 feel that the expansion policy has been imposed upon them and they are compliant with the policy. Manager 1's comment about being on a '*hamster wheel'* is suggestive of Foucault's panoptican, constantly under surveillance *'constantly going'* and unable to escape from the wheel.

This theme has illuminated practitioners' and managers' concerns with time as an allegory of attainment and quality. The story told by the Scottish Government is that expanding the length of time that young children are able to access longer hours of high-quality ELC centre experiences and as such this will improve attainment and help to close the poverty-related attainment gap. The 'golden thread' running through the expansion policy is that of high quality. Practitioners and managers recount a different story, by expanding the length of time children are experiencing ELC the children are *'shattered'* and unable to concentrate. There is a perception that rather than having more time to plan, observe and reflect on practice the practitioners and managers have less and are *'struggling'* to maintain quality in centres. The dilemma for practitioners in the allegory is that they are compliant with the politics of ELC in Scotland whilst struggling with the morality of the provision of longer hours that result in young children becoming tired which may impact negatively on attainment rather than improve attainment levels.

4.4 Conclusion

Each of the themes has identified key concepts that will provide the framework for discussion in Chapter 5. How the concept of 'quality' is valued, understood, and articulated by those with lived experiences of ELC in Scotland has been explored and analysed illuminating clear differences between these experiences and how the dominant discourse of 'quality' is presented by the Scottish Government through policy, frameworks and inspection regimes.

In Theme 1 practitioners and managers express the value they place on human relationality as a core, foundational, and prerequisite aspect of working with young children and their families. The complexity of the concept of human relationality is understood by practitioners and managers as a core aspect of their daily practice, as professionals who value the emotional and relational aspects of their professional role. This is contrasted with

the neoliberal, self-interested self as presented through government policy. These contrasting positions raise questions about how, in the pursuit of high-quality ELC services, practitioners are valued and value themselves as professionals and the wider concept of the professionalisation and inspection of the ELC workforce. Professionalism and professional identity will be discussed in Chapter 5 as overarching core concepts in how those with lived experience in ELC understand and value quality.

In Theme 2 practitioners and managers continue to express their disquiet surrounding the value they perceive is being placed on particular knowledge(s) required for their professional role. As with Theme 1, a dilemma appears to exist for those with lived experience of ELC as they wrestle with the practical application of knowledge and skills that they highly value and the neoliberal policymakers valuing of the more easily measured technocratic, pure forms of knowledge implicit in qualifications such as the HNC and Childhood Practice degree. The types of knowledge(s) that are valued by the professional ELC practitioners and managers appear to be wider than those of the Scottish Government and therefore the conceptualisation of the professional knowledge base for those working in ELC services requires discussion.

Although highlighting different aspects, Themes 1 and 2 may both be situated within the wider concept of professionalism and the professionalisation of the ELC workforce. Legislation such as the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014) and the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act (2001) and subsequent formation of the Care Inspectorate and SSSC has focused attention on the professional role of the ELC practitioner and manager. However, although ELC practitioners have, for many years, been actively advocating for greater recognition of their role and value within society, it appears from the data that the Scottish Government has imagined a different and more neoliberal subject to be formed as the ELC practitioner and manager.

An analysis of power, policy, compliance, and resistance and its effects on individuals and their practice is undertaken in Theme 3. Despite their concerns practitioners and managers appear to submit to Foucauldian disciplinary technologies – the objectifying practices – in which both invisible and visible power is used in the dominant discourses to shape and mould the ELC professional into a compliant and docile body.

The analysis uncovered practitioners' and managers' fears of compliance with and submission to techniques of power such as hierarchical observation, normalising judgments and the examination of the self as they submit to particular truths as told to them through policy, frameworks and the disciplinary gaze. There appears to be a Foucauldian (1977:138) 'policy of coercions' acting on the ELC practitioner and manager which, through a mechanism of power, manipulates, breaks down, re-arranges, and moulds them. The conceptualisation of the docile body within ELC, the body that is subjected to and complies with the power of policy is a core idea that will be discussed in Chapter 5 alongside a discussion of the apparent lack of resistance present within the interviews.

In Theme 4 the analysis considered time as an allegory of attainment and quality. The Blueprint for 2020 policy has substantially increased the hours of funded provision with a promise that the golden thread of high quality will not be compromised, and the additional hours will help to lessen the attainment gap. Practitioners and managers, however, view the expansion policy as having a detrimental effect on the quality of experience for the young child and the working lives of practitioners yet despite their grave concerns they comply with the policy. As with Themes 2 and 3, the implications for practitioners and managers from compliance and possible reasons for their lack of resistance require further exploration and discussion.

5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

> The age of 'quality' is upon us. But 'quality' itself is not a neutral word. It is a socially constructed concept, with very particular meanings, produced through what we refer to as 'the discourse of quality' (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013:92)

The search for 'quality' in Scottish ELC has come of age, the pursuit of 'quality' dominates Government, regulators, inspectors, managers, and practitioners' thinking. It is what everyone is searching for and in agreement with Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013:5) I argue that in Scottish ELC 'for the most part it is taken for granted that there is something – objective, real, knowable – called quality' but the idea that 'quality' in ELC is identifiable, universal, objective and reducible to measurement troubles me. In this chapter I discuss the analysis of my findings from interviews conducted with three managers and four practitioners currently employed in Scottish ELC centres and illuminate their lived experiences and sites of struggle with the concept of 'quality'. My dissertation did not set out to investigate the impact on the 'quality' of ELC centres from the implementation of the Scottish Government Blueprint for 2020 expansion policy (Scottish Government, 2017) however, it became evident during the interviews that this policy has had, in the view of my participants, a very detrimental effect on 'quality' in Scottish ELC. Although not intended as an aim, the wide-ranging effects of the implementation of this policy are discussed by my participants and therefore key aspects permeate my dissertation and are discussed in this chapter. I am writing my dissertation at a time of continuing and significant change within the ELC sector in Scotland with the Scottish Government's Blueprint for 2020 expansion policy (Scottish Government, 2017) implemented in 2021 - delayed by one year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In a recent report by Audit Scotland (2023:3) on the progress of the expansion policy it is stated that 'the sector is fragile' due in part to budget pressures but also highlighted the risks around the sustainability of the workforce.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the Scottish Government's focus on 'quality' and the key role of the professional ELC practitioner in its delivery, as foregrounded in the plethora of current Scottish Government guidance, frameworks, and plans. There is an emphasis on quality as the 'golden thread' running through all current ELC policies including the key Blueprint for 2020 expansion policy with a need to ensure that 'professionals are equipped with the

skills and resources they need to deliver the best possible outcomes for children' (Scottish Government, 2017b:2). The word *quality* features one hundred and sixty-one times in two key documents of the Blueprint policy (Scottish Government, 2017). However, in agreeance with McNair et al., (2021) and, based on the analysis of the findings of my data, I believe there is an erroneous assumption that the term quality, as it relates to ELC, is clearly articulated by policy and that there is a shared understanding and agreement with practitioners and managers. I propose that quality as it is currently being defined in policy and inspection regimes is a powerful term in the regulation and embedding of docility in the embodied professional and their practices. I propose that this conceptualisation of quality should be replaced with one which is in practice subjective.

I have argued, in my review of the literature, that the OECD has intervened in ELC for some time promoting a human capital discourse with an emphasis on the knowledge economy. A technical, neoliberal approach that values 'objectivity, universality, predictability and what can be measured' (Vandenbroeck et al., 2023, Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021 and Moss et al., 2016:346). Policy such as the Blueprint for 2020 is top-down and as argued by McNair et al., (2021:6) 'the documents simply sustain and reproduce systems and relations of oppression'. My analysis highlights an early years' profession that is 'struggling' with the latest policy of expansion and who maintains that this policy has had a detrimental effect on the quality of the services they provide. Emotive and powerful language, such as 'victims' was used by participants to describe the inspection regimes and the imposing of an expansion policy that they feel powerless to resist and is contrary to their own understanding of quality in practice.

These ideas bring to the fore a key concern of this dissertation, that neoliberalism has become and exerts a powerful force in ELC in Scotland which is problematic for how quality is understood and defined in the evaluation and day-to-day practices of early years professionals.

5.2 Emotion, professionalism and professionalisation in ELC

In this section, I will discuss the relationship between the emotionally reflective professional ELC practitioner/manager, the professionalisation of the sector in Scotland and the neoliberal valuing of quality. As the Scottish Government is clearly linking the

concept of quality with the quality of the workforce, I am concerned that in their desire for professional status practitioners and managers are being moulded by regulation and policy, and moulding themselves into a neoliberal construct of professionalism that marginalises or silences aspects of their professional identities and practices that they value as quality. Foucault calls this 'a regime of truth' which privileges one truth over another, one discourse has more political strength than another.

> Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the type of discourse which it accepts and makes functions as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth: the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1980:131)

In my dissertation, I explore how early learning and childcare practitioners and managers respond to the 'regimes of truth' of quality.

My findings indicate practitioners and managers value the emotional, care and love aspects of their role - human relationality – for the children and also for themselves. This is a concept that was discussed by Dahlberg and Moss (2005) as they called for a refocus on the importance of relationships in ELC and a valuing of respect and diversity. Osgood (2010:119) made a case for problematising neoliberal understandings of ELC arguing instead for the 'critically reflective emotional professional'. In recent Scottish policy such as Realising the Ambition: Being Me (Scottish Government, 2020:11) the aim is stated as an increasing expectation of high quality whilst claiming to provide support to the workforce.

> In essence "Realising the Ambition: Being Me" increases expectations of high quality but still provides the necessary support for all who work within the sector and beyond.

This policy also states that 'the key part of the environment for children is the human, social environment of positive nurturing interactions' (Scottish Government, 2020:15) which aligns itself with what the practitioners and managers value. However, the participants in my study claim that the expansion policy has not resulted in high quality as defined in the Blueprint for 2020 policy. They point to young children 'suffering' as they may spend up to 10 hours per day in ELC centres - longer than any staff member, many of which are very large to accommodate the large numbers of children, with staff working a

three-shift work pattern. They claim that this does not value or provide the space for human relationality and 'nurturing interactions' as there is regular turnover of staff throughout the day due to the shift patterns and they claim this has had a very negative effect on quality.

Recchia et al., (2018) discuss the increasing periods of time that young children spend in non-familial care and the need therefore for their emotional well-being to be supported by warm, loving, caring, sensitive adults. In the current Scottish context, the Blueprint for 2020 policy (Scottish Government, 2017) has almost doubled the funded provision of ELC for three and four-year-old children meaning lengthy hours spent in non-familial care. As the young children in their care are spending long periods of time, in non-familial care the practitioners and managers in my study believe there is an increased need to provide love and greater levels of care in a homely environment, but this appears not to be valued by those in authority.

There emerges a web of contradiction for the practitioners and managers in the regimes of truth arising in the above wording in the national practice guidance, Realising the Ambition: Being Me (Education Scotland, 2020). For Foucault (1977) regimes of truth are the dominant discourses that claim to be the only way to think and talk about a particular topic – the incontrovertible truth. However, in the national practice guidance, there are contradictory discourses or regimes of truth for ELC practitioners and managers. The neoliberal imaginary of quality is dependent on those aspects that can be observed and measured as presented in the document. For example, on page 81 of the document there are listed five individual quality frameworks and standards that it is stated will be used by inspectors, regulators, and local authorities to assure quality in ELC centres. However, in this same guidance, there is another regime of truth presented with practitioners being told that the story of high quality that involves providing positive human, nurturing interactions, aspects that are difficult to measure and quantify. The practitioners and managers in my study believe that, due to the expansion policy, they are unable to provide such experiences, which in effect means they are failing to provide high quality and are frustrated and feel powerless to resist these regimes of truth. The Scottish Government and subsequently local authorities, in providing such guidance, avoid blame as they have included both regimes of truth in their guidance.

In my analysis of the finding that human relationality is key to quality in ELC, this argument, I suggest, is further strengthened by the current policy context of longer hours spent by children and staff in ELC. Recchia et al., (2018) point to the invisibility of warm, loving, caring, sensitive adults in the practice of the ELC profession and attribute this to ELC becoming more attached to scientific, rational discourses – aspects that are measurable – such as current qualifications. This aligns with the views of my participants. A key concern expressed by the managers and practitioners in my findings is that young children are 'suffering' due to the long hours spent in ELC centres, which appears to present a dilemma. They feel a perceived need to provide measurable learning experiences, as prescribed by curriculum and policy, however, they have strong feelings of wanting to provide care as a significant aspect of their professional role. Participants recall this being the reason they entered the early years' profession but feel this aspect of the role is now diminished.

My analysis suggests practitioners and managers see their role as a professional in ELC as being connected to emotions such as love and emotional reaction in the form of care (Recchia et al., 2018; Cousins, 2017; Andrew, 2015). It is significantly important to them that children feel 'loved, safe and comfortable' through positive relationships in centres with a 'homely' environment. As well as the children being cared for some participants highlighted the significance of caring for each other as a team of professional colleagues, as one participant stated 'And we all care about each other. For me, this is my family' whilst another participant spoke of feelings of 'belonging'. Unlike Osgood's (2010) study which cited the Ofsted inspection as the primary means of assessing quality, in their initial responses, the participants in my study omit to mention Standards, regulation and inspection as being important to the assessment of the quality of the experiences with the children. When discussing inspection visits, they focus on their feelings of dread and the manifestation of these feelings as physical symptoms. This suggests they have, in effect in their daily practice, rejected the individual, embodied, self-interest of the neoliberal, rather they favour their professional selves as developed through relationality amongst themselves and with the children and families.

It has been argued (e.g., Rouse and Hadley, 2018; Sims, 2017; Cousins, 2017; Andrew, 2015) that, due to the discourse of neoliberalism which values measurable targets and accountability, professional love and care in ELC is being silenced rather than valued –

one regime of truth is being privileged over another. Rouse and Hadley (2018) argue that in the professionalisation of the early years' workforce, the characteristics of love and care have been lost. Elfer (2015) proposes that there is a correlation between staff themselves feeling understood and cared for and their emotional responses, positive and negative, to their work being valued and the staff responsiveness to the children. In my findings, the participants clearly demonstrate their desire to be professional practitioners and managers who value emotion in the work they do and understand the care needs of the very young children in their care but significantly value care for each other. Osgood (2010:131) analyses the meaning of professionalism and argues for greater recognition of emotion in ELC:

> …by increasing opportunities available to reflect upon the emotional toil expended in 'giving of oneself'…Emotional professionalism should become celebrated rather than denigrated and obscured from public discourse.

There appears to be a dichotomy between who the participants are as early years professionals, in what they see as a caring profession, one that embodies emotional capital and the profession they believe they have been moulded into – as the neoliberal, standardised, bureaucratic subject (Osgood, 2010). This dichotomy is concerning, as in the voices of my participants, often cracking with emotion, there is evidence of sites of real struggle with participants expressing how important they believe it is for children to feel 'love' and be 'cared for' and feel that 'they're valued' whilst in ELC centres. The practitioners and managers believe that the expansion policy has made it very difficult for them to continue to be the caring, emotional practitioner they value (Campbell-Barr, 2017; Taggart, 2016). These same participants then describe feeling subject to victimisation as they, the professional ELC practitioner and manager, become subjected to quality assurance, regulatory and inspection processes. The language used is powerfully descriptive such as 'we are the victims', they describe feeling 'terrified' with physical symptoms such as 'your heart is racing', 'your sweating', 'you're terrified', 'a feeling in your stomach always'. They describe feeling 'completely rubbish' and 'we're all struggling' with one participant saying they 'need to find a new path' suggesting the time has come to leave the ELC profession. These findings will be discussed in more detail in section 5.4.

I argue that my findings demonstrate that there is a serious need for attention to be given to the role of emotional labour in the lives of Scottish ELC practitioners and managers. I am concerned that, as my analysis reveals, the current levels of regulation and inspection

accompanied by the Blueprint for 2020 expansion policy are having a negative effect on the quality of ELC provision in Scotland and significantly on the lives of practitioners and managers. Nussbaum (2003) argues that society has succeeded in marginalising emotion, through the construction of conceptual dichotomies which privilege one side of the dichotomy over the other. In a similar way to male being privileged over female, reason privileged over emotion, a focus on learning in ELC plays into this binary and de-values the professional caring role of the practitioner despite a body of literature that has established emotional investment as integral to ELC (Osgood, 2006, 2010; Taggart, 2015 and Andrew, 2015).

The practitioners and managers in my study highlight their struggles with their conception of quality valuing emotion in their work with children and families. This is, they claim a core aspect of their identity and Practitioner 1 feels they have reached the point of leaving the ELC profession as the struggle has become too great. Ball (2019), Ball and Olmedo (2013) and Moss (2019:99) discuss that towards the end of his life Foucault shifted his work to an emphasis on 'technologies of the self' or 'care of the self'. This work focused on the importance of each person as a 'work of art' with our own identity, our own subjectivity and our own struggle against the effect of power on our identity. The term 'subject' has two meanings for Foucault, both suggesting 'a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to'. One meaning relates to the state of subjection 'to someone else by control or dependence' – in my study practitioners and managers are subject to control by regulators and inspectors – and the other meaning makes reference to the self-configuration of an identity 'by conscience or self-knowledge' (Foucault, 1982:212). I argue that whilst there is evidence in my data of practitioners and managers as subject to control by others and compliant with the *practices* of performativity, they have an identity 'by conscience' one that values human relationality within the concept of quality in ELC. As mentioned above for one participant the 'care of self' means leaving the ELC profession she has been devoted to for more than two decades.

As discussed in Chapter 2, there have been significant shifts in the perceptions of ELC practitioners from being *simply* carers of young children to being professionals (McGillivray, 2008; Wingrave and McMahon, 2016) and the professionalisation of the ELC sector has reconceptualised ELC practitioners' role to focus more on the learning aspects with care being placed within the context of learning (Recchia et al., 2018; Rouse

and Hadley 2018; and Joyce et al., 2023). As highlighted in my findings, most practitioners and managers, whilst not overtly critical of how the sector has been professionalised, do make clear that in terms of the quality of provision they highly value human relationality and the emotional aspects of their professional role. They express their belief that human relationality is a core foundational and prerequisite aspect of working with young children and of key significance to providing high-quality experiences for children.

I argue that a core aspect remains elusive – a clear and agreed understanding of the attributes, skills and knowledge(s), needed to care for and educate the young child. Based on my findings, there is a significant lack of parity between the attributes, skills and knowledge(s) needed for the professional role that the practitioner and manager, in my study, value - their professional identity – and those that are valued by the Scottish Government and regulatory bodies such as SSSC. These differences may be contributing to how practitioners and managers value themselves and the quality of the provision they offer. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the practitioners and managers in my study demonstrate their compliance with measurable standards and outcomes through inspection and regulation however, they are also very sure of the value they place on human relationality and the emotional labour of their role.

Vandenbroeck et al. (2023) and Eadie et al. (2022) outline features of ELC quality characterised as falling between two domains: structural quality – understood to include features of the learning environment, practitioner qualifications and professional learning, and process quality – understood as the children's experiences and interactions with adults in the centre. Process quality reflects 'a particular value on the interactions and experiences children have' within the centre including the emotional care they receive (Edwards, 2021:9). In my findings it is process quality that is valued and significantly this, I propose, differs from those signifiers of quality that are foregrounded by the Scottish Government. In core policies such as the Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland Quality Action Plan (Scottish Government 2017a:4) and standards such as the National Standard for Early Learning and Childcare Providers (Scottish Government, 2018) the focus is on a structural outcomes-based approach to quality, in the case of the expansion policy it is stated that:

> The development of the action plan was an opportunity to think systematically about the drivers of quality in early learning and childcare and how they link to child outcomes, to ensure that there is a comprehensive policy framework for continuously improving quality.

This policy states that 'the single most important driver of the quality of a child's ELC experience is a high-quality workforce' and lists essential characteristics of quality that are concerned with reviewing qualifications, continuing professional learning and quality assurance through inspection (Scottish Government, 2017a:6). The need for human relationality in the form of interactions with children is not mentioned until much later in the list. Similarly, in Care Inspectorate publications the emphasis is on quality evaluations and the role of SSSC in setting qualification benchmarks and continuing professional learning.

This section has discussed how the Scottish Government, through policy, focuses on quality as regulation, qualifications, and professional development – quality as structural – however, this is contrasted in my analysis by both practitioners and managers who value relationality as a core aspect of quality. Not what they are but in how they relate to themselves, to the children and families and to each other. The knowledge(s), skills and qualifications of the ELC professional and the effect these have in the pursuit of quality was a core finding from my study and these will be explored in the following section.

5.3 Knowledge(s), skills and qualifications

The managers and practitioners in my study discuss the knowledge(s), skills, and qualifications that they consider essential in the practice of ELC and how these relate to quality. What emerges is a potentially unclear shared understanding of the knowledge(s), skills, and qualifications that are valued in relation to quality. The term 'child development' and establishing what participants mean by this term is particularly problematic.

I utilise a poststructuralist approach and as such argue that all knowledge is incomplete and biased in favour of specific groups of people who all vie for power and status, all wanting to claim to have found the universal truth (Campbell-Barr, 2017). I challenge the idea that

we can really know the truth about how young children develop – the binaries of normal and not normal, good or bad. I propose therefore that the inconsistencies in terms used such as child development regarding knowledge(s), skills and qualifications is perhaps not to be unexpected in a neoliberal context that claims truth can be categorised by such classifications and binaries. This view is in agreement with MacNaughton (2005:22) who argues that:

> Our knowledge about the world is inherently and inevitably contradictory, rather than rational, and consequently, that many different truths about the child and about early childhood pedagogy are possible.

I propose, in this section, to first discuss a key but problematic term, that of 'child development' which is valued by some participants, and contrast this with neoliberal, technocratic practice. I will then discuss credentialism including its role in the production and professionalising of ELC practitioners and managers. This section will conclude with a discussion of the current knowledge base for ELC in Scotland in relation to quality. I will relate these findings to Foucauldian regimes of truth, objectification and bio-power.

The terms 'child development' and 'basic child development' were used by all managers to denote an aspect they believe is missing from the practice of those who have qualified more recently. In contrast, they are highly critical of practitioners' practices that focus on measurable tasks that can be quantitatively assessed. The terms used by the managers and one experienced practitioner such as 'basic child development' and 'the practical side of things' are ambiguous; however, I draw a correlation between the absence of 'child development' knowledge and 'trying to tick boxes'. I suggest that managers and experienced practitioners value the practical *application* of knowledge in practice and see the neoliberal, technocratic practice of measurement as a barrier to practice and quality. The managers question the validity of the content of the latest iteration of the HNC practitioner qualification. Manager 3 discusses that 'practitioners need to be skilled…there's a lot of skills and educationally learning to be done' but they claim that 'the practical side of things' is very significant. These are significant findings from my study that highlight core differences in views between what the experienced practitioner/manager values in terms of required knowledge and the knowledge and skills they claim are valorised in the more recent qualifications. These core differences in the required knowledge base are discussed by Dahlberg et al. (2013:46) and I am in agreement

with their thinking that there are 'many children and many childhoods' and rather than practitioners waiting upon 'scientific knowledge' to tell them who the child is and what they are capable of there are choices to be made. The young child may be viewed in neoliberal terms as *tabula rasa*, one to be made ready for school - the child to be filled with knowledge, trained as 'a knowledge, identity and culture reproducer' (Dahlberg et al., 2013:48). This concept of the child and childhood may sit well with the description of the practice of those with the newer qualification.

Although they express it differently the experienced practitioners also highlight that they too have concerns about the effect on quality from current practices. Practitioner 1 states that in their view child development is important but that this may now be overlooked due to the completion of paperwork. Practitioner 1 states:

> 'knowledge and understanding of child development I think is really key. I think we're missing that maybe sometimes because we are so busy trying to tick boxes'.

Similarly, another experienced Practitioner 2 highlights 'all this black and white paperwork' as 'takes over' and 'takes away from quality'.

The focus of my dissertation is *quality* in Scottish ELC and although I did not ask a question specifically about knowledge(s), skills, and qualifications the participants included these aspects in their answers to my question regarding what aspects of quality they valued and in so doing demonstrate that they make connections between their knowledge(s), skills and qualifications and the quality of provision. The participants in my study have a range of qualifications and have a wide range of experience from under five to over twenty years of experience in ELC. These experienced practitioners appear to value an understanding of the child as having inherent capabilities, but whose development is biologically determined – the child as nature (Moss, 2019, 2017; Wood and Hedges, 2016). One participant – a manager - claims that a good practitioner could 'work out of a cardboard box' if 'they've got that spark' suggesting that there is something more, a 'spark', required for the role alongside the knowledge(s) and skills learned through accredited qualifications.

The managers in my study all made mention of the more recently developed apprenticeship qualification routes now being offered and claimed that these may present a positive development as Manager 3 stated the apprentices are learning 'on the job'. I believe this indicates the value they place on the practical elements of the day-to-day work and tacit knowledge of the skilled professional practitioner working with children (Campbell-Barr, 2018, 2017).

However, at the same time, manager participants claim that more recently qualified practitioners do not have 'that basic child development knowledge' and this is something they claim is fundamental whilst at the same time they suggest that the more recently qualified practitioners are more concerned with the completion of paperwork and reference to theory. It is by no means straightforward to understand these claims and a number of factors may be at play. I suggest that this inconsistency may have arisen as a result of the content of qualifications and the time in the history of ELC. The managers in my study all have more than twenty years' experience in ELC and undertook their initial qualification at a time when developmental 'truths' of the young child influenced pedagogy and practice. Bloch (1992) argued that the desire for scientific data about child development was directly linked to early years practitioners' wish to be seen as a professional and qualifications reflected this:

> In an effort to be scientific and professional, early childhood education professors appeared to emulate child psychology, varying in the constancy of their attention to early childhood education and pedagogy issues (Bloch, 1992:15).

From a Foucauldian perspective child development became a regime of truth – a discourse of normal or abnormal development and developmental stages – that govern ways of knowing, thinking, acting and feeling about the young child. MacNaughton (2005:26) argued that this trend continued into the twenty-first century and, as neoliberalism took hold in ELC, key international institutions such as the World Bank began to 'link normal child development with effective economic development'. The current trend is to objectify the young child and practitioner using powerful 'human technologies' – the collection of assessment data used to ensure compliance to targets and standards (Moss, 2019:13). These neoliberal regimes of measurement and data generation are discussed by Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes (2017), Vandenbroeck (2020) and Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2020) that through, for example, the OECD (2017) project, the Early Learning and Child Well Being Early Study (IELS), what appears to matter most in ELC is the 'individual development of

the child' with programmes of measurement and data collection reducing the child to a technical procedure (Vandenbroeck, 2020:418). The practitioner working with the child is little more than a technician, executing the value-free and universal test to generate data on a child.

This is the practice that I propose the experienced participants in my study are referring to and are critical of – the fatalism of neoliberal objectification of the young child and the practitioner, the idea that there is one regime of truth, one story to be told or as Vandenbroeck (2020:423) writes 'only one road to walk and that the data will objectively tell us where that road leads'. In considering quality the managers in my study, in contrast, value knowledge and skills that view young children as capable, individual persons, with hopes and dreams, children who develop in non-linear, non-uniform and discontinuous ways. Children who as stated by Manager 2 'children just need to play and they'll learn through play if you just let them'. This manager is critical of practice whereby the young child is datafied through paperwork such as 'personal learning plans'. This is an example of what Foucault terms 'governmentality' knowledge(s) being used to construct dominant discourses or stories that claim to be true. The practitioner is to be seduced by the power of narrow definitions of what the young child can and cannot do, developmental norms that take no account of individualism. In so doing the practitioners define the child and their professionalism and practice through measurable data that may have far-reaching consequences for the young child and, I argue, for the professional practice of the individual practitioner.

Foucault (1978) referred to regimes of truth's 'ethical substance' arguing that regimes of truth are able to be unmasked if we seek the ethical substance of the particular regime of truth that is governing us. In so doing we should ask questions of ourselves, in this case in my study findings, ELC practitioners and managers, questioning how to be true to themselves, to their beliefs and practices. It is through questioning that we begin to analyse 'micropractices of power' – what Foucault (1984) referred to as the care of the self, reminding ourselves (themselves) how to act and think. Foucault (1980, 1988) argued that through choice there is the possibility to disrupt and choose different regimes of truth that we value. As discussed by MacNaughton (2005:43) Foucault considered it 'a violence to be enslaved within a regime of truth' and argued for knowledge to be used 'tactically by

destabilising officially sanctioned truths'. In so doing ELC practitioners and managers would open up spaces for other ways of working with and knowing young children.

Biesta (2017:322) argues that professional judgement is being replaced by demands for 'an evidence-based approach' whereby the professional opinion of the practitioner is no longer trusted. In using neoliberal, technicist practice the practitioner is compliant with their professional identity being shaped by neoliberal values. The managers and one practitioner who highlighted these views during the interviews are very experienced in ELC and all have a Childhood Practice degree. It may be that it is their experience and qualifications that give them the knowledge and confidence to express their views. The less experienced practitioners with the newer HNC qualification may lack the experience but also the knowledge to challenge dominant discourses. As mentioned earlier in section 5.2 one practitioner with less than five years of experience states they are 'a product' and in 'a mould' that has been created for them. Such practitioners, I suggest, may be compliant with the dominant neoliberal discourse that values regimes of measurement and data collection. They feel safe in the practice of 'ticking all the boxes' and 'write (ing) up accounts of practice' as stated by Manager 2 in contrast to the 'let them play' that requires time to play, to observe, time in which the practitioner may be getting it right or wrong for that child. Time and the agentive professional judgements of practitioners are core to the idea of quality as described by the managers. Perhaps the experienced managers are saying that it is time to escape the dominant neoliberal regime of truth to 'let them play' differently:

> We escaped a domination of truth, not by playing a game that was a complete stranger to the game of truth, but in playing it otherwise or in playing another game, another set, other trumps in the game of truth (Foucault, 1988:15).

I propose that further consideration requires to be given to the potential differences between what the practitioners/managers value and those aspects that they perceive as valued by the Scottish Government, Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), and provided for in the current choices of validated ELC courses in Scottish colleges and universities. A core aspect, therefore, to consider in this dissertation, in addition to the emotional, caring attributes and characteristics outlined in section 5.2, is the knowledge(s) and skills that my participants claim are important in the fulfilment of their professional role in practice and that they value in contributing to quality within ELC.

In agreement with Kay et al. (2021), Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021) and Archer (2022), I argue that neoliberalism has shaped ELC policies and in turn the power of such policies has shaped and affected pedagogy, provision and practices of ELC professional practitioners. Archer (2022:3) argues that:

> policy texts frame the ideal early educator as a compliant technician, but also as autonomous, entrepreneurial, self-improving, subject to both vertical and horizontal surveillance (i.e. by both regulators and peers).

Archer (2022:3) continues that ideal professional identities are 'established through desirable knowledges, skills, behaviours and attitudes in qualifications criteria and occupational standards'.

In a recent study by Joyce et al. (2023) considering the impact of the Childhood Practice degree on the professionalisation of the Scottish ELC workforce, the level of responsibility required in the ELC practitioner role is highlighted. It is asserted that the early years professional will focus on the social, emotional, developmental, and learning needs of the children they are caring for and educating. This is alongside working in partnership with families and other partners such as health professionals and schools whilst under high levels of scrutiny. This indicates that a wide range of skills, knowledge(s) and understanding is required in the role of the professional ELC practitioner as well as a culture of agency. My study is in agreement with Archer (2021), Campbell-Barr (2018, 2019), Andrew (2015), and Urban (2014, 2022), who argue that due to the complexity of the ELC working environment, a plurality of knowledge(s) is required and using a defined standard set of expert knowledge and a list of skills to define professional practice is problematic.

The Scottish Government's route to professionalising, upskilling and valuing the ELC sector has been through a top-down approach and a valuing of 'professionalisation through academicisation' (Wingrave and McMahon, 2016:710). A formal credentialised status in the form of an HNC for practitioners and a degree for managers is obtained by demonstrating a series of competences. This is in line with public discourse definitions of professionalism as understood by having a body of specialist knowledge and qualification, able to self-regulate and exercise high levels of autonomy. However, it may also foreground an approach in which individuals are being judged against set criteria – the

Standard for Childhood Practice – as they perform professionalism. As Osgood (2010, 2009, 2006) has argued, a neoliberal, technicist imposing of Standards thereby increasing government control and regulation. This could result in a diminishing of the very aspect that ELC practitioners have historically sought – professional recognition and autonomy - and as Osgood (2009:9) describes this could create 'a situation whereby individuals increasingly judge and limit themselves to a normalised and conformist construction of professionalism'. This is seen in a comment by one of the more recently qualified practitioners in my study who states that they feel they are 'a product' of the time they trained following the passing of the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act (2001) and believe they are 'in the mould that was created for me to step into'.

All managers and one of the practitioners in my study are graduates from a BA Childhood Practice degree programme however they make very little reference to the degree as enhancing their skills and knowledge as managers and practitioners or in how the degree has improved quality. In contrast, they discuss the value they place on their initial qualification, either SNNEB or an earlier iteration of the HNC in providing them with the skills and knowledge needed in the practitioner and current role. One of the practitioners in the study, who has recently graduated with a Childhood Practice degree expresses the pressure they felt from their local authority employer to undertake the degree - although it is not a requirement of their registration. Having recently graduated this practitioner is considering leaving the early years profession due to feeling 'exhausted' by the demands of 'paperwork' now required as part of her practitioner role. My findings, I propose, suggest an ELC workforce that, in an attempt to professionalise, still feels subjected to what Foucault (1978:140) terms 'bio-power': 'an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving subjugation of bodies' to explain how people are steered in a particular direction by the government without the use of violence but in ways that minimise resistance. Foucault (1980) also argued that the subject, in this case, the ELC practitioner/manager is produced as a subject through power relations whereby individuals are, as described by Ball (2016:1131), 'the subject is then governed by others and at the same time governor of him/herself'.

This is evident in practice with many local authorities providing funding to practitioners to undertake the Childhood Practice degree, a degree designed for those in managerial roles. The degree is not required by SSSC to register as a practitioner, so the key questions arise

as to why early years practitioners, such as those in my study, are being funded by local authorities to undertake this degree – a degree that requires hours of study not provided for by the local authorities – and why they comply with local authority requirements to undertake this degree. As I have described, the purpose of the Childhood Practice degree is to support those in, or aspiring to, managerial roles. I propose that employers, such as local authorities, in an effort to future-proof for managerial roles value the achievement of the qualification itself rather than the content knowledge derived from it, some of which may in fact be ineffectual for practitioners. It is an exercise in normalisation and conforming to a particular standard (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021; Moss, 2019). A means to achieve objectivity and predictability in the ELC profession for all, not just those in managerial roles, those the degree content has been designed for as specified by SSSC.

The skills, attributes and knowledge(s) required for the ELC practitioner and manager have been considered in the two reviews of the ELC workforce that have been undertaken in the last 20 years. The first review in 2006 made clear, in the following statement, that quality in ELC was dependent on the level of staff qualifications.

> Again, research is showing us that high-quality outcomes for children are directly associated with the level of qualification of centre staff. (Scottish Executive, 2006b:7)

This resulted in a review of initial qualifications and the introduction of the BA Childhood Practice degree in 2008. The need to 'upskill' the ELC workforce was further documented in the second review of the ELC workforce (Siraj and Kingston, 2015). I argue that the reviews of the Scottish ELC workforce, as outlined above, and the subsequent policy, place emphasis on levels of qualification and standards. However, as stated by Siraj and Kingston (2015) the ELC workforce, like the participants in my study, raised concerns about the content of qualifications and this has largely gone unheeded. As stated by Dunlop (2015), the main policy thrust is to increase qualification levels.

Joyce et al. (2023) and Wingrave and McMahon (2016) discuss the professionalisation of the Scottish ELC workforce through credentialism and the positive effect on quality in ELC as a result. Joyce et al. (2023) argue that the Childhood Practice degree has been a highly positive move and has provided graduates with many opportunities to advance their careers and professional roles. Similarly, Wingrave and McMahon (2016) report

participants in their study believe the Childhood Practice degree to be of direct benefit to them in terms of their professionalism and self-worth. They do however note that going forward the role of care within ELC requires to be addressed. Whilst specialised knowledge is recognised as a core identifier of a profession (Young and Muller, 2014; Siraj and Kingston, 2015), the data from my findings highlight that for managers and practitioners, qualifications in themselves do not equate to professionalism – with a claim that the current qualifications may be foregrounding knowledge and practice that mitigate against quality. In reality, the pressure felt by some of my participants to achieve degree-level qualifications is having a negative effect on their roles and sense of achievement within their ELC experiences. Nor are qualifications a given predictor of quality.

I propose that my findings suggest an ELC workforce that, in an attempt to professionalise and realise a professional identity, feels it is now being steered in the direction of these neoliberal constructs of quality, those that value the level of qualification for both the manager and the practitioner with little regard for the appropriateness of the content. The Scottish ELC workforce has and continues to feel undervalued as a profession and therefore I agree with Joyce et al. (2023) and Wingrave and McMahon (2016) that the Childhood Practice degree may be helpful in increasing feelings of self-worth, credibility and professionalism for managers. I suggest that by undertaking the degree, early years managers may enhance specific managerial knowledge and skills however, my findings critique the content of the current qualifications as a means to enhancing the current quality of provision. A clearer understanding of the knowledge(s) and skills base required in the professional ELC practitioner role would appear to be required.

In agreement with Campbell-Barr (2018), I propose that ELC quality in Scotland has become caught between the dichotomies of neoliberal, positivist approaches and poststructuralist approaches that recognise multiple forms of knowledge. I propose that my analysis demonstrates that managers and experienced practitioners, reflecting on current valued knowledge are concerned by what they believe is an emphasis on 'theorists' and 'ticking boxes' at the expense of practical aspects of the role. As discussed by Fenech (2011), Cottle and Alexander (2012) and Osgood (2012) ELC practitioners often have difficulty describing their role in tangible ways and the participants in my study had difficulty in articulating the knowledge(s) required for their roles and the effect of knowledge(s) on quality. Most participants were clear that a knowledge base that was

focussed on 'learning how to write up accounts of practice', 'trying to tick boxes' and being 'in about these theorists' was not helpful in determining quality. Manager 2 was emphatic stating 'that is not quality that is absolutely not quality'. This is, I argue, a rejection of neoliberal, technicist practice. Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021) describe educators developing an understanding of themselves in terms of developmental norms, the identity of both the educator and the child are determined by these norms with the educator the calculator and the child the subject of the educators' calculation. Neoliberalism is working on the subject, the ELC practitioner in this case, to produce a subject who internalises neoliberal images to the extent where they accept them as the norm and become the neoliberal 'this is who I am' subject (Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021:92). Manager 2 is refusing to accept this practice as contributing to the quality of ELC and is questioning the 'kind of self' that the more newly qualified practitioners have become. This does require self-questioning as Ball (2016: 5) asserts, 'what kind of self, what kind of subject have we become, and how might we be otherwise?'.

The difficulty my participants have in articulating a clear knowledge base for Scottish ELC is, I argue, unsurprising due to the constantly shifting sands of practice and plethora of pedagogical approaches and influences introduced over the past 20 years. Local authorities have introduced many influential examples including, the Reggio Emilia approach (Kinney and Wharton, 2015) Scandinavian-style outdoor learning, forest school/nursery, New Zealand's Te Whariki learning story approach to assessment, and more recently a return to holistic, child-centred learning Froebelian principles (McNair et al., 2022). Organisations provide additional qualifications in for example forest nursery and one Scottish university is a provider of the Froebel in Childhood Practice qualification. Local authorities endorse these by funding practitioners to undertake these qualifications, usually in their own time. One of the managers in my study, highlighted their local authority spending large sums of money to replace existing furnishings with Froebelian influenced natural wood furnishings, hessian wallcoverings and outdoor clothing/boots in every ELC centre in an effort to introduce Frobelian principles as a means of improving quality. The manager was highly critical of this claiming the result is a complete lack of individuality and a 'McDonald's – we all look the same' look and feel to centres. Whilst international influences may be welcomed in Scottish ELC I argue that this results in a constantly shifting knowledge base and this is unhelpful for practitioners and managers.

Hordern (2016:509) discusses the importance of the professional community having a shared conception of the knowledge base required and the importance of being able to articulate the knowledge base of their work in ELC. Shared understandings enable practitioners/managers to 'communicate and co-operate, both with each other and with others' but also to develop the capability to challenge dominant discourses and government objectives. Hordern (2016) argues that certain types of professional knowledge are afforded more importance than others depending on the involvement of particular public bodies, institutions, and organisations. The Scottish Government has a high level of interest and investment in ELC and therefore the knowledge base of the professional ELC practitioner/manager is, I argue, shaped by particular conceptions of knowledge. I argue the knowledge base is being influenced by a range of actors including the Scottish Government, local authorities, SSSC, and the Care Inspectorate and these policymakers articulate a valuing of more measurable knowledge(s) to suit their ideologies and priorities. Campbell-Barr (2018) discusses the education of the ELC workforce as crucial to the quality of the provision and this is a position articulated in current Scottish policy such as the Blueprint for 2020: A Quality Action Plan (2017). Increasing qualification levels is a current policy priority, and as seen through the funding of degrees by local authorities, therefore there is a valuing of educational knowledge produced in and by academic institutions. However, as acknowledged by Campbell-Barr (2018), and present in my findings, there is a need for both theoretical knowledge and practical skills – the know-that and the know-how of practice. Campbell-Barr (2018), Andrew (2015) and McGillivray (2008) argue that in their daily encounters with children, ELC professionals develop an innate set of characteristics - their practical wisdom.

> This is everyday knowledge, the logic of practice, which comes from daily engagement with the particular tasks of working with children, and the embodied knowledge that develops as a result (Andrew, 2015:352).

Participants in my study emphasise that experiential knowledge is less valued and silenced by policymakers in current theoretical, neoliberal constructs of the ELC professional.

Cannella (1999:36) writing about the 'othering' of children argues that modernist, scientific ways of viewing the young child as 'other' than the adult dictate that the child must gain knowledge legitimised by the older, wiser adult. In a similar way, I suggest that the ELC practitioner/manager is being 'othered' by the dominant discourse that is neoliberal, top-down, officially sanctioned forms of knowledge. As suggested by Urban

(2008:140) there is an 'epistemological hierarchy' which forms part of an 'effective means of control and regulation of diverse individual practice' and leaves practitioners with little influence over the knowledge base. Similarly, Moss (2014) argues for a rejection of understanding ELC knowledge as pre-determined and linear with prescribed outcomes achieved by applying particular technologies to the child: in contrast, he argues for practice that frees the child and I argue, the practitioner, to the creation of ELC environments that encourage experimentation, theory-building, meaning-making, where the unexpected is positively welcomed.

I assert that the manager participants, in particular, in my study are attempting to challenge reductive, technical, managerialist influences, present in current qualifications and practice as the only valued indicators of the knowledge(s) required for quality provision. I argue, as discussed in section 5.2, that they value the emotional and caring aspects required in their roles and, as I have proposed here, also value practical know-how of the role such as spending 'time in maternity wards' and in 'children need (ing) to play' whilst being observed by skilled practitioners. The practitioners themselves do not discuss specific qualifications but also express the negative effect on the quality of ELC from practices of targets, box-ticking, and data collection.

Significantly, and in contrast to a recent study by Joyce et al. (2023), those participants in my study who are graduates of the Childhood Practice degree programme make no mention of the degree in enhancing either their knowledge and skills or the quality of the centre. It appears that they make little connection between the quality of their daily practice and the content of their degree. In the context of ELC in Scotland, the expansion policy has resulted in a re-emphasis on the young children accessing services that seek to combine educational learning programmes with childcare as the children are attending centres for between six and ten hours each day. Colleges and universities offering practitioner and manager qualifications therefore may need to consider, in conjunction with SSSC as the regulator of the profession and validator of qualifications, the content of the qualifications offered to ensure fitness for purpose.

As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, ELC in Scotland is currently at a time of continuing and significant change and some uncertainty. I propose, therefore, that the development of shared conceptions of the professional knowledge(s) and skills in ELC

would increase the agency of ELC practitioners and managers and enable them to challenge dominant discourses which would lead, I argue, to improvements in the quality of practice.

5.4 The allegory of power – time, docility, and compliance

> Stories are, in short, the way in which we make meaning of our world and our place in it, rendering our existence meaningful…stories, then, are ubiquitous. They are how all of us 'weave reality'; they help us explain and justify what we think and do. Depending on your perspective or viewpoint, stories can be good or bad, enchanting or disenchanting, can have beneficial or harmful consequences, can trap us in dysfunctional positions or help us to move on (Moss, 2019:4).

In this section, I use the allegory of frameworks, inspection, time and attainment to discuss a story, in this case a political one, that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning and I propose that the story as told by the participants in my study is one of power. As participants discussed aspects of their roles within ELC during the interviews, they were invited to consider the effect of quality assurance practices, inspection regimes and regulatory frameworks on quality within the ELC sector. Participants also considered any barriers to quality they thought may exist. Through analysis and interpretation of the lived ELC experiences of my participants, the allegory of the power of policy, inspection regimes and regulatory frameworks and the hidden meanings within of time, docility, and compliance are revealed.

Foucault's work has power as a central and recurring concept (Foucault, 1977; 1980; 1983; 1988) and focuses on the relationships present within power. For Foucault, we are never outside of power relationships in that we are subjected to power but also exert power on others.

> Whatever they are – whether it be a question of communicating verbally…or a question of a love relationship, an institutional or economic relationship – power is always present: I mean the relationship in which one wishes to direct the behaviour of another (Foucault, 1987:11).

As I mentioned in section 5.3 Foucault (1978:140) used the term 'bio-power': 'an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving subjugation of bodies and the control of populations' to explain how governments steer people in particular directions in

such a way as to minimise resistance. Foucault termed the 'numerous and diverse techniques' as 'disciplines'. The diverse techniques that Foucault describes, as applied to ELC practitioners, may include *normalisation* – conforming to a standard (policy, regulatory framework, inspection regime) that expresses how the adult behaves, *regulation* – the use of specific truths to control ways of thinking and being *and surveillance* – the ELC practitioner expecting to be closely observed and monitored. I argue in this section that the practitioners and managers are, through policies such as the Blueprint for 2020 (Scottish Government, 2017), regulatory frameworks and inspection regimes subject to the disciplines of normalisation, regulation and surveillance.

Foucault also used the term 'governmentality' to explain how power works by insidiously taking hold of the person(s), in this case, the practitioner and manager as they embody the dominant discourse of the policy. As discussed by Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021) and Moss (2019) there are many stories or regimes of truth told about children, adults and the life and work of ELC. Having listened to the practitioners and managers describing their current lived experiences I consider the ELC expansion policy to be one current regime of truth in Scottish ELC. With high quality as its *golden thread* the policy is framed within a neoliberal discourse whereby:

> The Scottish Government recognises that the earliest years of life are crucial to a child's development and have a lasting impact on outcomes in health, education and employment opportunities later in life…this is why we are making an unprecedented level of investment in the early years (Scottish Government, 2017a:2).

I propose that there are three core aspects to this policy: *time* – an almost double entitlement to funded early learning and childcare to 1140 hours a year for all three and four-year olds and eligible two-year olds; *attainment* – the policy references the OECD's claim that a cornerstone of closing the attainment gap is the provision of high-quality, accessible ELC; *quality* – this is the golden thread at the heart of the policy and will be achieved through robust quality standards and inspection. These core aspects of policy combine to produce a particular story for the participants in my study. The Scottish Government, through the disciplinary power of the policy, is exerting a regime of truth on the practitioners and managers by providing them with time to enable the provision of high-quality experiences making them responsible for the reduction of the attainment gap whilst robustly inspecting their performance. The story is essentially that the practitioners and managers have double the time they once had to provide children with high-quality

experiences and therefore the result will be a reduction in the attainment gap. As the *golden thread* of the policy is high-quality then this must be assured through robust systems of self-evaluation, surveillance and inspection, measurements that may be used to justify Government spending (Scottish Government, 2020, 2017).

However, as participants discussed their experiences it became clear that, in relation to the expansion policy and their daily practice, their perception is that time and the lack of time is a key issue and in contrast is a barrier to quality. On first analysis this appears to be counter-intuitive, the expansion policy means that children are spending almost double the number of hours in centres than before so why do my participants claim they 'don't have time for anything' not even time to think? By way of context, prior to the expansion policy, children would typically attend centres for either a morning or an afternoon session of around three hours. The expansion policy means that children now attend full-day sessions, typically a centre that in the past accommodated fifty children in the morning and fifty children in the afternoon now has one hundred children attending full-day sessions. As a result, many new and large centres have been built and staffing has doubled (Audit Scotland, 2023). Practitioners and managers make the point that centres are very large to accommodate a large number of children and as I discussed in section 5.2 staff are working on a shift pattern. They claim this is detrimental to quality for children and staff and are highly critical of the current policy stating it is unrealistic. In agreement with my study, Urban (2022:393) highlights the global expansion of early education and care provision but challenges the thought that 'the dominant paradigm of universality (of development), measurability (of predetermined outcomes), and governability and manageability (of quality)' can be allowed to continue. Every participant in my study criticised the policy of expansion and strongly emotive language was used to describe the effect on the practitioners and managers and significantly their claims of the detrimental effect on the children. They unanimously claim that quality has been negatively affected by the policy.

As mentioned above the Scottish ELC expansion policy is framed within neoliberalism, and in agreement with Moss (2019:12) I argue this is used as 'a major plot line in the story of quality'. So, the story reads like this: there is a clear relationship between intervening early - Scottish Government funding for 1140 hours of education and childcare for all three and four-year olds and eligible two-year olds - with correct human technologies such as early years curricula and set developmental milestones and the outcome sometime later, is

that society (and the child) reaps the benefit. I will return to the term human technologies later in this section but for now, I make the point that the expansion policy that has almost doubled the time young children spend in ELC centres is a story of quality and high returns. The young child is an economic potential who will flourish if the correct human technologies are applied. The more time the young child spends in a high-quality ELC centre the higher the return and the practitioners and managers are responsible for the quality of experiences.

The participants in my study, however, appear to be rejecting this neoliberal story, and as Manager 2 claims the policy has changed the whole early years' sector 'and not for the better'. Manager 1 concludes that they feel they are on a 'hamster wheel' that never stops whilst constantly clock-watching. The additional hours are not welcome as the practitioners and managers claim they are having a detrimental effect on children, staff and the quality of provision. However, as discussed by Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021) policy-makers the world over fear falling behind in the global education race with the media and politicians using data gained from testing programmes to determine who are the winners and losers. Scotland is part of the race and policy in Scottish ELC is powerful and although in my interview data participants are highly critical of the expansion policy, they are compliant. The data in these findings demonstrates that the lived experiences of ELC professionals is as compliant, docile practitioners and managers who despite many years of experience feel unable to resist as they 'struggle' to provide the golden thread of quality. As mentioned in section 5.2, one of my participants, a very experienced practitioner is leaving the ELC sector. They have devoted more than two decades to the profession however, due to the exhaustion of trying to provide quality whilst at the same time struggling with feeling undervalued, they are contemplating leaving the profession. This practitioner questions the morality of a policy that in practice sees large numbers of young children gathered together, spending long periods of time in large centres staffed by practitioners working in shift patterns.

As discussed above I now turn to a discussion of the effect of another form of human technology, that of regulatory frameworks and inspection regimes, and the effect of these human technologies on my participants. By way of providing context, Scottish ELC is subject to rigorous inspection and scrutiny by two separate inspection bodies – Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate each using their own framework; HGIOELC (2016) is

used by Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate uses A Quality Framework for Daycare of Children, Childminding and School-Aged Childcare (2022). Education Scotland provides some advance notice of inspection whereas the Care Inspectorate provides no notice preferring to conduct unannounced inspections.

The findings did show some slight differences between the managers' experiences and those of the practitioners in the use of regulatory and self-evaluation frameworks. The managers generally claimed these to be of some use in helping them to understand the quality of aspects of the centre practice. Practitioners were less familiar with publications such as How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare (Scottish Government, 2016) which may indicate their lack of involvement in self-evaluation. Practitioner 1 however discusses the internal quality assurance system in her centre which makes use of the Care Inspectorate (2022) A Quality Framework for Daycare of Children, Childminding and School-Aged Childcare. They describe feeling 'completely rubbish' and their pleading to the Depute Head not to 'put it in black and white' as 'it's so horrendous and you're pointing the finger at me'. This practitioner is describing the internal use of the externally imposed quality framework and has become a self-governing professional as described by Bradbury (2013) and Roberts-Holmes (2015). They are under both the internal gaze of the simplified governing data embodied in the Depute Head whilst at the same time experiencing the external gaze of the Care Inspectorate. Although slight differences are highlighted in the use of regulatory and self-evaluation frameworks, there was unanimous accordance between managers and practitioners regarding their feelings and fear of the effects of the external scrutiny of the inspection process. Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016:120) assert that 'high stakes performance data increasingly acts as a 'meta-policy'' steering practitioners from a distance. Managers and practitioners described the experience of surveillance and inspection in very negative and emotive terms. The participants in my study focus mainly on the Care Inspectorate's unannounced inspection process when discussing their views towards inspection regimes. The Care Inspectorate may as argued by Foucault (1977) be utilising a range of technologies to exercise power over the actions of individuals.

Manager 1 discusses that although feeling 'worried' and the inspection being 'daunting when you see them coming through that door' they 'try to welcome it' as 'maybe it is good

to get that reassurance'. Foucault (1977) describes this as a process whereby the subject, through a process of self-governance willingly complies and also resists.

> He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (Foucault, 1977, pp. 202–203)

The practitioners clearly express their fears of quality assurance practices, inspection regimes and the effects, physically and psychologically on them – the professional person. Practitioner 2 spoke of the weight of responsibility they feel, saying they fear the outcome of inspection – 'bad grades for the centre' if they, the individual professional practitioner, 'do one thing, one thing wrong when the inspectors are in'. This practitioner used particularly emotive language 'so obviously we are the victims' they feel fear of an impending inspection and the power of the inspection, governmentality – a control technique to make the subject governable. Foucault described modern forms of governmentality as measures that aim to affect the soul or selfhood of the person rather than their bodies directly. However, Practitioner 2 and Manager 3 describe physical symptoms that affect their bodies, of the mechanisms of power in the form of the inspection. The mechanisms of power, as discussed by Foucault (1980:39):

> power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives.

As seen above in this data, the power and negative effect of regulatory and inspection regimes on practitioners and managers is very clear in the highly emotive language used by participants to describe their experiences. I propose my participants are describing forms of subjectivity, the practitioners and managers feel they are under constant surveillance and the 'not knowing' when the inspectors will arrive is a significant factor. Practitioner 2, who used the word 'victims' to describe their feelings also spoke of their fear on arrival at the centre car park in the morning and seeing two cars they did not recognise, fearing the cars belonged to inspectors.

The findings discussed above focus on performativity and surveillance, the power of the inspection regime. In 2003, Stephen Ball wrote about 'the terrors of performativity' and although this writing focussed on teachers, I argue that twenty years later those same

terrors are being visited on the practitioners in my study. Ball (2003:216) describes performativity as:

> a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic).

Ball (2003:216) continues to explain that the performances, serve as measures of the value or quality of an individual or organisation and crucially within a 'field of judgement'. The key question is who controls the 'field of judgement' or put another way who decides what is to be measured and what constitutes a satisfactory, good, excellent, or unsatisfactory performance. Such inspection and grading sit within a culture of competitive performativity and accountability and my participants' fear of 'bad grades' and the accompanying inspection report is significant to the point of physical bodily symptoms as they wait for the unannounced inspection, symptoms that increase when the inspection is in progress. Practitioners 1 and 2 feel there is individual accountability, Practitioner 1 feels that 'the finger' is being pointed at them, and Practitioner 2 worries that grades will be affected negatively if they do 'one thing wrong'. Foucault (1977:136) describes the docile body, 'a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved'. Foucault (1979:294) also describes those responsible, often managers, as 'technicians of behaviour' and their task is 'to produce bodies that are docile and capable'. In my study, there is little difference between the feelings of the practitioners and the managers towards inspection regimes and I therefore suggest the managers are as much 'docile and capable' as the practitioners are.

The practitioners and managers I interviewed were at times emotional during the interviews and I am in agreement with Osgood (2006:6) that due to increased attention and investment from central government, in the case of Scotland embodied in the Blueprint for 2020 expansion policy, individual ELC practitioners and managers are fixed 'in a web of objective codification'. They are subjected to a myriad of measurements, judgements, and comparisons with information recorded in the form of a public report. Foucault (1977:170) used the term 'the examination' to explain the use of 'simple instruments; hierarchical observation, normalising judgement' in other words the inspection as part of the culture of accountability. There is a feeling of uncertainty and a sense that they are constantly being judged and never knowing when the next judgement will come. A theme in most

interviews was their concerns over doing a good enough job by comparison to others in the sector, and I argue my participants have become as Ball (2003:220) describes:

> ontologically insecure: unsure whether we are doing enough, doing the right thing, doing as much as others, or as well as others, constantly looking to improve, to be better, to be excellent.

The culture of intensive surveillance and performativity is discussed by Proudfoot (2021); Page (2015, 2017); Hope (2016) and Perryman (2006) and the metaphor of the 'panopticon' (Foucault,1977) is highlighted. The panopticon, a circular building with an observation tower in the middle, enables those in the middle to observe what is happening in the circular building at all times. In relation to the ELC sector, the inspectors and their quality assurance frameworks are in the tower, and the practitioners and managers occupy the circular building, without the physicality of the building. The panopticon at its simplest is as I have described here but Foucault (1977:170) considered the visual element as just one aspect noting that disciplinary power is to 'train' or 'make' individuals that regard individuals as 'objects and as instruments of its exercise'. Central to the power of Foucault's panopticism is that those being observed begin to engage in the practice of self-surveillance and monitoring of their own behaviour. As self-surveillance takes hold the effect of external inspection becomes permanent and those involved, in this case, ELC practitioners and managers are constantly engaged in self-reflection and self-surveillance never knowing when they will next be externally inspected. There is evidence of the power of the panopticon in my findings as Manager 3 describes always thinking about inspection and it not being a job but a life, they speak of having 'knots in my stomach every day'. Manager 1 describes feeling 'on a hamster wheel' – surveillance is omnipresent.

Foucault (cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982:231) argued that 'power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere including from us'. It is possible to free ourselves from power by deploying what Foucault's called 'parrhesia' – the practice of free speech. Parrhesia helps us to generate alternative truths and challenge those officially sanctioned truths as found in policy and therein to care for ourselves. Westerink (2020:254) elaborates on parrhesia and taking care of oneself as characterised by:

a free-willing concern with oneself, a finding pleasure in oneself, and a devotion to one's self – not as an act of egoism, but in fact as a starting point for a care of others and the world.

Practitioners and managers claim that the Blueprint for 2020 expansion policy has negatively affected quality in the ELC sector however in what Osgood (2006:7) and Ball (2003) describe as 'forms of ventriloquism' they have accepted and embody the policy technologies. They do not believe in the policy that has required new contracts, new ways of working, new vocabularies – and are rendered docile and able bodies – but I suggest, in agreement with Ball (2003:216), it may be for the practitioners and managers who agreed to be interviewed in my study that:

The ground of such struggles is often highly personal. Expressed in the lexicons of belief and commitment, service and even love, and of mental health and emotional well-being. The struggles are often internalised and set the care of the self against duty to others.

That said it may be time for ELC practitioners and managers to develop parrhesia, to free themselves as subjects through thought and action, to care for themselves, and in so doing care for the children and families.

In this section, allegory has been explored through discussions of time, docility, and compliance. In the answers provided to my interview questions that informed this section the participants were often emotional as they described their lived experiences of regulatory frameworks, inspection regimes and quality assurance systems. Their fears of the inspection regimes and their embodiment of these regimes are concerning.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the analysis of the findings of my interviews with practitioners and managers with lived experiences in the Scottish ELC sector in relation to existing literature. The participants' conceptions of 'quality' have been discussed to illuminate what they value and, I argue, how this differs from what Scottish Government conceptions of quality.

The findings developed into four themes, and these were analysed in Chapter 4. These themes have been further distilled through engagement with literature and have been discussed in this chapter. In section 5.2, I consider the clear links made in current Scottish Government policy between the concept of quality and the quality of the workforce. I am concerned, as I argue, that practitioners and managers are being moulded by regulation and policy, and moulding themselves into a neoliberal construct of professionalism that marginalises or silences aspects of their professional identities and practices that they value as quality. The interview findings demonstrated that my participants place value on the emotional, caring aspects of their professional roles. They value the complex concept of human relationality as a core, foundational, and prerequisite aspect of working with young children and their families and claim that human relationality is a significant indicator of quality. This is contrasted with the neoliberal, self-interested self as presented through government policy.

In section 5.3 I discuss a dilemma that appears to exist for those with lived experience of ELC as they wrestle with the conceptions of the professional knowledge(s) and skills as valued in professional qualifications and the practical application of knowledge and skills that they highly value in their pursuit of quality. In attempts to professionalise the sector, the neoliberal policymakers valuing of the more easily measured technocratic forms of knowledge more implicit in qualifications such as the HNC and Childhood Practice degree are discussed. The knowledge(s) base that is valued by, particularly the more experienced professional ELC practitioners and managers, appears to be wider than those of the Scottish Government and this is problematic. The core significance of professionals being able to clearly articulate the knowledge base for their profession and the implications on their professional agency of not doing so is discussed in this chapter. I argue that the aspects discussed in sections 5.2 and 5.3 are sites of struggle for the participants in my study as they wrestle with Foucauldian regimes of truth and the Scottish Government's privileging of one truth over another, one discourse with more political strength than another. Enabling them to challenge dominant discourses would lead, I argue, to improvements in the quality of practice.

In the final section 5.4, I discuss the allegory of frameworks, inspection and time. The current expansion policy is contributing to the story and my participants claim is having a detrimental effect on quality in Scottish ELC. Despite their concerns practitioners and

managers appear to submit to Foucauldian disciplinary technologies – the objectifying practices – in which both invisible and visible power is used in the dominant discourses to shape and mould the ELC professional into a compliant and docile body.

The themes taken together highlight some significant dilemmas for the ELC profession in Scotland and I am concerned by the effect of the dominant discourse of power on my participants. Foucault (1972) proposed that although power is pervasive, that it is not necessarily repressive, arguing that power can be opposed, individuals can learn through the possibility of choice to refuse to be governed as they are and individuals can find their true selves, and shape their own subjectivity. In a 'politics of refusal' Ball and Olmedo (2013:86) consider the active role that teachers are beginning to take in forming their definition of who they want to be or become and thereby begin to 'care for themselves'. Although this study took place with teachers, I argue that it is applicable to the early years' practitioners in my study.

I argue that Foucauldian concepts may be developed to provide counter-discourses and open possibilities for agency and empowerment. The following words of Foucault (1983:216) state the position as I also see it:

> Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of a 'political double bind', which is the simultaneous individualisation and totalisation of modern power structures.

Resistance is possible for the ELC sector in Scotland, and I propose that however small, there are micro signs of resistance. In Chapter 6 I will move the discussion beyond neoliberal understandings of quality, beyond the panopticon and beyond the terrors of performativity, to propose that resistance is not only possible but desirable. Utilising Foucault and building on the work of others, notably, Goodley and Perryman (2022), Archer (2022), Proudfoot (2021), and Ball (2019) I will argue that where there is power there is resistance and resistance is possible for the Scottish ELC sector.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Major Conclusions

My research study has focused on the early years sector of Scottish education, a sector that has undergone significant changes in investment, policy, and practice over the last twenty years. The Scottish Government has an oft-repeated stated aim to give all children in Scotland 'the best start in life' (Scottish Government, 2018/19) with high quality as the golden thread running through the current expansion policy.

However, I am concerned that the changes to policy and legislation that have taken place have further strengthened a neoliberal discourse of investment to achieve high quality and high return, and that this discourse may have resulted in a neoliberal definition and valuing of quality. As I have argued in this study, a core aspect of a neoliberal discourse of quality is surveillance through measurement, inspection, and regulation to ensure that, in this case, the 'golden thread' of quality is being achieved. The practitioners and managers working in the ELC sector in Scotland are subjected to many forms of surveillance through quality frameworks and inspection by two separate regimes.

My dissertation brings to the fore a core aspect: that practitioners and managers may not have a shared understanding of the term quality. And, that quality as defined and valued by the Scottish Government may differ from that of the practitioner and manager. This research presents my concerns about the effect of extensive surveillance on the individual practitioner and manager and therefore the Scottish ELC sector. As this study has explored the lived experiences of practitioners and managers, it provides a significant contribution to the knowledge of how practitioners and managers may experience discourses of quality and quality assurance regimes and the effect on them of being subjected to such neoliberal practices. I claim these regimes may produce docile and able-bodied Scottish ELC practitioners and managers and their responses to discourses of quality and surveillance are significant to this dissertation. I therefore aimed to answer the question: In what ways do early learning and childcare practitioners and managers respond to discourses of quality and surveillance?

In this dissertation, I have demonstrated that the practitioners and managers in my study highly value relationality as a core aspect of the quality of their professional work with the children and their families. Every participant claimed that caring relationships and emotional responses were integral to quality in ELC but that this was very challenging to achieve. My study revealed that the expansion policy has resulted in large spaces being built to accommodate greater numbers of children and that the hours offered may be, through the lived experiences of my participants, too long for young children and for the practitioners/managers themselves. Staff may be working a three-shift pattern which is problematic for the children as the regular change-over of staff is unsettling and their key worker is often leaving before them. My research has demonstrated that children and staff appear to be 'struggling' with the expansion policy, highlighting that children who attend from 8 am until 6 pm experience a longer day in the centre than the staff do, and this length of day may be detrimental for a young child. My study has illuminated that the aspects of quality that my participants appear to value, such as relationality, may not be valued by policymakers. The rhetoric of relationality is found in core policy and guidance, but this research has revealed that discourses of reductionist measurement of the children and themselves by 'ticking boxes' appear to make it challenging for practitioners and managers to remain true to their professional judgements and values.

My conclusion is that although policy and the national practice guidance state the need for a 'human, social environment of positive nurturing interactions' (Scottish Government, 2020:15) the expansion policy has added to this being an unrealistic goal for practitioners and managers. Many centres are large spaces built to accommodate the bigger numbers of children attending and have been planned and resourced to a standard plan meaning they have, as one of my participants stated, a 'McDonald's' feeling of sameness rather than a homely, nurturing environment in which to celebrate the plurality and difference of children and adults in Scottish ELC. My research has demonstrated that the practitioners and managers feel they are unable to provide the caring, nurturing, emotional responses and processes that are so important to them and that they highly value in their practice as the environments are too large and bland with too many children attending centres for lengthy periods of time and with a constantly shifting staff team.

Through my study it is revealed that some participants, particularly the managers, are critical of the knowledge content that is valued in the current iteration of the HNC

qualification and although all managers and one practitioner in my study are graduates with the BA Childhood Practice degree, they made little mention of the value of their degree in relation to the quality of their practice. The managers' criticism of the content of the HNC is that practitioners are learning how to complete 'tick-box' assessments of narrow domains of the children's learning, and this is not valuing what the young child is actually capable of doing and being if simply provided with opportunities to play. In a Scottish-based study published in 2021 by McNair et al., it is suggested that the introduction of 'tick-box' assessments for children has presented a 'professional dilemma' with the difficulty of matching the knowledge that is valued by practitioners with that which is valued by local authorities (McNair et al. 2021:3).

McNair's et al. (2021) study claims that practitioners place greater value on the professional codes of practice produced by their professional body, the SSSC, academic learning, and their practical experience. However, in contrast, my research has found practitioners place value on their practical experience and whilst in agreement with McNair et al. (2021) problematising the valuing of tick-box style assessment of children's learning, they made little mention of the contribution that academic learning or SSSC makes to the quality of their practice. This further contrasts with Wingrave and McMahon's (2016) study and I propose this may be due to a change in the profile of those undertaking the degree. The Childhood Practice degree is designed for managers, however, my study demonstrated that practitioners feel under pressure from employers to undertake the degree but may not see the value in doing so. I conclude that my study has found that practitioners and managers may value knowledge gained from the practical experience of working with children, families, and experienced colleagues. They may not necessarily value the knowledge gained through HNC, particularly the latest iteration of the HNC, and degree study or the codes of practice produced by their professional body, and I propose this may be because they recognise a disparity between this knowledge as a neoliberal understanding of knowledge and quality and their emphasis on relationality as core to quality. Andrew (2015) and Campbell-Barr (2018) discuss the privileging of particular forms of knowledge in education such as pure and technical forms of knowledge that ignore practical wisdom, a form of embodied, relational knowledge that comes from everyday engagement with children and families. This may be because practical wisdom can be difficult to articulate due to its 'fuzzy logic' (Andrew, 2015:352) and is often at odds with reliance in ELC on the knowledge base of developmental psychology. As stated by Andrew (2015:352):

> Skilled practitioners, working in widely varying early childhood settings, have developed extensive amounts of practical wisdom, and this form of knowledge may end up more significant for them than the abstract knowledge or technical skills gained through formal qualifications.

I argue that this is a significant finding from this study, and it is important that attention to this contrast is drawn and addressed.

Campbell-Barr (2018:82) argues that making the case for a knowledge-base for ELC could be 'considered at best dichotomous and at worst non-existent' due to differing constructions of professionalism. The technocratic model of professionalism with its top-down construction could be considered too narrow and fails to recognise the complexities of ELC whereas the counter-discourse foregrounding an ethic of care may be considered too subjective. It is important to acknowledge that both the production and validation of ELC knowledge often take place outside of the profession with policymakers determining what constitutes professional knowledge. The result of this top-down process risks silencing knowledge from within the ELC profession in favour of restricting knowledge to that which meets the desired outcomes-based policy objectives.

Hordern (2016) and Young and Muller (2014) add to the discussion highlighting that postmodern accounts at best question the certainty of knowledge and more extremely that, knowledge as a concept does not exist. Knowledges exist in the plural, dependent on interdependent persons as they encounter each other in the real world. I argue, in the neoliberal context of the early years centre however, that knowledges are restricted to a knowledge imposed by powerful voices such as SSSC and the Scottish Government. It is challenging to determine how a shared understanding of valid, reliable, professional knowledge for ELC, one that is not dichotomous, can be established. However, as 'the application of expert and specialised knowledge' (Campbell-Barr, 2019:38) is considered central to a profession, and distinguishes it from an occupation or a workforce, it is therefore perhaps of some urgency for Scottish ELC.

The ELC sector is rich and diverse and there are many ways to work with young children that encompass many knowledges and skills. As Campbell-Barr (2019:51) writes 'there is no simple process of studying an early years-ology' and whilst developmental psychology

is often considered as the theoretical core for early years professionalism there is no one interpretation of it. Indeed, ELC professionals, policymakers, and parents may interpret child development in different ways. My dissertation has highlighted the differences that may exist between the knowledges and skills that are valued by practitioners and managers and those of the policymakers and those who regulate and provide qualifications and codes of practice. My findings highlight the value placed by my participants on professional knowledge gained through practical experience and a favouring of apprenticeship qualifications due to their practical development and application of knowledge.

In attempting to find a professional knowledge base that can be relied upon and to establish a shared understanding of valid, reliable, professional knowledge I align my thinking with Campbell-Barr (2019) who asserts that professional knowledge in ELC is an ongoing process of professional learning, and the knowledge base comes from the application of knowledge in practice. The participants in my study value knowledge that is relational, intuitive, and situated within multiple and diverse contexts and discourses recognising that, as Campbell-Barr (2019:105) states, 'it is not possible to universalise knowledges and skills'. To enable knowledge to keep evolving 'there is no utopian point of knowing' within the early years as knowledges and skills may change over years, months, weeks and sometimes hours.

Taking a post-structuralist approach, as I have done, challenges that there is absolute knowledge and deconstructs a given reality or truth arguing that it is impossible to have 'undistorted' knowledge. As explained by MacNaughton (2005:22):

> poststructuralists challenge the idea that we can discover or learn the real truth about young children's development and about good (or bad) early childhood pedagogies…poststructuralists believe that our knowledge about childhood and about early childhood pedagogies is inherently and invariably contradictory, rather than rational…

Urban (2022:386) highlights an epistemological tension – if the theoretical foundations that underpin ELC continue to draw on bodies of knowledge that are generated externally rather than 'field-generated…ways of knowing, being and doing' this leaves the sector subject to external domination. This imposed knowledge is at odds with what Moss (2014) calls the utopic space where knowledges and practices in ELC are co-created. Based on the

findings of this dissertation and the discussion above I am calling on the early years sector to refocus their gaze and their discussions on the knowledges that are encountered and found salient in their practices. In this context, the practitioner and manager are recentred as persons who both know and seek to know. This recentring requires professional bodies and organisations to move away from inspection and knowledge from above to listening and dialogue with practitioners and managers who know. SSSC and organisations such as the Scottish Government may present their gaze on early years practice however this is acknowledged and valued as only one partial way of looking and knowing, more important is the gaze and the knowledges from below, from practice.

A highly significant finding was the effect, on my practitioners and managers, of surveillance through quality assurance frameworks and inspection regimes. I elicited highly emotional responses when I asked practitioners and managers about their use of these publications and, particularly in relation to inspection regimes, my participants used highly emotive language to describe their feelings. My research has demonstrated that whilst the quality frameworks and standards could be helpful as discussion tools with colleagues, it is when they are used by inspectors to reduce the quality of my participants practice to a one-size-fits-all, tick-box exercise that they find this highly problematic and are very fearful of the process, with one participant describing themself and colleagues as 'victims'. This dissertation has clearly illuminated the awful fear felt by my participants, under pressure to assess themselves against quality frameworks and standards and to submit to the surveillance of inspection regimes. Participants in my research fully understand that as they are working with very young children there is a need for the quality of experiences to be assured and for children to be protected from harm. However, they explained the effect on them from current inspection regimes both the physical effects of 'sweating', 'your heart is racing' and 'feeling terrified' of getting something wrong and the psychological with one more recently qualified practitioner reflecting on being 'moulded' as they worded it. I conclude that rather than feeling empowered to be the professional, caring, responsive human beings they are, through processes of biopower and governmentality (Foucault, 1978) they appear to have become subjugated and docile bodies who are compliant with the dominant regimes of truth. This study contributes to the contemporary understanding of Scottish ELC, one in which practitioners and managers may feel they are caught in the panopticon always waiting fearfully as the 'victims' for the next act of surveillance.

My participants positively value quality of services for the children and families with whom they work and are very clear about what quality means to them and what it is they value – relationality and time to interact with children, families and each other - it is the quality assurance mechanisms with their more easily measured parameters of quality that cause my participants difficulty. Such quality assurance models as used in Scotland have become more widely used in other countries (OECD, 2015) captured by neoliberalism and the tension between the quality rhetoric and the global neoliberal agenda means that alternative quality assurance models are hard to come by.

Muller (2018:4) describes that under the neoliberal gaze practitioners and managers in ELC are governed through new public management and have become subject to:

> metric fixation…the seemingly irresistible pressure to measure performance, to publicise it and reward it, often in the face of evidence that this just doesn't work very well.

Although Moss and Roberts-Holmes (2021:152) acknowledge that neoliberalism is a powerful force they do claim that it is 'eminently resistible' by questioning the underlying assumptions and assertions. I am proposing that alternative quality assurance models are not only possible but necessary not least to protect the well-being of practitioners and managers in Scottish ELC. Currently, the quality frameworks represent a valuing of the early years' professional by measurement and numbers rather than valuing what they are capable of being in relationship to the children, families, and each other. Although my participants were secure in what they valued in terms of quality they struggled in the face of the current quality assurance models and inspection regimes. They need help in moving their dissent beyond the confines of the private self and as Urban (2022:383) suggests:

> The covid19 pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the crucial role of early childhood education as a common good and public service, essential for the functioning of societies.

In considering alternative quality assurance models I am concerned with the OECD (2015) claim that there is a trend toward increased monitoring and evaluation of early childhood education and care across countries. As outlined in Starting Strong 111 (OECD, 2012) different methods and models are used by countries to assure quality. As can be seen a number of countries reported on in Starting Strong IV (OECD, 2015) have improved and refined their monitoring methodologies, particularly in the monitoring of structural quality aspects such as regulatory compliance and staff qualifications. Inspection of both care and education is widely used in OECD countries when monitoring service quality. It is to this turn to alternative quality assurance models that I now focus on the Swedish, New Zealand, and finally Italian experience. I propose the Italian experience holds the closest alignment to a potential post-structural approach.

 The Swedish approach to quality assurance and inspection as outlined by Vallberg-Roth (2015:13) is set in legislation, the Education Act (2010), which stipulates that 'the quality of all preschools must be regularly and systematically documented, followed up, evaluated, and developed'. According to the OECD (2015), the Swedish model is responsive to the needs of national audit and evaluation. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate, an independent agency, is the national authority that scrutinises and monitors the quality of preschool establishments but within a decentralised system that combine local regional assessment with national quality audits. This aims to ensure comparability across preschool establishments. There are three levels of quality assurance responsibility – preschool, municipal and national levels with the stated purpose that these lead to improvement. The Swedish government advocates systematic quality assurance but recognises the importance of adapting to local needs and conditions with inspection areas chosen to align with local responsibilities and the autonomy of the preschool centre. In addition to external monitoring of quality each ELC centre in Sweden conducts internal evaluations and are required to submit an annual self-evaluation report. Significantly the active, participatory role played by all staff, children, and parents in quality improvement in a spirit of democracy, participation, and influence is noted (Vallberg-Roth, 2015) however it is unclear how this is achieved alongside current levels of internal and external scrutiny.

In New Zealand the Education Review Office is responsible for external evaluation and makes clear in their Principles of Practice (2021:np) document that 'technical rigour in evaluation design; data gathering; analysis, synthesis and reasoning; and the

communication of evaluation information' is a core principle. The document continues highlighting that 'the evaluation process promotes external accountability and strengthens professional accountability'. Before being visited by the ERO review team, centres have the opportunity to conduct an internal evaluation to assess their effectiveness and to share their thoughts about their practices. However, this is in the knowledge that the internal evaluation will be used by the ERO review team during the visit, to 'evaluate the quality of internal evaluation processes and test the validity of internal evaluation findings' (Education Review Office, 2021:np). In addition to quality assurance processes Alcock and Haggerty (2013) have perceived that New Zealand has shifted its focus from the holistic wellbeing and contribution of the empowered child, as portrayed in the Te Whariki curriculum to a set of 'quality outcomes'. Alcock and Haggerty (2013) describe the trickery of neoliberal governmentality as seen in the Ministry of Education website which depicts a narrow focus on school readiness and literacy and numeracy as needed for future employment. In this example, the quality assurance model is different from that of Scotland because of the emphasis on internal evaluation. Likewise, another difference is that there is a single body responsible for inspection in New Zealand. However, the narrow focus on literacy and numeracy to ready children for school has similarities.

It is in turning to quality assurance models in Italy that a valuing of diversity is to be seen. There is no national system of monitoring and preschool centres in Italy are inspected and quality monitored at a local level thereby reflecting the diversity of centres. Individual inspectors of regional scholastic offices decide their own procedures in a local context and inspections are carried out on an *ad hoc* basis if at all. There is no general inspection framework with a mix of tools and procedures chosen by individual inspectors under the auspices of local monitoring bodies. Any internal self-evaluation is conducted voluntarily sometimes with the help of an external partner such as a university. In Italy monitoring and inspection reports are not made available to the public. Whilst I do not advocate for inspection activity in Scotland on an *ad hoc* basis and I am not recommending the removal of all quality frameworks, the Italian approach to quality assurance is more in line with Foucauldian thinking that there is no one regime of truth. Rather Foucault (1992:9) advocates that the goal is to explore 'to what extent it might be possible to think differently (penser autrement)'. The challenge for ELC in Scotland is in moving from the current position towards what Foucault terms the:

> the critique of what we are and experiments with the possibility of going beyond…the art of voluntary insubordination, and a practice of intractability (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1987:108, 32).

In seeking ways to rebuild quality from the inside in a way that my participants could support Urban (2022:394) proposes that due to the crucial role of ELC as a public service, radical steps are needed to disrupt current thinking 'from vantage points *within* the field'. This approach places at the centre the lived experiences of all those who individually and collectively - children and families, educators, policymakers – contribute to ELC systems. In line with Urban's (2022) thinking I argue that there is an urgency to the task of refusing the dominant discourses of universality, governability, and quality management. A different story needs to be told from *within* Scottish ELC – the story of quality that my participants value. Moss (2017) claims that there are alternative discourses and examples of these flourishing at a local level. This claim is borne out by Archer (2022) who discusses De Certeau's (1988:18) concept of 'la perruque': the wig, whereby individuals adopt the wig as a means of disguising subtle, quiet *micro resistance* and in so doing 'the worker's own work is disguised as work for his employer'. In the example provided by Archer (2022) the practitioner complies with what is asked by her manager to a limited extent and the manager believes her wishes have been complied with. It is a 'charade of compliance…a sleight of hand response to the policy' (Archer, 2022:7). Each small act of resistance such as this is a means to rebuilding quality from inside – the quality that is valued by my participants.

Finally, my research is timely and significant as it provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on the effect on quality from the recent implementation of the expansion policy. Significantly they unanimously highlighted the detrimental effect on quality from this policy claiming both they and the children are 'suffering' as a result of the policy. The children and families have been provided with a near doubling of funded hours in an endeavour to narrow the attainment gap. I conclude however that this may, as I have argued in Chapter 5, be simply the allegory of the power of policy, inspection regimes and regulatory frameworks and the hidden meanings within of time, docility, and compliance. Time and resources have been provided by the Scottish Government, and families have been promised high-quality experiences for their children. The quality assurance and inspection regimes are in place so the powerful message that my participants are receiving is that the expansion policy cannot fail and if it does the finger of blame will point in the direction of the practitioners and managers who have failed to deliver high quality.

Research into quality and neoliberalism in ELC has been conducted in an international context, notably by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013), Moss (2019, 2016, 2014), Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021), Vandenbroeck et al. (2023) and Urban (2022) however there has been very little research in a Scottish context which this research has sought to address. McNair et al. (2022) reported on a small pilot study undertaken with early years practitioners in Scotland considering what quality in early years provision entails, particularly in this time of change and expansion. The study concluded that quality is a much-used term in Scottish ELC settings and understandings of the term can be subjective, yet powerful. McNair et al. (2022) then argue that Fröbelian principles could ameliorate some of the issues regarding quality in Scotland. Whilst this may be a key aspect in the way forward, as I discussed in Chapter 5, I suggest that the Scottish ELC sector has been tossed around from one pedagogical approach to another, such as Reggio Emilia, Scandanavian-style forest nursery, and of late there has been a resurgence of Fröbelian principles (self-reflective, active, creative children developing at their own pace, nurtured by knowledgeable and supportive adults) as outlined in this paper. I acknowledge that it may be helpful to understand international approaches however, I propose that an application of pedagogical approaches without an understanding of power and surveillance in ELC may leave practitioners and managers to deal with yet another pedagogical change, which they are responsible for learning and implementing, without the ability or opportunity to question, discuss and resist.

I am sure the 'golden thread' of high quality may continue to be the aim of Scottish ELC policy. The First Minister points out how proud he is of the generous current and continuing Scottish childcare offer with the policy of expansion set to continue. The First Minister for Scotland outlined in his speech to Parliament, on 5 September 2023, his Programme for Government 2023-2024 which included expanding the government's childcare offer. The details will emerge in the coming months but there is a commitment in the speech to expand provision for two-year-olds and in some authorities, childcare funding will be available for babies as young as nine months. However, my research has highlighted and concludes that the early years sector in Scotland appears to be fragile. My study is therefore timely and makes a significant contribution to research in this area in a Scottish context. I argue that my study provides new knowledge based on the lived experiences of practitioners and managers who are currently working in the sector and implementing the policy. This research provides an insight into the aspects of quality that

are valued by my participants in their practice, and I conclude that there are many differences between what they value and what is valued by the Scottish Government. Viewing Scottish ELC through a Foucauldian lens provides an opportunity for practitioners and managers to find ways to describe and resist the construction of a neoliberal discourse and valuing of quality in the ELC sector.

6.2 Practical Recommendations and Implications for Practice

In the light of Foucault (1977) within my research, I have argued that through specific normalising inspection and regulatory techniques performed on the ELC practitioner and manager, a goal in Scottish ELC appears to be the achievement of governmentality. Foucault (1977) explained that in pre-modern times governance would be achieved by repressive, physically oriented violence and that this has been replaced in modern societies. However, Foucault (1977) argues that the replacement may now lie hidden beneath the surface in unacknowledged aspects of power. This modern form of governmentality utilises neoliberal measures or techniques that affect the soul or self-hood of persons. Many actors such as the OECD, policy-makers, inspectors and regulators, who may see themselves as experts, both decide and create knowledge with the purpose of producing 'normal', conforming individuals. The ELC practitioner and manager striving to be considered professional succumb to political tactics that constitute specific ways of knowing. Foucault wrote in 1980 that successful normalisation produces 'self-controlled' bodies:

> …in thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking rather of its capillary forms of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes, and everyday lives (Foucault, 1980:39).

Scottish ELC practitioners and managers have been seeking professional status for many years and therefore may be an 'easy target' due to their perceptions of a lack of power and status within the education system however, as Ball (2016, 2019) proposes the time may be right to use Foucault 'to think differently about education and learning' (Ball, 2019:132). Ball (2019:133) continues that Foucault as a philosopher of contestation and difference:

> seeks to undermine self-evidences and open up spaces for acting and thinking differently about our relation to ourselves and to others, and identify and refuse and transgress the horizon of silent objectification within which we are articulated.

Most of the practitioners and managers that I interviewed are, in their own words, 'struggling' with the current surveillance mechanisms and dominant discourses as presented in the expansion policy, quality frameworks, standards, and qualifications. They do not believe that high quality is achievable with this policy and again in their own words feel they are 'victims' in the inspection process. There is a sense of powerlessness, however, Foucault saw a role as demonstrating to people that they are freer than they may feel and, although I acknowledge the challenges involved, following Ball's (2019) discussion, I propose two significant recommendations for Scottish ELC practitioners and managers to come from this research.

My first recommendation is that practitioners and managers focus on the care of the self and of others or as Ball (2019:135) suggests it involves both 'the *techne* of the self and the *techne* of life' – the different self is cultivated by disrupting dominant discourses and living well, living differently, taking care of the self, being otherwise. This would, in all probability, mean practitioners and managers entering a frightening space, as they would be 'unthinking' all that is currently certain to them. Like other aspects of life when we confront and denaturalise concepts, practices, and relations that we may have, for many years, believed to be what made us who we are and how we relate to ourselves we enter a fragile and frightening space. We unmask ourselves, and what we have become. The ELC practitioner and manager would in effect be saying that the current dominant neoliberal discourses or regimes of truth are no longer acceptable to them, they are untenable. In unmasking these regimes of truth, the practitioner and manager would be asking themselves questions about how they should think, act, and feel to be true to themselves, to free themselves from any form of enslavement. They should question 'what kind of self am I going to be? It is through the care of the self that we exercise choice, reminding ourselves what we value in our thoughts and actions (Westerink, 2020; Ball, 2019; MacNaughton, 2005).

Foucault (1997:300) discussed that in order to care for the self, one needs 'a master of care' a counsellor, and a friend to offset 'the dangers of solitude'. ELC practitioners and managers need to come together to mitigate the risks of exposing one's 'will to truth' as

there is always a risk associated in doing so, not least the question of 'who will sanction me if I don't conform' (MacNaughton, 2005:38). It is by using the knowledge they have in a tactical way that I argue ELC practitioners and managers will resist the regimes of truth that currently govern them and their practice. As Foucault, (1988:15) states:

> We escaped a domination of truth, not by playing a game that was a complete stranger to the game of truth, but in playing it otherwise or in playing another game, another set, other trumps in the game of truth.

My research has highlighted the fragility of my participants and the difficulties experienced as they struggle with current discourses of quality and surveillance techniques, and this may be indicative of the ELC sector in Scotland. Practitioners and managers in my study are experiencing feelings of powerlessness, victimisation and struggling in their day-to-day practice and this is not a sustainable position. If practitioners and managers felt able to resist and this recommendation was to be implemented the implication would be for a different kind of practice. Rather than feeling victimised and struggling, practitioners and managers would feel more empowered and more free to use their knowledge of ELC and *their* valuing of quality to practice the aspects of quality – relationality – that they have reason to value. They would have a greater sense of self, the self of the caring practitioner with time to build relationships with the children, parents and families and with each other.

This leads me to my second and related recommendation, the need for ELC practitioners and managers to practice free speech by deploying what Foucault called 'parrhesia' (Foucault, 1989), deliberately practicing for liberty. Ball (2016:1138) discusses the need for 'fearless speech' as resting on four characteristics: frankness and clarity of belief, the moral courage of the teller, the duty to tell – an ethical characteristic of the good citizen and, truth-telling as a form of criticism. Parrhesia requires speaking plainly and boldly often in the face of risk particularly when there is a power differential between the speaker and the listener, and the speaker is challenging dominant discourses. A significant aspect of parrhesia is that the speaker is not seeking to persuade but rather to tell. In the context of the ELC practitioner and manager in my study, rather than feeling like 'victims' of the Care Inspectorate, they would use courage and a duty to the children, the families, and themselves to speak fearlessly to confront the normative with the ethical. The practitioners and managers would confront the anonymity of the power of the inspection. As with care of the self, there is risk involved in 'exposing ourselves to censure, ridicule or

marginalisation' (Ball, 2016:1141, 1143) however a 'collective refusal' may be possible in the 'struggle over and against what it is we have become, what it is that we do want to be'.

The practice of ELC is formed through particular understandings and knowledge of the young child and how best to educate and care for them, what is right and ethical for them. As MacNaughton (2005) discusses, over time as different and competing understandings emerge these present choices for those working in early years education and care. My participants have become so familiar with the dominant neoliberal discourse that it has settled into the fabric of their practice leaving them feeling there is limited choice. They have become enslaved by these dominant discourses as Foucault (1977: 163) wrote:

> Knowledge does not slowly detach itself from its empirical roots, the initial needs from which it arose, to become pure speculation subject only to the demands of reason…Rather, it creates a progressive enslavement to its instinctive violence.

In practicing parrhesia my participants' practice would contest the enslavement of the current dominant discourses by using what they value in ELC to destabilise the current officially sanctioned truth to become true to themselves – their will to truth. MacNaughton (2005) provides a good example utilising Foucault's argument that observation is a disciplinary apparatus. She questions the common neoliberal practice of observing children in ELC centres using a set of developmental truths of the universal child rather than understanding children from the multiple perspectives of children and families – those that my participants value.

My research adds to two recent studies in Scotland that demonstrate there are the beginnings of small acts of resistance from within practice. Blaisdell et al. (2022) outline the findings from their study carried out in one Scottish ELC centre. The small action-research study had been instigated by a small group of practitioners who were strongly opposed to their local authority imposing of reductionist, tick-box style assessment practices. This style of child assessment presented a dilemma for the practitioners and, in the knowledge that their thinking challenged the views of the Scottish Government and the wider sector, they nonetheless produced their preferred 'lived story' approach to assessing children's learning. In so doing this small group of practitioners were refusing the dominant discourse that had sought to exercise power over them, they were seeking 'different ways of speaking the truth' (Foucault, 1988:51).

McNair et al. (2024:221) also highlight that practitioners are strong and have the knowledge and understanding of what is required for children and families in Scottish ELC. They argue that practitioners are agentic but are constrained and even tightly controlled by top-down policy-driven practice. They continue that 'practitioner inquiry – co-mingling the professional, the personal and the political' - in ELC would encourage practitioners to think deeply and critically about their practice. This may lead to the possibility, for those who work with young children, to engage in professional inquiry within their local environments and so 'return authority (and eventually power) to those who live day-in, day-out alongside children' (McNair et al., 2024:221).

Although I am arguing for resistance to the policy of Standards, quality frameworks and inspection regimes I am also very aware of the current difficulties present within the Scottish ELC sector and therefore I do acknowledge that engaging in resistance even at a micro-politics level within centres may be problematic. Some may indeed see it as a waste of very precious time in an already fragile sector. In presenting the ideas above I am seeking to demonstrate to my participants and other Scottish ELC practitioners and managers 'that they are much freer than they feel' and they can 'refuse and transgress the horizon of silent objectification' within which they are articulated (Foucault, in Martin et al., 1988:9).

I also provide recommendations that may be of interest to the policymakers, regulators and inspectors. Successive governments, through legislation and policy, have introduced many changes to the sector. These include significant expansion of services offered, high levels of regulation and inspection, changing qualification levels and content, the introduction of the Standard for Childhood Practice (2007 revised 2015), which established professional standards for those leading and managing the ELC sector, and the need for credentialism usually through the Childhood Practice degree. As these changes have been implemented the role of the ELC practitioner has fundamentally altered with the level of qualifications of the profession cited as a key component to delivering high-quality ELC services alongside robust inspection and quality assurance systems (OECD, 2012; Siraj and Kingston, 2015; Scottish Government, 2017a; Education Scotland 2020).

As I have argued throughout this dissertation the early years' sector in Scotland is heavily regulated and inspected and as acknowledged in a recent report by Professor Kenneth Muir, Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education published in March 2022 this places a burden on the sector. I join my thinking with that of The Muir report's recommendation for a new independent Inspectorate for schools and ELC centres to replace Education Scotland and a shared inspection framework for ELC.

The report recommended that:

> As a matter of urgency the new independent Inspectorate should re-engage with Care Inspectorate to agree a shared inspection framework designed to reduce the burden on Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) practitioners and centres (Scottish Government, 2022:6).

The Muir Report is a small, first step in recognising the need to reduce the burden of inspection on ELC but this needs to go much further. Although the above recommendation is proposing a joint inspection framework for ELC there is no recommendation for a single inspection body and inspection regimes continue to be proposed as having a crucial role in helping to ensure that children are flourishing in high-quality centres that are offering high-quality learning and development experiences. It can therefore be surmised that ELC centres, although benefitting from a joint inspection framework will continue to be jointly inspected by the Care Inspectorate and the body set up to replace Education Scotland. This recommendation in the Muir Report, although reducing the burden of paperwork, does not tackle the issue that my research has highlighted as the inspection regimes will continue to function in their current format.

My research demonstrates that the practitioners and managers in my study find the current regime of inspection intolerable, and that they are struggling with the burden of inspection. I recommend that, as a matter of urgency, the process of ELC inspection, must be re-visited to address the possible concerns of those who are subjected to the inspection process. Ball (2003:215) wrote of the 'terrors of performativity' in the context of schools with teachers feeling intimidated and humiliated by the human technology of inspection. These same terrors are now being experienced by Scottish ELC practitioners and managers. The participants in my study describe themselves as 'victims' living in fear of the arrival of the inspectors and of the consequences of 'getting one thing' wrong. Moss (2017:12) argues that there is an 'impasse – of a stifling, unhearing and regulatory dominant discourse' and that it is time for resistance. I agree that it is time for resistance by

the professionals, as outlined above, but it is also time for inspectors to accept responsibility for their collective actions, re-examine their roles and consciences, and begin to question their role in the dominant discourses and regimes of truth present in the inspection processes.

Statistics published by the Care Inspectorate (2021) demonstrate that the majority of ELC services are providing 'high quality' and therefore I recommend that the inspection processes change to a much more partnership, joint working approach of inspectors working with practitioners and managers in a trusting relationship rather than one of power. Inspectors would demonstrate that they value the voices of those working in the sector, and as one of my participants stated, have 'more trust in our professional judgements'. Practitioners and managers would feel able to use parrhesia – fearless speech - to tell the inspection bodies plainly and boldly those aspects of practice they do well and then discuss how to take forward aspects that they jointly agree would benefit from development. The power differential between the inspectors and the practitioners/managers would lessen and change. My participants feared not only the inspection but the written report that followed the inspection visit as their failings would be laid bare in a public document. Vallberg-Roth (2015:15) discusses how quality is 'operationalised through documentation' with actions in practice transformed to a recorded object. Citing the work of the Italian philosopher Ferraris (2013) who gives 'documentation a central position in an ontology of social reality that he calls documentality', Vallberg-Roth (2015:16) suggests that quality is linked to documentality in the sense that documentality, in this case in the form of the inspection report, is the basis of all quality improvement work. The participants in my study are fearful of the documentality of the inspection report and in particular the scoring of the centre using numerical values to denote their worth. I argue that my participants could help to rebuild quality from within if they had greater participation in the inspection process. Their fear of the inspection and report would lessen and therefore I recommend that the process needs to be qualitative rather than quantitative with a jointly written and owned report with the need for numerical scoring removed.

There are very few services inspected and rated as weak or unsatisfactory which then raises the question as to why such overly stringent inspection regimes are needed when the majority of services operate at a level of good or above. For the 'very low' proportion of services where significant issues are identified the inspectors would be able to act to protect children from harm.

My research highlights that for my practitioners the content of the latest iteration of the HNC may be problematic as it appears to value a 'tick-box' pedagogical approach and assessment based on child development norms rather than a valuing of what the child is capable of being and doing through play. An additional pressure to obtain the Childhood Practice degree is felt by some participants. The content of these qualifications is influenced and validated by SSSC as the professional regulator of the ELC sector and I recommend that this is an aspect that requires consideration. The views of those working in the sector and undertaking the qualifications need to be heard and the aspects of ELC practice that they value as contributing to quality incorporated into qualifications. In agreement with Nussbaum (2010:48) colleges and universities should be places where students will be 'stimulated to think and argue for themselves rather than deferring to tradition and authority'. However, colleges and universities themselves are also caught in the neoliberal valuing of content and pedagogy as they are publicly funded and are required to meet targets and live and die by their place in one league table or another. They are also educating students for an ELC sector where quality is measured and valued in neoliberal, standardised terms and therefore the content and pedagogy of the qualifications reflect this with a move away from content and teaching that promotes questioning, analysing, and individual critical responsibility towards more assessment-driven practices. I argue that colleges and universities need to have greater autonomy and influence over decisions regarding the content of the qualifications offered in their establishments such as the HNC and Childhood Practice degree. As the SSSC are responsible for the registration of practitioners and managers they have a role to play in assuring the quality and standards of the qualifications. However, given the maturity of the providers of qualifications, greater trust should be placed on colleges and universities, with their own internal quality assurance mechanisms, to determine the content and quality of the qualifications they offer.

As I have outlined above the First Minister asserts that he is proud of the generous Scottish childcare offer and wishes to extend the expansion policy to include two-year-old children and in some areas to extend the offer to the parents/carers of babies as young as nine months. I would caution against such a policy at this time as my research demonstrates a fragile Scottish ELC sector with one of my participants, a highly experienced practitioner, stating that they are leaving the sector and claim not to be alone in 'struggling' to continue working in the sector. Audit Scotland's (2023:4) report agrees that the sector is 'fragile'

and also points out that 'it is too early to assess whether the expansion has led to better outcomes for children and increased opportunities for their parents to work, study or train'. It would seem sensible to assess the current expansion policy before embarking on further expansion.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

My research was conducted with a small number of participants – three managers and four practitioners – and therefore this may be considered as a limitation, although this number is consistent with an interpretivist paradigm. The inclusion of a greater number of participants would have provided a wider range of views and experiences. However, working on my own as a Post-Graduate Research (PGR) student, I believe the number of participants provided me with sufficient opportunities to gain rich data in line with the traveller metaphor I outlined in Chapter 3 section 3.4.2.

As a Professional Doctoral thesis, my study is time-limited and has a limited word count both of which may contribute to limitations on this study. As a PGR student I have worked alone on this study and therefore extending the scope of the research as outlined above would require additional resources.

My participants were selected from and are currently working in local authority establishments across three authorities and one private establishment, that works in partnership with one of the three local authorities, and therefore subject to the policies and procedures of the local authority. The establishments are located in the West of Scotland, in the central belt, in a predominantly urban area and therefore this may have limited my study. A wider geographical study, which included the much more rural communities, beyond the geographical proximity and accessibility of surveillance of the densely populated central belt may have produced different data.

I am aware that my study may be limited as I chose to focus on exploring the lived experiences of early years practitioners and managers and their valuing of quality in ELC. I have not included the voices of the inspectorate, SSSC, or the Scottish Government. The inspectorate bodies may have their own truths -- that I did not include within the foci of my

research -- in their reasoning for inspection activities. These truths may differ in the way they are understood and described by the practitioners in the study and, although I would be interested in hearing their views, my research aimed to explore the views of those with lived experience of working in the early years sector. I was very keen to explore aspects of power and the normalising quality inspection and regulatory techniques performed *on* the ELC practitioner and manager to establish if my concerns had any validity in terms of the lived experiences and understandings of practitioners and managers. This is a clear area for further study, as outlined in my recommendations in Section 6.2 of this chapter. It would also be pertinent to conduct a future study to include the views of parents/families and the children themselves as their valuing of quality may present different ideas to that of either the practitioners and managers or the Scottish Government.

These limitations do lead to future research opportunities that will be outlined in the next section.

6.4 Identification of Future Research

> It is a question of searching for another kind of critical philosophy. Not a critical philosophy that seeks to determine the conditions and limits of our possible knowledge of the object, but a critical philosophy that seeks the conditions and indefinite possibilities of transforming the subject, transforming ourselves (Foucault, 1997:179).

As stated by Moss (2017:11) 'the field of early childhood education is increasingly dominated by a strongly positivistic and regulatory discourse' however there are alternatives. Moss (2017, 2019) and colleagues such as Archer (2022) and Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021) have considered a resistance movement in the field of ELC in England and across other Anglophone countries. Goodley and Perryman (2022) and Proudfoot (2021) urge moving beyond the panopticon and Ball (2019) has considered using Foucault to think differently about education and learning. Archer (2021:1) explores resistance to policy constructions of the ideal professional early years educator in an English context highlighting that little is known from empirical studies but that 'micro resistances to policy imperatives' are evident. Mikuska (2023) utilises Foucault's (1988) idea of 'governmentality' in their study, analysing English practitioners strong and often stressful relationship with policy. Working mainly in an Australian context, Hunkin and Grieshaber (2023) discuss dominant and contemporary interpretations of quality as both politicised

and positivist in nature. Urban (2022:383) argues for a paradigmatic shift in early childhood scholarship in response to 'a profoundly changed global context' highlighting what he sees as 'fields of tension' – the persistent promotion of decontextualised approaches to ELC, inequality between the Global South and North and an inability of dominant early childhood education theories to conceptualise both present and future directions.

This research provides a very good starting point for consideration of what may be possible in the context of Scottish ELC. It may be possible for ELC practitioners and managers to resist the dominant neoliberal discourses and understandings of quality and begin to confront and denaturalise current concepts and practices. This research may influence the Scottish Government to reconsider current proposals to extend the expansion policy to all two-year-old children and in some areas to offer funding for babies as young as nine months old. My research has been undertaken at a time of great policy change in the Scottish ELC sector with the expansion policy implemented as the world was emerging from the Covid -19 pandemic. The pandemic demonstrated the crucial role of ELC for the functioning of society as children unable to attend centres lost stimulating environments in which to play and learn, families lost reliable childcare, and educators lost already precarious employment as some centres permanently closed. The pandemic also demonstrated the fragility and uncertainty of life itself. My study has demonstrated that relationality and care are significant but overlooked concepts in Scottish ELC and are core to practitioners and managers understandings of quality and to their understanding of their identity as ELC professionals. Further research is required in Scotland to investigate the significance of these core concepts and to try to find ways to engage with the ELC profession. A significant finding from my research is the power of the dominant discourses of inspection and quality frameworks and the compliance of the practitioners and managers. I am concerned for the future of the sector and those working under such intense surveillance that they feel they are 'victims'. My study highlights the urgent need for research that aims to understand why such surveillance is considered necessary and looks to find more appropriate methods to assure quality. Research into the concept of quality in ELC has been ongoing for some time but there are few comparative studies, and this would be another interesting and timely avenue for further research. Urban (2022) has proposed research comparing the experiences in the global south and north however closer to home a comparative study of how quality is measured and regulated in the four nations of the United Kingdom would be pertinent.

6.5 Concluding thoughts

There will always be those who try to tell us their regime of truth and to exercise power over our thoughts, who try to govern us and in the context of Scottish Early Learning and Childcare tell us what quality we must value. There are alternative ways of being, those that value diversity and plurality, and escaping from the controlling, narrow narrative is possible. Foucault (1988:51) stated that:

> I believe too much in truth not to suppose that there are different truths and different ways of speaking the truth.

My research has found that the Scottish ELC sector is in a fragile state, and I am concerned by the highly emotive lived experiences that were recounted by my participants during the interviews, but I am also full of hope for the future. The first of my interview questions asked participants to tell me which aspects of quality they valued, and their responses were immediate and clear; they value the relationships they have with the children, the families and with each other. Two words were said many times, those of care and love as core values underpinning quality in ELC. My research demonstrated that although my participants may at times also feel 'victimised' and 'terrified' by the inspection regimes they know who and what has meaning and value for them and they are holding resolutely to those core values. The voices, including my own, that are sometimes silenced are never really silenced, they are still there vibrant and readily heard by those who take the time to listen. The early learning and childcare practitioners and managers voices will be heard, and my research is both timely and apt in helping those voices to be heard.

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Appendix 1 – Ethical Approval Letter

Ethical approval letter removed due to confidentiality issues.

Appendix 2 – Outline Interview Questions

Semi-Structured Draft Interview Questions/Discussion Themes

Research Title:

A Foucauldian analysis of the discourses of quality and its relationship to tools of surveillance in early learning and childcare in Scotland.

Research Question:

In what ways do early learning and childcare practitioners and managers respond to discourses of quality and surveillance?

The focus for my dissertation is to explore how practitioners and managers working in early learning and childcare in Scotland understand and respond to discourses of quality and the relationship between quality and tools such as Standards and quality frameworks that may be viewed through a Foucauldian lens as 'tools of surveillance'.

Emerging Questions and Themes for discussion:

When you think about 'quality', as an experienced early years practitioner/manager, which aspects are really important to you? What do you value?

When you think of the term 'quality' in the context of your early learning and childcare centre what comes to your mind?

In terms of quality are there any barriers to achieving what you value and if so, what are these?

The early learning and childcare sector has a range of frameworks, the Standard for Childhood Practice Revised (SSSC, 2015), How Good is our Early Learning and Childcare (Education Scotland, 2016) and A Quality Framework for Day-care of Children (Care Inspectorate, 2022)? How, if at all, do you use these frameworks in supporting the provision of a quality service? Do you find them helpful and/or are there aspects that you think are barriers to quality in early years?

The achievement of 'high quality' for all children attending ELC centres in Scotland is the 'golden thread' of the Blueprint for 2020 policy. How realistic is this? What, if any, are the barriers to quality in early years?

Have you been able to influence the development and content of quality frameworks and policies such as the Blueprint 2020 currently in use in Scotland? If so, in what ways?

Have you been able to influence the development of local frameworks and policies that focus on quality in your Centre? If so, in what ways?

In what ways do you think your practice is regulated? How does this make you feel? What are the impacts on your practice?

How do the frameworks and regulatory practices of you as an individual early years' professional impact on the aspects of your work practices that you value?

Appendix 3 – Participant Information

University
of Glasgow

College of Social
Sciences

Participant Information Sheet

Study Title: In what ways do early learning and childcare practitioners and managers respond to discourses of quality and surveillance?

Researcher: Agnes Allan

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to take part it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take some time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

The purpose of this research is to explore how early learning and childcare practitioners and separately managers understand and respond to discourses of quality and surveillance in early learning and childcare centres. 1-1 semi-structured interviews will be conducted in person with a small group (3-4) practitioners and separately a small group of (3-4) managers. I will introduce the topic and facilitate discussion of the topic by asking questions.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can choose to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason or without prejudice. In the event that you do decide to withdraw any personal data you have provided up to this point will be destroyed. The interview will last for between 40 and 50 minutes. I will collect as little personal information as possible and only that which is required for the study. Your personal details will be de-identified and you will be referred to by pseudonym. You will be able to request a summary of the interview data and it will only be used for research purposes.

The benefit to taking part will be that you will be helping me with my research and doctoral study and you will explore a topic that is relevant in practice in early learning and childcare in Scotland. There are no risks identified from participating in this research.

This project has been considered and approved by the University of Glasgow College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. Please note that confidentiality may not be

guaranteed; due to the limited size of the participant sample or if there is disclosure of harm revealed during the interviews.

Should you wish to contact either myself or my supervisor about any aspect of this research please see below contact details.

My contact details are:

Researcher's Name: Agnes Allan

Email address: xxxxxxxx@student.gla.ac.uk

My supervisor's contact details are:

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Kevin Proudfoot

Email address: Kevin.Proudfoot@glasgow.ac.uk

To pursue any complaint about the conduct of the research: contact the College of Social Sciences Lead for Ethical Review, Dr Susan Batchelor: email socsci-ethics-lead@glasgow.ac.uk

_____End of Participant Information Sheet_____

Appendix 4 Table of Participants

Identifier	Type of centre	Length of Experience in current role	Qualification	Registration Level	Gender
Manager 1	Local Authority 3	<5 years	SVQ3 or equivalent BA Childhood Practice	Lead Practitioner/ Manager	Female
Manager 2	Local Authority 1	5-10 years	SNNEB BA Childhood Practice	Lead Practitioner/ Manager	Female
Manager 3	Private in partnership with Local Authority	5-10 years	SVQ3 or equivalent BA Childhood Practice	Lead Practitioner/ Manager	Female
Practitioner 1	Local Authority 1	>20 years	SVQ 3 or equivalent BA Childhood Practice	Practitioner	Female
Practitioner 2	Private in partnership with Local Authority	5-10 years	HNC	Practitioner	Female
Practitioner 3	Private in partnership with Local Authority	5-10 years	HNC BA Childhood Studies	Practitioner	Female
Practitioner 4	Local Authority 2	5-10 years	HNC BA Childhood Studies	Practitioner	Male

Appendix 5 Example of Coding

Key/Code:

Yellow – relationships, care, love, interactions

Green – time, space, environment

Turquoise – policy, expansion, quality frameworks, inspection, self-evaluation

Purple – fear, compliance, feelings, surveillance

Gray – knowledge, skills, qualifications, child development

Code	Example of coding
Relationships, care, love, interactions	Participant 1: So for me personally, it all comes down to relationships. That's like, I think if you can get a quality relationship with the children, with the families, with the other staff members, then actually that takes you a long way.
	Participant 2: I do the job because I care and I want to make a difference. And I think if if I can provide experiences, love, care, basic needs, you know.
	Participant 2: For me, this is my family. It's my extended family here. And I think if I was to leave here, I don't think I could go anywhere else.
	Participant 2: You've got this love, for all these children and for early years, for high quality in early years to give them the experiences but they're not getting it, not every child's getting it.
	Participant 3: Let families know that we are there, we're there to support them. We can hear them. We can help them.
	Participant 4: And I think also in terms of the work I do where I am, the interactions we have with children, I think it's a big signifier of quality in what we do.
	Participant 4: I think the interactions is the big thing in my centre.
	Participant 5: So for quality for me is as I said, the relationships, the environment will be also your relationships with parents. That's really important as well to have those really trusting relationships and for them to have their trust in you, so it's safe.
	Participant 6: So for me, it's got to start with the people. Yeah, 100%.
	Participant 7: Well, yeah, relationships just looking at the positive relationships with the families and the children between the staff. I think you need that before you can build on anything else, so definitely the relationships.
	Participant 7: When I came here I valued that the family feel a home-from-home environment, that children are safe and comfortable, that's probably the most important thing for you is to have those relationships. It's at the top of the list.

	Participant 7: To be homely people got to, I think, feel that. That they're valued. And loved. I think you know for the kids to feel loved in the room. Yeah, that's a big thing for me.
Time, space, environment	Participant 1: that actually reality says you only have in a certain amount of finite time. So actually there's only so many quality interactions that you can have.
	Participant 1: But to me, it's time we're also lacking time. There is no time to have these, you know, important conversations and whereas we used to, we used to be able to do that.
	Participant 1: Definitely time, time is a huge barrier to quality. Time for anything. Time to think. Time to… In the past I've had great opportunities to do good self-reflection with teams. Yeah, and that has enabled everyone to then move forward. But we got we just don't have the time to do that.
	Participant 3: But the biggest barrier to quality is time. We don't have all you need to be running when you come in here in a day. Yeah. And quality starts to slip and then mistakes happen and an E-mail comes through and we start to look like idiots, don't we?
	Participant 5: So when I think about that question the first thing that comes to me is the environment. The environment needs to be right.
	Participant 5: I think the space is too big.
	Participant 5: The extended days are difficult. It's a long day
	Participant 5: Do we actually get the time to properly sit down and reflect and be like, where are we? No, cause you're constantly going onto the hamster wheel who is constantly going and you never take that time to actually have those discussions.
	Participant 6: But thinking about other barriers then. Maybe the local council, because they are coming in and putting these demands on places and they're expecting every nursery to be exactly the same.
	Participant 6: There's no individuality at all
	Participant 6: So there's never a time when everybody all comes together to discuss children to discuss issues. All that's gone, it's completely, completely gone. So again that's a quality issue because you don't know what's happening.
	Participant 7: The environment is important again, so you can provide good quality opportunities.
Policy, expansion,	Participant 1: Everything is very much about ticking a box.

quality frameworks, standards, inspection, self-evaluation	Participant 1: There's this big push, but actually when it comes back down and it drips back down to the floor of the nursery I think we're really struggling. I think practitioners are really struggling to keep it together because of of the the longer hours.
	Participant 1: It's like that for everything. It's it's, it's a it's boxes, it's ticking boxes.
	Participant 1: It's all about evidence gathering to ensure that everybody is covering their back. So, then it doesn't necessarily become about the people or who you are as a human being. It's about as long as we follow the policy and the process.
	Participant 1: I think you know it's impacted us all in different ways and the pressure then for the 1140 hours and making it a success, there's a, there's a very much it needs to be successful and it is that quality and that is what the overarching Scottish Government want. That's what the local authorities want. So the pressure coming down because of all this investment is huge and everyone has to be, is accountable. We're all accountable.
	Participant 2: The state sort of just produce the new kind of quality framework things. We're always getting another one and another one.
	Participant 2: they've just went like, the Government, we've got all these hours to provide for every child, we don't have establishments we don't have staff, so just. Do it.
	Participant 4: I think it's always there in my head because I obviously trained after the Regulation of Care Act and the Care Inspectorate was set up. So I think I'm very much in the mould that was created for me to step into it.
	Participant 5: We have children doing the 8 am to 6 pm model, that's 10 hours. They're doing more hours than what the staff are doing. Like, let's be honest.
	Participant 6: I think they're [local authority] always thinking about inspections. Yeah. So if an inspector comes and says we were terrible and we got threes or twos. That, obviously is a reflection on the Council.
	Participant 6: It's almost like they're covering their backs. Yeah, that's all they want is good inspection results at the end of the day.
	Participant 6: We don't use the, what are they called the Social, Health and Social Care Standards. We don't use those, I read it when it came out. Yeah, we don't. I didn't put any value on it. It's just a list of numbers and statements. There's nothing in it.
	Participant 6: I do not know what they were thinking when they thought that by increasing children's hours you would be increasing quality. These children are shattered. They are too tired to learn anything. Staff

	are shattered as well, they've got the same children all day from 8:00 o'clock to 6:00 o'clock at night. These children are doing a 10 hour shift.
	Participant 6: I don't know any other way to put it. It is wrong and to then expect staff to be working shifts. It's just not what childcare is about at all. And I'm sure about this.
	Participant 6: It's like it's completely changed the whole early years sector has completely changed and not for the better. There's definitely less quality because of these hours.
	Participant 7: I think you've to evidence every single thing and that's great, but it's time consuming. Yeah. Therefore, I think you're pulled away from what's important and that's the children in front of you and that's what I was talking about.
Fear, compliance, surveillance, feelings	Participant 1: Because actually I feel like I've been. I'm being directed a lot. Being told what I need to do from above.
	Participant 1: I'm just actually I'm fearful of giving an opinion.
	I think I'm fearful because I actually I don't know what anymore.
	Participant 1: I just feel really, really undervalued. I'm really sad. Because actually we can't we… We're exhausted. We can't. We end with all this paperwork.
	Participant 2: So obviously we are the victims.
	Participant 2: Like it can be scary. Such a such a responsibility. So you know when you're driving in to the car park and you see two strange cars at that corner. You're going, oh, my goodness. We've been waiting in this. There's two strange cars.
	Participant 2: Your heart is racing. You're sweating. You're terrified when you think you say or do the wrong thing and you know you're not really doing anything wrong. But you know what it means.
	Participant 3: Sometimes I do feel it is maybe a bit stilted, like they're council, and they're there to advise, but they don't want to give us the gold stars. They don't wanna give us the keys to their Kingdom. If we're doing something absolutely amazing, they don't tend to commend us on it whereas I'm like, I would tell someone I thought that was great. But they are…silence means it was good, but they'll quite happily pick up on the negatives.
	Participant 4: I feel like sometimes there could be a wee bit more trust in professional judgement. Our professional capabilities.
	Participant 5: I mean, obviously it makes you feel a bit... It's daunting when you see them (Care Inspectorate and HMiE) coming through that door and nerve-wracking potentially. You're worried.
	Participant 5: I've got no objection to them coming in and coming in and looking, as long as it's fair, as long as they do take on board what you're

	saying and you know I'll take on board constructive feedback, constructive criticism.
	Participant 5: What they see on that day, it's different opinions, their opinions. So in terms of inspectors coming in, I don't have any issue with it as long as it's fair and I don't think it is. Just the way I feel.
	Participant 5: I've always had a passion for the job and I never don't want to do it but it's always thinking I must do better. It's never good enough. I think back to when there wasn't all this inspection…
	Participant 6: I would be absolutely devastated if they said. Oh, you know you're not doing that, but, and you're not doing that and you should have had that. You should have had that. I think I would be absolutely devastated, yeah. Because if, and then your view of what good is and my view of what good is completely different then. Yeah, yeah, I would. I would take that really hard. Yeah.
	Participant 7: But you know there's definitely a feeling in your stomach always. Even if I'm contacting them about something and things like that and you just don't want it to feel like that. You want it to be a good relationship and a simple relationship.
	Participant 7: I think is it not right I think, am I doing a good enough job? No, I do I do. Think all the time it's not a job it's a life.
Knowledge, skills, qualifications, child development	Participant 1: Knowledge and understanding of child development I think is really key.
	Participant 1: So, it's observing. What are they doing children… doing now and what can they do? What and where's their gaps and how we can help them on in their development.
	Participant 2: I mean, it's been a hard pull, hard work getting good quality staff.
	Participant 2: it takes someone special to manage a nursery. They need to care. It's having that deep down care and love and respect for each child and parent that comes through the door.
	Participant 3: So I would like people to be knowledgeable team players, interpersonal skills. Yeah. Good communicator. Being a people person, flexibility, flexibility's, massive listening, understanding, strong work ethic, being up to date. Being honest, non judgmental is very important, especially in early years.
	Participant 3: It's not ticking a box. It's so hard. There's all these things going through your head. But yeah, I would like. I'd like to be known that we're somewhere that we're not just good at one thing is what I'm getting at there.

Participant 4: We've got a lot of different ages (of staff), lots of different backgrounds, levels of qualification and routes that were taken to qualification.

Participant 4: If you don't have a good role model when you, when you start out, but throughout your career, yeah, I think I was really blessed to work and because I have worked in kind of many different settings I was really blessed to come into contact with some really amazing staff and have learned so much and continue to learn so much.

Participant 5: So we need to develop that staff knowledge on that so the in-service days all the time we're going to have a meeting and I'll put in my chat. If there's anything you want to discuss, this is your time to do it. Yeah, so that we can have those open conversations.

Participant 5: Well, when I've qualified 20 years ago with an HNC, yeah, I went to the private sector because I couldn't get a job in a local authority. Right, it was difficult. It was hard to get into local authority. So I went in the private sector and Nancy it is the best thing that I ever done. It made me the worker I am. It made me the person I am without a shadow of a doubt.

But, fast forward 20 years, and this expansion, and let's be honest, everybody is getting a job. People who are barely qualified coming out of college are going straight into these jobs, lots of them, and I don't like the quality of it. Cause of the experience isn't there. You need that experience and I think that 4 1/2 years of me working in a private nursery it gave me loads of experience. Yeah. You were doing absolutely everything but it gave you experience. Now, these young girls coming into this profession, they're getting a really good wage but don't have the experience and I think that has a hidden impact on the quality in young staff teams.

Participant 6: Unfortunately, I don't value the HNC's that are coming out at the moment. I don't think they're learning about child development. Yeah, they're learning how to write up accounts of practise. But that is not quality that is absolutely not quality.

Participant 6: Yeah, all those years ago, you did two full years. You did from babies before the babies were born, you spent time in maternity wards. You learned about how that child develops well, they need to. They've gotta learn to do all these things before they can pick up a pencil.

Participant 6: It's a very, very different experience at the moment from maybe say even 10 years ago. You can go straight into HNC now, you don't even need to do the NC first. I don't agree with that. You can do nine months of a childcare course and you're qualified?

Participant 6: I quite like the modern apprentice qualification because they're in with you for two years. Yeah. So you are able to teach them and learn…about that child development.

| | Participant 7: I think that practitioners need to be skilled. There's a lot of skills and educationally learning to be done. |
| | Participant 7: I think looking at the training side of things as well, I think apprenticeships is a good way to go because you're learning. You know, work like on the job. |