# A study of the identity of Early Years teachers within a Montessori context.

By

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**Abstract**

The landscape of early education in Ireland has evolved over the last 20 years, with many significant changes coming through a recent influx of policies. The importance of school readiness has been widely recognised, as has the role of early education in improving equality. Ireland has followed international policy and research trends, pursuing high quality early educational experiences. However, in recognising the importance of the early education sector Ireland has not yet addressed issues surrounding early education teachers. Indeed, even the title 'early education teacher' is fraught with controversy, as the term teacher is often lost amongst a plethora of other labels, such as childminder and childcare worker. This research addressed the identity of early years teachers within a Montessori context. It examined identity formation and the implications of societal views, taking the stance that identity is socially and culturally constructed (Swennen, Volman and van Essen, 2008).

The methodology used was an interpretivist paradigm, gathering and generating qualitative data. Data were gathered from media sources, specifically newspaper articles and twitter. Further data were generated through semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire. All data were placed within the theoretical framework of interpellation (Althusser, 1971), viewed from a Foucauldian perspective and analysed using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. Themes were identified and discussed in terms of interpellation and subjectivity. There was also evidence of interruptions to interpellation, with early education teachers using social media as an outlet to express their discontentment.

Findings from this research offer valuable insight into the identity of early years teachers within a Montessori context, along with a number of suggestions regarding how this issue may be addressed. This research may be of value to policymakers and stakeholders wishing to address the current plight of early education teachers, particularly Montessori teachers.

**Dedication**

**For my Dad, who always said, "you can't waste a good education!"**

**You gave me a love of learning, an appreciation of knowledge, and every opportunity possible.**

**Thank you!**

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## Definition of Terms

| | |
|---|---|
| AIM | Access and Inclusion Model |
| AON | Assessment of Needs |
| CCC | County Childcare Committee |
| CCS | Community Childcare Subvention |
| CDA | Critical Discourse Analysis |
| CECDE | Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education |
| CHAT | Cultural Historical Activity Theory |
| CPD | Continuing Professional Development |
| DA | Discourse Analysis |
| DCCC | Dublin City Childcare Committee |
| DCYA | Department of Children and Youth Affairs |
| DES | Department of Education and Science |
| DoH | Department of Health |
| DoHC | Department of Health Care |
| ECCE | Early Childhood Care and Education |
| ECI | Early Childhood Ireland |
| EDI | Equality, Diversity and Inclusion |
| EEC | Early Education and Care |
| ELC | Early Learning and Care |
| EOCP | Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme |
| EPSEN | Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs |
| FDA | Foucauldian Discourse Analysis |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GDPR | General Data Protection Rules |
| HSE | Health Service Executive |
| ICTU | Irish Congress of Trade Unions |
| IDEA | Individuals with Disabilities Act |
| IDG | Inter-Departmental Group |
| ISA | Ideological State Apparatuses |
| LINC | Leadership for Inclusion |
| NCCA | National Council for Curriculum and Assessment |
| NCSE | National Council for Special Education |
| NDA | National Disability Authority |
| NEPS | National Educational Psychological Service |
| NEWB | National Education Welfare Board |
| NEYQDS | National Early Years Quality Development Service |
| NVCC | National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative |

| | |
|---|---|
| OECD | Organisation Economic Co-operation Development |
| PDST | Professional Development Service for Teachers |
| QQI | Quality and Qualifications Ireland |
| RSA | Repressive State Apparatuses |
| SEN | Special Educational Needs |
| SEO | Sectoral Employment Order |
| SERC | Special Education Research Centre |
| SESS | Special Education Support Service |
| SIPTU | Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union |
| SNA | Special Needs Assistant |
| TASC | Think-tank for Action on Social Change |
| TD | Teachta Dála (Government Minister) |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNCRC | United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| UNCRPD | United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| UNICEF | United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund |

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## Introduction

In Ireland, the profile of the early years sector is currently evolving, influenced by both national and international research highlighting the long-term societal benefits. Current policy developments within the sector suggest recognition of the importance of early education, however, that recognition does not extend to those working within early education. The early years workforce remains a workforce in crisis, the ever-increasing expectations and demands of the sector far outweighing the fixed-term contracts, lack of benefits and minimum wage offered in a sector with a turnover rate of 25% (Pobal, 2018).

Over the last couple of years there has been an influx of initiatives designed to enhance the early education sector yet CPD training pertaining remains optional and limited. One common thread running through both curriculum frameworks and recent diversity, equality and inclusion guidelines is a focus on identity and belonging, the importance of which was highlighted in the Aistear curriculum framework (2009). It is interesting that, in a sector with such a focus on identity, there is a complete lack of a singular united identity for the early education workforce, many terms co-existing including teacher, childminder and babysitter. It seems that early education policy in Ireland has tasked those lacking professional identity with the role of helping young children develop their identity, something which is fraught with complications given the fractured nature of the sector.

**How did we get here?**

In 1937, Article 42 of the Constitution of Ireland asserted the right to education for all children. With regards to the Early Childhood Care and Education sector (ECCE), Ireland's ratification of the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1992) had significant ramifications, including the introduction of government policy and regulation. In 1999, the Ready to Learn White Paper was published, dealing specifically with early years, later influencing the development of both a quality and a curriculum framework. Participation of all children in early education was supported by the launch of the ECCE Scheme (2010). This scheme offered three hours early education per day, 5 days per week, for 38 weeks, irrespective of family status or ability.

A damning RTE Prime Time exposé, entitled Breach of Trust (2013), raised serious concerns regarding the early years sector, finding 75% of preschools were in breach of childcare regulations. Tusla, the child and family agency, was established in 2014, followed by the creation of a National Early Years Quality Agenda (DCYA, 2015). Though necessary, the impact of this exposé continues to be evident today, early education teachers continuing to pay for the sins of the past. They are subjected to multiple inspections and answer to a plethora of agencies and stakeholders.

In Ireland, the prevalence of children with SEN is approximately 25% (Williams et. al., 2011), with 74% of early education settings having more than one child with SEN (Early Childhood Ireland, 2015), yet Ireland's current early education sector remains fractured, with numerous stake-holders involved and a severe lack of clarity regarding inclusion policy implementation. Indeed, action beyond policy production is needed for successful inclusion. Despite the challenging nature of the early education sector, a sector profile revealed 86.8% of early education teachers hold a basic minimum qualification (Pobal, 2016). Furthermore, 32%

of staff have less than 2 years of experience (Pobal, 2016).

**The research question**

This thesis presents a study of, the identity of early education teachers in a Montessori context. In order to explore this issue, the roots of identity were examined, from philosophy (Mead, 1934), to psychology (Erickson, 1959) and anthropology (Holland et. al., 1998). Wenger's (1998) notion of identity construction being embedded in communities of practice was considered of particular importance, as was the idea of fluid identity (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011) and the integration of multiple identity formations (Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004). Early years teacher identities play a significant role, as identity is key to commitment (Cohen, 2010) and intentions to leave the sector (Schepens, Aelterman and Vlerick, 2009). Critical for this research was the theory of identity being socially and culturally constructed (Swennen, Volman and van Essen, 2008).

There exists an awareness of the importance of early education, both for school readiness (Snow, 2006) and for improving equality (Schweinhart, Barnes and Weikart, 1993), yet there is an ongoing failure to recognise those responsible for early education. Recently, 57% of staff cited poor wages forcing them out of the sector (Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, 2017). They remain poorly remunerated (Moloney, 2014) despite their workload, leading Kremenitzer and Miller (2003) to refer to them as a super-person. While it is acknowledged that teachers can make a difference to what and how children learn (Hattie, 2009), most teachers doubt that they possess the knowledge and skills necessary for inclusion to be successful (Forlin, 2001). Nind (2005) recognised the need to make changes at institutional level, which becomes all the more challenging given that early years teachers are being marginalised by current policy (Russell, 2011).

**Why is this so important?**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the identity of early years teachers in a Montessori context. This topic is particularly pertinent in the current political and cultural climate, given the focus on early education in Ireland and the rapid influx of new policies. There is also the language change introduced by policymakers in the "First 5" (2019) document, the ECCE sector being rebranded the Early Learning and Care (ELC) sector and the word education being removed completely. While the ramifications are yet to be fully discovered the disapproval from within the sector is widely apparent.

By failing to establish a united identity and professional recognition, the early learning environment has the potential to become increasing stressful and isolating. This is simply not a suitable environment for any child to find themselves in, nor is it an acceptable working environment for those in early education. After all, the identity of those caring for and educating young children is central to the operation of the learning environment and the quality of the learning experiences.

As someone who has spent over two decades working in the early education sector in Ireland, I have experienced many changes regarding regulations and policies, yet professional identity still needs to be properly addressed. It is my view that teacher identity is intrinsically linked to the identity development of the young children who view those teachers as role models. This lack of professional identity is a contributing factor in early education teachers feeling under-trained and overwhelmed, feelings which have a negative impact on the successful implementation of inclusion. Given the recent focus on inclusion in the early education sector in Ireland, I suggest there is a need to address the multiple identities of early education teachers, the influence of those identities on practice and the ultimate impact of those identities on inclusion.

**My doctoral journey**

I initially trained as a Montessori teacher in 1994, and I have worked in early education for over twenty years. I have seen the sector evolve from within, new policies attempting to address problems while unwittingly creating further challenges. In particular, given the recent policy focus on inclusion, I find myself, as a Montessori teacher, concerned for children with SEN attending early education settings. While I am an advocate for inclusion, I question the various interpretations of inclusion which exist within the fractured early education sector. My setting continues to offer a medical model of inclusion, or a withdrawal system of learning support. Many people in the sector seem happy to embrace inclusion but, due to lack of training, experience and support, they rely on a medical model of inclusion, expecting, or sometimes hoping, that the child will fit into their practice. Many others are aware of the social model of inclusion but fear that they lack the knowledge and skills to provide children with the necessary support for successful inclusion. This lack of confidence makes them resistant to inclusion. In either case, it is difficult to imagine children with SEN being support to fully participate in all aspects of early education or being provided with high quality holistic learning opportunities. My previous research was based on my work with children however, much to my dismay, I was advised that this topic would require research from an adult's perspective, as adults are responsible for creating Montessori school cultures. I was truly out of my comfort zone but my quest for a better understanding drove me forward.

When I first proposed my thesis title it contained the word 'identity'. I began exploring identity formation theories and reading policies, from macro to micro. Gradually, my initial concerns were accompanied by a plethora of emotions: shock; sadness; anger; and frustration. Fortunately, these emotions were accompanied by a new level of understanding. I began to see clearly how ill-equipped many early years teachers were, through lack of training

and support. I began to understand their fears and frustrations and to see what a challenging environment existed, both for children and their Montessori teachers.

During my studies I discovered a love of language, intrigued by its ability to position people, or enable people to position themselves. I related strongly to Althusser's theory of interpellation, whereby assigned identities play a significant role in early education teacher identities. I discovered how carefully crafted policies and media articles offered many alternative labels, the word teacher, and associated professionalism, skillfully omitted. Given the troubling history of the early education sector in Ireland, I also found myself drawn to Foucault. His theories regarding power seemed evident in the early education sector, while his tools for discourse analysis facilitated an examination of the historical events essential to understanding the current status of early education and early education teachers.

Having received guidance by many of the experts I encountered at the University of Birmingham, I found myself tackling the incredible works of not just Althusser and Foucault, but also the likes of Ball and Fairclough. I began to gain knowledge I had not previously realised existed. This journey was not without peril. I often found myself wrestling rather than engaging, both tormented and fueled by a desire to achieve understanding. As I reflect, I delight on the impact this research has had on my professional practice. It has also challenged me to take action, becoming involved in teacher education in the hope of supporting early education teachers as they work towards creating inclusive environments in which all children may thrive.

There are many issues which must be addressed in order for the early years sector to experience the institutional transformation required. It is my hope that, one day, I may have the opportunity to play a bigger part in creating successful inclusion in early education but, for

now, I will take comfort that so many early education teachers have a desire to embrace inclusion and I will continue to do my best to support them in their endeavours.

**Thesis Overview**

Chapter 1, the Literature Review, examines literature pertaining to personal identity, teacher identity and early years teacher identity. It highlights the importance of identity, the values associated with professional identity and the importance of professional identity on professional practice. It shows the development of the ECCE sector and the various identities which co-exist within the sector. The literature review served to establish the importance of identity, exploring how identity impacts on practice and identifying the many challenges surrounding identity in the early education sector.

Chapter 2, Policy, discusses both national and international policy relevant to the research. It shows the action being taken by policy makers to ensure quality early education experiences for all children and highlights the absence of focus on the early education workforce in Ireland. It explores the impact of Ireland's ratification of the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (1992) and UNESCO's Salamanca Statement, showing how they influenced Ireland's Ready to Learn White Paper, the catalyst for change in the early education sector. It also examines policies in the ECCE sector, working conditions and training routes to qualifications, highlighting the diversity of the workforce.

Chapter 3, Methodology, identifies the research paradigm, outlining the reasons for this choice of paradigm and why it is best suited to this research. It also introduces the theoretical framework for this research, exploring the works of both Althusser and Foucault. It also justifies the decision to use an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative theoretical framework for

this research, exploring the works of both Althusser and Foucault. It also justifies the decision to use an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative research methods in order to produce trustworthy knowledge of interpretations. The theoretical framework took the form of Althusser's (1971) theory of interpellation, exploring the influence of societal views. Data were examined through a Foucauldian lens, which is linked to Althusser in section 3.13, The FDA route to interpellation. This chapter also provides an overview of the newspaper articles, interviews, questionnaires and social media comments used to both gather and generate data.

Chapter 4, Data and Analysis, presents the data gathered and an analysis of newspaper articles and social media comments, pertaining to early education in Ireland, along with data generated through interviews and questionnaires with early education teachers, showing their interpellation. Data are presented as a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) and themes requiring further exploration are established. The use of FDA facilitated the tracking of historical discourse and its influence over the creation and maintenance of power. Numerous struggles were identified for discussion in Chapter 5. Participant data are analysed in 5 sections: Background; ECCE; Inclusion; Perceptions and Practice; and Professional.

Chapter 5, Discussion and Findings, presents a discussion of data. This is presented under the themes of: Train(ing) derailed; Care catastrophe; Paperwork prominence; Funding fantasy; and All hail (de)valuation. Each theme is discussed in relation to Foucauldian Governmentality and Althusserian Interpellation. This discussion leads to Interpellation Interrupted, identifying a space where early education teachers may voice their concerns regarding their multiple identities. It concludes by discussing the identities of early education teachers in a Montessori context.

## Limitations

This is a small study, presenting 4 newspaper articles and engaging 9 participants. It was hoped to engage 12 participants but new legislation pertaining to GDPR reduced the number of people whom could be invited to participate, making it difficult to compensate for attrition. Over the course of this research 3 participants withdrew, each one volunteering time constraints as the reason for their withdrawal. While various struggles were consistently identified, the small number of participants limits the potential of the views presented to provide a comprehensive reflection of the sector.

# Chapter 1: Literature Review

Literature addressing identity (Erikson, 1959; Goffman, 1959; Ball, 1972), professional identity (Ayers, 2005; Cattley, 2007), teachers identities (Alsup, 2005; Moje and Luke, 2009), early education (Langford, 2007; Osgood, 2010) and inclusion (Farrell and Ainscow, 2002; Slee, 2011; Nind, 2005) will be explored. As societal perceptions of early education teachers are considered relevant the influence of society (Olsen, 2008; Althusser, 1971) will be examined, particularly with regards to ideology (Sinclair, 1996; Evetts, 2012), discourse (Russell, 2011; Pinar, 1998), policy (Ball, 2013; Mockler, 2011) and autonomy (Helsby, Knight and McCulloch, 1995; Trowler, 2003).

## 1.1 Identities: self, professional and teacher

Though 'self' and 'identity' are frequently used interchangeably in literature dealing with teacher education, both are complex constructs in their own right, drawing on research and theory from a broad spectrum including philosophy (Mead, 1934; Taylor, 2004), psychology (Erickson, 1959) and anthropology (Holland et. al. 1998). There is also recognition of the importance of how we interpret feedback, the perceived opinions of 'others' being credited with growing influence on the construction of self. In fact, from this recognition came Cooley's (1902) 'looking glass self', suggesting the development of self to be a reflexive process, with values, attitudes, behaviours, roles and identities being accumulated throughout a lifetime. Mead (1934) gave further weight to the influence of 'others', professing the development of self to be closely linked to social interaction and created through language and social experiences. This led to Mead's theory of a 'generalised other', where attitudes towards an individual are reflected in the individual's attitude towards themselves. Goffman (1959) addressed the issue of people's lives being multifaceted,

suggesting each person has a number of 'selves', while Erikson's (1959) theory regarding three stages in adult life gave insight to the possibility of conflicting forces affecting identity, suggesting identity is 'never gained nor maintained once and for all' (Sikes, Measor and Woods, 1985, p.155). Indeed, many identity frameworks exist, such as Vygotsky (1978; 1986), Bakhtin (1982balibar), Holland et al (1998) and Wenger (1998) which explore the notion of identity developing across time and the influence of sociocultural perspectives, the interaction between the self and others in a social community of practice. Sociocultural theories, rooted in cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) (Vygotsky, 1978; 1986), examine how subjects develop through their interaction with the world. Wenger (1998) described identity construction as fundamentally social and embedded in communities of practice. "Issues of identity are an integral aspect of a social theory of learning and are thus inseparable from issues of practice, community, and meaning" (p.145). As theories continue to progress there remains a lack of clarity regarding a clear definition of identity and there is a need to further research the connection between personal and professional identity, but it is now acknowledged that identity is both multifaceted and dynamic. The professional identity of teachers is considered fluid (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Alsup, 2005; Gee, 2000), an ongoing process which involves the integration of multiple identity formations (Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004) thus this research will examine early education teacher identities rather than identity.

Not only are there numerous theories regarding identity, there are various terms, used interchangeably, to discuss the shaping and reshaping of identity, with each term bringing a slight nuance to the concept. Within the literature there are many references to identity 'development' (Watson, 2006; Olsen, 2008), identity 'construction' (Coldron and Smith, 1999; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Søreide, 2006), identity 'formation' (Rodgers and Scott,

2008), 'identitymaking' or 'building' (Sfard and Prusak, 2005), 'creating' an identity (Parkison, 2008), 'shaping' an identity (Flores & Day, 2006) and the 'architecture' of teacher's professional identities (Day et al., 2005). To add further complexity, one must consider the external aspects, such as contexts and relationships, and the internal aspects, such as personal stories and emotions (Rodgers and Scott, 2008), when exploring identity formation. Indeed, Goodson (2003) described teaching as a highly contextualised social practice and suggested the personal stories of teachers could offer much regarding their identity formation, providing us with insight as to teacher's self-perception. There is a vast volume of research regarding metaphors and what they reveal about identity (Munby and Russell, 1990; Zhao, Coombs and Zhou, 2010; Leavy, McSorley and Boté, 2007; Calderhead and Robson, 1991; Hawkey, 1996; Bullough and Stokes, 1994; Dooley, 1998; Greene, 1978; Marshall, 1990; Sumsion, 2002; Volkmann and Anderson, 1998), with Harré and van Langenhove (1999) indicating that metaphors may reveal much regarding both how people position and construct themselves.

Beijaard (1995), drawing on the work of Sikes, Measor and Woods (1991), explored three features specific to teacher identity: subject; relationship with pupils; and conception of role. He found that subject status may have profoundly negative effects on professional identity, which is interesting when we consider the lack of government recognition of, and working conditions within, the early education sector. He also found that poor student relationships led to feelings of inadequacy, which may also be significant when we consider the introduction of an early education inclusion policy without sufficient prerequisite training for all, thus leaving those working in the early education sector feeling ill-equipped to create inclusive classrooms and support inclusion. His research revealed the importance of policy in establishing positive perceptions, again relevant to the early education sector, where policy

fails to offer something as fundamental as a single group identity to those working in the sector.

In reading the above literature it is difficult not to question the identity challenges currently being faced by those working in the early education sector in Ireland. When considering these challenges, one must address related topics and consider the possible root of such challenges, such as the care/education balance which must be strategically managed during the early years. The pairing of care with education finds teachers responsible for each pupil's well-being and progress, along with the development of their general disposition, according to Althusser (1971), helping pupils to identify themselves as the legitimate focus for the discourse of self-production and self-transformation that the governmental role of school enacts (Smith, 1989). The teacher is a focus of identification for the emergent self of each pupil, and teaches the pupil to be their own author, becoming a reflective, self-directing, self-managing subject (Baumann, et. al., 2000). However, this regime of care is one with a regime of surveillance. Inspection reforms require schools to self-organise, self-manage and self-monitor. Teachers must produce self-evaluation; they are required to produce themselves as norm-regulated beings within a regime of competence, attainment and aspiration, setting goals for themselves whilst identifying their positive attributes and areas requiring further development. They are subject to profile, analysis and critique, their professional identity forced into developmental relation to their self-identity; the bureaucratic operations of performativity that carry a personalised dimension grip the scrutinised professional self all the more tightly (Ball, 1998).

One focus of McDougall's (2010) research was how teachers cope with changing views of identity and their professional growth, while Day (2007) and van Veen, Sleegers and van de Ven (2005) investigated the link between education reform and professional identity. Tom (1980), in accepting that a teacher shapes what a person becomes, described the moral good of the learner as fundamentally important in every teaching situation. Indeed, there appears to be general acknowledgement in literature that teachers are conscious of their role in the betterment of their pupils (Arthur, 2003), yet society continues to use pupil progress as a measure of teacher effectiveness, with this progress becoming increasingly focused in the field of academia. This seems to imply a functionalist perspective of professionalism.

There is a growing awareness of the importance of teachers' professional identity, with much research to support this proposition. Beijjard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) argued that we lack an adequate definition, believing a more specific meaning must be provided for "identity", "professional identity" and "teacher identity". They proposed, in accordance with Gee (2000), the existence of multiple identities for each of us, relating to our core identity as well as our performance in society. Tucker (2004) cited many factors, including prevailing discourses, expectations and experience, as impacting on professional identity, while Moloney (2010) viewed professional identity as part of a broader picture of connections and interactions between personal and societal values, ideals and philosophies. Certainly, teachers' identity is central to their practice and commitment to the profession (Day, Elliot and Kington, 2005; Burn, 2007). Much research focuses specifically on teachers' reflective practices and how their professional identity is constructed (Alsup, 2005; Burn, 2007; Marcos, Sánchez and Tillema, 2008). Identity has a critical impact on the profession in relation to commitment and change (Thomas and Vaughan, 2004; Cohen, 2010). Moreover, research implies that professional identity and intentions to leave the teaching profession are

interrelated (Gaziel, 1995; Hoffman, 1998; Schepens, Aelterman and Vlerick, 2009). This is certainly reflected in the current crisis in early education, where increasing policy demands are not being paired with appropriate support and remuneration, leading to many leaving the sector, creating great difficulty in employing highly qualified and experienced teachers.

Research indicates that the ways teachers view themselves as professionals determines to a great extent how well they do as teachers, how long they stay in the profession, and how they feel about themselves as teachers in the classroom (Ingersoll, 2002; Hong, 2010; Mahan, 2010). Much research highlights the importance of self-efficacy in teacher resilience (Ee and Chang, 2010; Beltman, Mansfield and Price, 2011; Gu and Day, 2011; Leroux and Théorêt, 2014; Dinham et al., 2016) and it is these teachers who possess a strong sense of identity and believe they can make a difference (Flores, 2006; Day, 2007). Despite this, our own ideas, and possibly hopes, regarding the type of teacher we wish to be may be found conflicting with the reality of the workplace (Horn et al., 2008). Many teachers begin their career having given little or no thought to potential teaching challenges relating to institutional protocols (Friedman, 1996; Pillen, Beijaard and Brok, 2013), unaware of possible discrepancies between their own beliefs and preferred teaching practices and what is deemed acceptable within the school system in which they teach. These discrepancies between desired teaching practice and the requirements of the school system creates tensions between the personal beliefs and the professional demands (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). Moje and Luke (2009) furthered this definition of identity by stating that identities must also be built through social channels, constructed as multiple entities from childhood to adulthood, and be recognisable to others. If we view identity formation as an ongoing process, we must consider how personal and contextual factors interact in a dynamic way over the course of our lifetime. There appears to be a need to balance our personal views and experiences with the professional and cultural expectations placed on our role in order to develop our professional identity (Pillen, Beijaard

and Brok, 2013). Although, Lawn and Ozga (1986) described professionalism as a form of organisational control, it may also be seen as both a way to control teachers and a way for teachers to maintain some control (Smyth et al., 1999). Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to consider the role of teachers as being to implement the decisions of higher authorities and take responsibility for making decisions regarding curriculum by writing and planning curriculum, albeit in more detail, within national level guidelines (Westbury et al 2005). After all, teachers' self-perception related to their identity as professionals directly alter their development as well as their ability to deal with a variety of situations in and out of the classroom (Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt, 2000). Clearly the concept of "teacher" as a professional identity is fraught with many unresolved issues.

When we consider the term professionalism we tend to think of the 'classic' professions, such as law and medicine, with their associated codes of behaviour and standards of practice. These professions have instantly recognisable expectations which have evolved over centuries (Hart and Marshall, 1992). Taking this view, and given the clear classification and role aspects (Haralambos and Holborn, 2000), those working in law and medicine are easily identifiable as professionals. This identity not only provides societal standing but, in times of challenge these professions have a unified identity under which to address grievances. Identifying teachers as professionals proves more complex, despite Saracho and Spodek's (2003) classification of teaching as a 'lower' profession, due to the time required for training. Even if we were to use the 'list of attributes' approach (Flexner, 1915; Tomlinson, 1982; Parsons, 1954; Lieberman, 1956; Leggatt, 1970; Page and Thomas, 1977; Rowntree, 1981; Downie, 1990; Hoyle and John, 1995; Davies and Ferguson, 1998; Shafritz, Koeppe and Soper, 1998; Furlong et al, 2000; Breathnach, 2000), these lists are influenced by the researchers' own background, as suggested by Sexton's (2007) extensive literature review regarding attributes. They are also imposed on teaching (Sachs, 2001) despite the fact that

they are also fixed so take no account of historical or contextual factors. The lists are also generalised, thus they fail to consider attributes which may be specific to the teaching profession, such as what occurs inside the classroom, which is central to being a teacher. It is what takes place in the classroom that nurtures student learning and how teachers perceive themselves, their very teaching philosophy, that impacts greatly on what they do, therefore, teachers must be able to identify their own ways of knowing themselves (Gee, 2000). Perhaps Hoyle and John's (1995) analysis of professional groups combined with Sexton's (2007) research may shed some further light on professions, using what Locke (2004) labelled 'the classical triangle': knowledge attribute professions; autonomy attribute professions; and service attribute professions.

Sachs (2003) proffers that it is impossible to find an actual definition of professionalism but, despite lacking a clear definition, or rather having an ever-changing definition, professionalism remains a word which carries significant weight, and is a desirable label associated and imbued with positivity. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD) defines a teacher as a person whose 'Professional activity involves the transmission of knowledge, attitude and skills that are stipulated to students enrolled in an educational programme' (OECD, 2005:26). This seems to serve as a functional description with little regard for the affective aspects of teaching.

Teacher identity has been researched in numerous ways over the years, with Mitchell and Weber (1999) exploring the notion of teachers 'reinventing' themselves, Sfard and Prusak (2005) examining narratives and Alsup (2005) looking at a variety of discourses. There is even extensive research regarding the impact of metaphors (Hunt, 2006; Leavy, McSorley, and Boté, 2007). Much research also focuses on contextual influences (Chevrier

et. al. 2007; Flores and Day, 2006). Research indicates the importance of identity in the professional development of teachers (Freese, 2006; Hoban, 2007; Korthagen et. al. 2001; Olsen, 2008; Riopel, 2006; Sachs, 2003), yet the concept of identity is so complex that even the most cursory perusal reveals that much analysis and understanding is required to truly appreciate the importance of teacher professional identity. Adding further to the complexity is Ball's (1972) suggestion of the existence of a 'professional identity' separate to the existence of a substantive identity, offering the idea of the situated self being a malleable presentation, differing according to specific definitions of situations and a core presentation of self, fundamental to self-perception. Kelchtermans (1993) theorised that the professional self, like the personal self, evolves over time and that it consists of five interrelated parts: self-image addresses how teachers describe themselves though their career stories; self-esteem deals with the evolution of self as a teacher as defined by self or others; job-motivation is what makes teachers choose, remain committed to or leave the job; task perception is how teachers define their jobs; and future perspective considers teachers' expectations for the future development of their jobs. More recently, Hargreaves (2000) suggests that the evolution of teacher identity may be traced through four historical periods: the pre-professional; the autonomous professional; the collegial professional; and the postmodern professional. This chronological examination provides insight regarding how teachers are conceptualised and understood by both themselves and others.

The professional identities of teachers is the crux of much research (Alsup, 2005; Ayers, 2005; Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004; Cattley, 2007; Collay, 2006; MacLure, 2003; Sachs, 2001), but remains a contested topic of academic conversation. Wenger (1998) proposed the professional identities of teachers to be rich and complex as they are produced in a rich and complex set of relations of practice. This must be nurtured in an environment of

respect, mutuality and communication as, “there is a profound connection between identity and practice” (Wenger, p. 149, 1998). Loughran (2007) proffered that it “seems unlikely that the core of the personal will not impact the core of the professional” (p. 112), highlighting the relationship between who a teacher is and what a teacher does, as these will always be closely intertwined. Altruism, an element of Locke’s (2004) classical triangle, suggested that education always involves the teaching of values (Veugelers and de Kat, 2003). Indeed, Osborn et al (2000) revealed a desire to help ‘better’ children as a core motivator for teachers, while Sockett (1993) spoke of the moral complexity of teaching, suggesting that teachers can never simply teach. He used the term ‘professional virtue’ to describe those qualities he believed to be embedded in teaching. (Socket, 1993, p.90). Teachers are charged with creating environments in which their students will develop the ability to question, experiment and engage in learning. Perhaps it is time to revisit the thoughts of Dewey; ‘education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself’ (cited in Souto-Manning, 2010, p.29). Even a brief perusal of the Aistear Early Education Curriculum Framework highlights the need to address character virtue and provide role-modelling, which may be greatly influenced by the teacher’s own self-perception and understanding of their role.

As the early education sector strives to raise standards I am concerned by the sector’s staff turnover rate, amongst the highest in Ireland, which comes as no surprise given that research suggests the identities of teachers is key to their commitment to teaching (Cohen, 2010; Burn, 2007; Day, Elliot, and Kington, 2005) and intentions to leave teaching (Gaziel, 1995; Schepens, Aelterman, and Vlerick, 2009). Identity also significantly impacts on educational changes (Cohen, 2010; Day et al., 2005; Thomas, 2006), enabling teachers to embrace change or placing them in a position where they become resistant to change. This is particularly relevant in these times of policy flooding in Ireland’s early education sector. I

view leadership as a significant component to embracing change leading to further concerns regarding staff turnover rates. It seems early education teachers are caught in a vicious cycle whereby they rely on images and language to establish position and shape the worlds they hope to inhabit (Gee, 2000) yet, as this research suggests, they constantly find themselves positioned by others and devalued by society. In a world where teachers working in early education are given numerous identity labels, such as child-minder or carer, one must not lose sight of what is means to teach, for it frequently impacts teacher identity (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Bourdieu, 1984; Lortie, 1975).

According to Archer (2000), an understanding of teachers' selves is central to analysing their work, lives and effectiveness, especially when that identity exists in an environment where structure and agency are often perceived to be in dynamic tension. While van Manen (2007) suggests teachers' identities are constructed by lived experiences across a lifetime it is research by Swennen, Volman, and van Essen (2008) which holds the greatest significance for this study, as it offers the notion of identity being socially and culturally constructed. Interestingly, Burn (2007) believes professional identity should be explored as a flexible learning opportunity, as the teacher takes on the role of the learner rather than the expert. Current contexts means that certain tools are available to teachers as they construct their identities, such as personal experiences, school culture and their framing within policies and discourse (Alsup, 2005; Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt, 2000; Britzman, 2003; Olsen, 2008). Teachers engage these tools to make sense of their identity within their work context. Rodgers and Scott (2008) offer four assumptions shared in the investigation of teacher identity: identity is influenced by and formed within multiple social, cultural, political and historical contexts; identity is formed through relationships and involved emotions; identity is constantly shifting and is therefore unstable; identity involves the reconstructing of stories

told over time. Also intriguing is Alsup's (2013) theory of identity being fluid, changing across a lifetime, which suggests a need to explore the life narratives of teachers (Goodison, 1992). Baumann, Duffy-Hester and Hoffman's (2000) theory of liquid modernity is also worth exploration, especially given his belief that constructing a durable identity is becoming increasingly impossible.

### 1.2 Early Education

Although early childhood teachers have been studied previously (Langford, 2007; Osgood, 2010), as has the professional identity of teachers, (Ayers, 2005; Cattley, 2007), there is a need to research the professional identity of early education teachers in Ireland in the current educational and political climate. The importance of high quality early education is being recognised as playing an important role in school readiness (Snow, 2006), improving equality and positively influencing future outcome for the disadvantaged and vulnerable (Schweinhart, Barnes and Weikart, 1993; Ball, 2001). Indeed, research suggests a strong link between acquired skills and economic production (Little, 2003; Kenny, Larkin and MacSithigh, 2008) and positive social competencies (Nores, et. al., 2005; UNICEF, 2012). A recent influx of policies pertaining to early education and, most recently, inclusion, highlight the significance of early education yet do not recognise the important role of early education teachers. There exists a tension between policy makers and those tasked with meeting policy demands. Policy makers offer a policy rhetoric of increased autonomy (Bassett, et. al., 2012) despite early education teachers feeling constrained by policy and scrutinised by external inspections (Leat, Livingstone and Priestley, 2013). This tension, in an already complex sector, leads me to agree with Beauchamp and Thomas' (2009) view that 'identity development needs more overt attention' (p. 185).

The landscape of early education in Ireland has undergone what can only be described as a metamorphosis in recent years, hardly resembling the sector entered as recently as the start of this decade. Even since commencing this research many policy changes have occurred, creating a sense of constantly playing 'catch-up'. There is an ever-increasing volume of research, both nationally and internationally, highlighting the benefits not just of early education but of quality interactions in the early years. Kremenitzer and Miller (2003) suggested the cycle of positive and successful education begins with those working in early education, entrusted with providing the best possible learning experiences. They went on to describe those working in early education as a *super-person*, suggesting they must be able to observe and identify individual learning styles, be skilled in early literacy and possess knowledge regarding theories, assessment and implementation, and they must possess the ability to conduct their numerous roles simultaneously. In Ireland, it is certainly true to say there is a significant increase in demands made of those working in early education and it could be argued that staying up-to-date with legislation is a full-time role in itself. The crucial role of early educators, alongside the fact that children develop 50% of their brain and learn most of their life skills during the early years (Dallis-Been, 2012), lead Halfon et. al. (2001) to question why those in early education are not respected and honoured in our communities. Indeed, the positive impact of early education is such that it is seen as life-long (Schweinhart, et. al., 2005), with Kartal (2007) even suggesting it as logical that those working in early education would start to gain a more prominent place in society, given their vital role in determining the future of children in their care. Of course, despite the majority of teachers viewing care as part of their role (Norman, 2002), the word 'care' may offer insight as to why those working in early education currently find themselves experiencing 'silencing and marginalisation' (Aldridge, Kilgo, and Emfinger, 2010).

There is a body of research which suggests that that, due to the philanthropic beginning of early education, those working in this sector are often viewed in a mothering role (Clyde, 1990), as babysitters (Dillabough, 1999) or as advocates (Whitehead, 2000). Despite working hard to be seen as educated and possessing a wealth of knowledge (Dallis- Been, 2012), those in early education find themselves on the losing side of a power struggle, even within the teaching profession (Aldridge, et. al, 2010; DiGiovanni & Liston, 2005; Dillabough, 1999), often seen as caregivers and their work described as play. In fact, Aldridge et al (2010) proffered that rigid curriculum guidelines and government requirements inflict such stringent restrictions on early educators that they become ensnared in the role of 'handmaids'.

When society questions the judgement of teachers, and their ability to make decisions, it results in diminished self-confidence and corrodes their ability to act with confidence and authority, and it weakens their trust and sense of moral purpose. These factors play a significant role in what is being referred to as a staff crisis in Ireland, especially when we consider teaching knowledge as combining the complexity of experience and skill which a teacher brings into their classroom (Batten, Marland and Khamis, 1993). Due to policy changes, there is increasing administration work without the provision of commensurate adequate time, pay or resources and those working in the sector are experiencing mounting stress and pressure (Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, 2017). Despite the increasing demands there is an on-going failure to address working conditions in the sector, with 57% of staff citing poor wages are forcing them out of the sector and many required to access social welfare during the summer months due to lack of holiday pay. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Education at a Glance (2012): OECD Indicators pronounced the harmful nature of poor quality early education, providing

further evidence of the need to address working conditions in order to ensure the consistency required in order to provide quality education and care. Those working in the sector must receive financial security, the prospect of a decent quality of living and career path. Research continues to draw attention to the importance of quality experiences throughout early education, highlighting the critical role of early years in determining a child's future. Given their life-long impact, early education teachers deserve respect for their valuable contribution to society, a recognition of their professional position, with working terms and conditions to reflect this vital work. After all, '…teaching at its best can be an act of hope and love, compassion and caring, joy and transformation' (Stremmel, 2005, p. 375).

Research has shown school 'climate' as significant in fostering effective teaching and learning, along with influencing attitudes, levels of stress and self-efficacy (Chong and Low, 2008; Collie, Shapka and Perry, 2012; Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007). According to literature, teacher and teaching related factors play an important role in student learning (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Konstantopoulos, 2006; Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004; Scheerens, 1992). In fact, teachers' enthusiasm, commitment and job satisfaction has been strongly linked to student achievement (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2007; Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran and Barr, 2004; Caprara et al., 2006). Research suggested classroom climate influenced both learning and socio- emotional behaviours (Brophy and Good, 1986; Brown et. al., 2007), positive classroom climates being associated with positive and motivational outcomes, such as improved academic performance, engagement and self-esteem (Baker, 1999; Patrick, Kaplan and Ryan, 2011; Reyes et. al., 2012). However, a key component of creating a positive classroom climate is classroom management, how a teacher delivers instruction and effectively facilitates student learning (Emmer and Evertson, 2009; Evertson and Weinstein, 2006; Moore, 2004; Woolfolk Hoy, 2010).

Whilst this research is not specific to the early education sector it is most certainly relevant to the early education sector. Boyd (2013) suggested that despite recognition of the importance of early education there lacks an increase in professional status, recognition or compensation. Perhaps early education teachers continue to be viewed in a mothering role, as suggested by Clyde (1990). Establishing a professional identity is essential in order for early education teachers to be effective in creating a positive classroom climate. I agree with Sachs' (2003) suggestion that this professional identity should not be fixed or imposed, it must be negotiated through the interpretation of experiences. After all, students will be influenced, and supported, by the teacher's interpretation and construction of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their place, both in their profession and in society.

McGee (2004) intimated that the learning of children with SEN is dependent on the expertise of teachers, but Avramidis and Norwich (2002) suggested teachers lack confidence regarding knowledge and competence in teaching children with SEN, highlighting the need to improve access to Continuing Professional Development (CPD), as intimated by Carrington (1999), Loreman, Deppler and Harvey (2005), Forlin, Keen and Barrett (2008), O'Gorman et. al. (2009) and Shevlin, Kenny and Loxley (2008). There also remains concern regarding overemphasis on academic results (Daly, 2008; Drury and Kinsella, 2009), and time management concerns have been researched extensively (Horne and Timmons, 2009; Smith and Lenord, 2005; Talmor, Reiter and Feigin, 2005), with Harty (2007) identifying non-teaching time as a major barrier to inclusion. CPD is crucial and there is a constant need to upskill, especially amid the current evolution of the early education sector in Ireland. Hammersley, Fletcher and Qaulter (2009) indicate understanding teacher identity is crucial, as the self-confidence related to professional identity helps promote change and growth in

schools. Certainly, the ambitious policy plans of recent times indicate the need for a skilled professional workforce (Urban, 2008), yet early education teachers remain one of the most poorly remunerated amongst professionals (Moloney, 2014; 2015), with CPD frequently attended during personal time and at personal expense.

### 1.3 Inclusion

Teachers play a crucial role in creating environments in which all children are encouraged and assisted in fulfilling their potential, ensuring meaningful participation with achievement and success available to all (Black- Hawkins, Florian and Rouse, 2007), the achievement gap being of widespread concern. Schools are seen to have the power to initiate change, education used to combat poverty, improve lives and transform society (Grubb and Lazerson, 2007), yet most teachers do not believe they possess the knowledge and skills necessary to implement inclusion (Forlin, 2001). This lack of self-belief has led to teachers' attitudes towards inclusion being far from positive (Ellins and Porter, 2005) and the implementation of inclusion policies has been uneven (Evans and Lunt, 2002). While Ainscow (1997) highlighted successful inclusion there remain difficulties and failures. Shulman (2004) spoke of the importance of three components in professional training: a cognitive knowledge and theoretical base; the technical and practical skills; the ethical and moral dimensions.

Teachers can and do make a difference to what and how children learn (Hattie, 2009) yet training for inclusion remains fragmented and policies continue to be vague and open to interpretation. Policies and literature place inclusion on the social justice agenda and position teachers as agents of change, as recognised by Ballard (1997) and Zeichner (2009). It is essential to remember that mutual responsibility and joint action is required to negotiate professional boundaries (Edwards, 2010) and institutional change may best be established

through collaboration within and across schools, departments and communities, as recommended by Fullan (2006). Sharing responsibility for outcomes, strategic planning and having the opportunity to collaborate with other professionals can contribute to learning and achievement, particularly in the case of vulnerable students (Ainscow, 2005; Edwards, 2007). For teachers to become agents of change they must recognise and believe in the learning capacity of every individual student (Black-Hawkins and Florian, 2012) while acknowledging the importance of a knowledge of individual students and the development of supportive relationships (Brok et. al. 2010). Their knowledge, beliefs and response to barriers will inform their practice (Florian and Linklater, 2010).

Mittler (2007) recommended a radical change of the educational system, but according to Ainscow and César (2006) these institutional changes exceeded pedagogy, raising the issue of rights, enabling full participation of all children. In order to position teachers to promote social justice and embrace inclusion in early education it is crucial to support them in developing the necessary skills and enable them to reflect on their own values and beliefs (Korthagen, 2004; Pantic and Wubbels, 2010). Establishing a professional identity is critical to the successful implementation of inclusion, as highlighted by van Huizen, van Oers and Wubbels (2005), Tigelaar et. al. (2004) and Koster et al (2009), since it is the way teachers address inclusion in their daily practice which has the greatest impact on learning for all (Liston and Zeicher, 1990).

### 1.4 Early Years Perspectives and Approaches

Further complicating the early years landscape, both nationally and internationally, are the various training routes and the many theorists embedded within the sector. In Ireland, many people working in the early years sector find themselves working with colleagues from different training backgrounds, often with different beliefs. Indeed, even the introduction of Aistear, the

national curriculum framework, was met with resistance, many practitioners viewing the document as running contrary to their practice.

The Froebel approach was created by Friedrich Froebel, who recognised children as having unique needs and capabilities. The Froebel approach to early education places great value on play as a learning tool. Froebel teachers provides materials, or "gifts", to facilitate play, through which each child's understanding of the world may develop. The Froebel philosophy recongises the role of play in intellectual, social, emotional and physical development. Froebel teachers also provide learning opportunities through activities such as song, games and art. The influence of Froebel is still apparent throughout our current early years sector, placing great emphasis on facilitating child's play.

The work of David Weikart and Connie Kamii created the High Scope approach to early education, a philosophy that views children as constructing their own learning by engaging with materials, resources and each other. The High Scope approach identifies and builds on the strengths, abilities and interests of children. The "Plan-Do-Review" nature of High Scope facilitates children in structuring their day and reflecting on their learning. The environment is set out in interest areas and all materials are labeled to promote literacy. Key Development Indicators are used to support and monitor learning.

Rudolf Steiner created the Waldorf approach, often referred to as the Steiner approach, to early education. This approach recognises children as competent learners and is concerned with cultivating their independent thinking, allowing them to be creative and imaginative. Children progress through a broad curriculum at their own individual pace, learning for the joy of learning. Teachers provide opportunities for children to engage in art, music and dance. There is emphasis placed on natural materials and the outdoor environment. Steiner teachers are

concerned with creating a warm and safe environment in which children are free to develop and creating meaning in their lives.

Loris Malaguzzi created the Reggio Emelia approach to early education, a philosophy that views children as powerful and capable learners, with teachers viewing themselves as learning alongside the children. They value the child's interests and support them in creating in-depth projects, furthering knowledge of their chosen topics. They also embrace representational development, presenting ideas and concepts in a variety of forms, including print, drama and art. Similar to Montessori, Reggio Emelia teachers value the classroom environment, preparing it to enhance learning experiences and spark curiosity. There is also a focus on collaboration, enabling the children to learn from each other. The Reggio Emelia approach places emphasis on bringing a feeling of "home" into the classroom. A key aspect of the Reggio Emelia approach is the theory of "The Hundred Languages of Children", which recognises each child's ability to communicate in many different ways, both verbally and non-verbally. The Reggio Emelia teacher places values on play, gesture and even movement as forms of communication.

Maria Montessori, an Italian physician, created the Montessori approach to education. Children are viewed as competent learners, with an absorbent mind. There is a strong focus on the environment facilitating learning and exploration, and specialist materials are provided to encourage and support development in the areas of: Practical Life; Sensorial; Mathematics; Language; and Culture. Montessori teachers are facilitators, presenting materials relevant to each child's stage of development, interests and abilities. The teacher is trained to recognize "sensitive periods" in the child's development, in order to maximise learning. The activities in which the children engage are referred to as "work", each activity providing concrete materials to enable the child to explore abstract concepts. Children guide their own learning, choosing their own work and deciding how long they wish to engage in particular activities. While the

Montessori materials provide a natural sequence, there is no limit placed on the child's learning and progress is self-paced. The Montessori philosophy places emphasis on respect and care of the environment. It enables children to hone their motor skills and develop both concentration and independence. Indeed, Montessori placed great emphasis on the notion of freedom and discipline developing simultaneously, the prepared environment providing children the freedom to develop self-discipline.

The fissions and fusions of the early years sector not only adds to the challenge of collaborative practice, it also furthers confusion regarding professional identity. Early years practitioners must be able to acknowledge and respect the many influences on early education, and work together effectively in order to gain professional recognition. In order to establish a united professional identity, it may be necessary to negotiate and explore common ground, rather than holding tight to the multiple identities which currently exist within the sector.

**1.5 Policy and Autonomy**

The role of discourse in identity formation demands exploration, as language often leads, or misleads, us to a state of compliance in which we are easily manipulated, thus language plays a significant part in policy development and dissemination. The term professionalism is particularly susceptible to appropriation in education policy rhetoric, given its ever-changing and multiple meanings, as discussed in Hargreaves's (2000) four ages of professionalism and Ozga's (2000) theory regarding the meaning of professionalism being reflective of the changing relationships between teachers and the government. Russell (2011) believed teachers are embedded in an environment where ideas are publicly framed and debated and where their role in the classroom is being marginalised by current policy. It is further argued by Moloney (2011) that the manner of implementation of curriculum

frameworks continues to undermine and negate professional identity, reminiscent of the idea of a rigid curriculum, scripted and handed to teachers in a box, put forward by Gammage (2006), Thirumurthy et.al. (2007) and Woodrow (2007).

Cochran, Smith and Lytle (2006) warned of the troubling images of teachers lacking decision making power in their classrooms, their power stripped away while continuing to fail to fully and critically analyse and understand their role. Paris (1993) suggested that teachers are viewed as implementers of a prescribed curriculum but education, particularly child-led early education, demands recognition that curriculum outreaches the classroom and plays an important role in life beyond the classroom walls, as proposed by Branscombe, et. al., (2003). I believe the intricate link between curriculum and autonomy is undervalued and, perhaps, by addressing the complicated conversation which exists around the topic of curriculum (Pinar, 1998) we can re-establish the need for the teacher to decide what is in the best interests of not just the students they teach, but of the student communities and larger society (Sleeter, 2005).

Indeed, while Fullan (2013) placed teachers at the centre of educational change many would now question the autonomy available to teachers, suggesting that current curriculum guidelines serve to 'teacher-proof' instruction (Berliner and Biddle, 1995; McGuinn, 2006). Autonomy, the second element of Locke's (2004) classical triangle, is often regarded as a mark of professionalism, judging any teacher left alone to do their job as a good teacher able to work without guidance. This perception is embedded in society, corresponding to the historically isolated nature of teaching (Cuban, 2009; Lortie, 1975). Moloney (2010) views teachers as valuable contributors to society and critical to the education of children. Yet, in the current age of conformity and efficiency, it is easy to see how teachers feel devalued, after all responsibility is central to how teachers understand their role.

Whitty et al (1998) suggested the twenty-first century brought with it a struggle amongst stakeholders over the definition of teacher professionalism. Alongside this struggle, Jones (2012) believed we also saw the most comprehensive set of reforms in Western Europe, including curriculum centralisation. Interesting then, that while the teacher's role within the curriculum is considered a key element of their professionalism (McCulloch and Knight, 2000), teachers accepted this curriculum centralisation entirely compliantly (Jones, 2012), which is particularly shocking given Howells' (2003) view that curriculum responsibility and implementation is crucial to the professional identity of teachers. Perhaps this highlights a lack of awareness of the defining contextual features of curriculum. Lack of teacher input regarding developing, defining and reinterpreting the curriculum (Helsby, Knight and McCulloch, 1995) may have reduced them to mere deliverers of curriculum (Trowler, 2003) and ultimately led to Hargreaves (2003) labelling them 'drones and clones of policy makers' anaemic ambitions' (2003, p.2). Given that teacher autonomy is being significantly reduced (Alexander, 2008; Ball, 2007; Pring et. al., 2009; Sachs, 2003) there is a sense of de-professionalisation of teachers (Abbott, Rathbone, & Whitehead, 2013). When we add to this the fact that early education requires innate caring qualities, not naturally associated with professional knowledge and expertise, this serves to further the devaluation of early education teachers, as proffered by England, Budig and Flobre (2002). According to Dinneen (2009), early education teaching is a highly specialised and skilful task. The OECD (2006) and Moloney (2011) claim true professionalisation of the early education sector requires raising qualification standards which will lead to increased wage demands.

Ireland was once to the fore regarding professional recognition for teachers (Drudy, 2000) with union leaders determined to portray teachers as professionals, showcasing the importance and perceived value which would come with professionalism. This is in stark contrast to the position in which today's early education teachers find themselves, seeking

professionalism as a means to regain control over their work, as suggested by Smyth et. al. (1999). Professional identity is influenced by policy yet there remains a great deal of ambiguity regarding professional identity, making it the *site of struggle*, used by various stakeholders as a bargaining chip (Sachs, 2003). I am intrigued by Hargreaves (2000) and Ozga's (2000) proposals regarding contextualising different conceptions of professionalism by: questioning who decides of what professionalism comprises; and who is responsible for its monitoring and development. Were early education teachers to be recognised under a single title, or label, there remains the question of how this might be achieved. It is likely that this title would be assigned by those stakeholders seen as having power, and would represent their ideologies. Professionalism may be embedded with societal value but this research must seek to question the hidden costs of professionalism in the early education sector and on whose terms it may be established.

The current level of government involvement in education and the resulting decrease of autonomy may indicate what Hargreaves (2000) referred to as the fourth age of professionalism, in which teaching may adopt a diminished post-professional status. This 'apprenticeship' model serves to illustrate the ever-increasing challenge from government, and the battle for curriculum control historically indicative of teacher professionalism (Whitty, Power and Halpin, 1998). Policies designed to incorporate accountability measures and evaluate teachers tend to create feelings of isolation and quantify what individual teachers add to the learning experience of their students, opting to rank and compare their effectiveness (Collins, 2019; Cuban, 2009; Harris, 2011). Mockler (2011) suggested this de-professionalises the work of teachers, as their identity is constantly formed and reformed throughout their career, with this formation taking place at the crossroads of personal experience, professional context and the political environment, including the discourses, attitudes and understandings regarding education which influence teachers through both the

media and policy decisions. Day (2007) offered the notion that teachers can only succeed by complying with societal definitions of their role, success requiring an attitudinal change towards imposed reform, policy change and societal demands.

We are in a time when professionalism is experiencing managerial control (Evetts, 2011), socially constructed, redefined and influenced by prevailing policies and contextual ideologies (Hilferty, 2005), and the only self-regulation which exists is a guise for self-surveillance, ensuring it is impossible to avoid the erosion of trust, and with accountability threatening to punish teachers (Webb, 2009) we are laying the groundwork for what Janta and Wegrich (2008, p.16) describe as 'accountability overload'. It is clear to see why Sachs (2001) identified the important role played by the political agenda when seeking to define professionalism. While there is no shared definition of professionalism Furlong et. al. (2000) propose three key interrelated features: knowledge; autonomy; responsibility, which must develop appropriate professional values. While this proposal seems helpful, we must remember that teacher professionalism is shaped by an external environment which currently demands increased accountability and regulation, thus it is this view of professionalism which is presented within policy discourse, gaining legitimacy and changing how professionalism is portrayed and enacted. Sachs (2003) suggested teachers have both a moral and political responsibility to actively shape their identities and professional lives, proposing, 'An activist teaching profession is an educated and politically astute one' (Sachs, 2003, p.154). She further argued that this activist form of teacher professionalism is premised on a conscious form of social movement, ensuring trust, respect and reciprocity among stakeholders, thus providing the tools to improve the working conditions and status of teachers by working together.

## Chapter 2: National and International Policy

The influence of both national and international policy on the identity of early education teachers in Ireland is undeniable. This chapter presents a brief history of special education, identifying the international trends which influenced policy in Ireland. It follows Ireland's path to integration and inclusion and the development of the preschool sector in Ireland, including examining the *Ready to Learn* White Paper. It also examines the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector, or early education sector, and inclusion in the sector, including training and support for inclusion. Finally, it explores the challenges facing both the sector and its workforce.

### 2.1 The Development of the Preschool Sector

Kiernan & Walsh (2004) recommend that "History is essential to an understanding of the present" (p. 7), therefore in order to understand the current standing of Ireland's ECCE sector we must explore the development of the sector, no easy task given that Murray (2006) describes it as "bewildering in its evolution, structure, diversity, quality, inequality, key players and controlling interests" (p. 8).

A global change in attitude regarding children emerged, bringing about a considerable volume of policy and legislation regarding children's rights. This culminated in the almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). This convention was ratified by Ireland in 1992, and led to the National Childcare Strategy (Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1998) which established Ireland's commitment to safeguarding the rights of children in policies and provisions (Hayes, 2010). Ireland also found itself experiencing a growing economy which led to a dramatic shift in family life, with women returning to work and families requiring childcare. Prior to this economic boom most children were cared for in the home by mothers or childminders. The few preschool settings which did

exist were private and unregulated. As mothers began to re-enter the workforce the demand for childcare grew and this revealed a lack of quality and affordability (National Women's Council, 2005) along with highlighting the need for regulation of the ECCE sector. According to Moloney and McCarthy (2010), Ireland's 1992 ratification of the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child was monumental for the ECCE sector as it led to government policy and regulation of the sector. The enactment of Section VII of the Child Care Act (1991) in 1996 tasked the Department of Health and Children (DoHC) with the inspection of ECCE services and implement the *Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 1996*. The DoHC preschool inspection teams, comprising of public health nurses and environmental health officers, were established across the country over the period 1997 to 2000. Unfortunately, these efforts lacked coordination and lead to eleven Government Departments sharing responsibility for funding and provisions within the sector.

Having produced a family friendly manifesto (Pidgeon, 1997), once in power the coalition government, under the leadership of Fianna Fáil, set about delivering an early education plan, believing in the long-term advantages to society and the economy. The National Childcare Strategy (Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1998) was published, which led to the formation of an inter-departmental group. This group, under the direction of the Department of Justice, Equity and Law Reform, were mandated with reviewing the strategy recommendations, alongside those of the Report of the Commission on the Family (Department of Social and Family Affairs, 1998) and the Report of the National Forum on Early Childhood Education (Combat Poverty Agency, 1998), all concerned with directing focus onto the rights of children.

According to Hayes (2010) it was this initiative which established Ireland's commitment to creating policies and provisions designed to safeguard the rights of children.

In July 1999, a National Childcare Coordinating Agency (NCCA) was established to commence the phased implementation of the National Childcare Strategy. The main aim of the strategy was to ensure the provision of supports and services relating to all aspects of children's development. The National Development Plan (1999) allocated over €400m through the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme [EOCP] to facilitate the development of the childcare sector, particularly for those considered disadvantaged. The National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative (NVCC) was also established, consisting of organisations with an interest in the promotion of Early Childhood Education and Care.

### 2.2 Ready to Learn

The Department of Education and Science (DES) produced the *Ready to Learn* White Paper, designed to focus specifically on early education, establishing a comprehensive strategy for the education of children from birth to six years of age. This paper covers a broad range of issues pertaining to early education, including promotion of quality, encouraging parental involvement and a system of inspection. There is also great emphasis placed on education for all, providing provisions to enable the inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) and those considered disadvantaged, an area considered to yield great investment return (Barnett, 2003). Indeed, according to Hayes (2009) educational equity played a significant role in developments within the early education sector and the direction of research in Ireland in the wake of *Ready to Learn*. The paper places emphasis on quality, determining the production of a quality framework that would set high quality standards. The paper also proposes the production of a framework regarding curriculum, to ensure improved opportunities for learning experiences across services. It suggests that an education inspectorate work alongside the Health Service inspectorate, already in place, and that a central agency be created to coordinate services. The paper also promises commitment to several measures to enhance inclusion for

children with SEN and those considered disadvantaged, and acknowledges uniformity is not necessarily the key to providing equality, recognising the need for appropriate individual support to enable all children to fulfil their potential. *Ready to Learn*, it largely based its proposals on the Report for the National Forum on Early Childhood Education (Combat Poverty Agency, 1998) and highlighted the need for teaching to exceed pedagogy, encompassing both education and care. It set out an agenda to overhaul and greatly develop the early education sector and became the catalyst for educational reform, its influence evident still evident today. In 2001, thirty-three County Childcare Committees (CCCs) were established under The DJELR Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) and in 2011 Frances Fitzgerald became the Minster for Children, the first child specific Cabinet-level appointment and one which marked the start of greater coordination regarding childhood experiences in Ireland.

### 2.3 Early Childhood Care and Education

On April 7th 2009, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Barry Andrews, T.D announced the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) plans to introduce the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme (2010), providing a free preschool year for all children in Ireland irrespective of family status or ability. This was the state's first commitment to ECCE provision for all, offering stated funded preschool access for children for three hours per day over 38 weeks. This led to a significant increase in the number of children availing of preschool services. In fact, this is one of many steps taken over the last decade to improve the ECCE sector. *Síolta, the National Quality Framework* (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education [CECDE], 2006) was published following a three-year developmental process and *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009) was published following its development by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

In 2013, a Prime Time exposé on RTE entitled *Breach of Trust*, aired alarming revelations regarding the dire state of the early education sector in Ireland. Amongst the many concerns raised were: 75% of preschools were in breach of childcare regulations; 34% were in breach of at least five regulations; 48% were in breach of regulations regarding the adult/child ratios and staff background checks; 29% in breach of regulations regarding overcrowding and upkeep of premises; 41% were in breach of providing a safe environment; one in seven preschools were in breach of child welfare. As a response to this television exposé of poor practice in a number of settings, a National Early Years Quality Agenda was created, aimed at improving the quality of early education (DCYA, 2015). Tusla, the child and family agency, was established in 2014 and tasked with supporting and promoting the development, welfare and protection of children, inclusive of overseeing the preschool inspectorate. In 2016 the ECCE scheme was extended, enabling children to access preschool services from 3 years of age until either the age of 5 years and 6 months or the commencement of their primary education. From September 2018 the ECCE scheme was extended further, enabling enrolment from the age of 2 years and 8 months. These ECCE scheme extensions are designed to encourage and facilitate families to avail of two full years of preschool for their children prior to the commencement of their primary education.

Whilst the exposé was crucial in providing the catalyst for overhauling the early education sector, it left silenced early education teachers in its wake. Those who conducted themselves in a professional manner each day, providing the best possible care and education opportunities for young children, were left voiceless following these shocking and appalling revelations. They found themselves ensnared in a regime of control. Policy focused on safeguarding children, improving facilities and inspecting staff. While Ireland continues to strive to create a quality early education sector perhaps the ramifications of this damage may

still be found in the omission of early education teachers themselves from policy discourse, their lost voices proving difficult to restore. I acknowledge the need for children to be given a voice and I further advocate the need for early education teachers to be given a voice, believing it is necessary to re-establish autonomy and recognise professionalism, enhancing the standing of the sector, in order to improve the experiences of those children accessing the sector.

## 2.4 Inclusion in the ECCE Sector

"The Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services) 2016 Regulations" was published outlining key regulation to be implemented by all ECCE services based on the original recommendations contained in the Pre-School Regulations 1996. This publication highlighted a policy relating to access and inclusion of children with SEN and was the catalyst for free certified training in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) being offered to all ECCE settings. Initiatives such as the LINC (Leadership for Inclusion) Programme (2017) and AIM (Access and Inclusion Model) (2017) were launched in an effort to support inclusion in the early education sector. Despite these efforts there remains the issue of inclusion lacking a clear definition, its meaning varying not just between services but from teacher to teacher.

The most compelling rationale for inclusion is the fact that it is a fundamental human right, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1989) which states that children with or without disabilities have the same rights to educational opportunities (Callen, 2013, p.17). This was also supported by international law in 2006, with the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (Gordon, 2013). Article 24 of the Convention emphasises the roles of state governments in providing an "inclusive education system at all levels" (UN, 2006). Thomas and Vaughan (2004) proposed

that inclusion is about the child's right to participate as fully as possible in all aspects of school and that it is the role of the school to facilitate and support full participation. Ainscow (1997) described inclusion as a process of reaching out to all children, to enable full participation in education, whilst UNESCO (2008) believed inclusion to be the most effective approach to meet the needs of all children, but stressed it must be implemented as a whole school development plan. Ireland's current early education sector remains fractured, with numerous stake-holders involved and a sever lack of clarity regarding inclusion policy implementation.

### 2.5 Training and Support for Inclusion in Ireland

The government-funded study, "Growing Up in Ireland", (Williams, Murray, McCrory & McNally 2011) commenced in 2006, following 8,000 9 year olds (Child Cohort) and 10,000 9 month olds (Infant Cohort). It revealed the prevalence of students with SEN in Ireland is approximately 25%. Griffin and Shevlin (2011, p.267) believed "Education is vital for all children including those with special educational needs, if they are to become significant participants in society" while Armstrong, Armstrong and Barton (2000) suggested the key elements required for successful inclusion include adequate teaching resources and curricular inclusion. An increased demand for SEN provisions has brought about considerable change in mainstream primary schools in Ireland, both in terms of policy and practice regarding inclusion. Resources such as learning support and language support have increased significantly, along with an increase in the number of special needs assistants (SNAs). Further support is provided by the formation of such bodies as the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB), the Special Education Support Service (SESS) and the Primary Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).

Startlingly, there is a stark contrast between primary education and early education, where learning support teachers and SNAs are not evident within the early education sector. Government funding historically focused on schemes supporting preschool children considered at risk. The Early Start Programme, established in 1994 by the DES within the existing primary school system (Educational Research Centre, 1998), still exists and is staffed by both primary teachers and early education teachers, guided by a curriculum which reflects the original Rutland Street Intervention Project of the late 1960s (Kellaghan, 1977; Kellaghan and Greaney, 1993). Children identified as having additional needs from birth or those diagnosed through an Assessment of Need (AON) under the Irish Health Service Executive (HSE) may be offered a placement in HSE funded preschools or, in the event of no place being available, may be offered Home Tuition as an interim measure for a maximum of 20 hours per week throughout the academic year. It is available from 3 years of age but, despite the child being of preschool age, the tuition must be provided by a primary school teacher who is registered with the Teaching Council of Ireland.

Despite Hodson and Keating (2007) highlighting the need to recognise the impact of CPD on practice, lack of investment in CPD continues to be a key challenge for early education teachers (French 2005). Concerns amongst early education teachers regarding the need for training and support pertaining to the education and care of children with SEN led to the formation of an interdepartmental group (IDG) in June 2015, tasked with designing strategies to support children with SEN in accessing the ECCE scheme. This IDG included senior officials from the DES, the DCYA and the Department of Health (DoH) working alongside representatives from the HSE, the National Early Years Inspectorate at the Child and Family Agency, the NCSE, the National Disability Authority (NDA), Better Start's National Early Years Quality Development Service (NEYQDS) and the City/County Childcare Committees. In consultation with a range of stakeholders and with guidance from both

national and international research the IDA created a child centred model for Access and Inclusion (AIM) practice. AIM was launched by The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in June 2016.

The main objective of AIM is to enable all children to engage in and achieve meaningful participation in the ECCE scheme by providing support to ECCE services enabling them to creative inclusive settings. There are seven progressive levels of support within AIM, moving from universal to targeted based on the individual child and the preschool service accessing support. The onus is on the ECCE service to gain parental consent and apply for an AIM early years specialist to visit, assess and grant the level of support required to enable the individual child to fully participate in all preschool activities. All services benefit from AIM services such as the publication of updated guidelines and training for teachers although it is not without flaws. The model is specific to the ECCE scheme or alternative government programmes such as Community Childcare Subventions (CCS). While AIM is a wonderful support platform the limits imposed regarding accessing support are far from inclusive a fail in the mandate of providing all children with the support necessary to enable them to fulfil their potential.

In order for inclusion to become a fundamental pillar of early education practice it must become a staple of early education training, not just offered to but provided for all early education teachers. Programmes such as AIM may then take on the form of advanced training, providing a greater understanding of barriers to inclusion and how they may best be addressed. Furthermore, this type of training could be designed to enable early education teachers to further their knowledge and enhance their practice regarding the teaching of all children, exploring evolving strategies and up-to-date research.

## 2.6 ECCE Challenges

While the ECCE scheme is a welcomed initiative and of great benefit to all eligible there is another side to the story which demands mention-the impact on ECCE settings. The ECCE scheme operates on a 1:11 ratio despite the Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 stipulating a ratio of 1:8 for both part-time and full-time services. This change in ratio along with facilitating inclusion places settings under pressure as they struggle to provide tailored programmes and maintain the correct support for all children. The LINC and AIM programmes are limited in the support which they provide and, while training is of great benefit to staff, there remains a lack of specific support for children with SEN despite the existence of an international impetus for inclusion. Ultimately, the onus is firmly placed on ECCE settings to design and provide inclusion as required under The Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services) 2016.

In June 2015, Early Childhood Ireland published the findings of their research regarding inclusion of children with SEN, the findings taking the form of a proposed model of provision submitted to the DCYA. This submission included an examination of relevant literature, national reports, the results of a Pobal survey (2012) and previous Early Childhood Ireland survey results (2012; 2015). It was developed in consultation with Early Childhood Ireland members, campaign groups, specialist organisations, and parents. According to information provided in the proposal based on the Early Childhood Ireland 2015 survey, 74% of settings had more than one child with SEN or perceived as requiring additional support while 53% of settings reported having 2 or more. Also documented are the concerns of both managers and teachers regarding support and training since the inception of the ECCE scheme. It highlights how tensions, low workforce morale and systemic difficulties may negatively impact on teachers' ability to support children with SEN, self-efficacy impacting on the quality of care and education provided. The survey results also acknowledged the concerns expressed

by staff within settings, many feeling bound by the mandatory policy on inclusion, underpinned by the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016, the Employment Equality Act 1998 to 2011, the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2012, the UNCRC (Articles 29 & 30), the Disability Act 2005 and the EPSEN Act 2004. While 82% of respondents have policies on inclusion and supporting children with SEN the majority of services stated the need for increased staff, training and support alongside additional facilities and equipment in order to fully include and support all children. The overarching message of the submission was that while ECCE settings welcomed inclusion there remained a significant need for action beyond policy production with much greater support required to enable the creation of an environment that is universally designed and suitable for all children (Early Childhood Ireland, 2015).

The reactive work seemingly required regarding teacher training for inclusion is evidence of a lack of forethought and preparation. There is a sense of the proverbial 'cart before the horse' approach, which suggests that there are many children already attending ECCE setting in which the early education teachers are untrained and inexperienced in the areas of special education or inclusion, yet they are charged with providing the best possible experiences for these young children.

### 2.7 ECCE Workforce-an international perspective

Despite the globally accepted importance of the early years sector, it seems that many challenges facing the early years workforce exceed national policy and planning. In America, a 2018 report on the early years workforce described those employed within the sector as suffering "economic distress" (Whitebook, et. al., 2018, p.18). The report further suggests that the term "childcare provider" is used as a descriptor for anybody providing early care and

education, from parents and grandparents to those working in preschool settings, lacking recognition for the qualifications and role of the early years workforce. Despite acknowledge of the importance of early education, the American education system continues to lack equity, the premise being that younger children require a less skilled workforce. Along with the age of the children, the setting in which practitioners work also plays a key role: an early years teacher working with children under 3 years earns an average of $27,248; an early years teacher working with children over 3 years earns an average of $28,912; and a kindergarten teacher earns an average of $53,030 (Whitebook, et. al., 2018, p. 48). Qualifications also play a significant role. In the private sector, an early years teacher with a college degree earns, on average, $3.38 more per hour than somebody without a degree, while in the public sector the pay gap jumps to $6.89 (Whitebook, et. al., 2018, p. 35). Each state is responsible for decisions regarding the qualifications necessary to work with children under 3 years, which adds to the disparity within the early years sector. Given the low pay prevalent throughout the sector, many of those working in early education do not have the financial resources to attend CPD and upskill therefore, without state investment, it is difficult to see how the workforce will attain the skills and knowledge desired for those support early development.

While the working conditions of preschool teachers are considered a factor in the early experiences of young children, these conditions continue to be problematic in New Zealand, where early childhood teachers are employed privately, the government having no role in their pay and role specifications. A recent newspaper article reported a drop off of 59% in people training to work in early education, with the Education Institute Union attempting to address what they refer to as a "pay gap", the government stating their intention to attempt to "influence" the minimum pay rate ( https://www.stuff.co.nz/manawatu-standard/news/117217042/early-childhood-teachers-call-for-improved-pay-and-work-conditions). In 2018, a newspaper article in Australia also spoke of "low pay" and "lack of

professional recognition" forcing many people out of the sector. Australia's early years system appears to foul of the "care" barrier, with preschool settings perceived as offering education while daycare settings are perceived as offering care. The result is that those working in preschools tend to have better pay, working hours and conditions than those working in daycare centres https://apolitical.co/solution_article/australias-early-childhood-workforce-crisis-teachers-are-quitting-in-droves/.

Indeed, in parts of Europe the issue of remuneration in the early years sector appears frequently. In Austria, there is a wage discrepancy between the public and private sector, with approximately 100 income schemes in operation, which may be a factor in the sector's high turnover rate (Huntsman, 2008; OCED, 2012). In Germany, the average monthly income for those working in the early years sector is €1,350 (Fuchs-Rechlin, 2010), lower than their primary counterparts (Oberhuemer, 2010). CPD is considered ad-hoc and lacking follow-up (Baumeister and Grieser, 2011).

There appears to be a stark contrast when considering the Nordic approach to early education. In 2011, Preschools in Sweden became an integral component of the school system. Early years teachers receive the same rights and recognition as teachers throughout other stages of education. Legislation exceeds general working conditions, setting out clear requirements for promotion and workload. The engage in a curriculum approach which designates the teacher as a mentor for students, a system adapted from the early years sector and now present throughout the education system, as it is a valued approach to establishing teamwork and co-operation. With regards to pay and general working conditions in the early years sector, these are negotiated with a union, as is the case for primary "compulsory" teachers, with an average wage of 28,000SEK per month, again in keeping with primary teachers. Early years teachers receive the same holiday entitlements as primary teachers and are employed for an average of 40 hours per week,

including 9 hours of non-contact time, some of which may be used to attend CPD.

In Belgium, France and Spain, preschool teachers receive the same pay and holidays are their primary counterparts (Peñalver, 2009). Those working in the public sector follow the national civil servant pay scale, while those employed in the private sector are paid in accordance with collective agreements at national level. Spain also regulates CPD, making it mandatory for employers to pay for CPD and, furthermore, pay a supplement to those attending CPD in excess of 60 hours. It is also a requirement that preschool teacher be facilitated in attending CPD during regular hours of work.

A European Commission Report on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe stressed the importance of having skilled staff, with a deep knowledge and understanding of child development and pedagogy, working in the sector. Despite this, it identified 8 education European countries as requiring a qualification lower than a Bachelor's Degree to work in the early years sector. It was also disclosed that an induction period is not widespread and only 25% of countries list CPD as a mandatory requirement for working in early years education, despite the Commission's view that CPD should be as 'a requirement to stay in the profession' (European Commission, 2014, p. 32). The low profile and status of the early years sector was acknowledged within the report (2019).

Qualifications to work in the early years sector also vary significantly, with significant variations existing within many countries. In America, requirements are set by each individual state. While Montana imposes no regulations regarding preschool qualifications, Kansas requires preschool teachers to have a bachelor's degree, although there is no requirement for this degree to be early childhood specific. While Arizona requires 8 hours of practice, Colorado requires 6 months practical experience. New Zealand offers many types of early years settings,

such as Māori, kindergarten and playgroups. This creates many pathways into employment, from a one-year graduate diploma to a three-year degree, with a plethora of qualifications, including early childhood education, Te Tohu Paetahi Ako and early learning. In Spain, qualifications range from 6 months vocational training to a 5-year degree in early childhood education. Interestingly, Sweden created a 4-year degree programme specific to preschool education, which includes mandatory practical experience.

### 2.8 ECCE Workforce-a national perspective

In Ireland, according to Pobal's (2016) Early Years Sector Profile 2016-2017, 20,823 staff work in the early education sector but it is noteworthy that 32% have worked in the sector for less than 2 years and 86% of service providers identified recruiting and retaining staff as having a negative impact on the viability of their service. Alarmingly, early education teachers were found to fall into the biggest turnover category according to The National Skills Bulletin (2016). Furthermore, research conducted by Pobal in 2015 revealed 86.8% of early education teachers hold a basic minimum qualification. A National Early Years Quality Agenda was created in order to improve the quality of early education, placing significant focus on qualifications and introducing mandatory minimum requirements enforced from September 2016 (DCYA, 2015), the requirement being that of a QQI level 5 certificate in childcare or equivalent.

The qualifications and experience of teachers in the early education sector varies greatly compared to primary and secondary level teachers, with a vast array of recognised qualifications existing in the sector rather than a set route or established path to qualifying. Indeed, qualifications range from one-year certificates to 4-year Master's degrees, from early childhood care to Montessori or Froebel, practitioners often finding themselves working with

colleagues who do not share their training experiences, nor their pedagogical values. Moloney (2010) describes the ECCE workforce as a diverse group that differs considerably in their preparations, qualifications, employment situations and status, with Osgood and Stone (2002) arguing that the impact of this diversity within the sector leads to ECCE workers acting in defensive or isolated ways. To further this isolation, the sector lacks an agreed salary or a salary scale of any manner, there are no set role parameters across the sector and there is no one department responsible for employment within the sector. CPD is often self-funded by the teacher and time off in lieu is at the discretion of the employer. There is the further issue of CPD frequently being offered during regular working hours, with a lack of cover or substitute teachers making it difficult for many to access.

In preparation of the introduction by the DCYA (2016) mandatory minimum requirement was The Learner Fund was established by the DCYA (2013) to enhance quality by subsidising the cost of existing staff achieving a minimum qualification of QQI Level 5 by September 2015, later postponed to December 2016. This is now regulated under the Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016, with classroom lead teachers required to hold a minimum of a level 6 qualification in childcare as recognised by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). The DCYA (2016) also acknowledged those who obtained a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 7, Level 8, or Level 9, providing a bursary in recognition of their qualification. Plans to continue this bursary over the coming years indicates a commitment to raising standards in the early education sector, a welcomed initiative which comes many years after the Organisation for Economic Co- operation and Development's (OECD) acknowledgement of the responsibilities of professionals working with children (2001). Upon review of the OCED's report Moloney (2010) declared that "Quality ECCE, therefore, is dependent upon strong staff training and fair working conditions across the sector" (p.168).

Surprisingly, in the midst of this effort to raise standards in the early education sector, according to the Certificate Specification QQI Level 5 in Early Childhood Care and Education, SEN continues to exist as an elective module on the course, resulting in many ECCE teachers receiving their qualifications without knowledge or experience of working with children with SEN. Similarly, there is no mandatory module on the QQI Level 5 or Level 6 courses recognised by The Learner Fund. Putting this into perspective, all ECCE staff with Level 5 and Level 6 qualifications are expected to provide inclusion despite potentially having no training or experience regarding SEN. Clearly the consequences of this practice demand redress. We cannot expect early education teachers to provide quality experiences for all children when they lack the fundamental training and experience necessary to successfully engage our increasingly diverse student population.

Further incentive to gain higher qualifications is provided in the form of settings receiving a higher capitation for classroom lead teachers holding a QQI Level 7. An increase in funding from September 2018 resulted in a standard capitation of €69 per child per week and a higher capitation of €80.25 per child per week for classroom leaders holding a degree or higher. While this acknowledgement of training is welcomed the funding is paid to the service rather than the teacher and, and ground level, reinforces the diversity of the sector by creating an unspoken hierarchy amongst professional tasked with identical roles within settings. When we consider Ball's (1994) notion that we do not speak discourse, it speaks us, ensuring we take up the positions constructed for us within policy discourse, it sheds new light on the importance of the 2016 Irish General Election (Alvarez-Rivera, 2016), in which early education played a significant role. The word "teacher" was ominously absent amidst a plethora of alternative words and terms: childcare workers; staff; childminders; crèche workers; workforce; ECCE workforce and those who provide childcare services. Given this lack of clarity at Government level it is easy to understand why many early education teachers

are experiencing an identity crisis thanks to the power of language, after all, naming is a powerful tool (Clark, 1992).

# Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter is concerned with identifying the research paradigm and design used in this research. It presents a review of the ontological and epistemological positions, exploring methods used throughout this research, addressing concerns and limitations and providing a discussion of the theoretical framework.

## 3.1 Research Perspective: Interpreting Methodology

According to Mouton (1996) the research design acts as a plan, giving direction to all aspects of the research, from the philosophical underpinning to data analysis. Yin (2012) further suggested the design process may be initiated by identifying the research question and planning how best to address said question. The research question, the purpose of the research, proves a key aspect of the research paradigm (Berry and Otley 2004; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009; Yin 2012), which in turn plays a vital role in connecting methodology to a suitable set of methods. It is my view that the professional identity of teachers, particularly Montessori teachers, in the early education sector, is key to how confident they are that they have the skills with which to embrace change or fearful of change as they doubt their personal ability to manage classrooms. This research also considered the identities assigned by society, inclusive of policy discourse, and examined the influence of societal perceptions on professional identities. The research question was guided by the research paradigm and theoretical framework.

Guba (1990) suggested that many research paradigms exist as research questions and emerge from interpretations of social reality. In the case of this research, examining the identities of early education teachers in a Montessori context, the interpretivist paradigm appeared to offer the most appropriate platform from which to conduct this research,

given the interpretivist view that reality is socially constructed and individuals, with their personal backgrounds, assumptions and experiences, contribute to the construction of reality. The interpretivist paradigm provided a framework of scientific and academic ideas, values and assumptions (Olsen, Lodwick and Dunlop, 1992) which guided the thoughts and actions of the researcher (Jonker and Pennink, 2010), providing the philosophical platform on which this social science research was conducted. Regarding ontology, I possess an insider perspective based on over two decades working in the early education sector. The epistemological position was guided by my knowledge of the early education sector and the willingness of early education teachers to address their concerns and share their experiences, both in the workplace and when on training. Grix (2004) proposed that differing ontological and epistemological positions often result in different approaches being used to address the same phenomenon, thus my ontological and epistemological positions are reflected in the methodology and methods and based upon certain assumptions regarding reality and knowledge.

Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) suggested, as a result of the subjective nature of human perspectives and experiences, social realities may have multiple perspectives and may change. Interpretivists view interaction and dialogues as the path to understanding the social world, with Myers and Klein (2011) stating this social world may only be accessed through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings. While interpretivists seek to understand the social world through the subjective experiences of individuals, Seabrook, Reeves and Hedberg (2008) suggested the interpretivists' paradigm stresses the importance of context. Carr and Kemmis (1986) described interpretivist researchers as participant observers, engaging in activities and discerning the meaning of actions within specific social contexts.

As I adopted an insider perspective, examining social reality from the perspective of participants, the experiences of both myself and participants may influence the collection and analysis of data. The ontological position of interpretivism is relativism, which offers a subjective view of reality. Reality is individually constructed when consciousness engages with objects which already contain meaning (Crotty, 1998) and, since language actively shapes and moulds reality (Frowe, 2001), reality is constructed through interactions between language and aspects of the social world. The epistemological position of intepretivism is subjectivism. According to Heron and Reason (1997), by participating in the world we simultaneously mould and encounter the world. While people construct their own meaning in various ways (Crotty, 1998) the truth is a consensus formed by co-constructors (Pring, 2000), thus knowledge is culturally derived and historically situated. Given the dynamic nature of early education in Ireland, alongside the recent influx of policies, this view reaffirmed my view of intepretivism as the most apt paradigm for this research. Interpretivism accepts ideologies and seeks to make conscious hidden forces and structures.

In the context of education in Ireland, the world in which early education teachers find themselves demands societal interaction, and how they are positioned within that world is heavily dependent on language and interpretation. Interpretivism lends itself to revealing the knowledge embedded within interpretations, making it ideal for this research. Creswell (2007) viewed the interpretive methodology as concerning itself with understanding the social world from individual perspectives, examining interactions alongside historical and cultural contexts. Given the parameters of this research, and the possible methodologies available, I found hermeneutics to be a most suitable tool for this research, as it may be used to derive hidden meaning from language, thus ideal for uncovering the meaning buried within the data presented here.

Willis (2008) proffered interpretivists believe there is no single correct route or particular method to knowledge while Walsham (1993) argued that in the interpretive tradition there are no 'correct' or 'incorrect' theories. Interpretivists engage in an in-depth examination of a topic which is of interest within their field. Myers and Klein (2011) opined that for interpretivists to access realities they must examine language and explore shared meanings, attempting to understand their research topic through the meanings assigned by people (Deetz, 1996), drawing inferences or identifying patterns (Aikenhead, 1997). According to Seabrook, Reeves and Hedberg (2008), the interpretivist paradigm highlights the need for context, aiming to explain the subjective meanings behind social action. It seeks to understand the world from subjective experiences, engaging in techniques such as interviewing or observation, focusing on the full complexity of human interpretation as the situation emerges (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994). Interpretivists engage in research to evaluate and refine theories and the philosophical base of interpretive research is hermeneutics (Boland, 1985).

### 3.2 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is a branch of interpretive philosophy (Myers and Klein, 2011) which emerged in the late nineteenth century (Kaboob, 2001). Its fundamental principle is that all human understanding is achieved by considering the interdependent meaning of parts and the

whole which they form, thus it is the theory and practice of interpretation, a process by which to expose hidden meanings. Grondin (1994) described it as the art, science and philosophy of interpretation. Many have contributed to, elaborated on and developed variations of hermeneutic philosophy, such as Schleiermacher and Kimmerle (1986), who showed how hermeneutics could illuminate human understanding, and Dilthey (1988), who widened the field to include cultural systems. Gadamer (1981; 1989) not only highlighted the need for historical awareness, he considered understanding to be a historical, dialectic and linguistic event. This was supported by both Annells (1996) and Pascoe (1996), who believed understanding to come from interpretations which are embedded within linguistic and cultural traditions. The constitutive nature of language is at the very heart of hermeneutic philosophy.

Hermeneutics attempts to understand people in a social context, constantly moving "from the whole to the part and back to the whole" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 117), encompassing everything in the interpretive process, from verbal and non-verbal communication to presuppositions and pre-existing meanings. Deetz (1996) proffered that the interpretivist approach offers a means to address issues of influence and impact, and tackle 'why' and 'how' questions, thus confirming its suitability to this research. Bleicher (1980) proposed hermeneutics may be treated as an underlying philosophy and a specific tool for analysis. Interpretivism may be grounded in hermeneutics, as a philosophical approach to human understanding, while as a tool for analysis it offers a way to understanding the meaning of data, while acknowledging the researcher is neither objective nor neutral regarding the research topic. "Hermeneutics demands that we proceed delicately and yet wholeheartedly, and as a result of what we study, we carry ourselves differently, and we live differently." (Moules, 2002, p. 24). Given my experience in the field of early education, and my desire to

better understand how early education teachers are positioned by examining their interpretations of their position, I found myself drawn to hermeneutics. It also lends itself to the analysis of language, an area I find fascinating.

Gadamer (1975; 1976) advocated that conversation provided a means of revealing knowledge and reducing the political power embedded in our discourse. As conversation assumes mutuality of question and answer (Gadamer, 1976; Wright, 1991) it may enhance understanding however, it cannot be predicted or controlled. Interviews, guided by hermeneutics, should pose questions designed to assist participants in engaging with the topic, with probes employed to encourage further thoughts and reflections. A verbal face-to- face interchange, the most common type of interview (Fontana and Frey, 2000), was employed using a semi-structured approach. Techniques such as probing and encouraging story-telling (Minichiello, Sullivan, Greenwood and Axford, 1999) were employed during the interview process. Open-ended questions and probes were used to obtain a rich description of the experiences, and participants were invited to elaborate and use personal examples to further enhance their engagement with the research topic.

### 3.3 Qualitative Approach

My desire to conduct naturalistic research, examining everyday life in a natural setting, led to a qualitative approach which Domegan and Fleming (2007) believed "uses 'soft' data and gets 'rich' data'" (p. 24). Qualitative research enabled me to understand people and their social worlds, as it allowed the complexities and differences of these worlds to be explored, as proffered by Philip (1998), gathering deep narrative descriptions, providing great detail regarding the perspective of participants, thus enhancing understanding of the identities of early education teachers and exploring the impact of those identities in a

Montessori context. Data sources included interviews and texts (Myers and Klien, 2011) along with data gathered from public documents (Sprinthall, 1996). I was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, engaging the situation and making sense of the multiple interpretations which exist within the multiple realities of both myself and the participants, allowing data to reveal itself naturally and without predetermined conditions. My choice of a qualitative approach is supported by McLeod's (2011) research, acknowledging that this is particularly attuned to studying how aspects of social life is constructed.

According to many authors, qualitative data is best to further our understanding of people (Domegan and Fleming, 2007; Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit, 2004; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Richardson, 2008) and, as methods of analysis improve, there is a widening use of qualitative approaches (Price, 2002). Qualitative researchers tend to concern themselves more with the process than the outcomes of their research. One method often employed to gather qualitative data pertaining to investigating real life is a case study (Woodside, 2010; Yin, 2012).

The nature of the interpretivist paradigm raises certain issues which demand to be addressed, as legitimacy and trustworthiness must be established without claims of certainty. Rolfe (2006) suggested that if reality is subjective then it is natural for interpretations of participants and researchers to differ, leading to difficulties in employing techniques such as triangulation, member checking and peer review (Angen, 2000). The intimacy of interpretivist research may facilitate unexpected discoveries, revealing secrets or even oppressive relationships, as suggested by Howe and Moses (1999). Since understanding is 'structured historically in the traditions, prejudices and institutional practices that come down to us' (Taylor, 2004, p. 59), participants may be unaware of, yet guided by, invisible ideologies.

### 3.4 Interviews

Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) described qualitative research as a multiple method in, typically including interviews. My decision to engage in interviews was informed by research conducted by Kane and O'Reilly-De Brún (2001), who proffered that they give depth and facilitate cross checking information, along with encouraging participants to expand on their answers. Given the nature of this research this approach enabled the data to exceed descriptions (Neergaard and Ulhoi, 2006) as it provided such rich detail it allowed words to reveal what was discovered (Merriam, 2007) regarding the phenomenon early education teacher identities. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) defined an interview as a conversation with structure and purpose, while Lampard and Pole (2016) described it as a verbal exchange of information where one person seeks to gather information from another. The data generated in this research worked towards building a theory regarding the impact of early education teacher identities in a Montessori context, my own understanding enhanced from being in the field, as suggested by Babbie (2016). Given that this research pertains to the early education sector it is interesting to note that qualitative studies may influence decisions within the early education sector (Lampard and Pole, 2016).

Interviews allowed participants to share their perspectives, experiences and stories with me, which Boeije (2010) suggested was akin to passing on knowledge through conversation. While many researchers differentiate between unstructured and in-depth interviews, both approaches frequently engage a broad agenda (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) and may be focused through questioning and management techniques. For the purpose of this research, semi-structured interviews provided the primary data while media articles, publications and social media posts provided secondary data, thus permitting data triangulation (Patton, 2002) therefore enhancing the validity of the findings.

A semi- structured interview, or qualitative interview (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009) is a hybrid of structured and in-depth interviews. It is guided by themes but maintains the flexibility to enable participants to speak freely and allow the researcher to probe for further information or examples to provide a deeper understanding. Rubin and Rubin (2005) created a "responsive interviewing model" (p.20), which emphasised the importance of flexibility and being able to adapt should the interview lead into unexpected areas. It is focused on obtaining a deep understanding, the questions providing a guide and the probes facilitating further clarity.

A pilot interview was conducted, which confirmed the usefulness of the proposed questions but also highlighted the need to change the order of said questions to facilitate a more natural flow during interviews. Shneiderman and Plaisant (2005) suggested interviews can be very productive in pursuing specific issues and leading to constructive suggestions. The advantages of interviewing are: emerging solutions; detailed information; few participants are required; interviews may be structured, unstructured, semi-structured or involve focus groups (Shneiderman and Plaisant, 2005). The interviews conducted for this research permitted me to tackle specific issues and generated much detailed information. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined qualitative data analysis as organising data, breaking it down and identifying patterns, themes and meanings, with Yin (2012) suggesting these patterns may highlight causal links. Interviews facilitated probing and the gathering of primary information regarding the views and opinions of participants (Kane and O'Reilly-De Brún 2001), vital in addressing the research question posed here. The interviews revealed emerging themes and patterns, particularly regarding identity and inclusion. There was also evidence of numerous struggles being experienced by the early education teachers interviewed.

Robson (2011) suggested that data are produced rather than given, with much of the data collected actually being produced during the research itself. This implies that data are specific sources of information, which may be generated in a variety of way depending on the research question, methodology and methods employed. When conducting interviews, consideration must be given to what it is that turns the interview into data rather than simply a conversation (Mason, 2002). Robson (2011) described qualitative data as an "attractive nuisance", the attractive aspect being provided by rich narratives while the nuisance aspects refers to the potential difficulties regarding both generating and analysing this type of data. Robson (2009) highlighted the importance of writing up notes and transcribing information as soon as possible following interviews, although Mason (2002) believed there is no translation for some verbal utterances, thus even the provision of transcripts should not be deemed an objective record of interviews.

### 3.5 Participants

Participants were accessed using the Dublin City Childcare Committee (DCCC), as they have 377 school memberships. While it was originally hoped that members could be contacted by the DCCC via email, new GDPR laws meant that this was no longer possible therefore information was shared with members in attendance at training events. While this reduced the number of potential participants it still facilitated access to a large number of people, thus suited the requirements of this research. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique (Patton, 2002), meaning theoretically informed decisions were used to identify participants deemed to hold information relating to the research topic (Silverman, 2001). While it was hoped to engage participants from various backgrounds and educational routes the only requirements for participation were employment in the early education sector and willingness to share and discuss experiences relating to this research.

Providing information regarding my research via DCCC training enabled me to establish direct contact with those schools willing to participate in my research. Once contact was established a brief questionnaire was provided, to be completed by all teachers interested in participating. While it was hoped that male participants may be included in this research a complete lack of male respondents made it impossible to explore early education teacher identity from a male perspective. This served to highlight the natural bias present in early education regarding gender, as the workforce is predominately female.

As DCCC served as the institutional resource, this research formed a local knowledge study, based on the experiences of those working in Dublin. The research explored the impact of teacher identities on professional practice regarding inclusion, with 12 participants being engaged across the same time frame, commencing in June 2018. A new inclusion policy was introduced from September 2017, therefore conducting interviews in June 2018 enabled participants to engage in one full academic year under this new inclusion policy, facilitating first-hand experience and knowledge of inclusion.

All interviews were framed by a briefing and debriefing, as recommended by Kvale and Brinkman (2009). All interviews took place individually. An introductory letter was sent via email prior to interview, containing information regarding the research. Upon meeting, the participant was given a brief explanation regarding the aim of the interview and its confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary nature. A consent form was provided for both myself and the participant to sign and the interviews were recorded with permission from the participants. Interviews were semi-structured using open-ended questions under the headings: background; ECCE; inclusion; perceptions and practice; and professional. The rich data generated enhanced the understanding of teacher identity, while a critical examination of

of data permitted the assignment of value to interpretations.

Participants involved in this research were all employed in the early education sector at the time of their participation. Details regarding their qualifications, experience and current role is presented in Table 1. As noted below, 3 of these participants have now left the sector, with another participant planning to leave the sector in favour of primary.

**Table 1: Participant Information**

| Participant Information | Level of qualification | Number of years in the sector | Role within setting | Interview/Questionnaire |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| BJ* | MEd level 9 | 11 | Manager | Interview |
| RS | BA level 8 | 8 | Montessori teacher | Interview |
| DB | Diploma level 5 | 23 | Montessori teacher/manager/owner | Interview |
| TT | Diploma level 5 | 4 | Play Group teacher | Interview |
| AS | Diploma level 6 | 8 | Montessori teacher | Interview |
| HM | Diploma level 5 | 24 | Manager | Questionnaire |
| JS* | Diploma Level 6 | 12 | Montessori teacher | Questionnaire |
| PX* | Diploma level 6 | 8 | Play group teacher/ Inclusion officer | Questionnaire |
| EV | MEd level 9 | 20 | Montessori teacher | Interview |

*No longer working in an early education school service

### 3.6 Ethical Issues

The ethical dimension of research requires careful consideration as this ensures that research is conducted properly but it may add constraints to the approach (Lampard and Pole, 2016). This is particularly relevant when conducting qualitative research, as it involves researching the private lives of participants and placing this information in the public domain (Birch et al, 2002). Every attempt must be made to address all possible ethical concerns prior to commencing research and ethical awareness should continue right through to the production of the final report (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). When seeking consent from participants it is vital to ensure participation is voluntary and the participants are provided with, and fully understand, all information regarding the research and how it will be conducted. Patton (2002) suggested that informed consent also ensures confidentiality on the part of the participants. Data gathered had to be securely stored and accessed only by myself and those identified in and approved by the consent form.

Ethical approval for fieldwork was granted by the University of Birmingham. This consent was granted based on a detailed application, which set out how participants would be provided with, and fully understand, information regarding the research and how it would be conducted, and information regarding those with access to data gathered, namely myself and my supervisor. Assurances were given regarding anonymity, which was safe-guarded by the use of pseudonyms throughout the writing process and will feature in any future publication. All participants were involved in the research voluntarily and they were made fully aware of their right to withdraw from the research at any time and without consequence. Participants had the right to discontinue their participation at any time during the research without penalty and were offered the opportunity to request updates throughout the research process for the duration of their participation.

### 3.7 Concerns and Limitations

In interpreting the data generated, it is necessary for the researcher to identify their own position, acknowledging their role as an active agent. These concerns were addressed with the provision of a biography, being explicit regarding class, gender, ethnicity, commitments and ideas, thus enabling readers to identify my position and any role that it may play in interpretation of data. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) identified reliability as pertaining to the trustworthiness of research finding, with one way of addressing this issue being triangulation (Silverman, 2010). MacNaughton et al (2001) proposed providing triangulation by generating data from multiple sources, adding to the validity of findings. Furthermore, they believed triangulation helped attain rich data which in turn reduced bias. Lampard and Pole (2016) reported triangulation also highlighted interesting contradictions, furthering the reliability and trustworthiness of findings, as it ensures cautious analysis and forces the researcher to consider alternative interpretations.

This research sought to produce trustworthy knowledge of interpretations of the impact of early education teacher identities in a Montessori context, while acknowledging that qualitative research operates in a different domain and with a different agenda (Parker, 2003). The four components of trustworthiness, as developed by Lincoln and Guba (1986) and Guba and Lincoln (2005) were considered throughout this research. Credibility was initially established by selecting participants based upon criteria relevant to the research question and continued by analysing data as pertinent to the research question. Triangulation was methodological in nature as it allowed for numerous data generating and gathering techniques, such as interviews, policy analysis and media analysis. The richness of data enhanced transferability, as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1986) while a detailed explanation of the research process enhanced dependability.

The transcription of interviews provided the first step in data analysis as this enabled me to become familiar with the interview content, as proffered by Miles and Huberman (1984) and Kvale and Brinkman (2009). All identifying data was omitted and coding was applied. Guided by the research question, data were dismantled, segmented and reassembled in order to identify meaning (Boeije, 2000), with consistency or lack of consistency acknowledged, and both expected and unexpected themes and sub-themes presented, furthering validity. Reflective vignettes from participants were also included to help address potential bias, providing the reader with unedited glimpses of the world as seen by participants.

The use of multiple sources and multiple methods of data generation required careful data management to enable easy retrieval of data (Boeije, 2010) and, as the data generated were qualitative and primarily text-based, data storage, data transcription and data cleaning were given consideration. Once gathered, data were stored carefully, filing and indexing information, including a record of when data were collected and the source through which they were gathered. This is particularly important when gathering qualitative data, as many approaches require flexibility and often the analysis may begin prior to all data being gathered, which may result in a need to adjust or even transform the dataset, especially given that the dataset itself is defined by and intertwined with the analysis in which I am engaged. BEAR data share was used to assist with the storage of data and Microsoft Word Document Search was used to assist with the analysis of data. Interpretation plays a key role when analysing qualitative data, thus it must be conducted in a systematic and transparent manner. Taking this approach enabled the findings to accurately reflect reality (McLeod, 2011).

The analyses of data began by identifying key themes and patterns dependent on processes of coding, as recommended by Coffey and Atkinson (1996). Coding initially organised data into categories, as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1984), enabling labels to

be assigned to meaningful descriptive information. The patterns identified later provided me with a pathway through the data (Dey, 1993). All qualitative data which were converted into a form of quantitative data, such as word counts based on interviews, provided raw data, with the quantitative data becoming the dataset.

### 3.8 Theory and Analysis

Edge and Richards (1998) reported interpretivist researchers reveal their beliefs when establishing their research question and how they propose conducting their research and analysis their data. They accept that it is impossible for knowledge to be value-free, therefore they must be explicit regarding their agenda and value system. Research paradigms and methodologies are independent but should complement each other, thus enhancing research. The interpretivist paradigm does not demand qualitative research; this depends on the underpinning philosophical assumptions of the researcher. Qualitative research methods may fit any paradigm and are therefore independent of the underpinning philosophy. For the purpose of this research, to examine the identities of early education teachers in a Montessori context, the interpretivist paradigm offered a strong research platform, with hermeneutics providing the underpinning philosophy and multiple case studies generating qualitative data. As this research addresses identity, it is situated in the theoretical framework of Althusser's (1971) theory of interpellation, acknowledging the influence of societal views on the professional identity of teachers. As the interpretation of data so rich and complex was open to bias on behalf of myself (Cornford and Smithson, 2005), it was analysed using Discourse Analysis (DA), guided by the works of Foucault (1975), Fairclough (1995) and Ball (1993). Both Fairclough and Ball's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) facilitated the examination of specific language details while Foucault's work provided the frame in which to explore context and historically situate the data generated.

### 3.9 Interpellation

Althusser developed his thinking on the subject of interpellation by engaging with and rethinking Marxist philosophy and building on the work of Lacan (1971) to develop his understanding of ideology. Rather than the Marxist understanding, which suggests ideology is a "false consciousness", a false understanding of how the world functions, Althusser relates to Lacan's understanding of "reality", the world as we construct it around us once symbolic order is established. He also supports Lacan's notion regarding our reliance on language, concluding this reliance makes it impossible to discover what Lenin referred to as the real conditions of existence (cited in Jameson and Brewster, 2001), although by adopting a stringent scientific approach to society, and engaging in the complex process of recognition, we may discover the ways in which we are inscribed in ideology. He suggests ideology does not reflect the real world, rather it represents our imaginary relationship to the real world, following Lacan's understanding of imaginary order. This theory is highly relevant in relation to this research, especially considering the language of the early education sector, and the multiple identities assigned to early education teachers. After all, teachers' self-perception related to their identity as professionals directly alter their development as well as their ability to deal with a variety of situations in and out of the classroom (Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt, 2000).

Clearly the concept of "teacher" as a professional identity is fraught with many unresolved issues. Indeed, it offers a key to examine how ideology, and our relationship with ideology, may influence the perception of early education teachers and their societal value, thus impacting on their ability to implement inclusion. Research indicates that the ways teachers view themselves as professionals determines to a great extent how well they do as teachers, how long they stay in the profession, and how they feel about themselves as teachers in the classroom (Ingersoll, 2002; Hong, 2010; Mahan, 2010). As a result of our reliance on language to

establish our reality, we are always situated within ideology, with different ideologies representing our different social and imaginary realities rather than what is "real". Althusser also suggests that ideology is manifested through actions, somewhat relating to Pascal's (cited in Wolfe, 1998) proposal that if you kneel down and pray you will become a believer, thus our very interactions with society ensures we are subjects of that society. Indeed, traces of this thinking regarding ideology may have influenced Butler's (1997) understanding of performativity. Althusser uses the mirror stage to consider how ideology reflects both the subject and "other", and the social meaning conveyed through the imagined relationship between the person and their existence, suggesting this allows the individual to recognise themselves as an autonomous subject. Ideology hails individuals as subjects, thus individuals are always already identified as subjects by ideology.

Althusser uses the term interpellation (Balibar and Brewster, 1972), to describe a process in which individuals encounter their cultural values and internalise them, taking them as their own values and thus permitting them to have an effect on their lives. This process works on the premise that we are presented with ideas to accept, or decline, thus placing us in a certain relationship with "power" based on ideologies. What he is suggesting is that ideologies hail, or address, people and offer them an identity. As these identities are everywhere, some even being assigned by culture, we are encouraged to accept them in an invisible yet consensual process, believing the values and identity offered reflect a logical and obvious choice. We believe them to be our own. Ideologies thus both construct our identities and place them within society. We are hailed, or interpellated, into subject positions, therefore the process of identification creates identity. We become what we are identified as being.

Once interpellated, the consistency principle leads us towards a cycle where we invest, bonding our identity to the subject position and underlying ideology. Our identity is viewed in relation to "other", an ultimate form of authority. If we are defined by "other" we recognise ourselves as a reflection of "other", but this requires subjugation as to deny the existence of "other" is to deny our own existence. We become trapped within the ideology and our given ideological positions. We are, always, ensnared in the process through which we acknowledge, voluntarily, our hail, thus giving validity to the ideology of society, therefore becoming subjects. Considering this, can we ever really believe that there exists the autonomous, coherent and actualised human subject? Or is this simply an illusion, constructed for the benefit of capitalism and liberal humanism, under the guise of ideology? We, possibly from the very beginning of our existence, are immersed in social structures and discourses which influence our identity. Does this not raise the issue of misrecognition? Can we ever really discover our own true identity amidst the subterfuge of ideology? Does "self" even exist? This may be the result of the sheer pervasiveness of ideology, its ability to interpellate us into subjects, through its very lack of recognition, never professing to be ideology, merely inviting us to believe in what is "obvious", "logical" and "true".

Whilst Althusser presents a temporal form of interpellation (Dolar, 1993), we become subjects and thus enter ideology, he also stresses that we become subjects even prior to birth. This is explained in a way that is reminiscent of Lacan's "Name-of-the-Father" (Sheridan, 1980), acknowledging familial ideologies and expectation which exist for a child before the child is born. It seems that we are "willing" subjects, accepting ideology as our reality, thus hegemony does not require Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA), enforced by fear of the consequences of non-conformity and the threat of retribution, instead depending on Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) to instill ideology in its subjects. While the idea of RSA may be seen as

an extension of the Marxist "Theory of the State" (Gamble, Marsh and Tant, 2005) Althusser's ISA (Balibar, Bidet and Goshgarian, 2014) places control of power in ideologies rather than in the hands of the government or police, recognising the persuasive powers of, in particular, religion, morality and education. This is not a rejection of Marx, merely the result of Althusser's exploration of ideology. Certainly, we are surrounded by metaphorical vehicles of ISA, in the form of family, religion and media and, while these forms may appear disparate, they are unified by a common culture, the very ideology adopted by society, generally influenced by the views of the ruling class. Of course, difficulty in maintaining control over individuals often creates a struggle for hegemony, therefore the educational system plays a significant role in society and the establishment of ideology.

Instilling ideology throughout our interactions with the educational system may be the greatest way in which we can ensure a cyclical reproduction of current ideology, providing us with the attitudes, values and behaviours desired by society, but to maintain the power wielded by the educational system, it is essential to ensure teachers are fully invested in the ideology being presented. Indeed, Althusser goes so far as to use the word "hero" to describe those teachers who find ways to teach outside or even against the ideology (Jameson and Brewster, 2001).

While Althusser's influence is evident in the work of others, some question the appearance of his subject, and what existed before it was created. Barrett (1988) and Elliot (1998) also suggest he fails to acknowledge the possibility of misrecognition, as described by Lacan as misunderstanding or "méconnaissance". Butler's critical engagement with Althusser led her to a different understanding of interpellation, where language brings about the emergence of the subject, the hail animating the subject into existence, recognition bringing about constitution. Butler suggests, despite the lack of a pre-existing subject, there is a guilt

and compulsion which compels us to respond to the interpellative hail, thus acknowledging our own subjectivity and therefore permitting ourselves to be punished by the same laws which constitute us (White, 1998; Lampert, 2015). Althusser, however, suggests we are already an enactment of power-ideology, thus already the principle of our own subjection. If we, as subjects, are already the embodiment of the field of society-power-ideology, we cannot be compelled by an external force to become subjects. Althusser proposes that we are not born as a subject, we automatically, though not freely, become a subject, by the sovereign call of law, therefore, it follows that to be conscious, to be constrained and to be subject are merely different ways of expressing the same thing. Butler does not agree with this argument, proposing that if the subject is compelled to respond to a command as a result of living with feelings of guilt, we must then question who feels guilty. According to Althusser (Strathausen, 1994), this "who" cannot be the subject, as he is not conscious of this feeling of guilt and he does not exist prior to responding to the hail which thus makes him a subject. So, Butler raises questions regarding who is being hailed, and it is here that we return to what may be considered "subject". This subject appears under the auspices of society, representing ideology, thus ideology rules over the process of subjection, this process of subjection rediscovers "subject", directing it based on the interests of society. The subject is created by its very subjection, and through this subjection we discover will, and thus the capacity to resist. While Butler believes the automatism of responding to the hail put forward by Althusser reveals the subordination of the subject, some would suggest Althusser provides us with insight not only regarding resisting but opposing the dominant ideology.

Identity is certainly evident from an early age as it relates to concepts such as authority and gender (Montag, et. al. 1995; Drudy, 2008). We are interpellated using ISA, most effective in subtle form, surrounding us and influencing us yet remaining virtually invisible. We are told what is expected of us based on gender by a family that we instinctively trust, shown how to behave by a society we have inherently placed our faith in, and we are told how to "be" by a

governing power which we believe in, often unquestioningly accepting they are engaged in "good" work for our benefit. We give little or no thought to our interpellation, thus accepting the identity and place in society which we are "offered". We are simply led to "natural" and "obvious" conclusions regarding the presiding ideology of our society, conditioned to this way of thinking, almost from the point of conception it would seem. Teachers would appear to be interpellated and ultimately responsible for implementing the decisions of higher authorities. This raises questions regarding their autonomy and, at the same time, their dependency on higher authorities in giving both direction and value to their professional identities.

Althusser offered ideology as a system of representations which hides true relations by constructing imaginary relations between people and social formation (Althusser, 1971), thus providing a skewed view of social relations. He linked the subject closely to ideology, the subject becoming ideological through interpellation, the discourse defining the individual. Interpellation is the process by which language, or discourse, constructs a social position for individuals and, by accepting their given role, the subject becomes affiliated with the position and becomes an ideological subject, often influenced by the ideological state apparatus, such as the mass media and, in these current times, social media. Discursive practices contribute to the production and reproduction of unequal relations of power between social groups, cementing the ideologically desired effect. Interestingly, Althusser assumed subjects always accepted their given positions, without opportunity for resistance, yet social media may provide a platform for contradiction and a space for a discourse of discontentment. As an early education teacher, I was instantly drawn to the theory of interpellation as it offered credence to the influence of society in positioning early education teachers. Indeed, this societal action far exceeding the "hail" of interpellation, further embedding the hail throughout policy and discourse is an attempt to legitimise this positioning through language.

### 3.10 Discourse

Discourse refers to language. According to Van Leeuwen (2008), discourse can evaluate, justify, or even ascribe purpose, while discourse analysis can help people understand why people interact the way they do with each other (Jones, 2012). It is possible to construct a particular understanding based on language and how it is used, with Gill (1996) suggesting that discourse may be organised for the purpose of persuasion. Indeed, language is not neutral (Grillo, 2005) and may be used, explicitly or implicitly, to convey attitude, authority or intention (Ball, 2011). Discourses actively contribute to the construction of our knowledge and our social world (McGhee, 2001; Seale, 1998), with discourse analysis focusing on investigating language rather than accepting it as neutral (Cole, 1995; Fairclough, 1992; Willig, 1999). Discourse analysis is not seeking to identify "truths", but is instead striving to understand how discourse is used to present various forms of reality. Discourse analysis is a flexible term, greatly dependent on the particular framework being employed by the researcher. In relation to this research, discourse analysis facilitates the identification of not just whose ideas are being validated, but whose ideas are not being validated (Ball, 2011). It also highlights gaps in discourse in order to identify areas for potential change (Fairclough, 2001), uncovering how the meaning of language translates into social reality (Wodak and Meyer, 2002; Hardy, Harley and Philips, 2004). Discourse is socially constructed to represent reality, it is not an exact copy. It constructs knowledge, therefore it governs by producing categories of knowledge and assembling texts, establishing what it is and is not possible to talk about. It is in this way that it simultaneously produces power and knowledge. Discourse has the capacity to define subjects, both framing and positioning them, offering them an ideological sense of both who it is possible for them to be and what it is possible for them to do, thus creating limits within discourse. By historicised deconstruction, it is possible to examine discourse and reveal the reasons for certain lines of thinking to be accepted while

others are marginalised.

By viewing discourse from a distance, it becomes possible to make visible the seemingly invisible, to uncover that which is hidden, in the case of this research, to explore both the given and omitted identities of early education teachers.

### 3.11 Foucault

Discourse constituted a central element of Foucault's work. He believed discourse to be a socially constructed representation of reality, historically contingent and capable of producing knowledge and meaning while providing governance, thus reproducing both knowledge and power simultaneously. He suggested discourse to be material in its effect, controlling who people could be and what they could do, thereby framing and positioning subjects. He believed discourse facilitated the organisation of knowledge to structure social relations and ensure the acceptance of a particular discourse as social fact, the discourse structurally connected to the knowledge of the relevant historical period. The reiteration of a discourse throughout society assigns particular meaning to statements which is conductive to the political agenda which underlies its production however, discourse manages to conceal both its ability to assign meaning and its political motivations. In reproducing a particular assigned meaning, Foucault proffered discourse was capable of appearing objective and marginalising alternative ways of thinking or eliminate meaning which may challenge the discourse offered. The reiteration of discourse serves to normalise and homogenise it, even for those dominated by the discourse. It essentially creates a reality and becomes a technique of discipline and control, showing opposing discourses as deviant. Gill (1996) described Foucault's concept of discourse as 'a set of ideas and practices with particular conditions of existence, which are more or less institutionalised, but which may only be partially understood by those they encompass' (p.403). This holds relevance for this research as prevailing discourses impact on professional identities

(Tucker, 2004) and teacher identity is central to their practice and commitment to the profession (Day, Elliot and Kington, 2005; Burn, 2007). Language is rarely neutral (Grillo, 2005) and has the ability to impact on the reader simply by being present (Wodak and Meyer, 2002).

The contribution of Foucault (1961; 1969; 1981), both theoretical and empirical, was central to the development of discourse analysis, with discourse theory forming part of his archaeology, examining the rules which permit particular statements to be recognised as true during specific eras in history. He wished to investigate the structure of regimes of knowledge, believing they determined what constituted truth through discursive construction. He also acknowledged silences within discourse, finding it intriguing that countless statements are never uttered as discourse has the capacity to limit what it is possible to say.

Through his genealogy, Foucault developed a theory of power/knowledge, suggesting power is spread across various social practices and should not be viewed as exclusively oppressive but rather capable of being productive, constituting discourse, knowledge and subjectivities. It is through power that our social world is produced however, power is also responsible for the way in which the social world is talked about thus power is simultaneously a productive and constraining force. By pairing power and knowledge, Foucault provided a link between power and discourse, discourse contributing to producing the subjects we are and the objects we can have knowledge of, inclusive of ourselves as subjects. Since we cannot speak from outside discourse we cannot avoid or escape representation, thus power creates subjects. The subject is decentred, created in discourse, 'the individual self becomes a medium for the culture and its language' (Kvale, 1992, p.36).

He also provided a link between truth and power, adamant that truth is embedded and produced by systems of power, which brings us to 'truth effects'. Given the notion that truth is unattainable, we must instead investigate how effects of truth are created in discourse, examining the way in which discourses are constructed to give the impression that they represent a true reflection of reality. Wetherell (1998) recommended analysing practices, examining how people's account of themselves, experiences and events are accepted as real and stable, and how alternative accounts are shown to be false (Potter, 1998). Power and knowledge, according to Foucault, are not external to each other, they function in a mutually generative manner across history. He did not seek to explain one in terms of the other, he wished to examine the relations between them, considering specific discursive formation bearing in mind its history and its position in the context of power, thus enabling him to evaluate its claim to represent true reality.

It is possible to explore regimes of power through historical deconstruction of discourse, examining why and how certain ideas came to be accepted as truths while others were rejected or marginalised, unpacking and destabilising accepted meanings. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis may be used to analyse the effects of power and reveal ways in which dominant discourse is capable of oppressing certain realities. For the purpose of this research, FDA tackles certain questions pertaining to the identities of early education teachers, and the impact of these identities in a Montessori context, in order to access information and improve understanding. I view this as essential in examining the impact of dominant discourse on early education teachers in Ireland.

The core question should seek to identify exactly what is being presented as truth, examining how this truth is constructed and considering both the evidence provided and that which is omitted. It must also give consideration to both the foreground and background, what

is problematized and what is not, and what alternative meanings are being ignored. Given the multiple identities assigned to early education teachers, and the focus firmly place on the care aspect of their work, it is crucial that this research considers what is being addressed within discourse, and what is omitted.

Once gathered, this information will provide the platform from which to investigate the interests being served by the discourse and those which are not, along with questioning how this situation has arisen. FDA may also expose the identities, actions and practices offered as possible, desirable or required by the dominant discourse, and those made impossible, excluded or deemed deviant. It is a useful tool with which to analyse data collected during qualitative interviews, particularly as it seeks to situate the data, giving weight to the social and political climate, while tracing the power paths leading to and from the discourse presented.

Foucault (1980) suggested that power may be enacted subtly in everyday life rather than exercised obviously in abusive acts by dominant members of society. He also believed discourses consist of knowledge which systematically creates and reproduces particular social ideologies (Hall, 2001), controlling people in ways that appear neutral (Seale, 1998). Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) offers a particular critical approach as opposed to encasing researchers in a single theoretical framework, perhaps a result of Foucault's own dislike of prescription (Foucault, 1994). This sometimes leads to the perception of FDA as inaccessible and dangerous (O'Farrell, 1989). In fact, Foucault's reluctance to clearly state a particular research method is itself a source of investigation (Tamnoukou, 1999; Harwood, 2000). FDA will enable me to recognise the possible existence of many hybrid versions of reality, its distinguishing feature being its ability to permit contrasting positioning of

subjectivity. FDA is based on the theories of Foucault and concerns itself with societal power relationships as expressed through language and practice, examining how the world is affected by sources of power. Weedon (1987) described it as more than a way of thinking and producing meaning, it is a way of constituting the conscious, subconscious and emotional lives of those being governed.

FDA allows for the view that society is constructed, through language, and suggests it reflects the existing societal power relations. Importantly, it notes that discourse is culturally constructed to represent reality rather than being a copy of reality. It may be used to analyse how individuals view the world regarding themselves, politics and ideology. Foucault (1972) viewed a statement as a function rather than a linguistic structure, extracting the statement from what is presented in the discourse (Deleuze, 1988), thus FDA facilitates the recognition of discourse as statements which are systematically organised, creating space for statements and governing what can and cannot be said. This enables discourse to simultaneously produce both knowledge and power, circulating it through society, thus knowledge and power are entwined. Using FDA revealed multiple agendas in the early education sector leaving much ambiguity, affirming Ball and Bowe's (1992) suggestion that interpretation can be increasingly difficult when several agendas are being covered. It also revealed how policies claim to speak with authority (Ball, 2011), laying claim to the credibility which plays a key role in all aspects of society. FDA further revealed how "truths" presented in policies idealise solutions to problems, confirming Gill's (1996) idea that discourse is organised to be persuasive.

Discourse was key to analysing both self-perceptions and societal perceptions in this research. Foucault (1971) describes discourse as moving back and forth, reflecting and constructing the social world of those who use or are situated in it, while Hastings (1998) suggests detailed aspects of language to be of ideological significance. Language explored

through a social framework both constitutes and challenges social relations, making it a highly complex phenomenon. It is vital to provide information regarding context as this is pivotal to understanding the social relations in which discourse is embedded. By examining specific instances of language, it becomes possible to identify the social relations they reflect or reproduce, and to understand the social context in which they are embedded. In the field of education, researchers often blend Discourse Analysis with other methods used to generate qualitative data, such as interviews and observations (Rogers et al, 2005), enhancing validity of findings, as was the case for this research.

While Foucault is often cited as an influence on CDA it has also been influenced by such areas as linguistics and social sciences. Foucault significantly influenced post-structuralist thought, however, FDA was not developed by Foucault, developed instead following his death, an enactment of his ideas as interpreted by others. While it focuses mainly on how power governs societal experiences and interactions through discourse, there is room for much debate regarding how this is achieved. In fact, Diaz-Bone et al (2007) suggests the structure of FDA is not an internationally integrated field; approaches are found embedded in many different national histories and situations. The weight FDA gives to power and dominance makes van Dijk's (2009) description of CDA particularly interesting, suggesting it is a study of the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted through discourse. Clearly Foucault's influence is present, as it is in the work of many CDA researchers, however not all CDA researchers will explicitly use Foucault, therefore it can be said that while FDA may even be considered a form of CDA not all CDA can be considered FDA.

Schegloff (1997) suggests that conversation analysis should be based on a desire to better understand everyday interaction and the negotiation of identities and, while researchers may be unable to completely avoid preconceived ideas, they should attempt to ground their analysis in the interaction, focusing on what appears relevant to participants. This notion, alongside Potter's (1998) suggestion that features of participants, such as ethnicity and background, are not separable and enable the researcher to view social interactions as evidence of the way in which social phenomena are shaped. Habermas (1974) professes language to be the medium of domination and social force, which supported the decision to engage FDA as a means to explore the professional identities of early education teachers. As this research focused on the impact of identities, Foucault's way of deconstructing the social processes of meaning and his ability to examine how people become subjects proved very useful. However, while he had an analytical approach to the construction of knowledge he did not provide a methodological template or particular method of analysis, insisting he had not produced a complete theory, merely "tools" to be employed as seen fit by those wishing to use them. In this research, FDA was deployed from the theoretical framework of interpellation, enabling exploration of the impact of societal perceptions on the professional identities of early education teachers.

By engaging in FDA, the researcher must address particular issues, beginning with the fundamental question of what is being presented as a truth or norm; how it is constructed; what evidence is included and excluded; what is in the foreground and background; what is made problematic and what is not; what alternatives are ignored; what is joined and what is separated; what interests are being mobilised and served and what are not; how has this occurred; what identities, actions and practices are made possible and desirable through this thinking; what is not permitted; and what is normalised and what is not. The processes of

reiteration normalises and homogenises discourse, reaffirming meanings even for those it dominates. By affixing meaning discourse becomes a technique of control, proffering that which does not fix the model of accepted knowledge must be deviant, therefore reinforcing conformity. When analysing discourse, the researcher must seek to unfix and destabilise meanings, revealing the ways in which the dominant discourse excludes and oppresses alternative realities regarding how power should be exercised, dismissing these claims with no regard for their validity. FDA tracks the changes and challenges in discourse historically and examines how this influences the creation and maintenance of power. Influenced by the work of Foucault and Willig, FDA was conducted using the following steps:

- Discursive Constructions: highlights the ways in which discursive objects are constructed in text both implicitly and explicitly
- Discourses: locates the various discursive constructions of the object within wider discourse
- Action Orientation: questions action orientation of text (function and gain)
- Positionings: identifies the subject positions offered by the discursive object
- Practice: explores the ways in which construction and positioning can limit what can be said
- Subjectivity: examines the relationship between discourse and subjectivity (seeing the world and being in the world)

### 3.12 The FDA route to interpellation

People may use language and literacy to position both themselves and each other to accomplish social goals (Scribner, 1984). We can attempt to influence each other through the medium of language (Johnston, 2004), however, Fairclough (1995) opined that what is absent from text is often significant. When considering the early education sector, the word “teacher” remains ominously absent, with many early education teachers experiencing an identity crisis

amidst a plethora of alternative terms: childcare workers; crèche workers; and the early education and care workforce. I am reminded of Ball's (1991) suggestion that rather than us speaking discourse, it is discourse which speaks us. Given Orellana's (2007) proposal that language may be used as a social tool and play an important role in the development of identities, does language play a part in the current segregation of teachers in Ireland? Côté and Levine (2002) researched the theory of valued identities having identity capital, yet teacher capital is very much determined by the age bracket of the children they teach. While Gee (2000) argued that all people have multiple identities connected not only to the kind of person they are, but also by how society perceives them, it is my view that we are defined by our various roles in life, whether that is "wife", "dad", "librarian" or "teacher". We must consider how we come to be the "self" defined by our roles and who defines these roles within our society. Interpellation is a form of recognition based on the elements of identity believed to be of greatest value and significance by society (Althusser, 1971).

Data were viewed through a Foucauldian lens, with FDA used to track the changes and challenges in discourse historically and examine how these influenced the creation and maintenance of power. This revealed the interpellation of early education teachers in Ireland based on current ideology. By engaging in FDA, employing Foucault's conceptual tools enabled the data to be read in terms of structural components, identifying many factors in the construction of identity and revealing it as neither the passive reproduction of dominant ideologies or free will, rather it exists based on a constant interplay of both, which had significant implications for my research.

### 3.13 Newspaper Articles, Interviews, Questionnaires and Social Media

By examining historical discourse, it is possible to identify continuities and discontinuities and the social context in which certain knowledge is presented as desirable. By historically deconstructing discourse it is possible to examine why some views of society are accepted as "truths" while some remain marginalised. Diamond and Quinby (1988) described this as power circulating in the social world and attaching to theories of domination, although fragmented relations of power imply fragmented resistance to the dominant power. Power exists throughout the social world and is omnipresent, strategically exercised even in micro level social relationships.

To establish context, a selection of articles were chosen from The Journal and The Irish Times newspaper articles on early childhood care and education published during the five year period 2013 and 2017. The Journal and The Irish Times were selected for reliability of reporting. The starting point of 2013 was selected as this was the year prior to the Prime Time expose which pushed the Government of Ireland to address ongoing issues within the early education sector. In 2017, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone, called for those working in early education to join a union. The ramifications of this advice continue to develop at the time of research (2018) thus this was chosen as the end point. The articles selected were chosen based on the aspects of the early years sector addressed in each, topics which were considered seminal to this research: Article 1 addressed funding, which it described as "as drop in the ocean"; Article 2 raised the question of workforce "value"; Article 3 addressed the "staffing crisis"; and Article 4 proffered the notion that "If we want better people working in childcare, we need better working terms.

In an attempt to uncover how early education teachers view themselves and the value which they assign to their role, I turned to social media, exploring the Twitter feed for SIPTU's Big Start Campaign. The social media data proved interesting with regard to Foucault's theories of the possible existence of many hybrid versions of reality, permitting contrasting positioning of subjectivity.

Foucault (1972) suggests that once a discourse is established it then disperses throughout society. He considers power a key aspect of discourse, his "technologies" of power including sovereign and disciplinary power, maintained through the normalisation of discourse and a system of surveillance. However, FDA also allows for the monitoring of challenges, discontinuity, dispersion and limits of discourse; this in turn helps locate challenges and the reasons for them, both who and what purpose they serve. It identifies statements and considers their historical path, highlighting both their creation and their maintenance. This historical tracking is coupled with the idea of power for interpretation. These aspects of FDA allowed me to identify the ongoing power struggle between early education teachers and those charged with creating early education policies, revealing policy as being in direct conflict with the interests of early education teachers. It also helped to reveal how ideological discourse locates, and indeed interpellates (Althusser, 1971), early education teachers. If, as Foucault suggests, discourse defines subjects, dictating who and what it is possible to be and do, then this field offers a range of modes of subjectivity, but does not include "teacher" and contains limited the use of "professional" by those in "power" at policy level.

# Chapter 4: Data and Analysis

This chapter presents data and analysis of 4 newspaper articles. It then presents data and analysis of interviews and questionnaires of participants, used to identify themes which are discussed in Chapter 5. Information is presented in tables as FDA.

## 4.1 Introduction

For a number of years now Ireland's early education sector has found itself under the media spotlight. There is an ongoing debate regarding access, quality and affordability. Currently, there is a call for professionalisation of the early education sector featured in many academic publications, social media and amongst those working in the sector. There are contrasting views of this proposed professionalisation: improved terms and condition of employment; being recognised and valued as a professional; training and qualifications; and being professional in practice. While contrasting, these views are certainly not conflicting as professionalisation is "about all of these things and more…professionalisation, quality and best outcomes for children are interrelated." (Moloney and McKenna, 2017, p.3). Society values professional identities (Lawton, 1996) and a professional identity may contribute to early education teachers feeling valued in a time when they currently feel "dispirited and disenfranchised" (Moloney and McKenna, 2017, p.4). However, professionalisation is fraught with difficulties, including the issue of mandatory minimum qualifications falling short of the training associated with being a professional, the numerous recognised qualifications, which currently exceeds 500, and the overall fragmentation of the sector (Moloney and McKenna, 2017, p.4). Despite these difficulties, it seems professionalisation is beginning and early education teachers in Ireland are "now at the very cusp of becoming a professional with the privileges and challenges that come with it." (Schonfeld, Kiernan and Walsh, 2004, p. 8).

### 4.2.1 Article 1 Background

Article 1 (Appendix 3) appeared in The Journal on July 4th, 2013. The 520 word article was written by Aoife Barry, a news reporter for The Journal, under the title, "€2.75m childcare grants a 'drop in the ocean' of investment needed." It was published at a time when the early education sector in Ireland was experiencing the aftermath of a damning Prime Time report into the sector. The government found themselves under pressure to improve the quality of early education services and committed themselves to investment in the form of grant money to improve facilities. Article 1 refers to the second grant instalment.

### 4.2.2 Article 1 Analysis

The article is essentially presented in two sections, the first showing the government's perspective and the second showing the perspective of Early Childhood Ireland. Both sections are given similar text space, both are presented under subheadings, which appear in bold font, and both contain quotes which are made more eye-catching by being placed on a light blue background. In the first section, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs presents her view of the grant investment. In doing so she refers to the Government of Ireland, Pobal and research conducted on behalf of the Government of Ireland, perhaps in an attempt to establish credibility. Funding is mentioned twice and a bullet point list highlights what the investment is aimed towards achieving. She uses "I", "my" and "the government", making it very clear whom she is representing. The use of words such as "committed", "safe", "ongoing" and "encourage" create a very positive reading experience, providing a sense of pro-active Government initiatives and a sense of long term dedication to the improvement of early education services, ensuring "critical work" may take place and offering this, at least in part, as the solution to "startling statistics" regarding the childhood obesity epidemic. In the second section, the Chief Operations Officer of Early Childhood Ireland presents a contrasting view of the grant investment. She quickly reminds readers that this grant is not "new", simply a

"continuum" of previously announced funding. She refers to Prime Time and points out that the Irish investment in Early Education is below the European average, suggesting Ireland "lags behind". She calls for legislation reform and refers to the funding as "a drop in the ocean" of what she calls "necessary investment". She uses words such as "we" and "the sector", suggesting that the views presented are not just her own views, but represent a larger group of people. The picture is painted even more darkly when she suggests that the Government are "ring-fencing" funding to "ensure minimal qualifications in the sector", suggesting qualifications should be incentivised and a learner fund should be provided. She also implies that the mandate for change may "evaporate" during the summer holiday months, when many ECCE settings close and the Government of Ireland have annual leave. While both sides appear to be represented equally the language used by the Early Childhood Ireland representative paints a vivid picture of the remaining gaps and the need for further funding in the early education sector. It is worth considering Ball and Bowe's (1992) contention that interpretation can be difficult in the presence of more than one agenda. An overview is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Article 1 Overview**

| FDA Strand | Article Information |
|---|---|
| Discursive Constructions | Childcare appears 9 times<br>Services appears 2 times<br>Sector appears 1 time<br>Outdoor appears 4 times<br>Workforce appears 1 time |

| | |
|---|---|
| Discourses | The word "workforce" is used yet the word "teacher" does not appear.<br>While the word "childcare" appears 9 times and the word "services" appears twice there is only one reference to the "workforce".<br>It is clear that the importance of the "sector" far outweighs those working within it, with funding earmarked to: purchase equipment; improve accessibility; promote activity. |
| Action Orientation | Much of the text is dedicated to how the grant money is being used, giving the appearance that the government are dedicated to improving the early education sector and providing quality experiences for young children. The government appear very pro-active.<br>Despite this government investment there is a complete failure to address the working conditions of those in the early education sector. |
| Positionings | The use of the word "workforce" in favour of "teacher" serves to instantly marginalise early education teachers and separate them from their counterparts in the field of education. |
| Practice | The article focuses of the "good" work being supported by the grant money and gives no voice to working conditions or early education teachers |
| Subjectivity | The picture of the early education "world" being presented here appears to differ greatly from the view of those positioned as "staff" within the world, the positively rosy exterior in complete contrast to the rather bleak interior |

Table 2 shows information pertaining to Article 1 (Appendix 3)

### 4.3.1 Article 2 Background

Article 2 (Appendix 4) was published in The Journal on June 6th, 2015. The 823 word article was written by Marian Quinn, Chairperson of the Association of Childhood Professionals, under the title, "How much do you value the people who take care of your children?" It was published in 2015 at a time when 1 in 10 services were predicting closure due to the ECCE scheme capitation rate of €62.50 per child, per week and lack of investment in the sector placed TUSLA in the precarious position of not having enough inspectors to ensure a regular, robust and consistent inspection process.

### 4.3.2 Article 2 Analysis

The article starts by painting a bleak picture of early education teachers taking to the streets of Dublin, Cork and Sligo "in a bid to secure a wage that is commensurate with their important role", thus immediately establishing early education teaching as an important but under-valued role and highlighting the course of action being taken in an attempt to have working conditions in the sector addressed. It is revealing, however, that this protest takes place at the weekend, outside working hours of the sector and thus not interfering with service provisions. The paragraph then provides background information on childcare in Ireland, stating that it was historically provided by "the woman who lived down the road" and served to "supplement the family income". This arrangement required no formal qualifications or professional development, operating unregulated and without inspection, the only requirements being that children were "kept safe and fed". It then describes how "completely different" the role is in 2015, suggesting "heightened expectation" is a result of greater knowledge.

Following the introductory paragraph, the article is presented in two sections, with two startlingly contrasting sub-headings, "At breaking point" followed by "A win-win scenario". "At breaking point" describes the brain as more "plastic" in young children, enabling them to learn at a "more accelerated rate" and identifies the role of the "early childhood professional" in supporting this "critical stage of development". It highlights the multiple identities and expected multiple roles of early education teachers, including "early childhood educator, administrator, curriculum planner, researcher, cleaner, counsellor, communicator, parent coach, nurse, facilitator… and the list goes on" claiming these multiple roles are conducted "by one very capable multi-tasker", before addressing the plight of early education teachers "who earns little more than minimum wage!" It also suggests that the "workforce is at breaking point", with many requiring a second job or being forced out of early education as

as they “cannot afford” to continue working and are not earning enough to access a mortgage or medical insurance. The article even suggests that the situation is so dire that college students are reconsidering working with children or transferring to primary education. There is also mention of the employer’s perspective, showing their struggle to remain affordable while being a viable business. With ratios setting the wage bill at 60-80%, even when “little more than minimum wage”, and the additional cost such as rent, utilities, insurance and training, some employers “struggle to take a wage themselves”.

Having discussed the financial woes of all involved in the early education sector, employers, employees and parents alike, “A win-win scenario” suggests resolution is forthcoming and it begins by addressing the government’s failure to recognise the importance of “the foundation stage” and lack of funding, using the word “fail” twice within one sentence. The article goes on to suggest the “care” aspect of early education “needs to be recognised as a public service and allocated appropriate funding”. The overall lack of funding in the sector is highlighted by comparing Ireland’s 0.2% of GDP with an OECD average of 0.7% investment, stating Ireland’s level of funding is “inadequate”, suggesting the expected “market model” is impossible due to regulations making government funding “the only solution”. The article enhances its credibility by referring to research which indicates “investment will yield high financial and societal returns”, improving outlook and workforce participation. Following this argument in favour of increased government funding the article ends on a more sombre note, viewing investment as “progressive” and requiring “political bravery” rather than the current government position, which it concludes by identifying as “merely reactive”.

**Table 3: Article 2 Overview**

| FDA Strand | Article 2 Information |
|---|---|
| Discursive Constructions | Professional appears 7 times<br>Service appears 5 times<br>Sector appears 1 time<br>Childcare appears 2 times<br>Workforce appears 2 times |
| Discourses | It is interesting that the word "workforce" is used to represent teachers yet the article is laden with references to professionalisation of the sector.<br>The discourse present in this article highlights the plight of early education teachers and how they are being marginalised in the wider education field. |
| Action Orientation | Much of the text is dedicated to establishing the importance of early education teachers and how greatly under-valued they are by those with the power to bring about change. |
| Positionings | There is a notable call for professionalisation presented in this article, attempting to place early education teachers on par with their counterparts in the wider education field and reference to protests which took place in order to draw attention to the issues faced by early education teachers. |
| Practice | While this article highlights the importance of early education teachers and the need for society to value them there is little information regarding possible action as this must come from those at policy level. |
| Subjectivity | Demands for the professional role of early education teachers presented in this article are in stark contrast to the reality in which they currently find themselves working. |

Table 3 shows information pertaining to Article 2 (Appendix 4)

### 4.4.1 Article 3 Background

Article 3 (Appendix 5) appeared in The Irish Times on April 1st, 2017. The 323 word article was written by Aine McMahon, news reporter for The Irish Times, under the title, "Childcare services are facing a 'staffing' crisis due to low wages." It was published in 2017, amidst renewed interest in the Early Education sector, following the role of childcare in the 2016 Irish General Election. It comes at a time when the sector is experiencing an evolution of sorts, with numerous initiatives currently being rolled out, none of which address the working conditions of those employed in early education.

### 4.4.2 Article 3 Analysis

In the headline, Article 3 declares a "staffing crisis" which I expected it to address, however, it takes an unexpected turn 7 sentences into the article, discussing childcare issues for the remaining 5 sentences and failing to acknowledge that the issues, and their possible solutions, do not necessarily exist as one entity. The article establishes credibility by referring to Early Childhood Ireland, the Minister for Children and the Single Affordable Childcare Scheme. It also calls upon a survey conducted in 2016, although provides very little detail regarding its source. Money is mentioned on three occasions, the last of which refers to a childcare subsidy designed to assist parents facing the financial burden of care. The article makes numerous references to "staff", "services" and "the sector", yet the word "teacher" does not feature once, although there is one use of the word "professional". The article depicts a sector in "crisis" and describes it as "not financially viable" but then moves on to discuss the Single Affordable Childcare Scheme, which has no bearing on pay or working conditions in the sector, and concludes by mentioning "new support" but acknowledges this is designed to support "low income families", again failing to address the issue of low pay for staff. While the article paints a bleak picture, it seems determined to offer sources of hope, discussing the government's plan to provide financial support to families, despite this having no role to play in the issue which the article professed to address in its headline, the staffing crisis.

**Table 4: Article 3 Overview**

| FDA Strand | Article Information |
|---|---|
| Discursive Constructions | Childcare appears 11 times<br>Services appears 3 times<br>Sector appears 3 times<br>Workers appears 1 time<br>Staff appears 8 times |

| | |
|---|---|
| Discourses | The title itself mentions a 'staffing' crisis and the first part of the text discusses issues around staff. The latter part of the text is dedicated to describing the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs' plans to provide subsidies and supports for low income families. |
| Action Orientation | There is mention of the factors causing the staff crisis, such as low pay, turnover and retention difficulties and qualifications but the article then goes on to discuss how much families are spending to access childcare in Ireland and explain that the government plans to address this issue with subsidies. |
| Positionings | While care appears 12 times in the article the word education is omitted, as is the word teacher. Staff are described as "earning as little as €5,130 a year" with a turnover rate of 28.4% and 49% of services struggling to retain staff. Early education teachers are certainly shown to be in a time of "crisis". |
| Practice | Despite the article title indicating the need to address a staffing crisis the article itself does nothing more than outline the areas of difficulty, omitting any indication or insight as to how these difficulties may be addressed, choosing instead to focus on the Government of Ireland's plan to subsidise and support low income families, leading to a sense of action while failing to address the actual issue of working conditions. |
| Subjectivity | Early education teachers are shown to be in crisis regarding working conditions yet the government response is to re-direct public attention onto how new policies will support families to access childcare. |

Table 4 shows information pertaining to Article 3 (Appendix 5)

### 4.5.1 Article 4 Background

Article 4 (Appendix 6) appeared in The Journal on April 3rd, 2017. The 717 word article was written by Sinead Pembroke, a researcher at TASC (Think-Tank for Action on Social Change), under the title, "If we want better people working in childcare, we need better working terms." It was also published in 2017, just two days following the publication of article 3, thus the context is identical, however, this article was not written by a reporter, it was written by a researcher at TASC (Think-Tank for Action on Social Change). The author's position may provide some insight regarding the views expressed in the article, particularly regarding Government policy.

### 4.5.2 Article 4 Analysis

Article 4 is presented using subheadings which are bold in both font and content. They serve as statements which the article will address, suggesting the Government's ECCE scheme is "driving down working conditions" and mentioning "policy driven precarity", highlighting the discursive skills of the author. Both the European average GDP and desired UNICEF targets are referred to, establishing credibility for the author's claims. The researcher also makes a clear link between the consumeristic need for childcare and its negative impact on those employed in the early education sector. There is significant use of the present tense, cleverly creating a sense of urgency, suggesting these issues of concern must be addressed immediately. This sense of urgency is coupled with a glimpse at a stark future, suggesting "professionals" will have no choice but to "leave the sector" due to "low pay", "lack of job security" and "lack of career progression". It also draws attention to the lack of pension and maternity leave, and the fact that many people working in the sector are forced to "go on the dole", receiving State benefits during the summer months for which they are deemed unemployed. While the word "teacher" is absent from the discourse, those working in the sector are referred to as "educators" on seven occasions, elevating their status. The article also holds the Government to account, suggesting that policy is serving to further the "precarious" nature of the sector, and concludes by bluntly stating, "If we want better quality, devoted, and well qualified people working in childcare services, then we need working terms and conditions to match." If increased awareness is the first step towards emancipation (Fairclough, 1989), this article expresses a desire to push the early education sector ever-closer to that first step, and makes no apologies for doing so.

**Table 5: Article 4 Overview**

| FDA Strand | Article Information |
|---|---|
| Discursive Constructions | Childcare appears 14 times<br>Workers appears 1 time<br>Services appears 4 times<br>Sector appears 8 times |
| Discourses | There is a strong sense of early education teachers being grossly under-valued by society and, particularly, the government, with policies shown as being in direct conflict to the needs of a poorly treated workforce.<br>This article highlights the poor working conditions of early education teachers and calls for changes to reflect the conditions which already exist for other teachers. |
| Action Orientation | There is not only a bleak picture painted regarding the working conditions of early education teachers but government policy is shown as being in direct conflict to improving those conditions. |
| Positionings | There are calls for professionalisation and improved working conditions yet the word "teacher" remains absent from the text. Early education teachers are placed as firmly inferior to their teaching counterparts. |
| Practice | While lack of government policy regarding early education teachers is not directly mentioned there is reference to the conflict between policy and working conditions. |
| Subjectivity | This article shows the early education teachers' view of government policy and the impact it has on them. |

Table 5 shows information pertaining to Article 4 (Appendix 6)

### 4.6 Discussion of Newspaper Articles

Historically, much of the language appears similar throughout these articles (Tables 2-5), although the voices of early education teachers may be gaining strength, and their demand for action at policy level ever-determined. It is fascinating to see how these concerns are addressed. Demands for better conditions are met with political messages regarding funding, this funding which is currently being provided for children, facilities and materials, not those working in the sector (Tables 2 and 5). Despite this, perhaps early education is moving towards what Foucault refers to as discursive fields, in which contradictory and competing discourse can exist with varying degrees of power (Table 5).

These articles were published at a time when the Government of Ireland was forced to become involved in early education as the result of "a damning Prime Time report" (Article 1), a sector which, for many years, was "run by the woman up the road" and "required no formal qualifications (Article 2). Across the five year span of the articles there is evidence of multiple struggles: struggle for funding; struggle for action; and struggle for recognition.

Article 1 describes funding in 2013 as "a drop in the ocean" and there is an indication that the situation became worse by 2017, with Article 4 blaming the Government's ECCE scheme for "driving down working conditions". Early education is described as "critical work" (Article 1) at a "critical stage of development" (Article 2) yet many early education teachers are being forced to leave the sector due to "low pay" (Article 3) and "policy driven precarity" (Article 4), again suggesting a lack of improvement despite the importance of the role. Article 2 suggests that early education teachers want to "secure a wage that is commensurate with their important role" yet Government funding is being directed towards providing "a safe outdoor space" (Article 1) and supporting "families on low income" (Article 2) while graduates are expected to continue working in a sector where the "average rate of is 10.27 euros per hour" and investment is a mere 0.2 % of GDP, falling significantly short of the European average of 0.8% and the UNICEF goal of 1% (Article 4).

A reading across all 4 articles creates a sense that, as stated in Article 2, people "cannot afford to remain" in a sector that is not "financially viable" (Article 3), where many are on a fixed term contract, employed for "38 weeks a year…fifteen hours per week", completing "observation reports" and "administrative duties" outside these hours and expected to "go on the dole for the summer" (Article 4). The sector also lacks basic benefits such as "pension, maternity pay, and little if any sick pay" (Article 4). With many early education teachers "coming out with as little as €5,130 a year" (Article 3) it leaves them in an impossible position where "car loans, mortgages, pensions and medical insurance are unaffordable" (Article 2).

This suggests that Article 4's description of employment conditions as "predominantly insecure" is prescient.

Viewing the 4 articles across their respective contexts, the changing requirements and demands on early education teachers is apparent, from ensuring children were "safe and fed" to juggling multiple roles, such as educator, administrator and cleaner. The discursive construction creates an implicit sense that the government are addressing issues in the sector and providing funding, yet there is a conflicting sense that they are explicitly avoiding the issue of working conditions. The discourse highlights what funding is available and how it is being used. There is a huge focus on easing the financial pressure on parents, who are forced to pay "double the European average" (Article 3) and improving facilities by funding to "provide natural outdoor space", "ensure that buildings are fit for purpose", "improve accessibility" and "purchase equipment" (Article 1). Amidst all of this positivity and vital work it is easy to distract the reader from the continued failure to address working conditions and staff needs. In fact, "childcare" is mentioned on 39 occasions, "parents" or "families" are mentioned on 8 occasions and the "sector" itself is mentioned on 17 occasions while "staff" or the "workforce" appear on 12 occasions across all 4 articles. The nature of this discourse limits what can be said, even a "staffing crisis" not enough to elicit government intervention regarding recognition and remuneration, positioning the early education teacher unable to "plan for the future…start a family…or even afford some independence to rent on their own" (Article 4). Given these revelations it comes as no surprise that early education teachers "don't feel respected" (Article 4) working in "the foundation stage that primary and post primary build on yet it fails to be recognised in this context" (Article 2).

Amidst the continuity across the articles there is only a significant change, setting Article 1 apart from the other three articles. As Article 1 was written at a time when the early education sector was under scrutiny there is a significant focus on "investment to improve the quality and standards in the early childcare and education sector in Ireland", with mention of the need for minimum qualifications and more inspectors. A mere two years later, in Article 2, there is an obvious shift in focus, with early education teachers "taking to the streets" in order to draw attention to the fact that it "fails to receive the level of government funding that it requires" amidst "heightened expectation". This new focus continues in Article 3, where the sector is described as experiencing a "staffing crisis" due to "low pay" and is further highlighted in Article 4, where the majority of early education teachers are described as "well qualified and employed on a low hourly rate, with no job security and no career progression". Despite this change in focus it is evident throughout each article that the Government focus remains unchanged, directed at everything apart from working conditions, such as encouraging "play and physical activity" (Article 1) and "new supports…for families on low income" (Article 3), ignoring concerns that the sector is "at breaking point" and early education teachers "can no longer afford to deliver this level of service for the pay they receive" (Article 2) and oblivious to the fact that poor working conditions are "being promoted under the ECCE scheme" (Article 4). Like (2002) suggests that discourse plays a key role in social identity formation, constructing subjects and versions of reality, discourse acting as an indirect but fundamental way of reproducing dominance.

With this in mind it is interesting to consider the fact that the media continued to give coverage to funding initiatives and show Government contribution in a positive light, leaving the issue of working conditions lurking in the dark despite early education teachers' attempts to draw attention to the abysmal situation for the workforce, suggesting an underlying current

of power at policy level, an attempt to maintain the current ideology by those positioned in power and tasked with the protection of all their citizens. It came as no surprise that, in 2018, early education featured heavily in the National Budget. Interestingly, the proposed Single Affordable Childcare Scheme has not only been delayed but has become the National Childcare Scheme.

**Table 6: Overview of all Articles**

| FDA Strand | Articles Information |
|---|---|
| Discursive Constructions | Childcare appears 39 times<br>Service/sector appears 20 times<br>Parents/Families appears 8 times<br>Workforce appears 3 time<br>Staff appears 9 times<br>Funding appears 12 times<br>Teacher does not appear |
| Discourses | Discourse is focused on many aspects of the early education sector but does not address working conditions. |
| Action Orientation | There is a learner bursary to facilitate raising qualifications, and a proposal for a Single Affordable Childcare Scheme, both increasing the workload and expectations on early education teachers yet any address of working conditions remains absent. |
| Positionings | Staff are "earning as little as €5,130 a year", in a role which does not provide a pension and leaves them unable to afford a mortgage. |
| Practice | There is a focus on what funding is available and the initiatives this facilitates, such as improving early years experiences and reducing the cost to parents, cleverly deflecting the reader's attention from the omission of working conditions. |
| Subjectivity | These articles highlight the lack of societal value associated with the role of early education teacher, setting it apart from other roles in education, the lack of Government recognition continuing to undermine this role. |

Table 6 shows information pertaining to all Articles (Appendices 3-6).

### 4.7.1 Tweets from Early Education Teachers

There was a significant sense of struggle across the 6 tweets from early education teachers, presented in Table 7, an emerging tread for early education teachers. There was the struggle to "deal with demands from DCYA, HSE, TUSLA, DES, Pobal…while the political exploitation seek to get all this for the least investment", acknowledging that "we love our job but we also have to earn a living." There was also the struggle to accept that "amazing and high quality" work will not be "reflected in their wages, conditions or societal recognition", resulting in a workforce who "don't feel valued", with the suggestion that "no other sector would suffer it". It is also noteworthy that this sense of being "under-appreciated and undervalued" is present throughout the entire sector, in which "educators are struggling with low pay and providers are struggling to break even".

**Table 7: Tweets from early education teachers**

| **Twitter Text from @BigStartIreland 2017-2018** |
|---|
| "The idea that this is a 'vocation' is wrong – like we'd do it for nothing if we had to. We love our jobs but we also have to earn a living. Yes, we love what we do but we can't continue to be seen as doing our work through good will. We have to be paid for the work we do." |
| "We are providing a valuable service to our communities. We are not recognised for that." |
| "…I, and all seven staff in my service, are currently gaining higher qualifications from level 6 up to level 9. They do this while working full time and with no hope for this amazing work and high quality to be reflected in their wages, conditions or societal recognition. No other sector would suffer it." |
| "Wages are too low but stress and burn out are massive factors too. Educators have to deal with demands from DCYA, HSE, TUSLA, DES, Pobal etc. All these external pressures and expectation on educator just keep mounting all the time while the political exploitation seek to get all this for the least investment. Pay is important but unless something is done about these smaller issues too we'll continue to loose dedicated educators…" |
| "Government funding is low, as are wages, and educators don't feel valued for their work." |
| "We all know that the Early Years sector is under-appreciated and undervalued. Educators are struggling with low pay and providers are struggling to break even." |

### 4.7.2 Tweets from members of the Government of Ireland

Much was also revealed by the 5 tweets from members of the Government of Ireland, presented in Table 8, some very strong views being expressed. TD O'Loughlin declared that "I know of some people working in child care who are not paying themselves a wage" while Senator Gavan acknowledged that "you cannot build a quality early years sector when the pay is so low and staff turnover is so high". TD Nolan suggested that "we have some fantastic, dedicated, committed people in the childcare sector and we need to keep them there", which may be achieved by following the advice of TD Shortall, who recommended that we "stop treating childcare workers as second-class educators", an interesting observation by TD Shortall given the struggles and feelings expressed by the early education teachers in Table 6. Perhaps the most telling quote of all lies with Ireland's Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone, who stated that "if I was a childcare worker I would join a union". This seemed to suggest that Minister Zappone, someone who has frequently reminded early education teachers that her ministerial duties pertain to the children attending ECCE settings and not the ECCE workforce, was recommending a path which may lead to improvements in working conditions. Despite this support from those in the Government, investment in the early education sector continues to address aspects other than working conditions and there is no indication that the government are willing to consider subsidising wages in the early education sector, as is the case for private primary and secondary schools in Ireland.

**Table 8: Tweets from members of the Government of Ireland**

| |
|---|
| "You cannot build a quality early years sector when pay is so low and staff turnover is so high." Paul Gavan (Senator) |
| "We have some fantastic, dedicated committed people in the childcare sector and we need to keep them there." Carol Nolan (TD) |
| "Stop treating childcare workers as second-class educators." Roisin Shortall (TD) |

| |
|---|
| "I know of some people working in child care who are not paying themselves a wage and are struggling to maintain a sustainable service." Fiona O'Loughlin (TD) |
| "If I was a childcare worker I would join a union." Katherine Zappone (Minster for Children and Youth Affairs) |

### 4.7.3 Discussion of Tweets from Social Media

When viewed side-by-side, the Social Media tweets hint at a new space in which to engage in discourse addressing the concerns and struggles of early education teachers. It does not place emphasis on early education facilities or government initiatives pertaining to supporting parents to access early education for their children. It offers anonymity, enabling early education teachers to express their concerns regarding their working conditions: low pay; multiple stakeholders; and no professional recognition. It is interesting to see politicians supporting the voices of early education teachers, recognising the low pay and unsustainable conditions. Perhaps this may serve as the platform from which early education teachers will eventually be heard? Certainly, it is the platform from which they are challenging current ideologies. When examining the Newspaper Articles presented in this research, even the articles hinting at tackling working conditions soon presented information regarding government funding, funding pertaining to all aspects of early education with the exception of the workforce. Is it a case of smoke and mirrors? People are willing to acknowledge that there are problems in the early education sector, yet nobody seems to be willing to address them.

### 4.8.1 Early education teachers in 2019

Foucault's tools facilitated an historical examination of discourse, identifying how hierarchies helped regulate and legitimate the behaviour of people positioned within this field (MacLure, 2003), reminiscent of Gramsci's (1971) belief that the power of dominant groups

often take the form of hegemony. Foucault's (1972) theories regarding power and subject positions offered great insight regarding the notion of societal assigned identities and, in relation to the above articles it was interesting to examine the current position, or positioning, of early education teachers and to consider what may lie ahead. In light of the fact that the word "teacher" was ominously absent from all of the above articles it was revealing to discover that, in a survey conducted by the National Childhood Network, when given "a choice of three titles-Early Years Educator, Early Years Practitioner or Early Years Teacher" it seems that "the vast majority" chose Early Years Teacher (Quinn, 2017, p.19), yet "many shy away from using the word teacher" (Quinn, 2017, p.20). Is this because "teacher" is omitted from discourse and early education policy? Or is it a result of being hailed as childcare workers, staff and babysitters? It is here that Althusser's theory of interpellation becomes an intriguing possibility. "Titles confer symbolic power" (Quinn, 2017, p.20) yet the titles bestowed on early education teachers appear to limit both their power and their voice, "many shy away from using the word teacher" (Quinn, 2017, p.20). Is this because "teacher" is omitted from discourse and early education policy? Or is it a result of being hailed as childcare workers, staff and babysitters? It is here that Althusser's theory of interpellation becomes an intriguing possibility. "Titles confer symbolic power" (Quinn, 2017, p.20) yet the titles bestowed on early education teachers appear to limit both their power and their voice.

### 4.8.2 Montessori teachers in 2019

Montessori trained practitioners are very comfortable with the title "teacher", viewing the role in its many guises: educator; facilitator; guide; and directress. Montessori training concerns itself with holistic education, therefore care and education are provided harmoniously to cater to the needs of each individual child. The role of "carer" is viewed as an integral component of being a Montessori teacher, adding to rather than diminishing the perception of the role. It is noteworthy that, while not intentional, all participants involved in this research

work in a Montessori context within the early education sector.

My initial training was conducted in a Montessori college, while my first role was that of a Montessori teacher in a Primary Montessori school, teaching children from birth to twelve years of age. Through both my training and work, I developed a strong sense of identity as a teacher. In fact, throughout my career, I have had the good fortune to work in schools which supported and reinforced my identity. However, it is impossible to work in the early years sector in Ireland and not be aware of the multiple identities co-existing within the sector. Indeed, the Montessori school in which I currently work is a prime example of early years workforce diversity, as I work with teachers from a Reggio Emelia, childcare and social care background.

It seems that Montessori teachers are not only being diluted within a diverse workforce, their identity is being challenged by current discourse. The language of policies pertaining to the sector, especially the linguistic change present in the First 5 document, rebranding the sector the Early Learning and Care (ELC) sector, challenges both individual and sector-wide identity. This, coupled with the heightened media coverage regarding poor working conditions, raises concerns regarding the societal value of the role of practitioners working in the early years sector. As a Montessori teacher, the removal of the word "education" from the sector both increased my frustration and devalued my professional identity.

### 4.8.3 Participant Data Presentation and Coding

The following participant data is presented in tables similar to newspaper article and social media analysis. The headings are derived from the FDA model discussed in Chapter 3. For the purpose of analysis, presented in Chapter 5, both a deductive and inductive approach was undertaken for coding, a sample of which is presented in Appendix 18. Deductive

coding was formulated based on literature reviewed in Chapter 1 of this thesis. It focused largely on identity, training and societal perceptions. Once data gathered were transcribed, font colour was changed to identify key information (Appendix 18). Inductive coding was derived from data analysis, revealing themes related to: difficulty accessing CPD; the care aspect of the sector; the volume of paperwork requirements; the recent influx of policies; and funding concerns. These themes were identified within highlighted text. By engaging with Foucault and Althusser simultaneously, as discussed in Chapter 3, evidence of both subjectification and interpellation became apparent. There was also overarching evidence of a struggle for power, or power pendulum, and suggestions of interruptions to interpellation when viewing data as a whole: newspaper articles; social media tweets; and interviews and questionnaires.

## Participant Data

### 4.9.1 Participant BJ

**Interview Section A: Background (Questions 1-4)**

Participant BJ, the manager of a Montessori school, presented as highly qualified for the early education sector, having obtained a level 9 MEd in a sector with a minimum requirement of a level 5 qualification. She also had over a decade of experience working in the early education sector, having worked her way up from working in a Nursery class to managing a Montessori school with 40 children and 7 staff. She identified a need for teaching philosophies to remain "fluid", recognised the "abilities of children" and "the value in encouraging independence". She also expressed her belief in the need for those working in early education "being constantly learners as well as educators".

**Interview Section B: ECCE (Questions 5-8)**

Speaking of working in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE), participant BJ described a "huge discrepancy between theory and practice" and "lots of 'tick the box' exercises". She also mentioned "lots of pressure" from parents and government bodies and the need to make practice fit frameworks and guidelines "as opposed to what you know and what you feel is best", suggesting a struggle exists between guidelines and classroom/management practicalities. She spoke passionately about witnessing the first steps of a child with SEN, despite doctors suggesting he would never walk. She described this as a "proud moment" and one in which "you think there is hope for children" when we "give them the right environment and the right people working with them". However, she also acknowledged that "it's amazing to say we have an emergent curriculum and want to provide individual plans for each child but you just can't meet those requirements if we don't have the funding…", describing this as "really sad". This seems to reiterate Participant BJ's struggle, the emotive use of "proud"

contrasting with “sad”, her obvious excitement and enthusiasm for “one of the best moments” colliding with the reality of the restrictions imposed when “you just don’t have the resources to take it any further”.

**Interview Section C: Inclusion**

Participant BJ described inclusion as “being able to offer every child opportunity, so to be able to adapt, as necessary, to children”. She also expressed a wider view of inclusion, “to encourage all children to have an inclusive outlook” and “to identify difference but to then see it as unique…see the benefits”. Despite this clear desire to embrace inclusion she noted that “to have an inclusive practice you have to be really honest about it”, considering factors such as the environment and the “abilities of the staff”, proffering that “when all those things fall into place you have an inclusive practice”. She also identified inclusion as a “buzz word”, suggesting many people are “quick to say they have an inclusive practice” when they actually “have an admissions policy where they don’t say no to a child if they have a physical disability or intellectual disability”. Again, this seems to highlight the struggle between policy and practice, her own desires regarding practice tangled between the two components. Furthermore, her experience of training events served to cement the gaping chasm of this struggle, identifying “very mixed feelings…about what an inclusive environment is and what environments are actually being offered at the moment”. She also suggested her view “differed a lot to the other attendees of the training”.

**Interview Section D: Perceptions and Practice (Questions 12-16)**

During this segment of the interview, Participant BJ’s frustration was palpable as she spoke of her “struggle to identify myself” and “even 11 years later I fumble over the words”. She spoke of using “the terminology that ticks the boxes” and how the need for her to adjust

her language around identity "comes down to the audience", finding that upon identifying herself as the manager of a preschool or Montessori school, "the next thing out of their mouth is something related to a crèche…" She suggested labels such as "crèche" and "early years service" are associated with her role and offered further insight into this labelling, stating that "there are so many different departments publishing so many different frameworks it differs massively, depending on who writes it and what their turn of phrase is". She also suggests people working in the sector use terms such as "childcare workers and preschool practitioners…to tell the difference between somebody working in a full day-care system versus a sessional". It seems societal perceptions may play a significant role in the identities of early education teachers, highlighted by Participant BJ's view that "to contact anybody and sign it off as preschool teacher or manager I know I'll receive a quicker response if it's signed off as manager". While she acknowledges that "people are starting to understand…there's a lot more to working with the age group" she also states, "I don't think my role is seen with enough value similar to other roles with the same level of education". She goes on to provide a direct comparison with Primary School teachers, based on her experience while working towards her MEd with Primary School teachers, who are given government funding, a higher role and are "identified by society…as even better than Primary teachers" while an early education teacher returning to study at Masters level "just doesn't receive the same". Furthermore, there is "no connection between preschool and primary school…to allow the child to receive the same education throughout". Indeed, it would appear that even policy documents designed to enhance the sector and that are "definitely necessary" still contain "massive discrepancies because there's no black and white" and they are "very much open to interpretation and that can come down to the qualification and experience of the person interpreting it".

**Interview Section E: Professional (Questions 17-20)**

When asked about the term "professional" and the attributes of a professional, Participant BJ identified "attitude, qualification, experience and commitment", suggesting that "anybody can do a job but to train in it and be qualified in the area constitutes being a professional". She also mentioned the importance of "a commitment to training and ongoing training" in this "ever-evolving sector" and the "need to be proud of what you do". She advised "that money needs to go into professional development" and acknowledged the "need to monitor the training" as there are "massive discrepancies" which make it "very difficult to identify everybody as a professional".

**BJ Interview Overview**

Participant BJ (Appendix 9) is a well-educated, experienced member of the early education sector, dedicated to providing high quality experiences and "encouraging independence". She believes in the need for "a commitment to training and ongoing training" in order to "follow" the interests of the children. She takes delight in her role, takes pride in the achievements of children under her supervision and wants to "encourage all children to have an inclusive outlook". Despite her training and experience she shared the fact that "I struggle to identify myself", recommending "you need to be proud of what you do" while identifying herself by using "the terminology that ticks the boxes". There appears to be signs of a struggle on many levels, from the "need to make your practice fit as opposed to going with what you know and what you feel is best" to knowing her view of inclusion "differed a lot". Despite stating "policy is definitely necessary" she spoke of "massive discrepancies" and "no connection between preschool and primary school". It is difficult to understand how somebody so highly qualified and experienced could struggle to this extend in a sector she's worked in for 10 years and it begs the question, how do less experienced early education teacher traverse the ever-changing landscape of Ireland's early education sector? It is

noteworthy that Participant BJ resigned from her school role.

**Table 9: Participant BJ**

| FDA Strand | Articles Information |
|---|---|
| Discursive Constructions | Despite identifying place of work as a "Montessori school" teachers then referred to as "staff"<br>preschool practitioners 3 times<br>childcare workers 2 times<br>staff 5 times<br>crèche 2 times<br>teacher 10 times<br>education 6 times<br>care 8 times |
| Discourses | Mentions "staffing crisis" and a national policy change requiring all preschools to adjust the wording of their policy documents from "preschool service" to "early years service".<br>Mentions using "the terminology that ticks the boxes". |
| Action Orientation | Discusses returning to college for MEd and study with Primary School teachers. Despite doing the same course, Primary School teachers received "…funding from the government…higher role…identified by society as even better than a Primary teacher…" |
| Positionings | Identifies "massive discrepancies" making it "very difficult to identify everybody as a professional."<br>Lack of connection between preschool and primary school.<br>"people refer to themselves as practitioner or childcare worker."<br>When identifying position to others "the next thing out of their mouth is something related to a crèche…" |
| Practice | Discusses pressure from parents and government departments.<br>"It can be difficult when you're faced with new guidelines or frameworks that you feel you need to make your practice fit as opposed to going with what you know and you feel is best." |
| Subjectivity | Participant states she "struggles" to identify herself, "…even 11 years later I fumble over the words." |

Table 9 relevant to Appendix 9

### 4.9.2 Participant RS

**Interview Section A: Background (Questions 1-4)**

Participant RS, a Montessori teacher, presented as highly qualified for the early education sector, having obtained a level 8 Honours Degree in a sector with a minimum requirement of a level 5 qualification. She also had 8 years of experience working in the early education sector, having previously worked in Social Care. She highlighted the potential "life-long benefits" of early education and what she hopes is "the beginning of change in the sector". She equates "professionalism with education" and viewed her own return to college as a turning point that helped her develop "a huge amount of confidence in myself".

**Interview Section B: ECCE (Questions 5-8)**

Participant RS made some very revealing comments regarding the ECCE sector. When asked about her own teaching philosophy and how it fit practice requirements she stated, "…it's been a struggle for me and prior to returning to college I didn't really see that." This suggests that her return to college raised further questions regarding the current status and demands of the sector, her new found knowledge empowering her to question rather than simply accept the regulations and policy demands. Having highlighted the importance of play, Participant RS then began speaking excitedly about her greatest moment, "being part of the process of teaching a child to read", she led by suggesting, "This is where I contradict myself…" It is revealing that somebody so highly qualified and experienced is displaying such conflicting feeling regarding reading, hinting that current policy places greater focus on play. In a child-led sector it is difficult to reason why any component, be it play, academic development or any other area, is designated as having greater value. When learning is child-led it is the responsibility of the early education teacher to follow the interests of the child, therefore if the child's interests lie in academia that interest must be supported. A child who

is reading is doing so as a result of having their interests embraced and supported. The same may be said for a child who is playing, dressing-up, climbing or painting. An experienced teacher should not feel conflicted regarding her desire to "facilitate the children to construct their own learning". She also raised concerns regarding "…getting knowledge out there to society about the importance of early education and care" and expressed her frustration "that we're not respected or valued", suggesting this lack of respect exists across society, including the wider educational field, and stating that she find this "really challenging". She identified "societal education" as her greatest passion while acknowledging "I don't think, at the moment, it's going to happen". Again, there is a sense of struggle and conflict present in the discourse.

**Interview Section C: Inclusion (Questions 9-11)**

Participant RS described inclusion as "trying to include everyone in the service" and acknowledged that it can be "difficult", especially given the "…expectation that we have to be all inclusive but I think that can be a very dangerous thing when there isn't knowledge…" Again, Participant RS appears conflicted and questions her own ability, despite having a qualification that is far superior to the sector requirements, stating "I don't know if I'd have that level of awareness". She attended training regarding inclusion but described this as providing her with "a broad understanding", suggesting that "…there's knowledge that you need to have to be completely inclusive". Throughout our discussion of inclusion, Participant RS referred to a colleague with "quite a broad knowledge base on inclusion" from whom she would "take a lot of learning", highlighting the need for information sharing, something that can be difficult given the time constraints and minimal non-contact hours within the ECCE sector, along with the complete lack of in-service days. In fact, most training occurs during personal time, adding to the difficulty to schedule group/school-wide training or information sharing.

**Interview Section D: Perceptions and Practice (Questions 12-16)**

Having previously raised concerns regarding a lack of respect, Participant RS stated, "We are completely undervalued as a sector." She identified a societal lack of "knowledge about what we do", suggesting those working in early education are seen as "babysitters" and referred to as "the child minder" with the role of "looking after" and "minding" children.

Despite identifying herself as a teacher and working in a Montessori school, she believed the school is seen as "the play school where the children come in and play", further suggesting that parents "don't even see the value of what play is". Again, confusion is the undertone of this discourse, Participant RS stating, "I don't really think we're seen as teachers…I don't understand why we wouldn't be called teachers…why we wouldn't have the same title…" This is clearly of great importance to Participant RS, who sees value in labels and stated, "I'd love to see us being referred as teachers. I think we deserve that…" yet she finds herself viewed by society as "a childcare worker" or as one of "the minders in the crèche", her own sense of identity being denied by society. When asked about policy, Participant RS offered a sense of hope, suggesting "…there is improvements trying to be made" and "…it's the beginning of change in the sector" however, she also believed that "there isn't enough financial support" from the government. Furthermore, she spoke passionately regarding this lack of investment being detrimental to the sector stating, "You see people in these jobs who are highly qualified…working for minimum wage and they're not going to stay in the sector for very long…" It is noteworthy that she also described the recently introduced minimum level 5 qualification as "absolutely pathetic" given the expectations of the role but suggested an ulterior motive for this, that a more highly qualified sector "requires more money into the sector to pay salaries…" and "they don't want to have to raise wages but they continue to raise expectations".

**Interview Section E: Professional (Questions 17-20)**

When asked about the term "professional" and the attributes of a professional, Participant RS identified the importance of education, stating "…with knowledge comes professionalism…" equating it to "a confidence". Upon entering the sector, despite possessing a qualification exceeding the minimum requirement, Participant RS expressed concerns that she "didn't feel equal" or think her "training was as good" and that she did not possess "the same level of knowledge" as her colleagues. It was her return to college, to earn her degree, "that changed all that". Despite showing a keen awareness and appreciation of the value of teacher education in the early education sector, Participant RS also acknowledged that "Anything you do in this sector, education wise, is funded by ourselves and it's done in our own time…" identifying a lack of support regarding both time and funding. When compared to her experience in Social Care during a period when there was a desire "to professionalise the whole sector", Participant RS discussed how the sector "funded me to go back to college" and "you had study days", a stark comparison to the Early Education sector where, "If you want to do it you have to do it yourself". She felt strongly that the issue of teacher education is crucial as "quality experiences" can only be provided "where you have the staff that have the knowledge and the background to do it." She suggested that the recently introduced minimum level 5 qualification "needs to be raised" and proposed "providing long term courses for people on a part-time basis", along with recommending these course be funded and result in extra pay so "it's incentivised for people to go back to college and to gain the knowledge that is needed to work in this area". Interestingly, she commented on the media's portrayal of the early education sector and how government investment is "to help the parents" and is presented as, "…we're investing for you, for your childminder", as opposed to actually investing for the staff.

**RS Interview Overview**

Participant RS (Appendix 10) is a highly educated and experienced member of the early education sector who is passionate about "societal education" regarding the "long term benefits" of quality early education experiences. She believes in the importance of teacher education, stating that "with education comes a sense of professionalism" yet she identified a lack of government funding and support of teacher education in the early education sector, stating "you have to do it yourself". She expressed frustration at the direction of government funding, portrayed as being dedicated to assist parents in paying "for your childminder" rather than "actually investing for the staff". While she would "love to see us being referred to as teachers" because "we deserve that" she believes "we are completely undervalued as a sector" and feels there is not "any respect or knowledge about what we do". While she is highly qualified and experienced, she finds herself conflicted regarding the value of, or need to prioritise, aspects of the early education curriculum, hinting that play should carry greater value than reading, despite all activities being child led. It is noteworthy that Participant RS is in the processes of returning to college with the intention of leaving the early education sector to become a primary school teacher.

**Table 10: Participant RS**

| FDA Strand | Articles Information |
|---|---|
| Discursive Constructions | staff 3 times<br>crèche worker 3 times<br>childcare workers 2 times<br>minder 4 times<br>babysitter 1 time<br>teacher 10 times<br>education 11 times<br>care 9 times |

| | |
|---|---|
| Discourses | Mentions media coverage and the Government's investment being aimed at parents "for your childminder". |
| Action Orientation | Suggested the minimum level 5 requirement is a strategic move by the government as a more highly qualified sector would require additional funding and "they don't want to have to raise wages". |
| Positionings | She offered words such as "babysitter" and "childminder", suggesting "I would love to know how the parents refer to us" and "I would love to see us being referred to as teachers" while acknowledging "We are completely undervalued" and " I don't think there's any respect or knowledge about what we do". |
| Practice | Discussed lack of investment in teacher education, stating "it's funded by ourselves and done in our own time". She also opined that the minimum level 5 requirement is "absolutely pathetic" given the "expectations that are put upon us". |
| Subjectivity | Strong self-identity (teacher) amidst labels such as "childminder" and "babysitter". |

Table 10 relevant to Appendix 10

### 4.9. 3 Participant DB

**Interview Section A: Background (Questions 1-4)**

Participant DB, a Montessori teacher, presented as a qualified and highly experienced member of the early education sector who has spent over two decades working in early education and currently runs her own Montessori school, balancing teaching, managerial and administrative duties. She had a very clear sense of philosophy, stating "Montessori…and I really agree with that…from my end, I really like that way of teaching." However, Participant DB also raised serious concerns regarding Montessori education, suggesting that "there's so much rules and regulations coming in now that's kind of taking from the Montessori method of education", laying blame at the feet of the policy makers stating, "The government want you doing different things and want the children doing different things". This discourse creates a strong sense of conflict between what this highly experienced teacher feels works and what is expected of her. She feels she has a "little structure going where we do our Montessori work and the children love doing it", believing that early education framework recommendations "just causes chaos basically". She raised further concerns regarding the development of school readiness skills, "…they don't want the children doing the writing or leaning their sounds or their numbers". Again, in a child led sector, a highly experienced teacher is forced to question the curriculum she's tasked with delivering, that she feels is "completely trying to take over and change", versus what she knows "the children love doing".

**Interview Section B: ECCE (Questions 5-8)**

Participant DB is clearly very passionate about the ECCE sector, speaking of her love of "working with the children…getting to know them…" and her enjoyment in end-of-year reflections, "I love that bit when you can see what they've done and how well they've done". She identified one of her greatest moments as "when I opened up my own school", which she

has been running for almost a decade despite the challenges she continuously faces such as "a lot of the paper work" and "observation sheets…and it's taking from actually working with the children". There are further concerns regarding time "and then what they're expecting you to do in this time frame is very challenging", which is easy to understand given that government funding covers only 15 hours per week for 38 weeks per year for eligible children. Participant DB also expressed grave concerns regarding the limited funding available, identifying pay as "a big problem". As an owner, not only does she personally struggle with the level of pay, she also finds it incredibly difficult to recruit other teachers, stating it is a "huge problem trying to find anybody because the pay is so bad really and for what's expected for it". Yet again the early education staffing crisis raises its head, this time directly linked to lack of government investment in the sector.

**Interview Section C: Inclusion (Questions 9-11)**

Participant DB described inclusion as having "all different types of children" in early education settings and "it's including every child". She presented as having experience and awareness regarding children with SEN, discussing "being open to help every child…" but raising concerns regarding the practicalities of early intervention "because it takes so long to actually get the help that they need". Furthermore, she identified the extremely detrimental impact of this delay, suggesting "children end up going into primary school before anything is actually diagnosed". This discourse suggests that while Participant DB is willing to help the delay in accessing support is leading to difficulty in her providing the most suitable support for children with SEN attending her school. She attended training, completing a "diversity, equality and inclusion course" in an attempt to broaden her own skill set however, "it was over three or four weeks, one day a week, and I had to obviously pay somebody and get somebody in", so while the training was free it cost her money, from a very limited budget, to provide school cover in order to attend training. She acknowledged that there are some courses

available at weekends but “then it’s on your own time”, during which people may have other commitments. Here we have someone trying to attain further knowledge which she believes will benefit the children attending her school, with a desire “to do more”, yet she finds herself in a sector where her hands are tied by government purse strings, where her interest in attending training is problematic because “I then have to pay somebody to come to work in the school so it’s an extra wage I have to come up with even though I don’t have the money”, a startling revelation from a school owner, although not unusual for the early education sector.

**Interview Section D: Perceptions and Practice (Questions 12-16)**

Participant DB displayed a very strong self-identity as a Montessori teacher but acknowledged “you’re probably not as much respected as if you were a primary school or secondary school teacher”. She suggested the societal perception of her role is “just minding kids” and stated “you’d never hear the word teacher”. She continuously reiterated these sentiments throughout our discussion regarding perceptions. Regarding policies, rather than providing support, the ever-changing influx of policies simply seem to add to an already overwhelming workload. Participant DB stated “there’s so many policies that you nearly need to sit down and keep reading them” and “everything just keeps changing”.

**Interview Section E: Professional (Questions 17-20)**

Participant DB identified possessing the skills to “run a business” as being professional. While she also acknowledged that “you have to have your qualifications” she raised an interesting point, that childminders simply need to be “a responsible adult” yet “the outside world don’t seem to see the difference”. As an example of this lack of recognition from society she raised the issue of school fees, having had parents keep a child at home or

off sick only to ask, "…do we have to pay for that day?", highlighting their lack of recognition that "it's a job. It's a profession…", even when their child is at home the teacher is still in school, there are wages and running costs to be covered but "they don't seem to see that part of it either". Regarding enhancing the sector, Participant DB had some very strong feeling about the negative impact of low wages on attracting and retaining quality teachers "because I feel there's lots of people who would love to work with children and they can't because they can't afford to do it because of the pay". Furthermore, she mentioned "you could go off out and do so many different jobs and you'd be paid more", stating that if early education "was recognised and appreciated and more money was out into it, it would definitely make a huge difference". She finds it "so hard to believe…that you're working with people…and then there's such a low payment", suggesting this "makes absolutely no sense to me".

**DB Interview Overview**

Participant DB (Appendix 11) is very experienced having worked in the early education sector for 23 years. She currently owns her own school and juggles teaching, managerial and administrative duties. She feels very strongly about the value of Montessori education stating, "I really agree with that…and the children love doing it". She expressed concerns regarding changes in the sector, believing current frameworks are "completely trying to take over" and "the government want you doing different things and want the children doing different things". She identified further concerns over "a lot of the paper work…taking from actually working with the children". She expressed a desire to participate in CPD but explained the difficulties in doing so given that "I have to pay someone to come to work in the school so it's an extra wage I have to come up with even though I don't have the money". There are further concerns regarding the lack of financial investment from the government because of the difficulty encountered when trying to employ suitable teachers as there is "a big huge problem

trying to find anybody because the pay is so bad" and "you could go off and do so many different jobs and you'd be paid more". Regarding societal recognition, Participant DB suggested that despite requiring qualifications early education teachers are often seen as "minding the kids" and "the outside world don't seem to see the difference".

**Table 11: Participant DB**

| FDA Strand | Articles Information |
|---|---|
| Discursive Constructions | early years 4 times<br>minding 6 times<br>teacher 6 times<br>education 1 time |
| Discourses | Mentions "the outside world don't seem to see the difference" between early education teachers and childminders and "you'd never hear the word teacher". |
| Action Orientation | Suggested that while there is some free CPD provided this is done "in your own time" or "you have to pay somebody" to provide classroom cover.<br>Recently policies and frameworks seem to clash with Montessori education and "want you doing different thing" and "the Montessori structure they seem to want gone". |
| Positionings | She offered words such as "childminder" and "early years staff" raised concerns regarding recent policies "completely trying to take over" and suggested that "you're probably not as much respected" as teachers holding positions in primary or secondary education. |
| Practice | Discussed difficulty in attending CPD due to the fact that "I have to pay somebody to come to work in the school" and lack of investment is leading to significant difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers because of the many different jobs which offer better pay than that available to early education teachers |
| Subjectivity | Strong self-identity (teacher) amidst labels such as "childminder" "early years staff". |

Table 11 relevant to Appendix 11

### 4.9.4 Participant TT

**Interview Section A: Background (Questions 1-4)**

Participant TT, who works in a Montessori school, presented as suitably qualified to work in the early education sector with an interest in CPD. At the time of interview Participant TT was in the process of raising her qualifications to level 6 by undertaking the LINC training course stating "I got the study bug". She has worked in the early education sector for 4 years as a play group teacher. She describes her teaching philosophy as "a few things entwined", raising the possibility of philosophy being a somewhat complicated area.

**Interview Section B: ECCE (Questions 5-8)**

Participant TT identified "a few challenges" in the ECCE sector, such as a constant demand to link the practice philosophy of the Montessori school where she works with the Aistear Curriculum Framework for early education, which results in "extra bits expected from us". She is passionate about early education and "talking to the children" she works with but feels that particular age group come with their own challenges, such as risk assessment and ratio considerations when planning activities.

**Interview Section C: Inclusion (Questions 9-11)**

Participant TT described inclusion as "everyone is welcome…everyone is treated the same way" and suggested the school where she works is "pretty good" regarding providing an inclusive setting. She attended diversity training and is currently in the process of completing the LINC programme, designed to enhance inclusive practice, yet suggested "there should really be more out there".

**Interview Section D: Perceptions and Practice (Questions 12-16)**

Regarding perceptions, Participant TT proclaimed "you're under the childminder bracket" and acknowledged that while she identifies herself as a play group teacher she feels her role is perceived as "just a childminder, there to look after the kids" and "they definitely see you as a babysitter". Regarding policies which support her role in early education she hints at policy ambiguity, stating that there's "not much to go by".

**Interview Section E: Professional (Questions 17-20)**

Participant TT associated training and a title with being a professional and proffered "it's very important for us as teachers to be valued as a profession and to be recognised", suggesting "it would really help everyone". She acknowledged that "0-5 is such an important time in a child's life" and recommended clearer frameworks and policies would improve consistency, "Aistear, Siolta…it all needs to be narrowed down" and the early education sector could benefit from "one thing that we are all following". She also recommended unity as an essential component of an enhanced sector, declaring "There needs to be one!" and "They need to put us all under one name, one title…"

**TT Interview Overview**

Participant TT (Appendix 12) is a qualified and experienced member of the early education sector. She enjoys working with young children and identifies "talking to the children" as the aspect of her about which she is most passionate. She suggested she struggles to combine her Montessori practice requirements with current policy requirements, which seemingly "clashes a bit" and results in "extra bits expected from us". Despite completing diversity training and undertaking the LINC training course Participant TT suggested "there should really be more out there". She identified herself as a teacher but suggested "you're nearly put under the childminder bracket" and perceived to "look after the kids.

She hinted at policy ambiguity leading to difficulties and suggested "it all needs to be narrowed down…one thing that we are all following". She also expressed strong feelings regarding recognition, stating "it's very important…for us to be recognised" and "they need to put us all under one name". Despite being qualified and experienced, Participant TT was reluctant to expand on her answers, acknowledging, even prior to the interview, her concern regarding "giving the wrong answer".

**Table 12: Participant TT**

| FDA Strand | Articles Information |
|---|---|
| Discursive Constructions | babysitter 1 time<br>minder 4 times<br>minding 1 time<br>teacher 5 times<br>crèche 1 time<br>childcare 1 time |
| Discourses | Suggested early education teachers are "nearly put under the childminder bracket" despite the fact that "0-5 is such an important time in a child's life". |
| Action Orientation | Regarding CPD she believes "there should really be more out there" and while policies should provide support she suggests they are vague and there's "not much to go by". |
| Positionings | She offered words such as "childminder" and "babysitter" and suggests her role is viewed as being "to look after the kids". |
| Practice | Discussed how Montessori practice requirements "clashes a little bit" with policy requirements. |
| Subjectivity | Strong self-identity (teacher) amidst labels such as "childminder" "early years staff".<br>Feels very strongly that the sector requires unity and "They need to put us all under one name". |

Table 12 relevant to Appendix 12

### 4.9.5 Participant AS

**Interview Section A: Background (Questions 1-4)**

Participant AS, who worked in a Montessori school, presented as qualified and very experienced, having attained a level 6 diploma and worked in education for 8 years. She trained in Spain and worked in early education there for 5 years and special education for 2 years before moving to Ireland and spending 1 year in early education. Regarding her teaching philosophy she stated "I prefer Montessori teaching to traditional teaching".

**Interview Section B: ECCE (Questions 5-8)**

Regarding ECCE Participant AS expressed an interest in teaching Practical Life and Mathematics to the children in her class. She also expressed having "a place in my heart" for children who encounter learning difficulties. She identified the language barrier as being a challenge, stating "I want to express something but I don't have the words in English".

**Interview Section C: Inclusion (Questions 9-11)**

Participant AS described inclusion as something the early education sector must "try to normalise" and "talk about". While she had not accessed specific training she had worked with children on the autism spectrum and took delight in watching the development of care and friendship between mainstream students and a particular student on the autism spectrum, "they don't want to leave him. It's so nice". She also identified inclusion as an opportunity to "to invite the other children to know about that". She expressed concern regarding inclusion and the difference in practice between two schools in which she worked while in Ireland. Regarding inclusion in her current school she stated "In this school I can see this" however, during time previously spent working in another school "I can't see this". She displayed great determination regarding the "need to work and do all the things to help with this" and spoke

passionately regarding her personal experience with a particular student. She made significant progress in an area with health implications only to see this work undone when the student transferred to a different class.

**Interview Section D: Perceptions and Practice (Questions 12-16)**

Participant AS hinted at a lack of societal understanding and appreciation for Montessori education, stating "The problem is, we have this method and society needs to learn more." Furthermore, she suggested "The parents, they don't know what we do every day". Regarding self-identity, she described herself as a Montessori guide "because I'm still learning" but suggested parents viewed her as a "childminder" and perceived her role as being to "take care of your children inside a place" but expressed her frustration at this, believing "I think I can do more than this. I want to do more".

**Interview Section E: Professional (Questions 17-20)**

Regarding professional qualities, Participant AS identified herself as a professional but suggested training and qualifications may result in "a different role". She was unsure what action could be taken in order to enhance the early education sector, simply stating "I don't know".

**AS Interview Overview**

Participant AS (Appendix 13) has worked in education for 8 years, including 2 years working with children on the autism spectrum. She spoke of having "a place in my heart" for children encountering learning difficulties and expressed concern regarding a lack of consistency around inclusion in Ireland, suggesting "In this school I can see this. In the other school I can't see this". She suggested that parents "don't know what we do every day" and that they perceive her role as to "take care of your children".

Despite this lack of recognition she stated “I want to do more”. It is noteworthy that Participant AS resigned from her position and returned to her native Spain to take up a teaching position. As a native Spanish speaker, Participant AS expressed concern regarding her understanding of the questions. This became apparent during the final section of the interview, therefore the volume of information presented is shorter than that of other sections.

**Table 13: Participant AS**

| FDA Strand | Articles Information |
|---|---|
| Discursive Constructions | minder 1 time<br>teacher 1 time<br>crèche 1 time<br>guide 4 times |
| Discourses | Suggested that “The parents, they don’t know what we do every day.” |
| Action Orientation | Regarding Montessori education she stated, “we have this method and society needs to learn more.” |
| Positionings | She offered words such as “minder” and “guide” suggesting that her role is perceived by parents as being to “Take care of your children.” |
| Practice | Suggested lack of consistency regarding inclusion, “In this school I can see this. In the other school I can’t see this.” |
| Subjectivity | Despite having a level 6 diploma and working in education for 8 years she identifies herself as a “guide” and suggests this is “because I’m still learning.” |

Table 13 relevant to Appendix 13

### 4.9.6 Participant HM

**Interview Section A: Background (Questions 1-4)**

Participant HM, the manager in a Montessori school, presented as qualified and very experienced, having attained a level 5 diploma and worked in the early education sector for 24 years. Along with a Diploma in Montessori Education, she also attained certificates in both infant massage and speech and drama teaching. She described her philosophy as something which "…continues to develop from my direct experiences with the children". She also highlighted the "importance of play, self-directed learning and inquiry based learning" and suggested "a strong connection with nature and the environment should be encouraged". Her current role is that of manager of a preschool.

**Interview Section B: ECCE (Questions 5-8)**

Regarding ECCE, participant HM identified "writing an environmentally friendly curriculum for use in preschools in Bali" as one of her greatest moments. She stated that children were "the main reason I became an educator", suggesting "they deserve the best start in life and a wonderful first educational experience." She mentioned the administration requirements of her role, eluding to conflict between meeting the needs of the children and "the needs of government bodies and their many policies and paperwork requirements". Furthermore, she identified a conflict in practice, stating "I have had to do things that didn't 'fit' with how I feel about early years education.

**Interview Section C: Inclusion (Questions 9-11)**

Participant HM identified inclusion as "securing opportunities for students with additional needs to learn alongside their peers in general education classrooms". She considered this "vital" in order to "encourage understanding, acceptance and respect in all

tiers of society". Despite feeling strongly about both the concept and the practical values of inclusion for all children, Participant HM has received no training in the area of inclusion, despite working in the early education sector for over two decades.

**Interview Section D: Perceptions and Practice (Questions 12-16)**

Participant HM identified a lack of societal appreciation for early education and those working in the early education sector, stating "many people do not see early years education as valuable and see early years educators as glorified childminders". Despite her vast and valuable experience she hints at having limited time engaging with the children in her current role, identifying herself as "…more as an administrative manager rather than an educational manager" yet, when asked if there were any recent policies which supported her role she responded, "not that I know of…" which, coming from an experienced preschool manager who deals with administration on a daily basis, raises questions regarding early education policies and what aspects of early education they address.

**Interview Section E: Professional (Questions 17-20)**

Participant HM described a professional as "someone who has taken time and effort to dedicate themselves to their job". She also suggested that a professional must be "knowledgeable and also committed to learning more". Furthermore, she identified the importance of knowledgeable professionals "sharing this learning with others". While she proffered than many people view "qualifications as the sole identifier of a professional" she proclaimed that, for her, "it is the commitment to the job". She also placed great importance on work related experiences, identifying them as being "far more beneficial" and suggesting that these experiences "directly influence your actions on a day-to-day basis". Participant HM acknowledged that, having spent 24 years working in the early education sector, she does

identify herself as a professional “at times” however, she also stated that “I see myself in a state of consistent growth and learning”. She made a link between societal value and remuneration, stating “early years educators could be more valued with better salaries” and offered “clear job titles” as the route to improvement regarding “respect for the job”, proclaiming that “using the word ‘educator’…as opposed to childcare worker would bring a different feel to the job title”. She also suggested that CPD funding “would help educators gain more skills”.

**HM Interview Overview**

Participant HM (Appendix 14) has worked in the early education sector for 24 years yet, despite this experience she now finds herself spending the majority of her time as “an administrative manager”, finding it challenging to “meet the needs of children” while fulfilling “paperwork requirements”. Despite not having received any training in the area of inclusion, Participant HM considered inclusion “vital” and offered it as a means to “encourage understanding, acceptance and respect”, which reflected a desire to embrace inclusion irrespective of training. She described herself as identifying as a professional “at times”, seemingly conflicted by being “in a state of consistent growth and learning”, perhaps revealing a sense that it is not possible to be professional while continuing to learn, even though continuing professional development is a key component of being a professional. This is reminiscent of Participant AS’s view of herself as a guide rather than a teacher “because I am still learning”. Despite her experience working in the sector, she trained at a time when a level 5 qualification exceeded the requirements and finds herself with what is now the minimum qualification necessary to work in the early education sector, irrelevant of her vast practical experience. She also identified struggling to “do things that didn’t ‘fit’ with her personal views of practice. She stated that early education teachers are considered “glorified childminders” by many people despite the importance of children deserving “the best start in life” and suggested

"clear job titles", such as "educator", may act as the catalyst to increase respect and "bring a different feel" to working in a sector which "many people do not see…as valuable".

**Table 14: Participant HM**

| FDA Strand | Articles Information |
|---|---|
| Discursive Constructions | childcare workers 1 time<br>childminder 4 times<br>educator 5 times<br>education/educational 5 times |
| Discourses | Stated her view that early years educators could be more valued and respected. |
| Action Orientation | Suggested clear roles and job titles along with better salaries would increase respect for those working in the sector. |
| Positionings | She proffered that many people "do not see early education as valuable" and "see early years educators as glorified childminders". |
| Practice | Discussed the value of experiences and how they "directly influence your actions on a day-to-day basis.<br>Identified it as challenging to "meet the needs of the children while at the same time meet the needs of government bodies and their many policies". |
| Subjectivity | Identified herself as "an administrative manager rather than an educational manager" due to the "paperwork requirements". |

Table 14 relevant to Appendix 14

### 4.9.7 Participant JS

**Interview Section A: Background (Questions 1-4)**

Participant JS, a Montessori teacher, presented as a qualified and very experienced member of the early education sector, having attained a Montessori diploma and spent over a decade working as a Montessori teacher. She described her philosophy as being "child-led based on Montessori".

**Interview Section B: ECCE (Questions 5-8)**

Participant JS strongly identified as a Montessori teacher and hinted at conflict between the Montessori philosophy and current practice guidelines, stating "new curriculum frameworks and demands make it very difficult" to follow the Montessori philosophy. She described herself as being passionate about "children learning" and becoming "more independent" yet acknowledged that it is becoming increasingly difficult to "teach the Montessori materials in a short work cycle", as ECCE funding is only offered for three hours per day and "there's so much to fit into the day".

**Interview Section C: Inclusion (Questions 9-11)**

Participant JS described her understanding of inclusion as being "that all children are taught together" and identified inclusion as "a challenge" as her Montessori training left her with "no idea what to do" regarding inclusion, highlighted by her declaration, "I'm a Montessori teacher so I don't know about other stuff". Participant JS has attempted to improve her understanding of inclusion, recently attending AIM training but felt "it didn't really give practical ideas".

**Interview Section D: Perceptions and Practice (Questions 12-16)**

Regarding recent policies, Participant JS suggested that "all the changes just keep making it more difficult" and proffered that "parents don't see me as a teacher". She deemed her role as lacking societal value and offered the view that she is seen as "a minder or babysitter" despite her strong self-identity as a Montessori teacher.

**Interview Section E: Professional (Questions 17-20)**

Participant JS identified herself as a professional "because I studied to do my job". She suggested that "people respect qualifications" but proffered that "certain qualifications and training" constitute 'professional'. This statement may be further illuminated by her view that early education teachers "need to be recognised the way teachers are recognised". She also stated that they should "get the same treatment as teachers" because "at the minute we get nothing" and "work for minimum wage and get no pension or anything from the state".

**JS Interview Overview**

Participant JS (Appendix 15) is has 12 years of experience teaching in early education yet earns "minimum wage" and gets "nothing" from the state, which is the reality for many fixed term contract teachers who receive no holiday or sick leave pay, nor do they receive any other benefits, such as a government pension or CPD funding equated with being a Primary or Secondary school teacher. Her view of inclusion as a "challenge" may be as a result of her lacking confidence in her ability to facilitate inclusion, as evident in her declaration "I have no idea what to do". This is a teacher with valuable experience yet when she accessed CPD in her personal time to improve her skills she was let down, stating "it didn't really give practical ideas". She strongly identified as a Montessori teacher and a professional yet commented on being viewed as "a minder or babysitter" by parents and feeling that she is "absolutely not" valued by society. She also identified conflict, struggling to fit her own Montessori philosophy

and practice within “new curriculum frameworks”. Throughout her interview, Participant JS seemed deflated by her professional struggle and lack of recognition. Her answers were short and she showed little interest in expanding them. It is noteworthy that Participant JS resigned from her school role.

**Table 15: Participant JS**

| FDA Strand | Articles Information |
|---|---|
| Discursive Constructions | minder 3 times<br>teacher 8 times<br>babysitter 2 times |
| Discourses | When asked if she felt valued she responded “absolutely not”. |
| Action Orientation | Regarding status, she declared “we need to be recognised the way teachers are recognised”. |
| Positionings | She offered words such as “minder” and “babysitter” suggesting that “the parents don’t see me as a teacher”. |
| Practice | Identified training regarding inclusion as inadequate because “It didn’t really give practical ideas.” and suggested “I have no idea what to do”. |
| Subjectivity | Despite having a level 6 diploma and working in education for 12 years she strongly identified as a Montessori teacher working for “minimum wage and no pension or anything from the state”. |

Table 15 relevant to Appendix 15

### 4.9.8 Participant PX

**Interview Section A: Background (Questions 1-4)**

Participant PX, a Montessori teacher, presented as well qualified and experienced, having attained a level 5 Montessori diploma and a level 6 childcare and education diploma along with working in the early education sector for 8 years. Additionally, she completed further training which enabled her to become Inclusion Officer (Inco) in her setting. While she is Montessori trained, she described her philosophy as "keeping up with the child's interest".

**Interview Section B: ECCE (Questions 5-8)**

Regarding ECCE, Participant PX described her role as "helping and nurturing children" and declared every day "has a great moment". She identified time as being "a huge factor" and "trying to fit everything in" as a challenge.

**Interview Section C: Inclusion (Questions 9-11)**

Participant PX described inclusion as "making sure everyone has a voice and is heard" and suggested this is done "in a positive way" in her current setting, ensuring the children are listened to regarding "what they would like to see in their school". She completed the Leadership for Inclusion course, becoming Inclusion Officer, and she attended diversity training.

**Interview Section D: Perceptions and Practice (Questions 12-16)**

Participant PX described early education teachers as being "seen as child minders" and "referred to by lots of different names", which she opined "does influence people as to how they see you" and suggesting "there should be just one name" for early education teachers. She self-identifies as "an educator", a role she describes as "inspiring children to

learn" but does not feel supported by recent policies, proclaiming "more could be done in this area".

**Interview Section E: Professional (Questions 17-20)**

Participant PX did not self-identify as a professional but suggested that, regarding early education teachers, "we are all professional in our jobs" and stated that "as a teacher every day I like to give 100% to the children". She also addressed the importance of "always upskilling" as "the sector is always changing". She raised concerns regarding "fitting in Aistear and Siolta", suggesting "there needs to be more of a focus on the curriculum" as "there is too much" and everything "needs to be narrowed down".

**PX Interview Overview**

Participant PX (Appendix 16) has 8 years of experience working in early education yet there was a language variation regarding identity, describing herself as an "educator" while referring to herself as a "teacher". She also highlighted the need for "just one name", suggesting the multiple titles which exist for early education teachers "does influence people". Despite completing the Leadership for Inclusion course and becoming the Inco, Participant PX attended additional training in diversity. When considering this alongside her comments regarding "always upskilling", it is evident she values training. This is a testament to Participant PX's commitment as training is undertaken during personal time and, for the most part, at personal expense. Despite a recent influx of policies pertaining to the early education sector, Participant PX suggested "more could be done", echoing the thoughts of other participants regarding the purpose of these policies and what they are addressing or failing to address.

**Table 16: Participant PX**

| FDA Strand | Articles Information |
|---|---|
| Discursive Constructions | carer 1 time<br>minder 2 times<br>minding 1 time<br>teacher 2 times |
| Discourses | Suggested early education teachers are "seen as childminders" and does not think early years is "seen as an important time". |
| Action Orientation | Regarding CPD she highlighted the importance of "always upskilling and training" and suggested "more could be done" in the area of policy. |
| Positionings | She offered words such as "minder" and "carer" and suggested"…the early years I don't think is seen as an important time". |
| Practice | Discussed how "time to fit everything in" is a challenge and suggested the curriculum needs to be "narrowed down". |
| Subjectivity | Strong self-identity as an educator amidst labels such as "childminder" and "carer". |

Table 16 relevant to Appendix 16

### 4.9.9 Participant EV

**Interview Section A: Background (Questions 1-4)**

Participant EV, a Montessori teacher, presented as highly qualified and experienced, having attained multiple Montessori diplomas and a Master Degree in Special Education and having worked in the early education sector for 20 years. She described her philosophy as a combination of the Montessori philosophy, particularly that of freedom and discipline, and Aistear guidelines.

**Interview Section B: ECCE (Questions 5-8)**

Regarding the ECCE, Participant EV highlighted the importance of "all children fulfilling their potential and never being under-estimated". She mentioned "helping children write a Mission Statement" and described their problem-solving skills as "astounding". Participant EV also expressed concerns regarding the length of the ECCE day stating "The biggest problem is fitting everything into such a short day as ECCE is only 3 hours per day". Furthermore, she raised concerns regarding "ensuring the needs of all children are met during such a short morning", an aspect of ECCE she identified as challenging.

**Interview Section C: Inclusion (Questions 9-11)**

Participant EV described inclusion as, "enabling all children to achieve what they are capable of achieving" and acknowledged the importance of "providing the right support for them to participate in all aspects of school, physical, social and academic". Despite her concept of inclusion, she reiterated her concern regarding the length of the ECCE day, declaring "one key requirement in providing the right support is often time yet, within a 3 hour day, time is something of a struggle". She also hinted that her understanding of inclusion may be based on her personal educational background, describing CPD training for

inclusion as “very general” and suggesting “it failed to address real concerns”, one of which was “time management” while “support strategies” were also mentioned.

**Interview Section D: Perceptions and Practice (Questions 12-16)**

Despite attaining a level 9 Master Degree and working in the early education sector for two decades, Participant EV acknowledged her role as a Montessori teacher “often causes confusion for people and they end up asking if I mind children”, further suggesting “parents and society in general seem to think it’s a ‘minding’ role”, viewing her as a “childminder, carer, babysitter”. She described state recognition as “virtually non-existent” and proffered that “while the policy expectations of early education continue to rise the recognition of those working in the sector falls significantly short”. Regarding ECCE policies, Participant EV suggested “policies just seem to add to the workload” and “there are policies which look good on paper but policy-makers don’t seem to be aware of the practicalities of implementing policies”.

**Interview Section E: Professional (Questions 17-20)**

While Participant EV stated that she identifies with the term “professional” she opined that “this is rare in the early education sector”. Regarding what constitutes “professional”, she suggested “high standards of qualification and CPD” along with “how someone presents themselves, their attitude”. Furthermore, she proffered that qualifications “enable people to present themselves in a professional way and take pride in their role, suggesting that this “influences how society perceives them”. She declared “recognition of the workforce” as a key component of enhancing the early education sector, indicating that “many in the sector are employed for ECCE hours…paid for 15 hours per week, 38 weeks per year” for which they “don’t get holiday pay or sick pay” and that there are “no state

benefits or perks". She raised concerns regarding training, declaring that it is "attended during personal hours, often at personal expense", acknowledging that "funding seems to be assigned to improve facilities and help parents fund 'care' rather than supporting the workforce". She stated that "Government funding and conditions for those working in primary and secondary education differ starkly from those in early education" and suggested that "this influences how people in the sector see themselves and thus how they perform their role". While she acknowledged that not everybody in the early education sector "wants to be called 'teacher' she stated her view that "we deserve the same recognition afforded to teachers".

**EV Interview Overview**

Participant EV (Appendix 17) is a well-educated, experienced member of the early education sector, dedicated to "enabling all children to achieve what they are capable of achieving". Despite this desire, she seems to feel let down by training for inclusion, describing it as "very general" and suggesting it "failed" to address concerns such at time constraints or offer "practical strategies" to enhance inclusion. She also hints at feeling let down by policy-makers, stating they don't seem to be aware of the practicalities of implementing policies", which echoes concerns raised by other participants, again suggesting early education policies may be failing to address the concerns of the workforce or create a sense of supporting the workforce in performing their role. If this is the case it raises the question of what is being addressed in policy and whose agenda if being met? There are indications that Participant EV feels strongly about this area as she declared state recognition as "virtually non-existent" and intimated that early education teachers "deserve the same recognition afforded to teachers". While she did not disclose information regarding her terms of employment, she did raise the issue of early education teachers employed on ECCE contracts, resulting in them being "paid

for 15 hours per week, 38 weeks per year" while receiving "no state benefits or perks". Perhaps this is a factor in the turnover rate of 25% in the early education sector? To make matters worse, yet again there were concerns raised regarding training taking place "during personal hours, often at personal expense", an expense which may be difficult for many to endure given their possible terms of employment for working in ECCE settings. Despite attaining a level 9 Master Degree, Participant EV acknowledged that, even after 20 years working in the early education sector, her role is often seen as "minding" and that identifying herself as a Montessori teacher often leads to people asking "if I mind children", which raises concerns regarding the value associated with the role of early education teacher. It is difficult to consider someone so well educated and experienced acknowledging that "funding seems to be assigned to improve facilities and help parents fund 'care' rather than supporting the workforce". If this is a reflection of current discourse it begs the question, how can the early education sector be sustained in Ireland?

**Table 17 Participant EV**

| FDA Strand | Articles Information |
|---|---|
| Discursive Constructions | carer 1 time<br>childminder 1 time<br>minding 1 time<br>babysitter 1 time<br>teacher 7 times<br>education 5 times<br>care 2 times |
| Discourses | Stated state recognition of early education teachers "is virtually non-existent" and "parents and society in general seem to think it's a 'minding' role". |
| Action Orientation | She described CPD for inclusion as "very general", suggesting it "failed to address real concerns". |
| Positionings | She offered words such as "minding" and "care" and suggested early education teachers "deserve the same recognition afforded to teachers". |

| | |
|---|---|
| Practice | Suggested policies “just seem to add to the workload” and policy-makers “don’t seem to be aware of the practicalities of implementing policies”. |
| Subjectivity | Strong self-identity as a Montessori teacher while acknowledging this title “often causes confusion for people and they end up asking if I mind children”. |

Table 17 relevant to Appendix 17

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Findings

This chapter will present a discussion of data as themes viewed through a Foucauldian perspective with Althusser's interpellation providing the theoretical framework. Goodson (2003) suggested that the personal stories of teachers may offer insight into self-perception, which was certainly the case here. The struggles expressed by participants, along with the newspaper articles and social media comments, highlight the interpellation of early education teachers. It also identifies spaces in which interpellation may be interrupted. The discussion will be presented in key themes as revealed by the data, for which I have constructed the following titles: Train(ing) Derailed; Care Catastrophe; Paperwork Prominence; Funding Fantasies and All hail (de)valuation. Each area will be considered in terms of subjectification and interpellation, leading to a discussion entitled Interpellation Interrupted.

### 5.1 Newspaper Articles and Social Media

As previously discussed, a review of the newspaper articles examined here highlighted the lack of focus placed on working conditions, emphasis instead being placed on investments and improvements in the sector. Indeed, such was the focus on improved facilities and experiences the reader's attention was deflected from the omission of early education teachers themselves and their working conditions. There was an acknowledgement that some early education teachers with ECCE contracts were earning a mere €5,130 per annum (Article 3). While no proposal regarding how this may be addressed was presented, it was noted that a learner bursary was introduced to improve qualifications. The reality of this bursary was that it served as action while simply providing early education teachers with an opportunity to be better qualified while working for such a nominal wage. Of course, perhaps the very term "early education teacher" required examination, the word "teacher" ominous by its absence across all four articles and possibly, by its very omission, highlighting the lack of government

recognition for this role. Similar concerns were evident when examining quotes from Twitter, early education teachers mentioning their struggle to meet the demands of a sector which offers no societal recognition and working conditions which leave them feeling undervalued. There was also evidence of these struggles being acknowledged at government level, with politicians raising concerns regarding the treatment of early education teachers as second-class educators and expressing a need to ensure dedicated people are not leaving the early education sector.

### 5.2 Train(ing) Derailed

Research indicates that children, especially those with SEN, benefit from the expertise of their teacher (McGee, 2004; Edwards, 2007; Black-Hawkins, Florian and Rouse, 2007). Certainly, in order to ensure early education teachers are both confident and competent, the importance of training must not be underestimated. Participant PX spoke of the benefits of training and upskilling, especially given the current rate of evolution in the early education sector, highlighting the importance of up-to-date knowledge. Participant EV proffered that qualifications enable early education teachers to present themselves as professionals and take pride in what they do, further suggesting that this may influence societal perceptions however, Participant JS opined that this is only applicable to certain qualifications and training, once again drawing attention to the lack of consistency across training programmes, mentioned by Participant BJ. Participant DB voiced her frustration regarding lack of societal recognition of qualifications and training, stating that qualifications are essential in the classroom yet go unrecognized by society. For a Montessori teacher, spending an average of 4 years in college, this lack of recognition diminishes the importance of their role. Clearly training is a contentious issue.

**Interpellation**

Colleges continue to offer a myriad of courses pertaining to the early education sector, using a smorgasbord of labels and titles, thus adding to the confusion around early education teacher identities. While some colleges have embraced the term "early education teacher", identified as the favoured term in a recent survey (Barnardos, 2017), many continue to use alternatives, such as "practitioner" and "preschool worker". There are also variations in course titles, including "Childhood Care and Education" and "Early Learning". Participant BJ stated how difficult it is to identify everybody as a professional given the variation in qualifications, further suggesting the need for a hierarchy in terms of training. There are also concerns regarding the quality of training itself. Training frequently lacks detail, adopting a blanket approach and creating a false sense of what early education teachers need to know, leaving them feeling inadequate when, upon completion of training, they continue to struggle with aspects of practice. Participant EV described CPD training as generic and spoke of its failure to address practical concerns. Participant RS also expressed concerns regarding training, especially in the area of inclusion, suggesting the need for prerequisite knowledge in order to be inclusive. She added that, while training provides a broad understanding, the classroom practicalities of operating an inclusive setting differ greatly. Indeed, variation in training leaves many people lacking the knowledge and skills to facilitate inclusion. Participant RS confessed to feelings of inadequacy upon commencing work in the early education sector, identifying personal feelings of inequality between herself and her colleagues, due to concerns regarding the quality of her training. Participant BJ recommended that training must be monitored and suggested and current in order to ensure best practice in the early years sector.

**Subjectification**

Many of the participants acknowledged the importance of training, with Participant BJ highlighting the need for a commitment to ongoing training in order to maintain a level of professionalism, which she deemed particularly relevant in the early years sector, given its state of evolution. However, a commitment to training comes with many challenges for those working in the early education sector. In fact, Participant BJ went on to address some areas of concern, recommending the need for funding, not just in terms of qualifications but also in enabling staff to attend training. Participant TT further suggested that, regarding CPD, there is a need for increased options, with Participant RS declaring that, despite the recent introduction of a Level 5 requirement, there is a need to raise the minimum qualifications. Despite the fact that free training is occasionally offered, this training is frequently inaccessible, taking place during hours of work. This is particularly problematic given the need for many early education teachers to have a second job or provide full day care. This certainly posed a problem for Participant DB, who admitted that in order to attend training she must fund her own cover, essentially paying for cover from her personal pay. Beyond the funding issue, there is also difficulty in finding suitable cover, particularly in a Montessori setting. Participant DB acknowledged that some CPD may take place at the weekend but that then impacts on personal time, when many people already have commitments. Participant EV echoed this sentiment, declaring that training is not only attended during personal hours, but is also often at personal expense. There is also the recurring issue of a lack of consistency across training, raised by Participant BJ, resulting in vast variations in practice and making collaboration a challenge, particularly for Montessori teachers. Certainly, in a sector that associates the need for training and a sector-wide title with being viewed as a professional, as suggested by Participant TT, training is fraught with challenges.

### 5.3 Care Catastrophe

Aspects of care and education go hand-in-hand, well-being playing a key role in the acquisition of knowledge, with Participant BJ suggesting that there are days when care outweighs education. Certainly, in Montessori training, holistic development enables Montessori teachers to regard care and education as equal components. By finely balancing care and education, Montessori teachers create ideal conditions for holistic development, self-confidence and positive self-image (Einarsdottir, et. al., 2015; Ringmose and Kragh-Müller), 2017). Indeed, providing the correct balance may facilitate education by engaging in everyday routines often associated with care, such as playing, climbing and singing (Klette, Drugli and Aandahl, 2018). Despite this, research points to the caring aspect of early education as contributing to the silencing and marginalisation of the workforce (Aldridge, Kilgo, and Emfinger, 2010).

**Interpellation**

When it comes to the early education sector, the word "care" represents an ongoing site of struggle. The sector is shrouded in terminology which highlights care yet this often leads to early education teachers being perceived as "minding" children, as proffered by Participant DB and Participant TT. Despite Participant RS's views regarding the significant lifelong benefits, when it comes to early education, she does not believe there is any societal respect or value associated with the roles of Montessori teachers or early education practitioners. The impact of this care debate, and Montessori teachers being positioned by language, was evident throughout the language used by participants. The term 'babysitter' appeared on 5 occasions, care or carer was used on 21 occasions and 'minder' was the term of choice on 30 occasions. This confusion seems embedded in the language of Montessori teachers and it becomes easy to understand why, after 11 years in the early education sector, Participant BJ professed fumbling over words when attempting to identify herself and her role in early education. Despite Participant BJ suggesting there may be a shift, a new appreciation

of what working with young children entails, the 2016 regulatory changes resulted in a significant linguistic change; the term "preschool service" being replaced by the term "early years service". In 2019, the sector title switched from the Early Childhood Care and Education sector to the Early Learning and Care sector. Another significant linguistic change, made without acknowledgement of, or consideration for, the word education having been removed. It is telling that Participant HM suggested the use of the word 'educator' may create a different self-perception of the role.

**Subjectification**

Given the overarching societal view that early education teachers merely care for young children, as discussed by Participant AS, it is hardly surprising that only 56% of people participating in the Early Childhood Ireland Barometer (2018) survey recognised early education teachers as professionals. It is no wonder that many early education teachers feel unappreciated, or that their role lacks respect, as suggested by Participant RS. Participant EV recommended that Montessori teachers are deserving of the status afforded to other teachers, yet Government funding and conditions for those employed in primary and secondary education differ starkly from those in the early education sector. She further suggested that this negatively impacts the self-perceptions of Montessori teachers, thus influencing their professional practice. These views were echoed by Participant RS, who expressed strong sentiments regarding the early education sector being an integral component of the education spectrum, and questioned why the term "teacher" is not used to describe those working in early education. This lack of recognition and appreciation adds further challenges for Montessori teachers, leading to a lack of confidence in practice and a lack of value in training, sacrificing what they may feel is best practice in order to fit the requirements of the setting in which they work, as proffered by Participant BJ. Even Participant RS, despite her eight years of experience in the early education sector, declared her appreciation of play and her desire to

introduce more play into her practice, yet she struggles with how to introduce play into a Montessori class. This culture of self-doubt is made worse by a system of monitoring and inspection reminiscent of Foucault's (1977) panopticon, the ever-watchful eye monitoring from within, creating such a strong sense of constant supervision that, even in the absence of monitoring, there remains a sense of being eternally watched. Given the multiple stakeholders, such as Tusla, Better Start, the HSE and the DES, along with three separate inspections from different government bodies, there is an unsettling sense of over-monitoring and lack of autonomy.

The care role, and associated lack of value, results in poor communication between early education setting and primary school regarding transitions, which is particularly important for children with SEN. In relation to the implementation of inclusion, Participant BJ pointed out that there is a need for greater communication between preschool and primary school in order to support transition. She also suggested that in order to provide preschool for all children there is a need for everyone in the early years sector to be able to work with all children. She further recommended that collaborative training and networking may enhance collaborative practice, a recommendation that is particularly relevant given that early years education is defined as taking place between birth and age 6, yet many children transition from early education settings to primary education by age 5, with some moving as early as 4 years of age.

### 5.4 Paperwork and Policy Pandemic

The evolution of the early education sector in Ireland resulted in both an influx of policies and an increase in paperwork. On top of paperwork demands and the need to keep up-to-date regarding policy changes, the ECCE remains a three-hour day, which Participant EV identifies as problematic in terms of what must take place within such a short timeframe.

The many sector stakeholders have various demands, funding applications must be submitted thrice yearly and record-keeping requirements continue to grow exponentially. It is easy to feel overwhelmed and, to exacerbate the situation, Participant DB proffered that the time required to address paperwork takes away from time spent with the children. Participant PX spoke of a need to streamline paperwork, sentiments echoed by other participants.

**Interpellation**

Many Montessori teachers who entered the sector to engage young children in learning experiences are now discovering the difficulty in meeting the needs of each child while meeting the needs of government agencies, policies and paperwork requirements, as mentioned by Participant HM. Indeed, Participant DB declared that there is a constant need to read policies due to both the volume of policies and the frequent policy changes. The situation is made even more challenging due to the vagueness of many policies, leading to variations in implementation, Participant BJ proffering that these grey areas result in significant discrepancies. The challenge is further increased by the seemingly cyclical nature of the situation, the constant change and pressure just to keep up, mentioned by Participant DB.

After 24 years in the early education sector, Participant HM now sees her managerial role more akin to administrator than educator, while Participant EV expressed her frustration that, amidst the lack of recognition for Montessori teachers, policy expectations continue to increase. Newspaper Article 2 echoed these views, describing early education teachers as many things, such as: early childhood educator; administrator; cleaner; counsellor; parent coach; and nurse. It further acknowledged that these multiple roles are performed by one person, earning little more than minimum wage.

**Subjectification**

After more than two decades in early education, Participant DB stated that Montessori education is being undermined by current regulations based on government policy, further damaging the perception of Montessori teachers. Participant JS expressed concern that the volume of changes are furthering the difficulty of being a Montessori teacher, identifying curriculum framework as a particular challenge. Participant EV further acknowledged that, while some policies look good on paper, policy-makers are unaware of the implementation practicalities, giving way to the perception that policies add significantly to the workload yet offer little benefit. Both Participant JS and Participant DB commented on their struggle with the challenge of fitting everything into such a short window of time. This sentiment was supported by Participant TT, who recommended the need to strip back frameworks, with Participant PX proffering that emphasis must be placed on implementation. Participant BJ acknowledged that, while policy is necessary, the problem lies in the fact that there are so many different settings in which everybody is interpreting policy differently. The variation in practitioner training routes must certainly add to the multiple policy interpretations which co-exist. Furthermore, she identified this issue as problematic for a child transitioning from one setting to another, such as preschool to primary school, due to the lack of connection and consistency. Given the importance of supporting transitions, the fractured education system is certainly not helping matters. It seems that the early education system is experiencing significant challenges convert theory into practice, making it increasingly difficult to ensure the needs of each child are being met, a struggle highlighted by Participant EV.

Despite the ever-mounting demands of the early education sector, Newspaper Article 4 acknowledged that many people working in the sector found themselves on "low pay" and experienced a "lack of job security", further suggesting that in order to establish high quality practice, and attract and retain qualified professionals, the working conditions must match the

demands of the sector. No wonder there is a staffing crisis (Article 3) in the early education sector, Participant DB raising specific concerns regarding pay in relation to expectations increasing the challenges of both finding and retaining staff.

### 5.5 Funding Fantasies

The subject of funding proved contentious for participants and was further evident in the Newspaper Articles analysis presented. Ireland continues to fall well below the European average for investment, and the funding the early education sector does receive seems to be misdirected or misguided regarding its use. As Participant EV noted, funding appears to be assigned to improving facilities and assisting parents in funding childcare, rather than directly investing in the workforce. This sentiment was also evident in Newspaper Article 1, which discussed funding directed at improving facilities, and Newspaper Article 3, which addressed financial support for families.

**Interpellation**

It is easy to understand why Newspaper Article 4 spoke of the "policy driven precarity" of the early education sector when we consider Participant JS's declaration that Montessori teachers work for minimum wage and receive no state pension or benefits afforded to other teachers. Indeed, Participant EV pointed out that many Montessori teachers are employed on ECCE-specific contracts, meaning that they are employed for 15 hours per week, 38 weeks per year. They do not receive holiday pay, sick pay or funding for any preparatory work or paperwork conducted outside of these hours. To make matters worse, despite these appalling conditions, training is frequently attended during personal time and at personal expense. Participant RS voiced her frustration at funding being directed to parents, for childcare support, rather than investment in staff, which she believes would be of ultimate

benefit to children. She further suggested that, despite the government's desire to raise standards, the minimum level 5 qualification will remain in place in order to avoid the pay investment necessary to further raise the minimum level of qualification.

Newspaper Article 2 addressed concerns regarding people working in early education being unable to apply for a mortgage due to low pay, with Participant JS declaring the necessity for Montessori teachers to receive the same recognition as primary and secondary teachers, along with the same working conditions. Participant RS raised concerns regarding the sustainability of the sector, suggesting that highly qualified staff will not stay in a sector that offers them minimum wage, especially given the expectation that they continue to invest their own money to further their qualifications and training.

**Subjectification**

Concerns regarding funding of the early education sector are far from being a recent development. As far back as 1999, the *Ready to Learn* White Paper identified early education teachers as low paid and lacking status or career structure, a situation which has not changed very much according to Urban (2008) and the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs (2017). Indeed, the sector funding in Ireland is 0.2% of GDP, a figure that the OECD consider inadequate. Even recent higher capitation funding was paid to the service rather than going directly to the teacher who upskilled in order for the service to receive higher capitation. It is also noteworthy that this upskilling took place in a sector which lacks government investment and incentives for people to return to college, as discussed by Participant RS. Indeed, Participant BJ highlighted the need for greater CPD funding, with Participant DB identifying both time and money as constraints on accessing CPD. It seems the ongoing failure to address working conditions is having a rather damaging impact on those working in the sector, Participant DB acknowledged that there are many different jobs for which people would

receive better pay, many being forced away from the sector because they simply cannot afford to work as Montessori teachers.

### 5.6 All hail (de)valuation

Given the "policy driven precarity" (Newspaper Article 4) of the early education sector, it comes as no surprise that there is an overwhelming sense of a lack of appreciation tied to the sector. The results of a recent survey revealed that 56% of people viewed early education teachers as professionals (Early Childhood Ireland, 2018), but what of the other 44%? Indeed, a 2017 Congress Report revealed that the role of early education teacher falls into the category of *bad job* due to the widespread poor working conditions of the sector. The ongoing failure to address working conditions result in many staff being forced to claim welfare payments during the summer holidays or being forced out of the sector completely. Urban (2008) described early education teachers as struggling to establish a professional identity but it seems that their struggles are many. Poor remuneration and lack of benefits have a negative impact on their quality of life, with many unable to afford health insurance or gain mortgage approval.

**Interpellation**

This identity struggle is glaringly obvious to many within the sector, largely due to the multiple labels used to represent early education teachers, in policy and throughout society: childcare worker; crèche worker; and the minders in the crèche. Participant RS even identified a lack of societal respect during her interview. It seems that even sector veterans, who have a strong self-identity, find their identity challenged by society, such as Participant EV. Having spent over 20 years in the early education sector, she strongly identifies as a Montessori teacher, but when she publicly identified herself as such it led to confusion and resulted in people asking if her role was that of minding children. This sentiment appears to be

widespread, with Participant JS stating that parents do not see her as a teacher, instead identifying her as a minder or babysitter, a view echoed by Participant TT, who declared that parents definitely see early education teachers as babysitters or childminders. Indeed, the repetition of words such as "babysitter" and "minder" throughout participant discourse suggests this language plays a recurring and significant role in Montessori teacher identities. Perhaps this is why, despite working in the early education sector for 11 years, Participant BJ continues to struggle to identify herself.

Early education teachers also find themselves struggling with societal perceptions of their role. Participant AS admitted that society views her role as being to care for children, acknowledging the need to educate society with regards to the role of a Montessori teacher. Participant EV suggested this perception of Montessori teachers performing a "minding" role is further fueled by lack of State recognition, with Participant PX acknowledging that the myriad of sector titles further devalues the role of Montessori teacher throughout society. Participant TT appears to agree with this, stating that, as a Montessori teacher, it is very important to be recognized and valued as a profession. Societal perceptions are something that resonated with Participant RS, who described societal education as one of her passions. She further opined that, through discourse, she would love to see the value of Montessori teachers established throughout society, however she also acknowledged that, currently, she believes this is unlikely.

It seems that the identity crisis being experienced is further exasperated by policy changes and demands, the influx of which has left the sector in turmoil, even initiating a change of name, Participant BJ specifically mentioning the 2016 preschool regulations, which saw the term 'preschool service' being exchanged for 'early years service'. In 2019, the First 5 introduced a further sector-wide linguistic change, rebranding the Early Childhood Care and

Education sector as the Early Learning and Care sector.

**Subjectification**

Participant HM suggested that, for many people, Montessori teachers are not valued, simply viewed as 'glorified childminders', Participant DB adding that Montessori teachers do not receive the same societal respect afforded to primary school or a secondary teacher. This culture of undervaluing Montessori teachers is having an adverse impact on their practice, Participant JS stating the need for recognition and conditions on par with other teachers. Participant PX proffered that the lack of recognition leaves her struggling with her professional identity. This identity crisis is not made any easier by policies, as mentioned by Participant HM. Participant TT also suggested that policies lack clarity and are sometimes in opposition to her Montessori practice. Participant HM recommended clearly defined roles and job titles, along with improved conditions, may enhance societal perceptions of Montessori teachers. Participant DB raised concerns regarding the omission of the word teacher in discourse, Participant EV concluded that societal perceptions are influenced by the stark differences in funding and working conditions offered to Montessori teachers in comparison to their primary and secondary counterparts, stressing the importance of workforce recognition and funding support.

While the vital work of early education teachers would suggest a place of prominence in society (Kartal, 2007), Participant RS suggested that Montessori teachers are viewed as 'babysitters'. Participant BJ proffered that many guidelines and regulations created at national level continue to be open to interpretation, thus implementation may be based on the qualification and experience of the people interpreting the policy, Participant DB suggested that funding was essential for ensuring qualified and experienced people are remaining in the sector and are making necessary decisions regarding policy interpretation and implementation.

As a result of low pay, fixed-term contracts and lack of benefits, the early education sector has a significant turnover rate of 25% (Pobal, 2018). This creates an inexperienced workforce, with 32% of early education teachers having less than 2 years practice (Pobal, 2016).

## 5.7 Interpellation Interrupted

In Ireland, the role of teacher was, for many years, considered a vocation and teachers were entrusted with imparting knowledge and igniting passion, instilling a lifelong love of learning and influencing future generations. When considering the identity of teachers in Ireland today this notion appears romanticised and, especially for early education teachers, far from the reality they now face. Gee (2000) proposed identity may be viewed as the way in which teachers are seen, by both themselves and others, while Avalos and De Los Rios (2013) argued teacher identity is actually a co-construction between a teacher and society. This is reminiscent of McCaslin's (2009) belief in using a co-regulation model, giving weight to personal, cultural and social sources of influence when attempting to understand the emergence of identity. On the basis of my research, early education teachers in Ireland have been interpellated (Althusser, 1971) for many years. Early education teachers are told what is expected of them by a governing power in which they believe. Furthermore, they often unquestioningly accept the notion that this governing power is engaged in *good* work for their benefit, thus they accept the identity and place offered to them, both in and by society. This naïve acceptance becomes evident in examining the data gathered from newspaper articles, identifing the position available to early education teachers, the space which is available for them to occupy, and offering rationalisation to encourage acceptance. Across the four articles examined the term 'childcare' appeared on 39 occasions, with 20 references to the 'sector' or 'service'. The word 'teacher' went unmentioned while 'staff' appeared on 9 occasions and 'workforce' on 3 occasions. This media's omission of the word 'teacher' in their portrayal of early education teachers spanned across the articles published between 2013 and 2018,

suggesting an established pattern.

I would suggest that interpellation is evident throughout the participant data presented in this research. It exists in their acknowledgement that they: occupy a role associated with "care"; are seen to "mind" rather than educate; are thought of as "babysitters". Indeed, the power of this interpellation is such that they continue to work under atrocious conditions, such as ECCE contracts equating to "earning as little as €5,130 a year" (Article 3). This dismissive discourse continues throughout the newspaper articles, which place focus on many alternative aspects of the early education sector, such as the importance of quality experiences (Article 1), improving facilities (Article 1) and financially supporting parents in order to improve access to early education (Article 1). What the articles fail to address is the working conditions of early education teachers. Indeed, despite having hinted at the issue in its headline, even Article 3 fails to address working conditions. This omission was further noted when examining the action being taken at government level. There was acknowledgement of funding being made available to improve facilities, a proposal for a Single Affordable Childcare Scheme and mention of a learner bursary, designed to increase the qualifications of early education teachers while continuing to ignore their abysmal working conditions. These articles collectively reflect the lack of societal value associated with the role of early education teacher and give insight as to how the Government of Ireland continue to deflect attention from the issues facing early education teachers.

Although the tides may be turning, early education teachers are finding their individual voices and learning how to use those voices collectively, in spaces not occupied by policy, spaces such as social media. Campaigns, such as SIPTU's Big Start, have also given strength to the voices of early education teachers, demanding that working conditions must be addressed in order to sustain the sector. The recent linguistic change, introduced in the First 5

document, was met with severe backlash across Social Media outlets. Many Montessori teachers not only voiced their disapproval at being rebranded the Early Learning and Care sector, but demanded to know who was responsible for such a change with seemingly little consultation. While no direct answers were forthcoming, it was interesting to hear the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs comment on the sector rebranding during her speech at the Early Childhood Ireland conference (April, 2019). Her theory regarding the addition of the word "care" in order to give it great recognition and value did little to appease those Montessori teachers frustrated with the removal of the word education from the sector's title. Perhaps Ireland is experiencing an interruption in interpellation, for those willing to extend themselves beyond society's identity boundaries.

### 5.8 Power Pendulum

I now offer some reflections on Foucauldian power and the concept of the power struggle. Foucault not only highlighted the importance of engaging in critical reflection, but he also placed value on historical conditions: how the current situation may have occurred and possible alternative perceptions. Historically, in the case of early education teachers, the Prime Time expose acted as a catalyst, setting events in motion which positioned early educations teachers where they find themselves today. The newspaper articles examined here hinted at the power problem which exists in the interactions between society and individuals. Furthermore, the data generated here were indicative of the notion of social control, how it is dependent on its capacity to create individuals, and how those individuals are tied to their assigned identities by self-knowledge, as suggested by Foucault (1982).

I am intrigued by the notion of constructive constraints (Tremain, 2000; 2001), as it may be these constructive constraints which lead to Montessori teachers furthering their own

constraint by their very actions. Despite early education teachers acknowledging their own identity struggle, they continue to accept the dire working conditions to which they are subjected, irrespective of qualifications or experience. It seems that the government are adept at placing emphasis on other areas of the early education sector, deflecting focus from existing working conditions, for "the exercise of power can produce as much acceptance as may be wished for: it can pile up the dead and shelter itself behind whatever threats it can imagine" (Foucault, 1976, p. 64). Maybe it is a case of the segregated nature of the sector causing early education teachers to feel isolated, struggling to function as a unit? Or perhaps they are so immersed in ideological discourse which assigns little value to their role that they struggle to acknowledge the value of their role or to have their voices heard? However, when we consider Foucault's (1976) view that power exists only in action, we must again acknowledge the role of early education teachers in their own positioning. After all, Foucault's view of power concerns itself less with oppression than with the resistance of those who find power being exerted upon them, for it is in this space where new behaviours may emerge, behaviours which have the capacity to influence the interaction between people and government institutions. Indeed, it may be this capacity which serves to make these individuals governable (Rajchman, 1991) or governing subjects.

In his analysis of power, Foucault suggested that this is where subjects, in this case early education teachers, affirm their identity and establish their resistance to the exertion of power. This highlights Foucault's view of power as a strategy rather than a possession, the notion of power as a system encompassing society, and of individuals as vehicles of power, as the locus where both power and resistance collide. Hints of the Foucauldian power struggle are visible within the Social Media data presented, which suggests that Montessori teachers have started to seek change. However, the questions being asked by Montessori teachers suggest that this action

remains in its infancy, evident in the action being sought, the conditions being demanded falling significantly sort of the conditions offered to primary and secondary school teachers, despite feeling that Montessori teachers deserve the same recognition, as suggested by Participant EV.

# Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

## 6.1 Conclusions

Currently, early education teachers find themselves embedded in environment where ideas are publicly framed and debated, their classroom role marginalised by current policy (Russell, 2011). Ambitious policy plans recognise the importance of early education yet lack recognition of the early education workforce (Boyd, 2013), despite these policies demanding a skilled workforce (Urban, 2008). Indeed, it seems that meeting the high demands of policy is not fully entrusted to early education teachers, Moloney (2011) suggesting that the manner of implementation continues to undermine and negate professional identity, despite the potentially profoundly negative effects of status (Beijaard, 1995). Policies may claim to speak with authority (Ball, 2011), but whose interests are really being addressed? It seems that focus is placed on all aspects of early education, from facilities to improving access, while ignoring the working conditions of early education teachers, perhaps even in an attempt to avoid addressing these issues.

In a world where identity is socially and culturally constructed (Swennen, Volman and van Essen, 2008) it seems that early education teachers continue to be silenced and marginalised (Aldridge, Kilgo and Emfinger, 2010) and thought of as babysitters (Dillabough, 1999). Do the ever-increasing demands of the early education sector not require Montessori teachers to be respected and honoured (Halfon, Hochstein and Shulmann, 2001), applauded for their ability to perform so many tasks: teacher; carer; reported; accountant? Indeed, given the variety of duties they conduct simultaneously, Kremenitzer and Miller's (2003) description of them as a *super-person* is easy to understand. Certainly, they do deserve a more prominent place in society (Kartal, 2007) given that the ability to be an early years teacher, especially a Montessori teacher, is a highly specialised and skilful task

(Dinneen, 2009). When we consider the identity of early years teacher within a Montessori context, I would argue that the recent linguistic change, from the Early Childhood Care and Education sector to the Early Learning and Care sector, further highlights the need for a strong professional identity, developed and enhanced by language embedded throughout training, practice and policy. This is especially important given the new inclusion policy, as many Montessori teachers lack confidence in their knowledge and ability to implement inclusion (Forlin, 2001; Avramidia and Norwich, 2002). This is troubling given that research suggests children with SEN are dependent on the expertise of their teachers (McGee, 2004; Edwards, 2007), knowledge, beliefs and responses to barriers inform practice (Florian and Linklater, 2010) and professional identity is critical to the successful implementation of inclusion (Van Huizen, van Oers and Wubbels, 2005; Tigelaar et. al., 2004; Koster et. al., 2009). Belonging to a professional unit, under one unified title, may improve self-perception and confidence. After all, Jung (1979) once suggested that children learn from what the grown-up is rather than what the grown-up does.

Perhaps the time has come for Montessori teachers to use language to position themselves. Maybe they are the ones capable of addressing what is absent in policy and discourse. After all, if discourse is organised to be persuasive (Gill, 1996) and we can use language to influence each other (Johnston, 2004) then perhaps the time has come for Montessori teachers to use language as a social tool and enable it to play a key role in their identity. While the early education sector has a checkered history, the current workforce, those who embrace change and strive for improved practice, cannot be expected to indefinitely pay for the malpractice of their predecessors. Perhaps finding the right platform from which to speak may help Montessori teachers find their voice. Certainly, there are social media spaces in which Montessori teachers gather to challenge the conditions in which they find themselves. SIPTU's Big Start initiative may have even strengthened the voice of Montessori

teachers, and the early education sector workforce at large, in recent times. It may, however, be future generations who have the strongest voice. They are graduating with degrees in early education and are comfortable in the realms of social media. Perhaps it is they who will not be held accountable for the past, who will challenge those in power address the working conditions and demand the societal value offered to their fellow primary and secondary teachers.

In 2012, the OECD described improved qualifications, training and working conditions of the early education workforce as an effective policy lever in order to improve the early education sector. Despite this, throughout Ireland the average hourly rate of pay for an early education teacher is €10.27, with a manager earning €13.28. These rates of pay are irrespective of qualifications, Montessori or otherwise. These figures appear starkly deficient in relation to national income levels, remuneration but a fraction of equivalent roles, such as that of primary school teacher. A report by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (2015) raised concerns regarding the precarious working conditions for Montessori teachers, conditions created by the Government's ECCE programme which is funded for only 38 weeks per annum. This programme has resulted in part-time contracts which have forced most Montessori teachers to seek welfare payments from the State during the summer months, when they find themselves 'unemployed'. Despite 38-week work contracts, the report suggested that the increased workload necessitated full-time contracts. This means that Montessori teachers are being placed in the position of attempting to complete the equivalent of 52 weeks of work in 38 weeks. The result is that many find themselves working outside of term-time, beyond contract requirements, without commensurate financial compensation. This ongoing issue of remuneration has negatively impacted perceptions of working in the early education sector and undermined graduates' self-esteem in relation to how their work is valued (Moloney and Pope, 2013). It also makes it virtually impossible to establish a

graduate-led workforce, as recommended by the CoRe Report (2011), with little incentive for Montessori teachers to remain in the early education sector. The sector is stuck in a cyclical chain, each component dependent on the next, and in order to move forward we must strengthen the links from the foundation upwards. Providing consistency across training routes may facilitate the creation of a highly skilled workforce, a workforce hallmarked as professionals thus positioned to command the status and attributes associated with professional practice. Perhaps this is the platform from which change may be initiated, an opportunity to create a workforce with different expectations and demands and for whom value is embedded throughout training. Of course, in order for this change to be successful it must be supported by policy, and the language of policy. Assigning a unified title, a title on par with "primary teacher" and "secondary teacher", creates a sense of value, not just for early education teachers themselves but also throughout society.

A report on the early education sector's working conditions (Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, 2017) identified the need for a sector pay scale linked to qualifications, with low pay cited as leading to difficulty in retaining staff. As well as identifying a lack of investment in the workforce, the report also presented workforce concerns regarding a lack of respect and a desire to be treated more professionally. There were further concerns raised regarding the lack of non-contact time, given the paperwork requirements and ever-changing regulations. Interestingly, despite their participation, Montessori teachers felt that stakeholders acted as the primary source for consultation, the views of early education teachers sought as a box-ticking exercise and not given serious consideration. Furthermore, they offered an example to support their views, suggesting that during consultation regarding the introduction of a second free preschool year it was unanimously agreed to defer this expansion until the one-year scheme was fully evaluated with regards to capitation levels and staff remuneration. Despite this consultation, the second free preschool year was introduced,

replicating the shortcomings of the initial one-year scheme.

The Early Childhood Ireland Barometer (2018) revealed that 75% of people surveyed agreed that early education was as important as the education of older children and 56% of people surveyed recognised early education teachers as professionals, hinting at change. However, based on a report into precarious work, the role of early education teacher continues to fit into the realm of *bad job*, a bad job defined as lacking: a permanent contract; a pension plan; sick pay; funded training; an incremental salary (Congress, 2017). This report also acknowledged the negative effects and consequences of low status work, particularly relevant given that Ireland has the most underfunded early education sector in Europe at just 0.1% GDP, the average being 0.8% GDP (Social Justice Index, 2017), thus negatively impacting the 23,500 people employed in the sector (Pobal, 2017). It seems little wonder that it continues to be a sector in crisis, a Congress Report (2016) describing early education teachers in Ireland as being among the worst paid in Europe due to a major scale policy failure. Despite dealing with what Urban (2008) described as constant and substantial policy changes, Montessori teachers continue to struggle to establish a professional identity, perhaps due to the fragmented system which disempowers and undervalues them, making them struggle to associate the concept of being a professional with their low pay. Lynch (2014) referred to this as indirect Affective Inequality, suggesting that, despite being in what is often deemed a caring role, early education teachers' own needs go untended, lacking recognition on economic, political and societal levels. When we consider the power struggle, the need for early education teachers to add their voice to the political agenda is clear, for this seems the only opportunity to address issues of remuneration and recognition, and there is hope within the political arena. Minister Zappone, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, has publicly expressed support for recognition of early education teacher (Dail Eireann, 2017; Kennedy Summer School, 2017; Seanad Eireann, 2017), although she also acknowledged that the workforce is beyond her remit and

recommended joining a union in order to initiate change.

Bryson and Forth researched the benefits of joining a union, such as: lower turnover; increased motivation; higher pay; workplace pension; paid on the job training. Perhaps it is a union who can unite the fragmented early education workforce, creating power through one voice. It seems a 30% sector membership would enable a union to apply to the Labour Court for a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO), the court then producing a recommendation which is presented to government. An SEO has the capacity to establish minimum pay and conditions for Montessori teachers, and others working within the early education sector, a form of action which Minister Zappone stated she would support, ensuring an agreeable outcome for all concerned. Indeed, Minister Zappone is not alone in her support of early education teachers. In 2017, a Dail motion put forward that early education teachers should have better pay and conditions and it passed unopposed, despite this requiring additional funding or, at the very least, a restructuring of funding for the early education sector. In 1999, the *Ready to Learn* White Paper referred to early education teachers as low paid and lacking status or career structure. Urban (2008) suggested that little has changed and that enhanced pay and status are essential in order to retain good early education teachers. They also acknowledged that the government are not the direct employer of Montessori teachers, or others working within the sector, therefore not directly responsible or capable of creating change without the action of Montessori teachers themselves.

According to Balibar and Brewster 1972, Althusser used the term interpellation to describe the process by which individuals internalise cultural values and permit them to impact on their lives, becoming trapped within ideology and our given ideological positions. However, Althusser suggested that interpellation left no room for resistance, even using the word ‘hero’ when describing teachers who found a way in which to teach outside or against

ideology (cited in Jameson and Brewster, 2001). This is where the author offers Foucault's interpretation of power to illuminate the spaces where resistance lives and shine a light on its building momentum. Perhaps our social world is produced through the power of discourse, which may marginalise alternative ways of thinking. However, power and knowledge are intertwined, thus by possessing knowledge of discourse we gain the power with which to initiate change. Foucault described discourse as moving back and forth, reflecting and constructing the social world and those who use or are situated within the world. In these times of a social world in which social media plays such an integral part, there are signs that Montessori teachers are recovering their voices. A valued workforce must be recognised as a key component in providing quality early education, education which encompasses all aspects of child development. In her Ted Talk, Professor Brene Brown discussed how we enable our stories to define us when we deny them, but when we tell own our stories, we have the opportunity to write our own ending. Perhaps by recognising, and owning, their interpellation, Montessori teachers might empower themselves to influence their story's ending.

Our name is often the first thing people learn about us and, as a result, it may define us, influencing the earliest judgements of others. Applying this logic to professional titles highlights the necessity to address the issue of identities in the early education sector, to provide a unified title which holds value worthy of the work undertaken by Montessori teachers. After all, this is familiar territory, the word "doctor" used to identify medical practitioners engaged in a variety of roles. The decision, taken at policy level, to rebrand the early education sector the early learning and care sector is of great significance. While the intention may have been to add value to the word care, the removal of the word education ultimately undermined the role of Montessori teachers.

The multiple titles evident across training and CPD continues to cloud identity, causing further isolation and fragmentation. A unified professional title has symbolic power, influencing the status and respect associated with the role of Montessori teacher. A unified professional title reflects our knowledge and expertise and resonates with both the workforce and society. Perhaps this will enable policymakers to value the voice of Montessori teachers and enable society to value their role. Amidst a myriad of titles, a survey in 2017 (Barnardos, 2017) recognised the majority of participants expressed a desire to be recognised as early education teachers. These wishes have already been recognised by Mary Immaculate University, who introduced the term early education teacher into their LINC Programme in 2018, with Marino Institute of Education introducing the course title, "Early Childhood Education", removing the word care, which seems to attract so much attention, even though it is an integral part of the education role.

Of course, there is also a need to address working conditions of Montessori teachers. It is difficult to achieve a sense of professionalism when it is necessary to supplement wages, often by babysitting or childminding, the very roles that need to be separated from the role of Montessori teacher. It is also challenging to establish the same societal regard as that afforded to primary teachers and secondary teachers, given the lack of state recognition, pension, maternity leave and holiday. The language of policy, which influences discourse and ideology, must embed respect into the role of Montessori teacher in order for society to recognise and acknowledge the importance of those Montessori teachers working in the early education sector. Research continues to raise the profile and value of the sector but early education teachers continue to be left behind. Even perceptions of Montessori teachers themselves must be addressed, a sense of professionalism developed throughout training, ensuring high quality courses and the creation of a skilled workforce who do not feel apologetic for expecting to be treated as professions, but rather know it is their right, something they deserve.

## 6.2 Recommendations

The early education sector has many qualification routes, creating a diverse workforce (Moloney, 2010). Such variation in training leads to challenges in collaboration, early education teachers, including Montessori teachers, often acting in isolated ways (Osgood and Stone, 2002). Indeed, Participant BJ mentioned the need to address the discrepancies present in training several times during her interview. Having worked directly with twelve different early education teachers over the last fourteen years, I have personal experience of the challenges brought about by these discrepancies. People become protective of their knowledge and, rather than collaborating, they work in isolation, often fearful of not having the same level of knowledge as their peers, akin to Participant RS's experience of not feeling 'equal' to her peers.

Having commenced mentoring and lecturing during the past year, I am reassured by the training structure in place at two institutions in Ireland. My professional practice has also benefitted greatly from this work. I find that I am more confident and comfortable in appreciating my own role, and the role of my colleagues. I also ensure empowering language, supporting the development of professional identity, is used consistently throughout discourse with student teachers on work placement. We are moving away from the perception of early education "as an alternative to hairdressing and a suitable route for those who fail in school." (Greenway, cited in Nutbrown, 2012, p.38). However, I believe there is a need to address training as a whole, to standardise the components required to become an early education teacher, identifying common ground between theorists while instilling an appreciation for each approach rather than increasing the divide which already exists within the sector. I also believe practical experience needs to be a graded component of all training, and it needs to be closely monitored in order to both establish and reinforce good practice.

Perhaps early education settings should be provided with mentor training prior to students commencing practice placements. This would also serve to strengthen the links between training institutes and early education teachers, possibly enhancing collaborative practice.

Of course, unifying early education teacher training requirements is but one piece of the puzzle. Once qualified, these early education teachers will be joining a diverse workforce, many of whom took significantly different training routes and have lower level qualifications. In fact, a Pobal survey (2015) identified 86.8% of the workforce as having a level 5 qualification, which was introduced as the minimum qualification in 2016. Participant RS suggested the need for this minimum qualification to be raised and, perhaps, this could be achieved through long-term CPD? Currently, the LINC Programme is the only long- term CPD available to early education teachers, and it is recognised as a level 6 special award. Unfortunately, it is a short-term programme, soon to enter its final year of a four-year provision. It is essential to provide high quality CPD in order to enhance the skills of the existing early education workforce, perhaps considering the views of Fukkink and Lont (2007), that it is necessary to identify the features of training which yield the strongest evidence of desirable outcomes.

While CPD may provide part of the upskilling solution, it comes with its own challenges, which must be addressed. Currently, much CPD is undertaken by Montessori teachers during their personal time and at personal expense. It seems that, even when it is funded, training occurs during the working day, which is problematic. Since the government funded ECCE programme runs for 38 weeks per annum, it may be of value to extend funding for additional weeks, with training taking place during this time.

At the heart of this research was the identity of early years teachers in a Montessori context. The newspaper articles presented here all omitted the word teacher from their text. Beyond that, many of the participants in this research also offered strong views regarding identity. Recognition of the early education workforce as a professional group, who are provided with professional working conditions, must be established. However, the road to professional recognition may well lie in the creation of a unified identity, enabling early education teachers to function as a single professional entity. This unification may give strength to their voices. People working as Montessori teachers do so because they are passionate about early education and they recognise the value of early education, even in the absence of societal value for their role.

Perhaps a united title may form the catalyst for change regarding the working conditions of Montessori teachers. A formally recognized title which includes the word "teacher", creating common ground with Primary teachers and Secondary teachers. A united title may help establish Montessori teachers as part of a professional group and, in doing so, may lead to conditions afforded to fellow primary and secondary teachers. It is difficult to imagine other professionals struggling to get mortgage approval or pay for health care. It may be time for early education to come under government jurisdiction, as is the case for both primary education and secondary education.

I found myself feeling most perturbed by Participant RS's comments regarding highly qualified people working for minimum wage and her view that they will not remain in the sector for very long under such poor working conditions. Research indicates that young children, especially those with SEN, rely on teachers having the necessary expertise to support their learning (McGee, 2004; Edwards, 2007) but, in a sector with a turnover rate of 25%, and

with 32% of staff having less than 2 years of experience (Pobal, 2016), it comes as no surprise that early education teachers lack confidence in their ability to teach children with SEN (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). If the early education sector in Ireland is to provide high quality early experiences for all children, it must ensure highly trained, knowledgeable and experienced early years teachers are encouraged to remain in the sector. It is also essential for the sector to continue to attract graduates, who are trained to the highest of standards. In order for this to be achieved, it is vital to address working conditions. It is only by providing Montessori teachers, and others in the early years sector, with recognition, and assigning value to their role, that the sector will be driven forward by professionals with the confidence and competence to ensure its success.

It becomes impossible not to feel the marginalisation of Montessori teachers yet the government blatantly increases demands on them by recognising the importance of their role while failing to address their working conditions. While I am not saying everyone in the sector wants to be called "teacher", I think we deserve the same recognition afforded to teachers. By avoiding the recognition required to initiate change the vital role of Montessori teachers continues to be undermined. It is time for the government of Ireland to recognise Montessori teachers as they do primary teachers and secondary teachers. Early education must become fully government funded, with Montessori teachers paid by the state. We need a salary scale and benefits, such as a pension and maternity pay, on par with other teachers. Perhaps by creating an overlap in aspects of training and CPD, collaboration may be encouraged and enhanced, thus establishing a sense of value for Montessori teachers within the field of education. The current situation is not sustainable. It must be addressed from the bottom upwards, providing high quality training routes and embedding professionalism, while creating a professionalised sector, in which newly qualified early years teachers find themselves positioned alongside other teachers, as colleagues, equal in every regard.

Ireland must endeavour to remove the many terracettes from the landscape of education, creating a smooth plain on which all teachers, and children, may move freely, unobstructed by perceptions and appreciated as equals. In order to create an inclusive education system, where all children are enabled to fulfil their potential, it is necessary to ensure that all children feel valued as active members of society, who have a sense of belonging. The starting point is ensuring they have teachers who feel valued and have a sense of belonging, throughout the entire education system. After all, teachers can make a difference to what and how children learn (Hattie, 2009).

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Sample Letter Providing Information

To Whom It May Concern,

I am currently undertaking an Education Doctorate at the University of Birmingham. My research thesis 'How do the professional identities of early education teachers effect inclusive education?" is concerned with the professional identity of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector in Ireland.

Significant changes have occurred within the ECCE sector, including the publication of Síolta: the National Quality Framework (2006), Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009) and the launch of the LINC Programme (2016). These initiatives highlight the need for professional practice yet there remains a lack of policy regarding the identity of those working in the sector. Through this study, I hope to generate new empirical data regarding the lack of a single professional identity and the effects of this issue on inclusive education.

The purpose of this letter is to invite your participation in this research. This will involve your participation in a short interview (30 minutes approx) or completion of a questionnaire (15-20 minutes approx.). Involvement in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw without consequence at any time during the research project. ID codes will be used so that you, your setting or organisation cannot be identified by anybody other than by me. All information will be confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the research. Research findings may be published; however your anonymity and the anonymity of your setting / organisation will be preserved at all times.

For those willing to complete a questionnaire, there will be 10 questions based on your current role, your experiences, your views regarding your identity and your views regarding inclusive early education. For those of you will to participate in an interview, upon receiving your response I will contact you via e-mail to arrange a mutually suitable time for interview between July 2017 and May 2018. The interview may take place in school or an alternative mutually agreed location. Audio recordings may be used to allow for transcription and analysis. It is my hope that this research will be of benefit as it will highlight the need for clarity at national policy level regarding the professional identity and associated title of those working in early education. You may withdraw without penalty at any time during the research process and should you choose to withdraw your information will not be included in the research findings.

If you would like to be involved in this research, please complete and return the attached informed consent form by (insert date). Should you require any further information or clarification about this research, please get in touch with me on [redacted] or via mobile at [redacted]. Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor, Professor Julie Allan, on [redacted] or via office number [redacted]

I greatly appreciate your assistance and I am happy to provide you with a copy of my research upon completion.

Yours sincerely,

Natasha O'Donnell

## Appendix 2: Sample Consent Form for Participants

I (signature)_____agree to participate in research being undertaken by Natasha O'Donnell into the effects of professional identities of early education teachers on inclusive education.

I understand that my participation involves the completion of a questionnaire (15-20 minutes approx.) or taking part in a short interview (30 minutes approx) between July 2017 and May 2018.

I also understand that:

- My involvement in this research is voluntary.
- I may withdraw without consequence at any time during the research project.
- ID codes will be applied to the research data so that I, my setting or organisation cannot be identified by anybody other than by the researcher, Natasha O'Donnell.
- All information will be confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the research.
- Research findings may be published; however my anonymity and the anonymity of my setting / organisation will be preserved at all times.

**Please tick the appropriate box.**

Willing to participate via questionnaire ..... ☐

Willing to participate via interview ..... ☐

Signed:_____ Research Participant

Date: _____

Signed:_____ Researcher

**Appendix 3: Article 1 by Aoife Barry**

# €2.75m childcare grants a 'drop in the ocean' of investment needed

Some of the grants are being used to provide outdoor spaces for children to play in, in order to tackle obesity.

Jul 4th 2013, 8:19 PM Aoife Barry

NEWLY-ANNOUNCED CHILDCARE grants totalling €2.75 million have been described as a ‘drop in the ocean’ by a childcare association.

Frances Fitzgerald, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, announced that €2.75 million in capital grant funding has been allocated to 671 grantees from childcare settings throughout Ireland.

## Scheme

The national programme is administered by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Minister Fitzgerald said she was pleased to be able to provide capital funding for the second year in a row.

She said:

> This capital programme represents my commitment, and that of Government, to the ongoing development of the childcare sector.

This year’s funding scheme covered four strands:

- Small grants to purchase equipment or carry out small maintained work, assessed by the local childcare committees
- Grants to improve accessibility of services for children with disabilities
- Grants to provide natural outdoor spaces that promote active outdoor play and
- Grants towards critical works to ensure that buildings are fit for purpose under the childcare regulations (open to community/not for profit services)

Minister Fitzgerald said that “startling statistics” revealed by her department’s Growing Up in Ireland survey show that one in four 3-year-olds are overweight or obese.

> In this context I am particularly pleased that over €1 million in funding has being made available to 161 childcare settings throughout the country to help them provide a safe outdoor space to encourage play and physical activity.

## Investment

However, Teresa Heeney, Chief Operations Officer, Early Childhood Ireland said that while they congratulate the early childcare and education services around the country who have been successful in their application for the grants, “this is just a drop in the ocean of investment required in the sector”.

> This is not a “new” investment stream into the sector, but rather a continuum of the capital funding programme announced by Minister Fitzgerald last year.

She said that following the recent Prime Time investigation programme Breach of Trust,"there were cross party calls for essential changes and investment to improve the quality and standards in the early childcare and education sector in Ireland".

It's so important that this mandate for change doesn't evaporate over the summer months. We've got to ensure real action through detailed and realistic plans to develop the workforce; build quality through mentoring; reform and reinforce inspection; reform legislation and ring-fence the necessary investment to make all of this happen.

She also spoke of discussions between Minister Fitzgerald and her cabinet colleagues on ringfencing a training fund to ensure minimal qualifications in the sector, as well as money to recruit more inspectors.

Heeney said that higher qualifications should be incentivised and a Training Transformation Fund should be introduced to enable practitioners gain awards at levels 6, 7, 8 and beyond.

"The current Irish investment level of 0.25 per cent in early childhood lags significantly behind the European average of 1 per cent of GDP," added Heeney.

http://www.thejournal.ie/childcare-funding-979289-Jul2013/

**Appendix 4: Article 2 by Marian Quinn**

# How much do you value the people who take care of your children?

Marian Quinn, Chairperson of the Association of Childhood Professionals explains why thousands of childhood professionals are taking to the streets across the country this weekend.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS will today take to the streets in Cork, Dublin and Sligo in a bid to secure a wage that is commensurate with their important role of supporting children and families at the key stage in the young child's development.

When childcare was first provided outside of the home it was generally by the woman who lived down the road and took in a few children to supplement the family income as she raised her own children. There were no requirements in terms of qualifications, regulations, inspections, observations, curriculum planning, continuous professional development, community involvement, etc. This woman kept the child safe and fed and her job was done.

The vista of early childhood and care is completely different in 2015. Today, the practitioner is a professional person whose role extends beyond their care work with the children. Today's professional must still ensure that the children are kept safe and fed but there is so much more expected with it. This heightened expectation is because we know so much more about child development.

**'At breaking point'**

Research indicates that early experiences affect the quality of the architecture of the brain by establishing either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the learning, health and behaviour that follow. The brain is more 'plastic' at this stage and so young children can learn at a more accelerated rate – just look at how quickly and effortlessly the young child becomes fluent in at least one language.

The role of the early childhood professional is to support the child and family during this critical stage of development. Childcare has now extended to include early childhood educator, administrator, curriculum planner, researcher, cleaner, counsellor, communicator, parent coach, nurse, facilitator… and the list goes on. The amazing thing is that all these services are provided by one very capable multi-tasker who earns little more that minimum wage!

The early childhood workforce is at breaking point and can no longer afford to deliver this level of service for the pay they receive. Many have to take on a second job and increasing numbers are making the difficult decision to leave the profession that they love but cannot afford to remain in.

Students in colleges are reconsidering working with our youngest citizens and are applying for further courses to transfer to primary teaching or completely moving from the idea of working with children at all.

Car loans, mortgages, pensions and medical insurance are unaffordable. Employers struggle to take a wage themselves after they pay all the costs that are associated with delivering high quality early education and care. Wage bills account for 60-80% of these costs even though many are on little more than minimum wage.

This is because of the adult to child ratios that are required under legislation. In baby rooms there is one adult for every three children. In the toddler room this increases to 1:5 and in the preschool room it is 1:8 for full daycare and 1:11 for sessional services. Add to this the cost of rent/mortgage, rates, utilities, training, resources, insurance, programme costs and maintenance and you can see why the cost to parents is so high and why wages are so low.

**'A win-win scenario'**

Early childhood education and care meets two distinct set of needs. The first is supporting children and parents with early learning. This period is the foundation stage that primary and post primary build on yet it fails to be recognised in this context and so fails to receive the level of government funding that it requires.

Secondly, it also meets the care needs of parents who work outside the home. For both these reasons early care and education needs to be recognised as a public service and allocated appropriate funding.

The key fact behind the Dublin, Cork and Sligo rallies is the stark reality that Ireland currently spends 0.2% of GDP on the early childhood sector, compared to an OECD average of 0.7%.

This level of funding is inadequate to deliver high quality early care and education. There is an expectation that this service can be provided using a market model but the regulatory requirements make that impossible without increasing the cost to parents and this is not a viable option. State investment is the only solution.

Research indicates that this investment will yield high financial and societal returns in terms of reduced spending on health, justice, social welfare and educational intervention. Further financial gains will occur from an increase in workforce participation and in tax returns.

Investment in early childhood education and care is a win win scenario if only our government had the political bravery to grasp this nettle and be progressive instead of merely reactive.
*Marian Quinn is Chairperson of the Association of Childhood Professional. Further details of the rallies in Cork, Sligo and Dublin today can be found on their website.*

http://www.thejournal.ie/readme/early-childhood-professionals-march-2146063-Jun2015/

**Appendix 5: Article 3 by Aine McMahon**

# Childcare services are facing a ‘staffing crisis’ due to low wages

Irish families spend double the European average on childcare

Sat, Apr 1, 2017, 19:20

**Aine McMahon**

Childcare services say they are facing a staffing crisis as they are unable to retain staff due to low wages.
Professional childcare workers can earn less than €10 per hour with some staff on part-time contracts coming out with as little as €5,130 a year, a survey published last year found.
New research by Early Childhood Ireland shows the childcare sector is facing a staffing crisis with 86 per cent of crèches and preschools saying they were concerned about being able to recruit trained staff.
The childcare sector had a turnover rate of 28.4 per cent in the last 12 months.
The research shows 36 per cent of those who tried to recruit staff in the last 12 months were unable to find anyone suitable .
A total of 46 per cent of those that did manage to recruit had to settle for someone with lower qualifications than they initially wanted.
Overall, 49 per cent of childcare services were finding it difficult to retain staff with 57 per cent of respondents stating working in the sector was not financially viable.
Minister for Children Katherine Zappone recently promised an independent review of the cost of childcare.
Speaking at Early Childhood Ireland’s annual conference in UCD, Ms Zappone said the independent review would feed into future policy development and review of subsidy levels.
The average Irish family spends 34 per cent of their household income on childcare, which is double the European average.
The new Single Affordable Childcare scheme will come into effect from September 2017.
The scheme included a new childcare subsidy of 50 cent per hour for children under the age of three (the equivalent to €20 a week for full-time care), as well as new supports, on a graduated basis, for families on low incomes.

https://www.google.ie/amp/s/www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/childcare-services-are-facing-a-staffing-crisis-due-to-low-wages-1.3033640%3Fmode%3Damp

**Appendix 6: Article 4 by Sinead Pembroke**

# 'If we want better people working in childcare, we need better working terms'

Policy is driving precarious work for professionals in childcare, writes Sinead Pembroke.

Apr 3rd 2017, 6:45 AM Sinead Pembroke

HOW MUCH DO we know about the working conditions of the early years' educators who look after and teach our pre-school children?

A lot of the media focus tends to be on the cost of childcare, and malpractices within the childcare sector.

However, very little is known about the terms and conditions of employment, which is predominantly insecure, temporary, and low paid.

**Childcare workers are well qualified and on 10.27 an hour**

There are 23,000 people employed in childcare. They're mostly female with a minimum qualification of FETAC level 5. There has been a big push to professionalise the sector, and as a result there has been an increase in the amount of graduates working in childcare.

However, the average rate of pay is 10.27 euros per hour. Consequently, the majority of early years' educators are well qualified and employed on a low hourly rate, with no job security and no career progression.

For example, one woman I spoke to had finished her Masters and she was on ten euros an hour with no prospect of getting a pay increase.

There are 4,500 providers; about a third of the services are community providers and two thirds are private providers. Private providers are usually small, employing four or five people, and a lot of the older operators are self-employed.

While parents pay high fees, most are only just about staying afloat, and as a business it is not sustainable.

**The ECCE scheme is driving working conditions down**

State investment into the sector is low by European standards; 0.2% of GDP funds go into childcare whereas the European average is 0.8%. The UNICEF goal is 1% of GDP being invested into the sector.

State funding comes in the form of the Early Childhood and Care Education programme (ECCE), which gives a free pre-school year to all children. Approximately 95% of all childcare services offer this.

On this scheme, early years educators are employed on a fixed term contract of 38 weeks a year, working part-time for fifteen hours per week, (three hours per day). Once the 38 weeks are over, educators go on the dole for the summer months, after which they will either be issued with another 38-week part-time contract or not; there is no guarantee they have a job to go back to.

There are no employment benefits such as a pension, maternity pay, and little if any sick pay for educators employed on the ECCE scheme.

They are paid for three hours of contact time with a child, but there's a huge amount of work that goes on outside of the paid three hours, such as observation reports, preparation work and other administrative responsibilities they have to complete.

**Impact on lives of early years' educators**

We also have to think about the effect this is having on the lives of our early years' educators; they are unable to plan for the future, such as start a family, buy a house or apartment, or even to afford some independence to rent on their own.

Early years' educators are incredibly devoted and passionate about their profession, but they don't feel respected because of the poor working conditions that are being promoted under the ECCE scheme.

If their working conditions are not changed to give them job security, better rates of pay with pay increments and payment for non-contact time, then they will have no option but to leave the sector altogether.

**Policy driven precarity in childcare sector**

Consequently, the precarious nature of the childcare sector is policy driven because a lot of providers are dependent on State funding. More and more services are going towards the ECCE scheme, and that by nature is more precarious.

Community not-for-profit providers were traditionally funded by the childcare subvention scheme, and this model provided for full-time, permanent positions with much higher rates of pay. The latter funding model shows that government policy can be used in a positive way to drive employment practices in the childcare sector.

If we want better quality, devoted, and well qualified people working in childcare services, then we need working terms and conditions to match.
*Sinead Pembroke is a researcher at TASC (Think-Tank on Action for Social Change).*

http://www.thejournal.ie/readme/if-we-want-better-people-working-in-childcare-we-need-working-terms-to-match-3317383-Apr2017/

**Appendix 7: Initial Questionnaire**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name** | |
| **Gender** | |
| **What is your current role in the early education sector?** | |
| **How long have you worked in the early education sector?** | |
| **What is your highest level of qualification pertaining to early education?** | |
| **Where did you study early education?** | |

**Appendix 8: Interview and Questionnaire Questions**

Background

1. What is your educational background?
2. How long have you worked in the early years sector?
3. Describe your current role.
4. How would you describe your teaching philosophy? Where does it come from?

ECCE

5. Do you ever struggle to fit your philosophy with the practice requirements of your setting?
6. Describe one of your greatest moments in the early years sector.
7. Describe an aspect of the early years sector that you find challenging.
8. What are you most passionate about in the sector?

Inclusion

9. What is your understanding of inclusion?
10. How do you feel about providing an inclusive setting?
11. What, if any, inclusion training have you received?

Perceptions and Practice

12. Do you feel your role is valued/appreciated by society?
13. Are there any recent policies that you feel support you in your role?
14. How are you referred to in your setting? Do you think this influences how people see you/your role?
15. What words or phrases are associated with your role?
16. How do you identify yourself in terms of your role?

Professional

17. What, in your opinion, constitutes “professional”?
18. In what way do qualifications and training influence professional identity?
19. Do you identify with the term “professional”?
20. In order to enhance the sector for those working in it, what action could be taken?

**Appendix 9: BJ Interview**

Background

1. What is your educational background?
   I have a BA in early childhood education. I studied for that from '04 to '07. In '07 I started working in a Montessori school and continued studying to make it a 4 years honours degree. I spent 9 years working then returned to do Ed Masters. It will take 2 years.
2. How long have you worked in the early years sector?
   Since '04 I had work placement for 3 years. 11yrs full time.
3. Describe your current role.
   Manager of a part time Montessori school that caters for 40 children and 7 staff. I started as a nursery teacher, then a playgroup teacher, a room leader, assistant manager, manager. My role is currently based out of the classroom.
4. How would you describe your teaching philosophy? Where does it come from?
   Never thought of how I would define it. I guess it's not a specific philosophy. It must be fluid. In college I was very focused on a play based curriculum and hanging onto the imagination side of childhood. Montessori school showed me the value of education and the abilities of children. I don't know if it's defined as a philosophy but I do see the value in encouraging independence, follow interests. We are in a privileged position where there is no set curriculum for them so we can follow what they want to do and it involves us being constantly learners as well as educators.

ECCE

5. Do you ever struggle to fit your philosophy with the practice requirements of your setting?
   Yes. Lot of tick the box exercises. Huge discrepancy between theory and practice and it's very easy to say that we are child led and wants to follow what the child is interested in but in practice it can be a lot more difficult. 12 or 24 children, care and education under the one bracket, some days care outweighs education. You can have all the plans in the world and somebody might really want to know about the big bang but if someone has a temp of 38 degrees that's the focus in your room. There's a lot of pressure from parents, from the department. Different people you work with have different views on what are the best outcomes. It can be difficult when you're faced with new guidelines or frameworks that you feel you need to make your practice fit as opposed to going with what you know and what you feel is best
6. Describe one of your greatest moments in the early years sector.
   I worked in Australia for a year in a centre that was predominantly for children with additional needs. I worked with a little boy who had a rare condition and they were told that he would never walk and I was there when he took his first steps and I would put that down as one of the best moments where you think there is hope for children when parents are told "oh, they can't do" initially. Give them the right environment and the right people working with them and there's endless possibilities I guess. So it was really nice. Proud moment.
7. Describe an aspect of the early years sector that you find challenging.
   Resources. Possibilities are endless for children and it's amazing to say we have an emergent curriculum and want to provide individual plans for each child but you just can't meet those requirements if we don't have the funding there or the resources there. That could be really

sad when you have a project everyone's really interested in and you just don't have the resources to take it any further

8. What are you most passionate about in the sector?
   (Not asked as previously answered)

Inclusion

9. What is your understanding of inclusion?
   Being able to offer every child opportunity so to be able to adapt as necessary to children to be able to encourage for early years definitely to be able to encourage all children to have an inclusive outlook. To identify difference but to then see it as unique and to be able to then see the benefits of that person and to see the person rather than what generally runs into labelling. It's not that every child is welcome in every setting and we can do the same thing for every child. That's not possible. I think to have an inclusive practice you need to be really honest about it. You need to ab able to identify are the abilities there of the staff, does the environment suit. When all those things fall into place you have an inclusive practice where that child is given the best possible opportunities
10. How do you feel about providing an inclusive setting?
    My own personal experience influenced my view of inclusion. It's a buzz word at the moment and a lot of people are quick to say that they have an inclusive practice and by that they think it means they have an admissions policy where they don't say no to a child if they have a physical disability or intellectual disability. I don't think that's the case and I think being in Australia and trying to find that balance of yes, this child needs support or therapy or whatever it may be, how can we facilitate that and offer them a "normal" setting
11. What, if any, inclusion training have you received?
    I attended the equality, diversity and inclusion training and I think there was very mixed feelings, I would say, between management and practitioners about what an inclusive environment is and what environments are actually being offered at the moment and I think there was a lot of debate so I think my view probably fit in with the way they were running the training but I think it differed a lot to the other attendees of the training.

Perceptions

12. Do you feel your role is valued/appreciated by society?
    I think there's a definite increase. I think as people become more aware, there's a lot in the media at the moment in relation to the sector and the massive underfunding and the staffing crisis so I think people are starting to understand the pressure associated with the role. There's a shift in the view of, I suppose, child care that they're now understanding that there's a lot more to working with the age group. I don't think it receives enough, I don't think my role is seen with enough value similar to other roles with the same level of education, for example primary school teachers who go back and do a masters in education receive not only funding from the government to do that, a more higher role and responsibility in their school, are identified by society, I believe, as even better than a primary teacher whereas for us to do a degree for the same amount of time and a masters for the same amount of time just doesn't receive the same.
13. Are there any recent policies that you feel support you in your role?
    I think a lot of the advice or guidelines or even regulations that we get from national level are very much open to interpretation and that can come down to the qualification and experience of the person interpreting it, whether the policies at local level are drafted in

conjunction with staff or drafted by a board member or management so I think there's massive discrepancies because there's no black and white this is what you must do and this is what you must not do. I think policy is definitely necessary. I think it does benefit us to have something to work off but the problem is there are so many different settings out there and schools that if everybody is interpreting it differently nobody knows who's right or who's wrong and then the problem for the child is to hop from one setting to another. There's no connection between preschool and primary school and secondary school to allow that child to receive the same education throughout. It also comes down to, it doesn't even matter what the policy is. For me, in my setting, I don't have 100% control. I'm not a puppet master for the teachers that are in the classroom so your policy can say one thing, whether it matches 100% to practice, it varies day-to-day, it can depend on who's in, the mood that they're in, there's more to it than just what's in the policy

14. How are you referred to in your setting? Do you think this influences how people see you/your role?
    Manager, boss…I think I haven't changed as a person, my view of what I do hasn't changed but for me to contact anybody and sign it off as preschool teacher or manager I know I'll receive a quicker response if it's signed off as manager
15. What words or phrases are associated with your role?
    Crèche, early years service, Montessori, because there are so many different departments publishing so many different frameworks it differs massively depending on who writes it and what their turn of phrase is. The preschool regs changed in 2016 and we had to remove "preschool service" and change it to "early years service" and you do still hear a lot of references to childcare workers and preschool practitioners. I think sometimes they are trying to tell the difference between somebody working in a full day care system versus a sessional, I don't think it's necessarily to do with professionalism I think it's maybe to do with people who work in sessional or part time might identify more with being a teacher or educator because their time is more concentrated, that's what they're doing. I think usually when people refer to themselves as practitioners or childcare worker it's because they're in full day care and there's a much bigger care element. I've yet to come across a baby room where they refer to themselves a teacher
16. How do you identify yourself in terms of your role?
    I struggle to identify myself and I think a lot of the time it comes down to the audience. If I meet someone that I don't know and they say what do you do, even 11 years later I fumble over the words. It usually comes down to something like I work in a Montessori school or I work in a school or, if I say im on holidays they say oh you're a teacher and I say yes and they ask what class do you teach and if I say I actually manage a preschool/Montessori school usually the next think out of their mouth is something related to a crèche which doesn't really bother me. Then if im speaking to a parent or a friend of my parents or if im sttending training I would say I manage an early years service, because it seems to be the terminology that ticks the boxes.

Professional

17. What, in your opinion, constitutes "professional"?
    Attitude, qualification, experience, commitment.
    Anybody can do a job but to train in it an be qualified in the area constitutes being a professional. I think you are within your rights to say you are a professional if you spent time studying. I think to maintain a level of professionalism you need to have a commitment to training and ongoing training for any sector but especially in early years, it's an ever evolving

sector and I think it's not enough to say I have a piece of paper from 11 years ago. It's one of the main reasons I went back. I think your attitude, it comes down, I think you can't just demand respect but you can help people understand why you should be respected. I think sharing of information, I think acting in a certain way, will give you the respect that I think goes along with being a professional. Your attitude towards it yourself, I think you need to be proud of what you do and demonstrate that on a day to day basis in order to maintain the level of professionalism

18. In what way do qualifications and training influence professional identity?
19. Do you identify with the term "professional"?
    Yes, I do
20. In order to enhance the sector for those working in it, what action could be taken?
    Loads! I think, the budget never seems to go in our favour, but if we could have an increased budget that money needs to go into professional development. I think there either needs to be a lot more…they need to monitor the training that is out there, level 5, level 6 and level 7. There's massive discrepencies in what is being turned out from those courses. I think as long as that continues to happen it's very difficult to identify everybody as a professional if the qualifications are so…vary so vastly. I would foresee a graduate led sector at the very minimum with the hope that it would be a graduate run sector. I think there needs to be more funding put into professional development not only in terms of increasing qualification but in allowing staff to attend training, whether it's in relation to inclusion or it's mandatory or training that's of interest to them. If pushing towards preschool for all children then everybody in the sector needs to be able to work with all children. I think one government department over the whole sector needs to happen. I think there needs to be more communication between preschool and primary school. I think having preschool and primary school teachers training or networking together would bridge that gap that currently exists. A massive overhaul to the whole sector needs to happen. I think almost like a hierarchy needs to exist in terms of training.

**Appendix 10: RS Interview**

Background

1. What is your educational background?
   Studied social care. 10 yrs. Did a 1 yr course in mont and at the same time started working in a mont school, 6 years later returned to college and did early childhood dip in care and ed
2. How long have you worked in the early years sector?
   8 years
3. Describe your current role.
   Mont teacher jr mont class 2.11-5.2 yrs
4. How would you describe your teaching philosophy? Where does it come from?
   Don't believe I'm strictly mont. I like aspects of Montessori and working in a Montessori school, giving the children their own independence and encouraging what they can do and can learn for themselves. I'd like to think that we're there to facilitate the children construct their own learning. When I returned to college I learned a lot more about play and how play can be…children can learn an awful lot from play and I would like to incorporate more of that into the classroom but I don't know how you do that in a Montessori class.

ECCE

5. Do you ever struggle to fit your philosophy with the practice requirements of your setting?
   Yes, more recently it's been a struggle for me and prior to returning to college I didn't really see that whereas, maybe a little bit of lack of knowledge on my behalf I would struggle with how to do that
6. Describe one of your greatest moments in the early years sector.
   This is where I contradict myself because I think one of the most memorable moments for me is being part of the process of teaching a child to read and leave this classroom reading and, for me, when you see that they have the capability to do that and it's through the Montessori philosophy and following their lead with that
7. Describe an aspect of the early years sector that you find challenging.
   Getting knowledge out there to society about the importance of early education and care. I think the benefits and the outcomes for children who have quality childhood education and care I think that the lifelong benefits are huge and I don't think that there's any respect for that in society, in the educational field, I don't think and I find it really challenging that we're not respected or valued in that way
8. What are you most passionate about in the sector?
   Through conversation with parents I would love to show the value of what we're doing and I'd love to see that across society. I don't think at the moment it's going to happen. I think when you look at other countries. I think that is a passion of mine and I'm known among my friends and family as preaching quite a bit about that and about the abilities of children at this age. So societal education

Inclusion

9. What is your understanding of inclusion?
   Inclusion for me prior to doing some cpd, was probably more based on a needs basis as opposed to a general sense and I think that if we look at it from a general sense, it's about

trying to include everyone in the service, be it gender, race, religion, whatever it takes, ability. That's how I try to look at itnow.

10. How do you feel about providing an inclusive setting?
    Sometimes it can be difficult. There's an expectation that we have to be all inclusive but I think that can be a very dangerous thing when there isn't knowledge there behind it, and I think that is difficult. I'm very fortunate where I work I work with a colleague who would have quite a broad knowledge base on inclusion and I would take a lot of learning from her but I think if I didn't work where I work I wouldn't have either, a, then knowledge from herself or, that I don't know if I'd have that level of awareness
11. What, if any, inclusion training have you received?
    I think I have a particular colleague so we constantly converse about things, particularly around inclusion, and I would feel that I learn so much from her that it's invaluable. Training provided a broad understanding of inclusion but I think in the classroom trying to provide that inclusion is very different, there's knowledge that you need to have to be completely inclusive

Perceptions

12. Do you feel your role is valued/appreciated by society?
    I think we are completely undervalued as a sector. I don't think there's any respect or knowledge about what we do. I think we're still seen as babysitters. You know, the child minder, the play school where children come in a play and they don't even see the value of what play is or what it is that you're trying to do in these classrooms. Looking after them. Minding them
13. Are there any recent policies that you feel support you in your role?
    I think there is improvements trying to be made. I think at a government level there isn't enough support financially for them to do that. I think they are definitely trying to bring, like they have the minimum education for staff members now, it's a level 5 which, for want of a better word, to me is absolutely pathetic to have somebody at a level 5 when we have these expectations that are put upon us to have somebody with a level 5 I just don't think it's enough that we have that as our policy, although it's at a very early stage it's the beginning of change in the sector. It requires more money into the sector to pay salaries etc. you see people in these jobs who are highly qualified and have educational backgrounds pretty much working for minimum wage and they're not going to stay in the sector for very long at that minimum wage. I think that's probably why they have that policy of, ok we brought in a minimum ed of level 5. They're going to keep it at that because they don't want to have to raise wages but they continue to raise the expectations
14. How are you referred to in your setting? Do you think this influences how people see you/your role?
    The children will call us by our first names. I think the children see us as teachers and very often, especially at the beginning of the year, you might hear "teacher, teacher, teacher". I think the parents, I would love to know how the parents refer to us outside of here. I think, where we are, maybe they might say teacher, I think across the sector we're either a childcare worker, a crèche worker, the minders in the crèche. I don't think we're really seen as teachers or educators, or respected. I don't understand why we wouldn't be called teachers, I mean it's the early education sector, I don't understand why we wouldn't have the same title as those in primary schools or secondary schools. We're still on that spectrum of education. I'd love to see us being referred to as teachers. I think we deserve that but I don't think we are seen as that.

15. What words or phrases are associated with your role?
    Childcare worker, crèche worker, minder
16. How do you identify yourself in terms of your role?
    teacher

Professional

17. What, in your opinion, constitutes "professional"?
    I probably, personally, do equate professionalism with education, rightly or wrongly so. I do think that with education comes a sense of professionalism. I think with knowledge comes professionalism as well. I think, without that, it's very difficult for people to see them and for people to see themselves as being professional, if they haven't got that proof or whatever. It's like a confidence. I certainly felt that. When I started in the sector I had one years experience and when I looked at the people I worked with when I began I didn't feel equal to them I suppose because I didn't think that my training was as good, I didn't think that I had the same level of knowledge of Montessori or the early childhood sector as they did and I think going back to college, for me, changed all that. I certainly got a huge amount of confidence in myself and what I do from that. I look at the difference to where I was in social care and, you know, social care funded me to go back to college for my degree. Anything you do in this sector, education wise, is funded by ourselves and it's done in our own time, compared to where I was, I got two days off a week to go to college. You had study days. It's not supported in the same way in this sector. If you want to do it you have to do it yourself.
18. In what way do qualifications and training influence professional identity?
    You gain confidence and knowledge
19. Do you identify with the term "professional"?
    Yes, especially since going back to college and doing my h dip
20. In order to enhance the sector for those working in it, what action could be taken?
    I think the level 5 needs to be raised, I think that if they could do something similar to what they did when I was working in social care, that was done for very similar reasons, they wanted to professionalise the whole sector and I think by providing long term courses for people on a part time basis where they are able to both work but that it's funded for people that there's extra pay and it's incentivised for people to go back to college and to gain the knowledge that is needed to work in this area. It's not just, "wouldn't it be great if they had it", it's necessary. Even the way that's portrayed in the media, at government level it's always this investment has gone into the sector to help the parents so it's still seen as we're investing for you for your child minder as opposed to we're actually investing for the staff that are working in the sector and ultimately for the children. They're getting quality experiences and that's where you see the long term benefits and you only get that where you have the staff that have the knowledge and the background to do it.

**Appendix 11: DB Interview**

Background

1. What is your educational background?
   I have Montessori diplomas. I started working in mec back in…I was 21…that's about 23 years ago
   I worked there for 4 years and now I have my own
2. How long have you worked in the early years sector?
   23 years
3. Describe your current role.
   I run my own Montessori school, 16 children at a time, 2 sessions a day
   Teaching and managing since 1999
4. How would you describe your teaching philosophy? Where does it come from?
   Montessori method and I really agree with that. I kind of feel at the moment theres so much rules and regulations coming in now that's kind of taken from the Montessori method of education because the government want you doing different things and want the children doing different things and even lately I've heard that they don't want the children doing the writing or learning their sounds or their numbers. There's all these different things coming in and it's completely trying to take over and change. There has to be all the different arts and crafts, painting sections, play doh sections, free play area, the whole lot open to the children at the same time. The way I feel myself works, well my route, it has been and it works brilliant is that all of those things are involved but not all freely all together. They do obviously have free choice at work time and all but they wanted more…what im trying to say is where I have the little structure going where we do our Montessori work and the children love doing it and we do have obviously dress up area, kitchen area al that as well and two or three of them can do that at a time and you switch over and then obviously we do do our baking and our art and all that but I just feel by letting it be all free and open and all that it just causes chaos basically. And you've only got three hours so how can this all fit in in the three hours? It's impossible. I do agree that all of the stuff should be open and there for the children and they do enjoy all that but that whole structure, the Montessori structure, they seem to want gone, whereas from my end I really like that way of teaching but it's kind of gone off the opposite.

ECCE

5. Do you ever struggle to fit your philosophy with the practice requirements of your setting?
6. Describe one of your greatest moments in the early years sector.
   When I opened up my own school. I just like running my own place and managing…from every aspect, dealing with parents, working with the children. I like all that rather than going working for somebody
7. Describe an aspect of the early years sector that you find challenging.
   Especially the time frame you have with the children to fit all the stuff in but get them ready for school along with doing the teaching end of it. Time and a lot of the paper work, trying to get that done, observation sheets on the children takes up a load of time and it's taken from actually working with the children. The time thing is a big thing and then what they're expecting you to do in this time frame is very challenging, along with the pay…is a big

problem. A big huge problem trying to find anybody because the pay is so bad really and for what's expected for it

8. What are you most passionate about in the sector?
   Working with the children, spending time with each child and getting to know them and I love the fact that what we do, they move at their own pace so whenever they're ready to move onto their next little piece of work or whatever you're doing. I personally love when you get to the end of the year and you're able to look back on how far the child has come. I love that bit when you can see what they've done and how well they've done. It brings in the older kids who stay for the second year and they help the younger ones when they start. That's always good to see at the beginning of a year

Inclusion

9. What is your understanding of inclusion?
   All different types of children will be in your setting. Some may have different issues that need to be dealt with and looked into and basically being open to help every child in the setting if they do need extra help or outside help to come in and assess them or need to do work with them or whatever way. It's including every child
10. How do you feel about providing an inclusive setting?
    I don't personally have any problem with doing that, I'd be open to any help the child can get when they need it and especially to get it earlier than it seems to be available because it takes so long to actually get the help that they need and then being diagnosed with different things seems to be taking an awful long time and the children end up going into primary school before anything is actually diagnosed. It's taking so long as well to actually get to the route of what's going on and what help is needed
11. What, if any, inclusion training have you received?
    I've just done the diversity, equality and inclusion course and I do want to do more but I haven't had the time to go in and do anything else as yet so hopefully this year I will. When I do any training or go to, I have to then pay somebody to come to work in the school so it's an extra wage I have to come up with even though I don't have the money to go and do it so it is a bit of an issue, unless it's on a Saturday or something and then it's in your own time. That one course that I did do I think it was over three or four weeks one day a week and I had to obviously pay somebody and get somebody in and again trying to find somebody to come in and do that is really hard to find so it is a bit challenging really to get time and for the money

Perceptions

12. Do you feel your role is valued/appreciated by society?
    Well I consider myself a Montessori teacher, also I do child minding on top of it but I do feel like you're probably not as much respected as if you were a primary school or a secondary school teacher. You are kind of, I feel, looked upon as you're minding kids and that's all you're doing, whereas and it's coming from people who've not been in the setting, who've not been in the classroom and they don't see how much work you do with the children and what you're actually doing and they think you're just minding kids and that. So you're not really 100% appreciated for anything that you do
13. Are there any recent policies that you feel support you in your role?
    Well I kind of feel that there's so many policies that you nearly need to sit down and keep reading them because there's so much and then they keep changing so everything just keeps changing so you're kinda of…not really, no, I don't think there is

14. How are you referred to in your setting? Do you think this influences how people see you/your role?
    Well I'd be obviously called by my first name by parents and childrens so you wouldn't be going by miss or mrs or anything like that. You'd very rarely, you'd never actually hear yourself being called…I do find a lot of indian children, their parents would call you teacher or miss, they would but other than that you'd never hear the word teacher
15. What words or phrases are associated with your role?
    Minding the kids, you don't hear the word teacher, you don't. it's always the early years, staff and all that kind of thing…and then it's even hard to find the staff now
16. How do you identify yourself in terms of your role?
    I would say I'm a Montessori teacher

Professional

17. What, in your opinion, constitutes "professional"?
    Well obviously being able to run a business professionally and being able to deal with parents. Having control over it, having everything up-to-date, having all policies up to date, being able to, being professional enough to be able to run your own business
18. In what way do qualifications and training influence professional identity?
    Well obviously you have to have your qualifications to do it but whereas if you're just doing childminding, if you're a responsible adult, you have your first aid, you have your garda clearance, you can do your child minding but from the other end, if you're teaching and you're in a classroom obviously you need to have all your qualifications but then the outside world don't seem to see the difference in this. If you have your qualifications you're obviously professionally trained to do this job and obviously able to run the business.
19. Do you identify with the term "professional"?
    I would yes but other people…and I even find with some parents, obviously they know you have to be trained and you have to be qualified but I do find even down to term like of paying, like if the child's out or something, "oh do we have to pay for that day?" but like it is a job, do you know, you're not considered that that's your job so if they weren't paid…so from that end as well I always have to make it clear well if the child's sick or if you're taking a week off the fees still have to be paid. It's a job. It's a profession, so they don't seem to see that part of it either
20. In order to enhance the sector for those working in it, what action could be taken?
    I think definitely to be recognised and for to be seen exactly all the work that is done with the children and I feel that I just find it so hard to believe that you're working wit people, which is the most important, they're humans and that's the most important and then there's such a low payment on it which makes absolutely no sense to me so you could go off out and do so many different jobs and you'd be paid more which makes no sense at all. So definitely the recognition because it would enourage because I feel there's lots of people who would love to work with children and they can't because they can't afford to do it because of the pay so they're going off doing other things so if it was recognised and appreciated and more money was put into it it would definitely make a huge difference I think

**Appendix 12: TT Interview**

Background

1. What is your educational background?
   After school I studied Montessori teaching and child care for two years at level 5. I'm now doing the level 6 LINC course. I got the study bug!
2. How long have you worked in the early years sector?
   For 4 years
3. Describe your current role.
   Currently, I'm in the play group class with one other teacher and 12 children.
4. How would you describe your teaching philosophy? Where does it come from?
   My philosophy…a few things entwined.

ECCE

5. Do you ever struggle to fit your philosophy with the practice requirements of your setting?
   There are a few challenges, a lot of linking things to Aistear but we're Montessori based so it clashes a little bit.
6. Describe one of your greatest moments in the early years sector.
   Talking to the children. Every day they will do something that will amaze you.
7. Describe an aspect of the early years sector that you find challenging.
   Linking things to Aistear and the extra bits expected from us. Also, the age group…what you're able to do safety wise and with numbers.
8. What are you most passionate about in the sector?
   Talking to the children

Inclusion

9. What is your understanding of inclusion?
   Everybody is welcome, how you plan your day, everyone's interests culturally, everyone is treated the same way
10. How do you feel about providing an inclusive setting?
    I think we're pretty good here
11. What, if any, inclusion training have you received?
    I did the diversity training and now the LINC programme. There should really be more out there

Perceptions

12. Do you feel your role is valued/appreciated by society?
    You really are just a child minder, there to look after the kids. They definitely see you as a babysitter, childminder…that's it.
13. Are there any recent policies that you feel support you in your role?
    I'm not sure if many would. Some that we have to follow and our own that we have here but I'm not sure if many would…not much to go by and support…
14. How are you referred to in your setting? Do you think this influences how people see you/your role?

First name…some call you teacher…parents are friendly but…everyone's a bit on the same level

15. What words or phrases are associated with your role?
    You're nearly put under the child minder bracket…child minding…crèche…rather than teacher
16. How do you identify yourself in terms of your role?
    As a play group teacher

Professional

17. What, in your opinion, constitutes "professional"?
    Training and a title
18. In what way do qualifications and training influence professional identity?
    It's very important for us as teachers to be valued as a profession and for us to be recognised. It would really help everyone a lot
19. Do you identify with the term "professional"?
    They need to put us all under one name, one title, one level of everything
20. In order to enhance the sector for those working in it, what action could be taken?
    Aistear…Siolta…it all needs to be narrowed down, stripped back really…one thing that we are all following, one name for us all to fit under the bracket. 0-5 is such an important time in a child's life. There needs to be one!

**Appendix 13 AS Interview**

Background

1. What is your educational background?
   Montessori guide, level 6 or 7, teacher for little children 0-3
   Montessori training 0-3. Lots of other courses
2. How long have you worked in the early years sector?
   I work for 5 years in Spain. I also work with children with autism, 2 years, and
   1 year in Ireland.
3. Describe your current role.
   I try to teach all areas but it's difficult for me.
4. How would you describe your teaching philosophy? Where does it come from?
   I prefer Montessori teaching to traditional teaching but it's difficult for me in English.

ECCE

5. Do you ever struggle to fit your philosophy with the practice requirements of your setting?
   No, it's good now
6. Describe one of your greatest moments in the early years sector.
   Doing art things and Practical Life because I'm more comfortable. I like maths.
7. Describe an aspect of the early years sector that you find challenging.
   Worst thing is I want to express something but I don't have the words in English
8. What are you most passionate about in the sector?
   I have a place in my heart for children who, it's difficult.

Inclusion

9. What is your understanding of inclusion?
   Try to normalise the situation…talk about it.
10. How do you feel about providing an inclusive setting?
    In this school I can see this. In the other school I can't see this. I see two children with some problem. You need to work and do all the things to help with this. This boy likes to take his shoes off. His socks always wet from the garden. I try to work with this. Finally insisting with him. Shoes-garden. No shoes-no garden. He passed to the other class. No he have no shoes again.
11. What, if any, inclusion training have you received?
    I worked in public school in a special class with children with autism. We joined the other children for class like physical education. That's good because you can invite the other children to know about that. I see with the older children and one of the boys, he's 12, when something…they don't want to leave him. That's so nice.

Perceptions

12. Do you feel your role is valued/appreciated by society?
    I think that this is a good method. The problem is we have this method and society needs to learn more. If you explain to them, they learn
13. Are there any recent policies that you feel support you in your role?
    I think that we do the policies here?

14. How are you referred to in your setting? Do you think this influences how people see you/your role?
    I'm considered a Montessori guide because at this age I need to learn more. I prefer this because I'm still learning.
15. What words or phrases are associated with your role?
    If I can stay with little children maybe they will see me in another position. The parents, they don't know what we do every day. I think they can have different thoughts. Guide, child minder and crèche. Take care of your children inside a place. I think I can do more than this, I want to do more
16. How do you identify yourself in terms of your role?
    As Montessori guide

Professional

17. What, in your opinion, constitutes "professional"?
    This job, yes? It's professional
18. In what way do qualifications and training influence professional identity?
    Maybe they give you a different role
19. Do you identify with the term "professional"?
    Yes, I think.
20. In order to enhance the sector for those working in it, what action could be taken?
    I…I don't know how…I don't know.

**Appendix 14: HM Questionnaire**

Background

1. What is your educational background?
   Montessori diploma, infant massage instructor, speech and drama teaching cert
2. How long have you worked in the early years sector?
   24 years
3. Describe your current role.
   Managing a preschool of 35 children
4. How would you describe your teaching philosophy? Where does it come from?
   My philosophy has developed and continues to develop from my direct experiences with the children. I believe strongly in the importance of play, self-directed learning and inquiry based learning. I believe a strong connection with nature and the environment should be encouraged

ECCE

5. Do you ever struggle to fit your philosophy with the practice requirements of your setting?
   Yes, I have often been in settings where I have had to do things that didn't "fit" with how I feel about early years education eg giving mountains of worksheets
6. Describe one of your greatest moments in the early years sector.
   Writing an environment friendly curriculum for use in preschools in Bali. Introducing sustainability, recycling, gardening cycles and nurturing a deep connection with the earth.
7. Describe an aspect of the early years sector that you find challenging.
   I find it difficult to meet the needs of the children while at the same time meet the needs of government bodies and their many policies and paperwork requirements.
8. What are you most passionate about in the sector?
   The children-the main reason I became an educator. They are our future and deserve the best start in life and a wonderful first educational experience.

Inclusion

9. What is your understanding of inclusion?
   Securing opportunities for students with additional needs to learn alongside their peers in general education classrooms
10. How do you feel about providing an inclusive setting?
    I think it is vital if we are to encourage understanding acceptance and respect in all tiers of society
11. What, if any, inclusion training have you received?
    None to date

Perceptions

12. Do you feel your role is valued/appreciated by society?
    Generally no. many people do not see early years education as valuable and see early years educators as glorified childminders
13. Are there any recent policies that you feel support you in your role?
    Not that I know of…

14. How are you referred to in your setting? Do you think this influences how people see you/your role?
    I'm referred to as a manager. I don't really think it influences people or how they see me.
15. What words or phrases are associated with your role?
    Responsibility, supervise, guide, review, support, maintain, represent
16. How do you identify yourself in terms of your role?
    At the moment I see myself more as an administrative manager rather than an educational manager

Professional

17. What, in your opinion, constitutes "professional"?
    A professional is someone who has taken time and effort to dedicate themselves to their job. They are knowledgeable and also committed to learning more and sharing this learning with others.
18. In what way do qualifications and training influence professional identity?
    People often see qualifications as the sole identifier of a professional whereas for me it is the commitment to the job. Your experiences are far more beneficial and directly influence your actions on a day-to-day basis
19. Do you identify with the term "professional"?
    I do, at times, after 24 years working in early years, but at the same time, I see myself in a state of consistant growth and learning
20. In order to enhance the sector for those working in it, what action could be taken?
    I think early years educators could be more valued with better salaries, also there could be more respect for the job by having clear roles identified with clear job titles. Using the word "educator" for what we do as opposed to childcare worker would bring a different feel to the job title. Funding for CPD would help educators gain more skills.

**Appendix 15: JS Questions**

Background

1. What is your educational background?
   Montessori diploma
2. How long have you worked in the early years sector?
   12 years
3. Describe your current role.
   Montessori teacher for children 3-5 years. 3 teachers with 24 children
4. How would you describe your teaching philosophy? Where does it come from?
   Child-led based on Montessori

ECCE

5. Do you ever struggle to fit your philosophy with the practice requirements of your setting?
   Yes, new curriculum frameworks and demands make it very difficult
6. Describe one of your greatest moments in the early years sector.
   When children become more independent, closing their coat or reading for the first time
7. Describe an aspect of the early years sector that you find challenging.
   Trying to teach the Montessori materials in a short work cycle because there's so much to fit into the day
8. What are you most passionate about in the sector?
   Children learning

Inclusion

9. What is your understanding of inclusion?
   That all children are taught together
10. How do you feel about providing an inclusive setting?
    It's a challenge because I'm a Montessori teacher so I don't know about other stuff and I have no idea what to do
11. What, if any, inclusion training have you received?
    The AIM training but it didn't really give practical ideas

Perceptions

12. Do you feel your role is valued/appreciated by society?
    Absolutely not
13. Are there any recent policies that you feel support you in your role?
    No. All the changes just keep making it more difficult
14. How are you referred to in your setting? Do you think this influences how people see you/your role?
    My job title is Montessori teacher and that's how the children see me but the parents don't see me as a teacher. I think they see me as more of a minder or babysitter
15. What words or phrases are associated with your role?
    Minder, babysitter, childminder
16. How do you identify yourself in terms of your role?
    Montessori teacher

Professional

17. What, in your opinion, constitutes “professional”?
    Certain qualifications and training
18. In what way do qualifications and training influence professional identity?
    People respect qualifications
19. Do you identify with the term “professional”?
    Yes because I studied to do my job
20. In order to enhance the sector for those working in it, what action could be taken?
    We need to be recognised the way teachers are recognised and get the same treatment as teachers. At the minute we get nothing. We work for minimum wage and no pension or anything from the state.

## Appendix 16: PX Questionnaire

Background

1. What is your educational background?
   Level 6 childcare and education
   Level 5 montessori
2. How long have you worked in the early years sector?
   8 years
3. Describe your current role.
   Playgroup teacher and inco
4. How would you describe your teaching philosophy? Where does it come from?
   Montessori trained and I think keeping up with the child's interest as to how I plan the curriculum

ECCE

5. Do you ever struggle to fit your philosophy with the practice requirements of your setting?
   Yes I think time is a huge factor
6. Describe one of your greatest moments in the early years sector.
   I think everyday has a great moment, helping and nurturing children
7. Describe an aspect of the early years sector that you find challenging.
   Time-trying to fit everything in
8. What are you most passionate about in the sector?
   Working with children everyday

Inclusion

9. What is your understanding of inclusion?
   Making sure everyone has a voice and is heard. Celebrating all backgrounds and the wishes of the children
10. How do you feel about providing an inclusive setting?
    In my setting I think we do this and in a positive way, listening to the children in what they would like to see in their school
11. What, if any, inclusion training have you received?
    Diversity training

Perceptions

12. Do you feel your role is valued/appreciated by society?
    I don't think it is, I think we are more seen as child minders. The early years I don't think is seen as an important time
13. Are there any recent policies that you feel support you in your role?
    No, I think more could be done in this area.
14. How are you referred to in your setting? Do you think this influences how people see you/your role?
    we are referred to by lots of different names and yes, I think it does influence people as to how they see you. I think there should be just one name.
15. What words or phrases are associated with your role?
    Responsible, Child minder, carer

16. How do you identify yourself in terms of your role?
    In my role I see myself as an educator, inspiring children to learn, be independent and confident

Professional

17. What, in your opinion, constitutes “professional”?
    I think we are all professional in our jobs, everything we do from planning the curriculum to running our classrooms
18. In what way do qualifications and training influence professional identity?
    I think always upskilling and training benefit us. The sector is always changing so it is important to be aware and move with the times
19. Do you identify with the term “professional”?
    I don’t think the term professional I would identify with but as a teacher everyday I like to give 100% to the children and to everything I do in the school
20. In order to enhance the sector for those working in it, what action could be taken?
    I think there needs to be more of a focus on the curriculum and how we are fitting in Aistear and silota. I think there is too much and it needs to be narrowed down.

**Appendix 17: EV Interview**

Background

1. What is your educational background?
   I have two diplomas in Montessori Education, birth to 9 and 9-12. I have a degree in Special Education and a Masters in Special Education
2. How long have you worked in the early years sector?
   20 years
3. Describe your current role.
   Montessori teacher in a 3-6 classroom. I work with 2 other teachers.
4. How would you describe your teaching philosophy? Where does it come from?
   Child guided, combining the Montessori philosophy of freedom and discipline with the Aistear guidelines

ECCE

5. Do you ever struggle to fit your philosophy with the practice requirements of your setting?
   The biggest problem is fitting everything into such a short day as ECCE is only 3 hours per day
6. Describe one of your greatest moments in the early years sector.
   Helping children write a Mission Statement for their classroom at the start of the year. Their problem solving is astounding
7. Describe an aspect of the early years sector that you find challenging.
   Ensuring the needs of al children are met during such a short morning
8. What are you most passionate about in the sector?
   All children fulfilling their potential and never being under-estimated

Inclusion

9. What is your understanding of inclusion?
   Enabling all children to achieve what they are capable of achieving, providing the right support for them to participate in all aspects of school, physical, social and academic
10. How do you feel about providing an inclusive setting?
    It's difficult as one key requirement in providing the right support is often time yet, within a 3 hour day, time is something of a struggle
11. What, if any, inclusion training have you received?
    Apart for my own qualifications I have attended CPD for inclusion, although this was very general and failed to address real concerns, such as time management and support strategies

Perceptions

12. Do you feel your role is valued/appreciated by society?
    Sadly, no it isn't. While the policy expectations of early education continue to rise the recognition of those working in the sector falls significantly short. Parents and society in general seem to think it's a "minding" role and State recognition is virtually non-existent
13. Are there any recent policies that you feel support you in your role?

There are policies which look good on paper but policy-makers don't seem to be aware of the practicalities of implementing policies. Ultimately, the policies just seem to add to the workload and it's hard to see the benefit

14. How are you referred to in your setting? Do you think this influences how people see you/your role?
    I'm referred to by my first name and my role is described as Montessori Teacher. While it's lovely to use first names as it seems friendly it can sometimes blur the lines for parents, leading them to see me as a friend, or even an employee, rather than a teacher
15. What words or phrases are associated with your role?
    Childminder, carer, babysitter
16. How do you identify yourself in terms of your role?
    As a Montessori teacher, although this often causes confusion for people and they end up asking if I mind children

Professional

17. What, in your opinion, constitutes "professional"?
    High standards of qualification and CPD and how someone presents themselves, their attitude
18. In what way do qualifications and training influence professional identity?
    They enable people to present themselves in a professional way and take pride in their role, which influences how society perceives them
19. Do you identify with the term "professional"?
    Yes, although I feel like this is rare in the early education sector
20. In order to enhance the sector for those working in it, what action could be taken?
    Recognition of the workforce. Many in the sector are employed for ECCE hours, meaning they are paid for 15 hours per week, 38 weeks per year. They don't get holiday pay or sick pay as there is no government funding for anything outside ECCE. Training is attended during personal hours, often at personal expense. There are no state benefits or perks in the sector, despite increasing demands. Funding seems to be assigned to improving facilities and helping parents fund "care" rather than supporting the workforce. While I'm not saying everyone in the sector wants to be called "teacher", I think we deserve the same recognition afforded to teachers. Government funding and conditions for those working in primary and secondary education differ starkly from those in early education. This influences how people in the sector see themselves and thus how they perform in their role.

**Appendix 18: Sample of coding**

Deductive coding based on Literature Review

Red font: Identity

Blue font: Training

Green Font: Societal perceptions

Inductive coding based on transcript analysis

Yellow highlighted text: training

Purple highlighted text: care

Blue highlighted text: paperwork (not present in this interview)

Turquoise highlighted text: policy

Grey highlighted text: funding

Red highlighted text: role value

*In some case, there was overlap present

Background

Me: Thank you for agreeing to this interview, I really appreciate you taking the time to meet with me.

RS: Oh, no. It's not problem, I'm happy to do it.

1. What is your educational background?

   Me: Could you tell me about your educational background?

   RS: I studied social care, worked in that for 10 years. I did a 1 year course in Montessori and at the same time started working in a Montessori school. 6 years later I returned to college and did an early childhood diploma in care and education.

   Me: That's great, thank you.

2. How long have you worked in the early years sector?

   Me: So, how long have you worked in early education?

   RS: 8 years

3. Describe your current role.

   Me: Could you describe your current role for me?

RS: Montessori teacher. I teach in a junior Montessori class, children 2 years and 11 months to 5 years and 2 months.

4. How would you describe your teaching philosophy? Where does it come from?

Me: And with regards to you teaching philosophy, is it Montessori or how would you describe it? Where do it come from?

RS: I don't believe I'm strictly Montessori. I like aspects of Montessori and working in a Montessori school, giving the children their own independence and encouraging what they can do and can learn for themselves. I'd like to think that we're there to facilitate the children construct their own learning. When I returned to college, I learned a lot more about play and how play can be…children can learn an awful lot from play and I would like to incorporate more of that into the classroom but I don't know how you do that in a Montessori class.

ECCE

5. Do you ever struggle to fit your philosophy with the practice requirements of your setting?

Me: So, it sounds like fitting your philosophy with the requirements of your practice might be a struggle at times?

RS: Yes, more recently it's been a struggle for me and, prior to returning to college, I didn't really see that whereas, maybe a little bit of lack of knowledge on my behalf, I would struggle with how to do that.

Me: Yes, finding a balance can be tricky

RS: Yeah, exactly.

6. Describe one of your greatest moments in the early years sector.

Me: Could you describe one of the greatest moments you've experienced in early education?

RS: This is where I contradict myself because I think one of the most memorable moments for me is being part of the process of teaching a child to read and leave this classroom reading and, for me, when you see that they have the capability to do that and it's through the Montessori philosophy and following their lead with that

Me: That is a great journey to be part of!

RS: It really is!

7. Describe an aspect of the early years sector that you find challenging.

Me: Now, on the other end of the spectrum, could you describe an aspect of the sector that you find challenging?

RS: Getting knowledge out there to society about the importance of early education and care. I think the benefits and the outcomes for children who have quality childhood

education and care…I think that the lifelong benefits are huge and I don't think that there's any respect for it, that in society, in the educational field, I don't think…and I find it really challenging that we're not respected or valued in that way.

Me: Clearly something that you feel very strongly about?

RS: Yeah, I do!

8. What are you most passionate about in the sector?

Me: And what would you say you're most passionate about in the sector?

RS: Through conversation with parents I would love to show the value of what we're doing and I'd love to see that across society. I don't think at the moment it's going to happen. I think when you look at other countries…I think that is a passion of mine and I'm known among my friends and family as preaching quite a bit about that and about the abilities of children at this age. So societal education.

Me: Great!

Inclusion

9. What is your understanding of inclusion?

Me: Could you tell me about your understanding of inclusion?

RS: Inclusion for me prior to doing some cpd, was probably more based on a needs basis as opposed to a general sense and I think that if we look at it from a general sense, it's about trying to include everyone in the service, be it gender, race, religion, whatever it takes, ability. That's how I try to look at it now.

10. How do you feel about providing an inclusive setting?

Me: And how do you feel about providing an inclusive setting?

RS: Sometimes it can be difficult. There's an expectation that we have to be all inclusive but I think that can be a very dangerous thing when there isn't knowledge there behind it, and I think that is difficult. I'm very fortunate where I work, I work with a colleague who would have quite a broad knowledge base on inclusion and I would take a lot of learning from her but I think if I didn't work where I work I wouldn't have either, a, then knowledge from herself or, that I don't know if I'd have that level of awareness.

11. What, if any, inclusion training have you received?

Me: So, have you received any training in the area of inclusion?

RS: I think I have a particular colleague so we constantly converse about things, particularly around inclusion, and I would feel that I learn so much from her that it's invaluable. Training provided a broad understanding of inclusion but I think in the classroom, trying to provide

that inclusion is very different, there's knowledge that you need to have to be completely inclusive

Perceptions

12. Do you feel your role is valued/appreciated by society?

    Me: I think we touched on this a little earlier but, do you feel your role is valued by society?

    RS: I think we are completely undervalued as a sector. I don't think there's any respect or knowledge about what we do. I think we're still seen as babysitters. You know, the child minder, the play school where children come in and play and they don't even see the value of what play is or what it is that you're trying to do in these classrooms. Looking after them. Minding them.

    Me: Yes, that certainly echoes what you mentioned earlier.

13. Are there any recent policies that you feel support you in your role?

    Me: And do you think that any recent policies support your role?

    RS: I think there is improvements trying to be made. I think at a government level there isn't enough support financially for them to do that. I think they are definitely trying to bring, like they have the minimum education for staff members now, it's a level 5 which, for want of a better word, to me is absolutely pathetic to have somebody at a level 5 when we have these expectations that are put upon us to have somebody with a level 5 I just don't think it's enough that we have that as our policy, although it's at a very early stage it's the beginning of change in the sector. It requires more money into the sector to pay salaries etc. you see people in these jobs who are highly qualified and have educational backgrounds pretty much working for minimum wage and they're not going to stay in the sector for very long at that minimum wage. I think that's probably why they have that policy of, ok we brought in a minimum ed of level 5. They're going to keep it at that because they don't want to have to raise wages but they continue to raise the expectations.

14. How are you referred to in your setting? Do you think this influences how people see you/your role?

    Me: So, how are you referred to in your setting and do you think that this influences how people perceive you and your role?

    RS: The children will call us by our first names. I think the children see us as teachers and very often, especially at the beginning of the year, you might hear "teacher, teacher, teacher". I think the parents, I would love to know how the parents refer to us outside of here. I think, where we are, maybe they might say teacher, I think across the sector we're either a childcare worker, a crèche worker, the minders in the crèche. I don't think we're really seen as teachers or educators, or respected. I don't understand why we wouldn't be called teachers, I mean it's the early education sector, I don't understand why we wouldn't have the same title as those in primary schools or secondary schools. We're still on that spectrum of education. I'd love to see us being referred to as teachers. I think we deserve that but I don't think we are seen as that.

15. What words or phrases are associated with your role?

    Me: So, what words or phrases do you think are associated with your role?

    RS: Childcare worker, crèche worker, minder.

16. How do you identify yourself in terms of your role?

    Me: And how do you identify yourself?

    RS: Teacher.

Professional

17. What, in your opinion, constitutes "professional"?

    Me: So, what do you think constitutes "professional"?
    RS: I probably, personally, do equate professionalism with education, rightly or wrongly so. I do think that with education comes a sense of professionalism. I think with knowledge comes professionalism as well. I think, without that, it's very difficult for people to see them and for people to see themselves as being professional, if they haven't got that proof or whatever. It's like a confidence. I certainly felt that. When I started in the sector I had one years experience and when I looked at the people I worked with when I began I didn't feel equal to them I suppose because I didn't think that my training was as good, I didn't think that I had the same level of knowledge of Montessori or the early childhood sector as they did and I think going back to college, for me, changed all that. I certainly got a huge amount of confidence in myself and what I do from that. I look at the difference to where I was in social care and, you know, social care funded me to go back to college for my degree. Anything you do in this sector, education wise, is funded by ourselves and it's done in our own time, compared to where I was, I got two days off a week to go to college. You had study days. It's not supported in the same way in this sector. If you want to do it you have to do it yourself.

18. In what way do qualifications and training influence professional identity?

    Me: And in what way do you think qualifications and training influence professional identity?

    RS: You gain confidence and knowledge.

19. Do you identify with the term "professional"?

    Me: So, do you personally identify with the term "professional"?

    Yes, especially since going back to college and doing my h dip.

    Me: Great, thank you.

20. In order to enhance the sector for those working in it, what action could be taken?

Me: What action, do you believe, could be taken to enhance the sector for the people working in it?

RS: I think the level 5 needs to be raised, I think that if they could do something similar to what they did when I was working in social care, that was done for very similar reasons, they wanted to professionalise the whole sector and I think by providing long term courses for people on a part time basis where they are able to both work but that it's funded for people that there's extra pay and it's incentivised for people to go back to college and to gain the knowledge that is needed to work in this area. It's not just, "wouldn't it be great if they had it", it's necessary. Even the way that's portrayed in the media, at government level it's always this investment has gone into the sector to help the parents so it's still seen as we're investing for you for your child minder as opposed to we're actually investing for the staff that are working in the sector and ultimately for the children. They're getting quality experiences and that's where you see the long term benefits and you only get that where you have the staff that have the knowledge and the background to do it.

Me: Thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

RS: I think it sounds like a really interesting piece of research so best of luck with it.

Me: Thank you, and thanks again for your time.

RS: No problem. Bye.

Me: Take care.