An investigation into how Early Years policy is interpreted and enacted in an infant school in England

R E Gordine

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REBECCA ELIZABETH GORDINE

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with issues of EYFS policy and practice in Reception classrooms in an infant school in England. It explores the impact that performativity has upon policy enactments and classroom practice.

A theoretical framework influenced by Foucault's conceptions of power and governmentality is employed to examine the ways in which EYFS policy is interpreted, enacted and understood by Reception class teachers and practitioners. Foucault's explanations of regimes of truth are useful in examining how policy directives become normalised in schools and Early Years settings. An autoethnographic study, written by myself, of three Reception classrooms and teachers is used to explore the ways in which EYFS policy is enacted and to locate the spaces for resistance and transformative change. The findings from this research study, mainly data from entries in my reflective research diaries, highlight the significant extent to which Reception class practitioners find it difficult to balance the EYFS policy directives with their own values and beliefs about how young children learn and develop.

I conclude that Reception class teachers and practitioners agree with the guiding principles of the EYFS statutory framework but find balancing this with the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) and the EYFS Profile (EYFSP), within a strong performative discourse, problematic. In an educational climate where young children are tested and categorised at the ages of four and five based on their attainment in literacy and maths, and teachers and schools are judged on these outcomes, more and more teachers are becoming disillusioned and are leaving the profession.

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1 Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the issue of how Early Years policy translates into the reality of Early Years practice. It is a story of Early Years teachers and practitioners being enthusiastic about teaching young children and empathetic to how young children explore, develop and learn but are also tied to the demands and results driven expectations from senior management, local authorities and government EYFS policy. It is a tale of interpretations and enactments of policy, of ideologies not quite managing to meet realities and practitioners attempting to resist data demands within a performative formation of Early Years education.

1.1 Context and Rationale

I have been a teacher for seventeen years, thirteen of them as a Reception class teacher in the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage). I began my Early Years teaching career in a school located in a socially and economically deprived area, then moving to a school in a more diverse (socially and economically) area in the North West of England. During my first few years of teaching, I naively followed the EYFS Statutory Framework with very little thought about how EYFS policy, at that time, had been formed. I had loose ideas about young children and their development, with an awareness of the need for play in Early Years classrooms, but not really having a deep understanding why. It was only after completing my Masters in Education, spending more time teaching in the Early Years and then having my own children, that I began to become more interested and concerned about child

development and EYFS policy. As part of my role as a Reception class teacher, I completed a baseline assessment each new school year in September. I began to question this; who was it for? Why were we doing it? What impact did it have on the children?

Throughout my years of teaching in a Reception classroom, the emphasis on paperwork, evidence and assessment has increased and the way in which I view myself as an effective and successful teacher, my identity, has altered (Bradbury, 2013). Over time, I noticed a shift in the way that my colleagues and I were beginning to view and teach children according to the increasing demands of EYFS policies and how the surveillance (Foucault, 1979) of our everyday practice was impacting upon, and altering, the experiences and opportunities we offered the children in our care. I saw play implicitly marginalised against more pressing literacy, maths and data targets, advocated by the Bold Beginnings report published by Ofsted (2017), and I felt uneasy about it.

The introduction of the new Reception Baseline Assessment (STA, 2021) has brought these problematic difficulties into even sharper focus and, with it, an increasing impetus to find some answers to them, as well as a better understanding of how to navigate through EYFS policy and guidelines to find a happier, more effective balance for children and teachers in Reception classrooms.

In addition to the moral and pedagogical tensions identified between policy texts and classroom practice, there stemmed a harder to grasp, but no less pressing, issue involving the interpretation and enactment of policies in the infant school in which I was working at the time. I felt a deep pull to further investigate the differing

interpretations and enactments, with a view to better understand them as well as the reasons for them.

With an increasing workload and a proliferation of educational policy texts, meaning intensifying accountability measures for teachers, the culture which Ball entitled 'performativity' (Ball, 2000; 2003; Ball and Whitty, 1990; Elliott, 2001; Sikes, 2001), became evermore harder to ignore. Ball (2003), in his influential paper, 'The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity', explains his definition of performativity. He says, *"Performativity, it is argued, is a new mode of state regulation which makes it possible to govern in an 'advanced liberal' way. It requires individual practitioners to organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations. To set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation."* (Ball, 2003: 215). Performativity has become normalised (Foucault, 1977; Ball, 2008; O'Leary, 2013), an accepted 'truth' amongst teachers, leaders and education settings.

I have used three teachers' voices in this study, in addition to my own voice, reflections and observations, to present a case study narrative of how EYFS policy texts are enacted and interpreted in the context of the Reception classrooms of an infant school in England, exemplifying the performativity discourse (Ball, 2012), which pervades and governs teachers and education at the time of writing.

The research questions were borne out of my interest in the impact and nature of performativity upon practice and policy enactments. This interest developed, over time, into a sense of responsibility on my part to examine and tell the story of Reception practitioners in an infant school and the ways in which we navigated, interpreted and enacted EYFS policy. It is my intention that, by examining the

complexities of policy enactments and teachers' agency within them, a space is opened up for discussion, inquiry and for the potentiality of change and transformation.

As Sisk-Hilton and Meier (2017, X), state;

> *"Telling the stories negotiated inside classrooms is a powerful and transformative act. As teachers, it is our moral responsibility to tell the stories of our classroom; the stories told, enacted, and actively coauthored by the children we teach. It is upon us to narrate more hopeful tomorrows."*

In my quest to tell the stories, from an infant school, of effectuating EYFS policy whilst also upholding professional, moral and personal values and beliefs, I have formulated three research questions. The research questions, which will be attended to throughout this study, are;

- What is the relationship between EYFS policy and practice?
- What is the relationship between Reception practitioners and policy?
- How is EYFS policy enacted in Reception classes in an infant school?

1.2 Autoethnographical case study

This thesis is a case study of myself and three other Reception class teachers in an infant school. As one of the participants in the research, I take an autoethnographical narrative approach, including my own voice, thoughts and personal experience, as well as those of the other three participants, through reflective diary entries collected and collated over the years of the duration of this study. Literature indicates that

reflective diary writing enhances reflection, critical thinking, integration of theory with practice and develops professional growth (Brown and Sorrell, 1993; Callister, 1993; Kea & Backon, 1999; O'Rourke, 1998; Sinclair & Woodward, 1997). Biggs (1999) and O'Rourke (1998), state that the use of reflective diaries enhances critical self-reflection and self-awareness. The decision to use reflective diaries as a method of collecting data will be examined in more detail in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3).

Autoethnography is the study of the self (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p.9). It incorporates the author's reflections and interpretations of personal experience, hence the 'auto'. It also integrates ethnography, which is an approach to studying rules and resistance connected with cultural groups. Autoethnography is, therefore, a hybrid research genre (Hughes and Pennington, 2018). Autoethnography emerged from ethnography, which represents multiple voices of the people with whom the researcher interacts with (Lester & Anders, 2018). Hammersley (2006: 4), describes ethnography as a "*form of social and educational research that emphasises the importance of studying at first hand what people do and say in particular contexts*." In autoethnography, the researcher is at the centre (Edwards, 2021: 5), writing about themselves and their experiences as well as interactions with others who were at present when the experiences happened. Lee (2018), says; "*the autoethnographer strives to achieve a version of the self and an account of events that is consistent and acceptable to their own conscience"* (p. 313). By using autoethnography as a methodology in this study, I am able to centre myself as the author in this study and examine my own identity and contextualised experiences. By bringing intimate aspects of my own experiences and understandings, which are inaccessible to most

researchers, to the forefront of my research, they become part of narratives and can contribute to the field.

Although rooted in autoethnography as a methodology, this study also situates itself in relation to the larger research paradigm of narrative inquiry. This is due to the interest in the lived experiences and perspectives of a sample of Reception class teachers, which are revealed and combined, creating a narrative. Souto-Manning (2014), explains teaching and curriculum as micro narratives historically and sociopolitically shaped by macro narratives and it is these macro narratives which privilege some ways of knowing over others. Narrative inquiry allows for the time and space to participate in continuous reflection and study of the self, whilst also supporting the consideration of multiple perspectives. It acknowledges the hazard of 'single stories' (Adichie, 2009) in teaching, and opens up a space for understanding the complex and intertwined stories of education policy enactments. By making links with pre-existing and more established schools of thought, for example, narrative inquiry, the task of analysis is more robust. The methodology chapter (Chapter 3), will examine autoethnography and narrative inquiry in more detail and outline my justifications for taking this hybrid approach to my research.

1.3 What is policy?

In order to investigate and examine how EYFS policy is enacted in the context of an infant school in England, I need to firstly set out what is meant by the word 'policy'. It is a word which can be used to mean several different things. On a general and one-dimensional level, policy can be an effort to solve a problem. Policy texts are then generated and produced and put into practice in schools and settings. This is

'normative' policy analysis (Ozga 2000: 42). But policy is not just the policy texts created in order to solve a problem. It is much more.

Education policy is not neat and clear, there are many and varied issues and ideas connected to, and entwined within, it. To develop an understanding which captures the complexity of EYFS policy, it is necessary to consider the breadth of what 'policy' covers and to think of it as a set of guidelines. Harman (1984: 13) argues that policy is;

> ". . . *the implicit or explicit specification of courses of purposive action being followed, or to be followed in dealing with a recognized problem or matter of concern, and directed towards the accomplishment of some intended or desired set of goals. Policy can also be thought of as a position or stance developed in response to a problem or issue of conflict and directed towards a particular objective."*

Harman's definition of policy reflects the complexity and the systematic, goal-oriented nature of education policy. However, it is limited in that it only offers up an understanding of policy as a product, rather than a process and a product (Taylor et al, 1997).

Colebatch (2006a, p.2) contests the traditional '*established ways of thinking about policy'*. This form of policy analysis,

> "*rests on an unspoken presentation of government as a problem-solving being, separate from the society over which it rules…Government recognises problems and chooses courses of action to deal with them: these courses of action are 'policy'."* (Colebatch 2006a, p.3)

Maguire et al (2015: 485) identify that the problem with only seeing policy in these terms, is that all the other moments of policy enactments go unrecognised. The intention of this study is to pick out the 'other moments' and examine how these policy enactments tell a story about the actors and the subjects towards whom policy is aimed. One of the difficulties is that these moments change through time and space, becoming tangled and perplexing. Colebatch (2002) describes the messy and jumbled process of policy enactments by policy actors within schools and calls this 'policy activity'. He warns of the risk of the policy activity becoming displaced or invisible in narrow policy analysis which sees policy as straightforward and clear. In the words of Elizabeth Wood (2017, p.110), "*Policies aim to serve as a means for aligning organisational structures and regulatory frameworks, with desired purposes and outcomes, via key participants, organisations and stakeholders."* The job that policies have to do is clear and the complexity, therefore, involved in children's learning and development, teachers' practice and Early Years research, is not reflected in policy frameworks.

Education policies are written '*in relation to the best of all possible schools, schools that only exist in the fevered imaginations of politicians, civil servants and advisers and in relation to fantastical contexts'* (Ball et all, 2012: 3). The idea that policy is complex and 'knotty' is further elaborated upon by Ball et al (2012: 3) who state that policies need to be put into practice, in relation to history and context. Ball summarises the need to think of policy as a process and dependent upon context by saying, "*Practice is sophisticated, contingent, complex and unstable"* and that*, "policy will be open to erosion and undercutting by action, the embodied agency of those people who are its object"* (Ball 1994: 10-11). It is these enactments and the translation of a text into practice, considering differing interpretations and

perspectives as well as context, which is the central theme of this research study. I am not concerned with analysing policy texts on their own, as much as examining the ways in which the texts are ‘done’ and why.

1.4 The Early Years Pedagogical Context

This thesis is attentive to the tensions which exist between EYFS educational policies and practitioners’ practice within Reception classrooms. It is therefore valuable to delve into the history, events and thinking of Early Years teaching and learning, leading up to the present day.

In the following section, I attempt to sketch out the aspects of historical thinking about young children’s learning and development which have been influential in shaping current EYFS policy and practice. These features are important to give time and attention to, as they are the resources upon which teachers and practitioners draw to create order and structure.

Values and cultural and social beliefs are created and cultivated over time as teachers develop an understanding of learning and development in the Early Years. They are built upon lived experiences and through working in the classroom with young children, observing how they play, interact and learn about the world around them. They are constructed through research into early childhood education and through reflection upon practice and they bind together Early Years practitioners (Basford, 2019). Values are interwoven into Reception practice and into social interactions within the classroom. Moyles (2001), wrote about how the features of being a passionate Early Years teacher can be at odds with the ‘black hole’ of performative demands of policy mandates. Performativity is at odds with EYFS

principles and values, based on an understanding of each child as 'unique'. Performativity is the structure in which teachers operate, governing what and how they assess children's learning and development, continually displaying, and calling into question, teacher and pupil performance. Performances, of teachers and schools, as stated by Ball (2003), '*serve as measures of productivity or output'* and '*represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement'* (p.216). Reception classrooms have become a battleground, a perpetual struggle to maintain values in a culture of performativity. I will come back to explore performativity in more detail later in the thesis.

1.5 The Influence of Piaget and Vygotsky on Early Years Policy

The EYFS itself is deeply influenced by the ideas of Piaget and Vygotsky. The developmental theory of constructivist Jean Piaget and his description regarding young children's intellectual development (MacNaughton, 2003: 42), became the dominant explanation for learning and human development for a large proportion of the twentieth century. It was used in the formation of curriculum approaches for young children in the Early Years and was hugely influential in Early Years practice (Edwards, 2003, p.252). His developmental ideas have been challenged over the years (Silin, 1987; Edwards, 2003; Kessler, 1991; Bloch, 1992), with questions raised over the ontological basis upon which Piaget based his theory, as well as cautions against the overreliance on it as a curriculum informant.

In addition to Piaget's theory, Vygotsky's ideas around human development have also been influential in shaping early childhood education. The main difference between Piaget and Vygotsky was that Piaget emphasised that children's

development depended on their behaviours in the external world and Vygotsky emphasised social interactions as fundamental to the process of development (Edwards, 2003, p.255).

Piaget and Vygotsky, key thinkers in the history of Early Years education, constituted a significant component of my own teacher training. Elements of their influence can be recognised in EYFS policy texts, such as the EYFS Framework (DfE, 2017; 2021) and Development Matters (DfE, 2017; 2021). As such, Piaget and Vygotsky's impact on policy and practice is visible and can be seen as both structure and a source of discursive resistance for teachers and schools.

1.6 Characterising the Early Years Curriculum

Defining the Early Years curriculum and assessment can present as a deceptively simple process. It can be seen, on the surface, as the sum of what is being offered to children to be learnt. However, the creation of curriculum and policy is a human endeavour which involves the cultural values, beliefs and assumptions in its construction. Therefore, when examining policy and curriculum, the task becomes just as much about identifying the particular cultural values and theoretical constructs on which it has been based.

Over the course of the last twenty years, early childhood curriculum has centred mainly on developmental views of education that have looked to explain how children develop and acquire knowledge, in order to understand how early education may, most effectively, develop. Over the course of the last two decades, it has been Vygotsky's sociocultural view which, alongside Piaget's cognitive constructivist view, has become the dominant explanation for development and learning. By examining

education policy, schooling and young children's development in the Early Years we, inevitably, begin to look at societies and how they operate, the differences between societies and the 'social facts' (Giddens, 2012) which can constrain and act coercively over people and societies.

The following section offers an introduction to the three main policy texts given attention to, for the purposes of this study.

1.7 The Policy Texts

1.7.1 The Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Guidance

The Early Years Foundation Stage Guidance (DfE, 2017: 6), stipulates best practice as incorporating four main principles; 'A Unique Child', 'Enabling Environments', 'Positive Relationships' and 'Learning and Development'. These four main principles (See Appendix B, p.216) provide the backbone to the curriculum and are there to guide practitioners when caring for, and teaching, young children. Changes to the new EYFS Framework (2021), which became statutory in September 2021, can be found in Appendix A, p.211. This study aims to look at these principles and how they are interpreted, adhered to, resisted and ignored in real life practice and how these principles sit in relation to more target friendly assessment policy.

The EYFS curriculum (DfE, 2017; 2021) is split into three prime areas and four specific areas. The three prime areas are intended to be the foundational areas, on which the specific areas are then built.

The Prime Areas are:

- Communication and Language (CL)

- Physical Development (PD)
- Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED)

The specific areas are:

- Literacy (L)
- Maths (M)
- Understanding the World (UW)
- Expressive Arts and Design (EAD)

The prime and specific areas are then broken down again into seventeen more detailed areas of learning. These areas of learning constitute the Early Learning Goals (ELGs), on which all children are assessed against in the summer term of their Reception Year to complete the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), before moving up to Key Stage One and the National Curriculum. An overview of the Early Learning Goals and the Characteristics of Effective Learning can be found in Appendix E, p. 219.

1.7.2 The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

In 2003, the Foundation Stage Profile was introduced to assess children at the end of the Reception year. The Foundation Stage was the phase of children aged 3-5 years, until 2008 when the Foundation Stage Profile was renamed the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) and included guidance for practitioners working with children from birth to five. It was updated in 2016 and again in 2020 (DfE, 2020). In this study I use the term EYFSP to refer to the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, and EYFS to refer to the Early Years Foundation Stage which is the stage of development from birth to five. Children enter Key Stage One and begin to access

the National Curriculum at the end of the EYFS, once they have completed the Reception year and move into Year One. The EYFS Profile is submitted to the Local Authority and central government. It is subject to moderation and data analysis. The results of the EYFSP are recorded and published locally and nationally and are categorised from highest performing to lowest performing Reception classes and schools in a National Statistics publication (DfE, 2023).

1.7.3 The Reception Baseline

Over the thirteen years I have been teaching Reception, there has always been a baseline assessment, in some form, when children started school in September. When I began teaching Reception, having come from year two, there was the 'PIPS' (Performance Indicators in Primary Schools) assessment (Tymms et al, 2014), which was administered through a laptop or computer and assessed children's ability in reading and maths. Then, in my subsequent school, we used paper to record scores, moving after this to inputting scores into a succession of various computer and online tracker systems. In 2016, the controversial (BERA, 2018) new government Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) produced by Early Excellence, came in and, along with it, expensive training and data that ultimately could not be used (Bradbury, 2019; STA, 2016). Towards the end of this study a new Reception Baseline came in to be trialled, produced instead by NFER. It was due to become statutory for all Reception classes in England from September 2020, but the Coronavirus pandemic forced the delay of this until September 2021.

The DfE, in the 'Reception Baseline Assessment' document (2019), explain the aims of the assessment. They state;

> "*The purpose of the reception baseline assessment is to provide an on-entry assessment of pupil attainment to be used as a starting point from which a cohort-level progress measure to the end of key stage 2 (KS2) can be created.*
> *The reception baseline is not intended to:*
> • *provide on-going formative information for practitioners*
> • *be used in any way to measure performance in the early years, evaluate preschool settings or hold early years practitioners to account*
> • *provide detailed diagnostic information about pupils' areas for development"*
>
> (p. 4)

This study examines the spaces between EYFS policy and practice in which these policy statements don't quite meet the reality of a group of Reception class teachers and to investigate the variety of interpretations and enactments surrounding this document. It looks to find answers as to why and seek ways and means of *transforming* practice and policy (MacNaughton, 2003).

1.8 Researching EYFS Policy

In this study I aim to address the research questions through an examination of specific and relevant Early Years policies, to see what research and theory has influenced the creation of policy and guidelines for Early Years practitioners. This research also seeks to understand the entanglements between policy and practice and the people who enact it. I attempt, in this thesis, to evaluate how well policy translates into practice and to highlight the difficulties and ambiguities which this activity of implementing policy with young children throws up for practitioners. By

evaluating the enactment of Early Years policy through a theoretical framework of performativity and governmentality, opening up a space where it can be seen in a Reception classroom from the perspective of those doing it, I aim to generate critical and reflexive conversations in schools and between practitioners and researchers about the scope for resistance, power and active change. This thesis intends to inform policy and practice and provide a critical analysis of Early Years policy enactment in an infant school.

Policy is difficult to research because of the changeability and particularites of the context. Looking at EYFS policy over time becomes a political challenge and is not linear in its journey (Ball, 2012). Recognising what policy is proves difficult when beginning to research it in a school context. Olssen, Codd and O'Neill (2004) describe policies as, '*discursive embodiments'* of the balance of social and political dynamics at a particular historical moment". As this study was undertaken over a period of five years, it has been challenging, as well as interesting, to track Early Years policies alongside the political landscape as it has altered, adjusted and reorganised over time. The Ofsted Bold Beginnings document (Ofsted, 2017), was influential in the latter years of this study, on Reception classroom practice, increasing momentum of the school readiness agenda (Wood, 2019; Needham & Ulkuer, 2020; Roberts-Holmes, 2015) and affecting the ways in which EYFS policies were enacted by Reception practitioners.

1.9 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is structured in order to serve two purposes. The first purpose is to tell the story of a group of Reception class teachers who work to unpick EYFS policies and translate the ideas and guidance from them into practice with young children,

whilst at the same time holding true and loyal to their own values and beliefs regarding child development, learning and play, gained through life, work experience and research study. The second purpose is to provide a clear sense, to the reader, of how my chosen theoretical frameworks provide the lens that was used to collect and analyse the data, as well as to contribute to the field in which this research is situated.

The thesis is structured in the following order:

Chapter Two outlines the theoretical tools I employ, from Foucault's theories of power and governmentality, to Ball's application of the concept of performativity, and includes reflection on the problems involved in using these frameworks. Chapter two also incorporates the literature review for this study, where I consider the policy context and the literature which forms the basis for this study. I consider the research into Early Years policy and the irregularities in the policies' implementation and enactments. Chapter two looks at the theory of policy and how governmentality, performativity and questions of structure and agency have become important ways of understanding what policy is.

Chapter Three explains my methods and methodology and introduces the school context for my study. In this chapter I reflect on the data collection process and the ethical issues involved in autoethnographic case study research.

Chapter Four is the findings and analysis chapter. It outlines the findings from the study in relation to the research questions and provides an analysis of the current EYFS policies which provided the context for the research participants during the time of the study.

Chapter Five is the concluding discussion chapter, where I sum up my findings. I conclude the thesis by considering the wider significance of my findings in relation to Early Years policy and practice, limitations of the study, the possibilities for change and the potential for further research.

2 Policy Enactments and Resistance

2.1 Introduction

The process of undertaking this study has enabled me to gain a deeper insight into, and understanding of, the role of theory in educational research. This part of the thesis attempts to articulate, and to make visible, the process of formation of theoretical understanding I have been, and continue to work, through as well as looking at the research literature surrounding Early Years policy enactments and resistance, in order to identify key themes that are relevant to this study.

I am interested in how policies become more or less important and, crucially, how they are interpreted and enacted in the context of an infant school by teachers, and Early Years practitioners involved in the education of young children. The relationship between EYFS policy and practice, as well as the relationship between Reception practitioners and policy is a significant concern. I believe that, by furthering our understanding of the ways in which we use, and are used by, policies in education, we can develop our self-awareness and become more responsive and authentic in our interactions with, and our teaching of, children.

This chapter sets out the theoretical tools I use to examine the issues involved in this study. These tools are helpful in looking at important aspects of this research, for example, policy, performativity, governmentality, identity, structure, agency and power. When searching for a theoretical lens through which to examine my data and the policy narratives in both EYFS policy documents and in practice, I referred back

to some of my reflective diary entries from early on in my doctoral journey. The following extracts enabled me to pinpoint the key areas I was interested in.

Autumn 2017

"I set up the classroom with a range of different enhancements and felt pleased with the choices on offer for the children. In my planning I had blocked the morning out for 'observations' and I was happy to see the children were excited about all the new and interesting resources out in the provision. I moved around the classroom throughout the morning collecting valuable observations of the children, all engaged and learning through play. The richest observations came from the role play area where the children were acting out roles and experiences with their friends. I gathered some really useful information in regards to their communication and language development and their personal, social and emotional development. I felt satisfied that the children were sharing and listening to each other's ideas as this has been something we have been working on this term. Then, at 10.45am I remembered that the Headteacher was showing round a group of parents at 11am and I hurriedly got the children to tidy up the classroom and sit on the carpet quietly, just in time for the visit."

Autumn 2019

"The Baseline has taken up all of my time these last two weeks. It was new so I had to get to grips with it so that took longer. It was a tablet-based assessment and it kept freezing in the middle of an assessment. I felt frustrated by how long it took and how many times it stopped working. It has been good weather and the children have been outside a lot. I had to administer the test in a quiet place so I was stuck inside for most of the time while the TA was outside. I could hear the laughter and the games from the open window and I felt sad. I am so pleased that it is done now and I can finally get back to what I like doing best, playing with, and getting to know, the children."

These two short extracts from my diary illustrate the tensions I felt between what I knew was valuable and beneficial for the children, their learning and wellbeing, and what I felt was expected, and what was imposed, by 'others'. By examining the pieces of writing above I can see that I was struggling with finding a way to balance my classroom practice, expectations of others and the implementation of prescribed government EYFS policy and school expectations.

This chapter looks at two main orienting concepts; Foucault's ideas around power and governmentality and Ball's concept of performativity. In order to create a conceptual toolbox for this research I needed to carefully select ideas from key thinkers in the field with whom I align myself in relation to my own beliefs and positioning. To do this, I looked first to Michel Foucault (1979), whose theories on power and governmentality I kept returning to throughout my study years. Alongside

Foucault, I also looked to Ball (2008; 2012) and his ideas around performativity and education policy enactment.

2.2 Power and Governmentality

In the school, there was an unwritten and unspoken expectation to conform and behave in particular ways at specific times and in particular situations. The second diary extract, above, illustrates how, "*discursive practices, events and texts"* (Fairclough, 1995: 132), are instrumental to the process of 'doing' school (Ball, 2012). Colebatch (2002: 116), states that, "*policy involves the creation of order – that is, shared understandings about how the various participants will act in particular circumstances*."

These tacit shared understandings, implied but rarely spoken, convey a power which comes from above and filters down to the classroom, the teachers, the interactions and relationships between adults and children. This 'creation of order' (Ball, 2012) is what Foucault (1993) calls 'governmentality' and it forms part of the framework for this study. The aspects of poststructuralism with which I am concerned with are some of those ideas held by the French post-structuralist, Michel Foucault. His rejection of the deep theoretical structure of Marxism and functionalism (Foucault, 1978), made way for his individual conceptions of knowledge and power, according to Olssen et al, (2004: 18). Foucault's interpretation of governmentality is a useful frame for this study as it provides a lens through which to view school and Early Years education as an aspect of *changing rationalities of government* (Tickly, 2003; p. 172). By examining EYFS policy enactments within a framework of governmentality, it is possible to view policy as discourse, an entity in its own right,

with material effects (Hindess, 1997). Foucault, in his work on governmentality, scrutinised power and how it can be used by governments and policy makers to ensure that individuals govern themselves. This thesis looks at the materials used in policy implementation and enactments and how these become the tools of governmentality in schools (Foucault, 1991). In one of his lectures in Dartmouth, Foucault articulated the power of governmentality;

> "*Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word, governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself."*
>
> (Foucault 1993: 203-204)

The intricate ways in which governmentality asserts power over, and within, people, according to Foucault, above, is interesting when looked at alongside EYFS educational policy as it opens up a space in which it is possible to begin to understand the effects of policy on teachers' and practitioners' professional identity. By examining the data in this study through a governmentality lens, it is possible to begin to expose the school practices and to reflect upon them critically (Larner, 2000).

The research undertaken for this thesis reveals the power of the school culture, the expectations of teachers, children and parents about what school looks like and what it means to all stakeholders. An individual school culture reflects centuries of cultural and social beliefs and practices in education, which in turn reflect changing attitudes towards the purposes of education, to create docile citizens (Foucault, 1977) or

economic entities. It seeks to understand how practice is created amongst the, at times, conflicting expectations of teachers, school culture and EYFS policy, which is generally, although not always, pursuing practice reform. Through a developing awareness of the issues surrounding power, agency and governmentality, I decided a Foucauldian framework, located in the poststructural field, was a good match for the research I had chosen.

2.3 Power and Surveillance

Foucault's work on disciplinary power (1986) is useful in exploring how teachers are subject to visibility and how they are constituted within policy and accountability, standards and improvement agendas. Foucault's ideas about governance and self-governance can be applied to the education system which we find ourselves in today. Education is governed by data-based accountability (Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm, & Simola, 2011) and it is the visibility of schools, created through techniques such as data submission and league tables, which perpetuates the governance cycle, allowing governance and self-governance to dominate. Foucault (1977) states that "visibility is a trap", but he also argues that it is a trap that we, ourselves, construct. Ball (1993) discusses the power disturbances which happen around policy enactments in education settings. He asserts, "*Policies typically posit a restructuring, redistribution and disruption of power relations, so that different people can and cannot do different things"* (p.11)

The prescriptive nature of the EYFS Framework, and the predetermined outcomes which go alongside the Framework in the form of the EYFS Profile, focus only on what can be measured. The judgements of children which are made at the

beginning, throughout and at the end of the Reception year, by teachers, are reported and are seen by 'others' (SLT, LA, parents, Ofsted, the media) as a judgement of the quality of teaching and provision. It puts teachers and schools in the spotlight. The power of these judgements by others is substantial and it works successfully to keep Reception class teachers' concentration on the outcomes which are measured and reported. This interest in outcomes at the end of Reception is felt very keenly by Reception class teachers and the more attention this subject receives, the greater the power of them becomes. Roberts-Holmes (2019) discusses how statutory testing and EYFS assessment enhances self-governing by teachers *'as they themselves strive to improve their own performance'* (p.32), a process defined as 'governmentality' by Foucault (2010). This surveillance and power of measurable outcomes, works to conceptualise Reception class teachers in ways which may contradict or sit uncomfortably with practitioners and their core values and beliefs about how young children learn and develop. Teachers are 'professionalised' and 'de-professionalised' (Ball, 2003; Edgington, 2016) by the power of the outcomes and EYFS policy, they are held to account by them and no real alternative to more formal methods of teaching in order to achieve the narrow, measurable outcomes, can be properly contemplated. In some ways, thinking and reflection is removed from the expectations of Reception class teachers, complicating notions of agency and identity (Buchanon, 2015). Reception class teachers, while disapproving of the standardised testing of young children, may feel professionally validated when the children in their class are successful on those very measures of assessment.

Moyles (2001) argues that the EYFS sector needs to have a coherent and vocal workforce, consisting of teachers and practitioners who are able to define their own

professionalism and in doing so, she argues they become, "*active agents of change rather than passive recipients of policy*." (p.90). The conceptualising and re-conceptualising of teachers through policy and the silencing of core values and beliefs of teachers, through the implementation and reporting of prescriptive EYFS policy, is something which this study seeks to investigate, leading to further understanding.

The connection of action to power allows a space for an investigation into how policies are enacted in the structure of a school. Both Weber (1968) and Marx (1953) conceptualise power as conflict and domination, and, where this can certainly be seen in some aspects of policy enactment, it is not always true. Power does not logically imply conflict, it is only the attachment of power to the pursuance of interests which can cause the two to collide, as the interests of participants may not always coincide (Cassell, 1993: 110). Every form of human interaction features power to some degree, but interests are not always divided. Therefore, power and conflict do not always go hand in hand and power and action can be transformative where there are shared interests.

2.4 Power

Foucault focused on the political nature of discourse, emphasising the institutional technologies through which power can be effected. His ideas around discourse and power supports an understanding of how people's identities can be established and transformed and how social change can come about (Olssen et al, 2004; MacNaughton, 2004). Foucault's concepts of power support my investigation into how government educational policies are enacted in the school and classroom by

opening up ways to contemplate how the power enmeshed within policy documents compels teachers to engage with tasks which are contrary to their values and beliefs.

Concepts around ‘normalising judgement’ and the ‘panoptican gaze’ which Foucault developed in his work on discipline and punishment (Sheridan, 1977: 201) have been useful when examining the ways in which EYFS policy ‘works’ on Reception class teachers, even when they are not consciously or actively implementing policy. The idea that people are judged on where their actions place them on a ranked scale which compares them to everyone else, rather than their own individual path of progress and development, allows for the entry into an examination of early years assessment and reporting policies. Ball (1997) writes about how performative comparison is a form of power which is realised and reproduced through social interactions in schools (p. 261). It is a power, according to Ball, which is not only coercive, but also constructive, in that it articulates in teachers self-scrutiny, self-evaluation and self-regulation (Rose, 1989: 222). The idea that teachers are conspicuous and observable within a continuous improvement education agenda is touched upon by Ball (2015). He states that teachers are constituted as ‘effective’ through the visibility and comparison which permeates education policy and that they are subject to various interventions with the intention of bettering actions and practice.

Normalisation is a successful means of control, pervasive and, to a large extent, unquestioned, in our society, as there is always a higher level possible. The panoptican gaze is another form of control which, like normalisation, induces in us a state of consciousness and visibility which encourages us to govern ourselves.

2.5 Poststructural Theory

Foucault challenged the work of structuralists such as Barthes, Saussure and Levi-Strauss and their assertions that there is one universal structure and that it is more important than the parts (Olssen et al, 2004: 49; MacNaughton, 2005). Poststructural theory emerged as a way of critiquing positivist concepts which relied heavily on science and objectivity. Post-structuralism emphasizes the importance of the individual and historical and cultural contexts in order to create reality. The post-structural approach, differing from, but not entirely contrasting with, the structuralist approach, accepts that identified regularities are specific to particular times and places, rather than the same in all historical times and cultures (Olssen, 2003: 192). Olssen discusses Foucault's approach to social science and explains how Foucault's account of neoliberalism as an historically formed discourse is an example of poststructuralist analysis (Olssen, 2003: 189). For Foucault, neoliberalism represented an art of government, a discourse incorporating ideas that arise in response to problems located with a specific historical time period. By taking a poststructural approach to this research I can explore the personal feelings and motivations experienced by Reception class teachers in response to competing policy pressures on practice and I can investigate the ways in which these 'parts' contribute to policy enactments.

2.6 Regimes of Truth and Normalisation

When looking at and studying policy, Foucault's theories on discourse and power can prove helpful in examining how discourses operate as regimes of truth within EYFS policy. The way that the new Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA), as well

as the EYFS Statutory Framework and EYFS Profile operates within a Reception classroom to define children in specific ways and create 'truths' interests me. Over the last five years, an uneasiness about the ways in which very young children in Reception classes are characterised by policy and Early Years practice, has slowly escalated for me. I have become more aware of the power that Early Years education policy texts can have over Reception class teachers who accept their contents and the values attached to them as 'truths'.

> "*Discourses mobilise truth claims and constitute rather than simply reflect social reality [...] Policies are very specific and practical regimes of truth and value and the ways in which policies are spoken and spoken about, their vocabularies, are part of the creation of the conditions of their acceptance and enactment"*
>
> (Ball, 2008:5)

This statement from Ball (2008), highlights some of the challenges that Reception class teachers face when interpreting and implementing EYFS policies, the regimes of truth which construct children and their development in particular ways. Ball (2008: 5), explains the dimensions of enactment and the ways in which policies, "*organise their own specific rationalities, making particular sets of ideas obvious, common sense and "true"."* These 'truths' enjoy a 'centre stage' position within policy artefacts such as assessment grids, posters and EYFS training paperwork, reinforcing the policy message and cementing policy directionality. The policy artefacts, constituted of 'truths', beliefs and meanings, form part of policy enactments and governmentality. Once these become accepted and established, then the power becomes manifested

at a micro-level, allowing for discourses to become internalised (Ball, 2012) and individuals to govern themselves. The artefacts, the posters, assessment grids, pupil progress meetings and training materials, are tools of governmentality in EYFS policy enactments. Foucault (1993), discusses the power of people governing themselves;

> *"Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word, governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself."*
>
> (pp. 203-204)

One of the biggest hurdles to overcome in Early Years education is the 'normalisation' of assessment practices, measurement tools and bureaucracy (Ball, 2008; O'Leary, 2013). Early Years practitioners have come to just accept the continual assessment and data driven practices in Reception classes, seeing these practices as constituting the schools' 'narratives of progress' or 'Ofsted stories' (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017). That young children have predetermined development targets and goals to achieve is now 'part and parcel' of the job of a Reception class teacher. Foucault (1977, 184), states that, "*like surveillance, and with it, normalization becomes one of the great instruments of power*." EYFS educational policies act as 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1979; Ball, 2012), affecting policy implementation, classroom practice and teacher identity. The school readiness agenda (Kay, 2018; Roberts-Holmes, 2015; Ofsted, 2017) is an example of

normalisation and a regime of truth. It has become accepted by EYFS teachers and practitioners as an element of Reception class teaching and, as such, is powerful in its control, limiting space and potential for resistance. One of the core aims of this study is to delve deeper, and more critically, into the enactments of EYFS policy and to uncover and highlight the parts of these enactments which become accepted and established in school practice and culture as 'truths' with very little awareness of how this comes to be or allowance of space for opposition.

The use of measurable outcomes in the Early Years has become accepted over time and is an acknowledged part of provision and teaching. It has become normalised and, largely, deeply unquestioned by teachers and practitioners. Olssen et al (2004: 32) describe a norm as, "…*a standard, by which it is possible to assess or measure or appraise…It is through the norm that the disciplines operate, through an assortment of techniques, examinations, exercises, practices, punishments, rewards – they both constitute and regulate individuals…"* Foucault (1977: 184) emphasises the significance of normalisation. He says, "*Like surveillance, and with it, normalization becomes one of the great instruments of power."* It is this 'taken for granted' acceptance of the prescriptive outcomes of EYFS policy, which is one of the central themes to this study as it works as a force of power over reception class teachers and creates them as functional 'deliverers' of subject knowledge and skills as set out by policy makers and writers.

Normalisation, as described above in relation to the implementation of policy, can also be applied to the substantive outcomes as specified in the EYFS Profile which have become 'the norm' and accepted within the EYFS sector. The model of development which informs the EYFSP details a linear progression where each child develops at the same rate and it the same ways. This dominant discourse, also

known as ‘Developmentally Appropriate Practice’ (DAP), sets out a series of demands upon children which require fulfilment, in order to be seen as a ‘successful’ learner (Bradbury, 2019b). It has been argued that this discourse can be viewed as a regime of disciplinary power which defines some children as ‘normal’ and other children as ‘failing’ (Cannella 1997; Hultqvist and Dahlberg 2001; MacNaughton 2005). Writers such as MacNaughton 2005; Falabella 2021; Moss 2019; Ball 1990, 1994, have discussed in detail Foucault’s ideas around surveillance, self-monitoring and regimes of truth. These post-structuralist ideas contribute to the powerful performative discourse, governing Reception class teachers and leaders and are part of the policy texts they are obliged to follow and enact. The performative discourse surrounding EYFS has led to a constricted concept of teaching young children.

One of the dangers of the narrow, instrumental approach to teaching and learning in Reception, which is constructed through national education policies and has become normalised in schools, is that of commodification. By valuing measurable outcomes and knowledge as a commodity, we are denying the importance of human relationships and social values. Slater and Tonkiss (2001: 162) warn about the shift of our understanding of the world from social values created by people to one in which “*everything is viewed in terms of quantities; everything is simply a sum of value realised or hoped for.”* This ‘commodity culture’ reproduces education and blurs the lines between education for the public good and education for the market society.

2.7 Interpretations and Translations

Spillane (2004: 7) makes the point that 'doing policy' is complicated in that it involves a process of 'sense-making' and that policy actors "*use the lenses they have developed through experience to filter their awareness"* to interpret the signals. Interpretation is the ways in which policy actors (teachers, school leaders and support staff) first read and respond to policy, the 'decoding' of policy texts. It is the process of meaning-making and it connects the small picture to the big picture (Ball 2012; Fullan, 2001). Interpretation is not neutral, it is complex and political as it explains policy and at the same time creates an institutional agenda, 'often contradictory and always socially embedded' (Hodder, 2003: 156). Rizvi and Kemmis (1987) discuss how interpretation and recontextualization are part of a process which sometimes involves "*interpretations of interpretations."* Senior leadership meetings and staff meetings are the main places where 'interpretations of interpretations' happen.

2.8 Datafication

Another extract from my reflective diary highlights the difficulties I encountered when trying to mediate between policy expectations, particularly between assessment policy and my principled interpretation of the EYFS guidance, and my own beliefs and understandings about how young children learn and develop.

Summer 2019

"Data time again....

Time for the last assessment of the year. The children have been grouped and regrouped on pieces of paper over the last ten months, changing from little individuals with their own unique personalities and ways of looking at the world, to numbers and letters on grids and graphs. The children have been ranked and targeted, had extra booster sessions, learning plans and paperwork. The last few months have seen play opportunities squashed and squeezed into brief, mini sessions between adult directed 'learning activities' designed to get the children ready for Year 1 and evidence collected for moderation. There will be pupil progress meetings in the coming weeks where children will be plotted on a table according to whether they achieved a GLD (Good level of development) and how comfortably they got there.....a 'low' expected, a 'solid' expected or a 'high' expected. There will be 'borderline' children and 'emerging' children, either below age related expectations or 'well below'. The language is sometimes harsh and cold and I wonder to myself how we would feel as teachers grouped on a piece of paper alongside our peers in this way."

The diary extract above clearly shows the disparity I felt between my own beliefs about children as individuals and the reductionist language within EYFS assessment policy documents. This concern with how we view young children through a policy lens is what Holmes and Bradbury call the 'datafication of Early Years education'. On this point they say; "*young children are reconfigured as miniature centres of calculation*" (2016, p.600). Reception classes and Reception class teachers have never felt the effects of datafication more than they do right now in England. The

EYFS policy context, which is heavily dominated by assessment, has forced the shift in focus, by teachers, leaders, schools and local authorities, towards the production and analysis of data. This shift has been criticised as evidence of the 'schoolification' and formalisation of Early Years education (Bradbury, 2019: 7).

In this study, I draw upon concepts from the work of Foucault (1977, 1980) and Deleuze (1995) to conceptualise datafication. Foucault uses the idea of the panoptican as a metaphor for a position which is all-seeing and requires us to govern ourselves through the internalisation of expectations. He states that disciplinary power is exercised through '*conscious and permanent visibility'* (1980). This idea of permanent visibility can be applied to Reception class teachers and the expectation that they are supposed to govern themselves in response to demands placed upon them by EYFS policy and the government. This is then filtered down and expected on a local level by school management. Disciplinary power therefore operates through surveillance and governs practice as well as how teachers judge themselves and others.

Deleuze (1995) has a different viewpoint on discipline and power to Foucault. He writes that there has been a shift and a new system of domination, where mass, free floating monitoring has replaced targeted scrutiny of individuals and populations. He discusses how the change has brought about people becoming 'dividuals' rather than 'individuals'. Bradbury (2019a), uses Deleuze's theory of power and 'dividuals' to explain how data can reproduce the child as a 'data double', stripped of complexity and subject to visibility (p.10). Bradbury (2014; 2016) and Ball (1997; 2003; 2008; 2012) further aid an examination of the issues of agency, identity and performativity.

Ball's conception of performativity, of *"a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change"* (Ball, 2003: 216), is particularly useful when examining how teachers navigate enacting EYFS policy at the same time as holding onto their values.

The 'datafication' and the high value of assessment data in primary education in England is of great interest to me, as its fit with Early Years education and pedagogy is less than neat and tidy. The tensions and the spaces between data and assessment policy and Early Years practice and pedagogy is a theme which weaves throughout this research project. It is the backdrop to the ways in which EYFS policy is enacted by teachers and schools.

2.9 Ball and Performativity

Ball's concept of performativity (2003), even nineteen years on from his seminal paper, resonates with me and my experiences of enacting EYFS policy in an infant school. I have chosen to use performativity within this study, as a means to better understand how it is embedded in classroom and policy practice, as well as how it is experienced by Reception class teachers. There has been some research into performativity and education policy enactments, for example Bradbury (2019), Roberts-Holmes (2016) and Ball (2012), have contributed considerably to this field and continue to do so. It is my hope that this study contributes to building a more rounded insight into the experiences of Early Years teachers when navigating education policy, values and practice. There is an increasing requirement for Early Years teachers to grapple with demands for accountability and performativity (Ball, 2012; Edgington, 2016) and this has had an effect on classroom practice, policy

enactment and teacher retention (Perryman, 2020). Current EYFS policies, for example the Reception Baseline Assessment (DfE, 2021) and the EYFSP (DfE, 2020), serve to further implant and embed accountability and performativity into teachers' classroom practice by prescribing two main assessment points in the Reception year at which children, teachers and schools are judged. Wood (2019), writes about Ofsted's reliance on the circular discourses of performativity to reinforce the government's standards and accountability agendas (p.784). She states that this, "…*reveals the extension from Ofsted's remit of inspection, to a mandate for defining 'quality' and 'good' practice*," which further bolsters scrutiny and control over schools and teachers.

Ball (2001, 2003, 2012b), with some reference to Foucault and Lyotard, names the '*powerful and insidious policy technology'*, which works within education systems at all levels, performativity. Ball states that, within the regimes of performativity, teachers and practitioners are required to spend more and more time making themselves accountable, reporting on what they do, rather than doing it (2012b: 19). He argues that performativity is a '*moral system that subverts and re-orients us to its ends"* (2012b: 19).

Ball's application of the concept of performativity (1997; 2003; 2008), has become hugely influential for me, as it resonates with me and the context in which I was studying and conducting research. Ball's assertion that, "*working within a performative culture*" produces "*a set of dualisms and tensions"* and *"a potential 'splitting' between the teachers own judgements about 'good practice' and the rigours of performance"* (2003: 221), echoes my own feelings about what I was seeing and experiencing as a teacher in an infant school. Ball's use of Foucault's ideas on surveillance, regimes of truth, resistance and control (1997; 2003; 2008;

2011; 2012), reflect some of the concerns I was grappling with during this study and he wrote about them in ways which I had been struggling to articulate.

With the sharp focus on standards and outcomes and the use of online trackers and computer systems to record and analyse data, the classroom is made into '*a learning machine'* (Foucault, 1979: 147), used for surveillance and rewarding. The school then becomes a '*centre of calculation'* (Latour, 1986: 235), where data is used by professionals for the purpose of improving standards. When the 'machine' breaks down, those responsible are punished and more rigid pressures imposed.

Ball and Foucault's concepts of surveillance, governance and performativity are very useful for me when considering the ways in which the Reception class teachers (policy actors) in this study enacted Early Years policies and the ways in which these enactments were situated within a performative discourse. The performativity agenda, which infuses EYFS policy making, translation, interpretation and enactment in schools and education, requires specific attention as the weight of it leaves an imprint upon teacher identity and classroom practice. The following section examines the ways in which performativity impacts upon EYFS settings and reconfigures teacher identity as well as how children are seen and thought about. Performativity, and the pressures it brings to teaching in Reception classes, is a considerable concern for this study and it is a theme which permeates many corners and aspects of school life, and therefore, policy enactments too.

Foucault and Lyotard are influential in the work of Stephen Ball, who has done a lot of work on examining neoliberal policy in education and how it is operated within the system (Ball, 2003). Performativity is a mode of regulation that 'employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change' (Ball

2003, 216); "*professionals adapt to the increasingly complex demands of systems of monitoring and accountability, and in turn these change 'who we are' as well as what we do*" (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017: 945). Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes (2017), argue that data is central to the regulation of schools. Ball (2013: 57) explains performativity as, "…*a culture or a system of 'terror'. It is a regime of accountability that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of control, attrition and change.".*

Ball's work on performativity links with Foucault's discussion of disciplinary power, which is useful in thinking about how the power to judge schools through inspection and monitoring impacts upon practice in primary schools and Early Years settings. Performativity can exert a great amount of pressure on a school and the teachers and practitioners within it. It is controlling and, as Shore and Wright (1999: 570) explain, has the "*capacity to reshape in their own image the organisations they monitor*." Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016: 600) argue that the performativity discourse is increasingly impacting upon the Early Years sector. They say, "*the surveillance and performative culture of accountability both affirms, legitimates and seduces through discourses of quality while increasingly regulating and governing the early years."* They go on to say that, "*young children are reconfigured as miniature centres of calculation."* The introduction of the Reception Baseline Assessment, statutory from September 2021, is yet another means by which children are 'datafied' and teachers regulated and held even more accountable. Unnecessary and detrimental practices in schools can become part of the systems brought about by the performativity culture which exists within them. Shore and Wright (1999), claim that performativity has the '*capacity to reshape in their own image the*

organizations they monitor.' (p.570). These practices and systems then drive individuals to take responsibility for monitoring and disciplining themselves.

Husbands (2001), describes performativity as culturally refocusing schooling (p.10) through language, measurable criteria and assumptions. Elliott (1996), taking on Lyotard's (1984) 'law of contradiction' and the 'transaction costs' involved in performativity, explains how gaining the performative information necessary for ultimate control '*consumes so much energy that it drastically reduces the energy available for making improvement inputs'* (p.15).

Osborne and Gaebler (1992) and Bottery (2000), take the concept of performativity out of the classroom and the school and look at it in the larger global sense in which it changes the way we think of education. It reorients education to the requirements of the global economy and the demands of globalisation. Bottery (p.vii), states that, '*nation states are in danger of becoming servants of global markets, their education systems providing the human resources to feed them.*' This global picture, of children as economic entities and workforce products, is a theme that runs through this study. It is a formation, an understanding of children, from which the Reception class teachers in this research project are attempting to distance themselves from. The policy documents and the ways in which these are communicated and reinforced throughout the school and through interactions with other practitioners and senior leaders, LA advisors, Ofsted inspectors and the media provide very little space for alternative interpretations. Yet there is resistance. Pushes and pulls below the surface.

Osgood, in her work (2004; 2006a), identified a 'passive resistance' amongst Early Years teachers and practitioners, where there was overt resistance to some neo-

liberal policy reforms but, along with this, feelings of powerlessness. Ball (2003), writes about ‘ventriloquism’, whereby teachers appear to be performing a policy objective, but they don’t believe in it. Butler (1990), also discussed the ways in which practitioners feel obligated to adhere to performativity demands. She called this ‘enacted fantasy’. All of the above concepts, of ‘passive resistance’, ‘ventriloquism’ and ‘enacted fantasy’, fit in with Foucault’s ‘technicians of behaviour’ (Foucault, 1978: 294) and ‘bodies that are docile and capable’ (Foucault, 1980: 138).

Resistance, both passive and overt, is an important aspect to this study, especially as compliance is expected of those teachers and schools perceived as ‘good’ by Ofsted (Bradbury, 2012). But can there be space for resistance, rebellion even, within the compliant teacher and the consent to, and implementation of, EYFS policies? And is there an emotional cost for teachers and the way they view themselves as professionals as they wrestle with resistance and compliance?

2.10 Identifying the Research Questions

By reflecting upon my own epistemological and ontological beliefs and values in relation to Early Years education, I was able to open up an area of Reception classroom practice which was impacting upon the very core of why I chose to be a teacher in the first place. It allowed me to begin to see the space which exists between policy and practice, and it ignited in me a desire to examine the reasons for the problematic connection between the two, in order to consider ways of addressing this gap and transforming the way that practitioners educate young children in accordance with their own values and beliefs about how young children learn. During the course of conducting this thesis, new EYFS policy initiatives and reports on Early

Years education (Ofsted, 2017), in relation to practice and assessment have shifted the focus further towards technical knowledge and practice, bringing with them increased monitoring, surveillance, workload and accountability. It is with these things in mind that I endeavour to open up a discussion around change in the Early Years, with the ultimate goals of increased wellbeing for children and practitioners and a narrower gap between policy and practice, between what we 'believe' is right for the children and what we actually 'do'.

2.11 Overview of the history of EYFS Policy (1998-2022)

According to Melhuish (2016), prior to 1998 there was no statutory obligation for the state to provide any early childhood services for children under the statutory school age of five years. Melhuish (2016) states, *"From the mid-1990s ECEC started to re-emerge on the policy agenda. This move to greater priority for state involvement in early childhood education and care has gradually (if fitfully) gathered momentum over recent decades*." (p.3). It was the 'Comprehensive Spending Review' by HMT Treasury in 1998 which provided the basis for the Sure Start programme (Melhuish, 2016: 4) and it was the same year when free part time nursery education for four-year olds was introduced. The following table provides a timeline of government policies and reports since 1967, which have influenced Early Years practice.

Table 1 – policy timeline

1967	The Plowden Report – 'Children and their Primary Schools'
1990	The Rumbold Report – 'Starting with Quality', HMSO
1994	'Start Right', Sir Christopher Ball
1996	Desirable Learning Outcomes
1998	'Quality in Diversity', Vicky Hurst and the Early Childhood Forum, National Children's Bureau
2000	Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage
2001	Sure Start Guidance – Department for Education and Skills
2008	EYFS – Early learning Goals
2011	The Tickell Review
2012	EYFS Revised
2017	Bold Beginnings - Ofsted
2021	EYFS Revised
2021	Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) statutory

The last twenty years of the twentieth century, where there was a burgeoning emphasis on equal opportunities for women and an increasing requirement for childcare for working parents, saw a change begin to develop (Melhuish, 2016). During the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, there was a lack of political confidence in the idea that young children mattered and there was an established view that children were the private responsibility of their parents. As the last decade of the twentieth century came to a close however, this outlook and perspective had begun to shift (Moss and Cameron, 2020). The formation of the Early Childhood Education Forum in 1993, which brought together all the national agencies on the field, had expanded and grown in strength so much so, that by 1998 there were 45 national organisations as members of the group. This compelled the government to take action and to place greater importance and attention upon Early Years education. The Rumbold Report '*Starting with Quality'* (DES, 1990) was used, albeit much later than it was published, as a basis for best practice in the Early Years. The publication of '*Every Child Matters'* in 2003 was also a pivotal moment in the history

of change in Early Years care and education as it prompted a more joined up way of thinking about raising outcomes for all young children. But it was the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework and the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, that transformed the Early Years in the UK (Cameron & Moss, 2020; Sylva and Pugh, 2005). Trevor, Ince and Ang (in Cameron and Moss, 2020: p.100), argue that the introduction of the EYFS demonstrated a shift in educational thinking, whereby Early Years education and care began to be viewed as a means of alleviating and mitigating the impact of social disadvantage. They go on to say that the EYFS was (and is) an integrating mechanism across a sector which is split by age groups.

Early Years education and care has enjoyed a turn in the spotlight in recent years, and this heightened focus on Early Years education in the UK, is a reflection of the worldwide growing interest in education for the very young (Cameron & Moss, 2020; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Farquhar and Fitzsimons, 2008; Hultqvist and Dahlberg, 2001; Murray, 2017; Wood and Hedges, 2016). Along with this increased focus on the Early Years, however, comes increased government intervention and standardisation of the curriculum (Ball 2013; Moss and Urban 2020; Lloyd 2015), contributing to the concerns felt by the Reception class teachers in this study, when attempting to balance their values and the EYFS assessment policy imperatives within the classroom. This is illustrated later on in the Findings.

The investment in, and focus upon, quality Early Years education and care by governments worldwide has increased the funding for young children to attend Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings. The governmental rationales for increasing pre-school provision for very young children is often connected to a belief

that, "*young children starting in education earlier will give nations a competitive edge in the global marketplace*." (Needham and Ulkuer, 2020, p.209; OECD, 2017).

The fact that education is tied to a nation's competitiveness in the global marketplace, makes teachers the target for governmentality (Coloma, 2015: 14), which requires them to be accountable to the rules of the neoliberal market, and compelling them to act as modern *homo economici* (Attick, 2017). Neoliberal ideas, such as accountability, governmentality and individualism, are impacting upon the education system and creating teachers who are competitive economic beings, concerned primarily with delivery of a pre-determined, narrow curriculum, and leaving little space for critical thinking or questioning of pedagogy, policy and practice. Foucault (2010), offered a critique of the rise of neoliberalism, suggesting that the driving force behind all political, social and personal relationships, was economic exchange. Teachers are increasingly vulnerable to the pressures of the neoliberal ideology as they are held responsible for developing the skills in children which the neoliberal economic system needs for its future survival, hence the stringent government control over what, and how, teachers teach. In the current climate, there is a spotlight on literacy and numeracy in the education system, with little room for creativity.

Moss and Urban (2020) are concerned about the current focus on literacy, numeracy and self-regulation. They argue that it will add to the, already considerable, pressures to standardise pre-schools and Early Years settings. Robert-Holmes (2015) and Kay (2018), also voice their unease around the school readiness agenda pervading Reception classes, affecting classroom practice and enactments of EYFS policy.

The disquiet around the phrase ‘school readiness’ began to heighten around 2011, at a time when the government had released policy framework documents and independent reviews (Field, 2010; Allen, 2011) containing the expression ‘school readiness’ and politicians, academics and educationalists had not yet reached an agreement on a definition of the term (Graue, 2006; Snow, 2006; Maxwell and Clifford, 2004). The concern, amongst EYFS practitioners relating to children’s ‘readiness’ for school appears to arise from how their understanding around what happens in the Early Years differs from the government’s (Bingham and Whitebread, 2012 : 32). A study to investigate aspects of pre-school education which have a positive impact upon young children’s development and attainment, completed its first phase between 1997 and 2003. This project, the first European longitudinal study into young children’s development, was titled, ‘The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education’ (EPPE) and evidence from this significant research (Sylva et al, 2008), shows that children make better progress in settings where their education and social development are considered equal (Bingham and Whitebread, 2012).

Some Scandanavian countries, renowned for their long-established kindergartens and their focus on play, relationships and building social and emotional skills in young children, are now feeling the force of performativity and the push for more formal and direct teaching and assessment (McLeod and Giardiello, 2019). Countries such as Denmark are currently attempting to resist these demands and pressures (Needham and Ulkuer 2020, p. 211). Moss and Urban (2020), however, communicate their concerns about a *‘spreading global web of measurement’* (p. 211), which aims to reduce education to a ‘*purely technical exercise of producing common outcomes measured by common indicators*.’ It is this current focus and emphasis, within Early Years assessment policy, on measurement, standards and

assessment, and the tensions between these and Early Years pedagogy and practice which is the central concern of this study. The 'school readiness' agenda (Kay, 2018; Robert-Holmes, 2015), which permeates all three of the EYFS policies examined within this thesis as well as Reception classroom practice, has been bolstered and reinforced by the *Bold Beginnings* document published by Ofsted (2017).

The next three sections of this chapter will give an overview of the formulation of the key EYFS policy documents, and I will attempt to unpick the ways in which the policies address these tensions and create or allow spaces for alternative interpretations.

2.12 EYFS Framework

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework (previously known as the Foundation Stage) was introduced into schools and Early Years settings in September 2008, with revisions made in 2012, informed by Dame Clare Tickell's 2011 review of the EYFS, and updates in 2014, 2017, with the most recent update in 2021.

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

(DfE, 2017: 5)

The new Statutory Framework for the EYFS came into force on 1st September 2021 with new reforms designed to; improve outcomes at five years old, improve language development for all children, but particularly children from disadvantaged backgrounds and reduce workload for teachers and childcare practitioners.

It is a statutory policy which is used in the long term and short-term planning of teaching and learning opportunities in Reception classes and Early Years settings, as well as setting out operational guidelines. It is one of the main policies used in the Early Years and is a 'high status' educational policy for teachers and practitioners of young children. It is monitored and quality assured by Ofsted inspections.

It is useful here to provide a brief synopsis of Early Years education during the years and decades before the EYFS Framework was introduced into schools and settings.

The political, conservative discourses around education for young children in the 1980s and 1990s were concerned with 'basic literacy and numeracy' (Aubrey, 2002, p.67). During this time, as discussed earlier in this chapter, young children were not given the same priority and importance as older children. Even though excluded from the spotlight on improving outcomes and quality of education, Reception class teachers did, however, feel the impact of schools' focus on demonstrating progress and on standards and attainment. Reception class teachers felt the pressure to get four and five year olds 'key stage one ready' and to adopt more formal methods of teaching in order to create a seamless transition between EYFS and KS1 and to demonstrate 'value added' (Roberts-Holmes, 2012, p.31). This implicit pressure on Reception class teachers has not gone away, even after more than twenty years. In fact, it has only increased. In 2000, the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS) (QCA 2000), was introduced and Reception and the Early Years

became a part of the ever-demanding standards narrative in schools and educational settings. Keating et al (2002), found, through their research, that Reception class teachers shared the same main concerns about policy and practice around the time that the CGFS (QCA 2000), was introduced. They felt they were isolated in their '*battle to maintain good Early Years practice against this downward pressure of the more formal programmes of study'* (Keating et al, 2002: 194). In this 2002 study, teachers were already acutely aware of their part in raising school standards. In conclusion to the article, written twenty years ago now, Keating et al voice a shared ambition *for the future; "It is hoped that over time, the professional dilemma of choosing between a dedication to good Early Years practice and the notion of raising standards will no longer be an issue. Once all major stakeholders realise the long-term benefits of investing time and resources in good Early Years practice schools will surely reap the rewards."* This aspiration now, in 2022, feels optimistic as we look at the Early Years landscape in England, currently held in the performative grip of accountability, with increasing demands on Reception class teachers for raising standards, testing and data driven targets.

Since 2000 and the introduction of the CGFS, several research projects and reports on Early Years education have been published with the most high profile and influential being, 'The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education' (EPPE) (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva 2004). The findings from this research project have led to many strategies and policies which have raised the profile and quality of the Early Years, such as 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2004) and the 2006 Childcare Act. The EPPE research project found that all children benefitted from good quality provision and that it was particularly beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2002; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). It also showed that the quality of the

provision and an emphasis on the equality of cognitive and social-behavioural development contributed to developmental outcomes (Sylva, 2010, p.224), and stressed the importance of creating the right balance between child-initiated and adult-led learning. The findings from the EPPE project (2004), have influenced subsequent EYFS policies, through a more balanced approach to the curriculum (DfE, 2012; 2017; 2021), with the prime areas; PSED, PD and CL being the foundation upon which literacy and maths are built.

The current EYFS Framework, updated in 2021 (DfE, 2021), continues to promote the same message, that the prime areas of PSED, PD and CL are the bedrock upon which learning in the other specific areas of literacy, mathematics, understanding the world and expressive arts and design is built. In the introduction to the EYFS (DfE, 2021), it states that the document, "…*promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life."* (p.5)

The EYFS emerged from the research, strategies and policies outlined above. The EPPE project strongly informed the EYFS in its promotion of 'Sustained Shared Thinking'. Pugh and Duffy (2010, p.98), characterise the EYFS as, '*the single quality framework'* for early childhood education and care and Siraj-Blatchford et al (2008, p.33) define it as, "*a radical innovation in transforming early childhood education*."

The EYFS Framework is a common entitlement curriculum which, as stated above, was developed with the support of research findings from the EPPE Project. It was designed to address social inequalities and to provide a consistent approach to teaching young children. The introduction of the EYFS, while purporting to be a

policy promoting equality and consistency, has not been without difficulty and opposition (Kay, 2018; Trelford, 2018). This study of effective practice in the Early Years, the EPPE Project, and the policies and research which have come about because of it, are relevant to this particular study as they are important in beginning to unpick and understand the shifts in thinking and the tensions around Early Years education.

According to researchers investigating practitioner responses to The EYFS Framework policy document, it has had mixed reviews over the years since its introduction. There have been concerns around pedagogy, the place of play within it, the ambiguity of the balance of child-led and adult-led learning and the fundamental research on which it has been developed (Wood, 2019). Evangelou et al (2009) have cautioned against a linear model of progression because of the inclination to. "*simplify and…homogenise development."* (p.29). Policy-makers, however, did not take into account these warnings and they developed broad developmental indicators into discrete and narrow curriculum goals, with a priority on improving school readiness (DfE, 2012). In the drive to simplify progression and to get all young children to fit inside the same 'box' at the same time, a fundamental issue has been forgotten. The fact that children and teachers are human beings and we all come with our own unique backgrounds, values, beliefs and outlooks on life has been bypassed. It is these very core 'essences' of who we are, where we have come from and where we are going, which make the job of keeping everyone to a very narrow path when there is so much more breadth to the trail we are travelling, challenging and contestable.

The Characteristics of Effective learning (COEL) and the Prime Areas, stated in the EYFS Framework as, *"…particularly crucial for igniting children's curiosity and*

enthusiasm for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive" (DfE, 2017, p. 7), have been largely overlooked and very little attention paid to them by Ofsted in the Bold Beginnings document (2017). The failure, by Ofsted, to recognise the importance of the COEL and Prime Areas for all areas of learning, development and wellbeing, compromises Reception class teachers' professional knowledge of best practice for the teaching of four and five year olds as well as narrowing the curriculum to make space for formal teaching of literacy and maths (Williams, 2018; Trelford, 2018). It also risks producing more misinformed views among Reception practitioners (Williams, 2018), solidifying the school readiness agenda and decreasing children's enjoyment of school and learning.

The standards and assessment agenda (Ball 2012), which sits firmly at the forefront of current Early Years education (Moss and Cameron, 2020), is gaining ever more strength and, in doing so, is constraining and removing agency more and more. This increasing focus on standards and testing is a critical aspect of this research study and will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis. The next EYFS policy to look at is the EYFS Profile (EYFSP).

2.13 EYFS Profile

Children in English Reception classes have been formally assessed at the end of their Reception year, at age five, since 2003. The numerical scores produced from the assessments are reported to parents and local authorities for analysis at school and national levels. This assessment is the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) (DfE, 2020), previously known as the Foundation Stage Profile (2003-2008). The EYFSP was revised and condensed in 2012, the latest version published

in 2020, and it continues to be used in schools and Reception classes in England. The data produced from the EYFSP remains reported to parents, the local authority and nationally. The introduction of the Foundation Stage Profile in 2003 brought the Early Years into the accountability regime for the first time (Bradbury, 2014) and it continues to retain its position there.

The Labour government era (1997-2010) saw a large increase in funding in Early Years education (Bradbury, 2014: 327) and the EYFSP data furnished the government with a measure of the effectiveness of the funding. This elevated focus on funding and investment in the Early Years has brought with it discourses of quality, accountability and standards which, in turn, impact upon Early Years settings and the children who are cared for by them. There is a conflict which has long been felt by Early Years professionals in the ECEC sector (Aubrey 2004; Sylva and Pugh 2005; Bradbury 2012). On the one hand they are positive about receiving greater funding and investment, but on the other hand, this brings with it a sharper inspection focus on Early Years, more testing and measurement of children (Reception Baseline, EYFS Profile) and revised Early Learning Goals which are more in line with KS1 and require more formal teaching, thereby pushing the pressure and 'schoolification' further down the school to Reception and Nursery (Clausen, 2015; Bradbury, 2019; Moss, 2013; OECD, 2006). Practitioners in this study found their practice affected due to the ever-increasing pressures and accountability. They felt scrutinised, 'under the microscope' and with very little autonomy, time or space to teach the way they felt was right developmentally and socially for the children in their class. Assessment and the drive to show progress and added value, is a serious and powerful element of accountability (Ball, 2013; Buchanon, 2015; Collins, 2012; Cuban, 2013). The extent to which young children in

Reception classes are subject to statutory assessment, with the RBA, ongoing assessment against developmental stages and the EYFSP, as well as a formalised curriculum, has created a particular policy context. It is a context which has led to the 'datafication' of early childhood education (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017) and a focus on the production of data and analysis, with a shift away from the values and practice of Reception class teachers.

Hood and Mitchell, in the BERA-TACTYC Early Childhood Research Review 2003-2017, highlight the concern, by Early Years practitioners and researchers, of inequalities resulting from the assessment system. They state that, "*The framing of assessment in the EYFS leaves little space for engagement with key questions about how educators perceive the children they are assessing, and what sort of learner is characterised by the EYFS."* (2017: 88). It is the limited space and movement, allowed for Reception class teachers, to embrace and explore the 'human' element of teaching, learning and developing, which has become the site of increased pressure and tension. The main principles, as stated in the EYFS policy and guidance documents, have somehow got lost and devalued in the accountability game.

Wood (2017, p.109), discusses the main principles of Early Years education (play, relationships, interactions, pedagogical approaches, formative and informative assessment) and talks about their place in EYFS policy in England. She warns, however, that, "*these principles become vulnerable when exposed to policy technologies that incorporate performativity, assessment, inspection regimes, comparative benchmarking and monitoring of outcomes, school readiness, quality and effectiveness."* The disparity between the fundamental principles of Early Years practice and formal assessment, monitoring and inspection procedures will always

reveal a messiness and inconsistency when bound up also with values and beliefs of practitioners, leaders and parents.

An overview of the third EYFS policy examined in this study, the Reception Baseline Assessment, follows.

2.14 Reception Baseline Assessment

The Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) is an assessment of four year olds during their first few weeks in a Reception class in primary school. It produces numerical data which is then sent off for analysis, both at a local and national level. It has been designed to produce baseline data from which the progress of children can be measured across their time at primary school, from the beginning of Reception to the end of Year 6 and has been statutory from September 2021.The test is not designed to support children's learning and development in any way and children do not benefit in any way from the test (Goldstein, Moss, Sammons, Sinnott and Stobart, 2018). Therefore, the test is entirely for the purpose of school accountability.

Accountability is a topical and controversial issue. It is this agenda which has been regulating schools in England for many years (Ball, 2012; 2013; Buchanon, 2015; Moss, 2015; Olssen, Codd & O'Neill 2004), and is now intensifying, particularly in the Early Years. The accountability agenda sits alongside the standards agenda, with test scores and performance tables being the mechanism for teacher and school accountability (Buchanon, 2015, p.702). The current discourse for teaching and learning in England is clearly influenced by a sharp focus on making the child measurable. This makes it an easier task to hold teachers accountable and to make comparisons between them (Ball, 2013). One of the dangers of the increased

domination of the accountability agenda within our education system currently is the type of teaching which is privileged. Because of the fixation on standards and measurable outcomes, ways of teaching alter accordingly. More instrumentalist notions of the teacher's role and methods is favoured in education policies and this, in turn, begins to gnaw away at the professionalism of teachers and their autonomy (Mockler, 2011; Soler and Miler, 2003). The neo-liberal instrumentalist agenda, with its focus on standards, testing and measurement, is continuing, not just in the UK but in Australia and the US also. This approach to teaching and education tends to work with a notion of 'role' rather than 'identity', as 'role' fits more agreeably with the technical-rational conceptualisation of teaching which lies at the heart of neo-liberal education agendas (Mockler, 2011, p.525). With priorities on technical role responsibilities, what teachers do, rather than who teachers are, the less room and scope there is for teachers to be pro-active and transformative. Teachers with a strong sense of their professional identity and the connection between their purpose and their practice are more likely to be pro-active in the enactment of their 'moral purpose' both within and beyond the school (Sachs, 2003).

There has been considerable discussion amongst Reception class teachers, around the formal assessment of four-year olds during their first few weeks at school and this is something which emerges later in the Findings part of this thesis. There have been well documented criticisms of the effectiveness and precision of the RBA by teaching unions and educational organisations (ATL, 2015; NUT, 2015; Reclaiming Schools, 2015; TACTYC, 2015; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2017: 672). Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes (2016b), in a national report on the Reception baseline introduction, found that less than 8% of teachers believed baseline assessment to be a '*fair and accurate measure'* and that '*teachers have major*

concerns about the negative consequences of baseline assessment on children, teachers and schools' (Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2017: 672).

The introduction of a baseline assessment in the first few weeks for children aged four, with its focus on literacy and numeracy skills, contributes heavily to the 'schoolification' of Early Years (Bradbury, 2019; Brogaard Clausen, 2015; Moss and Cameron, 2020; p.2). The idea of schoolification is a useful way of understanding the tensions which exist in the context of the infant school in this study, and which underlines the fundamental conflict between policy and practice which was seen and experienced by many of the research participants. Schoolification refers to the targets for children to achieve predetermined goals at too young an age, which then in turn pressures teachers to prepare children for formal schooling in KS1 and KS2, getting them to complete developmentally inappropriate activities with very little opportunity for choice and play. House (2012) states that the schoolification of the EYFS presents a reductionist understanding of the complexity of young children's lives.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2001, p.42), has warned of the threat of inappropriate practice being brought into Early Years education with the increasing focus on literacy and numeracy. The OECD states that this leads *'to neglect of other important areas of learning and development'.* The Bold Beginnings document (Ofsted, 2017), has served to advance this threat further, by advocating a narrowing of the Reception curriculum to focus heavily on the formal teaching of literacy and maths skills. Kay (2018: 329) identifies the direct teaching of literacy and mathematics as the 'core purpose' of Reception, according to the Bold Beginnings document. She also highlights how Bold Beginnings (Ofsted, 2017) has been influential in developing the

‘schoolification’ (Roberts-Holmes, 2015) of the EYFS, where the focus shifts away from distinct pedagogical approaches suitable for young children (p.330). This tension around inappropriate practice is highlighted in the findings chapter.

The introduction of the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) has been seen by some to represent educational reductionism (Muller 2017). Malaguzzi (from Cagliari et al., 2016: 378), describes the minimisation of young children’s sophisticated learning to a single number as “*nothing but a ridiculous simplification of knowledge and a robbing of meaning from individual histories.”* It can be seen, then, that the RBA opposes sociocultural theory, which evidences how children learn and develop through social relationships (Broadhead, 2006; Fleer, 2010).

The reductionism resides in the comparison through the hierarchy of ranking schools, which the Reception Baseline Assessment produces through its delivery and implementation. Hogan et al (2016) describe this as the “*commercialization of comparison*”. Williamson (2016, p.3) also discusses comparison, explaining its role in “*digital educational governance’.* Comparison, competition, assessment, standards and accountability. The Reception Baseline Assessment encompasses and promotes, through its execution, five facets of ‘governance’ (Skelcher 1998; Keast, Mandell and Brown 2006; Jessop 2002), and ‘surveillance’ (Foucault, 1977).

Having looked at the three main Early Years documents for this study, there needs now to be an investigation into the contested meanings and purposes of policy and enactments. For it is the intricacies and entanglements involved in policy enactments which are the habitat for friction and dispute and which provide the fuel for this study.

2.15 Enactments

The policy enactments, which are a focus of this research study, are interesting because they are complex and ever-changing. The policy texts themselves are written by policy makers at a particular point in time, written in order to address an educational 'problem' which has been identified by the government at a given point in history, to reinforce politically informed belief systems around the purpose of education or to be seen as doing something different from the preceding political regime. The policies are then circulated to schools and the schools are charged with the task of interpreting, translating and enacting them. As each school is unique with their own mix of policy actors, all with their own perspectives, values and positions as well as the school's own priorities and position in time and place, policy enactments are "*contingent, fragile social constructions"* (Maguire et al, 2015: 487). Enactments come out of the "*micro-politics of policy practices through the diverse accounts of situated and entangled practitioners themselves."* (Forester, 2012: 23). Maguire et al (2015: 487) sum policy enactments up as "*a form of interpretation and intersubjectivity in action."* Policy is encoded within texts and artefacts in intricate and complicated ways. Therefore, the decoding of the policy texts is correspondingly challenging for practitioners and senior leaders and enacting policy can be a subtle and complex process. Taylor et al (1997: 20) write about policy work, "*we need to observe politics in action, tracing how economic and social forces, institutions, people, interests, events and chance interact. Issues of power and interests need to be investigated."* It is the interaction and the relationships involved in policy enactments which I aim to put in the spotlight in this study to further our understandings of the complexities of policy enactments and the impact upon teacher identity and professionalism.

2.16 Policy Discourses

In this study I am not arguing for the recognition that there are policy discourses at play in Early Years settings within schools. I accept, for example, that there are discourses of ‘development’, ‘progress’ and ‘improvement’ operating in Reception classrooms as ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault, 1980). Instead, for the purposes of this research study, I am concerned with the power that policy has in imposing and determining the discourses that Reception class teachers use in their everyday practice when enacting policy. As Ball (2008: 5) states, *'Policy discourses also organise their own specific rationalities, making particular sets of ideas obvious, commonsense and "true"*'.

The EYFS Profile (EYFSP) communicates a clear discourse of the ‘good learner’ (Bradbury, 2013: 6). This dominating discourse, permeating all areas of Early Years education in England at the moment of writing, is powerful in that it is capable of operating as a ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault, 1980), shaping who is successful, or not, in the classroom. It is specific in describing the ideal learner, which, according to the ‘good learner’ discourse, all children should strive to be in Reception classrooms. As well as the discourse of the ‘good learner’, the EYFSP also communicates a discourse of the ‘good teacher’ (Bradbury, 2012; 2013), through the performative practices of data collection, assessment and analysis.

The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP), has been heavily criticised by some early childhood academics due to it being informed and profoundly influenced by a model of development that expects linear progression (Developmentally Appropriate Practice). This model of ‘DAP’, acts as a regime of disciplinary power which defines children as ‘normal’ or ‘failing’ (Hultqvist and Dahlberg 2001;

MacNaughton 2005; Cannella 1997). Moss (2015) and Burman (2015) continue the discussion around developmentalist ideas, engaging in critical examination and furthering understanding of development in relation to education and children's learning. Bauman's idea of 'flawed consumers' and 'defective consumers' (2005) is interesting to note here as they '*miss out on a range of opportunities to provide evidence of themselves as good learners*.' (Bradbury 2013: 10).

As well as the EYFSP being criticised for its expectation for children to follow a rigid, linear developmental progression, whereby children are labelled as 'failing' if they do not meet the same goals at the same time as other children, as Bradbury (2012) asserts, Reception class teachers are labelled as 'failing' with them, for not creating the right learning environment for them in which to flourish.

2.17 Policy is Political

Policy is political, '*it is about the power to determine what is done'* (Bell and Stevenson, 2006: 9). It defines who benefits from policy, for what purpose and it is based on the fundamentals of educational philosophy, who and what education is for. Apple (2003) describes this;

> *"Formal schooling by and large is organized and controlled by the government. This means that by its very nature the entire schooling process…is by definition political. Thus, as inherently part of a set of political institutions, the educational system will constantly be in the middle of crucial struggles over the meaning of democracy, over definitions of legitimate authority and culture, and over who should benefit the most from government policies and practice."*
>
> (p. 1)

Apple's description of education policy above captures the complexity of the endeavour to understand how EYFS policy works, happens and how it is formed and re-formed. Schools are constantly, and simultaneously, involved in making sense of 'external' policy and creating their own 'internal' policies which attend to their own school objectives.

Education in England has, for many years, been the location for assessments for the function of accountability, with tests, in Primary and Secondary schools, used to judge schools and teachers (Stobart 2008; Ball 2013). The Labour government saw the introduction of the Foundation Stage Profile in 2003. This enfolded the Early Years into the accountability regime to sit alongside Primary and Secondary schools. The 2010 election, which brought about a change in government from Labour to a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, brought with it various educational reforms in all areas of education. One of the first things the new government did for the Early Years sector was to order a review of the whole of the EYFS. This was managed and overseen by Dame Clare Tickell, the Chief Executive of the charity Action for children. The outcome of the review was a reduction in the number of Early Learning Goals, from 117 statements to 17 (Tickell 2011). The Tickell Review proposed a slimmed down version of the EYFS to decrease bureaucracy and burdensome paperwork. Dame Clare Tickell also proposed the three prime areas and four specific areas which are currently the basis for the EYFS framework.

Since then, and another change of government, the EYFS has gone through many more changes and continues to do so. The new Reception Baseline Assessment (which came into effect in September 2021), along with the continuing EYFSP, now makes two statutory assessment points in the Reception year for children aged four

and five and the accountability and performative regime gets stronger and more powerful. The tests on Reception children are just another element of the system of surveillance of school performance (Bradbury 2014; Ball 2012). One of the effects of testing and assessment is that Early Years practice alters and bows to the pressures, forcing teachers and practitioners further and further away from their own values and beliefs about how children learn and develop in the Early Years. O'Neill (2013), describes this as when, '*the assessment tail starts to wag the education dog'* (p.4).

The conception of education policy as fundamentally political highlights the issue of values and beliefs and the 'knottiness' of government, leaders' and teachers' values in interpreting, implementing and re-forming policy. The EYFS education policies which come from a central source, the government, are steeped in political values and beliefs about education and are the manifestation of thinking at a specific time and place in history. It is this ever-changing political climate and the educational values attached to this which, when intersecting with school values and beliefs alongside teachers' and practitioners' own values and beliefs, generates a sticky web from which policy enactments develop. Research on policy enactment in schools (Ball 2012), has found that teachers' own values and beliefs are altered and overwhelmed by the disciplinary structure and systems of targets, inspection, data and performance management. Teacher resistance, to policy and systems, has been noted by Osgood (2004). She has identified a 'prevailing resistance' in research undertaken with Early Years practitioners. She has linked this passive resistance with Foucault's ideas round 'technicians of behaviour' who become 'bodies that are docile and capable' (Foucault, 1988a). Osgood recognises the tensions between agency and structure and the power that discourses can have in order to become

‘convincing and discursive oppressive truths’ (2006). Moss (2015), talks of resistance in a more positive way, of a burgeoning widespread resistance to the dominant discourse of quality and high returns, although we are yet to see any big shifts in the prevailing performative discourse in EYFS education in England. In fact, the introduction of the statutory Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) (DfE) in 2021 and the revised EYFSP (DfE, 2020), only further embeds the performative discourse and compels Reception class teachers to continue to resist with ‘cynical compliance’ (Ball, 2003; Bradbury, 2012).

Moyles (2001), has written about how the hierarchical systems and connections which exist in school settings have contributed to the difficulties that Early Years teachers face in putting their own values into practice. This links with the performative discourse which permeates schools and settings. The values and beliefs held by teachers induce individuals to interpret policy texts in different ways (Basford, 2019). These differing interpretations are then likely to lead to differences in implementation. Due to schools, as institutions, being settings with unique and particular conditions, these differences can become magnified and implementation further shaped and altered by them. Bell and Stevenson (2016: 12), describe these gaps or distortions that have the ability to appear in the process of implementation as ‘*policy refraction’*. Goodson and Rudd (2012) and Wood (2019) contribute also to the discussion around refraction in relation to education and educational policy.

Wood (2019), uses the metaphor of a kaleidoscope to illustrate her thinking around refraction and mirroring in relation to EYFS policy and practice (p. 785). Wood offers the idea of areas of EYFS policy and practice as parts of the kaleidoscope (for example, school readiness, play, standards, accountability), in which each of the constituent elements refract and mirror each other (p. 792). She goes on to explain

that with each turn the core principles are split, moved and re-assembled. Taking this kaleidoscope view of Early Years policy and practice, it is possible to begin to see how practice and policy enactments may alter and shift with each ‘surveillance’ or ‘performativity’ turn.

Goodson and Rudd (2012; 2014), have developed a theory of refraction, a conceptual tool used to support complex theoretical explorations of educational policy, discourse and practice. Refraction is where changes and initiatives at a governmental level can have unintended consequences for teachers, schools and children. A reform with clear intentions is reinterpreted repeatedly at each stage of refraction, creating a very different policy at the end of the journey. One of the most effective ways of understanding the refraction process and the reinterpretations along the way, is to show sensitivity to the intentions of actors at each stage of refraction. A narrative knowledge, a broader and more colourful understanding of different perspectives and actions along the way, is required for successful understandings.

Refraction is used to understand policy and practice in relation to ideology and power and the effects of these on professional identity and practice. Goodson and Rudd (2012; 2014), place actors in an active role when mediating, challenging and reinterpreting policy, opening up a discussion about structure and agency.

As well as an understanding of refraction and reinterpretation, is an understanding of the policy drivers and levers which influence policy production and enactment.

2.18 Policy Drivers

Wood, in Payler et al (2017: 109) talks about how policy drivers in the Early Years sector, 'emanate from a range of sources across national and international contexts'. Organisations such as the OECD and UNESCO, produce international data about Early Years education and care which supports immediate benefits for children and long-term benefits to society. "*As a result, ECEC is enmeshed in international discourses about quality, effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, standards and accountability."* (Ang, 2014). The global concerns about quality, standards and accountability to which Ang (2014) refers filter down, influencing the direction and focus of education policy making and development in England.

One of the main policy drivers in EYFS policy in England currently is a performative discourse which favours an accountability regime in schools, formed and shaped by the dominant and instrumental international data from organisations such as the OECD and UNESCO and national data such as Ofsted. Performativity is created and sustained through many policy texts and practices (Hyatt, 2013; MacNaughton 2005). A cycle is created and the performative policy driver continues, ingraining into the practice and policy enactments of Reception class teachers.

2.19 Policy Levers

Steer et al. (2007: 177) describe policy levers as, *'instruments that the state has at its disposal to direct, manage and shape change in public services. . .functional mechanisms through which government and its agencies seek to implement policies.'* In EYFS policy, there are five influential policy levers; funding, initiatives, targets, planning and inspection (Coffield et al 2007: 728). These policy levers have

the ability to shape and mould how we think and how we behave (Ball 2013; MacNaughton 2005). As teachers, these policy levers feel ever present, the shadow of them at the forefront of our minds. The participants in this study saw, and felt, reminders of targets, planning, observation and inspection throughout each day. The reminders were policy artefacts (Ball, 2012), influencing enactments, constantly sculpting and re-sculpting policy actors. The directionality of policy was continually reinforced and Reception class teachers were left in no doubt as to the expectations of children and outcomes. According to Foucault (1977); Olssen et al (2004); MacNaughton (2005); Falabella (2021); Moss (2019) and Ball (1990, 1994), policy levers have the ability to become normalised regimes of truth, which seek to encourage teachers to govern themselves.

2.20 Identity

The power of the policy discourses surrounding Early Years education should not be underestimated. They can mobilise truth claims rather than simply reflecting social realities (Ball, 2003: 7). Gee et al (1996: 10), warn about the dangers of neglecting to question discourses. They say; "*Discourses produce social positions from which people are 'invited' (summoned) to speak, listen, act, read, work, think, feel, behave and value."* Policy discourses can, therefore, be very powerful in influencing and constructing teacher identities.

There is a constant pressure of improvement in classrooms and schools. 'Good practice' in schools is communicated through meetings, observations, reports and resources. It is these 'meticulous and often minute' (Foucault 1979: 139) mechanisms of policy which work together to create 'good' teachers.

Brock (2001) notes how the infiltration of more formal teaching and learning, from KS1 into Reception classrooms, has impacted upon teacher's identities, with them feeling that they are, *'losing opportunities to be creative autonomous professionals'* (p.2). The pressing and increasing concern, of teacher identity and agency in a changeable and performative education policy climate, has been researched and discussed by different authors on the subject (Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt 2000; Day and Gu 2007; Mockler 2011). Mockler (2011), claims that teacher identity is positioned at the intersection of three domains: personal experience, professional context and the external political environment. The prominence of performativity (Ball, 2013) sits now alongside a disintegration of teacher autonomy, meaning that teachers can, "*succeed only by satisfying and complying with others' definitions of their work."* (Day 2007: 602).

2.21 Resistance

Resistance is a thread which runs through this study. The instances where teachers resisted parts of the content of policy texts and the moments where resistance opened up the possibility of transformation.

Teachers are "*subject to a regime of neoliberal accountability dominated by data and the visibility of their performance*" (Bradbury, 2019: 821). Ball et al (2011) describe how teachers are *"constructed in a network of social practices which are infused with power relations."* (p.611). An examination of the ways in which teachers question the power relations, resist and disrupt them, opens up the possibility that teachers can challenge policy in small ways and have some agency, even within the controlling and disciplinary powers of a neoliberal education system.

Challenges to policy, for example, vocalising the dissatisfaction with the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA), or contesting the implementation of more statutory assessment during staff meetings, are indications that there is space for policy resistance by teachers. The resistance and the challenges they put forward are based on understandings of themselves as professionals with knowledge which is specific to the Early Years. Resistance to policy, in particular assessment policy, such as the EYFS Profile (EYFSP) and the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA), can also be a way of preserving the ethos of Early Years pedagogy and provision. By rejecting performative policies, teachers' professional identities can be maintained (Bradbury 2019: 824).

On the issue of resistance, Foucault (1976: 95) writes;

> "*Where there is power there is resistance and yet or rather consequently this resistance is never in a position of exteriority to power…(it) depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network… there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case*."

This plurality, of which Foucault writes, is difficult to recognise in schools (Ball et al, 2012). Resistance can take different forms and can be seen in different ways; clearly in overt action, and in quiet moments of individual unease. Giroux (1983) writes a critique of resistance theory and cautions of resistance precipitating oppression. Goffman (1961), writes about 'role distancing' as a form of resistance, where actors' disengagement and murmurings of discontent cause 'disdainful detachment' from the role they perform (p.110).

One of the greatest obstacles to resistance, as observed during this study, was the idea of teacher professionalism which formed the base, the structure, on which social action within the school was produced and reproduced. Osgood discusses how the professionalism discourse permeating schools implicitly controls rather than empowers (2010: 121). She points to the professional standards through which teachers judge and limit themselves, striving to be 'good'.

2.22 Professionalism

There is a great deal of literature on the issues of teacher professionalism (Miller 2008; Nixon et al 2001; Halford and Leonard 1999; Du Gay 1996) and, in particular, the evolution of teacher identity from traditional professionalism (autonomy and care) to entrepreneurial professionalism (Keddie, 2018: 199) whereby compliance, regulation and competition are the main markers. The tensions which exist between these two interpretations of teachers' positions, tasks and concerns makes the job of understanding policy enactments in schools challenging and complex. It has been argued, by Holloway and Brass (2018: 362), that the *'accountability mechanisms'* attached to the performative culture dominant in schools, are the modes by which teachers understand themselves and their quality, making it a part of their professional identity. Braun and Maguire (2018) articulate the complexity of the relationship between professional identity and policy enactment, arguing that it creates a form of "*doing without believing."*

This connection between identity, professionalism and policy enactment is complicated, unstable, yet vital in beginning to understand the ways in which policy is enacted in a school, specifically in Reception classes with practitioners who have

a very strong identity as ‘Early Years’ teachers. Bradbury (2012), further illustrates the ways in which Reception class teachers, in particular, have been ‘*de-professionalised’* and then *‘re-professionalised’* (Osgood, 2006b) through the neoliberal education regime and the addition of statutory testing, assessment and extensive evidence. Bradbury argues that the pressures of performativity and the anxiety which it induces among Reception class teachers, leads to ‘*cynical compliance’* with policy. This then includes, “*tokenistic, half-hearted and tactical adherence of some teachers to the requirements…undertaken in a situation where teachers feel they have very little power to resist.”* (2012: 183). The conflict here is distinct to Early Years settings and teachers as it positions the engagement with statutory testing, data and assessment in direct opposition to traditional ideas of Early Years professionalism, linked with emotion, play and relationships (Fleer 2013; Moyles 2001; Osgood 2006a, 2006b).

2.23 Compliance

The issue of compliance within schools is complex and goes hand in hand with the performativity and accountability agendas which currently invade our education system. The concept of ‘cynical compliance’ (Ball, 2003; Bradbury, 2012), allows a space for resistance and agency, a space which neo-liberal notions of what it means to be a ‘good’ teacher have not closed down. The findings chapter of this study explores and investigates the ways in which the research participants adhered to the EYFS policy requirements through hesitant, half-hearted and cynical practices, thereby preserving some agency whilst still demonstrating the demands of a performative discourse. There is, though, an emotional cost to engaging in acts of

resistance through ‘cynical compliance’ (Bradbury, 2012: 183). Being ‘tactical’ and resisting some dominant government discourses, may affect teachers’ ideas about what it means to be professional. An exploration into the effect of resistance and compliance on teacher identity will be touched upon in chapter five.

The need for cynical compliance and resistance comes from teachers and schools under surveillance. It is borne out of a fear of the power that government and outside regulators have over schools and teachers. The next section will examine the impact of power and surveillance upon schools and teachers.

2.24 Concluding Commentary

This chapter has examined the academic literature connected to the main ideas of this study, those around policy enactments, performativity, accountability, power and resistance. It has provided a snapshot of the history of early childhood education and of how the spotlight on the Early Years has got brighter and brighter in recent years, along with the performativity and accountability agendas. The first part of this chapter looked at the EYFS Framework and how it was influenced by the findings from the EPPE project (2008) as well as the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA,2019) and the purpose it serves for school accountability. The EYFSP and the way that it frames the assessment of young children, leaving little room for practitioners to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the ‘whole’ child beyond their academic attainment, was examined. Weaving throughout the chapter was the acknowledgement of dominating discourses in early childhood education at the time of writing, mainly those of performativity, governmentality, accountability and the ‘good learner’, all of which operate as regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980), shaping who

is successful or not in the classroom. The normalisation and acceptance of these principal discourses is indicative of the power and influence of the political landscape on the creation of policy texts and documents. Lastly, the notion of resistance was discussed as, for Foucault (1976), where there is resistance, there is power. It is the moments of resistance, or the opportunities for the potential for resistance, which is fundamental to the possibility for change and transformation within Early Years education.

This chapter has enabled me to build a framework for my own research into policy enactments in an infant school and it has informed my research questions. The review of the literature has highlighted the disconnect which exists between EYFS policy and practice and the tensions between values and performativity.

Reception class teachers are faced with the perplexities of attempting to navigate Early Years policy, ensuring effective enactments of it, in order to obtain the professional title of a ‘good teacher’, whilst simultaneously upholding the moral values and beliefs about how young children learn and develop. The pervasive scrutiny within performativity, constructed around a discourse of ‘quality’, interferes with the process of balancing policy and practice for Reception class teachers.

The following chapter will seek to explain the methods, methodological framework and research design in relation to the key research questions chosen for the purposes of this study.

3 Methodology

The first three chapters of this thesis so far have looked at my research questions, examining how they were formulated using academic literature and the aspects of post-structuralism chosen for the purposes of this study, as well as through the lens of my own experiences as a full time Reception class teacher and assistant headteacher in an infant school. This chapter, split into four sections (*Introduction, Research Design*, *Data Analysis* and *Ethical Issues*), will seek to explore how these have impacted upon my choices regarding data collection and analysis. The first section begins by discussing the methodological framework in which this research is located.

3.1 Ontological Positioning

The reasons for my subject choice for this study stem from many years as a Reception class teacher and countless struggles with matching Early Years policy with Early Years pedagogy and good practice. As a member of the senior leadership team too, the policy interpretations and enactments were important to me and my professional status in a different way. As part of my role as assistant head, the enforcement of policies and initiatives, and specifically those pertaining to Early Years, held significant value in the performance criteria for my particular role. The tensions for me, therefore, came from several angles, one of them being, as a member of the SLT, the requirement to enforce and monitor in other practitioners, the enactments of various policies, some of which I had difficulty in reconciling against my own values and beliefs about young children's learning and development.

Another tension came directly from being a teacher enacting policy in the classroom with real children who didn't 'fit' the 'correct' model or trajectory of development as depicted in the guidance and where the focus on data and outcomes upset the balance between Early Years values and performativity. Barker (2010: 100) refers to this as "*the relentless pursuit of the unattainable*" and it is this which can terrorize policy actors' identity and self-esteem (Ball et al, 2012: 8).

It was, through the examples of tensions above, that a realisation of the wide spectrum of understanding and interpretation of policies by myself and my Reception colleagues slowly became apparent. It resonates with me that that once you have seen something that has been hidden for some time, you cannot 'unsee' it and the interest became a gnawing and persistent concern.

The complex nature of 'doing policy' (Ball, 2012; Spillane, 2004), deserves a detailed examination as it is something which is frequently overlooked when discussions about education arise. Policy is seen as a solution to a problem and all the 'policy activity' (Colebatch, 2002) goes unrecognised. This research study aims to offer an insight into the practical and personal realities of enacting EYFS policy in a Reception classroom and to open up discussion and teacher reflection around the tensions around Early Years policy and practice. The study develops personal insights on the pressures of performativity experienced as part of a group of teachers tasked with delivering the EYFS in a specific primary school context at a particular point in time. Given this context of being an insider researcher, reflection on the nature and practice of autoethnography has helped to inform the ontological and epistemological nature of this study.

As a teacher, a senior leader and a researcher, I was positioned in various ways, within different structures and with differing agency in each role. These multiple realities form part of my own ontological positioning. This 'inbetween' position I held as an assistant headteacher, bridging the teaching and leadership aspects of the school system in which I worked, represented the interface between the school and the external policy environment. It is, by examining the processes which took place at this interface, between myself, other actors and the structures, that a clearer and more informed understanding of how policies are implemented and enacted began to emerge.

In addition to this, my background and my own values and belief system came into play when enacting policy and so did those of the other participants in this study. So, the whole business of investigating the ways in which EYFS policy is enacted becomes a very messy and complex affair. It is this 'untidiness' of enactment which Colebatch (2002) calls the 'policy activity' and which often gets left out of studies and reports about policy implementation in schools.

The investigation into the enactment of EYFS policies in an infant school, which is the focus of this research study, requires a more complex inspection than the simple and straightforward decoding which it first suggests. Taylor et al (1997: 20), when looking at policy in education, say, *"we need to observe politics in action, tracing how economic and social forces, institutions, people, interests, events and chance interact. Issues of power and interests need to be investigated*". This issue of power and performativity, which permeates education policies to varying degrees, is a central theme to this study and one which requires adequate attention, for it can be a useful way to understand the ways in which enactments occur and the reasons why they happen in the ways that they do. In the words of Foucault (1983: 93), the issues

of power can also be "*a field of possibilities*", opening up and moving on understandings.

3.2 Subjectivity

Qualitative research, by its very nature, is working in real and natural settings with real people doing real things. One of the benefits of a qualitative case study approach to research is the depth of understanding and rich data that can be obtained from the process. According to Anderson et al (1994), as a participant researcher, subjectivity is an unavoidable issue which needs to be sensitively addressed. Subjectivity, in research, is a combination of the persuasions which emerge from our class, status, race, gender and values, interacting with the particulars of the object or subject of investigation. These can slant, misshape and misconstrue events and experiences. So, instead of searching for complete objectivity, it serves the research process better to acknowledge and work with the subjectivities which exist. Peshkin (1988 : 17), holds the view that, "…subjectivity operates during the entire research process" and that researchers, "should systematically identify their subjectivity throughout the course of their research". Self-reflexivity during the process of doing research, is an important consideration. Bott (2010: 159), highlights the need for, "researchers to remain in 'flexible' dialogue with their research subjects and contexts, in order to preserve a sense of the researcher's own subjectivity within the process."

My use of a reflective research diary was a tool which I could use reflexively throughout the research process to track my actions and thoughts. It was helpful in

helping me understand how and why I acted, behaved and made decisions in the way that I did and supported me in defining my researcher role.

3.3 Autoethnographical Research Design

My study is underpinned by aspects of a poststructural theoretical framework which allows an engagement with the workings of social inequalities and '*facilitates an awareness of the ways in which people are multi-positioned'* (Archer and Francis, 2007: 26). The approach used here is an autoethnographic case study, which uses a research diary as the main method to collect data and explore the issues around EYFS policy interpretations and enactments within Reception classes in an infant school. Because this study focuses on the complexities of classroom life and policy enactments within these, an application of poststructuralism enables an examination into these complexities. It offers a way of opening up a discussion about the 'messiness' of 'doing policy' (Ball 2012, Spillane, 2004), and examines the structures which exist in policy enactments.

3.3.1 Autoethnography

Autoethnography, a method of self-narrative that situates the self within a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997), is relatively recent. One emerging theme of autoethnography is the display of multiple layers of consciousness that aims to connect the personal to the cultural (Bochner and Ellis, 2011). It is built upon the principle that it is an autobiographical genre of research and writing and it is typically written in the first person. Forms of autoethnography differ by how much emphasis is

placed upon the self and the study of, and interaction with, others. By writing to make sense of ourselves and our experiences (Kiesinger, 2002; Poulos, 2008), we look to develop and enhance our understanding of our relationships (Adams, 2006; Wyatt, 2008), inspire responsibility and agency (Pelias, 2000, 2007), raise consciousness, advance cultural change (Goodall, 2006), and give people a voice (Boylorn, 2006; Jago 2002).

Butz and Besio (2009), explain that reflexivity, which is fundamental to autoethnographical work, is applicable to collaborative modes of research. They go on to say that, "*Autoethnographic analyses seem entirely appropriate, even essential, to critically reflexive collaborative or participatory research*." (p.1670). By taking an autoethnographical approach to research, the nuances of participant interactions can be captured in an, "*unpredictable real world, community context."* (Steketee et al, 2020: 7). Steketee et al (2020), suggest that autoethnography is, "*a thought-provoking, action-inspiring method for capturing implementation processes and outcomes."* (p.2).

Being a participant researcher, although not without its challenges, can be beneficial as it can offer an insight into an insider's perspective into the workings of a classroom as well as bringing specific 'expert' skills (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Schwandt, 1994). Teachers who are also conducting research enables them to perceive and convey classroom experiences more strongly and powerfully than if they were not a practitioner already (Anderson, 2002; Schwandt, 1994). There is a difficulty, however, which comes with being a participant in your own research and it is one I have struggled with throughout this study. Revising the role from teacher to researcher and back again requires a rebalancing of values and priorities that can

challenge and complicate the research process. As Labaree (2003) states; "*The shift from…teaching to educational research often asks students to transform their cultural orientation from normative to analytical, from personal to intellectual, from the particular to the universal, and from the experiential to the theoretical*" (p. 16). This is where writing a research diary helped me to define my role in the research process. It was a reflexive method which helped me to gain insight into how and why I made the decisions I did and it supported a robust tracking of the research journey (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Spry, 2001; Fook, 2007; Dyson, 2007). The realisation of the inequality and variation in enacting policy in my own context of an infant school began to gnaw at my mind and it is this which sparked the motivation to investigate it further.

Because I was a participant in my own research, along with three other Reception class teachers, and the context of the study was the school in which I worked, I began to look at a qualitative case study approach to the research. Policy was happening all around me, it was 'being done' and 'done by' teachers and staff on a daily basis. I was as close to the policy process as I could possibly be, so a case study approach appealed to me. I knew that the data I would collect would be mainly reflective diary entries based on observation and reflections on conversation, experiences and events and would be 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973). Therefore, an exploration of case study work was required.

3.3.2 Case Study

This research is an autoethnographic case study. When investigating qualitative research methodology, case study is a significant qualitative approach along with

phenomenology, ethnography, biography, and grounded theory (Crotty, 1998; Creswell, 1998, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2005; Hatch, 2002; Patton; 1990).

A case study is the study of real people in real situations, and it is a way of enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than if they were presented with abstract theories and principles (Cohen et al, 2017: 90). As my research and data collection took place in a school over a long period of time (September 2015 – July 2020) and involved teachers and myself as participants, an autoethnographic case study approach is compatible with the aims of my study. The purpose of this research project is to develop an in depth understanding of the issues surrounding policy enactments within an infant school. By taking an autoethnographic case study approach to the research, I can clearly convey the intricate nuances of the context in ways which reveal hidden or unspoken emotions and attitudes connected with interpretations of EYFS policy and enactments.

Context is a key feature of case studies and is a powerful means of enabling in-depth understanding. There are several hallmarks associated with a case study. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995: 317) define these hallmarks of a case study as; concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case, providing a chronological narrative of events relevant to the case, blending description with analysis of events and focusing on individual actors or groups of actors and seeks to understand their perception of events. They also explain that a case study highlights specific events that are relevant to the case, the researcher is integrally involved in the case and the case study may be linked to the personality of the researcher (cf. Verschuren, 2003: 133). They emphasise the point that an attempt is made to portray the richness of the case in writing up the report. It is this ‘richness’ which I

attempt to articulate and communicate through this research study. The data, collected over time and consisting of detailed diary entries, creates deep layers of description, useful for developing a comprehensive and thorough understanding of the complex issues involved in enacting policy. In essence, case studies allow an engagement with the complexity of social activity, which is then reported on with the aim to represent the meanings which social actors (participants) bring to the settings and generate within them. There is an assumption, with case studies, that 'social reality' is created through social interaction and these are identified and described before being analysed and theorised (Torrance, in Somekh & Lewin, 2004: 33). There are both strengths and weaknesses of case studies and it seems important, to me, to detail the advantages and disadvantages of using a case study approach for this study and to then show how I have balanced up both sides to make an informed decision on using it for the purposes of this research project. The difference between case study and other research approaches is that, in a case study, the research is a bounded system or case (Brown, 2008). As my research is focused on policy enactments within the context of an infant school, it seemed fitting that the research approach was a case study due to the fact that it is situated within a defined framework.

The advantages of a case study approach to research is that the results are more easily understood by a wide audience (including non-academics) as they are frequently written in everyday language. One ambition of this research study is to enable and support reception class teachers and EYFS practitioners to reflect upon their practice and, in particular, how they interpret and enact EYFS policies within their classrooms and schools. With the more comprehensible language of case studies, and the fact that this one in particular was written by a participant, it will

make engaging with theory and research more accessible and the ability to act upon it less complicated. Case studies are immediately intelligible, they speak for themselves and they catch unique features that may otherwise be lost in larger-scale data (e.g. surveys). It is these unique features which might hold the key to understanding the situation. Case studies are strong on reality and they provide insights into other, similar situations and cases, thereby assisting interpretation of other similar cases. They can be undertaken by a single researcher without needing a full research team and they can embrace and build in unanticipated events and uncontrolled variables (Nisbet and Watt, 1984).

It is important to be mindful, when collecting data for the purposes of a case study, of the issues of inequality, othering and difference (Bott, 2010: 159). With myself as one of four participants in the research, I was careful to preserve my own subjectivity. To do this, I maintained a flexible dialogue with the other participants, my colleagues. Skeggs (2002), writes about the importance of recognition that, *"the selves we locate…are specific historical productions, brought into being through particular methodologies*." (p.349). The continual locating and relocating of myself within my work is an important component to reflexivity and was vital in acknowledging subjectivity. By acknowledging the involvement of myself as a participant, by continually reflecting upon my position within the research and my role within the staff team, and by being careful to describe the true state of affairs (Hammersley, 1987), I was ensuring the validity of the study.

The 'rich description' (Geertz, 1973) which is a key feature of a case study, invites the reader to see the 'case' from the participants' perspective, therefore 'illuminating' their understanding of an issue (Parlett and Hamilton, 1976) and facilitating deeper understanding.

Disadvantages to using case studies include the fact that results may not be generalizable, they are not easily open to cross-checking, hence they may be selective, biased, personal and subjective and they are prone to problems of observer bias, despite attempts made to address reflexivity. Case studies can also have, what Spence (1993) terms a ‘closed texture’ which coerces the reader into accepting at face value whatever conclusions the narrator himself or herself has already made about the case (Brandell and Varkas, 2011: 4), something I was keen to avoid.

After weighing up the pros and cons of using a case study approach I decided to go with this methodology as it fitted best with the subject and focus of my research, as well as the circumstances surrounding it (for example, I was creating a study of the school in which I worked and I was a participant and an observer). I was in a very solid position, having been at the school for a long time and with a great deal of experience, I concluded that, as long as a degree of sensitivity and thoughtfulness is applied and objectivity is carefully monitored when writing a case study, and consideration taken of the unique and personal nature of the study, then it can be a very useful and insightful approach.

3.4 Research Methods

3.4.1 Research Setting

The setting for this research was a three form entry Infant School in an urban area of the North West of England. It served a socially and economically mixed catchment area. The school building was built in 1960, with a purpose built nursery added in 2001.

3.4.2 Research Participants

The four main participants in this research study were three Reception class teachers and myself. They were selected because of their role in teaching children and, therefore, interpreting and enacting EYFS policy on a daily basis.

The first Reception class teacher is Teacher A, a full-time teacher at the school for more than fifteen years. The second Reception class teacher is Teacher B, a full-time teacher at the school for five years and the third Reception class teacher is Teacher C who was at the school for two years at the time the research was being conducted.

The participants were aware of the fact that I was writing about experiences, conversations and interactions throughout the research process. Mostly, in my diary entries I was reflecting upon discussions, observations and interactions within the context of the school in which I worked. I also included reflections upon my own feelings, practice and some of the difficulties I faced in my role. The three other participants did not write diary entries, their involvement was entirely conversational. The majority of the data collected was from informal discussions, in classrooms before or after school, in team meetings or in corridors and during lunch breaks. Some of the data came from discussions during whole school staff meetings.

Other teachers and teaching staff appear in the reflective diary entries sporadically, for example when reflecting on staff meeting discussions or informal conversations around school.

The table below presents the data sets used in this research and their purpose.

Table 2: Data Sets

Data	Purpose	Method of data collection	Frequency	Participants	Collection period	Location of meetings & conversations
Reflective diary entries – My own reflections upon observations, conversations and interactions and some direct quotes.	To reflect upon interactions, conversations and observations and to explore my own feelings and thoughts. To capture participants' views and experiences.	Contemporaneous Notes taken during meetings and written up a few hours later.	2-3 per week on average	Myself and three Reception Class Teachers	Sept 2015-July 2020	Classrooms Staff Room

3.4.3 Reflective Research Diary

The reflective research diary, created and added to over several years, became important in identifying my own viewpoints and areas of interest. And it is these viewpoints and beliefs which determined what I considered to be relevant observations in my research. Carr (2000), states that; "*in empirical research there is no telling it as it is. There is only telling it from a theoretically partisan viewpoint*" (p.441). This study acknowledges the challenges faced in research when endeavouring to report upon findings objectively and also through the lens of theory and through personal values and beliefs. Along with acknowledgement of the complicated nature of educational research within a school, there is a responsibility to communicate the research process and findings clearly and authentically.

Daily recordings of observations in various fields have been used for many years by researchers in the social sciences. These recordings have been referred to as field notes, log books and research diaries, however they are very similar and serve the same purpose, as 'external memory' (Altrichter in Somekh and Lewin, 2011). The use of reflective diaries in qualitative research has increased in recent years due to their holistic nature but it still attracts some criticism from those who view research diarying as chaotic and not clear or linear.

Foucault's claim that everything is interpretation (1972) supports the use of reflective diaries in research, as it enables the observer to see more clearly the facts and perceptions. From these more visible interpretations, new understandings can be developed (Somekh and Lewin, 2005: 27), shared and communicated.

Reflection and reflexivity are key components of autoethnographic research, so using reflective diary entries as research data for a study into interpretations and enactments involving themes of power, agency, performativity and discourse, seems to me to be a useful and insightful approach to investigating the intricacies and the more 'invisible' parts of policy action.

Reflective diary writing is a methodologically sound practice from several different perspectives (feminist, constructivist,, interpretivist, and poststructuralist), for example, Lather, 1991; Denzin, 1994; and MacNaughton, 2001. It allows for reflexive consideration and contemplation.

Reflexivity is something which is encouraged now in qualitative research projects. Harrison et al (2001), explain that;

> *"qualitative research is presented in ways that make it clear how the researcher's own experiences, values,*

and positions of privilege in various hierarchies have influenced their research interests, the way they choose to do their research, and the ways they choose to represent their research findings." (p.325)

Keeping a reflective diary throughout the research process allows the researcher to constantly reflect upon, and acknowledge, the values and assumptions which can impact upon the study. When looking for literature around the use of reflective diaries in qualitative research I found there was little out there. I looked to Ortlipp (2008) in order to gain a better understanding of the use of reflective diaries in my research and how I could use them to explain the journey of the research process from beginning to end and to show the ways in which ideas were altered and reshaped over time. Ortlipp (p.703) argues that the reflective diary is invaluable in qualitative educational research as "*the process of reflection helps to bring the unconscious into consciousness and thus open for inspection*". The diary writing, for me, supported, not only the transparency of all the elements of the study, but also helped me to map out and see my own research journey and the twists and turns in it over time, all contributing to the bigger picture and enabling me to move forward. My research journey for this study has not been an easy one, it has been messy, difficult and confusing. I have made many mistakes and it took me a long time to realise and understand that these were, in fact, all normal occurances in the journey of an Ed.D. I had assumed that research was simple and linear, that if I followed the rules I would get a neat product at the end of it. All the theses I read and the journal articles I trawled through seemed to depict a shiny straightforward process with a clear beginning, middle and end. It was only after writing my reflective diary over several years and then going back over it whilst reading the literature surrounding the use of

diaries in qualitative research, that I stumbled upon the work of Boden, Kenway and Epstein (2005). They pointed out that the seamless, neat and linear research projects presented to inexperienced researchers, like myself, did not realistically depict what went on behind the scenes, that the research process was made up of "*muddle, confusion, mistakes, obstacles and errors*" (p.70). They argue for the use of reflective diary entries in qualitative research in order to avoid the reproduction and circulation of the discourse of research as a neat and linear process. Cazden, Diamondstone and Naso (1988) discuss reflective diary writing and the benefits for children and teachers in an education setting, supporting the 'recalibration' of pedagogy and understanding of teaching and learning.

I decided not to use participant face to face interviews or audio recordings to collect data, as I was concerned to preserve the informality and easy relationships I had with colleagues. Instead, I kept an ongoing reflective diary documenting observations, thoughts, ideas, feelings and reflections on conversations I had with colleagues over time. The reflective diary entries focused on mainly, but not exclusively, EYFS policy and the ways in which it was being enacted in the school in Reception. My reflective diary is something I wrote and contributed to over several years. In it, I wrote about all sorts of instances, events, concerns, frustrations and my recollection of what people said. Some of the time the entries I wrote were stories, retelling the things that had happened which interested me in some way. Other times, the entries were simply an emotional response to something I had experienced at school. My reflective diary incorporates contemporaneous reflections, some direct speech quotes written at the time, paragraphs containing descriptions of events, context or environment and minutes from team meetings. There were short notes of interactions I had with colleagues in EYFS meetings. These conversations

were not scheduled in but were part of regular meetings and the participants knew that I was making notes and would write these up at after the meeting. Now and again, I would reflect on the entries themselves and the story I had told would be unpicked and examined, culminating in, most usually, more questions. It was nearly all the time written after the event, as writing it whilst teaching and being in the classroom was extremely difficult. I always wrote notes in a notebook I kept in my bag or in my desk and then wrote up properly at home. The reflective diary has proved to be very interesting to read back upon, seeing the feelings and foci I had at the time and how they changed and altered over time.

McKernan (1991), explains three types of journals or diaries;

1. The intimate diary – personal and full of personal sentiments and a log of events as seen through the eyes of the writer
2. The memoir –a more impersonal document. It aspires to be more objective and not concentrated on personal feelings
3. The log – a running record of events, meetings attended and calls made

My diary entries are a mixture of all of the above at different times and places. They are very personal to me and this feeling of protectiveness became even more strong as I re-read entries written over time during the analysis. I came to the realisation that my diary entries say more about me and what I was able to see at the time, than the things I was actually observing and writing about.

Another way I addressed the subjectivity in my qualitative case study, was to incorporate and discuss it openly in my writing, rather than attempt to exhume it from myself and my study (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

3.4.4 Documentary Evidence

Although the main source of data in this study is the reflective diary, I also collected documents and policies relevant to the research subject. Some of the documents and policies collected were reflected upon in my diary entries.

Document collection and analysis is a secondary data analysis method. The documents have already been generated by someone else in a different place at a different time. One of the main limitations of document collection and analysis as a data method, is that it is usually not possible to follow up with the person who created the document in the first place. Another is that the documents are not directly related to the research questions and the quality of the data is not always known. A significant advantage to documents as data is that they have already been generated, they are readily available, which can save time and money. Padgett (2003: 123) explains the advantages of using documents as secondary data, highlighting *"their lack of reactivity*", as the researcher was absent at the time the data was produced. I collected school policies relating to Early Years as well as wider government EYFS policies which were pertinent to the school and the education climate at the time. I collected examples of children's work, observations and assessment data. I was able to access the school's policies and information on groups of children (pupil premium, free school meals, SEN, summer birthdays, boys and girls).

As well as the above, I took photos of places and things where EYFS policy was visible, for example, posters, leaflets and displays in corridors or classrooms. This visual policy evidence has been little written about or investigated in policy research, but it was valuable when attempting to understand how policy is 'spread' and

distributed throughout schools and to staff, as well as the value placed upon particular policies and who the audience was intended to be.

3.5 Data Analysis

In order to analyse and interpret the data I collected, I drew on several theoretical resources, such as Foucault's writing on governmentality and discourse (Foucault, 1979) and Ball's work on the 'policy cycle' (Ball, 1997). I took a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to analysing my data, as it is flexible and accessible. It is a system for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes in data. In my analysis I was looking, specifically, for examples of engagement with the policies themselves directly, or texts which came about *because* of the policies (secondary or recontextualising texts). I was searching, in my data analysis, for information which attempted to make sense of the relationship between teacher and policy and the spaces which existed between policy and practice. I was noticing the processes which took place between the people and the policies as well as considering the intended and unintended consequences of actions in relation to policy enactment (Ball, 1997). I was also looking at any examples of discrepancies between readings of policy by different policy actors.

I also drew on the work of Foucault (1986) and his writings on disciplinary power when examining the ways in which teachers and practitioners are situated as "*productive subjects within the mundane and polymorphous techniques and apparatuses of policy and the logics of improvement*" (Ball et al, 2012: 16).

The data analysis was extensive, as I had been writing in my diary for a long period of time and I had a wealth of entries. I read and re-read diary entries, looking for

things which interested me at first. This was a frustrating process as everything I had collected was interesting to me. It proved useful, though, for identifying some emerging patterns in the data. My next step in analysing was to narrow down the search by examining each entry for specific themes, repeated patterns of meaning, identified in the theoretical framework (Ball, 1997; Ball et al, 2012). The themes I felt were important and useful for the study were;

- Policy
- Structure and systems
- Performativity
- Tensions between policy and practice
- Power
- Identity
- Agency

The themes above, I felt were important due to the amount of times they appeared in the data and the links to the theory I was drawing upon, governmentality and performativity.

Once the data had been sorted into themes, I began to look for a better way to begin to analyse it. Ball et al (2012: 19) talk about the importance of context and its role in shaping policy enactments. Due to the nature of this study, the fact that it is a case study in one location (an infant school) and the main data source being reflective diaries, an understanding of the contexts in which policy 'happened' and contexts which policy 'created', is paramount in deepening the examination into enactments. Ball et al (2012: 21) outline four 'contextual dimensions of policy enactment';

- Situated contexts (e.g. locale, school histories and intakes)

- Professional cultures (e.g. values, teacher commitments and experiences, and ‘policy management’ in schools)
- Material contexts (e.g. staffing, budget, buildings, technology and infrastructure)
- External contexts (e.g. degree and quality of LA support; pressures and expectations from broader policy context, such as Ofsted ratings, league table positions, legal requirements and responsibilities).

I decided to use these four contextual dimensions as a way of analysing the data I had collected.

Out of all the diary entries, I ultimately chose 42 for further analysis. This amounted to approximately one fifth of the total data collected. This selection of diary entries consisted of a variety of different ‘types’; from stories, emotional responses, policy examinations, context descriptions, to examples of direct speech and snippets of conversations. Some of these were written down at the time and others were written up after the event. They were carefully selected because of their ‘richness’, the insights they provided and the potential for further analysis and contribution to new understandings, as well as their fidelity to the themes documented in the theoretical framework. The data analysis involved a lot of writing, an essential part of analysis, and a lot of moving back and forth between the data set, my coded diary extracts and the data analysis. Notes of conversations with colleagues and entries written up after conversations were part of my reflective diary. Reviews of the data extracts and the analysis came regularly, but were not always planned in, due to the organic and flexible nature of thematic qualitative analysis.

3.5.1 Analytic Framework

The data collected, consisting mainly of reflective diary entries, has been analysed using concepts discussed in the theoretical framework chapter. These concepts, or tools as they have been used in this instance, are as follows:

- Power
- Structure
- Performativity
- Policy enactment
- Agency
- Identity
- Multi-positionality

To analyse and interpret the data I collected, I drew on Foucault for his work on discourse and governmentality (1979) and Ball (1997) for his work on the 'policy cycle'. In my approach to data analysis, I was looking for the types of engagement with policy and any disparity between 'readings' and interpretations of policy texts by different participants (policy actors). Foucault's work on disciplinary power was used in the data analysis to examine the ways in which the Reception class teachers were subject to the constant gaze from above when implementing and enacting EYFS policy within the classroom. It also proved a useful tool for scrutinizing how the participants were created as subjects within the parameters of policy and the ongoing standards, performance and improvement agenda for Early Years as it existed at the time of the study.

In terms of this study, the narrative is the 'whole', the complete study and the configuration is the 'grasping together' of all the elements, characters, actions and

events which create a coherent and meaningful ‘whole’ (Ricoeur, 1984). It was important for me, as I journeyed through the research and writing process, to recognise how, through writing in a research diary, I was chronicling events, describing them in the order in which they happened. The ‘story’, however, is a different matter and is told afterwards, detailing only the most important bits (Carr, 1991: 59). Danto (1985) suggests that the truth of an event can only be known after the event. It is this point, regarding the positive and negative aspects of hindsight in educational research (Kvernbekk, 2013), to which I needed to be sensitive and pay attention as I wrote about my personal journey in this study. The time between writing the entries in my research diary and writing up the study provided me with the space in which to view events without the emotional attachment and with more objectivity. It did, though, require a lot of thought to recall the events as they happened based on the descriptions written in the diary entries.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

As well as the designing of the research study and the planning of the methods required, thoughtful consideration about the ways in which I would conduct the research in a ‘moral’ way, had to be undertaken as I began this study. Aubrey (2005), defines ethics as, “…*the moral philosophy or set of moral principles underpinning a project*.” (p. 156).

Even though the research diary entries themselves highlight my own biases, assumptions and distortions, they also allow a passage in to examine and confront these biases, therefore opening up a discussion which is useful to the research and for moving thinking forward. I see the diary data as a very positive and ‘deep’ method

for gaining sound and holistic understandings about issues around education, teaching and operating within the political boundaries of a school, which other data methods are unable to do the same extent.

The guidelines contained in the British Educational Research Association's ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018) have been read and digested. The participants in this study were invited to take part and were informed of the purposes of the study before formally consenting. I was careful, too, to ensure that they knew that they could withdraw from the research study at any time. Their names have been changed to ensure anonymity (Elliott, 2005).

I was aware, throughout this study, how I could be perceived and the position I held as a senior leader could alter the way that the participants spoke and discussed issues around power and policy. I made sure to consider, as I moved through the project, the impact that my research could have on others and on the relationships I had with the other participants (Goldbart and Hustler, 2005; Wolcott, 1995).

My self-positioning as a Reception class teacher, I felt was an important part of my approach to the research, as I had shared experiences with the participants and a fundamental understanding of the context in which we were all working. I was, at the same time, aware of how my researcher role was framed by ethical systems that contributed to a researcher identity and how I was expected to behave as such. It became apparent, very early on, that I would have to be self-reflexive throughout the research process if I was to effectively examine my identity and positioning at various points in the study. By doing this, it enabled me to refocus on the challenges I encountered when constructing an account of the lived experience of Reception class teachers, including myself, while at the same time being a researcher and in a

position of power in my role as Assistant Headteacher. Giampapa (2011), highlights how researcher identities can be controlled and repackaged by participants and that reflexivity is essential when approaching fieldwork and thinking about what it means to '*be and become a researcher in the field'* (p. 142).

Edwards (2021: 3), explains that autoethnography requires a contextual approach to probing and understanding self experience in context. Bishop (2020), describes the need, in autoethnographical research, to continually question the right to speak about and for others and that this should be done with a high degree of reflection, self-interrogation, bringing with it huge responsibility and honesty. Roth (2009), writes about how all forms of autoethnography are inherently ethical acts. He explains that, with autoethnography comes responsibility, for the Other and for the Self (p.3). Ethnography means writing and describing a nation or 'others', so autoethnography, writing about the self, necessarily focusses on what we have common with others. This brings with it ethical issues, as we are not just writing about ourselves but others too. As Ricoeur (1990) and Derrida (1998) write, there cannot be a 'self' without an 'other'. Atkinson (2009), discusses the ethical considerations required by researchers when undertaking ethnographic studies involving others and their social worlds. He writes about the need for ethnographic researchers to pay attention to how social worlds are framed and portrayed in the texts they create and he asserts that how ethnographic researchers write up their research is, *"never a purely neutral matter."* (p.27).

Autoethnography can be ethically fraught (Lapadat, 2017), especially when it comes to collecting the views of others. One of the ways in which I approached the dilemmas involved in gathering the perspectives, feelings and experiences of my colleagues, was to allow the participants to consent right at the beginning of the

research process. This was followed up with consistent repeated examination of ethical decisions within each situational context (Ellis, 2009). I was concerned throughout, with protecting their identity, privacy, consent and the relationships I had with them. There was dialogue between the research participants and myself, all the way though the research process, about what I was writing and how their views contributed to it.

3.7 Concluding Commentary

This chapter has explored the methodological, theoretical and ethical considerations that have pointed the way to the subsequent data analysis chapter. It has carefully presented the tools which I have taken from the theoretical framework to undertake this research study, and specifically how they have helped me to form an analytic framework to answer my research questions.

4 Findings and Analysis

The findings from this research project are presented here. The research questions, which were identified in the introductory chapter, form the structure for the presentation of the findings.

The three research questions are:

- What is the relationship between EYFS policy and practice?
- What is the relationship between Reception practitioners and EYFS policy?
- How is Early Years policy enacted in Reception classes in an infant school?

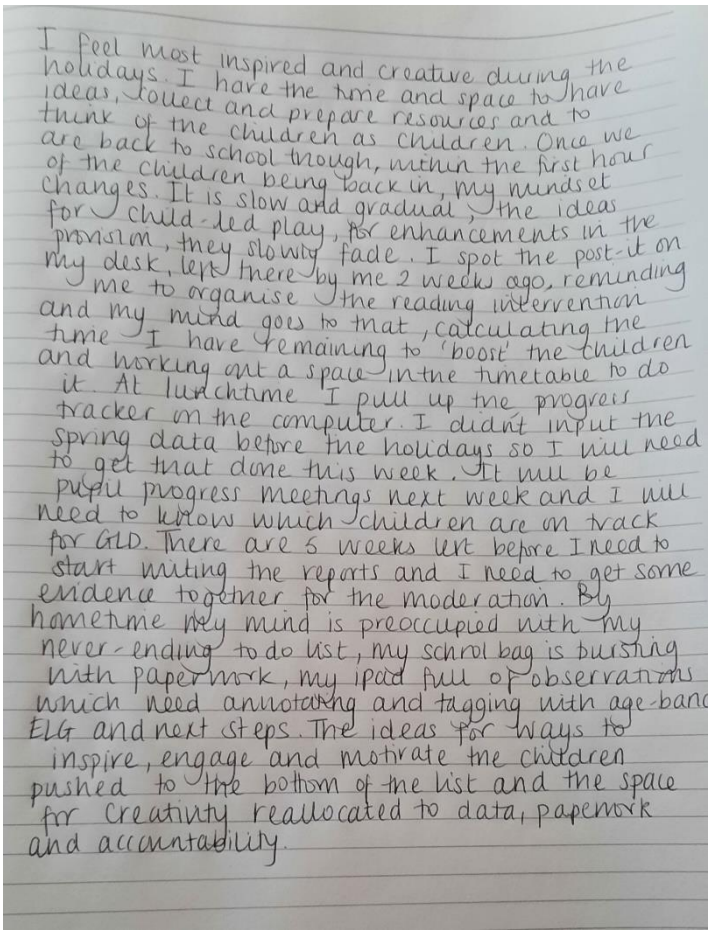
This chapter tells the story of how Early Years policy was enacted in an infant school, located in the North West of England, and the relationships between policy and practice and between teachers and policy, using data collected between 2015 and 2020. Data, consisting of notes of conversations, diary entries reflecting upon meetings, interactions, conversations and observations of practice as well as reflections upon my own thoughts and feelings during this extended period, has been filtered and analysed, teasing out the moments of tension between policy and practice, between teachers and the policies they are expected to follow and within policy enactments. Using the data to illuminate behaviour and action in the periods above, I seek to highlight and understand what it means to be a Reception class teacher enacting policy in an Early Years classroom.

The data I collected (see Table 2, p.86), consisted mainly of reflective diary entries. These entries were in a mixture of handwritten and typed formats, some were lengthy and others brief. Two examples of the diary entries are shown below.

Fig 1. Diary Extract - September 2019

I am looking forward to getting to know this new class. They seem so young compared to the children who just left Reception 6 weeks ago. I enjoy being a part of their play, of taking on a character and being led by them for a while. Relationships grow so much better and deeper when we play together. We will play but for now I have to complete their baseline assessment.

Fig 2. Diary Extract - Summer 2019



I feel most inspired and creative during the holidays. I have the time and space to have ideas, collect and prepare resources and to think of the children as children. Once we are back to school though, within the first hour of the children being back in, my mindset changes. It is slow and gradual, the ideas for child-led play, for enhancements in the provision, they slowly fade. I spot the post-it on my desk, left there by me 2 weeks ago, reminding me to organise the reading intervention and my mind goes to that, calculating the time I have remaining to 'boost' the children and working out a space in the timetable to do it. At lunchtime I pull up the progress tracker on the computer. I didn't input the spring data before the holidays so I will need to get that done this week. It will be pupil progress meetings next week and I will need to know which children are on track for GLD. There are 5 weeks left before I need to start writing the reports and I need to get some evidence together for the moderation. By hometime my mind is preoccupied with my never-ending to do list, my school bag is bursting with paperwork, my ipad full of observations which need annotating and tagging with age-band ELG and next steps. The ideas for ways to inspire, engage and motivate the children pushed to the bottom of the list and the space for creativity reallocated to data, paperwork and accountability.

The findings are presented in two parts. First, there is an analysis of how the EYFS curriculum guidance was received and implemented. This is followed by an analysis of how the assessment policies were received and implemented and the pressures from within the school to place more emphasis on engaging with literacy and numeracy activities. This is intended to illustrate how these two policy areas were

received similarly and differently within the case study setting to illustrate differing levels and forms of acceptance and resistance.

4.1 The Relationship between EYFS curriculum policy and Reception practice

In this section of the chapter, I have strived to unpick the perilous and slippery relationship between curriculum policy and practice. Wood (2019), uses the metaphor of a kaleidoscope to conceptualise the relationship between policy and practice. She describes this as small movements producing immediate changes and patterns and it is metaphor which echoes and supports this study's findings.

The main guide for Early Years practice in the case study school was the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017). It was a central curriculum policy document around which practice was developed and reviewed. It set out key principles for Early Years practitioners to take account of, and understand, as they planned the environment and learning opportunities for young children. The data suggests that ideas about what was best for children were a persistent concern and always at the forefront of the minds of EYFS staff. All the Reception class teachers and support staff in this study demonstrated a commitment to the development of well-rounded individuals. There was a consistent aspiration, amongst the EYFS staff, for a holistic, rounded approach to teaching and learning in the Early Years, rather than one which was narrowly based upon academic success. One of my research diary entries, from 2019, included a segment from a team meeting discussion around our goals for the children in Reception.

"My goal is well rounded independent children with a voice and a love of learning. They will be willing to take on challenges and not give up. I want them to grow into happy individuals with a growing circle of friends."

(Teacher A – Autumn 2019)

The above quote from a teacher about aspirations for the children in school is one of a number of similar quotes collected during this study (See Appendix C, p.217). It illustrates the alignment of the participant teachers' values and beliefs about Early Years education with the wider narrative amongst Early Years professionals and research, of the benefits of a child-led, playful and integrated curriculum for young children in the EYFS (Moyles, 1994; MacNaughton, 2003; Moss, 2019; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013).

"We all want the children to have a full and wide experience of Reception. To be able to provide them with a range of experiences which encourage them to see themselves as part of the wider world and be curious to try new things. I worry that, through a narrow curriculum, we are risking them becoming passive learners."

(Extract from reflective diary, Spring 2020)

These aspirations and ambitions, within the team, for a varied and balanced curriculum with provision which encouraged child voice, independence and individuality, were shared by all the EYFS staff at the school. This drive for a holistic way of working in the Early Years was clearly voiced throughout the study and was a distinguishing feature of our EYFS meetings. It demonstrated the professional knowledge that the Reception class teachers possessed. It was also highlighted as different from the rest of the school in whole school staff meetings where academic success was the primary driver for new initiatives and performance overtook the values so carefully protected by those working in the EYFS. The following quotes,

taken from my research diary in 2019, were spoken by a KS1 teacher during a whole school staff meeting.

"Our performance management targets are based on the end of Reception scores you gave them. I'm not saying they were wrong but there is a group of children who were exceeding at the end of Reception who are not going to get Greater Depth now"

(KS1 teacher – Autumn 2019)

"The expectations for Year 1 and 2 have changed a lot. There is a big focus on literacy and numeracy."

(KS1 teacher – Autumn 2019)

"There seems to be an expectation from further up the school that we should fixate only on literacy and numeracy in reception to get them ready for more formal learning. Is this for the children or for the teachers?"

(Extract from diary entry – Autumn 2019)

The guiding principles of the EYFS Statutory Framework had the general support of the Reception class teachers. The comments highlight the type of school readiness agenda (Kay, 2018; Needham and Ulkluer, 2020), fortified by the Bold Beginnings report (Ofsted, 2017), which was an ever-increasing concern throughout the course of the study, and which began to call into question the balance of child-led practice in Reception classes and the research behind it. The diary data above, about the heavy shift in focus in Key Stage One to literacy and numeracy, indicates a reaction to the Bold Beginnings report (2017). This reaction to the report had gathered momentum in Reception since its publication and had reverberated around the school, echoing in staffroom conversation and expectations. The dominant narrative of academic performance and getting children 'test ready' in Key Stage One (as illustrated in the extract above), was powerful and it was influential in shaping ways of working in

Reception. All of the Reception class teachers commented upon the pressure to get children 'key stage one ready' (Hood and Mitchell in BERA-TACTYC, 2017; Basford and Bath, 2014; Roberts-Holmes, 2015; Rogers and Rose, 2007). This pressure came from both inside and outside of the school. It reflected the 'school readiness' narrative which was reinforced by the findings of the Ofsted review of the Reception curriculum in England, entitled 'Bold Beginnings' (Ofsted, 2017).

Talking informally at the end of one of our EYFS meetings in 2018, we were discussing how we were getting on in our classes.

" The autumn term was ok, we were getting the children settled, getting to know them and showing them the new routines. In December we were busy with the Nativity and Christmas, but it's now that I feel the pressure. I think we are playing a lot less.....I've got to fit in phonics, guided reading, maths, PE, assembly, circle time, interventions, assessments and handwriting. I have had to squeeze outdoor time just so that I can get through all of that and then there is hardly any time for continuous provision time."

(Teacher A – Spring 2018)

The above comment from a Reception class teacher resonated with us all. We were all in the same boat, trying to implement the EYFS whilst simultaneously juggling all the other policies we were expected to follow as a school. The 'test ready' agenda (Ball, 2012; 2013; Buchanon, 2015; Moss, 2015; Olssen, Codd & O'Neill 2004), which was embedded in Key Stage One had seeped into the Reception and Nursery classes and reformed the central core of the school.

The formalisation of the Early Years over the last two decades has been heavily associated with giving children 'a head start into Key Stage 1' (Wood & Attfield, 2005, p. 21). The Bold Beginnings document (Ofsted, 2017) strengthens the school readiness agenda by placing a firm focus on the formal teaching of literacy and

mathematics as well as preparation for Year One and asserts these as the main purpose of Reception (Richards, 2018; Williams, 2018; Kay, 2018).

The research conducted for the purposes of this study captured and highlighted the school readiness agenda, furthered and strengthened by the Bold Beginnings document (Ofsted, 2017), which permeated all aspects of teaching and learning across the school. As an infant school, the Key Stage One SATs were the end goal, the importance placed upon them was great as it was one of the measures of how effective we were as a school. The regulatory gaze, from SLT, the Headteacher, Local Authority and the government, in the name of higher standards, was disempowering (Osgood, 2006a: 5). There was little time or space to challenge or resist the preoccupation with externally prescribed constructs of competence and success and this led to feelings of constraint.

All the initiatives brought into the school in the later years of the study were targeted towards Key Stage One and were brought in on the premise that they would support and enhance test results for six and seven-year olds at the end of Year Two. This ethos of performativity had a direct impact upon practice and provision in the Reception classes as we were, as a school, working to one common goal of success in the KS1 SATs and everything we did in Reception was scrutinised for how well it prepared children for their next stage in learning with the ultimate ambition of ‘greater depth’ at the end of the key stage.

The increased expectations in Year One and Year Two, particularly in literacy and maths, pushed down, resulting in more formal teaching of these skills in Reception being expected by KS1 teachers in order to achieve higher outcomes at the end of KS2.

There were several occasions where we, as Reception class teachers, were asked to teach KS1 specific skills to the children in our classes; skills which were not even in the EYFS curriculum. The following extract from my research diary, a quote from a KS1 teacher, highlights the performativity pressure felt in the school by all the teachers, not just those in Reception.

" We're finding spelling a big issue. Please can you focus on spelling this term, especially the high frequency words. If you test them as you go along and then pass on a final test of them all at the end of term to the Year One teachers, it will help them with their writing next year."

(KS1 Teacher – Summer 2018)

The 'test ready' culture in the school and the 'spilling over' of KS1 expectations into EYFS, (as seen in the comment from a KS1 teacher above), intensified the tensions which existed in Reception, between pedagogy, policy and practice (Bradbury 2012; 2019). Good practice, such as outdoor free flow provision, was being pushed out more and more to make room for things which were going to have a specific measurable impact upon the children further along their educational journey. One such thing which came in towards the end of this study was a new phonics programme. We had worked hard in Reception to develop a sound and solid phonics programme which worked for our children, it was interactive, practical and it 'stuck'. However, we were forced to abandon our preferred method of teaching phonics to make way for a new whole school phonics programme with the clear, vocalised purpose of raising standards of phonics in upper KS1.

The Reception class teachers were all thinking about how to make the environment and their teaching and learning as enabling as possible and the children's needs were in the forefront of their minds as they reviewed and planned their provision. However, there was a less visible force which directly affected the teachers' own

actions as they attempted to provide the provision they felt was right for the children in their class. It was this implicit 'readiness' (Kay, 2018; Roberts-Holmes, 2015; Ofsted, 2017) culture which had become accepted and embedded into the ways in which policy was enacted, that pulled and twisted practice and pedagogy in Reception. Two examples of the ways in which school readiness had impacted upon, and become ingrained within, practice are depicted below in extracts from my research diary.

"Today, with guided reading, phonics, maths, funky fingers, the assembly and nativity practice, the children haven't had much time to go into the areas and choose."

(Teacher B – Autumn 2019)

"The 'extra' little things, the assemblies, the phonics, the PE lessons, the lining up for lunch, getting them all to sit on the carpet for register, it all impacts upon the time the children have to play and choose and access continuous provision."

(Teacher A – Spring 2019)

The above comments from Reception class teachers illustrate the tensions which existed between what they believed to be good practice, with a balance of adult and child-led learning throughout the day (also included in the EYFS statutory guidance), and the pressures of the 'school readiness' culture (Kay, 2018; Roberts-Holmes, 2015) which was permeating all aspects of the school day. The above two extracts reveal the level of compromise felt by the participants. The key points from both extracts, "…*the children haven't had much time to go into the areas and choose*" and, "…*impacts upon the time the children have to play and choose and access continuous provision*", show how teachers wanted to offer a different experience to

children but they were being pulled away from this through all the extra directives and expectations from SLT.

Looking back over the diary entries and the key principles of the EYFS Framework policy document, some interesting discoveries came to light. It is evident that, even though the principles are set out clearly for practitioners and we discussed these at length formally during EYFS meetings and informally during conversations and discussions at break times and before and after school, teachers and teaching assistants were interpreting them differently, through their own lens of personal values, experiences and beliefs. I wrote about the variation in interpretations and practice in my research diary and the following extract illustrates my interest in this.

" There appears to be a significant difference in the time spent on the carpet during whole class teaching sessions. Some teachers spend between 10 and 20 minutes on the carpet and others up to 40 minutes. This then has a knock on effect on the time spent in continuous provision."

(Extract from reflective diary – Summer 2018)

This example taken from my research diary, shows a concern I had with the amount of time being spent engaged in independent and whole class teaching and learning activities throughout the EYFS. To follow up this concern, I initiated a conversation at the next EYFS meeting. It became apparent, through discussion, that the pressures to prepare children for KS1 during the summer term of Reception, were being attended to in differing ways. One teacher felt that encouraging children to spend more time on the carpet was preparation for more formal teaching in Year One. Another felt that more time spent in continuous provision was developing independence ready for the following school year. I found this interpretation variation interesting, as it suggests that there was a degree of agency involved in the

enactment of the curriculum policy. However, I felt the extent to which the agency existed to move or resist policy was small, limited in effect.

"The differences in carpet time length varies from day to day and class to class. The teachers all reported having to fit in the same amount of 'things' into the school day, it's just that the length of time devoted to each of the 'things' shifts and changes."

(Extract from reflective diary – Summer 2018 – written after the EYFS meeting addressing carpet time)

I felt the agency, intimated by the variation of time spent engaged in whole class teaching, was more indicative of the lived experiences and personal value systems of the participants, rather than any real conscious effort to affect change or make room for alternative interpretations or practice.

Souto-Manning (2014) points out that we should not assume an unidirectional relationship between the system and the lifeworld of people acting within systems. The policy enactments, which were taking place each day in the Reception classes were more individual and complex than straightforward implementations of policies. The enactments were shaped by the participants according to their own unique views about the world. Maguire et al (2015) state that policy enactments are, "*a form of interpretation and intersubjectivity in action."* (p.487). Spillane (2004: 7), writes that, "*policy actors use the lenses they have developed through experience to filter their awareness"*. It is these interpretations that can disrupt practice and increase the untidiness of policy enactments.

Reading back over my research diary from 2019, two of my entries from the summer term attracted my attention.

Extract 1

"It is the summer term. This year has gone so fast. I love the summer term, plenty of time and opportunities for outdoor play and learning. Everyone loves being outside in the summer, even those who muttered under their breath and went out reluctantly every time it was their turn to 'go outside' in the autumn and spring terms. There is so much to see and notice and talk about in the summer, the birds, the flowers, the insects……However, summer term is the time to get the children 'ready for Year 1'. That means more sitting at tables, guided groups, longer carpet sessions and extended writing. There is no time in the summer term to 'go outside'."

This data extract is evidence of my unease as the guiding principles of the EYFS were compromised in order to support school readiness and preparation for Year One, as advocated by the Bold Beginnings document (Ofsted, 2017). Research studies show the importance of an Early Years pedagogy that is a balance of adult led and child led, play based learning (Needham & Ulkuer, 2020; Schweinhart, 2013; Sylva et al. 2010). The data suggests that the balance in Reception was uneven and became more changeable as the academic year progressed.

Extract 2

"Summer term: We have just had the 'New Parents' meeting. It went well, most of the parents attended and we explained the practicalities of their child starting school in September. We talked about school uniform, lunches, timings of the school day and ways to support their child to be more independent and 'ready for school'. The other Reception teachers and I spoke a little about our ethos (We have a meeting in September to explain this more). We spoke about our ambition for a child led, play based curriculum and we gave examples of where we do this. But this is where I find it difficult. On the one hand I actively encourage child initiated play in Reception, with open ended resources and free choice. And on the other hand I am also expected to encourage parents to ensure their child is 'school ready' in September. What is a 'school ready child'? How school ready do they need to be? Where is the line between school ready and free play"

In both of the extracts, the context was different, the first was focused on opportunities for outdoor learning and play. The second extract was focused on the events during a Reception new parents introduction meeting. However, the fact that I was highlighting the contradictions I felt existed between what I felt was best for the children and the expectations of what I felt I had to do, links the two extracts in a way that resonated with each other. It signified, for me, the importance of emerging themes in my data, that of compromise, contradiction and the tensions between policy and practice.

Extract 1 identifies the tensions between the guiding principles of the EYFS and the pressures to prepare the children for KS1. It acknowledges the wealth of learning opportunities available and the benefits to children of being outside as well as acknowledging the demands of the school readiness agenda and the task assigned to Reception class teachers of getting children 'Year 1 ready'. This transformation of the purpose of the Reception year in policy making (Kay, 2018) over recent years has generated what Roberts-Holmes (2015) calls the 'schoolification' of the Early Years, where the focus shifts away from distinct play based pedagogical approaches traditionally appropriate for young children (OECD, 2015).

The second extract highlights the contradictions which existed in the parents meeting. On the one hand we explained in detail, to the parents, the child led approach we had adopted and the open-ended activities and resources of which we were dedicated to providing for the children. And, on the other hand, we were detailing the things that parents needed to do to make sure that their child was 'school ready'. This incongruity between 'school ready' and 'child led' generated a discomfort in me and a jarring between policy and practice, with which I found it difficult to reconcile. To take account of every child as a 'unique child' as stated in

the EYFS, then there develops a difficulty when expecting every child to conform to the same ideals and stage of development by the time they start school. The fourth and final guiding principle in the EYFS states that; '*children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates'.* From the extract above it is clear that the school readiness agenda does not harmonize with the main EYFS policy principles.

The school readiness agenda featured heavily and consistently throughout my reflective diary entries, it was a component of two thirds of them, and it is something which was at the same time a conscious and open (yet limited) discussion, and an unconscious and 'unspoken' expectation. The idea of 'school readiness' alludes to preparation and skill acquisition and the word 'school' implies formality and academic focus. It doesn't, for example, conjour up ideas around personal, social and creative development. One of the guiding principles in the EYFS Curriculum Framework states that, '…*all areas of learning and development are equally important and inter-connected*.' There was a consistent dialogue between Reception class teachers around this statement throughout the year and practice never seemed to reconcile with the policy as each area assumed different levels of importance and fluctuated over the course of the year.

"The emphasis is on the prime areas at the beginning of the year and by the end of the year, the specific areas, especially, reading, writing and maths, have gained the most importance."

(Teacher C– Summer 2018)

The comment above, although brief, underlines one of the tensions between the EYFS Statutory Framework and Reception classroom practice; that of the mismatch between the value attached to the prime areas of learning and the CoEL in the policy document and the value attached to the prime areas of learning and CoEL for

Reception practitioners. The Bold Beginnings Report (Ofsted, 2017), reinforces the idea of formal teaching of literacy and maths in Reception, moving away from the prime areas of learning, CoEL and play, seeing them as useful only for developing personal, social and emotional skills (Ofsted, 2017, p.4). Furthermore, in the Bold Beginnings report, there is no mention of play in the Ofsted recommendations, something which was a concern to the participants in this study as their Early Years pedagogy and professional knowledge was based upon play as a vehicle to develop skills including, but also reaching far beyond, personal, social and emotional skills, to investigation, literacy, maths and creativity.

The Statutory Framework (2017) sets out the guidelines for play in EYFS classrooms: "*Each area of learning and development must be implemented through planned, purposeful play and through a mix of adult-led and child-initiated activity. Play is essential for children's development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, to think about problems, and relate to others."* (p.9). At first glance, this statement appears to align with the dominant Early Years pedagogical ideas about the importance of play in educational settings, backed up by early childhood research (Sylva et al, 2010). The fact, however, that this statement is nestled within a document about curriculum and outcomes, is problematic because the messages about the importance of play become diluted when encased within text about formal teaching and prescribed outcomes. When statements about play are situated alongside statements about Early Learning Goals, the message becomes distorted and can lead practitioners to interpret play as only being valuable if it is contributing to specific learning outcomes.

"During continuous provision time, when the children are involved in independent learning activities, I have noticed myself, at this time of year,

gravitating towards the children who are in the writing area or the construction area more often than the sand area for example. Reflecting on this, I think this is because I feel I can intercept the play in these areas more easily and shape the activity to the Development Matters statements and baseline assessment."

(Extract from Reflective Diary, Autumn 2019)

The data extract above suggests that I was aware of my own tendency to manipulate play into evidence to be recorded and tracked, for the purposes of accountability and judgement.

The following extract from my research diary illustrates the complications encountered when interpreting and enacting policy.

"We enhance our provision by putting resources into the different areas, objects which link with the 'topic', items which will support the learning of a skill from the framework. This is not open-ended play, this is play for a purpose, to achieve the outcomes as directed by policy."

(Extract from research diary – summer 2019)

It is clear, from the content and tone of my diary entry above, that I felt frustrated at the difficulties faced when attempting to reconcile policy with practice and pedagogy. Ingleby (2013 : 127), writes about this difficulty and explains it as, *"…when 'ways of being' (or policies about practice) are separated from 'ways of knowing' (practitioner expertise)".* It is these 'ways of knowing', which hold value and which are missing from the instructional approach to Early Years policy, causing discomfort and jarring when enacting policy in a Reception class.

Play is complicated, it is more than just children with toys. It is too intricate and multifaceted to simply drop into an educational policy document in two sentences, alongside a prescription of outcomes and skills for children to achieve by the end of

the Reception year. Wood (2019), argues that there is a movement within schools and settings, towards educational play, or 'eduplay'. She advises caution with this and explains it as an '*imperfect response to the complexities of play and its relationship with curriculum."* (p.794). There was no argument amongst the Reception class teachers at the school about the need for play in Early Years classrooms. It was the packaging of play alongside prescriptive guidance, goals and outcomes and within a school readiness agenda which was challenging and which caused a discord when it came to enacting policy whilst staying true to personal and professional values and beliefs.

The relationship between EYFS policy and Reception classroom practice is problematic. There is not a seamless and smooth communication between the two. Instead, it is turbulent and unstable. The Reception class teachers in this study agreed with the fundamental principles on which the EYFS Statutory Framework is based and there was a consensus that the prime areas and COEL were essential to children's development, learning and wellbeing. There was an uneasiness about the presentation, within the EYFS policy document, of play alongside prescriptive goals and outcomes, as explained above. An additional complication in the relationship between policy and practice appeared when attempting to interpret and implement the EYFS Statutory Framework into classroom practice with the children. The school readiness agenda, performativity narrative and datafication of children all obstructed the implementation of the policy. The space for autonomy and practitioners' professional knowledge was restricted by the requirement of continual assessment, data and formal teaching.

The findings from the data indicate the problematic and complicated relationship between EYFS policy and Reception classroom practice. Throughout the study,

there was a continual struggle to attend to EYFS policy directives and at the same time stay true to the fundamental early years pedagogical values and beliefs held by myself and the other research participants. The relationship between EYFS policy and practice was complicated and interlaced with frustration, dissatisfaction and compromise.

The narrowing of the curriculum and the move towards a more instrumentalist approach to teaching and learning in Reception had an impact upon teachers' relationship with EYFS policy over the course of this study. The next section of the chapter will look at this concern in more detail.

4.2 The relationship between Reception practitioners and EYFS policy

Braun and Maguire (2018), describe the complicated nature of the relationships teachers have with policy and the tensions which erupt when trying to reconcile professional identity and policy enactment. They argue that these tensions create a form of "*doing without believing."* Examples of instances where teachers were involved in 'doing without believing' were times when they were testing children and when they were enacting policies in ways which they were told to by leaders and managers.

There emerged, through the data collected, an eagerness from teachers to talk about policy through the lens of their practice and more of a discomfort and reticence when talking about policy in terms of themselves. On occasions, teachers stopped short if they felt they were about to reveal a part of themselves they would rather keep hidden, especially if it conflicted with policy narratives.

We were outside on the reception playground and [redacted] was talking about her phonics lesson that morning. She was explaining how she likes the new phonics programme we had introduced. "I like the way it is clear, it tells us what to do….I, um….the repetition is…it helps…..um, I like it."

(Extract from reflective diary – Autumn 2019)

In this instance, teacher A was articulating how she liked the new phonics programme. It was a dry and prescriptive programme with very little movement or scope for creativity. By admitting her preference for this style of teaching and learning, she was moving away from the wider held beliefs of EYFS professionals for child-led curious play.

In other captured moments, teachers qualified their response to better fit with policy messages.

"I like teaching them to read and write, but through play of course."

(Teacher C – Spring 2018)

I found the above quote a curious one. It felt, to me, that the person saying this felt a degree of shame for admitting they like to teach young children to read and write. There is nothing wrong with enjoying teaching children these valuable skills, that is the reason most of us move into the teaching profession after all. It was the comment immediately after, qualifying the statement with '*through play of course'*, which piqued my interest. Do we, as Early Years professionals, feel coerced into falling into an Early Years narrative whereby play is the 'be all and end all' and any deviation or admittance of high expectations is deemed as not fitting with the narrative? Ailwood (2003 : 297), highlights the importance of being vigilant about the circumstances and discourses through which the place of play in Early Years education has been produced.

In a question posed to the Reception class teachers about what makes a good learner, all replies were different to some degree and all told a story about themselves as well as the children. This illuminated the differences between the policy actors as well as the reasons for their varying approaches to Early Years practice.

"...the role is sometimes not taken seriously by others and the importance of the foundation stage and those early developmental achievements are not given merit."

(Teacher A – Autumn 2019)

The statement above, by a Reception class teacher, reveals a dissatisfaction with the way in which Early Years teachers were perceived by others who were operating outside the EYFS. For some, like the teacher above, it influenced the way in which they talked about the EYFS in whole school meetings, inducing deep conversations about the importance of play and modelling it in the classroom. For others, it influenced practice in a different way, leading to more formal teaching and a heavier emphasis on literacy and maths.

This feeling of 'not being taken seriously', and the unease around this, arose on several occasions throughout the study. It occurred mainly at the beginning and the end of the school year. At the beginning of the school year in September, there would sometimes be a comment from another staff member in the school about spending so much time playing.

"If I hear one more KS1 teacher say, "I wish I was in Reception, you just play all day" or, "at least you don't have any marking"....."

(Extract from reflective diary – Autumn 2019)

At the end of the year, it was common to hear a comment from a staff member in Key Stage One questioning the validity of the judgements we had made against the early learning goals and there was an expectation that children in the summer term 'should be sat down doing proper work now'.

As well as there being tensions between EYFS policy and Reception class practice as shown in the first part of this chapter, there were tensions between teachers, their identities and values and beliefs and EYFS policy, although the tensions weren't immediately visible. Teachers in this study all adhered to policy directives and carried out the expectations within EYFS policy documents, even if it was sometimes begrudgingly or with complaint. The following quote, from a Reception class teacher, was typical of many informal grumbles about policy messages and expectations.

"The Framework says that assessment should not take us away from the children, but here we are, siting in the library area with a child at a time, trying to get the baseline done."

(Teacher B – Autumn 2019)

There wasn't, within the context of the school I was researching, an overt rebellion or a defiance of the EYFS Statutory Framework. They sought to stay loyal and faithful to the EYFS principles and guidance as much as possible, whilst also attempting to negotiate the school readiness discourse. The noise from the pressures of school readiness got more and more difficult to ignore as time went on and the demands from it increased. Still, the teachers persisted with the task of blending the principles of the EYFS Statutory Framework with the requirements from school and Ofsted (2017) to prepare the Reception children for KS1 and formal schooling. This indicates an ambition within the Reception class teachers and the team as a whole,

to comply, to be seen as 'good teachers' (Bradbury, 2012) and to serve both frameworks.

"There is an overarching mindset of performativity which is both productive and disruptive. It is productive in that the assessments get done and teaching is, more than ever before, full on and relentless as we are judged more and more on our data and results. It is disruptive though in so many more ways. Disruptive to the underlying ethos of a child-led curriculum, disruptive to the day to day workings of a reception class and disruptive to the wellbeing and fundamental ideas and beliefs teachers hold about child development."

(Extract from reflective diary – Summer 2019)

The extract from my reflective diary above, clearly shows the difficulties my colleagues and I encountered whilst attempting to enact the guidance from the EYFS Statutory Framework within a performativity discourse which was weightily concerned with 'school readiness' and with the formal teaching of literacy and maths. Ball (2003 : 221), refers to the 'values schizophrenia', experienced by teachers, *"where commitment, judgement and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression and performance."* The tensions felt, by all the research participants, through enacting policy guidance whilst simultaneously trying to stay true to our own values and beliefs were not the only tensions felt by myself. From a leadership perspective, I felt pulled between finding the productive aspects of performativity useful in my role as assistant headteacher, and the disruptive aspects damaging to the ethos of the Early Years in the school. For example, the data produced by the RBA and the EYFSP was a practical way of demonstrating the effectiveness of the teaching and learning environment in the Reception classes to the headteacher and the senior leadership team.

"Having presented the summer Reception data in the SLT meeting this morning, I feel relieved that it was well received and shows the progress the children and the team have made. I didn't enjoy doing all the assessments and testing at the time, but I'm pleased with the results."

(Extract from reflective diary – Summer 2018)

The feelings I experienced at these moments were complex and, at times, uncomfortable. I was continuing the cycle of performativity by doing the assessments and then reporting to the leadership team, local authority and government. The feelings of validation as a teacher and a leader by obtaining the 'right' results was overwhelming at times as it jarred awkwardly with the pursuit of a child led Early Years ethos.

4.3 Performativity and Standards Agenda

The performativity and effectiveness narrative (Ball, 2012) was clear to see in the data collected. It was pervasive and it altered the way in which teachers viewed Early Years policy over time. The feelings of frustration and pressure, around enacting EYFS policy within the classroom, can be felt in the following quote from a Reception class teacher.

"The main negatives are generally the paper work side of the role. It feels as though we are always under pressure to ensure we have evidence of each child's development and this sometimes can have a negative impact on activities, especially when we need to write observations or take photos during what would otherwise be uninterrupted quality play and fun learning experiences"

(Teacher A – Autumn 2019)

"I like the emphasis of focus on the prime areas for young children. I feel the Early Years curriculum is what we as practitioners make it using the seven

areas of learning and the characteristics of learning as a framework to build on. I feel it is up to us as practitioners to make it as broad and balanced as we can make it."

(Teacher C – Autumn 2018)

There was, over the whole span of this research study, a constant pulling and pushing of policy by the Reception class teachers. The EYFS Framework was the main and central policy to which the classroom practice in Reception was firmly rooted. There was an acceptance of a curriculum which was prescribed by an outside body and an acknowledgement that the policy guided our practice. There was general cooperation for the most part. With the EYFS Framework, there was questioning of the early learning goals throughout the study by all the Reception class teachers. This was mainly concerning the content of the goals and there was a consistent dialogue about them in EYFS meetings and informal conversations. Even though the EYFS Statutory Framework policy was questioned and challenged in places, for example, the too-light emphasis of the Characteristics of Effective Learning (CoEL) and the omission of Understanding the World (UW) and Expressive Arts and Design (EAD) from the Good Level of Development (GLD), it was done so with a small sense of resignation, for staff felt that there was little to nothing anyone could do about it. They were the goals prescribed by policy and the government and that was what the children and teachers were measured by. The degree to which teachers can successfully deliver externally imposed outcomes becomes a measure of their value in the market (Attick, 2017 : 45). The EYFS Framework was the most highly valued policy for all practitioners in the Early Years at the school. It was the central policy to which all EYFS staff were required to follow and it was the core of our Early Years provision. Other policies, specifically handwriting and phonics, which came in over the research period were challenged more heavily and vocally with the

knowledge and understanding of teachers that the newer, smaller and less valuable policies could be rejected or altered if there was enough protest or objection. For example, the handwriting policies and phonics policies changed over the time of this research as a result of discussions and reviews by teachers in staff meetings but the EYFS Statutory Framework stayed consistent and enduring. It remained a stable policy and was adhered to throughout the research period.

The cooperation with some policies and rejection of others, as exposed above, pointed to an unspoken hierarchy of policies within the school and a fluctuating and unstable relationship between teachers and policy.

"With each new policy that comes into school, whether it is relevant to Reception or not, there is a perceptible readjustment, a shifting of focus and priorities. I notice this in whole school staff meetings. In some ways there is frustration from teachers. We have just got started with one thing and another thing comes along. We had been asked to introduce 'Colourful Semantics' last term. We had the resources, looked at them and created planning around it. Then, last week we were told that we would continue instead with our established narrative intervention."

(Extract from reflective diary – Summer 2018)

The EYFS Framework was a policy which gave to, and took from, the teachers and so therefore their relationship with it was sometimes fraught and tumultuous. This policy in particular gave teachers a structure, a frame in which to work. It provided the groundwork and a pathway to follow towards an end goal. This framework, however, could, at times, become a cage where teachers felt constrained by predetermined goals and statements. The pathway, which was offered by the EYFS, was welcome but it was also narrow and precariously uneven. The walls lining the path blocked diversion and the ability to look out onto other possibilities.

The paperwork generated by enacting the policy took away the teachers' time from the children and from the careful consideration of provision and practice. It took from teachers some of their initiative and, in some cases, their values.

The next, and final, part of this section of the chapter looks into how the Statutory Framework was enacted by Reception class teachers.

4.4 EYFS curriculum policy enactment in Reception classes

The previous section looked at the relationship between Reception class teachers and the 'Statutory Framework for the Early years Foundation Stage' policy document. It focused on the practicalities, such as the paperwork teachers felt required to produce on a daily basis and the predetermined outcomes which they felt constrained autonomy. The production of so much paperwork made my colleagues and I feel overwhelmed, exhausted and anxious. The lack of autonomy created feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction.

The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is one of the main Early Years policies in primary schools. The infant school in which I undertook this research study was distinguished by the fact that it not only had a school nursery, but also an established two-year old provision which served as several things for the school. It provided consistency for families and for our school community as it admitted children from two years old who then went on to access our school Nursery and continued their school journey through our Reception and Key Stage One classes. It also served as an income stream, as parents paid for term time provision (unless the children were funded two-year olds). This unique Early Years set up was a key area for marketing opportunities too and it was a huge draw

for families who had a child at school and a younger sibling as they could drop both off at the same place at the same time without having to drive to a different nursery before going on to work. The fees were also much lower than those charged by private day nurseries in the surrounding area.

This school package was quite rare in the local authority and so the Early Years, and the policies which came with it, became more meaningful and considerable in the eyes of all stakeholders. Although the high percentage of Early Years children within the school could have strengthened our professional standing as EYFS teachers, that did not appear to be the case in this particular context . In fact, it served only to heighten the pressure and performativity demands and led to high levels of anxiety and a narrowed view of the EYFS.

The following extracts from my research diary illustrate the pressures I felt about 'getting the Early Years right' due to the high concentration level of children aged between two and five in the school.

"As an infant school we are under the microscope more for our Early Years than a primary school."

(Extract from reflective diary – Autumn 2020)

"Our Early Years accounts for around 50% of our overall pupil numbers. We need to get it right and we all need to understand it."

(Extract from reflective diary – Autumn 2020)

The higher than average percentage of children in EYFS in the school meant that the spotlight on Reception, practice and outcomes was bright. It also meant that the expectation to prepare children for KS1 and more formal teaching was high**.** The investment in the EYFS, the children and the families, many for three or four years, only intensified the 'schoolification' (Bradbury, 2019; Brogaard Clausen, 2015; Moss

and Cameron, 2020) and reductionist approach to teaching in Reception and preparation for KS1. There appeared to be a reluctance, from leadership and some practitioners, to altogether subscribe to a child led approach to teaching and learning in the Early Years. It was seen by some as a 'risk'.

Because of this significant emphasis on the Early Years within the school and the school community, the policies which came through assumed greater importance in the minds of the practitioners who worked within the Early Years provision. With this, came a greater deal of 'sense-making' (Spillane, 2004). And it is this 'sense-making' and the different approaches to it, which provides the prosperous ground for this investigation into policy enactments. From the beginning of this research project, my reflective diary entries kept coming back to reflections on discussion and conversations with colleagues around providing the best possible environment and learning opportunities for the children. I returned consistently, in my diary writing, to themes of collaboration and partnership.

"I've found that our Early Years meetings are becoming more challenging. I like this, I feel that every time we reach a sticking point we are working together and moving forward."

(Extract from reflective diary – Summer 2017)

"The thing which I notice first and foremost is how much everyone cares about what they are doing."

(Extract from reflective diary – Summer 2017)

The above two extracts from my reflective diary were written from a positive point of view. At the time of writing, I felt that discussions I had with the other Reception practitioners were useful and productive. I felt that we were working together as a team. They were moments of agency, spaces where I felt we could use our

professional knowledge to change our practice for the better. We were making sense of policy and the demands placed upon us as Reception class practitioners.

The rich policy site of the Early Years in the infant school this study focuses on, was mediated by various, and many, policy actors (teachers, teaching assistants, SLT, midday supervisors, office staff), all with their own professional backgrounds, perspectives and practical approaches. There was a collective effort in the enactment of the EYFS Statutory Framework. The number of policy actors involved in this engaged a distribution of an assortment of knowledges, experience and training and sometimes contradictory values and beliefs. The policy texts did not just come on their own, clean and tidy, there was 'borrowing' of ideas from other schools and practitioners, as well as from social media, for example Instagram and Facebook groups specifically for Early Years. Practice was a collection of ideas and experiences over time, some of which had been 'magpied' or evolved from a range of different encounters, events and interactions. The enactments which were then produced through these complex layers of input became 'messy' and complicated. They were not just simply read from policy texts, they were a product of a mixture of all of the above and were individual to the school and the actors within it. Henry (1993 : 102), in response to Ball's writing about policy, highlights the 'messiness' of policy enactments, due to the fact that many policy texts are multi-authored, read, filtered and creatively acted upon. Many conversations and moments relating to the uniqueness of the school, the ethos and the values and beliefs of those who worked there, were captured and recorded in my reflective diary, two of which are set out below.

"We have our own (name of school) way, it is a balance of everything we know and believe".

(Teacher A – Spring 2018)

"We can't do it the same way as the school down the road, they have a different catchment and different parents. We need to make sure we are giving the children here what they need now."

(Teacher A – Spring 2018)

The two diary extracts above illustrate the acknowledgement, by Reception staff, of the uniqueness of the school, the context and the children and families. The participants in this study showed an awareness of how EYFS policies can be enacted in ways different to the ways they were intended. By stating that practice is a balance of 'everything we know and believe', they are vocalising their understanding that policies cannot be read in isolation. Their professional knowledge, beliefs, values, culture and context have to be considered, alongside the children's and families' backgrounds, values and beliefs. They show a commitment to the striving to meet the needs of the children and the community and providing appropriate, relevant learning experiences and opportunities. The awareness and recognition that the EYFS staff had, about the unique school context and the children's needs, affected the ways in which they interpreted and enacted the Statutory Framework. For example, the knowledge that teachers had about the local area and the community, precipitated a focus on exploring cultural diversity throughout the Early Years.

"We looked at the children's learning journeys together today. It was clear that the children have a good understanding of technology and how to use it at home and at school. We noticed, however, that their understanding of other religions and cultures is not as developed as we would like. One of the teachers present at the meeting commented upon the local area, pointing out that there are not many different places of worship nearby and there are few families with different cultural backgrounds. This is something we need to focus on next"

(Extract from research diary – EYFS moderation meeting – Spring 2018)

Another example was the long-standing concern of a lack of resilience, perseverance and communication skills displayed by the children.

"Dean is quiet. He barely speaks. The only time he talks to anyone is when he is outside. It may only be a word or two but he speaks."

(Extract from research diary – Autumn 2016)

"The children give up so easily. If they can't do it first time, they quit."

(Extract from research diary – Autumn 2016)

These concerns motivated the early development of our Forest School provision, where skills such as resilience, communication, perseverance, along with many others, were further advanced.

It could be seen, and read, through the data gathered, that enactments were intersected from a multitude of different sources and were not a direct and prescribed result or product of the policy text from which they originated from.

The constant changing nature of policy enactments was partly due to the policy actors who were 'doing' policy. Different people had different inputs at different times, the injections of advice and ideas which was untidy and the pressures which fluctuated throughout the days, weeks and terms, led to an instability making it

impossible to ‘pin down’ the business of policy enactment to a durable and steady understanding which could be transferrable across a range of different contexts.

Going back in time to when I started as EYFS leader at the school in 2010, there were already established models of adult directed teaching in Reception. It was formal, with tables and chairs where children sat for group work on a carousel system. Time spent on the carpet for direct teaching was long, planning was activity driven, displays were bright, resources were plentiful and plastic and there were two set playtimes and a lunchtime break where all children went outside at the same time for ‘free play’. I had already formed broad, and admittedly rather vague, pedagogical ideas around learning through play in my previous teaching role in another school and I was keen to implement some of the ideas in the new setting. It took time, money and new leadership to finally get the go-ahead to put the ideas into practice. We bought in training for staff, new shelving and resources, displays, timetables and planning were all changed. We created our own school EYFS policy based on ideas and evidence around child-led learning and the principles of the EYFS framework. By creating our own school EYFS policy, we were acknowledging the unique context of our school and the children within it. We were able to put a greater emphasis on the values and skills we felt, as a school and an EYFS team, were most important for the children. For example, we ensured, within our policy, that we enriched our curriculum with weekly visits to the woods for our Forest School experiences, in order to address the children’s communication and PSED needs. As part of the EYFS policy, we committed to continuous provision and access to the outdoor area to develop independence and increase motivation. We all agreed on daily literacy and maths sessions but we didn’t agree with the statement in the Bold Beginnings document whereby these subjects are the key focus. We decided, instead, on a way

of working which valued all the areas of learning and developed maths and literacy skills through play and did not advocate formal whole class literacy lessons sat at tables. This new way of working was embraced in different ways by different members of the team. These changes, although suggesting aspects of Early Years professional practice and pride, were not scrutinised in my data analysis.

Policy resistance occupied a space in the enactment of policy. It was found in the staffroom during break times, mutterings of displeasure, rumblings of discontent. There were under breath groans in staff meetings when some policies were discussed.

"There is a feeling in school of dislocation. A coolness in staff meetings."
(Extract from Reflective Diary. Autumn 2020)

There was even, on occasion, resistance within teachers' practice, where they withdrew from policy, only doing what was absolutely necessary. This was especially the case with those policies centred around assessment, where teachers felt unease and conflict with their own values and beliefs about the development and wellbeing of young children. This is what Goffman (1961), calls 'role distancing'. Resistance, although identified at points throughout the study, was fleeting and difficult to pin down. It was mainly observed in the moments of disquiet and instability. It was seen in murmurings and under breath utterances about policies, for example, *"I don't agree with testing four year olds*", but I found no evidence of links being made between school policy enactments and wider, national or global political issues.

One teacher from the research sample agreed with ideas on child-led learning, set up effective continuous provision in the classroom and followed our 'indoor, outdoor' free flow system. However, there was a degree of manipulation below the surface.

Even though we had a rota for adults who were placed outdoors in the mornings and afternoons to facilitate outdoor learning, many times I noticed the teacher in question had sent out her teaching assistant instead of herself. When questioned on this, she answered that she had important work to finish off indoors. It seemed that 'work' inside the classroom had a higher value than the 'work' happening outside. She also spent long periods with the children on the carpet, involving direct teaching and adult instruction. These subtle manipulations of policy were not always easy to pinpoint or notice as they happened while everyone was in their own classroom. It raised the question of whether pedagogical ideas formed in another place or time produced a resistance, or brought about manipulation, of policy ideas and narratives. Touching upon the work of Edwards (2003) and Spillane (2004), is the idea that lived experiences and values and beliefs constructed over time affect teachers' practice in quiet, subtle ways and therefore subconsciously influence the enactment of policy.

The participants in this research study mainly lived in the local area. The area in which the school was situated was a fairly prosperous area with many professional working families. There was a local grammar school which was the ambition of a proportion of the parents to send their child there at the age of eleven. There was a history of competition between schools in the local cluster for the best results and the best Ofsted ratings. The majority of the primary schools nearby were quite formal in their approach to Early Years teaching and learning and some of the participants in this study had attended schools in the local area and had a good knowledge of the community.

These local cultures permeated the school and the practices within the school. One of the participants in this study had attended a local school as a child and received quite a formal education. Her teaching style and her practice therefore leant more to

a formal way of doing things and, while embracing continuous provision and independent learning, she favoured a more traditional instructional teaching model.

The EYFS Framework sets out the educational expectations for practitioners to follow in regards to curriculum and practice. On page seven of the document, it states that, "*All areas of learning and development are important and inter-connected*". There appeared to be, in the context of the Reception classes in this study, a mismatch between the above statement and practice in reality. By studying the amount of time spent on each area of learning in each Reception class, it was clear that there was a hierarchy of subjects and areas of learning and development. The time spent on planning for, resourcing, teaching and assessing guided reading, phonics, writing and maths was far longer than the time spent doing the same for art, drama, music, physical development and understanding the world. With an eye on completing the profile at the end of Reception, the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) and the pressures from higher up the school to get the children 'test ready', teachers were spending more time on the subjects which were measured in the 'Good Level of Development' (GLD) calculation at the end of the summer term. This manipulation of the curriculum and the statements in the EYFS Framework became a part of the way of working in Reception and enactment of policy.

4.5 Policy Artefacts

A part of the enactment of the Statutory Framework, there was the production of artefacts, things which reinforced what it was that needed to be done and drew attention to the 'fabric' of policy through observable materials. And there were many of these over the course of several years. There was the 'What to expect, when?'

document which outlined the developmental milestones for parents and we shared parts of this with parents. There were also, among others, the ‘Birth to Three’ documents, including cards, a poster and a booklet which we discussed at EYFS meetings and used for staff training. The Early Years Foundation Stage Principles poster was given out to all our EYFS staff and displayed in our classrooms and in the entrance to the school. It represented what it was that needed to be done, as stipulated by policy and served as a reminder to staff, parents and visitors that it guided our practice.

Fig 3. The EYFS Principles Poster

The poster above, which outlines the EYFS principles, represented an attempt to depict, manage and produce a ‘compliant institution’ (Ball, 2012: 134). It was one way (of many), to present to visitors, a picture of ‘good practitioners’ in a ‘good school’.

Alongside the official policy artefacts, which became a part of the school environment, there were the informal artefacts which came about through enactment of policies and served as reinforcements of policy narratives. Some examples of these informal, or casual, artefacts were the phonics and academic achievement displays around school and certificates given out in assemblies celebrating things such as ‘good handwriting’ or ‘marvellous maths’. The artefacts which were produced as part of the reinforcement and circulation of the Statutory Framework for EYFS, were cultural and contained beliefs and meanings. All the materials and artefacts produced and circulated around the school and in meetings, became part of the aparatus of governmentality (Foucault, 1991). The visual data (posters, displays, signs) were interpretation devices (Ball, 2012), used with the intention of transmitting the schools’ and leaderships’ take on policy.

The data presented so far shows that EYFS policy, specifically the EYFS Statutory Framework, was enacted by Reception class teachers in ways which were complex. There was an underlying acceptance of the main principles underpinning the framework, as they mirrored the fundamental pedagogical values held by all the research participants. It was the pressures of the increasing demands of performativity from policies, Ofsted, local authorities and government that shaped and moulded enactments, compelling teachers to go against their knowledge and understanding of how young children learn and develop in order to meet external measures of performance and success.

4.6 Assessment Policy in the EYFS : The EYFSP and The RBA

The previous part of this chapter examined the Statutory Framework for the EYFS in relation to the three research questions.

This section of the chapter looks specifically at two assessment policies which are pertinent to the work of Reception class teachers across England and which were significantly influential upon the practice and actions of the participants in this study.

The two policies are the EYFS Profile (EYFSP) and the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) and this section seeks to illustrate how more resistance to these policy documents was manifested because these were also perceived to be linked to a performative pressure.

The EYFS Profile was first published in 2007 by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). It has been revised and updated several times since, along with the EYFS Framework, in 2012, 2014 and 2017. The newest version has just been published by the DfE (2020). The EYFS Profile (2020) provides EYFS practitioners in settings and schools with a way of assessing and recording a child's level of ability and the progress they make as they move through the EYFS. The profile is built up through observations of each child and the record of each stage as they meet it. Its creation was greatly influenced by a model of development (DAP) which assumes straightforward and linear progression. The profile has received a lot of objection due to the fact that it characterises children as either 'normal' or 'failing' (Hultqvist and Dahlberg 2001; MacNaughton 2005; Cannella 1997) and functions as a 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980).

4.7 The Reception Baseline Assessment Framework (RBA)

In September 2017 the DfE announced that a new assessment in Reception would be introduced as a baseline measure to track pupils' progress during Primary School. It was intended to become statutory in all Reception classes in England from September 2020 but due to the global pandemic, it was postponed until September 2021. As a school, we trialled the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) in September 2019.

4.8 The relationship between EYFS policy and Reception practice

The relationship between assessment policy and practice is problematic due to strong beliefs amongst the Early Years workforce about testing young children and the detrimental effects on their wellbeing. It has been widely discussed and well documented in Early Years research (Ball, 2003; 2008; 2012; Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017; Wood, 2019). Bradbury (2014) and Ball (2012), describe testing young children as one component of the system of surveillance of school performance.

The very public way in which the standards agenda is produced, and reproduced, through Ofsted inspections, league tables, national averages, performance indicators and assessment policies, ensures that a strong culture of performance is infused into schools and classrooms. This is then pushed down from Head, to senior leadership team, to teachers and teaching assistants and then to children and parents.

This performance culture was evident in the study school and it was evident in the teachers as they talked about, and enacted, assessment policy in the classroom. Due to the downwards pressure of assessment and data policies, practice was

directly affected. One of the main concerns of teachers was the time spent away from interactions with children.

"Assessment will sometimes take over spontaneity and time spent building meaningful relationships with the children and then this has an effect on what happens in the classroom."

(Teacher A – Spring 2017)

"It takes time away from other children in the early days and it wasn't very accessible to SEN children. I think some children felt pressured by the situation."

(Teacher B – Autumn 2019 – talking about the RBA)

The above extracts, from my reflective diary, are just an example of several responses to assessment from the participants (See Appendix D, p.208). Being away from, or unavailable to, the rest of the class for long periods of time whilst completing the RBA and other assessments was a unanimous concern amongst the Reception class teachers and one which clashed with personal and professional opinions about making time for quality interactions and building positive relationships. Wood (2017), talks about the main principles of Early Years education, such as play, relationships and interactions, and how they are compromised by being exposed to policy technologies of assessment and performativity. The negative responses from the participants about the time spent on, and the disagreement with the idea of, assessing children illustrates Goffman's (1961) concept of '*role distancing'* and Braun and Maguire's (2018), '*doing without believing'*.

Another concern of EYFS practitioners was how well the assessment criteria and statements fitted with the developmental needs of young children, as highlighted in the following quotes.

"Statements in some age bands doesn't reflect today's children and parents, for example, toilet training in 16-26 months)

(Nursery practitioner – Summer 2018)

"The outcomes can sometimes feel restricted and literal. I feel it can also set some children up to fail from a very early age"

(Teacher – Summer 2018)

"Although the outcomes are not meant to be used as a tick list, practitioners can't help but use them in this way. To me, it seems quite obvious that in order to ensure children meet the criteria this will undoubtedly happen."

(Teacher – Summer 2018)

The above extracts from my reflective diary highlight the incongruence between the assessment statements and the knowledge and understanding teachers and practitioners had about how young children learn and develop. There was a tension between the RBA, the EYFSP and the practitioners' reality of working with young children.

The teachers in the study were professionals with a wealth of knowledge, understanding and experience of child development. Their questioning of the goals and predetermined outcomes in the EYFSP and EYFS, suggested that there was a degree of power and agency within this muffled resistance. Foucault (1976) writes, "…*points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network"* and Bradbury

(2019) asserts that by rejecting performative policies such as the RBA, teachers' professional identities can be preserved.

The participants in this study were troubled by what they viewed as the 'undermining' of teacher judgement. There was a performative discourse within the school, which came from a wider national narrative, of the high status and value of assessment, standards and data (Ball, 2012). A picture had been created by government policy makers and politicians of the golden standard, a defined and particular benchmark. It was communicated through many assessment policies with specific guidelines and through the media. It took away trust in teachers and did not take into account teachers' experience and understanding of the young children in their care and how they learn and develop. This picture of what a child should do, be and how they should behave permeated most aspects of everyday school life. There was little room or opportunity to question the standards agenda but it was done on a small scale, in classrooms and meetings. There was an unspoken acknowledgement, however, that even by questioning the reasons for assessment, who it was for and the mechanics and practicalities of it, there could be no real change. This was something big, it was serious, important and unchallengeable in any meaningful way by teachers enacting it with children in the classroom.

There was a persistent struggle and conflict between assessment policy, such as the RBA and the EYFSP, and Reception classroom practice. The Early Years curriculum guidance encouraged practitioners to view children as unique individuals and to be responsive to their interests and needs. The Early Years Profile, Reception Baseline Assessment, assessment policies, data expectations and performance management took the opposite view, that children learn and develop in a linear way and were to be tested and measured against predetermined criteria. A mood of discontent, from

the research participants, could be sensed in conversations about the RBA and the EYFSP, as highlighted below.

" There are time constraints, managing observations and teaching specific skills. The expectations are hard, I am torn between making them independent and teaching them skills that they may not be ready for. The baseline and assessments are the downsides to the job."

(Teacher A – Autumn 2019)

The feeling of 'being torn' between assessment policy and practice, as shown in the diary extract above, was a recurring theme throughout the research. It reflected not only the standards agenda dominant right through the school, but also the pressures of the 'school readiness' agenda which was potent within the Early Years, and which was at the heart of the conflict between EYFS policy and practice. The disillusionment felt by all the research participants, at various points in the study, was countered by the sense of service and the promise of improvement intimated by the policy enactments.

The ongoing struggles between policy and practice, experienced by the Reception class teachers in this study, created a battleground where policy enactments often collided. The standards narrative, pushed downwards onto the school, produced the school, and all it encompassed, as a performance in itself.

4.9 The relationship between Reception practitioners and EYFS policy

The relationship between Reception class teachers and assessment policy has historically been difficult for a long time. Teachers have been vocal about their dislike for the assessment practices required of young children and concerns have been

raised in literature about testing and accountability in schools (Ball 2012, 2013; Buchanon, 2015; Moss, 2015; Olssen, Codd & O'Neill 2004).

In the study for this thesis, the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) proved problematic for teachers to reconcile with their own feelings about how young children learn and with what teaching and learning in EYFS classrooms should look like. There was heavy questioning of assessment practices and an ongoing dialogue between the Reception class teachers and between the EYFS team and the senior leadership team about assessment, who it was for and why is was being done. An example of some of the questioning I engaged in, of policy and practice, can be seen below in an extract from my reflective diary writing.

"Pupil Progress meeting. Autumn Term 1. I need to list all the children on track for GLD at the end of the year. It feels like I have only known these children a few weeks and now I have to make judgements about them and create targets for them. If they are not on track they will receive 'interventions'. What are we intervening? Are we intervening in their play? Or their learning? Or their natural development? Some of the children are only just four. They need to play and develop at their own rate."

(Extract from research diary – Autumn 2017)

The above extract from my research diary exposes the frustration I felt about having to make judgements about children based on scores at the beginning of their Reception year. It embodies the complicated relationship I had with EYFS assessment policies, such as the RBA and EYFSP. Teachers were sceptical about the justifications around assessing young children. By the end of the study, with the introduction of more policies and initiatives, assessment had infiltrated most parts of the Reception school day, the curriculum and provision. The continuous testing and assessment promoted further the 'schoolification' of the Early Years (Brogaard

Clausen, 2015; Moss and Cameron, 2020; p.2) supported by the wider performative pressures identified on the first part of this chapter. There were still specific 'data points, during the academic school year and it had begun to seep out into the rest of year. The main foci for assessment were reading, writing and maths, which were seen as high value subjects within the school. The exasperation I felt, at the schoolification of Reception, was evident in my diary writing throughout the duration of the study.

"The agenda for the staff meeting was, again, data and progress in reading, writing and maths. It all relates back to the school improvement plan and how we can improve attainment at the end of year two. Attainment forecasts, tables we have to fill in for each child, with the headings reading, writing and maths, were given out today for us to complete. We have to decide where we think the children should be at the end of the school year in maths and literacy and write down those projections. I drove home tonight thinking already of how they will be used at the end of the year. It is difficult to say now, in the first half of the autumn term, how each child will develop and at what rate."

(Extract from research diary – Autumn 2017)

It is clear to see, from the diary extract above, my feelings of irritation and resentment as I grappled with how to unify the demands of EYFS assessment policy, the school readiness agenda and my own beliefs about how young children develop and the guiding principles of the EYFS Statutory Framework.

The feelings and concerns of Reception class teachers about assessment stemmed from four things.

1. The misalignment of assessment with the EYFS values of child-led, unique child.

2. The performativity agenda and pressure to achieve and improve, for children and teachers.
3. The predetermined outcomes, the language of 'expected' and the concepts of an 'ideal learner'.
4. The time spent on assessments and paperwork, away from the children, teaching and their play and learning.

Peppered throughout my research diary, were moments, observations and reflections which highlighted the extent to which the above concerns had permeated teachers' practice.

"I found it daunting. I was conscious of being away from the children. It looked long and intense. It put a lot of pressure on TAs."

(Teacher A – Autumn 2019 – talking about the Reception Baseline Assessment)

"It takes time away from other children in the early days and it wasn't very accessible to SEN children. I think some children felt pressured by the situation."

(Teacher B – Autumn 2019 – talking about the Reception Baseline Assessment)

"I always feel the term 'assessment' is a very formal word for such young children."

(Teacher A – Autumn 2019)

The above statements, from Reception class teachers, show their unease about administering the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) and reveals the conflicts they felt. The formality, pressure, time, intensity and inaccessibility for SEN children

were the main issues for teachers, as well as the mismatch between assessment and Reception good practice, as detailed in the EYFS Statutory Framework.

The reality of enacting policy is that there becomes a requirement to police the policy too. By having assessment policies and procedures it became necessary to check that they were being done. This came from the leadership team, through pupil progress meetings, data meetings, moderation, book looks, the completion and handing over of tracking documents. There was continual scrutiny, judgement and accountability within the school which was reinforced in staff meetings and key stage team meetings. All the inspection and close observation perpetuated the feeling of being governed (Williamson, 2016; Skelcher 1998; Keast, Mandell and Brown 2006; Jessop 2002; Foucault, 1977). Teachers felt that assessment policy was being done to them as it was being done to the children. This then further eroded the relationship between teacher and policy. Judgement featured heavily in teachers' dissatisfaction with EYFS assessment policy directives.

"It's like I am being observed as I observe the children and judged as I make judgements about the children."

(Extract from research diary – Summer 2018 – assessment and moderation)

In my role as EYFS lead, I was a policy enforcer, ensuring that policy was being implemented. This led to frustration on my part and a complicated relationship with the policies I was attempting to enforce. The frustration stemmed from the different roles I played, in and out of school, and the values and beliefs connected to these roles, from which I could not be freed and through which I viewed the world and approached my work. The following extract from my reflective diary reveals the fractured emotions I felt, connected to the roles I had to a responsibility to perform.

"I wear so many different hats, I'm a reception teacher, an Early Years lead, assistant head and a mum. I believe wholeheartedly in Early Years provision for children which is geared towards their interests and allows them to develop in ways which are unique to them. I believe in a responsive curriculum and nurturing environments. I believe in relationships and raising thoughtful, inquisitive, creative, confident, resilient and kind children. The assessment practices I am asking of colleagues don't completely align with my own values and beliefs about young children's learning and development and this is contributing to an overall feeling of unfulfillment."

(Extract from research diary – Summer 2017)

The feeling of being torn when enacting, specifically assessment, policy, was a theme which emerged to the surface time and time again during this research study. It was something to which all the research participants talked about and it was one of the most challenging things to work with. Foucault (1982 : 789), writes about subject as being tied to someone or something else by control and dependence, as well as being tied to one's own identity by a conscience or self knowledge. This duality is, according to Foucault, an element of power. It can be seen from the data extract above, that the division between the directives from assessment policy and the values and beliefs of Early Years education, induced feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction.

There was a growing disenchantment with policies in school. The introduction of new policy was becoming more frequent towards the end of this study and teachers were getting tired of the constant change. At one point, it felt as though there was a constant stream of new policies and initiatives being introduced into the school.

"It feels as though each week there is something new, something else we need to do or an extra document we need to produce. Talking to a few colleagues after school today, there seems to be an apathy towards new initiatives now, a

lukewarm response. I have to decide whether to put all my energy into this new thing when I know that there will be another new thing in a few weeks or months. With each new policy or initiative which comes into school, everything else we are striving to do is diluted a little bit more"

(Extract from research diary – Autumn 2019)

The frustration I, and others, felt at times about the misalignment of Early Years assessment and curriculum policies, was greatly relieved and counteracted by the friendships and relationships which existed between colleagues. This demonstrates the power of the context of the school, its ethos and its culture (Ball, 1994; 2012). The data and standards discourse within the school was persistent and unrelenting at times (Ball 2013; Moss and Urban 2020; Lloyd 2015). And it was because of the commitment of staff to the pursuit of happy, nurturing, playful and challenging environments, that staff turnover was low and resentment was kept, for the most part, at bay.

" The job is hard and I am exhausted at the end of each day, week and term. But I keep doing it for the children and because of the team. We keep each other going and when one person is down, another person pulls them up. It's why we stay."

(Teacher A – Autumn 2017)

Loyalty and commitment was high throughout the school and it was this 'emotional capital' which greatly increased the capacity of the policy actors within it to enact policy and retain some positive belief that innovation and creativity could be possible within the confines of prescribed and normalised assessment policy agendas.

An interesting aspect to all of this was the degree to which loyalty played a part in policy enactment. There was, in this particular school, a strong sense of loyalty and attachment to the school, the team and the children. In the diary extract below, I

expose the reasons why everyone kept going, striving for the best whilst hoping for change.

"Teachers come here and they stay for a long time. It is a good place to work and everyone is supportive of one another. I feel like we go through the difficult times and we enjoy the good times together. We all work hard to make sure that we do all that we can for the children who come here "

(Extract from reflective diary – Summer 2020)

The loyalty and allegiance to the institution enabled teachers to reconcile their differences of opinion around the subject of assessment and comply with systems and procedures in order to uphold the integrity of the school.

"The Head and the Senior Leadership Team understand how we feel about the continuous assessment in Reception. They sympathise with our predicament, but they are governed too by the policies and agendas, by Ofsted and by the competition for school places. It's why we carry on doing what we have to do."

(Extract from reflective diary – Summer 2020)

Bibby, 2010, explains that there are emotional differences between schools in terms of trust, bullying and transparency. The ethos and emotional capital of the school in which this research took place, cannot be overlooked. It was the reason that so many staff stayed and were able to weather the policy storm (Moore, 2006).

None of the teachers wanted to let the children, or the team, down and worked very hard as a result to support the achievement of the outcomes prescribed in the assessment policy documents and to measure them accordingly in the ways articulated in the documentation.

One of the challenges for the Reception class teachers was their identity within policy and the ways in which they saw themselves in relation to the policies they

were enacting (Sachs, 2003). The participants in this study were reflective upon their practice and their own values and beliefs.

"I'm not the teacher I want to be……I'm focussing so much on data"

(Teacher C – Spring 2018)

"When I am assessing children I don't feel like I am teaching."

(Teacher A – Autumn 2019)

The statements above clearly show the extent to which the Reception class teachers in this study felt their autonomy and agency as teaching professionals was under threat. The first statement, although short, is full of feeling and emotion. The teacher's identity as a teacher was compromised as she wrestled with the demands of EYFS assessment policy and school readiness. Lightfoot and Frost (2015 : 402), write about professional identity as inextricably linked to personal identity, meaning that it is therefore unique and multi-faceted. Whilst a teacher's identity is unique, it has also been found to reflect the educational landscape and context that they are part of (Coldron and Smith, 1999). This then becomes visible in the classroom. Policy changes can shift the landscape, altering professional identity (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999) and producing emotional turmoil as teachers struggle to defend their 'story to live by' (Lightfoot and Frost, 2015 : 403), to help them themselves and their practice.

The subsequent comment highlights the division between assessment and teaching and supports the idea that there is more to teaching than assessment, that those two things require the deployment of different skills and techniques. It reinforces the general apprehension felt by the Reception class teachers, that assessment and

data was taking over classroom practice in the Early Years and was consuming more and more of the teaching and learning time available for Reception children.

The assessment policies were informing and influencing the teachers' identities within the classroom. Through enacting policies which were prescriptive in their approaches to testing children and by placing a high value on the data collected, teachers felt they were being asked to be something they were not. The policies were producers, creating a narrow version of a teacher and making sense of what it meant to be a Reception class teacher. The production of alternative professional identities which clashed with teachers' preferred construction of self, contributed to an instability felt by individuals and the team as a whole. Sachs (2003) argues that teachers with a strong sense of their professional identity and the connection between their purpose and their practice are more likely to be pro-active in the enactment of their 'moral purpose' within the classroom.

The feeling of constraint was felt by all the participants in this study and was a theme in many conversations about assessment. Interestingly, even though feeling of being constrained or limited did come up in discussion around curriculum, it wasn't a focus to the same extent as when we were examining assessment and data collection in the Early Years.

4.10 How Early Years policy is enacted in Reception classes in an infant school

This section of the chapter will examine how assessment policies, specifically the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) and the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA), were enacted within the infant school where I worked.

There was a vocal dislike of assessment in the Early Years by teachers and teaching assistants. Their relationship with assessment processes and data was fraught with dissatisfaction and opposition to the testing of young children. All of the participants in this study expressed their concerns around testing four and five-year olds during their first year of school. They felt that testing children took staff away from the rest of the class, involved unnecessary paperwork and was detrimental to children's self-esteem. These criticisms of assessment in the Early Years are not unique to the context of this study. They have been documented by teaching organisations and unions over recent years (ATL, 2015; NUT, 2015; Reclaiming Schools, 2015; TACTYC, 2015; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2017).

Assessment was an area which was susceptible to diverse patterns of enactment throughout the school year. There are definite and specific times of the academic year when assessment and standards dominate teachers' lives, provision and practice. These data or assessment points in the year have spread and seeped out across other times, taking up more space and time than ever before. When it came to the implementation of assessments and tests at various points in the year (RBA, Christmas data, phonics, Easter data, moderation, Summer data – Profile), it was done so more as a 'tick box' exercise. It was done quickly and efficiently, marked down and put to one side. There was an urgency to get it over and done with, as highlighted in the following extract from my reflective diary.

"Assessment time again and I feel the pressure to get it done, recorded and reported. I have a really good idea where the children are, the paper assessments will just confirm and evidence what I already know. I just need to get this week over and done with. It's like pulling off a plaster, best done quickly and without a big fuss."

(Extract from research diary – Summer 2019)

"It's about survival. I need to get this done and the pressure will lessen."

(Extract from reflective diary – Summer 2019)

The above research diary extracts highlight the feelings I had towards assessment in Reception. A lot of the time it felt needless and unnecessary, all the Reception class practitioners had the information they needed about each child in their heads. There was an awareness that we were 'doing' policy, not for the children, not for ourselves, but for 'others', for data, league tables, government. Ball et al (2011: 627), draws upon the work of Brown, Stacey, & Nandhakumar (2008) and Currie & Brown (2003), in his writing about schools as story-telling systems. He argues that all policy actors in schools, including teachers and senior leaders, tell sophisticated stories about the school, in order to unite things or move things on. He goes on to assert that these narratives, which are aimed at both staff and children and are a "*focus of organisational commitment and cohesion, and for consumption by various publics (parents, Ofsted, local authority, etc.)"*

There were, however, during this study, pockets of time where teachers could be free of the chains of assessment, they could be creative and think momentarily of parts of teaching and learning which would not be tested or measured. These brief pockets and slots of time were valuable to teachers, they looked forward to them and they opened up opportunities for alternative enactments of policy.

"I love Christmas, I love the build-up and the fact that we can focus on other things for a bit rather than just the same reading, writing and maths."

(Teacher C – Autumn 2019)

"Assessments are done, the Profile is completed and sent off to the Local Authority. Now, for the next three weeks before the summer, we can do more of what the children and the adults love the most, playing, painting, dancing and singing."

(Teacher A – Summer 2019)

Assessment in Reception was accomplished in three different ways. One way was through more formal one to one tests, for example, termly phonics tests, where teachers showed the children letter and word flashcards and then ticked a box if they could read the sound or word. Another way was through observation where teacher and teaching assistants observed the children in their independent play and learning and recorded achievement of predetermined statements on an online tracking system using an ipad. This was done throughout the year and was continual. The last method of assessing children was continual but not recorded. It was teacher assessment, but of the whole child and it was held inside teacher's heads. It was a holistic picture of each child and a knowledge and an understanding of them which could not be put down on paper. It encompassed everything they knew about that child and was the most up to date version of them. This assessment tool, a teacher's mind, their knowledge and understanding of a child over time and their relationship with them, cannot be found in any substantial or eloquent way within any of the assessment policies used at the research study school. It is therefore a product of the assessment policies themselves, created and produced by Reception class teachers in part as a form of subconscious resistance and creativity or innovation as well as the natural consequence of doing the job of teaching young children every day. Formal assessments were performed half-heartedly, teachers knew why they were doing them but they didn't agree with them. It was what Braun and Maguire (2018) call, 'doing without believing' and what Goffman (1961) defines as 'role

distancing'. They felt they went against everything they stood for yet were, simultaneously, encompassed within them.

Reception class teachers didn't feel assessment was always for the benefit of the children. They believed there was a bigger force at play - the academic outcomes for the school, the image of the school as a whole, accountability, to push the idea of formal schooling onto teachers and practitioners and to use it as a stick with which to beat the teachers. There was continuous competition between schools (Keddie, 2018). School places were lucrative to schools, especially with budget cuts and little money and schools needed to be as full as they could possibly be.

The profile assessment completed at the end of the summer term in Reception was emotionally charged and laden with pressure and expectation. I wrote about the compressing nature of enacting the EYFSP towards the end of the summer term each year.

" The tension is palpable at Profile time. We are all on edge as we complete assessments and input scores. The data is checked and checked again. We have moderated, pored over evidence and learning journeys and discussed individual children. There is an overwhelming sense of relief as the data is sent off to the local authority."

(Extract from reflective diary – Summer 2019)

The mixed feelings associated with completing the EYFSP at the end of the Reception year were familiar and expected by all of the Reception class teachers.

There were five main strands to this;

- Outward defiance, reluctance and unease about completing it
- Pressure to achieve, for good results

- Concern for how teachers would be perceived in light of the outcomes and in comparison with other teachers, classes and schools
- How it would be perceived by teachers and colleagues in other year groups
- A feeling of having to justify and fight your corner

The enactment of the EYFSP involved a lot of emotion. This emotion was felt in varying degrees by different members of staff and the degree of emotion was dependent upon their own values and belief system, created over time through personal lived experiences. The emotions and feelings behind the enactment of the profile were powerful, and could be felt through discussion, but the actual enactment was serious and narrow. There wasn't room, in the completion of the EYFSP, for a great deal of creativity when it came to enactment. The assessment policy, the EYFSP, defined the ways in which teachers could respond and it clearly marked out what those responses should look like. There was, however, small room for manoeuvre with some of the practices surrounding assessment and I will touch on this in the next section.

There was a space in the enactment of assessment policy, and in the practices surrounding assessment, for a small degree of manipulation, of controlling aspects of the enactments. The Profile assessment at the end of the Reception year did not allow for movement, it had to be completed by a fixed and predetermined date. The formal paper assessments feeding into the Profile (phonics, maths, reading, writing) were completed in blocks and done all at once, for example during an assessment week each term. This was the school's way of approaching assessment. It was done as a way of reducing the impact of paper testing upon the usual flow of the day and upon the time for play and learning opportunities for the rest of the time. The paper testing of phonics, maths, reading and writing was seen as a 'needs must' task,

something which had to be done for the purposes of the headteacher and senior leadership team, but which had little use for teachers who knew where the children in their class were and what their next steps needed to be without the formal paper tests.

Even though the Profile and assessment policy in the EYFS was constraining and produced policy actors (teachers) who were passive and technical, it also allowed for a small degree of creativity. This creativity of the assessment policy came about by, and through, teachers having ownership, not over the prescriptiveness, statutory reporting, assessment statements or Early Learning Goals, but over how it was seen by others. This wasn't full ownership or autonomy but there was a certain extent to which teachers could portray the profile, assessment and practice in the Early Years in ways which better reflected their own, and collective, broader ideas about effective Early Years practice. Teachers went above and beyond at the school to promote, to children, parents and the community, the Characteristics of Effective Learning (CoEL), wellbeing, nurture and child led learning. Emphasis was put on the points above at any available opportunity.

"…the videos of the eggs hatching at school, the Alice in Wonderland trip, the nature art made at Forest School….they are put on school social media as a way of drowning out the voice of assessment and data."

(Extract from research diary – Spring 2019)

This was, to a certain extent, a resistance to the prescriptive and rigid assessment narrative which was being played out within school and in the wider context of national agendas and government. But it was also an exercise of agency, the space in which to promote the elements of practice which were positive and which aligned with practitioners' values and belief systems.

Having a large EYFS team created a rich site for discussion, collaboration and the sharing of ideas. It was also, however, the location for conflicts in philosophy and pedagogy. Whether these conflicts were large or small, it was these conflicts which led to slightly different versions of 'doing' assessment in the Early Years.

"I've noticed that [redacted] spends a lot of her time in the classroom calling children over to her and assessing children one to one. She also squeezes in extra phonics sessions and practises rote learning the high frequency words in the days before her paper assessments. [redacted] on the other hand is more organic in her approach to the assessments, using notes she has written down during recent phonics and maths sessions to prefill the assessment sheets and then only assessing the bits she is unsure of."

(Extract from Reflective Diary)

The above diary extract illuminates the differences in approaches to assessment within the same year group and school and highlights one of the problems involved in examining policy enactments. The first teacher had a more formal approach to assessment and spent a great deal more time involved in assessment tasks. The second teacher took an informal approach to assessment which took up the least amount of teaching and learning time possible. She used her knowledge of the children and observations collected over a period of time, to inform her judgements. Teaching is human work and, as such, it moves and shifts as a result of teachers' lived experiences and understandings of what it means to teach and to learn (Edwards, 2003).

The Reception Baseline and the EYFS Profile, which are the two main assessment policies chosen for the purposes of this research study, are both prescriptive in what they ask of the teachers and the children. There are set out ways to organise and record assessments. The prescriptiveness of the assessment policies left very little

room for alternative interpretations of them. The only real ways in which teachers could bend or apply any degree of autonomy, was though the space they put between themselves and the messages the policies conveyed, as well as the ways in which they attempted to create alternative discourses for themselves and others.

"We planned to put time aside today on the timetable for completing the baseline assessments. We agreed to just do it and box it off. It did take longer than expected but it feels good now to have it out of the way."

(Extract from reflective diary – Autumn 2019)

This 'role distancing' (Goffman, 1961) from policy messages was a way of teachers marking out their values and beliefs about teaching and learning in the Early Years as well as preserving their professional identity.

Assessment was a huge preoccupation at the school during the course of this study. It was high on the agenda for the senior leadership team and it was a serious and considerable subject which took up a lot of staff meeting, discussion and thinking time. For the participants of this project, it was visible and constant. From comments heard in conversations around school, assessment was an inescapable and obtrusive topic which had a hold over teachers due to the significant consequences arising from it.

"The data target is one of my performance management targets. It is always playing on my mind."

(Teacher A – Autumn 2018)

"Two new children have joined the class since October and now I think my data isn't going to look as good."

(Teacher B – Spring 2019)

"I've just finished one batch of assessments and it is time to start again. I spend so much time assessing children but I have to do it as I have a pupil progress meeting coming up."

(Teacher B – Spring 2019)

Assessment, feeding into league tables and published results, was visible beyond the school walls too. It held a power in the media, among parents choosing which school to send their child to and with Ofsted. This predominant force affected and influenced ways in which policy was enacted at the school. Amongst the Reception class teachers there was a strong sense of being observed, scrutinised, of being under the microscope. It was this sense of surveillance and accountability which was the fundamental drive for teachers to implement and comply with assessment policy.

4.11 Concluding Commentary

This chapter has looked at one EYFS curriculum policy (The EYFS Framework) and two EYFS assessment policies (The Reception Baseline and The EYFS Profile). It has explored the ways in which each of the policy documents were enacted in Reception classrooms in an infant school and the effects on teacher relationships with the policy texts. The performativity agenda, in and through which these three policies were interpreted, translated and enacted, largely controlled the extent to which teachers felt they had to adhere to directives.

The EYFS Framework, detailing the Early Years principles and curriculum, was generally well received by teachers, offering a structure for teaching and learning, with guiding principles which complemented their values and beliefs. The EYFS assessment policies, the RBA and the EYFSP in particular, were much less well

received by teachers as they moved away from the pedagogical knowledge and understandings which all the Reception class teachers in this study held in high regard and believed in.

All three policies, the EYFS Statutory Framework, the RBA and the EYFSP, endured complex relationships with teachers and classroom practice. It was these meshed, interwoven relationships which made enacting policy difficult within a performative school culture, where value was placed on outcomes and teachers' identities were bound up with accountability and duty.

The data, presented within this chapter, reveals that the spaces available for contestation and negotiation of policy directives were dominated and consumed instead by teachers' overwhelming feelings of responsibility, survival and endurance. It does, however, allow a glimpse of resistance, through the messages about policy conveyed by teachers, however limited these may be due to an intrinsic need to preserve professional identity and to survive in the school environment. The performance management system, in conjunction with the policy directives and accountability discourse, ensures that teachers feel compelled to adhere to the rules and are constrained to a large extent by their professionalism and desire to 'do their best'.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

This final chapter looks back at the research process and considers the success of my chosen research methodology and theoretical framing, in addressing the research questions. It also looks at the implications for this study on the wider field of Early Years research.

The three research questions for this study were:

- What is the relationship between EYFS policy and practice?
- What is the relationship between Reception practitioners and EYFS policy?
- How is EYFS policy enacted in Reception classes in an infant school?

5.1 Contribution to knowledge

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate how Early Years policy is enacted within the context of a Reception class in an infant school. It sought to understand the tensions which exist between EYFS policy and practice, the relationships teachers have with policies and the extent to which teachers have power and autonomy over the implementation and enactment of them. I became concerned with the acceptance of policy narratives by Reception class teachers, myself included, and wanted to examine the potential for resistance and change.

This thesis adds to the literature on policy enactments as it focuses specifically in detail on EYFS policy enactments in an infant school over a number of years. It adds details to Osbourne's (1992) assertion that Early Years practitioners resist policy pressures in ways which can be quite subtle. It looks at EYFS policy enactment through a performative discourse lens (Ball, 2003) and challenges the assumption

that teachers are ‘docile bodies’ (Ball, 2003: 219; Foucault, 1988a)) with no room for agency. In fact, when interests are shared by a group of people, this study has found that power can be transformative (Sisk-Hilton and Meier, 2017, Cassell, 1993) and policies enacted in ways which allow a little room for potential activity which is sympathetic to the needs, values and beliefs of the participants or policy actors. This study has begun to present teachers’ viewpoints and their feelings associated with performative demands and policy directives and it something I would like to explore further in future research.

This thesis is an autoethnographic narrative case study (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Chang, 2008) with myself as a participant, and it was conducted over a number of years. As such, it is a unique investigation, rich in observations and reflections which have been used carefully and thoughtfully to explore, examine and scrutinise EYFS policy enactments and the perspectives of the research participants towards them. The use of a reflective research diary (Ortlipp, 2008; Cazden, Diamondstone and Naso, 1988), throughout the study, provided a plentiful and fertile landscape from which to collect examples of, not only enactments of policy, but also the associated feelings and the moments of strain and tension. I want this autoethnographic study to contribute towards debates about policy enactments, specifically in the Early Years, and add to the conceptual frameworks within which these discussions take place. The purpose of this research was to open up new ways of thinking about, and contexts for, policy enactment, to provoke questions and develop new tools for further study and inquiry. It also highlights the need for early years teachers to work with headteachers to promote a more diverse understanding of school readiness.

This study has found that there are contradictions between what is written in EYFS policy and the messages they signal to practitioners, and the reality of practice in

Reception classrooms. On the one hand, EYFS policy documents, in particular the EYFS Statutory Framework and the EYFS Profile, stress the importance of 'play' and child-initiated learning, being led by the children's interests, and on the other hand they are setting out the requirements for each individual child to achieve pre-determined outcomes. This contradiction has brought about a reproduction in Early Years classrooms which is proving difficult to escape from. EYFS teachers are, more than ever before, championing child-centred pedagogies and learning which follows children's interests. They are also, however, more than ever before, held accountable (Edgington, 2016; Buchanon, 2015; Moss, 2015) to the Early Learning Goals and Good Level of Development (GLD), tools of measurement for children and teachers. These conflicting narratives have brought about a friction too in Reception classrooms. Children are actively encouraged by practitioners to learn through play, developing their independence and their social skills. At the same time, they are being asked to be obedient and submissive, adhering to the rules of the classroom and producing work and evidence for specific learning outcomes. The findings from this study show that the relationship between EYFS policy and classroom practice is sometimes rocky and unstable, at times smooth and balanced and at others, problematic and entangled. It is the job of leaders, then, to help practitioners through the changeable EYFS landscape by providing space to reflect and offering opportunities to question and challenge policy and practice.

The assessment requirements and procedures in EYFS policy and in Early Years settings locate teachers and practitioners as people collecting, enabling and recording 'knowledge'. The existence of statutory assessment and ongoing tracking systems has enabled the evolution of schools and Early Years settings as places where particular types of learning are planned for, and occur, in accordance with the

statements in the policy documents. The EYFS Profile, a document which must be completed and returned to local authorities at the end of each child's Reception year, is also a surveillance (Foucault, 1977; 1979) tool, used by those in power to observe and judge performance. The performativity discourse (Ball, 2003, 2012; Ball et al, 2012), evident and omnipresent in schools and classrooms, demands conformity and compliance to policies and greatly influences policy enactments through expectation, provoking a fear of resistance and the alternative. In the context of the infant school in which this study took place, there were routines, technologies and systems which were developed to ensure the enactment and management of EYFS policies. These routines became structures which controlled and applied pressure to comply to the dominant policy agenda. Olsen and Sexton (2009), call this a form of 'threat rigidity' and it was evident throughout the study.

5.2 Who do the enactments belong to?

When looking at policy enactments, and in particular, assessment policy enactments, it is interesting to compare them with the curriculum policy enactments. By examining assessment policy and the ways in which it was interpreted, implemented and translated into practice, subtle differences between assessment enactments and assessment enactments could be identified. The enactments did not belong entirely to the teachers in question. They were tied up within prescribed processes, schedules, performance and standards. The elements of judgement, competition and conformity were tightly binding the teacher's enactments of assessment policy. The vocalised dissatisfaction, of EYFS teachers, with the assessment of young children and the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) and the Early Years Profile

(EYFSP), was interesting to note as it explained how, even though the assessment policies were adhered to, they were not necessarily deemed appropriate by the members of staff who were responsible for implementing them. The vocalised dissatisfaction, as outlined above, can be seen as a form of resistance to the performative discourse and standards agenda permeating the school and the enactments of EYFS assessment policy. These moments, peppered throughout the study, where teachers stated their frustration with assessment processes and policy directives relating to testing, were fleeting gaps opened up for imagining alternatives. It is the task for leaders and practitioners to recognise the points when these alternatives occur and to celebrate them when they do. The pressure on teachers and the overwhelming need to survive needs to lessen in order for larger spaces to develop for alternative practices and for a different reality in Early Years education to begin.

5.3 Implications for practice

Throughout the time that I have been undertaking this research study and writing this thesis, my professional role has changed, from Reception class teacher, to EYFS Lead, Assistant Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher and, finally, to Headteacher, which is the role I am currently in at the time of writing. In each teaching role that I have held, I have had to read, digest and implement many varied policies relating to Early Years education and practice. By initiating, and engaging with, this research study, I have challenged my thinking, ideas and beliefs about EYFS policy, who it is for, how and why it is ‘done’. The process of writing this thesis and immersing myself in the literature around policy enactments, performativity, surveillance and

governance, has equipped me with, not only an in-depth knowledge and understanding of these subjects, but also an appetite and an eagerness to learn more. It has brought about a shift in my thinking as well as my practice. I am a more observant and questioning practitioner and a more mindful leader. My mindset has altered from a negative and sceptical view of EYFS policy, to a more constructive perspective, where I see capacity for manoeuvre and agency to enact policy in ways which align more effectively with the values and beliefs of individuals and groups of EYFS teachers and practitioners.

This study has highlighted for me, the importance of ongoing critical and challenging conversations between teachers, about EYFS policy, child development and practice. It is something which is lost within the highly pressured and busy job of Reception class teacher and EYFS practitioner. Confronting and contesting the neoliberal pressures placed upon teachers requires space and time to question the convergence of power, ideology and pedagogy (Attick, 2017: 46). Hill (2007), suggests that, *"Critical space for critical education studies and research is being compressed through curriculum control, through the remaking of human personality, and through a gamut of ideological and repressive state apparatuses."* (p.125).

It is my recommendation that valuable spaces are opened up for EYFS practitioners and the whole school staff, to discuss, think about and reflect upon policy and practice and to engage in collaborative thinking about the political landscape which impacts upon the creation of policy. It is through these critical conversations that the potential for change and transformation (Sisk-Hilton and Meier, 2017; Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2008) can be seen and understood more clearly. My use of a reflective diary, throughout the research process, has been crucial to the development of this study, to facilitate reflection and provide opportunities to go back

and analyse experiences, conversations and pockets of unease and tension. Reflective diary writing is something which I intend to continue with over the coming years, and would recommend to other practitioners, in pursuance of further, deeper understanding of the impact of performativity upon policy, practice and professional relationships. The formation and development of cluster groups for schools could be strengthened, giving practitioners and teachers from all year groups the opportunity for continued professional development and the space for connection, talk and reflection. With social media, the ease of online networking and virtual meetings, the ambition for effective cluster working to develop professional relationships and challenging thinking is obtainable and realistic. As a headteacher, I am currently working on ways of freeing up space and time within school, without compromising the quality of education and provision, to enable teachers to engage in meaningful and thought provoking discussions around performativity, policy and practice. This is a protected time, away from the distractions of planning, assessment, paperwork and curriculum activities. Creating these spaces, however, is a very difficult task when the challenges of finances and Ofsted are all encompassing and heavy for school leaders.

5.4 Limitations

As I was undertaking and writing this research study, I quickly became aware of the need to narrow down and remain focused on the research questions and loyal to the main focus of my study which weaves throughout the thesis. There were numerous occasions, too many to count, where I became distracted by things I read in books and articles, of concepts and ideas which interested me. One of the main limitations

of this study is the word count requirement. This prevented me from disappearing down a rabbit hole and kept me focused, but it also constrained me and hindered my attempts to explore other topics of interest. I would, for example, have liked to have examine the subject of identity in more detail, to look more closely at how teacher and child identities are formed and moulded over time and the role that school and policy has to play in this.

A more comprehensive and concentrated exploration of Foucault and Ball would have been beneficial to this study, and I would have liked to have examined, in detail, the new EYFS Framework (DfE, 2021) as part of this investigation.

There were limits to what I could say in this study as a result of the context in which I was working and researching. As the context for the study was one urban infant school, I could only discuss my findings in that particular context. Although there is an increasing landscape of research and literature around performativity in education and early years settings, I could not generalise my analysis or connect it to other, contrasting contexts, for teachers in other EYFS contexts may not resist policy in the same ways. The sample I used for the purposes of this study, in particular three Reception class teachers, limited the study due to the small number of participants. For this research study it would be impossible to examine all EYFS policies which impact upon classroom practice and enactments, therefore I was constrained by the policies I did use. Another limitation to the study was the methodology. It is necessary to choose a lens for looking at data, when instigating a research study, as it is not possible to approach it from all theoretical perspectives. The performativity lens through which I examined the data, whilst suitable and effective for this study, inescapably bounded the findings in ways that prevented multiple different understandings.

This research study, while limited in ways highlighted above, is an illustration of the gap between EYFS policy directives and the enactments of policy in Reception classrooms. It suggests that Reception class teachers resist policy in certain ways, dependent upon their own experiences, values and beliefs and the ever-changing context of the classroom. It is an insider insight over an extended period of time into the intricacies of resistance and the ways in which teacher attitudes towards policy change over time. The use of a reflective diary was crucial in documenting my own struggles, challenges and adjustments as I grappled with enacting policy in ways which did or did not align with my own values and beliefs about how young children learn and develop. It is, therefore, a positive contribution to the educational research field.

5.5 Future Research

The arguments I make in this thesis induce other questions which could form the basis of future research study. I would like to explore the topic of identity, as outlined in the previous section, within subsequent research. The extended time period between data collection analysis and final write-up highlights how attitudes to self and professional roles change overtime. I touched upon Youdell (2006a; 2006b) and Butler (2006), when looking at identity formation and I would like to explore this further and to investigate how teachers' identities change over time and in response to policy and government agendas. It would be interesting to see how different approaches to Early Years teaching and education, shapes teacher and child identities. I would be curious to examine a range of EYFS settings, where different

ways of enacting and resisting policy are noticeable and to look closely at how performativity impacts upon identity, and individual and collective values and beliefs.

When examining the ways in which EYFS policy was enacted in the infant school in which I worked during the time of this study, I was interested in the positioning of teachers in relation to the different policies they were enacting. The varied narratives of the teacher and teaching in a range of policies were visible and positioned teachers in different ways. I would have liked to have examined this in more detail, to investigate the ways in which children, teachers and education are articulated and made sense of in different kinds of policies, for example behaviour, SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and equality and diversity policies.

In conclusion, this study is not exhaustive and finished. It is not complete. Early Years education and practice is changing all the time. New policies and initiatives are being brought out and global attitudes and approaches to educating young children are developing and adjusting to political events as well as research. This study is a snapshot of the experiences of a group of Reception class teachers at a point in time as they worked to negotiate, interpret and enact EYFS policies within their Reception classrooms, attending to the demands of performativity whilst also protecting their own personal and professional values and beliefs.

This research study shows the gaps that exist between EYFS policy and enactments. It presents the findings which show that Reception class teachers are generally compliant with the EYFS Statutory Guidance and the underpinning principles. The greatest rift is between EYFS assessment policy and practice, with enactments demonstrating the most resistance from teachers as they wrestle with policy directives which clash with their deeply held values, beliefs and pedagogical

understanding in the Early Years. It is my belief that there is indeed room for the voices of resistance to be heard and to make a difference, to shape and influence Early Years policy and practice. Moss (2017: 12), in his writing about power and resistance, poses the question, "…*what might a transformed and commensurate policy and practice look like?".* In opposition to the positivist, regulatory dominant discourse which this study highlights, the values of inclusivity and creativity, which are held by Early Years teachers, as found in this research study, should be the foundation upon which transformation should be built.

I have gained so much from the research and writing process. Looking back over the years I have been investigating EYFS policy enactments, I have come so far in, not only my understanding, but also distancing myself from the policies. One of the golden threads that has run throughout this research study is the enduring topic of the relationship between policy, agency and the capacity for alternatives. By gaining a sharpened grasp of, and insight into, the bigger picture of government and global intentions regarding Early Years education, I have been able to free up some space between policy and classroom practice. This has enabled me to develop a more optimistic realisation of the opportunities there are for future increased teacher agency and policy resistance. This has been transformative for me and has ultimately, I believe, kept me in teaching as, without the deeper understanding that undertaking this research project has afforded me, I would have found the impact of performativity upon young children's experiences of school and education disheartening and oppressive. It is my hope that this study opens up discussions amongst EYFS teachers around resistance and the importance of holding true to the fundamental values of Early Years education, as it is the children we teach today who are the leaders of tomorrow. Within these discussions, I believe there should be

scope to imagine alternative tomorrows and to debate and compose them in the hope that they may be created. I recommend all EYFS teachers to question, to be curious and reflective, for that will not only pave the way for deeper understanding and expanded agency, but it will also be mirrored in the children we teach.

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Appendix A

What the early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework is

The EYFS framework sets the standards to make sure that children aged from birth to 5 learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe.

The framework is for all Ofsted registered early years providers in all settings, including:

- nurseries
- childminders
- pre-schools
- reception

The framework changed on 1 September 2021 and you can find out more below about the changes and how they affect you.

Why the changes have been made

The changes to the EYFS statutory framework have been made to:

- improve outcomes at age 5, particularly in early language and literacy
- reduce workload such as unnecessary paperwork, so you can spend more time with the children in your care

Important documents

The new early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework was published on the 31 March 2021 and should be used by all Ofsted registered early years providers in England from 1 September 2021.

Development Matters is the non-statutory curriculum guidance for the new EYFS framework that everyone can use from September 2021.

What the changes are

Changes to the educational programmes

Educational programmes, referred to by some people as the ‘early years curriculum’, are the areas of learning and development which must shape the activities and experiences that children have in your early years setting, at all ages. Your setting should use the educational programmes to decide the approach to curriculum that is right for you.

The 7 areas of learning and development remain the same.

The 3 prime areas:

- communication and language
- physical development
- personal, social and emotional development

The 4 specific areas:

- literacy
- maths
- understanding the world
- expressive arts and design

The changes

Changes have been made to the wording in the educational programmes. Specifically, this means:

- they are longer, there is more depth, and they contain examples of things that you can do with children
- there is a new focus on early language and extending vocabulary, with more examples on how to embed and develop vocabulary skills across all 7 areas, because this improves child development in a broad curriculum

What this means in practice

The Development Matters non-statutory curriculum guidance for the early years foundation stage can help inform your approach to curriculum, putting the educational programmes into practice.

Changes to safeguarding and welfare

The changes

There have been some minor changes to the safeguarding and welfare section, including a new requirement to promote the good oral health of children.

What this means in practice

This could include things like talking to children about the effects of eating too many sweet things, or the importance of brushing your teeth.

Adding this requirement does not mean that you must carry out supervised toothbrushing. You will not be required to assess children's oral health.

However, you can decide how this requirement is met, for example, there are various schemes around the country that support supervised toothbrushing. You may want to speak to your local authority about this.

If supervised toothbrushing is something you decide to introduce, you should also read the guidance on supervised toothbrushing during coronavirus (COVID-19).

Assessment arrangements

Age 2 progress check

No changes have been made to the progress check at age 2. This is the only statutory assessment that people working with pre-reception children will need to carry out.

The purpose of the 2 year check is to help identify strengths and any areas where progress is less than expected. It is not a requirement to identify a child as emerging or expected for the 2 year check.

Changes to the early learning goals (ELGs)

The early learning goals summarise the knowledge, skills and understanding that all young children should have gained by the end of the academic year in which they turn 5, the reception year.

Pre-reception providers do not need to use the early learning goals, but the changes are included here so you can see a child's expected level of development by the time they turn 5.

The early learning goals should not be used as a curriculum. They should be used as an assessment during the summer term of the reception year.

The changes

The early learning goals have been changed to make them clearer and more specific. They are more focused on the main factors that support child development at age 5. The 7 areas of learning and development are:

- communication and language
- personal, social and emotional development
- physical development
- literacy
- mathematics

- understanding the world
- expressive arts and design

The goals are there to be used to assess children at the end of reception year, rather than for pre-school children.

Changes to Development Matters: non-statutory curriculum guidance

We have republished Development Matters. While it's not compulsory, we recommend that you use it with the new statutory framework.

The change

It's easier to navigate, and shorter in word length to allow for more freedom to develop the right broad curriculum for the children you work with.

The age bands have been simplified to avoid tracking activities that do not support child development. There are now 3 instead of 6:

- birth to 3
- 3 and 4-year-olds
- children in reception

There's more room for professional judgement. You can make more judgements based on your knowledge and experience, instead of using the early learning goals or age bands in the framework to track children's progress.

Appendix B

The four guiding principles of the EYFS, as set out in the 'Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage' (DfE, 2017: 6) state;

1. **every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured**
2. **children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships**
3. **children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers**
4. **children develop and learn in different ways (see "the characteristics of effective teaching and learning" at paragraph 1.9) and at different rates. The framework covers the education and care of all children in early years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities.**

Appendix C

Quotes and extracts from Reflective Diary

"I want them to be happy and enjoy school."

(Teacher 1 – Autumn 2019)

"The rope swing is really good....[redacted] has kept on trying for weeks and now he can lift his feet off the ground."

(Teacher 1 – Spring 2018)

The thing about this school, and the foundation stage especially, is the relationships the staff build with the children. We work so hard all the time to encourage mutual trust, respect and kindness. I feel it is a strength of the EYFS here and the school as a whole. We take time to get to know the children and everyone involved in the care and education of children in the Early years knows each child in their keyworker group very well.

(Extract from reflective diary – my own thoughts – Spring 2018)

Everyone who visits our school comments on how nurturing, friendly and warm it feels.

(Extract from reflective diary – my own thoughts – Autumn 2019)

Appendix D

Quotes and extracts from Reflective Diary

" There are time constraints, managing observations and teaching specific skills. The expectations are hard, I am torn between making them independent and teaching them skills that they may not be ready for. The baseline and assessments are the downsides to the job."

(Teacher A – Autumn 2017)

"I feel the curriculum and assessment methods puts practitioners under pressure to meet the assessment criteria in terms of over observing and perhaps not leaving enough time to play"

(Teacher C – Spring 2017)

Appendix E

The seventeen ELGs, taken from the recently updated EYFS Framework (DfE, 2021), are:

- Listening, Attention and Understanding
- Speaking
- Self-Regulation
- Managing Self
- Building Relationships
- Gross Motor Skills
- Fine Motor Skills
- Comprehension
- Word Reading
- Writing
- Number
- Numerical Patterns
- Past and Present
- People, Culture and Communities
- The Natural World
- Creating with Materials
- Being imaginative and Expressive

As well as the ELGs above, there are also the Characteristics of Effective Learning (CoEL), which have been put into the EYFS framework as attributes and attitudes towards learning which should be identified and developed in young children throughout the EYFS. The principles, the prime and specific areas and the

characteristics of effective learning are all interconnected and should work to complement each other.

The CoEL aspects are:

Characteristics of Effective Learning
Playing and Exploring – engagement • finding out and exploring • Playing with what they know • Be willing to 'have a go'
Active learning - motivation • Being involved and concentrating • Keeping trying • Enjoying achieving what they set out to do
Creating and thinking critically - thinking • Having their own ideas • Making links • Choosing ways to do things