
Constructions of Early Childhood Education and Care Provision: negotiating discourses

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ABSTRACT Drives to increase the number of early childhood education and care places in England have relied on a mixed economy of providers. Yet this is not a free market as policy makers have sought to create a discursive truth of an entrepreneurial provider in order to secure their initial pump priming investment. However, there remain sustainability issues within the sector, and whilst it has been suggested that it is the hyper-feminisation of the workforce that has positioned early childhood education and care as outside of the entrepreneurial discourse, here it is argued that it is the romanticisation of childhood that really creates the tension with the entrepreneurial discourse due to a rejection of a commodity view of children, childhood and early childhood education and care services. There is a call for a construction of early childhood education and care services from within the sector as opposed to one from top down policy directives, but a construction that does not obscure the voice of the child.

Introduction

It is well established that there is international interest in the role of early childhood education and care (ECEC) due to a growing body of evidence that has demonstrated its social and economic benefits (Lloyd, 2008). In funding ECEC governments can support equality of access to its educational and social advantages, whilst also recognising the role that ECEC has in sustaining parental employment (see Bertram & Pascal, 2002; Calman & Tarr-Whelan, 2005; White, 2011). Stephen (2006) makes the distinction between constructions of ECEC that are shaped by ideas of children, childhood and learning, and those shaped by socio-political objectives for investing in ECEC. The former relate to a view of self-fulfilment and well-being, whilst the latter is about the expected outcomes of ECEC and the influence of human capital theory. White (2011) also discusses these two aspects of ECEC investment from the perspective of international organisations, highlighting the contradictions and tensions between the different elements of ECEC. Countries such as England, Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Canada and Hong Kong, for example, are all trying to blur the boundaries between the economic and social benefits of ECEC. Here, I focus on England, whilst drawing on other countries to further develop discussion. The difficulty is that in England the attempt to align ECEC policy developments with both economic and social aspects has created tensions in the provision of ECEC (Moss, 2006; Campbell-Barr & Garnham, 2010). I particularly wish to focus on the tensions that exist for providers in determining their approach to delivering ECEC services. I will explore how policy developments in ECEC in England have sought to create an entrepreneurial discourse in the delivery of ECEC provision and contrast this to research that has demonstrated that providers can be resistant to such a discourse. Whilst it has been suggested that the feminine nature of the sector offers an explanation for this resistance, I put forward the proposal that it is a romanticisation of childhood discourse (focussed on the needs of the child) that sits uneasily with the entrepreneurial approach put forward by policy. Having explored the tension, I conclude by suggesting that both the entrepreneurial and romanticisation of

childhood discourses have created a view of the child as passive in the provision of ECEC that is far from desirable.

The article concludes with a call for action for policy makers to engage with the views of ECEC providers and for an understanding of ECEC to come from within the sector, but for ECEC providers to also be vocal in their views. The Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government have just published *More Great Childcare* (Department for Education [DfE], 2013) outlining their proposed reforms to ECEC services, including improving staff qualifications and altering ratios. Many of the proposals have been met with outcry by those working in the sector as there is a fear that altering ratios will lessen the quality of provision and that improving qualifications is not enough to prevent this from happening (Gaunt, 2013; Senior, 2013; Stewart, 2013). Whilst the public consultation offers one opportunity for providers to voice their frustrations, the outcry signals that ECEC providers are becoming increasingly vocal and that now is a time for their voices to be heard.

Background

In England, following the election of New Labour in 1997, the National Childcare Strategy was introduced (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE], 1998). Whilst there had been some tentative steps towards investment in ECEC prior to 1998 (see Randall, 2000; Cohen et al, 2004; Campbell-Barr, 2010), the National Childcare Strategy signalled a new policy era for ECEC both in relation to supply and demand. The Strategy looked to invest in the quality, affordability and accessibility of ECEC. It identified with both the economic and social aspects of ECEC provision by acknowledging the role that it had in supporting women's employment, addressing child poverty and contributing to child development. In 2004, a 10-year childcare strategy was introduced furthering the commitment to ECEC (Her Majesty's Stationery Office [HMSO], 2004).

Central to the National Childcare Strategy was a commitment to secure sufficient childcare places for those who wanted it. At the time of its introduction, provision was uneven across the country (Penn, 2007) being both fragmented and diverse (Cohen et al, 2004). Previous governments had relied on the market to respond to the growing demand for ECEC provision that was the result of an increase in maternal labour force participation (Lloyd, 2012). Rather than looking to consolidate the provision of ECEC services, the National Childcare Strategy built upon the market system that was already present, offering pump priming funding to boost supply in areas where there were gaps in provision. Various funding initiatives (detailed below) aimed to increase the level of provision through a series of start-up grants to help stimulate the market (Cabinet Office, 2002).

We will also provide start up funding for new childcare places where the market is not able to respond sufficiently, and provide other targeted funding where needed. (DfEE, 1998, p. 34)

It was always envisaged that the expansion of places would be reliant on a mixed economy of providers (Harries et al, 2004; Penn, 2007; Lloyd, 2008). The focus on the market was enshrined in legislation when the 2006 Childcare Act was introduced (National Archives, 2006). Under the Act, local authorities are required to manage the market in order to ensure sufficient provision for parents that want it. However, under this market management, maintained (state) provision is to be a last resort.

The mixed market in ECEC reflects a much wider policy approach to welfare delivery, whereby the mixed market is favoured in many areas, for example elder care (Powell, 2007). Whilst the provision of welfare services is often seen as synonymous with the provision of state (maintained) services, this is not always the case (Powell, 2007). A reliance on the market has a long history in welfare provision as is evident when considering welfare being provided by religious and community groups throughout history (Lloyd, 2012). The role of the market in the provision of welfare services has been especially stressed in the last quarter of a century, but it has always played a part (see Stewart, 2007). In favouring a market approach, neo-liberal economies privilege the market through policy developments (Acker, 1998), with the role of state being minimal (Penn, 2012). In England, the Third Way approach to welfare development that is attributed to the New Labour government was underpinned by a focus on markets as they were regarded as less expensive and more responsive to public demands, whilst also building on the privatisation agenda

that had been a part of the Thatcher government. Other liberal economies have also justified a reliance on the market due to its ability to respond flexibly to consumer demands (OECD, 2006; see also Lloyd & Penn 2012).

[T]he rationale is to supplement public expenditure, widen the sources of service supply, introduce competition into the provision of services and provide parents with more provider choice and greater flexibility in services. (OECD, 2006, p. 108)

The reliance on the mixed market is thus about building on what is already there, whilst arguably providing parents with choices about the services that they use. Through their choices, parents will help regulate the quality of provision, as with citizens becoming consumers, they will drive provision through voting with their feet (Clarke et al, 2005).

Support for this neo-liberal choice agenda is reflected in the funding streams that looked to increase the levels of provision and those that looked to stimulate purchasers, such as the funding of free early years education places and the Tax Credit initiative. The funding for the expansion of provision can be grouped into three areas: childcare, early years education places, and out-of-school provision. Childcare included care for those under the age of three and wraparound childcare for those accessing the early years education funding. Early years education places were primarily to support the offer of free, part-time early years education provision for three- and four-year-olds, with this now being extended to deprived two-year-olds. Out-of-school provision focused on creating childcare for school-aged children to help bring school days in line with a typical working day. Since the Strategy was introduced, there have been numerous funding streams including: the Sure Start initiative (£450 million between 1999 and 2002 alone) for childcare and early years education provision for children under the age of five (see Cohen et al, 2004); the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative for early years education provision (£246 million revenue funding from the then Department for Education and Skills [DfES] and £100 million capital funding from the New Opportunities Fund [subsequently the Big Lottery Fund]); the New Opportunities Fund for out-of-school provision (£325million between 2001 and 2004); and the extended schools initiative (over £1billion between 2008 and 2011) (see Cabinet Office, 2002; Smith et al, 2007; Peters et al, 2009;). In 2010-11, £2,088 million was invested in Sure Start, early years education and childcare as a whole (National Audit Office, 2011). Whilst the figures are not a comprehensive list of the monies invested in ECEC, they reflect the policy drive for ECEC. Butt et al (2007) summarise that broadly the funding has been effective as the strategy has increased the overall level of supply of ECEC. However, there are concerns with the reliance on the market to expand provision.

Tax credits are a demand led initiative designed to stimulate purchaser power. Currently tax credits can cover up to 70% of childcare costs for families and are allocated on a means tested basis. Whilst the means testing reflects an equality drive to offer support to those families deemed economically in need, it also reflects how providers are expected to compete with each other in order to successfully attract more customers (see Penn, 2012). As providers look to sell their product, the choice agenda creates implications for the relationships between parents and providers as it ensures that it is the parents' responsibility to select childcare and assume accountability for the risks involved in this (Cohen et al, 2004). ECEC becomes a commodity (Woodrow & Press, 2007), a good for consumption (Moss & Petrie, 2005) reflecting the economic aspects of ECEC over the social ones discussed earlier. Parents are individual consumers as opposed to members of a community and there is little to acknowledge the position of the child, as will be discussed later. Further, as Plantenga (2012) notes from the Dutch context, there is an assumption that parents know how to make an informed choice. Difficulties are also identified when considering that choice will drive quality as the quality of services has been found to be variable in market systems (Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training [NESSE], 2009).

A Correct Reading of ECEC

Policy developments to support the expansion of ECEC have clearly focussed on the role of the private, voluntary and independent sectors. However, the government has worked hard to secure their investment, which has been focussed on creating a 'correct reading' of ECEC provision (Osgood, 2006, p. 198). Policy developments represent a series of 'claims about how the world should and might be' (Bowe et al. 1992, p. 13), with governments working hard to create a series of

truths that for Osgood are centred on professionalism, but for me are about entrepreneurialism (with an overlap between the two that is considered later). The discursive truths put forward by policy makers reflect sanctioned ideologies that look to dominate (in this instance) ECEC provision, whilst other discourses can struggle for existence (Sinclair, 1996, cited by Osgood, 2006). Often those discourses that are struggling are in stark contrast to the ones being endorsed by policy makers.

I am interested in the way in which policy makers have sought to create a series of discursive truths to govern ECEC practitioners. Discourses seek to normalise, to shape individuals towards a particular (normative) way of being (Dahlberg et al, 1999). As Bowe et al, (1992, p. 13) raise, to approach policy as a discourse is to recognise that it is: 'Constituted of possibilities and impossibilities, tied to knowledge on the one hand (the analysis of problems and identification of remedies and goals) and practice on the other (specification of methods for achieving goals and implementation)'. Here the problem is the need for sufficient ECEC, but also for that provision to be financially viable. The solution is entrepreneurial ECEC provision. However, discourses can help to highlight how the policy solutions render some aspects of ECEC invisible (Mitchell, 2010), creating tensions in the implementation of policy. The scientific approach to policy 'Implies that the objectives, content and method of implementation of the problem are unproblematic, that they are appropriate for many contexts, and that the targets of particular policies are passively receptive' (Blackmore, 1995, p. 294). However, the application of the solution is not in the hands of the policy makers (as acknowledged by Bowe et al, 1992). Rather, the implementation is reliant on ECEC providers who have their own sense of social agency. Policy is a process, not a product and those working in ECEC are a part of that process. Thus, ECEC providers do not merely react to policy directives, they are involved in a process of 'reproducing, interpreting and transforming policy through individual action or agency' (Osgood, 2006, p. 189). Here I look at the tension between the policy evidence for an entrepreneurial discourse to govern the provision of ECEC and how this has sat uneasily with constructions of ECEC provision held by practitioners as is evident in research.

The Entrepreneurial Discourse

Through analysis of the policy initiatives to support the expansion of ECEC provision, it is possible to see evidence of how the government in England has looked to create an entrepreneurial approach to the provision of ECEC. The entrepreneurial discourse is part of a wider political objective that reflects the market driven ideology of the English government referred to above (Perren & Jennings, 2005). The discourse is underpinned by economic rationality and ideas of competition, commercialism, economic returns and financial viability (Moss & Petrie, 2005; Perren & Jenkins, 2005). As will be demonstrated, the entrepreneurial discourse in ECEC is about sustainability, business prowess, managerialism, accountability and professionalism, all of which are implicitly evident in the policy rhetoric around the provision of ECEC.

Firstly, as already discussed, the funding to expand the provision of places was targeted at the private, voluntary and independent sectors. Underpinning the funding initiatives was a clear focus on business principles and for providers to be self-sustaining after the initial start-up funding (Harries et al, 2004). For example, under the New Opportunities Fund providers were required to produce a five-year business plan. In addition, in 2001, funding was allocated to local authorities to employ Business Support Officers (Osgood, 2003) who would deliver business training and support to local providers. This focus on business skills reflects the intention of the National Childcare Strategy to ensure that ECEC providers operate in an entrepreneurial way (Osgood, 2006). However, the employment of Business Support Officers arguably undermines entrepreneurialism in the acknowledgement that there are business concerns with the sector.

Secondly, although England has encouraged a mixed economy of ECEC providers, this is not a completely free economy. The entrepreneurial discourse clearly seeks to mould the character of the mixed economy of ECEC and it does this under strict regulation requirements. In most countries there is legislation or regulatory frameworks that look at adult-child ratios, staff qualifications and other quality criteria (OECD, 2006). England is no exception, where the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) provides a Foucauldian panoptic gaze (Foucault, 1991) to monitor the delivery of ECEC. Although discussing schools, Case et al

discuss how: 'The establishment of an officious 'external' surveillance and control system in the form of OFSTED ensures at least some degree of compliance with government demands for the implementation of a managerialist agenda' (2000, p. 607). The managerialist agenda is evident from the increased focus on accountability and performativity in ECEC (Osgood, 2006). The performance of providers is monitored against national minimum standards, whilst the efficiency is monitored by the assessment of children attending the settings. Alongside the managerialist agenda, the assessment of performance helps to ensure that, to some extent, ECEC providers are working towards policy objectives.

Whilst Ofsted ensures that providers are meeting the minimum standards (albeit on a four point grading system), they also reinforce the market principle of competition between ECEC providers, as under the new monitoring system inspection reports are published on the internet for parents and other providers to see. This reinforces the entrepreneurial approach as for ECEC providers to be successful they must effectively negotiate the market in order to sell their product (Dahlberg et al, 1999).

Other managerialist principles are evident in the move to 'professionalise' the workforce. The drive to professionalise the ECEC workforce is based on a growing level of evidence that demonstrates that well qualified staff help to improve the outcomes of the children attending the setting (for example, Melhuish, 2004; Sylva et al, 2004). The drive to improve the quality of ECEC is not being questioned. Rather, it is the connotations of professionalism in relation to entrepreneurialism and managerialism that seek to highlight that those working in ECEC are part of a wider social policy project to impose business and market terminology onto them.

The underlying philosophy of the entrepreneurial discourse is thus based on economic rationality, which is centred on market ideologies. In this model structure, order and accountability are privileged as reflected in the managerialist agenda, but so too are the economic objectives of sustainability and viability that underpin the investment and support strategies for ECEC provision. The professionalisation agenda provides evidence of how it is not just the ECEC settings that need to be rational, structured and ordered, but so to do those who are leading the practice in the settings.

Emerging Tensions

Despite the focus on business minded, managerial and professional ECEC providers, there are continuing concerns surrounding the sustainability of ECEC in England (see Cabinet Office, 2002; Harries et al, 2004; Penn, 2012). Phillips et al (2010) found that only 34% of full daycare providers reported making a profit in 2009, with another 34% covering costs. What is perhaps most concerning is that 18% did not know (with the remaining 13% making a loss). Possible explanations include falling occupancy rates, that quality standards impose high adult-child ratios (with staffing often being the highest outlay for providers), and that there is increased competition amongst providers (see Butt et al, 2007). Yet recent proposals by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition suggesting altering ratios in order to increase wages have been met with opposition (DfE, 2013; Gaunt, 2013). Further, given that parents still site gaps in the provision of ECEC there is clearly a mismatch in the supply and demand of ECEC (Campbell-Barr & Garnham, 2010), and it is perhaps this that needs to be addressed in the policy attempts to manage the market, as opposed to the entrepreneurial approach of ECEC providers.

Both the failures to meet the gaps in provision and the continued problem of sustainability in ECEC have positioned ECEC providers as deficient, rather than the reliance on the market for service delivery being deficient. Under this deficiency model there is a focus on structural issues such as staffing costs and a mismatch in the supply and demand of provision to explain the continued sustainability concerns with ECEC. Whilst structural elements clearly play a role, they are located within discursive frameworks that shape understandings of ECEC. I have already considered how policy developments have sought to focus efforts on an entrepreneurial discourse. However, such a discourse only seeks to highlight how the policy solutions for sufficient and sustainable ECEC have tried to hide other discursive frameworks. In particular, the romanticisation of childhood discourse helps to highlight how the entrepreneurial discourse sits uneasily with the historical construction of ECEC provision.

It is widely recognised that 'childhood is a social construction deeply embedded within societal norms and values' (Bertram & Pascal, 2002, p. 8). 'Constructs of children and childhood and those who work with children are woven together from cultural and economic strands within society' (McGillivray, 2008, pp. 244-245). These values shape ECEC policy and provision. The romanticisation of childhood discourse has a long history that is largely attributed to Rousseau and his philosophy of the natural child (see Moss & Petrie, 2005; Gabriel, 2010). The romanticisation of childhood discourse represents the natural, innocent and pure child that is in need of protection and guidance (Hendrick, 1997; Kehily, 2004). Childhood is seen as a 'golden age', where children need to be sheltered from the 'corruption of the adult world' (Moss & Petrie, 2005, p. 58). This view of childhood can be seen at the cornerstone of policy developments in the UK with the growing interest in children's well-being that emerged in the 1800s. The long history of the romanticisation discourse means that it has long been implicitly ingrained in social understandings of childhood (see Moss & Petrie, 2005). Social policy throughout history is clearly motivated by a concern for children and much of the policy in England (and other parts of the world) has been driven by a want to address the needs of children (Kehily, 2004; McGillivray, 2008). The natural child was the antidote to the process of industrialisation and the dominance of urban living (Gabriel, 2010). Children were no longer regarded as having an instrumental value, but were instead becoming emotionally priceless (Hardgrove et al, 2011). Through the process of distancing children from industrialisation and the loss of their instrumental value, children became positioned as outside of the adult world of economics and markets.

Those who work with children identify with the romantic child discourse. The romanticisation discourse builds on a concept of children's needs whereby children need nurturing, safeguarding and caring for, all of which are seen as characteristics of ECEC provision (Osgood, 2004; Moss, 2006). Penn (2011) refers to an earlier study (Penn & McQuail, 1997) where she identifies that trainee ECEC practitioners refer to the naturalness of the work that they are doing, demonstrating how the romanticisation of childhood discourse is reflected in the views of practitioners. People who work in ECEC offer children protection and safety (McGillivray, 2008). The difficulty is that the romanticisation of childhood sits uneasily with the entrepreneurial discourse.

The historical development to position children as outside of economics makes it difficult to recognise how they could now be regarded as potential sources of profit making for ECEC providers. The neo-liberal belief in market rationality is underpinned by a view that everything can be commodified (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). As everything is a commodity, everything is reduced to economics; even children and care. Childhood becomes a site for consumption, with a commercialised view of the child (Woodrow & Press, 2007).

In relation to childcare, there is a concern that where interests lie in the return on investment, little attention will be given to the quality of the work undertaken by centre staff, the potential for innovative practices and subsequent effects on children during this important time in their lives. (Doherty et al, 2002; McGirr, 2002, cited by Goodfellow, 2005, p. 54)

Consumption and childhood are often discussed in relation to toys and the creation of children as consumers (Woodrow & Press, 2007), but ECEC markets create children as a commodity, whereby their need for nurturing and protection are bought and sold between parents and providers. As Moss and Petrie (2005) discuss, one metaphor is to see children's services as a factory, where children become a product to be manufactured correctly (through the care and nurturing of others), but also the factory model reflects the urban industrialisation process that romanticism looked to reject. To create ECEC as a site for consumption has implications for the relationships between parents, children and ECEC providers, but it also has implications for how we understand children and childhood. Whilst ECEC providers might enter ECEC for philanthropic reasons to support the needs of the child (Woodrow & Press, 2007), this humanistic ideal is undermined by the economic productivity that is created within ECEC markets, with ECEC providers finding themselves negotiating between entrepreneurial and romantic discourses.

The fear that focussing on economic productivity will result in a disregard for the well-being of workers and consumers goes back to at least Marx (Acker, 1998, p. 200). In ECEC the application of business principles has received considerable attention in recent years (e.g. Osgood, 2004, 2006, 2010; Goodfellow, 2005; Campbell-Barr, 2009; Penn, 2012). The concern is that business principles

are representative of corporate and industrial models (Dahlberg et al, 1999), whereby care is commodified (Goodfellow, 2005), and that things that cannot be valued will disappear from the market, e.g. caring, trust, happiness, emotions and relationships (Held, 2002). The consequence is that ECEC becomes a business (Moss & Petrie, 2005) where the balance sheet becomes the primary consideration rather than the well-being of children (Penn, 2012, p. 29). The result is a loss of the humanistic and social aspects of ECEC as they are harder to value (Held, 2002; Campbell-Barr et al, 2012). The focus of ECEC becomes profits and not the well-being of the child (Sumsion, 2006). In particular, there is anxiety in England (Lloyd & Penn, 2010), Australia (Sumsion, 2006) and Hong Kong (Yuen, 2012) that the growth in large corporate chains in the provision of ECEC could result in a loss of an underlying ethic of care. However, it should be acknowledged that the growth in large chains in England is limited (Laing & Buisson, 2010).

Held (2002) argues that market values should not be prioritised in services such as care and education and that there should be a focus on the social and humanistic aspects of such services. Research conducted with ECEC providers in England offers evidence that ECEC providers are also concerned that the application of business principles to ECEC is not appropriate (Bourn, 2004; Harries et al, 2004; Campbell-Barr, 2009). It is this research evidence from ECEC practitioners that highlights the resistance to the entrepreneurial discourse. For example, prior to the introduction of the National Childcare Strategy, Whittingham (1994) discussed how daycare providers often had a keen sense for understanding the need for a childcare service, but were less clear about the business side. Osgood (2004) has also explored that ECEC providers fear that a business ethos in their delivery of services will result in care being eroded. Held (2002) provides further evidence for resistance to the entrepreneurial discourse by acknowledging that you can work for a large corporate chain, but not uphold their for-profit status. In the Australian context, Sumsion (2006) discusses how small for-profit businesses may be more likely to side with the not-for-profit sector when looking at company ethos. This is what Osgood (2010) has later defined as 'emotional professionalism'.

The arguments centre on what Goodfellow (2005), from an Australian context, has described as the 'childcare paradox', whereby there is a tension between the humanistic and economic drivers of ECEC. Under the humanistic ideal there is a focus on the family as a social construct with a model of citizenship and a social, moral and ethical view of caring. This humanistic ideal is evident in the romantic child discourse. The economic model sees the parent as a purchaser, influenced by government drives to support workforce participation and societal regeneration. Whilst Goodfellow (2005) discusses the paradox in relation to parental decisions to use ECEC, the same paradox can be applied to the provision of ECEC. Just as the market constructs parents as consumers under Goodfellow's model, it constructs providers as the producers of a product for sale. As policy makers have sought to create an entrepreneurial discourse, whereby providers are sustainable, professional and managerial in their approach, there has been little regard for how the economic productivity that underpins this discourse is positioned outside of the humanistic ideal held by many ECEC providers. Several writers have discussed the need to explore understandings of childhood in order to appreciate how they influence views as to the role and purpose of ECEC (see Moss & Petrie, 1997; Dahlberg et al, 1999; Mitchell, 2010). In simplistic terms, ECEC providers appear to align themselves with romantic principles over entrepreneurial ones, but is this enough to explain the continued sustainability problems found in the sector?

One explanation for the tension between emotional professionalism and the entrepreneurial discourse is due to the feminine nature of the workforce. Osgood (2004, 2010) discusses how it is the feminine nature of ECEC that sits outside of the entrepreneurial discourse.

The focus on developing individualistic and entrepreneurial skills akin to those found in corporate organizations which as (Acker, 1992) highlights have tended to be defined as lean, mean, aggressive and 'rational' (traditionally masculine traits), is misplaced in the female and feminized world of early education and childcare. (Osgood, 2004, p. 19)

With 98% of the workforce being female (Phillips et al, 2010), we cannot be gender neutral (Acker, 1998) in our views of ECEC as it is clear that gender does have a role. Osgood argues that the feminine dominance in ECEC creates tensions in trying to impose entrepreneurial, managerial (masculine) traits onto ECEC. There is a long history of the social construction of gender roles whereby women have been aligned with caring and suitable ECEC workers and men positioned

outside this (see for example Smedley, 1998; Cameron, 2001; Badgett & Folbre, 2003; Rolfe et al, 2003;). However, I argue that it is not about what we have constructed as being socially acceptable roles for men and women, but more to do with our concepts of childhood that creates the tension with entrepreneurialism. On the one hand the romantic discourse positions the child as vulnerable and, as Owen (2003) and Cameron (2001) have argued, men are seen as a potential threat to this vulnerability. Cameron and Moss (1998) frame it as the risk and child protection discourse, but whether it is referred to as this or romanticism, both highlight children's vulnerability and their need to be nurtured and protected. Whilst the position of men being outside of ECEC is important, it has been discussed elsewhere (Cameron, 2001, 2006; Owen, 2003). I wish to focus on how the 'lean, mean and aggressive' traits of managerialism and entrepreneurialism do not fit with romantic concepts of protecting and nurturing children, and suggest that it is this that is creating a tension in the provision of ECEC.

To argue that entrepreneurial skills are misplaced in a feminised world undermines a long history of feminist debates and developments. I do not argue that there is full equality, but it has been estimated that between 12.3% and 16.5% of businesses are wholly or majority owned by females (Department of Trade and Industry, 2006), demonstrating that women can be entrepreneurs. Further, returning to the sustainability figures discussed earlier, one third of providers are making a profit and another third are covering their costs (Phillips et al, 2010), so there are some sustainable childcare businesses. I think it is important to acknowledge that it is not just the feminisation of ECEC that interplays with entrepreneurialism, rather, it is how both entrepreneurialism and the feminisation of ECEC interplay with the romanticisation of childhood discourse that is important. Efficiency, effectiveness, performativity and accountability are not synonymous with romanticism.

Discussion

As stated earlier, the use of discourses helps to demonstrate how providers reproduce, interpret and transform policy through individual action or agency (Osgood, 2006). Thus, whilst policy makers seek to create discursive truths, providers will negotiate between these and other societal views on children and childhood. ECEC providers are sites that represent the interest of a number of social actors and domains (Vandenbroeck et al, 2010). Developments in policy around ECEC provision in England have looked to create a discursive truth whereby providers are entrepreneurial in their approach. The entrepreneurial discourse is characterised by providers adopting a business approach to service delivery and providers that are sustainable, professional and managerial. However, this entrepreneurial approach to ECEC has been found to sit uneasily within ECEC provision, with evidence from research suggesting that providers are largely resistant to the discourse.

It has been argued that the prevailing feminine nature of the workforce in ECEC offers an explanation as to why providers are resisting the entrepreneurial discourse. However, I argue that it is the romanticisation of childhood discourse, whereby children are innocent and in need of protection, that creates the resistance to entrepreneurialism. The romanticisation of childhood is outside of the economic rationality of entrepreneurialism. The irony is that policy developments around ECEC are motivated by the romanticisation of childhood discourse. The focus on the social benefits of supporting child development and well-being, and trying to reduce the negative consequences of cycles of deprivation in policy rationales for investing in ECEC, sustain the romantic view of childhood. Such romantic concepts of childhood can be reflected in the historical routes as to why policy makers have invested in and developed policies around children (Vandenbroeck et al, 2010). However, such romantic views of childhood are lost when policy makers rely on the market to secure sufficient ECEC places. The market brings an overt focus on economics through the creation of parents as consumers and providers as entrepreneurs. However, in investing in the provision of ECEC, policy definitions have not taken into account the cultural concepts of childhood held by providers (Osgood, 2010). ECEC policy has and continues to be constructed outside of the ECEC field (Vandenbroeck et al, 2010). I agree with Osgood (2010) that there is a clear need to create a definition of ECEC from within the sector. In January 2013, *More Great Childcare* (DfE, 2013) was published by the coalition government. As detailed it was met with

opposition. Whilst there have been petitions and there is the public consultation, I urge providers to go further and to grasp the opportunity to be involved in constructing an understanding of ECEC from within the sector.

I have discussed the possibility that the different approaches to ECEC could be the result of how long practitioners have worked in the sector (Campbell-Barr, 2009), with newer providers being more entrepreneurial (business-minded) than older providers. McGillivray (2008, p. 251) makes a similar suggestion when she discusses the interface between new discourses and historical influences on professional identities in ECEC. It is therefore possible that there are changes taking place in the way in which ECEC providers negotiate their understanding of what it is to be an ECEC provider, but it is an area that needs further exploration for it to be justified. Discourses are fluid and if constructions of ECEC provision are changing, the discursive truths that seek to govern ECEC still need to come from within the sector. Policy makers will undoubtedly want to influence the provision of ECEC, but they should not be blind to its historical roots and the views of ECEC providers.

Conclusion

In creating a definition of ECEC provision from within the sector, it is important to recognise the position of the child within this. Both the entrepreneurial discourse and the romanticisation of childhood discourse represent children as objects of policy and provision. Within entrepreneurial approaches, children are objects to be passed between parent and provider, whilst in the romanticisation of childhood discourse they are passive receivers of the good will of the adults there to protect them. One of the key things in the development of the sociology of childhood has been the recognition that children are active social agents (see James & Prout, 1997) and works such as Moss and Petrie (2005) have argued for the need to shift from ideas of children's services to children's spaces by way of recognising children as active social members. I do not believe that ECEC providers would reject the view that children have social agency. However, in the debates over the role of the market in service delivery and attempts by policy to create a correct reading of ECEC, the voice of the child has been lost (Woodrow & Press, 2007, p. 323). If there is to be a continued reliance on the market for the delivery of ECEC places (and current times of austerity suggest that a shift away from this is more unlikely than ever before), then there is a need to recognise children as consumers of ECEC services. Thus the construction of ECEC provision that comes from within the sector needs to do so with recognition not only of adults' concepts of childhood and the purpose of ECEC, but of the views of children themselves.

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