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Being a Graduate Professional in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care: silence, submission and subversion.

Jo Basford

Manchester Metropolitan University

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Abstract

Recent workforce reform in England has sought to increase opportunities for practitioners who work outside the maintained (school) sector to gain graduate status. Whilst these opportunities have generally been welcomed within the sector, this has created dichotomous tensions for the ECEC workforce.

The traditional construction of the ECEC practitioner assumes a lack of educational and social capital (Osgood, 2009). Its associated dispositions do not necessarily fit with the alternative construct of the Early Years Professional or Teacher who, through gaining educational capital in the form of a university degree, will be sufficiently equipped to enact the normative and performative discourses which dominate educational and social policy.

These tensions serve as the focus for this study, which was concerned with examining how a group of graduate practitioners were endeavouring to broker their competing professional constructs within their own workplace. The research argues for the necessity to establish professional, relational spaces within and across the field of Early Years Education and Care in order to have a greater understanding of the value that all early years professionals can contribute to pedagogical practice.

KEY WORDS

Graduate Early Years Professional; habitus; relational

Introduction

This paper is concerned with the experiences of a group of graduate practitioners who work outside the maintained (school) sector – namely the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector in England. It seeks to examine how they endeavour to broker their recently acquired 'graduate' status within their professional context in order to influence pedagogical practices. A critical examination of the policy landscape related to workforce reform within the sector is firstly offered in order to set the scene for the study. The second part of the paper begins with the methodological and theoretical considerations that underpinned the study. It outlines how a phenomenological methodological approach was used, drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) conceptual ideas of **'**[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice' to support the analysis of findings in relation to the key research question*: to what*

extent has workforce reform created opportunities for graduate professionals to utilise their newly acquired status to inform and influence pedagogical practices? The notion of *field* within the context of this study is understood as the structured social spaces which early years practitioners occupy, as well as the effects of the wider socio-political landscapes that serve to define their position in the field (Atkinson, 2016; Bourdieu, 1998). The final part of the paper seeks to theorise the tensions and dilemmas professionals working in the field experience and suggests a possible way forward that aspires to transform the early years field.

Workforce reform in the field of ECEC

The identity of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) professional in England is underpinned by competing and paradoxical discourses (Moyles, 2001). The dominant discourse is founded on the historical perceptions of poorly qualified practitioners who are not sufficiently "expert" in education (Payler and Georgeson, 2013a), with the assumption that due to the play-based nature of the curriculum little professional knowledge is needed (Bradbury 2012). This sits alongside the traditional construction of the ECEC practitioner as classed, caring and gendered (Osgood, 2009; McGillivary, 2008; Colley, 2006). These constructs assume a lack of educational and social capital (Osgood, 2009) which, although arguably outdated and undervalued (Taggart, 2011), have informed recent ECEC policy workforce reforms.

In a bid to raise the professional status of the ECEC workforce, a new graduate leadership role was introduced. Government funding was made available for practitioners working in the PVI sector to study towards a degree that would then make them eligible to gain this new professional status. The role was intended to provide pedagogical leadership, based on a concept of non-hierarchical and democratic leadership (Murray and McDowall, 2013, Moss, 2012) due to the fact that many graduates would not hold management responsibilities. Initially the role was given the title of Early Years Professional (EYP), with a remit to be the "catalysts for change and innovation" (Children's Workforce and Development Council (CWDC), 2010:17) within the sector. Following a review of the children's workforce (Nutbrown, 2012) the title 'Professional' was replaced with 'Teacher'. Entry requirements onto the programme became commensurate with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) programmes, and included success in passing a QTS skills test in Maths and

English (National College for Teaching and Leadership NCTL, 2013). A new set of standards were also introduced which outlined the expectation that Early Years Teachers would be "accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in their professional practice and conduct" (NCTL, 2013,1). In England, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum framework equates professional standards as an obligation to ensure specific requirements for learning and development are met, alongside safeguarding and the promotion of children's welfare (DfE, 2017).

An equal playing field?

The shift in status and emphasis on accountability and standards created a "seductive promise" (Osgood, 2012) for practitioners that they would now gain the same recognition as their school-based counterparts. It created an alternative construct of the ECEC professional, one that is foregrounded in masculinist values and cultures (Osgood, 2012) and practices that value technical, rational pedagogical approaches. Consequently, as Murray and McDowall Clark (2013) argue, it also ran the risk of the role becoming policy compliant and performative in character.

Whilst there is clear evidence that the sector is "becoming more professional" (Nutbrown, 2012,5); that it has opened up more opportunities for professional learning (Brooker et al., 2010), and that it has increased confidence and interest in professional development and leadership (Roberts-Holmes, 2013; Hadfield et al., 2012), those working in the PVI sector still find themselves working within "structural injustices" (Osgood, 2009,736). These injustices are related to conditions of employment, pay and status that are substantially less favourable than those of their counterparts in the maintained sector (Simpson, 2011; Cooke and Lawton, 2008). As such, despite their newly acquired professional status, the PVI field remains positioned as anything 'other' than professional (Davis, Kreig & Smith, 2015). Ironically, this is also a group who as a result of increased political attention to the importance of the formative years of a child's life, have found themselves in an elevated but still submissive position (Osgood 2009; McGillivray, 2008). They find that they are required to implement policies, of which their contribution to the formation has been little more than tokenistic, and therefore unable to fully utilise the knowledge and skills they have gained to inform interpretation of policy. Part of the rationale therefore, for the choice of

participants in this research was to explore ways of capturing the experiences of these practitioners who despite their elevated position have limited voice in utilising it to influence policy and practice.

The relationship between the PVI sector and the maintained sector is pertinent to this study. This relationship has become increasingly political, due in the main to the persistent and dominant 'readiness' discourse and concerns that have grown about children starting school insufficiently prepared and ready to learn (Moss, 2013). There appears to be a distinct correlation between readiness to learn when starting school and the quality of the provision a child experiences whilst attending an ECE setting. Inspection evidence, in particular, highlights that quality of education is often weakest in areas of highest deprivation (OFSTED, 2014) which is a result of inadequately subsidised provision in the PVI sector (Adamson and Brennan, 2014). It is also worth noting that the curriculum requirements for the PVI sector are mandatory, despite it being a non-compulsory phase of education. Consequently, by making a document mandatory for all settings in England, the government puts the PVI sector in a similar position of obligation to schools, but without the same level of resources and status to help them achieve this (Grieshaber 2000,272) .

Despite endeavours to transform the Early Years field, and create a more equal playing field (DfES 2006) for EYP and EY teachers, the field remains a site of struggle and contention. The culture and context of individual settings can also pivotal in shaping possibilities for transforming practice (Payler and Georgeson, 2013a). These challenges for EYP/EY teachers are not isolated to the work within their own settings. There have been numerous studies that highlight how perceived notions of professional competence can impact on collaborative working with other professionals (Payler and Georgeson, 2013a, 2013b; Simpson, 2011). When practitioners are required to work across their professional boundaries in a collaborative manner they report instances of "occupational hierarchy" (Simpson, 2011,706) between the position of the teacher and childcare practitioner who has gained EYP status. Professional boundaries are reported as barriers, and in Simpson's research teachers were "competitive" in trying to preserve their existing social status within the occupational hierarchy (2011,709). Simpson referred to one practitioner using the analogy of a "wall of cotton wool" (710) to describe the strategy a teacher employed as a

way of ignoring and resisting practices suggested by the EYP/EY Teacher. As a consequence expectations are lowered and opportunities to fulfil the role of change agent are closed off.

The research study

The data drawn upon in this paper was generated from a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) of a study that examined how graduate practitioners in the PVI sector were mediating their professional habitus with their work place and the wider policy context to inform practice. The study was deliberately small scale as it was designed to be in-depth. The participants had studied the same BA (Hons) degree in Early Childhood Studies, and had then later gained either EYP or EY Teacher Status. In response to an open letter sent to previous cohorts of full time and part time students who had studied on the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies degree programme at University in which I worked, five participants (see Fig.1) expressed an interest in being involved in the study. A key requirement for joining the group was a willingness to engage in reflexive and critical dialogue about their practice through attending two Focus Group (FG) sessions over a five month period on the University campus.

The purpose of the FG sessions was to bring the participants together into a space that would allow them to engage with dialogue in order to promote deeper thinking about how they were mediating their professional *habitus* with their workplace settings and the wider policy context. As considerable significance was placed on the participants' *habitus*, there was a biographical element captured in the study. A narrative form of inquiry was thus adopted that sought to allow participants to "explain, entertain, inform, defend, complain and confirm or challenge the status quo" (Chase, 2005,657). The epistemological principles that underpin this method were drawn from Kamberlis and Dimitriadis's (2013) Focus Group methodology. This approach is concerned particularly with emancipatory pedagogy and *praxis*-oriented inquiry, and has three inter-related functions which are intended to illuminate "the pedagogical, the political and the empirical" (Kamberlis and Dimitriadis, 2013:19), and was therefore very relevant for this research. In each of the two sessions, the participants brought self- chosen examples of assessment documentation that served as a stimulus for discussion.

It was important that the participants revisited their discussion in order to reflect upon them and generate their own meaning and interpretation. A closed social network Discussion Site (DS) was set up where the transcripts of the previous session were posted for the participants to member check. The DS was intended to be used by the participants to share their *praxis*-orientated reflections as well as pose questions to each other. As Griffiths and Macleod (2008) argue, *praxis* is open to revision when narratives are shared, and this was an important methodological consideration. In order to understand the relationship between the participants' *habitus* and practice, they were also asked to provide a brief 'life history' narrative of their journey towards becoming, then subsequently being, an Early Childhood practitioner. This provided some insight into the formative conditions that had led them to the career they had chosen and how their previous experiences had served to shape the values and beliefs that underpinned their relationships with children.

Name (pseudonyms)	Qualifications/ Graduate Status	Setting	Role
Helen	NVQ L3; BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies. EYPS	Day Nursery	'Senior' Practitioner
Jackie	NNEB FdA Early Years Practice; BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies. EYPS	Pre-School	Setting Manager
Lucy	BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies. EYPS	Children's Centre Nursery	Room Leader
Kathy	NVQ 2 and 3 FdA Early Years Practice; BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies. EYPS	Pre-School	Setting Manager
Ruth	BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies. Trainee EY Teacher	Day Nursery	EY Teacher and Room Supervisor

Fig.1

Ethical considerations

The ethical principles that underpin this study were informed by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) ethical guidelines, and were approved by the associating University. The participants were provided with an information sheet and an introductory meeting was arranged to outline the intentions of the research, their role in the study and aspects of confidentiality that were pertinent to the study. Consideration was given to the fact that I had a previous student/tutor relation with the participants, and that this would have given them some insight into my own positionality and knowledge base. However the participants had moved from being my 'charges' as students into the field of practice. They had new and varied additional knowledge on which to draw. They had effectively become the 'experts' in the field, and my role was to understand how they were mediating their expertise within the local and political context.

Theoretical framework: Bourdieu's conceptual tools.

This research adopts a phenomenological position, drawing particularly on Bourdieu's conceptual framework **'**[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice' (Bourdieu, 1986,101) to help shed light on the lived experience of graduate practitioners. Bourdieu viewed phenomenology as a relational rather than an ontological style of enquiry. From this perspective, any understanding of the social being can only reveal itself through experience when situated in the broader context, understanding particularly, the inter-relationship of the different aspects of his conceptual framework.

Within any given context there are actors who occupy positions within the field who are determined by the distribution of resources (in the form of capital) and the structural relations between the field and others. Many of these structures are "invisible", and historically determined forces (McNay, 2004) yet can form part of an individual's *habitus*. They also serve to legitimise how they are positioned within the social field. For the ECEC graduate, they are affected by the "invisible" and historical structures of the classed, gendered, maternal role that construct their professional identity. This is turn creates parameters and boundaries for what is possible or likely in their professional roles.

However, Bourdieu was keen to challenge the view that habitus is a form of determinism, as he also believed that at the heart of habitus lay choice. Education can play a key role in

7

increasing choice, and transforming *habitus*. For the participants in this study the educational experiences of studying for a degree provided an opportunity to increase their symbolic *capital* through gaining a recognised professional status. It raised their expectations and aspirations for possibilities available to shape and transform pedagogical practices. Choices form part of what Bourdieu (1998) referred to as strategy, or a "feel for the game" (80) and are bound by both opportunities and constraints that are determined by external circumstances – namely the state of the field. Choice is also determined by an internal framework (i.e. individual dispositions) that make "some possibilities inconceivable, others probable and a limited range acceptable" (Reay, 2004a, 435).When there is a change in objective conditions that do not take account of individual or group *habitus* there becomes a mismatch for those who do not have the "feel for the game" – effectively there are winners and losers. In order to have recognition and authority within the field there is a necessity to accept the taken for granted assumptions and values that are shared by the dominant group (ie; *doxa*). The doxa regarding the role of early years education within the context of this study is exemplified by the EYFS (DfE, 2017) statutory curriculum framework, which outlines a set of standards that

> all early years providers must meet to ensure that that children learn and develop well are kept healthy and safe. It promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' and gives children a broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school life (p5)

In relation to *capital*, Bourdieu made a distinction between 'economic capital' and other forms of capital (such as cultural, linguistic, scientific and literary) which he referred to as 'symbolic capital'. This form of capital can be understood as types of assets that bring social and cultural advantage or disadvantage (Moore 2012:101). The possession of "emotional capital" (Nowotny, 1981) forms part of the "vocational habitus" (Colley, 2006; Colley, James, Tedder and Diment, 2003) synonymous with the ECE sector. Emotional capital is an "embodied resource" (Andrew, 2015a) that is generated through the emotional labour usually associated with a maternal and caring role. The value of this type of capital beyond the immediate field has been brought into question (Skeggs, 2004), and for women, they can find themselves forfeiting their emotional capital in pursuit of cultural capital (Reay,

8

2004b). The participants in this study had all made deliberate attempts to gain additional 'symbolic capital' by studying for a degree and gaining EYP or EY Teacher status. This later experience arguably gave the participants the opportunity to transform their *habitus* (Nash, 1999) and to take up different positions and roles (Green, 2013) that had been regulated by their transformed *habitus*. However, as I argue in this paper, this was not a straightforward endeavour, due to the power relations that exist in the field.

The rhetoric and reality of being a graduate in the PVI field.

From the perspective of the graduate EY professional, the extent of choice, or range of strategies that are available to draw on to influence and shape pedagogical practices, are determined by the conditions of the field. Numerous studies (Rose and Rogers, 2012; Moyles and Worthington, 2011; Adams et al., 2004; Wood and Bennet, 2000) have highlighted how the transition from the ideal of the university classroom, where the acquisition of symbolic capital involves the encouragement of students to think deeply about their pedagogical values and beliefs, is challenged once they enter the reality of the workplace. Such studies have highlighted what Rose and Rogers (2012) refer to as a 'dissonance' between practitioners' own principles and values and the reality of the classroom context. The dissonance could be understood as part of the professional dispositions that contribute to notions of professional *habitus*. There are two noticeable tensions that form part of this dissonance. One is the tension between balancing a play-based pedagogical approach, which has been embodied through the personal histories, against the increasing pressures associated with addressing governmental directives related to accountability and school readiness. This tension is apparent not only for practitioners in the PVI sector, but also for Reception class teachers (Bradbury, 2012; Robert-Holmes, 2014; Bradbury & Roberts -Holmes, 2016) and is a factor that can affect collaborative working within the field. The other is the tension of maintaining a commitment to a relational pedagogy that is embedded in practice (Degotardi and Pearson, 2014; Degotardi, 2013; Page and Elfer, 2013; Osgood, 2010). A relational pedagogy within the context of this study is concerned with both the child and other professionals. It relates to an ability and commitment to recognise and respond to the contribution of all players to strengthen responses to pedagogical encounters. Such responses allow for multiple voices to be heard, and decisions made that serve to construct the learner in an authentic manner.

It has been argued that Bourdieu overplays the unconscious impulses and aspects of *habitus*, by paying insufficient attention to the everyday reflexive "inner conversations" (Sayer, 2004 cited in Reay, 2004a) that actors have when engaged in practice. Such dialogues with the self, allow for a deeper analysis of aspects of identity related to personal and professional commitments and the logic of practice that this produces. Within the field of ECEC, research related to reflexivity and praxis has helped to gain an insight into the theory/practice relationship to reveal how focused reflection can determine practice as well as enable a practitioner to understand why there may be discontinuities between personal theory and practice (for example, Fisher and Wood, 2012; Garvis et al., 2011; Wood and Bennett , 2000) as well as to help understand the things that "get in the way" of constructing meaning (Lenz Taguchi, 2005). These are important dispositions that frame part of the professional *habitus* of the Early Years Professional and enable them to become a more "active and reflexive agent" (Simpson, 2010,6).

Findings

The narratives that the participants shared of their experiences of being a graduate highlighted that opportunities to utilise their newly gained capital to inform and influence pedagogical practices were more often than not limited. The performative landscape of the field was a clear driving force that served to determine the strategies professionals used to regularize practice. There were two notable strategies employed by the players within and beyond the settings in which the participants worked. I have categorised these as the acts of silencing, and subversion. They relate particularly to strategies that reflected misrecognition of the role of the EYP/teacher and effective pedagogical practices.

Silencing – containment and surveillance

Silencing strategies were employed by the other practitioners who the participants encountered within their professional work, and served to limit the opportunities for them to utilise their newly gained capital to inform and challenge practices. All of the participants had talked in their life history work about the type of practitioner they aspired to be. For Jackie and Kathy, this aspiration was easier for them to fulfil, as they worked in smaller

settings, and had overall management responsibility. Jackie felt strongly that part of her role was to lead by example.

Jackie: *Yes, I'm the manager but I'm also a practitioner with it ….I just couldn't... do something I wasn't prepared to do myself. So we all come together as a staff*

Opportunities to lead practice for Helen, Lucy and Ruth were less readily available. They talked about instances where they had made steps to use their capital to question the underpinning philosophies that seemed to be driving the pedagogical practices they had described, or had requested time to work with staff in their capacity as EYP/EY Teacher to develop practice. Their managers used strategies such as avoidance as a way of silencing their requests.

Helen: *No matter how many times you go into the office and say "look, can we please do this, this is a really good idea it will benefit all the children in the nursery - not just pre-school" …. still nothing gets done.*

For Lucy in particular, working for a larger corporate chain meant that there was an additional layer of management with whom to negotiate. She had challenged the requirement by the company to complete "*long observations*" for each child every six weeks, and was keen for their observations to be more intuitive, rather than "*doing it for the sake of it*".

Lucy: *we've told the manager…. And that's it… It needs to be done. That's the response we got…… It's been brought up in team meetings, it's been brought up to the regional manager.*

Ruth on the other hand found her role as room leader and trainee EY Teacher was a very isolating and lonely endeavour and that the demands of her day to day role meant there was no space for her to work collaboratively with her team as she was contained within the confines of her own room.

Ruth: *I've personally had a few difficulties at my work at the minute because, I'm finding that what I'm trying to do I'm struggling to do alone. I'm training to be an early years teacher… And I've been a preschool room leader…. But I find it really difficult to be the room leader and the early years teacher trainee….. I'll also sometimes take charge of things when things aren't done… I like things to be done properly. It's difficult to manage all those roles. You can't be*

> *the room leader; answering the phone and the door; and interacting with the*
> *children; and writing planning and talking to the parents.*

This idea of containment was also a counter-strategy used by some managers in the settings where they seemed to retain themselves within their own office spaces to 'dictate' from a distance, and avoid opportunities that required them to justify their management decisions.

Helen: *[Our] manager and the deputy manager are in the office all the time, so we*
get dictated to how we should be doing our planning …. My manager has said
that the planning that you have out on your wall, you stick on observations
taken from that week, and from those observations you're planning for next
week. But I have argued… how is that relevant to next week because their
different children? …it's individual observations from particular children's
observations and they might not be even interested in that the week after(!?)
It's very difficult and I'm trying to argue my case all the time.

Sometimes the strategies that managers used were a more explicit act of silencing in the form of surveillance. For example Lucy talked about how her manager would monitor the number of observations that were made for each learning goal. If there were more than the required number in a profile they would be "*ripped out because it's already been in the profile, [and] shouldn't be in there again. If they've done it, they've done it-ticked off and go on to the next thing.*" This created a tension for the participants where they found themselves in a "*Catch -22*" [Jackie] situation pulled between competing expectations to be both rule enforcers and rule changers.

The group reflected on the impact of these strategies when they were under the surveillance of OFSTED. They acknowledged how Jackie and Kathy's role in their setting enabled them to use their knowledge and experience to engage in professional dialogue in order to explain and justify the pedagogical decisions that they were making. Jackie referred to the importance of making things "visible" to OFSTED in order to "play the game"

Lucy: *…you know when OFSTED come in , they talk to the manager quite a lot don't*
they ?...... And I think like for you [Jackie and Kathy], *if they were to say "why*
are you doing this?" …. You can say comfortably "this is why we do it".
Whereas someone who sits in the office and doesn't do it themselves they're
lacking that …..confident ability of being secure in themselves to say "this is
why we do it" rather than being like "we do this, because this is how we're
told…. "

12

Clearly the position the participants held within their different settings was a significant factor that contributed to how their professional habitus played out. As Jackie and Kathy held overall management responsibilities, and had been working in the sector for a number of years this gave them more authority and professional experience to draw upon. Conversely, Ruth, Lucy and Helen found themselves in a peripheral position regarding decision making, so the forces at play were maintaining current practices. Their endeavours to displace and challenge practice that the EYP/EY teacher role suggests, were silenced by their managers in numerous ways. It may well be that their managers had inaccurate and misinformed perceptions of the EYP/EY teacher role, or they were threatened by the 'new' knowledge that they were bringing into the settings (Payler and Locke, 2013). Either way, the strategies such as avoidance and containment employed by their managers to maintain their own position regarding pedagogical decision making were synonymous with the wall of "cotton wool" analogy alluded to by Simpson (2011,710). These strategies contributed to the practitioners' sense of uncertainty about their status and to some extent their practice. The consequences thus resulted in "inauthentic practice and relationships" (Ball, 2003,222) where they had become mindful of how the metrics of accountability were distorting their practice.

The impact of policy discourse is an important factor to include in this analysis. The curriculum frameworks that the participants were required to use to inform their practice served as a particular lens that shaped the way in which the settings were assessing and structuring children's learning and development. The way that outcomes were assessed and documented revealed a site for tension and conflict in which the different practitioners found themselves drawing on strategies of silencing or subversion. Acts such as ripping out observations and managing from a distance are examples of strategies that organisations employ to elude or deflect direct surveillance. They require the players to submit to the disciplines of performativity and competition (Ball, 2003) and it seemed that these were strategies that were perceived would result in a good inspection outcomes.

Subversion - manipulation and distortion

A further strategy that was employed by both the participants and other players beyond their own setting was a more underhand 'game plan'. It was concerned with the manipulation and distortion of data that meant that the documentation was not always an accurate or authentic representation of the progress a child had made.

For Ruth, Lucy and Helen in particular, the interpretation of the type of assessment practices that OFSTED would deem appropriate tended to result in mechanistic approaches to evidence gathering and documentation. They talked about how the *Early Years Outcomes* (DfE, 2013) were being interpreted in a hierarchical and literal manner. This resulted in a requirement to collate a number of observations in order to assure a developmental judgement was accurate.

Jackie: *Physical proof you need, because you feel like your own professional judgement isn't going to be good enough.*

Helen: *It has to be tracked…I can't put anything in that isn't tracked.*

On other occasions the observations were amended in order to make them 'fit' for their designated purpose. Ruth talked about checking reports to ensure they were fit for purpose.

Ruth: *I felt that I really knew that child, and what they were up to. But I couldn't 'fit' them into a box...and I thought I'll sort of 'highlight' <u>across</u> the boxes they were in ... and that caused a major thing because they weren't 'fitting' into one, so I found myself trying to then change what I wrote..*

The challenge, therefore, for the participants was the extent to which the evidence that was produced was deemed to be reliable and valid. There also seemed to be some concern if documentation of learning showed too much progress. Lucy problematized this by way of children being "*too ready*" when they moved from one room in the nursery to the next:

I have been pulled up... …If I was to mark in babies at 20 to 36 [months]…., then they went to Two's [the room that cared for Toddlers] that would be taken out because then they've not got anywhere to go.

The requirement to demonstrate added value meant that despite children making good progress in the pre-school and nursery settings, the documentation that was sent over to the receiving room or school was sometimes disregarded. This went as far as schools

14

apparently amending judgements of the levels children had achieved in order for them to be able to demonstrate good progress. Kathy and Jackie shared anecdotes of how the records that they had sent over to the reception class had been "*marked down*" so that children who they deemed to have made progress that exceeded expectations were downgraded to the earlier band.

Jackie: *I've got to say that I've been told by the reception class teacher that it doesn't really matter what we put, because the head will mark them straight back down to 30 to 50 months for every single child because they want to prove that they have made progress.*

Jackie: *We're not, not getting them ready. We are, but schools are in effect marking them down, so they can show they've made progress and yet ....*

Kathy: *I don't think they look at those transition sheets you know.*

Jackie: *No I know they don't...They go in a cupboard, or it stays in the file, and they don't get looked at.*

Lucy also talked about how the validity of the records that had been compiled by staff in the pre-school room had been questioned by teachers in the feeder school.

Lucy: *We've just done a pre-school tracking meeting and the results back were "they can't possibly be that high"...they wanted evidence*

Jackie used the analogy of a "*criminal offence*" to describe this type of practice, but acknowledged that schools found themselves under equal pressure to prove their worth and consequently had their own "*game plan*" by "*massaging*" the data that was sent over to the school in order to demonstrate to OFSTED added value.

These strategies of manipulation and distortion of data illustrated how the teachers and head teachers in the feeder schools were able to use their educational and social capital to influence the manipulation of data in order to positon themselves advantageously, arguably subverting the regulatory gaze away from them towards the preschool. The documentation that was received from the PVI settings was questioned regarding its validity, which in turn questioned the professionalism of the players within that field. Such instances of "occupational hierarchy" (Simpson, 2011,706) help to reinforce the deficit construction of the ECE practitioner as insufficiently expert (Payler and Georgeson, 2013a) to make

judgements that are trustworthy and reliable. This is yet another strategy that serves to preserve positions in the field.

Research by Roberts-Holmes (2012) suggest that the highly subjective nature of EYFS assessment and the lack of moderation opportunities between the PVI and maintained sector could be one of the reasons why there is distrust in the data that is shared across professional boundaries. However, it is important to acknowledge that Reception teachers have reported finding themselves in an equally submissive position in providing data that satisfies both OFSTED and the Local Authority hold in validating the claims teachers have made regarding the production of their EYFSP data (Bradbury, 2011; Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017). It is therefore evident that notions of hierarchical power within the field mean that the strategies the actors in the PVI sector are able to employ are constrained by their position.

Ball (2003) argues that the policy technologies of the market, managerialism and performativity that underpin neo-liberal educational reform have effectively created new "ethical systems" (218), essentially Bourdieu's 'rules of the game'. These are based upon institutional self-interest, pragmatics and performative worth, and have replaced the 'older ethics' of professional judgement and co-operation. In the samples from the study, co-operation within and across boundaries had been replaced by competition, which is another form of submission which can restrict individual or group behaviour.

A case of unconscious reproduction?

Bourdieu argued that "social inequality is rooted in objective structures of unequal distributions of types of capital" (Swartz 1997,145). For graduates working in the PVI sector, the distribution of both economic capital (in terms of funding and pay conditions) and cultural capital (namely qualifications) has meant that they have effectively been the poor relation to their counterparts in the CSE sector. Despite the recent review of the workforce (Nutbrown, 2012), there still remains disparity and inequality for those who have achieved graduate status (Nutbrown, 2013). Previous research (Roberts- Holmes, 2013; Osgood, 2012; Simpson 2011) identified factors such as misrecognition of the role of the EYP/EY Teacher and the tension between emotional and technical characteristics of the role created

a form of "bounded agency" (Simpson, 2010) where their position in the field determined the extent to which they could exercise their capital to influence practice. In this study, these factors were of similar significance. As Ogood (2012; 2009), McGillivray (2008), Andrew (2015a, 2015b) argue, there are dichotomous tensions that currently exist within the ECEC workforce. These tensions are concerned with the competing constructs of the historical caring, maternal and gendered workforce and/or a professional, degree educated and highly trained workforce (McGillivray, 2008:246). It seems that the participants found themselves caught in between these two constructions when they reflected on the significance of their own professional *habitus* and the importance they placed upon practicing in an ethical and democratic manner:

Ruth: *We're trained to understand children and look after them and do our best to be that key person role there...and then you've got things like that* [i.e. tracking documents] *always at the back of your mind. You have to think about it because you'll be in trouble if you don't...*

This misrecognition of the professional role was a form of *doxa* that had created "shared but unquestioned opinions and perceptions" (Deer, 2012:115) across the field. For the participants this had created an internalized sense of limits and therefore *habitus* regarding the extent to which they could use their capital as an agentic force in challenging the mechanistic and technical practices that seemed to be the expected rules of the game. A further problem with *doxa* is that it misrecognises differences in individual ability. The participants recognised themselves that the tensions that they experienced in utilising their role seemed to be in some ways different dependent on their position in the setting as well as their location in the field. Lucy, Helen and Ruth were young and relatively inexperienced in comparison to Jackie and Kathy. Their more extensive experience had therefore given them the confidence to at least bend or subvert the rules in ways which meant that they were able to utilise their *habitus* in order to satisfy the regulatory gaze - whilst still holding onto their own values and beliefs. Other research has highlighted how 'schoolification' and readiness discourses dominate the relationships between and across the field (Roberts-Holmes, 2014; Moss, 2013; Roberts-Holmes, 2012) and the findings from this study concur with this argument. A distinctive consequence of this ecological power relationship seemed

to be a lack of trust in professional competence across the sector. Undoubtedly these perceptions and practices are partly as a result of the policy context. I argue however that there is still also a broad lack of professional understanding of the PVI sector and the skills and knowledge that EYP/EY teachers possess which equip them with a *habitus* that is based on "dialogue, democratic practice and valuing the contribution of other people" (Moss, 2006a,74) – in other words, a relational pedagogy.

The symbolic capital associated with professional status rather than qualifications seemed to determine power. Relationships of inequalities played out within and across field boundaries. Here I am drawn back to notions of a relational pedagogy, as well as other studies (Edwards, 2011; Payler and Georgeson,2013a) that have identified the significance of boundary talks in order to open up *conscious* spaces to share, understand and utilise teachers' funds of knowledge. Such opportunities help to position children as competent and complex learners, providing an authentic insight into the social and cultural attributes that contribute to a child's learning characteristics. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) remind us, a truly relational pedagogy cannot become a reality unless all the conditions for democratisation are fulfilled (79).

Practitioners in the PVI sector (and indeed teachers) have found themselves conforming to practices that have preserved the field. Whether this is a conscious or unconscious act is more difficult to ascertain. These findings suggest that there is potential for *habitus* to be unconscious if there are no opportunities made available to bring these to the forefront of discussion. The participants talked of their fears of becoming "stuck in the rut" by the demands of pre-school life. They referred to physical and human barriers that made it increasingly difficult to play out their role of "active and reflexive agent" (Simpson 2010,6), which is epitomised by the EYP/EY Teacher status.

Conclusion.

This research highlights how the creation of discursive and collaborative spaces can increase opportunities for more conscious reflection. This is an important disposition to possess if practice is to be transformed, and the role of the EYP and Early Years Teacher is to be understood. Bourdieu et al (2008) argues "It is by knowing the laws of reproduction that we

18

can have a chance, however small, on minimizing the reproductive effect of the educational institution" (53). The research also highlights the need to reduce the reproductive effects of the conforming pedagogical practices that have been exemplified in this study.

In order to transgress traditional educational boundaries, they first need to be made visible (McArdle, 2005). Too many assumptions have been made regarding the professional constructions and identities of those who work with children in the field of ECEC (for example Moss, 2013; Payler and Locke, 2013; Osgood 2012; Cottle, 2011). When this gaze is extended to the broader multi-disciplinary field, it seems that the policy landscape has further complicated this matter, and practitioners can find themselves trapped between competing imperatives (Cottle, 2011; Anning 2005). Arguably, the technical, performative policy requirements have become embodied as part of the graduate professional's *habitus* (both within and outside the maintained sector). A consequence of this, as Osgood (2006) argues, is that whilst they do not necessarily believe in policy discourse, they also feel unable to resist it.

There are emotional costs to the practitioner that can make them feel incompetent (Bradbury, 2012), or as this research has revealed, mistrusted. Therefore there is also a necessity to pursue ways of working professionally that allow for dialogue to reveal insight and understanding of the *habitus* that frames practitioners' practice. This will create opportunities for building confidence and capacity within the PVI sector which positions them as equal players in the field, and enable them to make an equally important contribution about the most appropriate pedagogical practices for young children.

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24

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