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Problematising policies for workforce reform in early childhood education: A rhetorical analysis of England's *Early Years Teacher Status*

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Keywords: workforce reform; early childhood education; rhetorical analysis; responsabilisation

Abstract

This paper examines workforce reform in early childhood education in England, specifically the policy trajectory that led to implementation of the Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) qualification in 2014. Taking a critical perspective on policy analysis, the paper uses rhetorical analysis to make sense of the how EYTS is understood within workforce reform. From an assemblage of salient policy documents, we report our critical analysis of two key texts: *Foundations for Quality* (DfE 2012) and *More Great Childcare* (DfE 2013). Both documents identify policy levers and drivers for reform, but from markedly different perspectives and with contrasting recommendations. By using rhetorical analysis to examine how these policy texts construct not only problems but **also** preferred solutions, we illustrate the paradoxical nature of early childhood policy in England as it relates to aspirations to raise the status of the sector and improve quality through the implementation of EYTS.

Introduction

Over the **past** twenty years, early childhood education and care (ECE) has been the focus for policy interventions in global and local contexts, with common aspirations to raise quality, and improve access, inclusion, children's life chances, and outcomes (OECD 2006). Central to these aspirations is workforce reform, specifically the qualifications and professionalisation of a diverse workforce, whose pay, conditions, and status remain problematic. Although the focus of this paper is on England, many of the issues we identify have international relevance for the policy turn towards early childhood education and the outcomes expected from investment in ECE.

The international policy turn towards education has brought into focus the restructuring of early childhood institutions via new public management, the professionalization of the workforce, and debates about the identity of the ECE pedagogue, teacher or leader. Through these means, workforce and workplace reform are entwined at international and national levels. These trends have required the intervention of governments in providing funding for high quality ECE provision (especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds) and creating structures for governance that ensure a return on investment. As a result of policy intensification, discourses of professionalism may be directed towards teachers striving to achieve policy aims and aspirations that may be in conflict with established values and beliefs within the ECE sector. For example, Rauschenback and Riedel (2016) trace a difficult path to professionalization in Germany, based on the country's Froebelian traditions, the alignment of ECE with social welfare, decentralised governance, and the gendered nature of ECE work. Focusing on Australia, Nuttall, Thomas and Wood (2014) examined the impact of global policy flows and national policies, and the major changes that ensued in the day-to-day practice of the ECE workforce. In particular, Australia's policy designation of the Educational Leader has brought into focus the relative lack of research on professionalism and professionalization in ECE, especially for centre leaders and managers.

Common policy discourses, levers, and drivers operate at global scale, **so** it is important to understand how policy initiatives touch down at local levels, and in local cultural and socio-political contexts. **This paper is drawn from a study funded by the Australian Research Council, *Learning rich leadership for quality improvement in early childhood education*, in which we are examining the ways in which English policy on educational leadership has 'travelled' to influence Australian policy. Our concern in this paper is specifically** with the emerging effects of new public management on the early years workforce in England. This focus reflects the touch down of global policy flows, and the responses made at national level,

thereby contributing to international debates on workforce reform in ECE. Taking a critical perspective on policy analysis, we use rhetorical analysis to make sense of the how a key policy initiative – the creation of Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) – is understood within policies for workforce reform. From an assemblage of salient policy documents, we report our critical analysis of two texts selected for their centrality to the construction of EYTS: **the government-commissioned review on the Early Years qualification system**, *Foundations for Quality* (DfE 2012) (also known as the Nutbrown Review), and **the government response to this review**, *More Great Childcare* (DfE 2013). Both documents identify policy levers and drivers for reform, but from markedly different perspectives and with contrasting recommendations.

We begin by briefly describing the origins of the two policy texts and how the role of EYTS arose from the policy conversation between them. We move on to contextualise EYTS within the wider case for ECE workforce reform in England. Before turning to our analysis of the texts, we describe the methodology of rhetorical analysis and the specific concepts we employ. In the main section we address three questions that are central to rhetorical analysis of policy texts: What are the problems that need to be addressed? What rhetorical strategies are used in proposing solutions? And with what intended effects?

Our conclusions are, first, the texts agree that early years workforce development is a problem but that they offer materially differing exigencies as evidence for why such development is desirable. Our second claim is that the two documents reflect widely differing views about the nature of professionalism in the early years workforce and therefore about the preferred solution for workforce reform. Third, we claim that the early years profession in England has become subject to one of the most egregious aspects of new public management (Hood 1995): the illusion of devolution versus the realities of surveillance and responsabilisation. We conclude by arguing that our analysis illustrates the deeply paradoxical

nature of the attempts at persuasion offered by these texts, and pointing to the emerging consequences of this disparity for workforce reform.

Policy texts and the creation of EYTS

In 2012, the UK's Conservative-Liberal Coalition Government commissioned a review of Early Years qualifications in England in response to other policy reports highlighting that 'successful early intervention was dependent on high-quality provision and high-quality staff' (Wild et al. 2015, 231). The report, *Foundations for Quality* (DfE 2012), identified that, in order to create a 'sense of professionalism' in the sector, a qualifications system was needed that was 'easy to understand', had 'clear progression routes', and was 'effective in developing the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to work with babies and young children' (17). Importantly for many early years professionals, the review identified that, despite both Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and the already-existing Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) being graduate-level qualifications and roles, there were significant disparities between the pay and status of the Early Years Professional (EYP) when compared to those with QTS (primarily teachers in schools), who were on regulated levels of pay with clear routes for career progression. It was proposed that a new graduate qualification be created, the Early Years Teacher (EYT), which would be an 'early years specialist route to QTS, specialising in the years from birth to seven' (59).

The government response, set out in *More Great Childcare* (DfE 2013), **was to replace the EYPS with the new EYTS qualification, with the latter being 'specialists in early childhood development, trained to work with babies and young children' (27). The new EYTS training programme had the same entry requirements and similar standards to QTS, and supported the aspiration to have more teacher-led nursery classes (32). However, these changes did not address the** lack of parity with QTS, despite the recommendations made in the Nutbrown

Review. Furthermore, the response ignored the recommendation that the scope of the EYT should be for work with children from birth to seven years of age. Instead, it was specified that the EYTS be awarded to graduates who are leading education and care and who have been judged to have met all of the standards in practice from birth to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) when children reach their 5th birthday. Moreover, those with EYTS could work only in the Early Years Foundation Stage, whereas those with QTS can work across any phase of education, as well as progressing to leadership roles within schools. Nutbrown's response to these changes was one of questioning why the early years sector 'should be less well-qualified and afforded a lower professional status than those teaching older children' (DfE 2013, 8).

Nutbrown's question was a timely challenge to the long-standing disparities in the ECE workforce, as documented in her review. From a policy perspective, the government response to this question is partly that the twin drivers of economic effectiveness and raising quality, as evidenced by children's outcomes against the EYFS goals, are key influences in ECE. On the one hand, the EYT workforce cohort has been given the responsibility of improving the quality of provision and professionalising the workforce. This is highlighted in the government's Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE 2017) where it states that 'Achieving EYTS can give a *real feeling of professionalism* to nursery staff, *increasing their confidence*, giving them the ability to *promote excellent practice* and the *authority to share knowledge and good practice* with colleagues' (14, emphasis added). Implicit in this statement is that the EYT can be expected to assume leadership of the setting, of practice, and of staff, including their professional development, knowing that this will give them 'a real feeling of professionalism'. However, this statement positions individuals as being responsible, and willing, to work for the real feeling of professionalism that will not only improve the practices of colleagues but raise quality, standards and children's outcomes. On the other hand, this strategy can also be

interpreted as a neoliberal act of responsabilisation, positioning individuals as responsible for working to solve collective societal problems (Torrance 2017, 91). In other words, EYTs are expected to bring advanced expertise to local settings to solve problems of practice but without any additional resources from the state.

Before turning to our rhetorical analysis of how the Early Years Teacher has been constructed in these contradictory ways through *More Great Childcare* (DfE 2013) and *Foundations for Quality* (DfE 2012), we situate this construction within the wider case for reform of the early childhood education workforce in England. Our analysis later in the paper is illustrative of how the contemporary construction of the need for workplace reform has been built upon, but has not displaced, earlier arguments for the professionalisation of the early years workforce.

The case for early years workforce reform in England

Historically, preschool provision in England (birth to five) has been diverse and uncoordinated with ‘little cohesive integration of services’ (Bertram and Pascal 2000, 14) or regulation of the quality offered by the range of childcare providers (Faulkner and Coates 2013, 247). In the wider context of reform processes, ECE has been subject to ‘unprecedented attention and relentless change’ (Lightfoot and Frost 2015, 404), and workforce reform has been central to policy intensification. A key focus has been addressing variations in the quality of provision offered between maintained (government-funded) Nursery and Primary schools, and the non-maintained private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector that includes day nurseries, pre-schools, playgroups, and childminders. The long-term aim of the transformation of the Early Years workforce was to raise the standards of the care and education of young children, and ‘engender a transformative change in the professionalism of the sector’ (Ang 2011, 292).

By the 1990s political interest had begun to focus on ECE as a way of narrowing the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their more affluent peers. The New Labour government, elected in 1997, initiated the Sure Start Local Programmes and Early Excellence Centres to tackle poverty and to narrow the existing divisions between education and care (Cottle and Alexander 2012, 636). The *Ten Year Childcare Strategy* (HM Treasury 2005) committed to the provision of free nursery education for all three- and four-year olds, delivered across the maintained, private, and voluntary sectors (24). The government set a target to create one million additional childcare places, leading to tensions between the need to provide more childcare services whilst also ensuring quality remained high (Hevey 2010, 160).

Increasingly the need for workforce reform could not be ignored. The Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2003) had explicitly stated that the goal must be to ‘make working with children an attractive, high status career, and to develop a more skilled and flexible workforce’ (10). Evidence from government-commissioned research, the *Effective Provision of Pre-school Education* (EPPE) study (Sylva et al. 2004), highlighted the ‘significant relationship’ between the quality of provision and improved child outcomes, and found correlations between qualifications of staff and ratings of quality. Children who attended settings where staff had higher qualifications made more progress, particularly if the manager was highly qualified (iv). Drawing on this research, the *Children’s Workforce Strategy* (DfES 2005) proposed that, in order to raise the quality of provision across the sector and offer more choice to parents, the skills and qualifications of all workers, particularly in the PVI sector, needed to be improved (33).

The government responded with the announcement of a new Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) role for those leading Children’s Centres and childcare settings, alongside the offer of significant funding to improve qualification levels of the workforce as a whole (DfES 2006, 29). An alternative to the Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), the Early Years Professional

(EYP) was a graduate award based on a set of professional standards developed ‘using evidence from the EPPE research, expert advice and stakeholder consultation’ (CWDC 2009), with the aim that all settings would employ at least one graduate or EYP by 2015. These EYPs were given responsibility for improving the quality of provision, enabling the most disadvantaged to escape deprivation through the achievement of educational outcomes, as defined in the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)* (DCSF 2008) and ‘ensuring that England had a well-educated, economically competitive, future workforce’ (Barron 2016, 327).

In 2011, the government commissioned a review of the EYFS, led by Dame Claire Tickell as the independent chair (DfE 2011). The report highlighted the importance of an experienced, well-trained and supported workforce, but acknowledged that more needed to be done to raise professional status, improve qualifications, establish career pathways, and develop effective leadership within and across settings. This review, and subsequent versions of the EYFS (DfE 2014, 2017), consolidated the relationship between the learning and development requirements (expressed as the expected standards for children’s outcomes) and the professional standards for the QTS and EYP qualifications (and therefore for the subsequent EYT qualification).

In our present program of research (*Australian Research Council, Discovery Project 180100281*), we are concerned with the relationship between policy technologies, such as creation of the EYPS and EYTS qualifications, and the regulation of teachers’ work through ECE reform processes, particularly as this influences the work of leadership in early years settings. One of our first tasks has been to understand how policy texts construct problems and preferred solutions, attending to how language and discourse are used in persuasive and, sometimes, derisive ways. In the next section of the paper we outline and justify our choice of rhetorical analysis to achieve this aim.

Methodology and methods of rhetorical analysis

This paper adopts a critical perspective to policy analysis, built on the notion that policy is a ‘social construction’ that is ‘complex, inherently political and infused with values’ (Winton 2013, 159). Edwards et al. (2004) assert that ‘Policy, practice and research are not simply neutral statements of facts but are attempts to persuade in some shape or form’ (3). It is argued that within policy texts, ‘justifications are ideologically developed through ‘common sense’ rhetoric that presents simple solutions to nuanced political and social difficulties’ (Crines 2015, 126). Jowett and O’Donnell (2006) argue that understanding the ideology behind the policy text is a ‘form of consent to a particular kind of social order and conformity to the rules within a specific set of social, economic and political structures’ (271). With this in mind it is important to identify the ideology within which the policy texts are situated as being ‘the world view that determines how arguments will be received and interpreted’ (Cooper 1989, 162). This helps to develop an understanding of how arguments are constructed to reflect particular meanings of policy, and how the audience is persuaded of a particular course of action (Winton 2018, 58).

Gottweis (2007) asserts that ‘Rhetoric is broadly acknowledged as an important feature of the political process’ (240). Although often considered to be a strategy for manipulation in everyday language, rhetoric refers to the study of both the methods of argumentation and certain features of the argumentative process (Fischer and Gottweis 2012, 10). As a way of analysing these methods of argumentation within rhetoric, Leach (2000) has identified the following elements: the rhetorical situation (including exigence and audience), persuasive discourses (stasis theory), and the five rhetorical canons (invention, disposition, style, memory, and delivery), as shown in Table 1.

PERSUASIVE DISCOURSES (STASIS)				
Forensic (judicial)		Epideictic (demonstrative)		Deliberative (political)
Concerned with the nature and cause of past events		Focuses on current issues and whether something or someone deserves blame or praise		Concerned with convincing others to do something and/or accept a particular point of view Are actions advantageous for the future of the state?
CANONS OF RHETORIC				
Invention	Disposition	Style	Memory	Delivery
Findings arguments to support a point of view - Logos - Pathos - Ethos	How is discourse organised for rhetorical effect	Choice of words and style of arrangement, figurative language, etc	Shared cultural memories	Previously how the speaker delivered the speech – now concerned with the dissemination and rhetoric of its content

Table 1. The elements of the rhetorical analysis (summarised from Leach, 2000)

Within its origins in classical Greece, rhetoric was categorised into three branches of persuasive discourse based on how a rhetor addressed their audience: legal (*forensic*), political (*deliberative*), and ceremonial (*epideictic*) (Leach 2000, 8). For the purposes of our analysis, we understand the two selected policy texts to be in the ‘deliberative’ genre, which is concerned with convincing others to do something and/or accept a particular point of view. We primarily employed one of the canons of rhetoric in our analysis – invention – as well as exploring the wider rhetorical situation (Bitzer 1968) to identify the exigencies of the policy agenda and its target audience.

The canon of invention consists of arguments based on three kinds of appeal to the audience: *pathos*, *ethos* and *logos*. Appeals to the emotions of the audience constitute the *pathos* of an argument; its *logos* is designed to appeal to a sense of reason or logic; and *ethos* is an attempt to generate confidence in the character of the presenter (Winton and Milani 2017, 11). By invoking the ‘authoritative’ strategy of *ethos*, the goal of the rhetor is to appear not only as ‘the expert’ but **also** as the sort of person that is to be ‘admired, respected and trusted’ by the audience (Finlayson 2012, 207). As Leach (2000) asserts, this audience does not simply

reside within the text; rather, the text rhetorically positions the reader, or ‘creates’ the audience, through conventions of language that can be discerned through analysis (8). The audience is central to the canon of invention, and within rhetorical analysis it is ‘essential to consider the audience responses’ and how specifically arguments are constructed to ‘reflect their expectations’ (Crines 2015, 119). When considering a particular audience, rhetoric therefore becomes a ‘creative activity’, whereby different styles or combinations of invention are needed in order to be convincing of a particular course of action (Finlayson 2006, 544).

To maintain coherence across the concepts of pathos, ethos, logos, exigencies, and audience, our analysis was guided by three overall questions:

- (1) What are the exigencies the texts argue they are trying to address?
- (2) What rhetorical strategies are used to construct EYTS as one solution to these exigencies? and
- (3) What are the potential effects of these policy constructions?

We first read the texts, simultaneously tagging phrases that we interpreted as indicating pathos, logos, ethos, exigencies, and/or the intended audience. These tags were then categorised and re-categorised according to the recurring rhetorical features of the texts. Next, a compare and contrast approach was used to identify our substantive claims, based on our findings from within and across the two texts.

Our findings argue that the texts offer materially differing exigencies as evidence for why such development is desirable. Second, we describe the widely differing views about the nature of professionalism in the early years workforce and therefore about the preferred solution for workforce reform. Third, we argue that the early years profession in England has become subject to some of the most egregious aspects of new public management (Hood 1995), namely surveillance and responsabilisation. In our concluding section we consider the emerging consequences of these claims for the field.

Defining the problem: the exigencies of early years workforce reform

Edwards and Nicoll (2006) describe exigencies as the problems identified within a rhetoric that demand a response and argue that the identification of exigencies within a rhetorical analysis ‘contextualises and locates the discursive or textual practice’ (18). Further to this, Winton (2013) asserts that it is the policies *themselves* that construct the problem, so it is important to identify these problems within the policy rhetoric rather than look for something ‘existing someplace outside the texts’ (162). In our analysis, the exigencies were primarily located by examining the stated purpose and proposed intentions of the policy texts.

Foundations for Quality (DfE 2012) was commissioned by the government to ‘lead a review of the training, qualifications and career opportunities of people working in early education and childcare’ (Gheera et al. 2014, 20). Consistent with the historical context outlined earlier in this article, the following exigencies were identified from an analysis of the text, all of which related to ECE workforce development:

- Issues with the qualifications system of the time
- Limited opportunities for career progression
- Lack of continuing professional development
- Lack of parity with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), and
- The low status of the profession.

The policy response to the Nutbrown Review, *More Great Childcare* (DfE 2013) acknowledged that public recognition of the status of the early years workforce remained low (7) and stated that the aim of the policy was to ‘build a stronger and more professional early years workforce, and to drive quality through everything it does’ (4). However, our analysis

of this document identifies the dominant exigencies and how these are expressed primarily as economic, rather than professional, issues:

- Challenges to the affordability and availability of childcare
- The need to support flexibility for parents' working patterns
- Tight staffing rules in Early Years settings leading to low pay and status
- Graduate leaders focusing on managerial tasks rather than leading practice, and
- The duplication by local authorities of the work done by the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED).

When comparing the exigencies presented in the two policy documents, we see markedly different lenses being applied to the need for the professionalisation of the Early Years workforce. This claim is consistent with those of Wild et al. (2015), who compared the 'underlying values and assumptions, as well as overt and covert agendas' (232) of *More Great Childcare* (DfE 2013) and *Foundations of Quality* (DfE 2012), illuminating their differing political and ideological viewpoints. For instance, they argued that the Nutbrown Review (2012) focused on the 'quality of the child's experience of that care and education' (Wild et al. 2015, 237), whereas in *More Great Childcare* (DfE 2013) there was 'a distinct shift in the way that care and education for children has been more marketed and commodified, with an emphasis on educational outcomes rather than relational processes' (243). This shift indicates how discourses of professionalism are being directed towards teachers achieving policy aims and aspirations, which may conflict with established professional values and beliefs in the sector, and the importance placed on relational processes with children and families. In light of these fundamental differences, how, then, do these texts propose to solve the challenge of workforce reform through the construction of leadership in ECE?

Proposing a solution: the rhetorical construction of the Early Years leader

In *Foundations of Quality*, Nutbrown (DfE 2012) positions early years professionals as a workforce that has historically been marginalised through low status and poor pay and conditions. Furthermore, Nutbrown highlights how the ‘present qualifications system does not always equip practitioners with the knowledge and experience necessary for them to offer children high quality care and education, and to support professional development throughout their careers’ (2). Accordingly, Nutbrown’s recommendations strive to raise the status of the Early Years workforce through the improvement of the qualification system and continuing professional development, and the introduction of a ‘new early years specialist route to QTS, specialising in the years from birth to seven’ (72). A key assertion of the Nutbrown Review is ‘the need to ensure professional and pedagogic development in order for practitioners to develop their understanding of how and why they could support and extend children’s learning opportunities’ (Wild et al. 2015, 232).

Wild et al. (2015) highlight how, conversely, *More Great Childcare* invokes a discourse of ‘leadership’ rather than the professionalisation of the sector. This distinction between professionalism and leadership opens up an interesting space for debate. The introduction of the EYP as a graduate leader in 2008 was a new policy directive that had given hope to the early years community that a new qualifications framework would provide a sense of professionalism for the workforce. Prior to this time, research on leadership in the Early Years sector was limited and ‘not well informed by theory and research in the broader field of leadership study (Muijs et al. 2004, 158). Furthermore, leadership in ECE has ‘historically drawn from research in business and educational leadership literature’, which is not only contextually different from early years environments but which places value on performance, competition, authority, and managerialism (Nicholson et al. 2018, 3). However, as our rhetorical analysis shows, it is exactly these values that have influenced the construction of the

EYT as a leader and as a professional in *More Great Childcare*. In order to qualify as a graduate leader, candidates for the EYT must demonstrate that they meet a set of expected standards (NCTL 2013), which are almost identical to those required for QTS. The EYT as leader is expected to deliver the same standards for learning and care in the EYFS (DfE 2014, 2017), and to work within the same curriculum and assessment framework to ensure high quality. Furthermore, the Foundation Stage is subject to the same OfSTED inspection regime as compulsory education, where overall effectiveness is judged by the achievement of pupils, the quality of teaching, leadership and management, and the behaviour and safety of pupils. Thus, there is clear alignment between EYTS and the roles and responsibilities of those with QTS, but without equivalent financial rewards, career progression, and professional status for the EYT.

The emerging consequences of this policy construction

The claims we have made so far suggest that the two texts originate in markedly differing interpretations of the rhetorical situation in their attempts to persuade audiences about the problems and solutions facing early years provision in England. Yet each suggests that early years leaders, in the form of EYTs, can offer one solution to these problems. We argue that an immediate consequence of these competing rhetorical approaches has been to place EYTs in a paradoxical situation. We base this third claim on the tension we identify across the two texts between a logos of quality arising from skilled professionalism (*Foundations for Quality*) versus a logos of quality arising from better management and surveillance (*More Great Childcare*).

The pathos evident in both policy texts is the importance of high quality provision and the positive impact this has on children's outcomes. Although 'quality' remains a contested concept in ECE (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999; Hunkin, 2018) there is a rational consensus

that high quality provision is dependent on staff who have the ‘necessary skills, knowledge and understanding’ to improve experiences for babies and young children (DfE 2012). *More Great Childcare* (DfE 2013) likewise declares quality to be ‘paramount’ to secure the success of the children (34), positioning early years leaders as the responsible agent driving the policy objectives of what Osgood (2009) argues is the ‘(discursively constructed) ‘childcare challenge’’ (747). However, tensions arise in the rhetorical construction of the EYT when the logos of economic benefits (DfE 2013) and the logos of educational effectiveness (DfE 2012) enter the public sphere through these policy texts. The juxtaposition of these texts exemplifies what Keast et al. (2006) describe as a “‘crowded” policy domain’, as state, market, and network modes of governance each bring ‘additional actors, new processes and mechanisms as well as alternative values and goals that have to be considered and accommodated’ (28).

This policy crowding is highlighted in the foreword of *More Great Childcare* (DfE 2013), where Elizabeth Truss, then Secretary of State for Education in England, declares that high quality has to be delivered in a way which is ‘good value for children, parents and the taxpayer’ (4). The report asserts that the reforms will ‘benefit both society and the economy by delivering high quality education in the early years at the same time as helping parents back to work’, invoking the rhetorical ethos of human capital theory (Becker 1964) as ‘it always pays to work’ (13). Building on this economic narrative, the text states that the government spends almost £5 billion a year on early education and childcare, which is ‘around 40 per cent more than the OECD average on childcare’ (17). Despite this claim to largesse, the text also presents evidence that demonstrates the disparity between early years pay rates in England and other comparable countries, highlighting a difference of almost 50% across the sector between England and the top paying countries (18). In summary, this combination of logos and ethos is an attempt to firmly establish the need for economic effectiveness whilst delivering ‘high quality’ provision.

However, Wild et al. (2015) assert there is an ‘ideological emphasis’ in *More Great Childcare* that ‘re-positions the importance of the early years by focusing on deregulation, and the supply and demand of provision’ (242). For example, the exigence of ‘tight staffing rules’ mean ‘higher costs for parents and lower pay for staff’ which in turn makes the profession less attractive to potential applicants (DfE 2013, 7). The text also argues that graduate-level staff are often placed in managerial roles rather than working directly with children, but that if settings utilised the ratios better by using these staff to work with larger groups of children, this would generate more income and improve salary levels, thereby rhetorically signalling a logos of improving the ‘cycle of low pay and perceived low status’ (17). In this way, the text implies that providers, and perhaps even professionals themselves, are the cause of their poor pay and conditions due to their mismanagement of staffing resources.

We understand the suggestion that the providers are to blame for workforce exigencies as an attempt to create a ‘primary discursive site for negotiating the values that inform decision-making and orient actions within a culture’ (Summers 2001, 263). Shifting the blame to the providers for high costs and low pay is a rhetorical strategy to persuade an intended audience (the early years workforce and parents) to accept the claims made by the text and agree to the changes proposed. By focusing on a ‘more highly qualified workforce’, providers will be able to offer ‘more high quality places’ that will then allow for higher staff to child ratios (30). Relaxing staff rules on ratios equates to more children, and therefore extra income which will allow settings to ‘reduce fees for parents and pay staff more’ (7). The construction of the rhetorical argument here relies upon the uptake of the rhetoric by the public and, in particular, those entering the profession. This construction also serves to reinforce responsabilisation - that it is the ‘real feeling of professionalism’ (DfE, 2017, 14) that matters more than the pay and conditions. However, *More Great Childcare* (DfE 2013) fails to consider how such a scenario further decreases the incentive for potential candidates to undertake a qualification that already

leads to low pay and conditions, and we return to this peculiar oversight in our concluding discussion.

Despite the Coalition government maintaining a focus within their policy discourse of the importance of early education, Lloyd (2015) describes this discourse as a ‘policy turn’ towards ‘the economic well-being rationale’ that subsequently became the main driver for early childhood policy (149). *More Great Childcare* (DfE 2013) goes so far as to suggest that providers can become ‘entrepreneurs’ if they demonstrate a ‘*strong commitment to quality*’ as parents become ‘ever more demanding consumers of their services’ (40, emphasis added). Interestingly, the report justifies this strategy of economic effectiveness through the use of pathos, declaring that a move to better staff to child ratios will ‘put the needs of the child at the *heart of decisions over staffing*’ (29, emphasis added), despite the economic logos that runs through the report. In comparison, the dominant logos of the Nutbrown Review (DfE 2012) is the ‘quality of children’s experiences’ and how this is dependent on ‘the status of the early years workforce in society’, and the need for continuing professional development and opportunities for career progression (2).

The rhetorical construction of childcare services as a market commodity with the power to determine increases in pay and status in the early years workforce reflects an ethos of what Moss (2006) refers to as ‘new managerialism’ (37). Ball (2017) argues that in this ‘new paradigm of public service organisation ... learning is re-rendered as a ‘cost-effective policy outcome’ and achievement is a set of ‘productivity targets’ (51). The effect of this approach is a decentralisation of control away from government that *appears* to give more local power, yet actually brings with it an evacuated definition of performance and ‘ever escalating demands for accountability’ (Apple 2004, 25). *More Great Childcare* points to this definition of accountability in its assertion that, ‘Key to delivering more great childcare is a rigorous and

regulatory inspection regime which ensures providers are focused on quality rather than process' (DfE 2013, 10).

This heightened accountability for ECE in England reveals its contemporary form in the professional standards for the EYT (NCTL 2013), the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfE 2014, 2017) that sets the standards for children's learning outcomes, and the regulatory mechanisms of the OfSTED inspection framework. These accountability mechanisms are pivotal to driving the simultaneous policy objectives of economic and educational effectiveness, and entwining workforce and workplace reform. Yet, as Davies (2003) has argued, the responsibility placed on individuals through this system of new managerialism does not work 'in relation to a sense of trust' because it is driven by 'the almost subliminal anxiety and fear of surveillance rather than a sense of personal value within the social fabric' (93). This responsibility underscores our argument that discourses of professionalism may be directed towards teachers achieving policy aims and aspirations, which may be in conflict with established values and beliefs.

Conclusion

International research concurs that professionalising the ECE workforce remains desirable but problematic. *More Great Childcare* (DfE, 2013) set out 'to move decisively away from the idea that teaching young children is somehow less important or inferior to teaching school-age children' and proposed a change to 'improve the existing standards' for the EYP so that they matched the standards for QTS more closely (27). **This aspiration implied a change of status and of recognition, informed by the evidence that linked high quality with the level of practitioners' qualifications.** However, the continuing disparity between EYPS and EYTS and QTS, as well as the low pay and lack of professional development opportunities, 'paint an unjust and deeply problematic picture' for the early years sector (Osgood et al. 2017, 36), **which**

has significant consequences for the field. Early years leaders are effectively charged with ‘enacting discourses of social justice’ against a ‘wider discursive backdrop of national economic priorities’ (Done and Murphy 2018, 148). As a result, the failure to raise the status of the EYT to align with the QTS re-enforces the ‘persistent deficit discourse’ and ‘acts to divert attention from continued structural disadvantages associated with working in the sector’ (Osgood 2009, 747). Moreover, as Payler and Davis (2017) argued, research evidence indicates that EYPs were not able to enact their roles effectively, which highlights the problems of reliance on singular roles for effecting changes in practice. This is a salient point in light of the complexity of the expectations on EYT leadership roles in the context of responsabilisation and ongoing reform processes— as leaders of people, of pedagogy and curriculum, of quality and of change. The long-standing structural problems in ECE have not been solved by the change to EYT status, especially as concepts of professionalism, and what EYTs are expected to do, vary across government policy documents. These contradictions have been driven to the surface by the increasing policy demands on the ECE workforce, and have highlighted the illusion of devolution versus the realities of surveillance and responsabilisation.

The disparity in pay and conditions between EYTs and teachers with equivalent qualifications has produced specific effects which are having consequences for recruitment in a field that has historical problems with high turnover of staff. There continues to be an ‘ongoing barrier to recruiting the best candidates into early years’ (Kempton 2014, 48). Osgood et al. (2017) assert that this has left the early years workforce feeling ‘devalued’ and is likely to have ‘contributed to the growing shortage of trainee practitioners within the sector’ (36). The recruitment crisis has been further exacerbated by the government’s recent decision to scrap plans to grow the early years graduate workforce, and to change the rules to allow those with EYTS or EYPS to lead Nursery and Reception classes in maintained schools (Gaunt

2018) within the Foundation Stage. This decision came after news that School Direct, an employment-based route to QTS for ‘high quality graduates’, was no longer offering the delivery of the EYTS qualification due to a lack of demand (Crown 2018). Despite the ongoing policy focus on quality and the importance of children’s outcomes, there is uncertainty over the future of the EYT qualification, and what this will mean for the early years sector.

Our use of rhetorical analysis has allowed us to show how the rhetorical strategies of naming exigencies and solutions can be used to position the work of leaders as central to reform processes in ECE. In the context of England, this rhetorical analysis has provided some insights into the policy process, how persuasive discourses are constructed and communicated, and the challenges and limitations of those acts of persuasion. Far from ameliorating the societal challenges and the structural disadvantages within the sector, it now appears that government policies have had the effect of further destabilising recruitment, suggesting that lack of parity of professionalism, pay, progression and status can actively suppress policy aspirations. Furthermore, the ethos and pathos of the Nutbrown Review (DfE 2012) may be more closely aligned with the child-centred and relational values that are embedded in ECE discourses, not least because a sense of moral agency has deep historical roots in ECE. These discourses stand in contrast to the drivers of new managerialism and marketisation employed in *More Great Childcare*.

By illuminating the elements of pathos, logos and ethos within these two policy documents, we have problematised the exigencies claimed by policies and their proposed solutions. However, as Ball (1994) reminds us, practice is sophisticated, contingent, complex and unstable, so that policy will often be undercut by action, including the embodied agency of those people who are its object (10-11). In the context of international workforce reform, further evidence is needed of how ECE leaders develop or exercise the capacity to navigate the contradictions inherent in these policy formulations. **Our ongoing research into workforce**

reform and educational leadership in England and Australia will enable us to explore further the impact of policy and to contrast this with opportunities and efforts to professionalise and determine professionalism from within the sector. We are committed to contrasting the rhetorical construction of early years leaders to meet policy objectives with the aspirations and commitments of early years professionals, including their professional values and identities.

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