Education Project Part 2

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Child Poverty: Issues of Access and Quality in Early Years Education Policy and Practice

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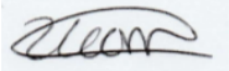
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Statement of Originality

I confirm that I have fully acknowledged all sources of information and help received,

and that where such acknowledgement is not made, the work is my own.

Signed:

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Abstract

This education project investigates how effective early years settings are in supporting children and families that live in poverty. This topic was chosen because I was interested to see if the Government's commitment to eradicating childhood poverty by 2020 has influenced current practice in the early years sector, and to what extent. This is a desk-based project which critically analyses the current debates of childhood poverty; specifically, how it is defined and measured, the motive behind government funding and how early years practitioners can improve children's life chances by delivering high-quality education. The findings demonstrate that the current poverty measurement system could be failing children and families because it heavily focuses on income. The research reports that the number of children living in poverty is expected to increase by 2023, effecting 1 million more children (Corlett, 2019). Therefore, with ever changing social attitudes, more may need to be done to support the most vulnerable children in today society.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

In the UK there are two definitions that are used to describe poverty which is absolute poverty and relative poverty (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2019). These two terms indicate the level and type of poverty an individual is experiencing (Child Poverty Action Group, 2019a). Absolute poverty refers to individuals who lack the necessities to support their physiological needs, for example, food, water, and shelter (Poole, Higgo & Robinson, 2011). For a child to qualify as living in absolute poverty in the UK, they must be living in a household where the income is less than 60% of the median average for a family of their size for that year (Child Poverty Action Group, 2019a). Relative poverty refers to those who lack the resources that are socially expected, for example, having access to the internet. The lack of resources can cause an individual to be at a disadvantage in comparison to the rest of society (Poole et al., 2011) and could limit a person's social mobility (Hoskins & Barker, 2019). For a child to qualify as living in relative poverty, they must be living in a household where the income is less than 60% of the median average taken from the 2011 statistics (Child Poverty Action Group, 2019a). The UK Government records and reports national statistics each year. With regard to childhood poverty, information is collected from the Households Below Average Income Survey (HBAIS) (Gov.UK, 2019). These statistics are then used annually to create the 'poverty line' (Ejebu et al., 2019).

Unfortunately for children, their social circumstances are largely out of their control as they are highly dependent on their parents (Unicef Office of Research-Innocenti, 2020). This is problematic for parents as they are then often blamed for choosing to live in poverty (Wolf, 2019). The current poverty definitions focus highly on income as a way of defining the difference between absolute and relative poverty. However, money is only one part of the problem in childhood poverty (Hirsch, Padley, Stone, & Valadez-Martinez, 2020). The issues of poverty for a child can be about many other things such

as family relationships and equality (Main, 2019). Ferrone (2017) gives a great example of this, in which they explain that two children living in the same house can have a different experience of poverty. This is because they will have access to different resources and the relationship that they have with their parents may impact how these resources are distributed. Tomlinson (2013) explains that the effects of poverty can be long-lasting and detrimental for a child's health, development, and wellbeing which can even affect adult health, and in some extreme cases it can lead to death. What's more, it can be extremely difficult for families to remove themselves from poverty due to the many barriers which can make it feel impossible (Adams, 2019). For most children who are born into poverty, they will remain in poverty in their adulthood and it is likely that their own children will be born into poverty (Cronin, Argent, & Collet, 2017). This is known as the cycle of deprivation (Chilton, 2011). Childhood poverty is recognised as a social issue in the UK, and there many services that are now working towards rectifying this issue.

1.1 Research Aims

This education project aims to investigate to what extent early years practitioners and settings are involved in tackling childhood poverty. This will be achieved by exploring what strategies are already in place for early years settings and to discuss the effectiveness of these strategies. This will include current Government policies and funding. The main focus of the project will be to explore early years funding and quality of education in early years settings, due to child poverty being a broad topic. The project will use a critical lens to discuss and critique how effective early years anti-poverty strategies are in improving outcomes for children. The purpose of exploring and critiquing these areas is to investigate if the early years sector needs to have more involvement than what is currently the case in terms of how government funding is distributed and how pedagogy can support the quality of early years education.

1.2 Rationale

According to the Child Poverty Action Group (2019b), childcare is one of the biggest financial burdens for families living in the UK, which can cause added pressure on those families. What's more, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2020) reported, that in 2019 just under half of the people who were employed in full-time positions were living in poverty. This challenges stereotypes which suggest that poverty is a behavioural choice and is caused by worklessness (Cronin et al., 2017). Regardless of why a family may be in poverty, the financial cost of childcare is problematic; particularly for working families that are living in poverty. This is because childcare is an essential outgoing which ensures that they can continue to work or to take up new employment (McDonough, 2019). This means that the cost of childcare can make it harder for families to remove their children from poverty especially when a large portion of their income is then spent on the necessary childcare (Moss, 2014). This information has inspired the research topic for this education project. Furthermore, if early years settings are too costly for families, could more be done to lessen the financial pressure and, are early years settings contributing to the problem?

This education project will be library-based and use secondary research to inform the answer to the research questions. A library-based project is required to meet the aims of this education project. This is because it enables data from a large time scale to be accessed and analysed, including past and proposed Government policies and national statistics. Assessing and analysing data from a wide range of materials will ensure that the project can come to a cohesive conclusion. It is important to be aware of the ambiguity of childhood poverty definitions when analysing secondary data. Smith and Noble (2014) explain that this is because research that uses an unclear definition has a higher chance of data collection bias. This means that there may be confusion when interpreting the data. Findings that are affected by data collection bias will have

lower reliability and validity, therefore, they cannot be generalised (Cronin et al., 2017). Identifying any strengths and limitations of the secondary research used within this education project will support a critical evaluation by considering the reliability and validity of the data. Murray (2012) explains that secondary research may also be affected by researcher bias. This is where the researcher uses the data that they collect to convey their own ideas. It is important for any individuals reading this education project to be mindful of such biases.

To ensure that the information is robust, a range of sources will be studied, such as published journal articles, websites, and books. The findings from this education project may then be used to inform my own practice which I can share with my colleagues.

Chapter 2 – Poverty: Definitions and Debates

Much of the early research into childhood poverty was carried out by sociologist Peter Townsend (1979). His main ideas were that poverty can be in a relative form, this saw a shift in the paradigm, in which the absolute poverty definition was criticised (Bradshaw, 2009). It is Peter Townsend's modern definition of poverty which has been influential in informing the UK's current poverty measurement system (Hirsch et al., 2020). Townsend described relative poverty as ambiguous (Minujin & Nandy, 2012). It does seem reasonable to describe relative poverty in this way because it is a social construct so it may have a different meaning to individuals (Shildrick & Rucell, 2015). As Dean (2016) explains, the term poverty may not only be associated with money and wealth but associated with a person's power, social mobility, material deprivation, and health and well-being. The definition could also vary depending on the culture of the person who is defining it. Different cultures will have different living standards and ideas of what acceptable living conditions are. Therefore, it can be hard to agree on a definition cross-culturally (Featherstone et al., 2019). Townsend also set up the Child Poverty Action Group, in which he became an advocate for children, by recognising their vulnerability in society thus, highlighting a need for social change (Child Poverty Action Group, 2020)

Having a way to measure poverty is one way in which individuals who are struggling to actively participate in society can be recognised as needing support (Ferragina, Tomlinson, & Walker, 2013). Child Poverty Action Group (2012) explains that there is just as much need to identify those living in relative poverty as there is a need to identify those living in absolute poverty in hope that it could increase social mobility. However, this desired outcome may not be achieved (Levitas, R, 2005) and perhaps could be responsible for creating a negative stereotype within society. A poverty label could have a damaging impact on children during their education. Gannon et al. (2018) gives

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a clear example of this by explaining that primary school children are often quickly segregated upon their 'ability' just weeks after joining a school, without the parents questioning how their child's ability has been assessed. The author also expresses that children who are from a low social class are often easily identified by their teachers because the vocabulary that they use is different from that of their affluent peers. Research by Huttenlocher, Haight, Bryk, Seltzer, and Lyons (1991) supports this idea about language, by explaining that children from wealthy families often have more exposure to language so there is usually a noticeable difference in the vocabulary they use. Although, Gannon et al. (2018) argues that a child living poverty has the same ability to learn as a child who is not in poverty which is irrespective of their language. But, because of the preconceived ideas within society surrounding poverty, it can make teachers believe those children from a lower social class are less able to learn, which is the reason why they become quickly segregated. Therefore, a child may receive a negative experience in their very first year of formal schooling as a result of being labelled. Dave Harris (2018, cited in Gilbert, 2018) expresses that it is important to not lose sight of why we need to label groups in society especially as a label might help families to receive support. Furthermore, educational leaders and politicians should take more accountability to ensure the most vulnerable children are not subject to negative experiences as a result of being labelled (Dave Harris, 2018, cited in Gilbert, 2018).

Labelling is not the only limitation of having a poverty measurement system. The system itself may be flawed due to the poverty line being worked out annually and using a mean average (Pensions, 2012). This is problematic because if the poverty line decreases it can give an illusion that more families have left poverty when this is not the case, as poverty is as much to do with social mobility as it is to do with simply money and income (Mascarenhas, 2012). Therefore, the current measurement system

lacks reliability and validity. Furthermore, it uses an objective measuring system in which the rise and fall of income are assessed. Therefore, the holistic needs of a child are not considered. Although money cannot be ignored when discussing and measuring poverty, there are many components that better explain what being in poverty means for a child as highlighted by the relative poverty definition (Neckerman, Garfinkel, Teitler, Waldfogel, & Wimer (2016). Income is not necessarily the main problem for children as this is largely out of their control, but the problem for children is more to do with the negative experience associated with being in poverty such as ill-health and bullying (Stewart & Roberts, 2018).

With new legislation coming into effect, updates in policies, and changes within the early years sector, there is a gap for more child poverty research. Up to date findings are needed to ensure that any new changes to policy and practice are made with good intentions and use reliable research to support the need for change (Roberts-Holmes, 2014).

Chapter 3 – History of Childhood Poverty and Early Years Education

Sir William Beveridge (1942, cited in Dalrymple, 2005) recognised and reported the public suffering following World War 2. He believed that for the country to recover, there were 'five giants' in society that needed addressing. These were social issues that were present in society even before the War that Beveridge explained had been disregarded (Alcock et al., 2012). These giants were known as Want, Ignorance, Disease, Idleness, and Squalor (Bochel, Bochel, Page, & Sykes, 2009). As a result, the UK's welfare state was introduced which included the NHS, a universal system of education, commitment to providing full-time employment, public housing, and a benefits system (Alcock et al., 2012). This was the government's first response to addressing and managing social conditions such as poverty because the welfare state was inclusive and aimed to help the whole population. (Jones & Tony, 1999). It was a shared notion of the UK population to want to help those that were most disadvantaged. This era was known as the post-war consensus (Cronin et al., 2017).

The Black Report (1980, cited in (Mcintosh Gray, 1982) found that many health inequalities remained in the UK despite the introduction of the NHS in 1948, with the gaps between health inequalities widening. In theory, it was thought that the NHS and welfare state would provide better health amongst society. This is because the quality and access to health services were universal so individuals of all social classes would be eligible to seek the same medical care (Goldson, Lavalette & McKechnie, 2002). However, the Black Report (1980, cited in (Mcintosh Gray, 1982) uncovered that health inequalities still existed between social classes due to a range of confounding factors that make up a person's lifestyle and not as a result of NHS failure. The contributing factors which were mentioned included education and poverty. Whilst this report

focuses primarily on health care inequalities, there is a strong link between health and education and poverty (Owen, 2017).

Similarly, The Marmot Review (2010) is another health care report that published the health inequalities found in England. The review suggested that six main areas needed to be supported, one of which was early child development (Marmot, 2010). Sir Michael Marmot (2019) has since revisited his work in his ten-year review which he explains that the early years and education sector is still a priority area for the UK, particularly because there is a strong link between health and education. Goodman and Gregg (2010) explain that children living in poverty are more likely to suffer ill health and in return, their education may suffer at the same time too, with children needing taking more days off school. What's more, ill-health as a child can persist into adulthood (Menestrel & Duncan, 2019). This refers back to the cycle of deprivation theory, as the effects of poverty on health and education can remain in a family causing generations of children to be born into a life on inequality (Levy & Sidel, 2013). It's reasonable to believe that ill health remains in families because of the biological explanations of ill health such as hereditary diseases that are passed on from parents to their children. However, the social reasoning behind ill health such as poverty may be just as responsible for explaining why these health and education inequalities exist from a social perspective (Clarke, 2010).

Goldson et al. (2002) criticised how past research has influenced policies, explaining that despite there being a strong link between a child's health and education, it has not always been reflected well by government policy, and that services do not work closely enough to achieve a common goal. This is exemplified in the work undertaken by Barnes, Blumenau and Launderdale (2019) who found that on average the UK population wanted a 10 percent increase in money to be spent on both health and education services. However, childhood poverty is a complex problem. Therefore,

providing more money for health, social care, and education may instead offer false hope. For example, an increased budget cannot guarantee better outcomes for service users as there are many other pressures that settings face (The Health Foundation, 2017). However, government spending can affect a setting's ability to maintain their standards particularly when budgets are cut. Taylor-Gooby (2013) explains that budget cuts are often first seen in benefits services and areas of social care which can have an immediate negative impact on the children and families living in poverty. Thus, a solution for childhood poverty should not only focus on government spending (Spencer, 2000). In addition, Moss (2014) argues that childhood poverty strategies should not simply focus on funding because what really matters are the outcomes that a service can achieve.

The welfare state has had some success in improving health and education, but childhood poverty has remained a problem within society (HM Treasury, 2001). In 1999, Labour Prime minister Tony Blair proposed his ideas surrounding child poverty, in which he revisited the work of Sir William Beveridge (Flaherty et al., 2004). In Blair's proposal, it was put forward that child poverty would be eradicated by the year 2020. To achieve this, it was announced that a bigger investment was needed in both education and health services for young children (Parton, 2014). The Child Poverty Act (2010) was brought in to support the government's commitment to eradicate childhood poverty. This then meant there was a legal duty bound to this government commitment and that going forward a childhood poverty strategy would be published (Stewart and Roberts, 2018).

The New Labour government's anti-poverty policy appeared to be effective in its first years, with 6% fewer children living in poverty in 2004 (House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 2004). It was later revealed that the decline of children living in poverty was more likely to be because the median average household income fell. This

meant that the poverty line moved, although the children and families were no better off (Pensions, 2012). Thus, the effectiveness of the Government's anti-poverty strategy and current poverty measurement system should be questioned. Therefore, more could be done to improve outcomes for children, particularly as the number of children living in poverty is expected to rise due to the 2020 global pandemic (O-Hara, 2020).

How childcare is implemented will be determined by what government party is in power, especially if the party prioritises worklessness or the economy as this will have a direct impact on childcare policy (Tomlinson, 2013). According to Jones (2012) the Labour party and the Conservative party each have their own tactics to win votes from the different social classes that exist within society. With regards to the Labour party, it is assumed that they appeal more to the working class. Whereas, the Conservative party is assumed to appeal more to the upper class. This appears to be true at the time of Tony Blair's commitment to end childhood poverty, in which he gives the impression that he is an advocate for the working class by committing to help the most vulnerable individuals (Greener and Greve, 2014). Although, it could be argued that Tony Blair's plan to eradicate poverty may have had a hidden agenda. Instead, it could be argued that eradicating childhood poverty was a plan to improve the economy and reduce the number of people relying on the welfare state (Baldock, 2011). Thus, the statement made by Blair may have had other intentions, instead to target lone families who were thought to be the real policy driver for this commitment (Greener & Greve, 2014). There is strong evidence to suggest that removing children from poverty has better outcomes for individuals when they reach adulthood (Baldock, 2011). Therefore, tackling childhood poverty may be one tactic the Labour government devised for saving money, as it would be expected that less money would need to be spent on welfare in the future if there were fewer people living in poverty (Egan-Bitran, 2010).

The fear of unemployment and ill health for people of the working class may have been reduced following the introduction of the welfare state by providing some security (Goldson et al., 2002). However, the UK's shared notion of wanting to help those worse off has since changed. Individuals are becoming less in favour of a welfare system that helps specific groups within society such as benefits for those who are unemployed, as compared to the NHS which is supportive of everybody (McKendrick et al., 2008). It may be argued that this has been influenced by the Conservative party who portrayed the working class as 'feckless', in a bid to win votes predominantly from the upper-class (Jones, 2012). The Conservative Party may have also appealed to those in the working class who felt they were treated unfairly by having to work while others were 'choosing' not to work (Wiggan, 2012). Therefore, attitudes may have begun to change based on political reasoning, feelings of inequality amongst society, and portrayal of classes within the media (Jones, 2012).

It could be argued that providing a welfare state has harmed some individual's work ethic (Robb, Montgomery, & Thomson, 2010). Children who are born into a family where their parents receive benefits can become socialised to believe that receiving benefits is normal which may change work aspirations (Goldson et al., 2002). Whilst this could worsen poverty, Jones (2012) explains that poor people are often blamed for being in poverty and choosing not to work, even though this may not be the case. Many unemployed people are actively looking for work or are even employed (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2020). Therefore, more awareness is needed to challenge poverty stereotypes.

Not only have attitudes changed based on entitlement to welfare, but this can be said the same for attitudes surrounding childcare. Day nurseries became more popular and accepted by society particularly after World War Two. One reason for this is that the role of women in society had begun to change which saw more women staying in

employment (Evans et al., 2014). Therefore, families required an alternative form of childcare making early years services rise in popularity (Walker, Sinfield, & Carol, 2011). The popularity of day nurseries is continuing to grow. The reason for this may be due to the Labour governments' national childcare strategy which aimed at making childcare more affordable so that mothers could remain at work (Bratley, 2019).

However, the responsibility and expectations of day nurseries has changed drastically. The responsibility now goes beyond the practitioner only providing basic care for children, but to now include educating and assessing children's development (Whitters, 2017). A key reason for the shift in early years responsibilities may be due to the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (Cronin et al., 2017). The EYFS could be considered as a childhood poverty strategy within the early years sector as the document clearly states, "every child deserves the best possible start in life and support to fulfil their potential" (DCSF, 2008, pg.7). This emphasises that following and implementing the EYFS will lead children to better outcomes, demonstrating that early intervention is important during a child's early learning.

Recent statistics indicate that childhood poverty is still a problem. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (2020) report that 30% of children are now living in poverty. The number of children in poverty is expected to continue rising, in which case it will affect an estimated 1 million more by the year 2023 (Corlett, 2019). Alongside this, the popularity of day nurseries is also rising. Therefore, it is important to investigate if early years settings can do more to help this national problem, particularly as it will impact a larger number of children since the increased use of daycare. From a Bentham (1748-1832, cited in Smith's (2014) Utilitarianism perspective, having a responsibility to tackle childhood poverty in early years' settings would maximise the greater good for society. Although, Palaiologoy (2012) argues that ethics is not a

simple as doing what is for the greater good because this will differ depending on personal opinions, particularly if it involves government policy.

Chapter 4 - Current Government Strategies in Early Years Settings

There have been several government strategies and legislations introduced in response to the childhood poverty crisis. Most of these changes appear to either target the cost of services or the quality of the services (Bratley, 2019). This chapter will explore and critique the implementation and changes to early years funding in terms of how effective this is as a childhood poverty strategy.

The amount of funding that parents can receive has continued to increase since September 1998 (see appendix C). This was when free early years education was first introduced by the Labour government, which was part of the first-ever national childcare strategy (Lewis, 2003). The first amount of funding was available for all children aged 4 for 12.5 hours a week which was then extended to include 3-year olds in 2004 (La Valle & Smith, 2009) and further extended to 15 hours a week in 2010 (Brind, Norden, McGinigal, Oseaman, & Simon, 2012). Such changes have had a direct impact on the finances for both parents and early years providers (Lewis & West, 2017).

It may be agreed that the main purpose of introducing free universal childcare was to provide all preschool-aged children with an equal opportunity to learn at no cost to the family (Lewis, 2003). But, as mentioned previously within this education project, there are often other motivators that may better explain why the government chooses to make social investments. For example, research suggests that investment in early years education can increase human capital; thus, this may benefit the economy (Georgeson & Payler, 2013). Of course, this funding may have brought benefits for both children and parents. Department for Education and Goodwill (2017) explain the two most obvious benefits that the 30 hours funding brings to families is the financial

gain and flexibility. For those parents that were already paying for childcare, it would mean a reduced childcare bill. Therefore, lower outgoings for a family could mean households then have more spare money to spend or save (Egan-Bitran, 2010). But the funding also opened new opportunities for children by providing them with new experiences, different learning resources, and opportunities to engage in enriching social experiences with other children and adults (Melhiush et al., 2013). Previously when funding was not available nurseries were very much a marketplace for families who could afford the service (Brewer, Crawford & Dearden, 2005).

However, the initial fee of childcare is not the only cost of early years education that parents need to consider when choosing to send their child to an early years setting. Parents may need to pay for transport in order to access a setting of their choice although they may not have enough money to do this (Tomlinson, 2013). The early years funding does not account for these extra costs (Ridge, 2011). So, while it might appear that the funding can provide children with equal opportunities, there are still barriers that can affect families living in poverty. This could prevent the uptake of the funding or mean that there is less of choice for parents when choosing a setting for their child meaning that social exclusion remains a problem (Dermott & Main, 2018). Barriers can persist for a child and their family throughout a child's formal schooling which Buttle UK (2019) reports 79% of professionals have reported seeing a family struggle at least once with the hidden costs of schooling.

Regarding the effectiveness of the 15 hours funding for preschool children, it does appear to be valuable as an anti-poverty strategy, as it has increased social mobility for children (Lewis, 2003). The introduction of the funding alongside the later introduction of the EYFS curriculum may help get children ready for the transition to primary school. Rouse, Nicholas, and Garner (2020) claims that a positive start to

primary school is important for ensuring positive outcomes throughout the rest of formal education leads to long-term positive outcomes. Furthermore, much of school readiness may be parent-led but early years practitioners can work with families to assist school readiness by identifying any learning needs a child may have and to ensure the correct support is in place before formal schooling begins (Bratley, 2019). Some parents are unaware that their child is behind in their development, especially if they have no knowledge of developmental milestones. Camden et al. (2019) found that parents from a low-income household were more likely to misjudge their child's educational needs. So, having access to early years education which is free of charge is beneficial for all children, including those who are not living in poverty because it provides additional support for those families that need it (Bratley, 2019). An example of this could be a practitioner who notices that their key child has trouble communicating; the practitioner would need to be responsible by first identifying that this is a developmental delay and then liaising with the SENDCO and parents to decide an appropriate level of support for the child. Support could be in the form of an Independent Education Plan (IEP), a referral to speech and language or advising parents how they can help meet the child's needs at home (Roffery & Parry, 2013). In turn, the child is more likely to have better outcomes when starting school because with the right support in place the gaps in their development may close. However, Roos, Wall-Weiler, and Boram Lee (2019) recently found that children in poverty are still far less likely to be ready for school than those not living in poverty. Furthermore, the Department for Education (2015) state that children in poverty perform typically lower than children who are not. Therefore, each of these statements suggest that providing more nursery funding for children is not enough to improve outcomes between children of different socio-economic backgrounds. There could be other

variables which better explain why educational inequalities amongst children still exist, such as the more recent changes to the funding.

In 2007, extra funding was made available for 40% of the most disadvantaged two-year olds (West, Roberts, & Noden, 2010). Families are only able to claim this funding if they meet the criteria. Examples of this criteria include families who claim benefits, a family whose household income that is less than £16,190 or a child who is looked after by a local authority (Gov.UK, 2020 A). This funding is a strength when regarding how early years settings tackle childhood poverty because it targets the most vulnerable children. The Sutton Trust (2020) explains that the first years of a child's life are the most critical in terms of gaining social mobility and, where the differences between children begins. Therefore, it seems justifiable to provide support for a target population, as it is one way to maximise government resources by investing in children early to minimise harm.

Having outlined the strengths with the two-year-old funding, it is important to recognise that some families will be earning just over the threshold. This is a weakness to the funding as it means that some families are unable to claim funding (Coleman & Cottell, 2019). What's more, families that earn just over the threshold are then no better off for returning to work. The financial pressure may be heightened for parents who do chose to return to work with a toddler aged child because there is no other funding between the time after parental leave until pre-school (Lyndon, 2019). Furthermore, Coleman and Cottell (2019) report that the period after parental leave until preschool is becoming more expensive, with a 4% increase since 2018. This could mean that the cost of childcare is contributing to the stress for low income families and even pushing families into poverty.

The most recent change to early years funding has been the introduction of 30 hours free childcare for working families (Akhal, 2019). This funding is the most questionable of all in terms of the impact it has on childhood poverty. Alike the two-year-old funding, families must meet a set of requirements in order to claim this funding. However, eligibility for this funding depends upon how much a parent is working and how money is earnt. Parents can claim this funding if they are earning over £1813.76 across 3 months. Any partners that are married, in a civil partnership or living together as a couple in the same house must be earning this amount too (Gov.UK, 2020, c).

It appears that the 30 hours funding has been purposefully targeted towards making early years settings more affordable for parents who are working full time that have large childcare bills (Akhal, 2019). Statistics show that this may be the case as 69% of working mothers reported that the funding has helped them remain in work whilst affording the necessary childcare (Department for Education, 2019). It could be argued that the real purpose of introducing the 30 hours funding is to encourage families to take on full-time jobs. Therefore, this could be another Government incentive that is more about stopping people relying on the welfare state. Statistics from a Department for Education (2017) survey conclude that an expected 32% more parents would work more hours and days if they could receive 30 hours of childcare funding, supporting the argument that the 30 hours funding is a strategical way to ensure parents work fulltime. The funding could even reinforce the idea amongst society that employment is a behavioural choice, by rewarding those that work enough with free childcare (Abbott et al., 2019). It is unfair to assume that this is the case, especially when some individuals will only just be missing out but are doing so to better their situation, for example, a part-time employee who is also a student.

The Department for Education (2018) explains that early years services are filling more spaces which is likely to be linked to the introduction of the 30 hours childcare funding. But in terms of the 30 hours funding being an anti-poverty strategy, it could be exacerbating the issue. This is because children living in workless and low-income families are missing out despite the fact that these are the children who are most likely to benefit from extra early years education (Morton, 2020). In return, the funding could be responsible for widening educational inequalities between children of different socio-economic backgrounds rather than closing them. This is problematic as children could then be at an educational disadvantage before their formal schooling starts, making it harder to close the gap (Halfon, 2019, cited in www.parliment.uk, 2019). Arguably, the quantity of early years education a child receives cannot guarantee the quality of education they receive. This links back to the earlier point made about false hope, as it cannot be concluded that increased funding for children will lead to better educational outcomes. One question that needs to be asked is do children need to be school-ready or should schools be ready for the new cohort of children (Hogg, 2017)?

There are other limitations with the 30 hours funding. The funding for some settings may be an insufficient amount to cover costs of a child's place, meaning that settings have had to permanently close for this reason (National Day Nurseries Association, 2019). This is problematic, especially for nursery closures that have happened in already deprived areas, as the children attending these settings are ones most likely to already be at a disadvantage and the most likely to benefit from attending a setting (National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) (2020). The funding has also led to other settings charging for general extras such as hot dinners in order to make a profit and remain open (Dean, 2017). These general extras can be off-putting and misleading for parents on a low income as they are expecting their childcare to be free. In return, they may then choose not to enroll their child or choose a different childcare provider that

does not expect this cost (Busby, 2018). This could mean that early years settings are then split according to social status and this highlights a lack of social mobility in the early years market for parents. Wealthier families are more likely to pay for the general extras, not because of willingness to pay the cost, but because these settings often offer long sessions which appeals more to families working long hours (Chen & Bradbury, 2020).

It could be argued that the childhood anti-poverty strategies are less apparent in the early years sector and it is primary schools where childhood poverty strategies are more noticeable and better implemented. For example, state primary schools offer free school meals for children in reception class, year one and year two which is universal for (Gov.UK, 2020b). This seems a more appropriate way to tackle poverty because all children irrespective of their social status can benefit. This is an interesting contrast between early years and primary schools. As mentioned, many early years settings are now adding an extra cost for meals (Dean, 2017). However, the government appears to value the importance of free primary school meals more than universal funding for children in their early years. This was made apparent during the 2020 coronavirus outbreak where parents could still collect their child's free school meal despite school being shut (Gov.UK, 2020b).

Arguing that all children should be entitled to the same amount of early years may seem justifiable and a fair way to give children equal opportunities. However, it is not possible to conclude that universal early years childcare would lead to a decreased educational gap amongst children (Nursery World, 2019). This is because the are many other factors that can impact a child's learning some examples are, the quality of education, a child's physiological needs, a child living in stressful conditions, a child who has disabilities or a child experiencing abuse (Neaum, 2010). Therefore, early

years settings may need to be more responsible by ensuring they implement high-quality education and care (Stewart & Waldfoel, 2017) which will be discussed within chapter 5. It would seem reasonable to suggest that the current universal early years funding is worthwhile despite its weaknesses because the benefits for children and families go far beyond educational attainment and closing educational inequalities (Lawson, 2018).

Chapter 5 - Quality in Early Years Education

The way that early years settings can be responsible for tackling childhood poverty may need to be far more than honoring government funding. This chapter looks at the quality of early years education, as this was highlighted within the last chapter to be a variable that may better explain why educational inequalities exist, despite the increased use of daycare. According to Taggart, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammon, and Siraj (2015), children in high-quality early education make significant improvements in their development and this remains the case up until a child reaches secondary school. This suggests that having high-quality early years education is an important part of tackling childhood poverty as it can have lasting effects on an individual's success. While this may be true, it is important to outline what is meant by the quality of education and how settings can achieve it due to the vastness of ideas and opinions surrounding the matter (Nurse, 2007). The term quality education is ambiguous leaving it open for debate (Cottle & Alexander, 2011). What's more the opinions of quality may be influenced by government policy, the understanding of pedagogy and theory, cultural norms, and personal values (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013). Ideas of what quality is also likely to differ between individual stakeholders due to what people believe is important. For example, parents and practitioners are likely to have differing opinions due to their relationship with a child (Cottle & Alexander, 2011).

In England, quality education is heavily based around Ofsted's ideas of what quality means. Ofsted is a government service that records data, regulates and assesses educational settings to standardise and formalise education (Ofsted, 2020). Ofsted inspect early years provision to check that they are upholding the EYFS framework, which settings have a legal duty to implement (Ofsted, 2019a). Settings are then awarded a grade of either outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate (Gov.UK, 2018). The feedback from an inspection will include a report which outlines

what the setting is doing well and what the inspector feels can be improved (Hayes, Daly, Duncan, Gill, & Whitehouse, 2014). Settings can use the feedback from their inspection to make changes and reflect on their practice (Grenier, 2020).

The Ofsted inspection framework has undergone recent changes which took effect from September 2019 (Ofsted, 2019b). This has placed an increased focus on how practitioners implement Ofsted's ideas of high-quality education, how practitioners interact with the children, how practitioners build on children's cultural capital, and the use of EYFS curriculum (Ofsted, 2019a). These changes to Ofsted inspections mean that the inspection process will now include a 'learning walk'. This gives the manager the opportunity to show the inspector around, to allow them a chance to discuss how they are meeting the new Ofsted focus on high-quality education (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, 2020). In some cases, settings can be closed by Ofsted if they are believed to be underperforming for example, if the children in the setting are deemed to be unsafe (Roberts, 2019). With that in mind, settings must follow Ofsted guidelines (Ofsted, 2019b), but there is not an expected pedagogy that must be used to implement the curriculum (Lewis, 2018). However, Nurse (2007) explains that staff working in the early years sector are often afraid of using child-led pedagogies, even if this is their normal day to day practice. The author explains that this is because they fear that they will be judged for not being professional enough which results in a change of behaviour during an inspection. This is known as the Hawthorne Effect (Coolican, 2019). With that in mind, inspections may not show a true representation of a normal day at a setting or fairly report the 'real' level of quality.

Ofsted (2018) state that high-quality early years education is important as it can help to close the gap in young children's learning and better prepare children for the transition into formal schooling. Therefore, it seems reasonable to believe that educational settings need monitoring and assessing by Ofsted to ensure that children

are appropriately supported. However, as mentioned in chapter 4, a question that needs asking is why are we constantly preparing children for the next transition and continuously measuring their progress? Perryman and Calvert (2019) explain that the UK is in a performative culture which means that there is an educational culture of testing performance. This can be seen early on in educational settings such as the use of baseline assessments (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2017). This is problematic because it can create a blame culture, meaning that teachers are accountable for children who are behind in their development (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016). The statistics collected from children's tests are used by the government to inform Ofsted league tables. However, the quantitative data collected from testing is questionable in terms of whether it is a valid way to measure the quality of education as Lee (2019) explains it is more of a way to discipline disadvantaged settings.

The quantitative measures used by Ofsted has limitations because it ignores the holistic ideas of what high-quality education and care means (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2017). Many professionals explain they join a career with children and young people as they have a passion to make a difference but feel disheartened once working in a qualified role in which they compare it to a tick box exercise (Perryman & Calvert 2019). What's more, high-quality education is more than ticking boxes for an inspection in which teaching children valuable life skills should be valued just as much as children's academic attainment because it underpins all areas of formal learning (Barbour, 2019). According to Asquith (2020), quality education is about how practitioners model language and behaviour to children which in return can help children to learn how to self-regulate their own emotions, giving them the necessary social and emotional skills for healthy well-being.

There are some issues with having Ofsted ratings and how this may have an impact on the quality of education. As noted earlier, many nurseries have struggled to make

a profit since the introduction of the 30 hours funding (National Day Nurseries Association, 2019). This has meant that many settings have made cuts in their spending in order to accommodate the funding (National Day Nurseries Association, 2019). But making cuts could be damaging for the quality of education as it means settings are not investing money into their provision so might lack resources or it could mean that low skilled staff are hired as their hourly pay rate is lower (Crown, 2020). Some early years settings are compromising the quality of their provision as way of managing their budget which is likely to be because Ofsted set a minimum requirement. For example, settings can receive a requires improvement rating but remain open for up to 12 months before their next inspection (Ofsted, 2019a). Therefore, settings can remain open even if the settings do not offer a high Ofsted rating. This is alarming, as the 30 hours free childcare was put into place to benefit children. But in reality, settings may be more concerned with business survival (Crown, 2020). This problem may be amplified by poor management skills. Burke (2017) explains that nurseries can still provide Ofsted's idea of quality education when budgets are reduced but, to achieve that managers need knowledge of both business management and childcare accompanied by a team of staff who are passionate to work sustainably. A problem is that many managers in early years provision have "worked their way up" and whilst they are able to pursue a company vision that puts children at the center (Newstead & Isles-Buck, 2012), they do not usually have the essential skills to maintain these standards under a budget (Burke, 2017).

Interestingly, many people who work in the childcare sector are considered as living in poverty themselves (Crown, 2019). Alongside this, it is one of the lowest paid jobs in the UK, which may be responsible for the high turnover of staff in the sector (Crown, 2020). This is problematic because a high turnover of staff could have an impact on the children's overall happiness and development, especially if it interrupts children's

attachments at a setting (Mathers, Eisenstadt, Sylva, Soukakou, & Ereky-Stevens, 2014). The low pay, high demand of the job, and performative culture may equally lead to difficulty recruiting highly skilled staff in the sector meaning that high-quality education is hard to achieve if staff are not competent (Crown, 2020) (Perryman & Calvert, 2019). There have been attempts to professionalise the early years workforce which, saw new qualifications introduced such as the Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) and Early Years Educator (EYE). But these qualifications are still lacking in terms of the pay meaning they are not appealing to those working in early years (Osgood, Elwick, Robertson, Sakr, & Wilson, 2017). As a recommendation, settings could take more responsibility by investing in their staff's training. But, an obvious problem with this is that staff who do upskill often leave the early years workforce due to the high emotional demand of the job role paired with a pay that does not reflect the duties of the job role (Rayner & Espinoza, 2016).

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

The early years sector appears to already be making steps towards tackling childhood poverty. The changes to childcare funding and quality of education have been discussed and critiqued within this project which has uncovered their many valuable benefits of both. However, this has also highlighted many limitations of how effect they are as an anti-poverty strategy. Current evidence has shown that, despite there being more funding for children, educational inequalities still exist (Roos et al., 2019). This indicates that there are many other variables that should be explored when deciding the appropriate strategy to manage childhood poverty in the early years sector.

Quality of education is one of the variables which has been identified in this project as needing more research. Many problems have been identified with quality such as how settings are inspected and how quality it is delivered. Therefore, the quality of education may better explain why educational inequalities still exist amongst children and this problem may be magnified because of the conflict between managing a setting whilst offering funded spaces. Providing more money and funding to early years settings may not be a reasonable solution to improve the quality of early years education because as discussed, this cannot guarantee better outcomes for children. Although, more money could better support settings to provide the 30 hours funding which could relieve some pressure for managers and mean that they do not have to compromise a small budget.

Nevertheless, the findings from this project have highlighted the need for further research to understand what extent parents shape their child's education, how this varies among families according to their social backgrounds and what can be done to support home learning. As explained the changes to the Ofsted inspection framework has put a focus on cultural capital to give children opportunities to engage in

experiences they might not engage with at home. But supporting home learning is equally important. The coronavirus outbreak in 2020 has meant that nurseries had to close for a long length of time meaning that children could not attend their usual day care provider. Future researchers could use this as an opportunity to see how much progress children made in their development at a time when learning occurred at home, as the data during this period would be genuinely comparable to highlight the impact of home learning of children from different social backgrounds.

From a thorough investigation, it can be concluded that early years settings should have more responsibility to tackle childhood poverty as it remains a problem. Much of what is already in place combats the effects of poverty. But, in order to eradicate childhood poverty and close educational inequalities, the strategy needs to be proactive and understand the dynamics of the childhood poverty (Tomlinson, 2013). There may not be one solution to improve outcomes for children living in poverty due to its complex nature. But, to improve better outcomes for children more awareness is needed as depending on government funding to solve the issue is unrealistic.

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select/education-committee/news-parliament-2017/life-chances-report-published-17-19/

Appendices A Ethics Form

Initial Research Ethics Checklist for New Applications

Please complete this checklist as the first step in your application for research ethics review. We recommend you refer to the Checklist Guide when completing this Checklist.

1. TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Should Early Years' Settings Be Responsible for Tackling Childhood Poverty?

2. INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION

Name: Zoe Coombes
Programme: Childhood Practice
Institutional e-mail: 20092542@marjon.ac.uk

2. CHECKLIST

Section A	YES	NO
1. Will your research involve research participants identified from, or because of their past or present use of, the NHS and/or Social Care Services?		X
2. Does the research project involve intrusive procedures with adults who lack capacity to consent for themselves or health-related research involving prisoners?		X
3. Will research be led by a researcher at another UK institution?		X

If you answered **YES** to **ANY** question in Section A then your research may require review by the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) or another University's Research Ethics Committee. **It is the responsibility of the researcher to determine what means of approval are required and to obtain approval prior to starting the project.**

If you answered **NO** to **ALL** questions in Section A please proceed to Section B.

Section B	YES	NO

1. Does the research project involve human biology, or experimental human psychology?		X
2. Does the research project involve human participants, or personal data in any way (this includes secondary data e.g. existing survey data, interview transcripts)?		X
3. Does the research involve non-human animal participants, or non-human animal biology?		X

If you answered **NO** to **ALL** questions in Section B such proposals will not normally require ethical review. Advice should be sought in cases of doubt.

If you answered **YES** to **QUESTIONS 1 AND/OR 2** in Section B please proceed to Section C.

If you answered **YES** to **QUESTION 3** you will need to contact the Research and Innovation Office to ensure your research is compliant with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act (1986).

Section C	YES	NO
1. Does the research involve participants who are unable to give informed consent, considered to be vulnerable, or who lack capacity? (e.g. your own students, children, people with learning disabilities)		
2. Will the research require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups/individuals to be recruited? (e.g. for access to students at school, or to members of a particular organization)		
3. Will the research involve access to records of personal or confidential information concerning identifiable individuals, either living or recently deceased?		
4. Will the research involve the use of administrative data or secure data? (e.g. student records held by a school or college, medical records)		
5. Will the deception of participants (including covert observation in non-public places) be necessary at any time?		
6. Will the research involve discussion of sensitive topics? (e.g. sexual activity, drug use, political behaviour, ethnicity and, potentially, elite interviews)		
7. Will the research involve sensitive material that might be linked, or interpreted as linked, to terrorism/matters that the PREVENT policy is concerned with?		

8. Will the research involve members of the public in a research capacity, helping to shape methodology and/or to collect data? (e.g. participatory research)		
9. Will the research involve visual or vocal methods where participants or other individuals may be identifiable in the data used or generated?		
10. Will the research involve any drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins and other supplements) being administered to the participants, or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?		
11. Will blood or tissue samples be obtained from participants (deceased or alive)?		
12. Is the research likely to involve or result in participants experiencing pain or more than mild discomfort?		
13. Could the research induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences? (both research participants and their living relatives should be considered)		
14. Will the research involve prolonged or repetitive testing of participants?		
15. Will data collection involve e-mail, social media, and/or instant messaging services in data collection?		
16. Will financial inducements (other than reimbursement of expenses) be offered to participants?		
17. Will the study involve external organisations to recruit participants?		
18. Will the research place the safety of the researcher(s) at risk?		
19. Will the research be undertaken outside of the UK?		
20. Will the research or its dissemination involve data sharing of confidential information, or the re-use of previously collected data?		

If you answered **NO** to **ALL** questions in Section C your research may qualify for **LIGHT TOUCH** review.

 If you have answered **YES** to **ANY** question in Section C please proceed to Section D.

Section D
Please indicate the Risk Level for the project by checking the intersecting box

Par tici		Research Risk

		Low	Medium	High
	Low			
	Medium			
	High			

Please research group indicated above – be sure to discuss what to include here with your supervisor.

justify the risk and vulnerability

This will be both low participant vulnerability and low research risk because the project will be carried out using only secondary data. No primary research will take place therefore, there will be no participants used in the research. I will only be using the findings from published work to conduct this research project.

This project will uphold the guidelines within the British Education Research Association (BERA) (2018).

Signature of applicant:

I declare that I have read the Ethics Policy and
will follow the guidelines therein:

Signature of supervisor / module leader

I declare that I have read the completed Ethics Checklist and the research described accords with my understanding of the proposed work.

Signature:

Date: 13.12.2019

Signature

Date: 13.12.2019

If the Risk Level for your project is in the shaded box in Section D your research may qualify for **LIGHT TOUCH** review.

If you answered **YES** to **ANY** question in Section C **AND** the Risk Level of your research is **OUTSIDE** the shaded box then your application requires **FULL REVIEW.**
If the Risk Level of your research is **INSIDE** the **DIAGONALLY STRIATED** boxes

your research also requires scholarly review. If this is the case, you will need to complete the following form:
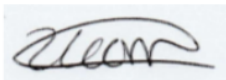
Ethics Form Reference List:

British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018). *Ethical guidelines for educational research*. Received from: https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018

Appendices B Ethical Approval Form for Student Research

Name of Applicant	Module Code
Zoe Coombes	PRUHP1-19/20X: Education Project
Name of supervisor / module leader	
Jayne Garcia	
Faculty	
Childhood Practice	
Title of project	
Should Early Years Settings Be Responsible for Tackling Childhood Poverty	
Timeframe of research Provide a brief timetable of the proposed research, particularly indicating data collection phase(s). Ethical approval is for a limited time period: if the research changes, or extends beyond this period, the applicant should ensure that ethical issues are reconsidered by the Panel.	
September – November 2019: Deciding an area of research interest and acquiring knowledge in this area. December - Ethical approval form submitted and returned ready to start research January: 3500 words submitted on the 10th (research proposal) February/March: Continue with writing, reviewing and revising written work. Have a first draft ready at the end of these two months April: Finalising the final draft and submitting (Minimum of 3 hours per week to study around the subject area. This will include time to visit different libraries to access different sources).	
Purpose of research Provide a summary of the research, written in terms easily understandable by a non-specialist	
The purpose of this piece of research is to provide a deeper understanding into childhood poverty and explore the complications with regards to this in the early years sector. It will inform my practice and in turn improve how I deliver care in the sector. Having a deeper understanding of such issues can also help others, allowing me the opportunity to raise awareness and to share my knowledge with other practitioners.	
Justification for the research Indicate the contribute to knowledge, policy, practice and/or peoples' lives that the research is anticipated to make	
I am hoping that my research will be used to inform other practitioners who are working in the early years sector. It may also be influential with regards to policy.	
Participants in the research Provide details of the participants in the research. Where appropriate, this should include specification of the population to be studied and sampling procedures to be used	
N/A This will be a literature-based project using secondary research.	
Recruitment procedures	

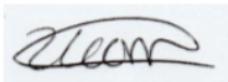| |
|---|
| This should explain the means by which participants in the research will be recruited. If any incentive and/or compensation (financial or other) is to be offered to participants, this should be clearly explained. |
| N/A
This will be a literature-based project using secondary research. |
| **Informed consent**
Explain the information that will be provided to potential participants, and procedures for gaining consent |
| N/A
This will be a literature-based project using secondary research. |
| **Methods**
Outline the methods of data collection and analysis |
| This project will be literature based. I will not be collecting my own primary research so there will not be a specific method that I will use to collect data.

However, I am aware that published may have a bias. For this reason, I will examine the methods the researchers have used when collecting their data. This will help me to decide if the research is reliable and valid.

I will ensure to use a range of different sources including, but not limited to, books, journals and websites. In doing this I will be using a broad range of publications which will allow for a deeper, robust and more accurate insight into child poverty. Alongside this I will ensure to access different libraries as I am aware that only accessing one small library can limit what research is available for me to study. |
| **Confidentiality, anonymity, data storage and disposal**
Provide explanation of any measures to preserve confidentiality and anonymity, including specific explanation of data storage and disposal plans. (Note that there may be need to store data for some years after completion of the project.) |
| N/A
This will be a literature-based project using secondary research. |
| **Ethical considerations**
Outline the ethical dimensions to the proposed research, both those which may be seen as 'positive' and 'negative'. Where potential risks to participants' or researchers' physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing may be present, explain any steps that will be taken to minimize these. |
| N/A |
| **Published ethical guidelines to be followed**
Identify the professional code(s) of practice and/or ethical guidelines relevant to the subject domain of the research. Your supervisor/module leader should be able to provide guidance. |
| BERA (2018) guidelines will be upheld throughout this educational project. |

Signature of applicant:

Signature of Module Leader, Programme Leader / Head of Department / Chair of Faculty Ethics Committee

I declare that I have read the Ethics Policy and will follow the guidelines therein:

Signature:

Date: 13.12.2019

I confirm that this project has been approved for the stated period:

Signature:

Date:

Appendices C

Date	Policy
September 1998	Introduced 12.5 hours free education for all 4-year olds for 33 weeks per year
April 2004	Entitlement extended to 3-year olds
April 2005	Entitlement increased to 38 weeks
September 2009	Introduced 10 hours per week for most disadvantaged 2-year olds for 33 weeks
September 2010	All offers extended to 15 hours per week for 38 weeks (spread over 3-5 days)
September 2012	Entitlement spread increased to 2-5 days
September 2013	Extended funded places to 20% of most disadvantaged 2-year olds
September 2014	Extended funded places to 40% of most disadvantaged 2-year olds
April 2015	Early Years Pupil Premium introduced
April 2016	Expanded childcare component of Universal Credit
April 2017	Tax-Free childcare introduced
September 2017	Introduced 30 hours entitlement for working parents
October 2018	Childcare Vouchers scheme ends

Appendix C Reference: Akhal, A. (2019). The impact of recent government policies on early years provision. Retrieved from https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Early-years-take-up_-EPI.pdf