

Early Years Practitioners' Perceptions of Ofsted Inspection

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Abstract

This research explored the perceptions of Early Years (EY) practitioners in England regarding the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspection. While a significant amount of previous scholarly literature focuses on primary and secondary school teachers' perceptions of this phenomenon, less is known about the views of EY practitioners, especially those working in private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings. This study addresses this gap, whilst also incorporating the views of other practitioners working under the umbrella of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (Department for Education, 2014 – *at the point of interviews*).

Working within the interpretivist paradigm, I engaged in thirteen semi-structured interviews with EY practitioners who had all experienced at least one Ofsted inspection. The key theorist employed to help with navigating through this study, was Foucault (chiefly 1977), and my interpretation of his ideas about panopticism provided the analytical framework.

Prominent findings indicated that participants often considered their practice to be similar, irrespective of the presence of an Ofsted inspector. While the panoptic mechanism might have offered an explanation for this, participants also held some shared pedagogical values and beliefs with government requirements for EY settings. This raised the question of whether panopticism could explain all that they told me about their practice.

These practitioners generally accepted that some kind of monitoring of settings was necessary in order to ensure quality in EY. In addition, they shared suggestions on how improvements could be made in relation to quality assurance. Regarding inspection, their chief recommendation was for Ofsted to prioritise the training of inspectors.

This study will be of interest to all individuals grappling with their own thoughts about Ofsted inspection, as well as the decision-makers involved in EY quality assurance policy-making in England.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed:

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1 Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Brief background and research aims

I became interested in researching arrangements for Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) inspection of Early Years (EY) settings, including anywhere offering provision which, at the time, fell under the umbrella of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, Department for Education, DfE, 2012), after conversing with practitioners about their experiences of this phenomenon. Their thoughts were often quite negative, and yet the practitioners I spoke with seemed to be enthusiastic about, and dedicated to their work roles. These conversations, plus my own experiences of Ofsted inspection in settings (both EY and other), caused me to become concerned that there may be 'unintended consequence[s]' (Jones and Tymms, 2014, p. 315) of inspection, alongside any potential benefits. To my knowledge, there was no sufficiently detailed existing scholarly research which focused particularly on Ofsted inspection related to the EYFS (DfE, 2012 - when my research commenced) and how it was perceived by those who experienced it. Therefore, I set out to address the following:

Aim 1 (A1) – To explore Early Years practitioners' perceptions of their own experiences of Ofsted inspection.

Aim 2 (A2) – To explore Early Years practitioners' perceptions of Ofsted inspection, apart from their own experiences.

Aim 3 (A3) – To discover whether Early Years practitioners had suggestions about quality assurance for settings, other than through Ofsted inspection.

N.B. For the purpose of this thesis, the term 'Early Years practitioner' refers to any individual working under the direction of the EYFS (see Sections 1.3.1 and 1.3.2), and, as such, incorporates all the participants in my study.

While A1 is fairly self-explanatory, A2 was established because it was possible that participants' reflections on their personal experiences of inspection differed from their more general thinking about it. Finally, I included A3 to see if participants wanted to put forward any ideas that they may have had about how we should address EY quality assurance in England.

1.2 Anticipated contribution

At the beginning of my research journey, while scholarly research existed which focused on Ofsted inspection in schools (e.g. Brimblecombe and Ormston, 1995; Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Chapman, 2002; Ball, 2003; Perryman, 2007; Clarke, 2012) and some of these studies included the views of teachers on inspection, I could not find equivalent research for EY. There was literature which commented specifically on EY inspection (e.g. Penn, 2002; A+ Education, 2010; Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson, 2010; Daycare Trust, 2010; Jones, 2010; National Childminding Association, 2010; National Day Nursery Association, 2010; Mathers, Singler and Karemaker, 2012) or made mention of it (e.g. Physick, 2005; Cottle and Alexander, 2012). While this was enlightening and important, it did not include sufficiently detailed views directly from a range of EY practitioners. It was possible that practitioners working under the umbrella of the EYFS (DfE, 2012 - when my research commenced) held differing views to teachers who had been the focus of prior studies, because:

1. There were sometimes differences between EY practitioners and teachers in terms of their qualifications, pay, and conditions (Department for Education, DfE, Dean, 2005; Cooke and Lawton, 2008; 2013)
2. There were sometimes differences in the way that EY settings were inspected. For example, prior to the existence of the Common Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2015a), many EY settings received no notice of their inspection, whereas schools had ordinarily received notice (Ofsted, 2013)
3. There appeared to be greater difference amongst types of EY settings (e.g. 'childminders, preschools, nurseries and school reception classes' (Gov.uk)), than there was amongst schools.

Therefore, potential findings from my thesis could include detailed views from a differing perspective, about a differing approach to inspection, and in relation to differing settings.

When my interviews took place, while there were often differences between school inspections and EY inspections, there were also similarities to be

noted between the two. This latter reflected a general global trend for EY quality assurance to be in alignment with school quality assurance (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD, 2015). As concerns had previously been raised about the inspection mechanism in schools (Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Chapman, 2002; Ball, 2003; Perryman, 2007), it followed that there was also potential for concerns to exist about the approach to EY Ofsted inspection. Also Penn (2002), A+ Education (2010), The Daycare Trust (2010), The National Childminding Association (NCMA) (2010), The National Day Nursery Association (NDNA) (2010), Jones (2010), Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson (2010) and Mathers, Singler and Karemaker (2012) had raised concerns specifically about Ofsted inspection of EY settings. My research aimed to enable practitioners' concerns to be voiced, whilst also allowing them to express any positive thoughts they wanted to put forward about Ofsted inspection. Learning about participants' perspectives promised to be practically useful to EY policy makers, so that they might be more able to make informed decisions about quality assurance. Also, the sharing of practitioner voices could serve as a vehicle through which other EY practitioners could reflect on their own thoughts about inspection.

I explored perceptions of EY inspection largely through the lens of Foucault (chiefly 1977) (N.B. I will often adopt the unusual practice of writing 'chiefly 1977', as this is the source that I used the most from Foucault, although on occasion I have also drawn on parts of some of his other works). Foucault had already been used to analyse teacher perceptions of Ofsted inspection in the UK (e.g. Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Ball, 2003; Perryman, 2007) and indeed 'the Foucauldian metaphor of the panopticon is frequently deployed or invoked in conceptualisations of accountability and performativity in education' (Courtney, 2016, p. 623). Foucault had also been drawn upon in a study specifically focused on the regulation of EY in Australia (Fenech and Sumsion, 2007). However, prior to my study commencing, Foucault (chiefly 1977) had not been sufficiently used to look specifically at inspection of a range of EY settings in the UK and thus my application of his theories and concepts would be an addition to the body of knowledge about the

usefulness of Foucault. Also, as there were indications that perhaps Foucault was not an especially familiar name amongst EY practitioners (MacNaughton, 2005; Cohen, 2008), my study had the potential to bring Foucault's work further into the awareness of the EY workforce.

1.3 Terminology: Early Years/Early Years Foundation Stage/Ofsted/Quality

The following offers clarity about the terminology used in this thesis.

1.3.1 Early Years (EY), EY practitioner, and EY inspection

EY (Early Years) is the term currently being used in England to describe services for children who are five years old and under, and not yet required to be attending school (Education Act, 1996). EY is sometimes referred to as ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) in the global arena (OECD, Penn, 2011; 2015). Both EY and ECEC do not distinguish between education and care, as these aspects are recognised as being interconnected. The age group that ECEC refers to can be wider than for EY (often up to eight years of age).

For the purpose of this thesis 'EY practitioner' refers to people working with children aged five and under, and in a setting which has to adhere to the EYFS (see Section 1.3.2) (referred to as 'EY setting' for the remainder of this thesis). EY inspection refers to the inspection of EY settings (although note that Ofsted inspection arrangements differed amongst the EY settings).

1.3.2 The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

In England, EY falls under the umbrella of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2017), which 'sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well' (Gov.uk, 2019). The EYFS (Department for Children, Schools and Families, DfCSF, 2008) replaced the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (Department for Education and Skills, DfES, 2001)

(relating to children between the ages of three and five) and Birth to Three Matters (Sure Start, 2002) in order to introduce a universal framework covering the ages between birth and five.

In conducting its inspections of EY settings, Ofsted inspection is closely connected with the requirements of the EYFS (2017), as inspectors check that the quality and standards of the setting are in line with the principles and requirements of the EYFS (Ofsted 2015b: Part 1). EY settings are required to be Ofsted registered in order to receive government-funded places for children.

Throughout the remainder of this thesis, a reference will not be provided for the EYFS (as there have been so many versions (DfCSF 2008; DfE 2012; DfE 2014; DfE 2017), and because participants often did not distinguish between these versions), unless there is a particular reason to do so. While it is fair to say that the EYFS had received minimal critique (Spencer-Woodley, 2013, p. 45), concern had been expressed around the outcomes expected of children by the time they reached the end of their foundation stage (Defries, 2009, p. 21; British Educational Research Association Early Childhood Special Interest Group [BERA] and The Association for the Professional Development of Early Years Educators [TACTYC], 2014, p. 12), as these outcomes were sometimes considered to ‘fly in the face of the principles (of the EYFS)’ (Defries, 2009, p. 21).

1.3.3 [Ofsted](#)

‘Ofsted’ is the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills in England. Prior to my interviews, Ofsted (2013) presented itself as an organisation reporting ‘directly to Parliament’ and to be ‘independent and impartial’. It focussed on inspecting and regulating services which cared for ‘children and young people, and those providing education and skills for learners of all ages’ (Ofsted 2013). After inspecting and publishing their inspections of settings, Ofsted would then ‘work with providers which were not yet good’ and were involved with settings ‘promoting their improvement, monitoring their progress and sharing with them the best practice’ they found

(Ofsted 2013). The possible grades Ofsted could award when my interviews began were; 'Inadequate', 'Satisfactory', 'Good' and 'Outstanding'. Ofsted (2013), declared its priorities to be; 'better outcomes, better inspection and regulation, better public involvement and better ways of working'. Its values were expressed as; 'putting children first, achieving excellence, behaving with integrity and valuing people's differences'.

Ofsted's own rhetoric presented itself as being a supportive organisation, which aimed to help achieve the best services for children, and to do this in an ethical manner. Its intended outcome was also desired by others (e.g. Ho, Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2010; Sylva and Roberts, 2010; Penn, 2011), who are amongst many who believe that quality services for children are important. Not everyone, however, thinks that Ofsted operates independently of the government (President of TACTYC, 2013), and some question whether Ofsted's approach is always the best way to ensure quality services for EY children (see for example, Roberts-Holmes, 2015). Ofsted has been particularly criticised (TACTYC, 2017; Early Education, 2018) for its recent publication 'Bold Beginnings' (Ofsted 2017a) which put forward recommendations as to what, in its view, should be happening in the Reception year (the final stage of the EYFS) as it included a focus on more formal methods of teaching. Similar criticism of Ofsted was indicated by Wood (2019).

1.3.4 [Quality](#)

Ofsted declares that it aims to improve quality in settings (2013; 2017b) and quality provision for young children is important (Ho, Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2010; Sylva and Roberts, 2010; Penn, 2011). The measurement of quality impacts on the type of quality provided in settings. As the old adage asserts 'what you measure is what you get'. The term 'quality' is problematic, and the debate over what quality constitutes snakes through much of the literature surrounding inspection and policy issues in the Early Years (e.g. Sylva and Roberts, 2010; Penn, 2011; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013; Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016) and discussions of educational evaluation in general. 'Quality' is central to aims within EY and yet participants in Cottle

and Alexander (2012, p. 644) described this concept as a 'slippery' term which was hard to define. As Ofsted are charged with ensuring the presence of such a 'slippery' concept in settings, they clearly have a challenge on their hands. If something is difficult to define then it is riddled with problems in terms of measurement, maintenance, and improvement. While Ofsted has its own notion of quality to guide inspections (as laid out in the Common Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2015a)), this is not necessarily a universal view of what quality constitutes (Mathers, Singler and Karemaker, 2012) and 'their current framework cannot be seen as the final word on quality' (Grenier, 2017, P. 47).

Concerns have been expressed over the accuracy of some judgements by Ofsted inspectors (A+ Education, 2010; National Childminding Association, 2010). Penn (2002) also found certain inconsistencies and misrepresentations in Ofsted reports of nursery practice because diversities between settings were not taken into account. Finally,, Jones (2010) questioned whether 'one size fits all' inspections can be appropriate for settings in such a variety of circumstances, and with differing philosophies. Although, it should also be noted that EY organisations put forward clear support for maintaining a single inspectorate (see Section 2.1.4).

1.4 Positionality and reflexivity

My position in this research was 'part-insider' and 'part-outsider' – or 'inbetweeners' (Milligan, 2016). Evaluating myself as neither entirely one nor the other reflects that the 'duality of insider *or* outsider is too simplistic' (Dhillon and Thomas, 2018, p. 444). I considered myself to be 'part-outsider' because, throughout the research undertaken for this thesis, I have been employed as a lecturer in EY. This did not involve my working directly with young children and did not subject me to EY Ofsted inspection. However, my job certainly necessitated that I conversed with many people who worked directly with children and who were subject to EY Ofsted inspection. These conversations led to my concern about what was happening in relation to EY inspection, for example in relation to staff retention (related to quality) in EY. However, this 'part-outsiderness' did not, in isolation, lead to the election to focus on EY inspection. Another contributory factor in my choice of topic was my 'part-

insiderness', as I had previously worked as an EY practitioner and a primary school teacher, and had experienced Ofsted inspection both within these roles and within higher education. Therefore, to some extent, I had 'shared history' (Dhillon and Thomas, 2018, p. 444) with my participants, which contributed to my being interested in their working lives.

My thoughts about Ofsted inspection had been evolving since 1998, when I first encountered a primary school Ofsted inspection. I am hesitant to be too forthcoming with these thoughts as, unlike my participants, I am not anonymous in this thesis, and as such, in the process of being reflexive and considering my positionality, I will not only expose myself, but I may also indirectly identify my inspectors and former/current colleagues. As advised by Musgrave (2019, p. 16), it was essential that I did 'not reveal details that may identify people, places and events'. I had to be careful, not only because of a desire to protect others, but also because I am still subject to Ofsted inspection, and thus Ofsted remains in a position of power over myself and my current colleagues. Nevertheless, details of my thoughts on Ofsted inspection, prior to the interviewing period, can be summarised as my being fairly fearful of EY (or any) Ofsted inspection and also unhappy that it was a reality of my working life. I felt differently about each inspection I had encountered, but themes which emerged, when I reflected across my experiences, included a focus on the level to which I felt ready for my practice to be exposed, my perceptions of the inspectors, and the influence of my emotional intelligence in relation to coping with the inspections (see Section 5.9 for more on this).

It is apparent from the above that my research was 'not a voyage of discovery that start(ed) with a clean sheet' (Denscombe, 2007, p. 68). In section 5.9 there is a more detailed record of my initial reflection on my own experience, my interpretation of the experience of others and my understanding (then) of the literature related to inspection. All of this combined, influenced my initial selection of Foucault (chiefly 1977) to be central to the theoretical framework for this thesis. It is clear that, from the beginning, my prior thoughts impacted on my 'contemplative eye' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 69).

Reflexivity continues to be detailed throughout this thesis. For example, in

section 5.2.2, I describe how my positionality was considered in relation to awareness of potential bias regarding selection of participants, and in 5.8, I consider positionality and power during my interviews. Also, in section 5.11, positionality is taken into account in relation to how I ensured that I not only employed 'a priori' coding (influenced by my theoretical framework and prior literature), but that I also employed a more open 'a posteriori' approach to coding, which was less influenced by my choice of theorist or prior contextual literature that I had read. This contributed towards my being able to 'hear' my participants and to present what they told me as accurately as possible in the interview analysis and findings (see Chapters 7, 8, 9 and section 10.1). Finally, in section 10.7, I explain how the views of participants had impacted on the way I perceive Ofsted inspection, demonstrating how views and beliefs of a researcher 'are not fixed over the course of the project, but are also seen as relationally constitute, (re-created through interactions between people, places and things' (Browne *et al.*, 2017, p.1379). This self-insight was facilitated by my requesting (towards the end of my research) that my supervisors question me about my more recent views on Ofsted inspection.

[1.5 Methodological overview and participants](#)

I worked within an interpretivist paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), and gained an in-depth understanding of practitioner perspectives on EY Ofsted inspection via semi-structured interviews (Rugg and Petre, 2006, P. 138) . Purposive sampling (Silverman, 2010, P. 141) led to thirteen EY practitioners donating (on average) approximately one hour each to talk with me about their views. Participants worked in a variety of EY settings and were employed in a range of roles. The majority were not employed as teachers and worked in non-maintained settings. Interviews took place during the bounded period between May 11th, 2014 and April 30th, 2015.

[1.6 Overview of this thesis – What to Expect](#)

The structure of this thesis reflects what I have to say in a way that makes sense to me. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 will expand on this introduction to consider

the literature surrounding Ofsted inspection and Foucault (Chiefly 1977) which I consulted prior to conducting interviews. Chapter 2 focuses on the contextual literature, Chapter 3 sets out the concepts and applies them to inspection, and Chapter 4 analyses studies that used Foucault (or related to Foucault) and were particularly helpful in establishing my conceptual focus. Chapter 5 details my methodology including a discussion of the ethical considerations surrounding this research. In Chapter 6 I present additional literature consulted during the process of analysing my interviews. Then, Chapters 7, 8 and 9 present my analysis of the interviews. Finally, in Chapter 10, I summarise my findings and reflect on the knowledge gained during my research journey. In chapter 10, I also highlight the contribution that this thesis offers, whilst considering the opportunities for future research in this area.

Introduction to Chapters 2, 3 and 4

The following three chapters consider the literature I consulted prior to interviews. Advice on conducting these scoping reviews was sourced from Hart (2001), Kamler and Thompson (2006), Ridley (2008), and Jesson, Matheson and Lacey (2011). Chapter 2 focusses on contextual issues related to quality assurance in EY, in order to ascertain what was already known, and therefore confirm the construct and placement of my research aims/questions. Chapter 3 considers the work of Foucault (chiefly 1977) and demonstrates how I have interpreted his ideas for use in my own research. Finally, Chapter 4 looks at how others have used Foucauldian concepts (and concepts which relate to Foucault) to explore both education and other topics. These studies were particularly helpful in refining my conceptual focus. The literature in chapters 2, 3 and 4 also helped with later analysis of the material I gathered (see Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10).

2 Chapter 2: Contextual literature considered prior to the interviewing period

2.1 Introduction

The following section briefly details how EY Ofsted inspection ‘came to be’ and some of the surrounding issues. This contextual literature provided clues as to what participants might have wanted to discuss, and correspondingly, assisted with decisions about my research aims and interview questions. Section 2.1.6 provides details of how the literature from this chapter informed my interview planning.

2.1.1 Brief contextual history of EY and EY Ofsted Inspection

Differing approaches have been adopted for provision for children under the age of five in England, but EY provision, as recognisable today (pioneered by the likes of Owen and MacMillan (Bettaney, 2010, pp. 17-25)), and as tried out more generally during World War 2 (Cunningham and Morpurgo, 2006, p. 188), was established through the playgroup movement of the 1960s and the childminders and private nurseries of the 1990s (Pugh, 2010, p. 8).

Under the Labour government (1997 – 2010), EY policy received particular attention, and this was accompanied by changes to quality assurance of EY services. Prior to 1999, government-led quality assurance of EY settings had been the responsibility of the Department for Health (Baldock, 2011, p. 84) and was undertaken by local authorities (Jones, 2010, p. 67). In 1999, it was announced that regulation of EY was to be given to Ofsted (which had already been inspecting schools): this change in remit marked a significant move in the history of EY regulation. The move to Ofsted for EY had been made in order to bring about greater national consistency and to move away from social-care oriented perceptions of EY (Baldock, 2011). While this was a plausible rationale, it also enhanced the likelihood that the regulation of EY would now be steered in an educational direction, as Ofsted was ‘very closely

linked with the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)' (Penn, 2002, p. 879).

EY had experienced a prolonged period of change prior to my interviews taking place (Spencer-Woodley, 2013, p. 35; Tomlinson, Davison and Waltham, 2013, p. 39). Also changes in EY policy frequently meant a change to the inspection framework. For example, Jones (2010, p. 64) recalled that the 'Every Child Matters' agenda (DfES, 2004) ultimately resulted in changes to the ways in which EY childcare providers were 'registered, regulated and inspected'. Table 1 details some changes to EY policy and EY inspection in the period preceding my commencing interviews. Table 1 has not encompassed each and every change (as there were too many).

Table 1 Key changes to EY policy and EY Ofsted inspection during the twenty years (or so) prior to interviews commencing

Date	Key changes
1998	The National Childcare Strategy (Department for Education and Employment, 1998) is launched, reflecting greater government interest in families' childcare needs.
2000	'Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage' (Department for Education and Employment and Qualification and Curriculum Authority, 2001) is launched. The Care Standards Act (2000) asserts that early childhood regulation will move from local authorities to Ofsted in England. Announcement that Ofsted will begin to inspect EY settings (Select Committee on Education and Employment, 2000).
2001	Responsibility for the registration and inspection of daycare and childminding moves from Local Authorities to Ofsted (House of commons: Education and Skills Committee, 2004; Kingdon, 2013, p. 81). This broadened the remit of Ofsted, and had significant implications for the focus of regulation of EY settings because of Ofsted's close relationships with the Department for Education and Employment (Penn, 2002, p. 879)
2002	'Birth to Three Matters' (Sure Start, 2002) is introduced - to be used by EY settings in addition to the Guidance for the Foundation Stage (Department for Education and Employment and Qualification and Curriculum Authority, 2001).
2003	The Laming report on the Victoria Climbié case (Laming, 2003) is produced and Every Child Matters is published (Great Britain, 2003).
2004	The Children Act (2004) provided the legal underpinning for the Every Child Matters agenda and aimed to ensure both joined up working amongst professionals working with children and better outcomes for children. The Ten Year Strategy for childcare (DfES and The Department for Work and Pensions, 2004) was established and involved an expansion of EY provision for children and simpler registration and inspection arrangements. It was asserted that the inspection process would prompt self-reflection and give settings independent evaluation of strengths and weakness from which they could improve (Jones, 2010, p. 64).
2005	No notice inspections were introduced for many EY settings (Curnow, 2005).
2006	The Childcare Act (2006) was the first act devoted entirely to childcare. It introduced the EYFS framework (DfCSF 2008) and announced reforms to inspection (Tomlinson, Davison and Waltham, 2013, p. 39): The 2006 Ofsted Inspection Framework declared that it would provide for a common understanding about quality and sufficient and relevant professional expertise and training of inspectors.
2008	The EYFS (DfCSF, 2008) and its associated inspection schedule, brought about what Jones (2010, p. 64) viewed as 'the long awaited level playing field across the maintained and non-maintained' EY settings.
2012	Following the Tickell Review (2011), the revised EYFS (DfE 2012) aimed to 'reduce burdens, including unnecessary regulation and paperwork, so professionals [had] more time to concentrate on supporting children' (Gov.uk, 2014). The Early Years Teacher (EYT) replaced the Early Years Professional status (Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) 2012b) (introduced in 2007), which was sometimes referred to as being the equivalent of qualified teacher status.

2013	It was announced that changes to the grading structure in Ofsted inspections would take place which would remove the grade of 'Satisfactory' and replace it with 'Requires Improvement' (Page, 2013, p. 11). This change had been publicised by Ofsted (2012) when they confirmed Chief Inspector Wilshaw's planned alterations. Page (2013, p. 11) described this adjustment as being attributable to a solution being sought by Wilshaw to the problems being caused by 'mediocrity in education'. Such a measure, Wilshaw argued, would drive up standards so that all schools [and presumably EY settings] became Good or Outstanding (Page, 2013, p. 11). It can be seen from this that 'Requires Improvement' was not simply intended to be a replacement for 'Satisfactory'.
2014	Following the Nutbrown Review (2012) of early education and childcare qualifications, the revised EYFS (DfE 2014) was established which, amongst other things, introduced the Early Years Educator role.

Table 1 highlights a few issues. The first being that EY had received much attention, including for the first time, an act being devoted entirely to childcare during this period. Enhanced attention to EY accompanied a rapid change in EY (Penn, 2002). While the EYFS had only been operational since 2008, it had already been revised on two occasions. Also, while inspection remained in the hands of Ofsted, there had been frequent changes to arrangements for inspection (the two most significant being (i) withdrawal of notice of inspection for many EY settings, and (ii) the change in grade structure to replace 'Satisfactory'). Details of further changes that took place to both the EYFS and EY inspection during and after my interviewing period can be found in Chapter 6.

2.1.2 An international perspective on EY quality assurance

International comparison of EY is often problematic, in part because of a lack of a shared definition of what EY is. This somewhat reflects the use of differing terminology to describe provision for young children, differing ages for entering formal schooling and differing departments which might oversee this sector. Nevertheless, studies had been conducted to attempt to gain an international perspective on EY (and within this, how quality assurance is approached). For example, Bertram and Pascal (2002, p. iii) found that amongst twenty (mainly westernised) countries, while there were significant differences in their approaches to EY inspection and quality assurance, most countries had a national system of regulation and licencing, in order to enforce minimum standards.

Later, the OECD (2011, pp. 308-309) reviewed their member countries' monitoring of service quality and regulation compliance. They found that more countries engaged in external (e.g. inspection, rating scales and checklists) than internal (e.g. self-assessments, evaluation reports and portfolios) evaluation. England reported itself to engage in both external evaluation (through inspection), and internal evaluation (through observation from parents, EY staff and management), causing England to stand out in

terms of its approach to quality assurance. While some information was available for international comparison of how countries monitored their EY services, the OECD (2013) emphasised that monitoring in EY was under-researched, and plans had been instated for future research to focus on this aspect (these OECD plans came to fruition in 2015 - see Chapter 6 for further details)

In addition to larger international studies, individuals had commented on EY quality assurance around the world. For example, Penn (2011, p. 102) described alternatives to England's approach to quality regulation, and drew on Nordic countries (in which quality regulation was 'devolved by intent'), and countries such as Italy, (which were 'devolved by default'). Either type, in Penn's eyes, encouraged creativity and innovation that could not exist in England because of its centralised approach towards quality assurance. Alongside noting a shining example of local regulation as being the world-renowned approach to EY in Reggio Emilia (Italy) (Edwards, Gandini and Forman, 2011), Penn (2011, p. 102) also saw such local governance as potentially problematic and cited Calabria and Sicily as areas of Italy where she thought this approach was not so successful. In the context of the Nordic countries, Penn (2011, p. 102) stressed that devolution of responsibility ran alongside a commitment to the professionalism of those delivering the services, and indicated that the two needed to run hand-in-hand.

There had been reports of some countries being dissatisfied with arrangements for quality assurance. For example, in the Netherlands, where employers had to make a contribution to costs of quality regulation, there were complaints from employers that the quality agenda was getting too costly (Bertram and Pascal, 2002, p. 43). Overall though, Bertram and Pascal (2002, pp. 42-43) concluded that the most positive model for improvement and quality enhancement was thought to be one which would emphasise the external validation of systematic and rigorous self-evaluation by practitioners. David, Powell and Goouch (2010, pp. 33-34) explained that the OECD identified eight key elements of quality, one of which was that

countries should have 'a participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance'. This echoed the findings of Bertram and Pascal in 2002.

Because EY and schools in England were both inspected by Ofsted, I also took into cognizance the differing approaches to school inspection.

Approaches across Europe varied...

from systems involving sanctions with governmental control to systems with few consequences based on peer review and from emancipatory systems involving self-evaluation to bureaucratic systems involving compliance and regulation (Jones and Tymms, 2014, p. 316)

While most European countries had their own inspectorate, Jones and Tymms (2014, p. 316) also commented that 'there [was] surprisingly little firm evidence for the impact of school inspections in the literature on how school inspection is supposed to promote school improvement.' This statement appeared to also be applicable to EY.

2.1.3 [Accountability](#)

The issue of accountability is inherent to discussion of inspection and Holmes (2005, p. 50) observed that to whom and for what teachers in England were accountable was complex. The same could be said for EY practitioners, although both groups are certainly accountable to Ofsted. 'Almost all governments plan and pay for childcare and early education at some level' (Penn, 2011, p. 159), and Pugh (2010, p. 12) observed that a substantially increased amount of money had been allocated to EY. In 2008, the UK was the highest spender on pre-primary education in Europe (OECD, 2008, p. 218) and thus it is no surprise that EY providers were accountable to the public purse (Jones, 2010, p. 64) and that in relation to this, the government needed 'some measure of value for money' (Penn, 2011, p. 159).

Connected to accountability is 'reassurance' for parents to trust their children into the care of others. Parents' concerns regarding certain EY settings had been reported in the media. For example, BBC News Online (2004) suggested that Ofsted was not recognising bad practice during the inspection of settings. Going back further, Panorama (1998) (N.B. this source predated

Ofsted inspecting EY settings) highlighted a child dying in childcare and the inevitable anxieties which were raised around this incident. In 2010, concerns were posted by a parent (Netmum 9790, 2010), who was advised by another 'Netmum' to report a nursery to Ofsted. The implication of this post was that for EY service users, there seemed to be a need for an organisation such as Ofsted to act as a watchdog. Finally, a reporter who went undercover in an EY setting (Willcocks, 2008), questioned whether she would put her own (possible future) child into day care at all (based on the concerns she had about childcare settings). All this indicated that there may have been a public discourse of concern which called for accountability/reassurance in relation to settings.

Although Penn (2011, p. 99) worried that the inspection system was not equipped to address the task of ensuring quality (and accountability), and reported that when she asked Ofsted, they revealed that they had closed eight nurseries (in total) throughout 2008. Penn's tone indicated that Ofsted were missing something if this was the case, as it was too small a number.

2.1.4 Perceptions of Ofsted Inspection (practitioners' and otherwise)

'Perceptions of Ofsted inspection' are inherent to all literature pertaining to Ofsted inspection, and therefore may have already been touched upon above, or will be included in Chapters 3 and 4 (if they relate strongly to Foucault). However, this section aims to provide some overview of perceptions and to particularly include details of what I discovered about EY practitioners' perception of Ofsted inspection prior to interviews commencing.

Public perceptions of Ofsted range from 'a body which cannot adapt to encompass an evolving education system' (Leppenwell, cited in Griffiths, 2013a) to a place to report concerns about EY settings to (inferred through Netmums correspondence (Netmum 9790, 2010)). Some accepted Ofsted's self-declaration of independence (Neaum, 2013, p. 29), while others were not so convinced. The President of TACTYC (2013) thought that there were a clear intersect between the government and Ofsted. Her commentary

provided some particularly useful insight, as she had worked both for the DfE and also for many years as an Ofsted inspector.

Only a limited amount of literature regarding EY practitioners' perceptions of Ofsted inspection existed prior to this thesis, although there was some work which made mention of perceptions of Ofsted within studies which had a broader remit (e.g. Physick, 2005; Cottle and Alexander, 2012; Mathers, Singler and Karemaker, 2012), with Cottle and Alexander (2012) and Mathers, Singler and Karemaker (2012) providing a little more detail on EY practitioners' thoughts). Physick (2005, p. 22), who had returned to working in a non-maintained setting in 2004 after a gap of around ten years, found that much had changed, including that provision was now 'subject to rigorous inspection'. One of Physick's (2005, p. 26) participants reported that 'the education and the Ofsted and all that side of it [pause] it [felt] to me [pause] more focussed on than the actual kids... who they are and what they need'. While limited in commentary on Ofsted, Physick's study was useful as it focussed on practitioners in non-maintained sessional groups (whose voice seemed to be the least reported on in relation to inspection).

Cottle and Alexander (2012) also sought EY practitioner views on issues which were sometimes related to Ofsted. However, their participant group was almost exclusive to those working in maintained settings, and focussed less on the views of practitioners in other types of EY setting. Also, although Cottle and Alexander (2012) sought out perspectives from a variety of practitioners, a significant proportion of these were qualified teachers and while these views are important, they are not the voices of practitioners (other than teachers), and there were clear differences between the working lives of the two groups which could have impacted on their perspectives on inspection.

Cottle and Alexander (2012, p. 644) reported that Ofsted was mentioned by a small number of their participants as representing 'the stamp of quality'. However, more of their participants considered 'Ofsted outcomes to be important but not an end goal'. Two Reception teachers' frustration was expressed regarding the power of the outcomes-based agenda (their

materials were collected in 2007/2008) which conflicted with their own professional values. A head teacher in the study also mentioned a vision of a 'bottom up' curriculum that she wanted for her school, but acknowledged that this clashed with the accountability regime. She also envisaged having to defend 'bottom up' issues with Ofsted inspectors. In contrast, Cottle and Alexander also found that some of the practitioners in the study described Ofsted as a 'necessary evil' so that settings could have a stronger voice within the local authority.

Mathers, Singler and Karemaker (2012, p. 46) put forward views from practitioners (chiefly leaders) which included that Ofsted inspection on its own could not improve quality, but that a looming Ofsted inspection might encourage the setting to engage in quality improvement, so as to get a good grade and attract parents. Nevertheless, some practitioners were not convinced that parents could really use Ofsted reports to make their decisions about which setting to choose. Scepticism about the accuracy of Ofsted judgements was voiced by some practitioners, because of the 'snapshot' approach of inspection, and there was also concern conveyed from settings in disadvantaged areas about the 'additional barriers they faced'.

The outcomes of the study by Mathers, Singler and Karemaker (2012, pp. 97-98) (which also took account of views from parents and local authority representatives about quality in EY settings), in relation to Ofsted, included that a 'snapshot' decision about quality in a setting should be avoided and that decisions should not be made about quality from Ofsted judgements alone. They also found that settings should be supported to use other quality improvement tools to supplement Ofsted inspection, and that inspection reports should present information more clearly to parents.

In 2010, a collection of EY organisations (including A+ Education, 2010; Daycare Trust, 2010; NCMA, 2010; NDNA, 2010) contributed their views on EY Ofsted inspection as memorandums to the Education Select Committee report; *'The Role and Performance of Ofsted'* (2011). While the report itself did not appear to have made a substantial impact to inspection policy (two

key recommendations were to split Ofsted into two sections (one to inspect education and one to inspect care) and to have unannounced inspections as normal for all - neither of which came to fruition), the memorandums from the EY organisations offered insight into views from the field (either that of the EY organisation, or from surveys they had carried out which included views on inspection). They reached a consensus that Ofsted inspection had improved quality in EY (see 2.1.5) and that they wanted to ensure the continuance of this single inspectorate. Other prominent messages put forward included that:

- Inspectors' knowledge of EY was variable (A+ Education, 2010; NCMA, 2010; NDNA, 2010)
- Inspection judgements showed inconsistency (A+ Education, 2010; NCMA, 2010)
- More frequent inspections were desirable (Daycare Trust, 2010; NDNA, 2010; NCMA, 2010)
- A more standardised notice period was required (Daycare Trust, 2010; NDNA, 2010)

In relation to EY Ofsted inspection, several of the views put forward by Mathers, Singler and Karemaker (2012) and those put forward for the select committee report outlined above, aligned with Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson (2010), and it can be noted that all of this work took place during a similar time period. Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson (2010) had consulted local authority employees and representatives from government departments and charities, all of whom were involved in EY in some capacity. Their interviewees asserted that external surveillance was needed for EY settings and that unannounced inspections were desirable, but also that there was room for improvement with Ofsted's approach to inspection at that point, regarding the time inspectors spent at the settings, the time in-between visits, inconsistency in interpretation of the standards and issues around understandings of minimum standards.

It is evident from the above that perceptions of EY inspection were not a completely blank slate, although qualitative detail behind practitioners' views was limited. In contrast, a broader bank of work existed which put forward teachers' perceptions about school inspections (e.g. Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Ball, 2003; Perryman, 2007; Clarke, 2012). Many studies of school

inspection either drew on Foucault or related to Foucault and have therefore been detailed mostly in Chapter 4. To offer a flavour of some studies which did not use Foucault, findings included that teachers in schools found the inspection process to be stressful (Brimblecombe and Ormston, 1995; Jeffrey and Woods, 1996; Chapman, 2002; Education Select Committee, 2011) in part because of the great amount of preparation which took place for the event. Teachers also highlighted the importance of the behaviour of the inspectors (Brimblecombe and Ormston, 1995; Dean, 1995). Although there were criticisms of Ofsted amongst these studies about schools (in addition to those which used Foucault (see Chapter 4)), there was no strong suggestion that monitoring of these establishments should be dropped completely. This may be attributable to public perception of a need for inspection and Ofsted's own rhetoric (2013) (which described their primary concern to be the safety of children, with their highest value being placed on 'putting children and learners first').

2.1.5 Quality and whether or not Ofsted inspection improves quality

Views about quality are dependent on beliefs about what is important and what is valued. Pugh (2010, pp. 8-9) listed a variety of reasons underpinning EY aims, and noted an apparent ambiguity in certain instances regarding the key purpose of EY. For example, there have been debates about whether EY was for children's stimulation, preparation for school, childcare for working parents, support for equal opportunities for women, making cost savings for employers, reducing government benefits bills, or in the longer term, preventing things such as juvenile crime. It was unsurprising then, that Penn (2011, p. 157) sympathised with postmodern views of early childhood including scepticism of any one particular truth as to what the term 'quality' represented. However, Penn (2011, p. 188) also suggested an existing need to provide measurable criteria of what constitutes quality.

Some EY studies included a message that Ofsted inspection had contributed to quality improvement in EY (A+ Education, 2010; Daycare Trust, 2010; NCMA, 2010; NDNA, 2010). This notion was questioned by Ho, Campbell-

Barr and Leeson (2010, p. 254) who stated that the system for quality assurance in England was lacking as it failed to ensure systems were in place 'to drive forward the change' (such as the inclusion of stakeholder 'buy-in' from practitioners), which they had observed in EY quality assurance measures in Hong Kong. Also concerns had been expressed regarding Ofsted's ability to identify quality in EY, which would clearly impact on its ability to improve it. For example Hopkin, Wilkinson and Stokes (2010, p. 29) found a low correlation between Ofsted judgements and other quality measures such as the ECERS (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale) (Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart, 2003). Nevertheless, Mathers, Singler and Karemaker (2012, p. 95) cautioned that 'ECERS and Ofsted are different tools, designed to do different things'.

In relation to schools, while Matthews and Smith (1995) asserted that secondary school improvement had been achieved through Ofsted inspection, the Education Select Committee (2011, p12) conveyed a general lack of agreement by teachers on this. Jones and Tymms (2014, p. 328) found that, there was a lack of evidence regarding a 'causal link between inspections and school improvement', although they (2014, p. 326) also considered the 'nudge' mechanism (Thaler and Sunstein, 2009), whereby, Ofsted inspection would not itself bring about improvement, but as a catalyst, would nudge others into action. This was consistent with Ofsted saying that it promoted school improvement (as opposed to causing it) (Jones and Tymms, 2014, p. 326). Jones and Tymms (2014, p. 324) also identified that feedback to schools was one of the strategies Ofsted employed in order to improve standards, but stated that according to Coe (1998), the notion that people performed better when they received feedback, could not be confirmed.

While it is contentious to measure school improvement purely in terms of exam results, it is still of interest that statistical analysis of school inspection indicated that, for the most part, exam results did not improve (Shaw *et al.*, 2003) or had a slight adverse effect because of it (Rosenthal, 2004).

It was significant that Clarke (2012) (in relation to schools), was unable to find empirical studies which could support the claim that quality was improved by school inspection. This may be because inspections prevent 'sufficient attention being given to the improvement process', because of another (suggested incompatible) focus on accountability (Ferguson *et al.*, 2000, p. 248).

2.1.5.1 Unintended effects of inspection

In their overview of empirical studies, De Wolf and Janssens (2007, p. 383) found that, in relation to schools, control mechanisms, such as inspection, can induce side effects (other than improving quality). Some of these are intended by schools (e.g. 'window dressing' of the school), some unintended (e.g. placing emphasis only on elements of the curriculum which would be assessed) and some are 'other' (e.g. stress). Stress has been associated with school inspections by many (see 2.1.4). However, some might question how placing emphasis only on assessable curriculum elements could be unintentional, although a prior study of my own (Ward, 2008) would concur that emphasis in certain areas can sometimes occur because of assessment, without people consciously deciding to do it. These 'unintended effects' had not really been highlighted within the memorandums put forward by various EY organisations to the Education Select Committee (2011).

2.1.5.2 Ways to ensure quality, other than through inspection

As noted by Penn (see 2.1.4), in Nordic countries, devolving responsibility for EY quality ran alongside a commitment to the professionalism of those delivering the services. Also Pugh (2010, p. 15) and Sylva *et al.* (2003, p. 2) reinforced the positive correlation between more highly qualified staff and higher quality services. In the years prior to my study commencing there had been a surge in people engaging in education and training related to EY (CWDC 2012a). However, there had been limited development in requirements for staff to be qualified (despite The Nutbrown Review (2012)), and in funding to pay highly qualified staff.

2.1.6 How the contextual literature I explored informed my research aims and interview questions.

The following section explains how the contextual literature in Chapter 2 informed my research aims and interview questions

N.B. Aims are stated in 1.1 and Interview Questions are in Appendix 4. In the following: 'A' stands for Aim and 'IQ' stands for 'Interview Question'.

- Changes to EY curricula and inspection frameworks (Section 2.1.1), indicated that I should enable participants to tell me about more than just their most recent inspection, as they may have had different experiences depending on the timeline of the inspections (Applies to A1 and A2 and most interview questions).
- Exploration of literature related to EY, and to some extent school, quality assurance (Section 2.1.1, 2.1.2) (especially from Bertram and Pascal, 2002; OECD, 2011; Penn, 2011; Jones and Tymms, 2014) highlighted the possibility of more than one approach to quality assurance. This confirmed the appropriateness of A3 and interview questions designed to elicit participants' thoughts on the best way to ensure quality in EY settings (IQ11-2).
- Earlier literature concerning EY (Physick, 2005; A+ Education, 2010; Daycare Trust, 2010; NCMA, 2010; NDNA, 2010; Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson, 2010; Cottle and Alexander, 2012; Mathers, Singler and Karemaker, 2012) contained only limited information on EY practitioner's views on inspection (Section 2.1.4). This confirmed the necessity of my own study to gain a more focussed and detailed insight (solidifying all aims to be addressed by all interview questions).
- Earlier studies (Brimblecombe and Ormston, 1995; Dean, 1995; Jeffrey and Woods, 1996; Chapman, 2002) of teachers' perceptions of inspection (section 2.1.4) were useful because of similarities between EY practitioners and teachers. However, possible differences between teachers and EY practitioners in relation to curricula, inspection arrangements and conditions of employment, necessitated my own study (confirming all research aims and all interview questions).
- Varying views had previously been expressed as to whether or not inspection improves quality (Matthews and Smith, 1995; Ferguson *et al.*, 2000; Shaw *et al.*, 2003; Rosenthal, 2004; A+ Education, 2010; Daycare Trust, 2010; Ho, Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2010; NCMA, 2010; NDNA, 2010; Clarke, 2012; Mathers, Singler and Karemaker, 2012; Jones and Tymms, 2014) (Section 2.1.5). I therefore, questioned participants, to see what they thought about this (IQ11-2).

- There are ways to ensure quality, other than through inspection (Pugh, 2010; Sylva and Roberts, 2010; Penn, 2011; Nutbrown, 2012) (Section 2.1.5.2). Therefore, questions were designed to see whether my participants would mention any such ways (IQ11-2)

2.1.7 [Summary](#)

Analysis of relevant contextual literature enabled clarification of my research aims and interview question design. Chapters 3 and 4 will provide analysis of relevant conceptual literature.

3 Chapter 3: Conceptual literature considered prior to my interviewing period.

While the contextual literature detailed in Chapter 2 provided me with a gap in knowledge which was important to fill, following this I needed to consider how to structure this research. As a result of exploring the contextual literature, I had become more familiar with the work of Foucault. His concepts (especially in relation to panopticism (1977)) seemed to be particularly suitable to help explore practitioners' views on inspection. To see if this was the case, I took my research aims, personal experiences of inspection and prior discussions with others about inspection, and set them in relation to my interpretation of Foucault (chiefly 1977). This process indicated that Foucault was an appropriate theorist to draw on. The following section is an explanation of the concepts I used and their relationship to EY Ofsted inspection.

3.1 Foucault and power

Foucault mainly focused on the concept of power (described by Haugaard and Clegg (2013, p. 1) as being central to understanding of society and by O'Leary (2007, p. 204) as 'the capacity of individuals or institutions to achieve their goals despite opposition'). Foucault wrote many texts which discussed this concept (e.g. 1977; 1980c). However this study mostly uses my interpretation of Foucault's (1977) ideas about panoptic power to explore practitioners' thoughts on inspection.

While power has the possibility of being both constraining and enabling and is both relational (one with power has that power over another) and reciprocal (even if unequal, both parties generally have some power) (O'Leary, 2007, p. 204), Foucault's notion of panopticism (1977) focussed more on relational power, although his other works (for example, 1980a) further explored reciprocal power. Scott (2001, p. 6) distinguished between two different streams of power; the mainstream tradition which considers the power that

one agent has over the other and the second stream which considered power being 'diffused throughout a society rather than being confined to sovereign organisations', whereby 'all can gain from the use of power, and there need be no losers' (Scott, 2001, p. 9). Scott thought that Foucault would fall into this second stream of thinking. While Foucault certainly saw power as being diffused throughout society through discourse and knowledge (1980c), his concept of panopticism (1977) might straddle both of Scott's identified power categories. Although Foucault (1980a, p. 59) was not happy with the term 'repression' (in relation to power) because 'power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress', to some extent, panopticism does contain an element of repressing individuals into acting in a certain way (via corrective influence). Nevertheless, it also incorporates persuasive influence, for example through Foucault's (1977) notion of the normalising judgement (Section 3.1.1.2). Foucault (1977, p. 194) was of the opinion that 'power produces', which indicates that he did not view power as an exclusively negative thing.

Foucault was interested in social control (defined by O'Leary (2007, p. 252) as 'the regulation of society through social mechanisms such as socialisation, coercion, norms, laws, rewards and sanctions'). He (Foucault, 1991, p. 95) wrote about governmentality as 'multiform tactics' being employed so that others can 'guide or control' (Brass, 2015, p. 10) people's conduct, or so that people can govern their own conduct. Foucault also discussed the notion of truth (1980c) and Schirato, Danaher and Webb (2012, p. 56) were succinct in their explanation of how Foucault considered truth is used as power, as they stated that he 'demonstrates how the perception that a position, value, idea or narrative is true, is a means of facilitating and naturalising regimes of power'. While power, discourse, truth and governmentality are mentioned in my thesis, and also other aspects of Foucault (1977), the focus rests on panoptic power, and analysis of my material is ultimately presented under the three key elements of panopticism (hierarchical observation, normalising judgement and examination) in the material analysis chapters (7, 8 and 9).

3.1.1 [Panopticism: The mechanism](#)

Foucault (1977) argued that a subtle form of ‘discipline’ pervades society to control the beliefs, actions and behaviours of the people within that society. He suggested that ‘docile bodies’ (people who do what is required of them by others) are produced in society through three systems: ‘hierarchical observation’, ‘normalising judgement’ and ‘examination’. These three elements combine to form Foucault’s (1977) theory of panopticism. The sections below split these elements for ease of writing, although they are all closely related, as ‘examination’ is the culmination of ‘hierarchical observation’ and ‘normalising judgement’.

3.1.1.1 [Hierarchical observation](#)

‘Hierarchical observation’ was Foucault’s term for controlling what people do, through the act of observing them (Gutting, 2005, p. 82); ‘the exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 170). In Bentham’s (1969, pp. 194-209) detailing of the design of the panopticon prison or ‘inspection house’ (which Foucault drew on when discussing panopticism), he showed the essential features: a place from which the guard could see all of the prisoners, but the prisoners could not see the guard. Hence, the prisoners were unsure whether or not they were being watched. Because of this, the prisoners would ‘assume that they could be observed at any moment’ (Schirato, Danaher and Webb, 2012, p. 88) and act accordingly. Foucault thought this way of controlling people was pervasive throughout society (Gutting, 2005, p. 87). In my study the notion of panopticism has been particularly apt, as during my interviewing period, many EY inspections (although not all) were carried out on a ‘drop in’ basis, i.e. without prior notice. Thus, it can be seen that EY practitioners might consider themselves to be always potentially observed. Even though this ‘drop in’ arrangement has now changed (Section 6.1), all settings can still be inspected at any point if a serious complaint about a setting is made.

All types of surveillance are necessarily connected with observation (Levin, Frohne and Weibel, 2002, p. 53) and surveillance is a part of modern life. The current debate surrounding civil liberties vs. public security serves as testament to this. Surveillance may appear to be a modern phenomenon, but it has always been present in human life as ‘the idea that gods have eyes, or even more, are eyes, reaches back to before antiquity’ (Levin, Frohne and Weibel, 2002, p. 18). Perhaps we are now used to being watched, or at least accept it as ‘normal’. Observers often seek not to influence the behaviour of the observed, in order for the observed to act as they would usually do (Flick, 2014, p. 309). In contrast, Foucault (1977) discussed observation, more from a surveillance point of view, whereby the observed will act in the way the observer wants them to act, because the observed is aware of the surveillance at play.

Foucault showed how disciplinary power ‘gets going and keeps going’ (Hoffman, 2014, p. 30). Part of this is making visibility constant through specific design features, which act ‘on those it shelters to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them and to alter them’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 172). He (Foucault, 1977, pp. 171-173) wrote much about structures and buildings, which were specifically designed to enable observation of the people within them, referring to military camps, schools, hospitals, housing estates - which were designed to create ‘a perfect eye that nothing could escape’ or ‘the perfect disciplinary apparatus’ (1977, p. 173). In addition to building design, more recent times have witnessed cameras installed in some schools (Hope, 2009) and EY settings (Corbett, 2014). While these cameras have not been installed by Ofsted and are not being used by Ofsted to directly observe practice, they may be related to a hierarchy of observation, at the top of which, sits Ofsted.

[3.1.1.1.1 Surveillance tolerant](#)

As a society, we may be used to being told what to do and monitored to see that we do it, so that it increasingly goes unquestioned (Levin, Frohne and

Weibel, 2002, p. 18). Practices which might once have been regarded as 'Big Brotherish' (Orwell, 1954) may now be considered as being fairly normal. This can increasingly be applied to the general population, including EY practitioners. While the government may not yet have set up surveillance cameras in EY settings, some of my participants will have come into EY while inspection and monitoring have been fully implemented, and therefore this surveillance may have become a 'norm' of working in EY. It was of interest that several EY organisations (Daycare Trust, 2010; NDNA, 2010; NCMA, 2010), alongside a study by Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson (2010), indicated a preference for more regular EY inspections, than was already occurring. However, this was really because they did not want 'fixed' judgements, which were no longer relevant to the current staff members (Daycare Trust, 2010, 2010), or which inhibited settings from quickly providing evidence that they had improved (Daycare Trust, 2010; NCMA, 2010; NDNA), rather than simply wanting settings to be watched more.

3.1.1.1.2 Simulated surveillance

'At the heart of the panoptic metaphor is the idea of simulated surveillance' (Hope, 2013, p. 45). The notion of simulated surveillance can be considered in relation to EY inspection because, for many settings, an inspector could have arrived without prior arrangement (up until and during the interviewing period). Even for EY settings which received notice, the notice was quite limited, and thus it was possible that practitioners might have acted as if the inspector were present at all times, in order to always be ready. It was interesting that the Education Select Committee (2011) put forward advice that no notice of inspection should become more of a norm for all settings inspected by Ofsted (so that notice periods would have been the same as it was for the majority of the participants in my research, and therefore more related to the notion of simulated surveillance). Although, the Daycare Trust (2010) and the NDNA (2010) simply wanted parity of arrangements amongst settings (which could have meant more settings having no notice of inspection).

[3.1.1.1.3 Who is observed/visible](#)

Foucault noted that in the panopticon, light was shed on the prisoners, rather than the guard. He (Foucault, 1977, pp. 170-177) frequently mentioned 'visibility' throughout *'Discipline and Punish'* and detailed how technologies of power had shifted from making the sovereign most visible (in relation to sovereign power), to making the subjects the most visible in modern forms of control. Those who are being made visible, or who are what Smart (2002, p. 87) described as 'potentially visible' (when they do not know if they are being watched or not) in this thesis are the EY practitioners. In contrast, the inspectors may be less subject to such visibility, as although a complaints system exists regarding inspectors/inspections, complaints are dealt with by Ofsted themselves.

[3.1.1.1.4 Who observes?](#)

Foucault (1977, p. 171) noted that in the Classical Age (17th and 18th centuries) we began to see 'minor techniques of multiple and intersecting observations, of eyes that must see without being seen', He (Foucault, 1977, p. 174) reflected on workshops and factories whereby, in order to avoid fraud, there was less emphasis on simply having inspectors but a developing need for 'continuous supervision', which came in the form of clerks, supervisors and foremen. These roles could observe 'the activity of the men, their skill, the way they set about their tasks, their promptness, their zeal, their behaviour' (Foucault, 1977, p. 174). Foucault listed a variety of organisations from the classical age including a military camp, a hospital, a school and a factory, to give an idea of the range of establishments where he thought panopticism existed. Taking the school, he detailed the positions filled by school children, so that they could act as observers of the other children, and fill gaps where the teacher could not observe. Such chains of hierarchical observation may be present in EY settings, as when they visit, Ofsted inspectors will report on the management of the setting in terms of staff supervision (DfE, 2014, p. 20). In many nurseries there are also room

leaders, or leaders of certain age groups, who may also be involved in this supervision process.

Foucault stressed that observation is not always directly hierarchical (2006, pp. 4-6). In relation to psychiatric hospitals, he observed that it was not just the doctors who were gaining information on the patients, but also, for example, the servants. The latter were feigning pure servitude and concurrently reporting on the patients' behaviour. Foucault (1977, pp. 176-177) described this as

...a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally...this network 'holds' the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors perpetually supervised.

Foucault (1977, p. 177) extended this to say that the observation is 'indiscrete' as it is on everyone, and also 'discreet' as 'it functions permanently and largely in silence'. During Ofsted inspection, children, staff and parents could be asked to speak to the inspector about what has been happening at the EY setting during the period of time in-between inspections.

Hoffman (2014: 31) made an astute point that the vigilant and multi-directional gazes might make disciplinary power seem 'ubiquitous', but the 'sheer simplicity of its mechanism also makes it seem rather inconspicuous'. This can be applied to many EY settings in which parents assist with roles ranging from chairing the committee (which manages the setting), through to helping clear up after snack time (for an example of such practice see Scallywags Playgroup, 2016). Also, EY settings have other professionals visiting, for example Link Health Visitors (Somerset Partnership National Health Service Foundation Trust, no date), or University tutors (Palmer, 2009, p. 10). On top of this, there may be visits from people in the community (Fenoughty, 2009). Ofsted invites people with concerns about settings to report such concerns to them. In this way, anyone who is in the setting, or hears about what is happening in a setting is a potential observer for Ofsted.

EY settings were expected to promote the EYFS to parents. This could have led to parents being more aware of government requirements of settings. Alongside this, practitioners were also likely to be better informed of requirements because of the surge in training which had been available to them (CWDC 2012a) much of which, had been government-funded (e.g. Knight *et al.*, 2006, p. 37). So, both practitioners and parents were both potentially more equipped to observe, and to potentially comment to Ofsted.

3.1.1.2 Normalising judgement

The second element in panopticism (Foucault, 1977) is the existence of the normalising judgement. Gutting (2005, p. 82) described this briefly as where people (and in this study, organisations) are ranked, in order to draw comparisons. This is not quite the same as saying whether someone is right or wrong, or good or bad, but more how they are in relation to everyone else. Schirato, Danaher and Webb (2012, pp. xxiii-xxiv) defined the normative judgement as a device to 'assess and monitor the actions and attitudes of people according to the notion of a norm or average' in order to 'divide the normal from the abnormal'. Foucault (1977, p. 184) claimed that normalisation became 'one of the greatest instruments of power'.

'The threat of being normal constrains us moderns at every turn'. (Gutting, 2005, p. 84). However, perhaps in some cases, the end justifies the means of this social control. Depending on one's viewpoint, the impact of the normalising judgement imposed by Ofsted on EY practitioners could be seen to be either positive or negative, or somewhere in-between. Social control, while sounding like a negative, undesirable thing, and perhaps a little bit too much like Orwell's 'Nineteen Eighty Four' (1954), is not necessarily perceived as being bad, so long as it is for what O'Leary (2007, p. 252) describes as being for the 'public good', or in relation to this study, the good of the children attending EY settings.

Foucault (1977, p. 181) looked at a military school, which would rank every child according to the same scale regardless of their age. Children of a

younger age would have been likely to have been at a disadvantage in terms of this grading scale, just as settings operating in different circumstances (see McGillivray, 2010, pp. 79-80) would be either at a greater or a lesser advantage in relation to the Ofsted grades allocated. In the case of Foucault's school example, children who were younger, might have been expected to receive a lower rank, because of their age. In contrast, with EY settings, there is no such allowance for the disparity in circumstances between settings and it is questionable whether there is a 'level playing field' amongst EY settings, despite this being the intention with the establishment of the 2008 Ofsted Framework for Inspection (Jones, 2010, p. 64).

After their Ofsted inspection, settings are not ranked numerically in relation to each other, but are given a grade. The order of these grades affects the meaning of the judgements. For example, one might assume that if settings are informed that their setting is 'Good', that this could be a rewarding thing. However, perhaps that is until practitioners realise that their practice is judged as less good in relation to 'Outstanding' settings.

Foucault (1977, p. 238) also wrote about the act of isolation for prisoners (whereby they could only talk to their warden), which theoretically enabled them to wrestle with their conscience in order to 'reform' and conform to expected norms. EY settings also often operate in relative isolation. This can be exacerbated by settings effectively competing with each other.

Ultimately practitioners may have become excluded because of an inspection result, which was also part of the normalisation process (Foucault, 1977, p. 183). 'Exclusion' could relate to practitioners who leave working in EY, because they think that they are 'abnormal'. If there is a 'normal' then there will also be an 'abnormal'. Although the average grade awarded to EY settings is 'Good' (Ofsted 2018), a practitioner may have a different idea about what should be normal for themselves.

3.1.1.3 Examination

The examination is the final piece of the puzzle. Foucault (1977, p. 187) thought that the examination transformed the economy of visibility into the

exercise of power and 'surrounded by its documentary techniques, makes each individual a 'case' (Foucault, 1977, p. 191). Visibility, or 'potential visibility', as propounded by Smart (2002, p. 87), becomes less 'potential' during the inspection and more 'actual':

The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to quantify, to classify and to punish. (Foucault, 1977, p. 184)

The examination holds subjects in a 'mechanism of objectification' and is the 'ceremony' of their objectification (Foucault, 1977, p. 187). This ceremony is critical to panopticism because of the greater visibility it ensures. For the purpose of this study, I have translated 'examination' into 'inspection', and used the two words interchangeably in this thesis.

As demonstrated above (Sections 3.1.1.1 and 3.1.1.2), there are ways in which Ofsted could be perceived to be 'observing' in an on-going way, in order to achieve something like 'a perpetual comparison of each and all that [in turn makes] it possible both to measure and to judge' (Foucault, 1977, p. 186). The Ofsted inspection/examination is part of this on-going observation process and the subsequent report makes it possible to compare different settings through the final grading.

Foucault (1977, p. 187) exemplified the examination effects through his writing about schools whereby the examination 'guaranteed the movement of knowledge from the teacher to the pupil', since in the examination, pupils were required to demonstrate their knowledge, accumulated through lessons. Similarly, the Ofsted inspection aims to guarantee that EY settings are run in the way deemed ideal by the government, and to try to ensure that children achieve certain standards. In his school example, Foucault noted that, not only was knowledge being conveyed to the pupils via the process of examination, but also knowledge was being extracted from/about them. He (Foucault, 1977, p. 187) stated that the examination 'extracted from the pupil a knowledge destined and reserved for the teacher'. In the case of Ofsted this 'knowledge' is published for anyone who chooses to read it online.

3.1.1.3.1 Examination/Inspection judgements

The following considers the examination, and the consequences of the judgements of the examination.

3.1.1.3.2 The written report

'The results of the examination are recorded in documents that provide detailed information about the individuals examined and allow power systems to control them' (Gutting, 2005, p. 86). Foucault (1977, p. 189) recognised the 'power of writing' and observed that a change had taken place in society concerning those who constituted the subject of those descriptions. Writing was 'no longer a monument for future memory' focusing on the great and mighty, 'but a document for possible use' (Foucault, 1977, p. 191) in order to control others. Whereas once writing focussed on chronicling the lives of important people (ascending individualisation), now everyone was being recorded (descending individualisation) (Foucault, 1977, p. 193) The Ofsted report could be viewed as an example of 'descending individualisation'.

'The examination... places individuals in a field of surveillance [and] also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them' (Foucault, 1977, p. 189).

Foucault (1977, p. 190) mentioned that writing about someone in this fashion marked 'the formalisation of the individual' and Ofsted reports have surely been instrumental in the formalisation of EY settings.

The ultimate documentary 'evidence' in relation to Ofsted inspection is the inspection report (written by the inspector), whereby files, documents and records are combined (Smart, 2002: 87). 'According to Foucault, this system of examination and documentation resulted in the creation of the individual as an object that could be described, analysed, and compared' (Guittar and Carter, 2014, pp. 136-137). The report constitutes the means through which EY settings become classified cases with labels attached to them. This can be compared to people being allocated medical labels. So,

for example, John becomes less 'John' and more 'schizophrenic'; St Clements playgroup becomes... 'a good setting'.

[3.1.1.3.2.1 The report and the truth](#)

Foucault (1977, p. 184) described the examination as a mechanism to establish the 'truth'. If the inspection is being used 'to quantify, to classify and to punish' (Foucault, 1977, p. 184), then the judgement made during the inspection needs to be accurate. However, concerns have been raised in relation to the accuracy of EY inspection (A+ Education, 2010; Jones, 2010, p. 64; NCMA, 2010; Penn, 2011; Mathers, Singler and Karemaker, 2012) (see 1.3.4 and 2.1.3). Lack of inspector expertise and knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice and the EYFS have also been suggested to sometimes hinder accurate judgements (A+ Education, 2010; NCMA, 2010). A+ Education (2010) and Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson (2010) put forward that there was a lack of consistency in areas for focus amongst inspectors: diversified focus amongst the inspectors could risk a lack of consistency in grading.

[3.1.1.3.2.2 Consequences of inspection/panopticism](#)

Foucault (1977, p. 181) noted that after examination, those in a lower class can move up, and vice versa, so they ultimately might be like one another. He (Foucault, 1977, p. 181) explained that 'the distribution according to ranks or grade has a double role: it marks the gaps, hierarchizes qualities, skills and aptitudes; but it also punishes and rewards'. Foucault's (1977) theory of disciplinary power details how people might act on the normalising judgement, either because of a fear of punishment or because of a hope of reward (Smart, 1985, p. 86). He (Foucault, 1977, p. 180) was clear that 'punishment is only one element of a double system: gratification – punishment'. Demia (cited in Foucault, 1977, p. 180) stated that within a school, the teacher 'must avoid, as far as possible, the use of punishment; on the contrary, he must endeavour to make rewards more frequent than penalties'. Foucault drew on Demia to highlight the point that the attraction of

rewards would be more effective than the avoidance of punishment. Ofsted's encouragement of settings to use their outstanding logo, should their setting achieve this grade, may indicate a focus on reward.

Foucault (1977, pp. 182-183) noted that the aim of discipline was that people might be 'like one another' so that punishment was not really aimed at 'expiation' or 'repression', but more at them reaching 'a minimal threshold, as an average to be respected or as an optimum towards which one must move'. Certainly Bentham's aim with his original panopticon design was to rehabilitate rather than punish (Bentham, 1969)

[3.1.1.3.2.2.1 Reward](#)

Ofsted's intended rewards come in the format of grades of 'Good' or 'Outstanding' (and possibly 'Satisfactory' under an older framework). Foucault (1977, p. 181) recognised that 'discipline rewards simply by the play of awards'. While Ofsted essentially offers only a reward, there are additional 'knock-on' implications which accompany this reward, such as attracting staff and parents/children to the setting.

[3.1.1.3.2.2.2 Punishment](#)

'The whole indefinite domain of non-conforming is punishable' and 'at the heart of all disciplinary systems, functions a small penal mechanism' (Foucault, 1977, pp. 177-189). The punishment for receiving a 'below Good' grade is not 'death by hanging' for EY practitioners, but the associated consequences are substantial. Employment in EY can be considered to be emotive work (Section 3.1.1.4.4), and therefore being judged as not providing well for children may have some negative emotive strings attached in addition to a 'micro-penalty'. Hillier suggested that the 'micro-penalty' itself could be humiliation, which would clearly have emotive connotations. Foucault (1977, p. 179) used emotive terms when discussing punishments. For example, he referred to a school which had a bench for 'the ignorant' on

which pupils would have to sit if they were unable to carry out a task. He (Foucault, 1977, p. 182) also wrote about a 'shameful class'.

Apart from possible emotional responses from practitioners, a grade below 'Good' can now trigger a further inspection within one year. This could be viewed as a punishment, but Foucault (1977, p. 180) wrote that 'to punish is to exercise' and that critically there is always the possibility to improve. If settings received a grade which was below 'Good' (under more recent inspection frameworks), they have the opportunity to improve. 'Disciplinary punishment has the function of reducing gaps' (Foucault, 1977, p. 179): if gaps are not reduced then panopticism is not working. It is possible that some practitioners may be unwilling to change as a result of corrective measures, but it is also possible that they may be unable to change (for example because of funding difficulties).

[3.1.1.3.2.2.3 Docile bodies](#)

The aim of panopticism is to produce people who are docile and able to 'operate as one wishes' (Foucault, 1977, p. 138). The inspection report is an example of a document which can capture and fix individuals in order to make them 'legible and docile' (Foucault, 1977, p. 188).

[3.1.1.4 Other related concepts to my main analytical framework](#)

While panopticism remained central to my analytical framework, the following discusses other (Foucault-related) concepts, which I considered as being connected with panopticism. Some of these concepts emerged during the process of applying my understanding of Foucault (chiefly 1977) to my prior understanding of Ofsted inspection (see Section 5.9).

[3.1.1.4.1 Truth](#)

Foucault believed in a relationship between power, knowledge and truth (O'Farrell, 2005, p84) and that all knowledge (or truth) is interpretation (O'Farrell, 2005, p. 84). The notion of quality (see 1.3.4) holds common

ground with the notion of truth and Cottle and Alexander (2012, p. 635) highlighted that what constitutes quality practice is debatable and open to interpretation.

There are different possible ways to care for and educate young children. Examples of 'truth discourses' related to EY have been established at various periods in time by EY pioneers, such as Rousseau (1974), Montessori (2004) and Froebel (1904). However, even though competing truths are established at different historical periods, political institutions create an illusion of truth based on the knowledge available at any given point in time (Ransom, 1997). Different countries at the same period in time also take varying approaches, correspondingly Cottle and Alexander (2012, p. 635) asserted that 'the concept of 'quality' [or the truth about quality] in early childhood services has been the subject of international debate'. For example, in comparing New Zealand's approach to EY 'Te Whariki' (1996) with the EYFS, McNerney (2012) found that 'Te Whariki' took a more sociocultural approach and also that it focussed more on learning dispositions than the approach taken by the EYFS. Even so, both curricula (or governments which support the curricula) would probably indicate that they held the answer as to what quality EY provision looks like.

The EYFS does not appear to be overly prescriptive and controlling, and cannot be compared to Foucault's observation of Oppenheim (1809, cited in Foucault, 1977, pp. 150-151), who provided very precise details of what his employees could and could not do. However, the EYFS expectations of what children should achieve by the end of the Reception year in relation to their Early Learning Goals (Standards and Testing Agency, 2017), may have acted as a determinant of the pedagogy, which had to dominate in some settings for the accomplishment of these goals.

For more on 'truth' and 'quality', see Section 6.5.

3.1.1.4.2 Governance

Governance is 'the process of social regulation... the way authority is exercised and resources are managed for social or economic development' (O'Leary, 2007, p. 104). Inspection is part of a system that the UK government uses to govern its EY provision. O'Leary (2007, p. 104) noted that the question in relation to governance is whether the exercise of this power leads to effective, equitable, empowering and just leadership, and emphasised that:-

...governance would not be fully effective if potential contributions and needs of relevant stakeholders were not thoroughly considered managed and coordinated in ways that optimise strengths and promote effective interaction

Governance takes different forms in relation to EY in England, and it changes regularly, but the two key ingredients are the EYFS and the accompanying Ofsted Inspection Framework.

3.1.1.4.3 Resistance

Foucault has been criticised for not paying enough attention to how certain mechanisms of power could be resisted (Rawat, 2014, p. 381) and certainly resistance was not really emphasised in '*Discipline and Punish*' (Foucault, 1977). Others have detailed how he absolutely paid attention to this concept. For example, O'Farrell (2005, p. 99) noted that Foucault argued that 'power can only be exercised over free subjects' who have a choice as to how they behave. O'Farrell (2005, p. 109) also noted that while Foucault assumed that people would 'always seek to modify the actions of others, in short to exercise power' he also assumed that 'people will at the same time resist such attempts'. The implication of this is that resistance where necessary is possible, or even, at times, inevitable.

Foucault would insist that 'no matter how bad the situation is, there are still different options for action and change even if these are very limited in some cases' (O'Farrell, 2005, p. 109). An example of such limited circumstances was considered by Foucault (1980b, p. 136) when he wondered what it was that enabled some Russians to resist the powerful 'Gulag' (government

agency in charge of Soviet forced labour camps). Ultimately, Foucault implied that we should question and 'resist', when he said that we should 'put in play' and 'show up' in order to 'transform and reverse the systems which quietly order us about' (Simon, 1971, p. 201).

Foucault's later work seemed more explicitly to take resistance into account. This was perhaps because 'Foucault, at the end of his life (sought) an ethical solution to minimise domination' (Dean, 2013, p. 233). Nevertheless, throughout '*Discipline and Punish*' (Foucault, 1977) there was an implicit message about resistance, as the highlighting of power mechanisms would enable people to be more aware of them. Then, if necessary, they might find ways around being 'docile bodies'.

With regard to resistance from EY practitioners, there are, what could be perceived as, opportunities to 'resist'. In relation to regulation (or the requirements of the EYFS), there are arenas in which practitioners can express their opinions on government policy (Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay, 2013, pp. 52-54). EY influence on policy was particularly evident with the most recent Labour government. For example, 'Childcare and Early Education: Investing in all our futures' (Department for Education and Skills and Local Government Association, 2001) was 'a set of guidelines for local authorities to develop successful EY provision' and was written by the Daycare Trust for the Local Government Association, within the auspices of the DfES' (Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay, 2013, p. 53). More recently, BERA and TACTYC (2014) joined forces to present their EY policy advice to the government on a wide range of issues which they considered required attention. All practitioners have the option to, either independently or within a group, attempt to influence policy, although resistance in this format might be less likely, as EY practitioners do not have a strong union to put up a united front.

Opportunities to resist at the point of inspection seemed to be limited. Although teachers had reported that while they were able to influence the substance of what was written in an inspection report, they were not able to influence the grade (Dean, 1995).

3.1.1.4.4 Identity, professionalism and autonomy

Professionalism and professional identity within the EY workforce had received some attention both nationally and internationally (Osgood, 2006; McGillivray, 2008; Miller, 2008; Osgood, 2011; Murray, 2013). There may be changing identities for EY practitioners which are related to the recent professionalisation of the EY workforce (Mitchell and Lloyd, 2013). One of the most recent additions to this professionalisation process was the introduction of the Early Years Teacher qualification. This replaced the Early Years Professional status, which evidently contained the term 'professional'. Adams (2008, p. 204) found that, when EY students/practitioners were asked how they would like to be known, their first preference was 'teacher', potentially reflecting the differing status between EY practitioners and the majority of primary school teachers.

How practitioners perceive their own identity is of interest in relation to inspection and can be explored in relation to Foucault who stressed the relationship between disciplinary power, surveillance and identity (Haralambos *et al.*, 2013, p. 763). Haralambos and Holborn (cited in Haralambos *et al.*, 2013, p. 727) highlighted the possible impact on peoples' identity when they are increasingly watched, monitored and, where necessary, punished: this shows a clear intersect with panopticism.

Miller (2008) considered how students/practitioners can, and do, act as professionals, even within a regulatory framework such as the English prescribed EY context (with pre-set goals for children (Standards and Testing Agency, 2017)). Alongside this, McGillivray (2008, p. 1) argued that changing identities offered an opportunity for EY practitioners to have more of a voice, especially as they were some years into the workforce reform process.

When looking at the professional identity of EY practitioners, McGillivray (2008, p. 245) thought that there was a tension between a workforce that is 'caring, maternal and gendered' and one that is 'professional, degree educated and highly trained'. Whereas Simpson (2010, p. 8) found that Early Years Professionals...

...in expressing their professionalism, all sample members used terms such as 'love for children and the job', 'rapport with children', 'caring', 'nurturing' and 'passion' rather than the language of technical proficiency and a commitment to meeting targets.

Simpson clearly found, what he described as an emotional discourse about this topic. Brock also asked a range of EY practitioners about perceptions of professionalism and found that...

...being a professional working with young children... (was) not just about having qualifications, training, skill, knowledge and experience but also about attitudes and values, ideology and beliefs, having a code of ethics, autonomy to interpret the best for children and families, commitment, enjoyment and passion for working with children. (Brock, 2006, p. 2)

Brock (2006), found some similar emotional discourses as Simpson had. However, her participants also recognised their levels of training, knowledge, skills, ethics and autonomy. The word 'autonomy' has been used both specifically in relation to EY professionals and also in more generic descriptions of professionals. Autonomy is often put forward as a key feature of being a professional, but may be at odds with an increasingly regulated EY workforce.

Dean (1995) connected school inspection with professionalism, as she found that when receiving feedback, teachers (although very critical if this was not done well) felt that their professionalism was protected if inspectors looked for reasons as to why anything found to be lacking, was so.

For more on professionalism, see Section 6.4.1 and Section 6.5.

[3.2 How the conceptual literature I explored informed my research aims and interview questions.](#)

The following section explains how the application of Foucault (chiefly 1977) to EY Ofsted inspection helped to establish the interview questions.

'IQ' stands for 'Interview Question'.
Interview Questions are listed in Appendix 4.

- Exploration of Foucault's work (chiefly 1977) (Section 3.1) enlightened me to some of his concepts, but also led to my decision not to use his exact terms in my interviews. This was firstly because I thought that EY practitioners were unlikely to be familiar with his terms (MacNaughton, 2005; Cohen, 2008) (Section 3.1.1), and there would be insufficient time to explain them. Secondly, I did not wish to influence participants' thinking, so that they were considering Ofsted inspection in terms of Foucault, as I also wanted to listen to their thoughts apart from those which related to Foucault. (applies to all interview questions)
- In Section 3.1.1.1.1, I suggested that surveillance may now be part of modern day life (Levin, Frohne and Weibel, 2002, p. 18). By asking for participant views on inspection, I hoped it would reveal their levels of surveillance tolerance (IQ: B1-2, C1-4, E1-2, F3, G1-2, H1-3, I1-2)
- Because of Foucault's notion of simulated surveillance (Hope, 2013, p. 45) (Section 3.1.1.1.2), I asked participants about their estimated levels of control over their practice, and what the impact on their practice was of an inspection happening at some point (IQ A4-5, F3, G1, H1-3), to try to elicit information about whether they thought 'drop in' or 'little notice' inspections amounted to continual simulated surveillance (IQE1, E2).
- In my interviews, I wanted to find out whether practitioners felt visible (Foucault, 1977, p. 184) (Section 3.1.1.1.3) because of the inspection regime, and how they reacted to this possible feeling of being visible (IQC1-4, F1, G1).
- In relation to Sections 3.1.1.1.4 and 3.1.1.4.4, through asking practitioners about control and professionalism (IQA1, A4, A6, D1-3, G1, H2-3), I hoped to elicit their views on whether they 'felt' any multidirectional observation (Foucault, 1977, pp. 176-177) and if this impacted on their sense of professional control.
- With the normalising judgement (Foucault, 1977, p. 184) (Section 3.1.1.2) in mind, I was aware of the possibility that grades might have impacted on ways in which participants discussed inspection during their interviews, and I also specifically asked participants questions to elicit this information (IQF1, F4-5)
- The examination/inspection (Foucault, 1977, p. 184) (Section 3.1.1.3) was always in the background of the questions I asked during the interviews, as essentially this is what I wanted to find out about. Questions about inspection were also aimed at eliciting views on governance (Section 3.1.1.4.2) and resistance (Section 3.1.1.4.3).
- During interviews I asked about participants' experience of inspection (IQC-4, D1-2) to elicit commentary about their views on the accuracy

of inspection judgements, in order to establish 'the truth' (Foucault, 1977, p. 184) (Section 3.1.1.3.2.1).

- I asked participants about feelings of pride or humiliation (IQF2), to see if rewards or punishments had registered with them in relation to inspection, and to help consider the notion of inspection/panopticism leading towards practitioners being 'docile bodies' (Section 3.1.1.3.2.2).
- In relation to Section 3.1.1.4.1, I asked practitioners about their views on the EYFS (IQH4), to explore whether they thought that it represented the 'truth' about the best way to work with children, and therefore if their own views aligned with government views.

3.3 [Summary](#)

Application of Foucault (chiefly 1977) confirmed that my understanding/ interpretation of his work could assist my exploration of EY Ofsted inspection.

4 Chapter 4: Studies by others who used Foucault (or related to Foucault) and which particularly informed my conceptual focus

Others (see below) had explored a multitude of topics (including education and EY) using Foucauldian concepts or concepts that relate to Foucault. The following section details the studies which were particularly useful in helping to establish focus in the pre-interview stage of my research. I explain how they were used in Section 4.7

4.1 Studies by others who used Foucault: Panopticism

Researchers who used Foucault to consider school inspection (Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Perryman, 2007) conveyed that teachers put on a 'performance' (Case, Case and Catling, 2000, p. 605) during inspection (or during a period of several inspections), indicating that panopticism was not operational. This was reinforced by Chapman (2002, p. 268), who (while making no specific mention of Foucault), found that for schools facing challenging circumstances, teachers considered Ofsted's impact on ongoing practice to be limited. Case, Case and Catling (2000), Chapman (2002) and Perryman (2007); all indicated that staff were either not willing, or not able, to later maintain the practice demonstrated during inspection/s.

In agreement with Case, Case and Catling (2000), Chapman (2002), and Perryman (2007), Ball (2003, p. 225) found that schools would offer a certain version of the truth of what they were normally like, when the inspection was actually happening. Thus, indicating that 'what is produced is a spectacle, or game-playing, or cynical compliance... which is there simply to be seen and judged, 'a fabrication'' (Ball, 2003, p. 222). While this might indicate that a performance happened during the inspection, Ball (2003, p. 225) also stressed that while playing this game might be a form of 'resistance', it could

also lead to schools' 'capitulation' (Section 4.4), thereby, leaning more towards the success of the panoptic model.

It is important to note that when Case, Case and Catling (2000), Chapman (2002), Perryman (2007), and Ball (2003) gathered their research material, notice would usually have been given to teachers, thus, enabling them to prepare to 'perform', which contrasts to limited or lack of notice for my EY participants.

4.2 Studies by others who used Foucault: Self-surveillance

Hope (2009) drew upon Muller and Boos's (2002) typology of public closed-circuit television (CCTV) and indicated that conduct control was questionable through this medium, due to the inevitability of blind spots. Hope (2013, p. 42) also asserted that 'school surveillance [of pupils was] rarely continuous and ubiquitous' and that they did 'not always respond in a 'disciplined manner' to potential observation'. Thereby, questioning Foucault's (1977, p. 201) indication that the presence of an 'invisible' observer guarantees order in the school.

Hope (2013, p. 42) recognised that central to Foucault's discussion of panopticism and power was 'the potential to encourage people to engage in observation of the self', so that 'observation is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action' (1977, p. 201). He (Hope, 2013, p. 42) also drew on Simon (2005, p. 7) to address a flaw, which he identified in Foucault's argument: In order for people to self-police, they must not only be aware that a supervisor is present, but also 'understand the rules,... [and] evaluate when an act is in conformity, thus eliminating the 'blind, ignorant or irrational'. Some of the adjectives that Simon used, may sound a little insulting, for example, being 'ignorant' of requirements. This could, of course, be because the requirements had simply not been defined clearly enough for the audience. It can be noted that the NCMA (2010) was particularly concerned that Ofsted's requirements regarding the necessary paperwork at childminder inspections, was unclear.

'Where social values are contested and alternative subcultural viewpoints flourish, normalisation through self-surveillance may break down' (Hope, 2009, p. 896). In other words, people who know that they are being watched and act against the observers' wishes, may do so because they perceive the benefits of their chosen actions to outweigh the costs of any potential punishment (Hope, 2007) (Although to flip this around, Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p. 113) noted that compliance (or self-surveillance) from EY teachers in Australia was sought via rewards and incentives being offered).

Selwyn (2011, p. 478) found that some school managers required planning documents (written by teachers) to be made 'open' for editing by others. This placed the teachers and their documents in the 'visible' arena, which, in turn, resulted in teachers being more likely to engage in self-surveillance when planning. This is comparable to the practice of lecturers advising students to complete a self-evaluation of their assignments before they submit them. The aim of doing this is to assist the students to pass the assignment (as 'when suitably organised, self-assessment can lead to significant enhancements in learning and achievement' (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, p. 207)). However, this technique could also be viewed as an act of control to make students pay attention to the requirements/aims of the assignment. Similarly, Ofsted encourages practitioners to use a self-evaluation process, which could also guide practitioners to pay attention to areas that Ofsted would like them to attend to, thereby encouraging the practitioners' self-surveillance.

4.3 Studies by others who used Foucault: Docile body

Suggestions had been made that teachers and practitioners were sometimes 'docile', and there seemed to be increasing suggestion that this was the case. 'Passive resistance' amongst EY practitioners was accompanied by 'fatalistic resignation' because 'resistance was futile' (Osgood, 2004, p. 18). Osgood drew comparisons between findings about EY practitioners and Foucault's (1977, p. 294) ideas pertaining to 'technicians of behaviour' and bodies which were 'docile and capable'. In a later study, Clarke (2012, p. 2)

noted that head-teachers were also thought to have ‘accepted surveillance by Ofsted, along with the disciplinary power wielded when the Ofsted model is not met’. In other words they may have accepted the ‘legitimate harm’ (Mittermaier, 1836 cited in, Foucault, 1977, p. 238), which could come as a result of a less favourable Ofsted grade.

4.4 Studies by others who used Foucault: Truth

Foucault believed that societies, and institutions within them, survive by producing truths which detail how we should ‘think, act and feel towards ourselves and others’ (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 35). Indeed EY institutions have ‘a set of officially sanctioned truths about how those working within them should think, act and feel towards children, parents and colleagues’ (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 35). It should be considered that ‘discourses of truth’ (Fenech and Sumsion, 2007, p. 113) / ‘normalising discourses’ (Hope, 2013, p. 44) may be so ‘deeply enshrined’ in education ‘that individuals do not reflect on the choices that led to their acceptance’ (Hope, 2013, p. 44). Hope shared the example that over time, it has ‘become acceptable that schools can regulate what students eat’, and suggested that while in England we may have a norm of ensuring that children do not waste food and eat all that they are given, in another country this could be seen less in terms of wasting food and more in terms of children being able to exercise constraint over what they are eating. Hope (2013, p. 44) argued that, similar to the views of Foucault (Section 3.1.1.4.3), sometimes accepted truths need to be questioned and set against differing perspectives. This was reinforced by MacNaughton (2005) and Cohen (2008, pp. 18-19), with the latter suggesting that EY practitioners could question accepted truths via ‘reflective discourse’, ‘action research’ and considering ‘multiple perspectives’.

(For more on Foucault and ‘truth’ in EY, see Section 6.5)

4.5 Studies by others who used Foucault: Resistance

Hope (2013, p. 45) was concerned that studies which use the concept of panopticism might neglect to focus on resistance because Foucault's 'arguments about resistance in the panopticon [were] underdeveloped'. Resistance had been explored in studies about school teachers' views on inspection, although it was sometimes implicit. For example, Case, Case and Catling (2000, p. 615) found that teachers 'responded to the normalising gaze... by preparing and delivering what they took to be more 'formal' lessons than they would otherwise have done', but then typically returned to their every-day practice after inspection, and resoundingly and universally reported that it [inspection] had had either minimal or no impact at all' (2000, p. 617). This indicated that resistance was being engaged in, even if the word 'resistance' was not mentioned, and it may not have been considered by the teachers as being 'resistance'.

Perryman (2007, p. 184) reported from a slightly differing angle, as she found that there was a 'demoralised workforce' and that staff were either being off sick, or leaving their roles after their school came out of 'special measures'. This might be identified as 'subconscious resistance', whereby, people may not have consciously decided to resist, but yet were unable to maintain practice demonstrated during inspections. Also, just as there might have been 'subconscious resistance', there may also be 'subconscious compliance'. Ball (2003, p. 225) wrote that, while 'fabrication' for the purpose of examination may have been 'resistance', it was also 'capitulation' because 'acts of fabrication and the fabrications themselves become embedded in... practice.' Jones (2010, p. 72) indicated something similar to Ball, and highlighted that settings will begin to ask 'the same questions of themselves as inspectors ask'.

Hope (2013, p. 45) wrote about resistance to surveillance from school children who exhibited 'false conformity, avoidance, counter-surveillance and playful performance'. Such resistance could also be possible in EY if practitioners happened to disagree with government requirements and were not dissuaded by the potentially negative outcomes of a poor inspection

report. In Australia, Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p. 116) found that EY teachers exercised resistance to regulation in two ways: 'resistance that used regulation to mitigate perceived threats to quality and to the practitioners themselves' and 'resistance against regulation'. Most participants in their study were reported to demonstrate 'resistance against regulation' in that they were 'openly resisting interpretations of the regulation when such interpretation [was] perceived not to be in the children's interests' (Fenech and Sumsion, 2007, p. 117) and also 'confidently articulating alternative ways of "doing"' (2007, p. 117). Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p. 117) quoted an Australian EY practitioner who thought that 'articulating alternative ways of "doing"' would 'earn [one's] respect as a professional from the CSA [Children's Services Advisor – sometimes experienced as inspectors]'. However, the example used to demonstrate this happening, detailed how the practitioner would offer alternative ways to still meet the regulations. This is different from completely resisting the regulations. Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p. 118) also found participants 'strategically deciding when to acquiesce and when to "fight"', perhaps because of the potential risk involved in demonstrating resistance.

Ultimately, Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p. 117) found that Australian EY practitioners were not completely opposed to regulation, because it 'resisted perceived threats to themselves and to the provision of quality ECEC' and in this way, 'practitioners [were] able to experience regulation as enabling, instead of, or as well as, constraining'. Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p. 117) were explicit in saying that 'what was intended as a strategic resistance tactic may be misconstrued as a 'docile' act of compliance'. In other words, it cannot be automatically inferred that because people align themselves with regulatory documents, they are acting as 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1977, p. 135), they may simply agree with their contents.

With the explanations above it is understandable that Fenech, Sumsion and Goodfellow (2006) described regulation as a 'double edged sword', as on one hand it can be perceived as something to protect quality and on the other as a threat to quality. Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p. 113) were also wise to consider that EY teachers...

...may not experience regulation as constraining because they have internalized knowledge/truths that claim an early childhood teacher will be implementing professional, quality practices if they are complying with regulatory accountabilities.

This is governmentality at play, whereby 'multiform tactics' (Foucault, 1991, p. 95) are employed so that others can 'guide or control' (Brass, 2015, p. 10) people's conduct, or so that people can govern their own conduct.

Furthermore,

...within a regulatory context, tactics designed to maximize teacher compliance include the propagation of discourses that position regulation as legitimate and as a guarantor of quality ECEC [early childhood education and care] (Fenech and Sumsion, 2007, p. 113).

It was possible, therefore, that practitioners in England might have agreed with the EYFS because they understood it to be part of their professionalism to comply with regulations. Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p. 113) also thought that if practitioners were experiencing constraint, this was a good indication, as...

...if early childhood practitioners can feel constrained by regulation [this] suggests that processes of subjectification and objectification are neither given nor fixed, and that within the realm of power relations, freedom and agency can be exercised.

EY practitioners have the opportunity to complain about Ofsted inspections and 'utilizing complaint mechanisms' was also reported by Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p. 117) as a resistance strategy.

Other studies also explored resistance but were unrelated to the education and care of children. An example of this is Mackey (2007), who wrote about occupational therapists, and how Foucault had assisted her in reconsidering the limiting view of power as repressive (similar to some of the thoughts of Fenech and Sumsion (2007)), and that occupational therapists could appropriate power and use it to redefine themselves (2007, p. 101). The consequence of this, Mackey (2007, p. 10) thought, was 'the emergence of individualised, reflective ethical professionals who continually work on their own personal interpretation of what occupational therapy practice means'. This is in line with Foucault's (1980e, p. 92) views on power, because he thought that considering power as being repressive was 'inadequate'.

Finally, Ord and Rosemary (2013) (respectively counsellor and counselee) reflected on how Ord had shared with Rosemary, the theory of modern power structures related to the normalising gaze (Foucault, 1977). This strategy was adopted by Ord so that Rosemary could gain a different perspective on 'normal'. Rosemary reported that learning about normalisation was somewhat life-changing, as she was then able to 'return the normalising gaze', and in essence, to resist against it. Correspondingly, a possible limited awareness of Foucault amongst EY practitioners (MacNaughton, 2005; Cohen, 2008), may relate to whether or not resistance is displayed. (For more on Foucault and resistance in EY, see section 6.5)

4.6 [Studies by others who used Foucault: Well-being](#)

The concept of well-being was an anomaly in my thesis, as while Foucault (1977) did not make explicit reference to well-being in *Discipline and Punish*, or in the later work of his that I have considered, there have been implicit undertones of this concept in his work. In highlighting the power mechanisms operating in society, he was implicitly empowering the reader through their enhanced understanding about them.

It is no coincidence that several studies (Ball, 1990; Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Ball, 2003; Perryman, 2007), which used Foucauldian concepts to review performativity and Ofsted inspection in schools (N.B. Ball (1990) predates Ofsted inspection of schools), also commented on the related effects on teachers' well-being. Examples of quotes from such studies include:

...the fear of the dire consequences of failing in schools which are less successful can lead to stress and negative emotions of fear, panic and loss of self (Perryman, 2007, p. 177)

Ofsted inspection had a detrimental impact on the well-being of teachers. (Case, Case and Catling, 2000, p. 618)

And in relation to performativity technologies...

...responses to the flow of performance information can engender individual feelings of pride, guilt, shame and envy (Ball, 2003, p. 221)

Some discussion about the concept of well-being is necessary within this section, as it has not yet been sufficiently explored in Chapters 2 and 3 (as it did not fit neatly into the contextual or the conceptual literature discussed within them).

4.6.1 [Well-being](#)

The term 'well-being' has been used interchangeably with health (Underdown, 2007, p. 3) and with happiness (Vernon, 2008, p. 43). For the purpose of this thesis, mental health is of particular interest and according to the WHO (World Health Organisation 2013), one aspect of good mental health is being able to 'work productively and fruitfully'. 'The combination of low decision latitude and heavy job demands ...is associated with mental strain' (Karasek, 1979, p. 285). Increased workload to meet the requirements of inspection could combine with lower levels of control caused by inspection, to impact negatively on practitioner well-being. In turn, lower levels of practitioner well-being could impact on quality in settings. The following section explores these issues.

4.6.1.1 [Workload](#)

Whistance (2013, p. 10) considered the workload of teachers. In 2003, the workload agreement (DfES et al., 2003) came into being which entitled teachers to half a day a week of non-contact time. No such agreement was in place for EY practitioners. This may have had implications for EY practitioners who may have been experiencing 'top-down' pressures filtering through from schools. An example of such pressures prior to interviews, were the suggested plans for national tests for 5-year-olds (Griffiths, 2013b). Although these government plans had not come to fruition when I was conducting my interviews, their possible influence on the participants in my study cannot be negated. Also, specifically in relation to inspection, there had been concerns expressed about the amount of preparation being

undertaken by EY practitioners for these events (A+ Education, 2010). The workload associated specifically with the inspection event has also been recognised in relation to teachers (Perryman, 2007).

4.6.1.2 Control

Holmes (2005, p. 49) commented that because of the prescribed curriculum and amongst other things, the extent of inspection, teachers had less control than some people might assume. Holmes (2005, p. 60) discussed powerlessness, not specifically in relation to inspection but generally in relation to teacher well-being, noting that a complaint voiced regularly from teachers was that 'a sense of powerlessness can arise from having little, if any influence on decisions that are made that directly affect the job'. More specifically in relation to inspection, Perryman (2007, p. 176) stressed that teachers' resentment of inspection/external mechanisms could exert 'profound effects' on teachers' emotions.

One teacher Holmes (2005, p. 62) spoke to, thought that teachers were in a strong position of power because of the 'strong and influential teaching associations in the UK' and that teachers were 'frequently asked to consult on policy decisions'. Consultation on various issues is also invited from EY practitioners. Some explanation as to why a teacher might consider themselves to be in a position of power/control can be sourced from Ball (2003, p. 217), who discussed 'the appearance of freedom in a 'devolved environment''. Thus, indicating that, although schools appeared to have more freedom of choice, actually 'performativity...requires individual practitioners to organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations' (Ball, 2003, p. 215). So, while teachers may feel in control, this may only be to the extent that they are meeting the government expectations.

4.6.1.3 Negative stress

'The prevalence of occupational stress and its negative impact upon teaching staff's emotional well-being had been considered to be increasing' (Salter-

Jones, 2012, p. 18). This may partly have been attributable to the pressures of inspection, as it extensively impacts on what happens in schools. Also, studies have reported teachers' stress to be particularly associated with inspection (for example, Jeffrey and Woods, 1996; Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Ferguson *et al.*, 2000; Follows, 2001; Perryman, 2007)

Much of the literature associated with well-being in the workplace makes connections with stress. Holmes (2005, p. 1), who focussed specifically on teachers and their well-being, stated that 'if we can divide the concept of wellbeing into the different wells of physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual/mental health, it is possible to hold negative stress responsible for 'dis-ease' in just about every dimension of our lives'. She (Holmes, 2005, pp. 42-79) also talked about both the obvious and hidden causes of stress in teaching. The obvious causes included poor workplace environments and excessive workloads. The hidden causes included the need for perfection, the emotional aspect of teaching, the public image of teachers, fear of being 'found out', and isolation. Both the hidden and obvious causes of stress can be connected to inspection and Perryman (2007, p. 173) found that for teachers in schools in 'special measures' that it was the sense of relentless surveillance which [led] to negative emotional consequences.'

Preston (2013, p. 334) found that 'the demands from multiple stakeholders such as... Ofsted inspectors were mentioned by several [EY practitioners]' as being a big responsibility. Preston (2013, p. 334) also mentioned 'how the expectations of stakeholders were perceived to have changed [meaning risen]'. Looking after children in itself is a significant task, as one participant from Preston's study stated: 'The fact is that you have got 52 children here and some of them are very tiny. That is a big responsibility and sometimes keeps you awake at night' (2013, p. 333).

[4.6.1.4 Leadership, inspection and well-being](#)

Harpley and Roberts (2006, p. 10) thought that the staff members who had positive leadership and feelings of positivity, approached an inspection 'with confidence and clarity..., [had] more energy and [were] able to cope better'.

The emphasis here was on the leaders ensuring the well-being of the other practitioners throughout their inspection. However, this argument raises the question about who will be supporting the leader in relation to inspection.

4.6.1.5 Lower practitioner well-being and lower quality in settings

Before specifically considering inspection, certain areas were already associated with EY practitioners' working conditions, which may have been problematic for their well-being and hence, for quality in EY settings. For example, the demands on practitioners of 'constant giving', may have meant that their emotional resources ran dry, leading to 'high levels of sickness and staff turnover' (Manning-Morton, 2013, p. 154).

'Stability in care has been found to be strongly and consistently positively related to child outcomes' (Loeb *et al.*, 2004, p. 59), but unfortunately high staff turnover has been identified as a constant feature of EY (somewhere between 30% and 50% annually (OECD, 2011, p. 156)). Higher staff turnover (associated with lower quality) could be exacerbated when the matter of inspection is added to the mix. Indeed, Perryman (2007, pp. 184-187) found that, for teachers, after pulling themselves out of special measures, 'despite short-term joy, the consequences of undergoing the inspection regime... [left] a demoralized workforce, some of whom wanted to leave'. This was combined with reports from teachers about being off sick after the inspections had finished and that some did actually leave.

The OECD (2011, p. 322) found that England did not fall into that collection of countries which monitored practices for workforce conditions in relation to EY. The same report also suggested that working conditions for practitioners could improve the quality of EY services and that job satisfaction and retention could be improved by (amongst other things) a reasonable schedule /workload. Increased workload because of the inspection was, therefore, something to be considered in this study (also see Section 4.6.1.1).

(For more on well-being in relation to EY, see Section 6.7)

4.7 How studies by others (who either used Foucault or were connected with Foucault) informed my interview questions.

'IQ' stands for 'Interview Question'.

Interview Questions are listed in Appendix 4.

- Earlier studies about school inspections (Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Ball, 2003; Perryman, 2007) (Section 4.1) encouraged me to attempt to elicit whether or not EY practitioners perceived that they put on a performance during the inspection (IQC1-4, E-2 G1, H1-2). This was of special interest because of the lack of notice for many EY settings potentially making it less possible to 'perform'.
- Consideration of what would be needed in order that self-surveillance and compliance would take place amongst school children (Hope, 2009; Hope, 2013) (Section 4.2), led me to question participants as to whether the presence of a drop-in/limited notice inspection, alongside potential observers throughout the year (Section 3.1.1.1.4) amounted to them feeling continuously observed (IQ H1-3) , and also whether more than a perception of being continuously watched, was needed to ensure their compliance. In addition to feeling continuously watched, practitioners would also need to understand what was required of them and furthermore care about the consequences of either their compliance or non-compliance. Questioning about the participants' views on the EYFS (IQH4) was aimed partially at discovering the clarity of the government's requirements to these practitioners. Questions involving exploration of how participants might feel if they received a less (or more) favourable inspection grade (IQF2, F5, G1-2), were aimed at ascertaining perceptions of potential consequences.
- IQC1-4 held the possibility of participants telling me about the paperwork which is involved in inspection and whether self-surveillance was involved in relation to their planning documents and self-evaluation forms (Section 4.2)
- As I thought the term 'docile body' to be potentially offensive, my questioning in relation to Section 4.3 revolved around professionalism (IQA6, D3, D1-2) and control (IQA4, F3, H1-3)
- Section 4.4 highlighted that the truth about the best way to work with children may sometimes need questioning. By asking participants about their views on the EYFS (IQH4), I hoped to elicit their views on what constituted 'the truth' within the curriculum they were working with.

- Searching for resistance (Section 4.5) amongst participants was key (Hope, 2013, p. 45) to this research. Critical to this was discovering their views on the EYFS (IQH4) and whether or not they considered resistance against this was either necessary or an appropriate thing for them to do. Explicit or implicit reports of resistance from school teachers (Case, Case and Catling, 2000, p. 11; Perryman, 2007), EY practitioners in Australia (Fenech and Sumsion, 2007, p. 116) and studies which looked at resistance in fields other than education (Mackey, 2007; Ord and Rosemary, 2013) , encouraged me to question participants about their practice during and away from inspection (IQC-4, E1, F3, H1-3) and also whether or not they would question the judgement of their inspector (IQD1-2)
- Because earlier studies (Ball, 1990; Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Ball, 2003; Perryman, 2007) (N.B Ball (1990) pre-dates Ofsted inspection of schools) had used Foucault to explore school inspection and also made connections with teacher well-being (Section 4.6), I questioned participants about whether or not they thought there was anything to connect their well-being with inspection (IQG1-2).
- Because low levels of control and high job demands had been connected with lower levels of well-being (Karasek, 1979, p. 285) (Section 4.6), and higher workloads and lower levels of control could conceivably be associated with inspection, I questioned participants about their perceived workloads (IQA2, A3) and perceived levels of control in relation to their work (IQ A4-5, F3, H1-3)

4.8 [Summary](#)

Studies by others who had used Foucault (or which were related to Foucault) enhanced my understanding of how I might use Foucauldian concepts (or concepts which were related to Foucault) to underpin my interview questions and to later engage in analysis of my interviews. Studies which had employed Foucault to look at school inspection were especially useful in assisting me to consider EY inspection, particularly in relation to well-being. Finally, studies which considered resistance in relation to Foucault, enabled me to be alert to this aspect.

Summary of Chapters 2, 3, and 4

This literature considered in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 focussed on areas, themes, and concepts that I encountered on my journey to identify an appropriate way to research this topic. The literature I encountered could only lead me so far, as it incorporated only a little of EY practitioners' views surrounding EY inspection in England, directly from 'the horse's mouth'. Therefore, the ultimate contribution that I hoped to make in this thesis was to address this gap in knowledge. Foucault (1977) offered a clear model of the mechanism of panopticism, with which I could create my analytical framework, which was particularly helpful during interview analysis (see Chapters 7, 8 and 9).

Foucault's work (1977 and otherwise) had been much used by others to explore various topics, including teachers' views on Ofsted inspection and to some extent EY practitioners' views on regulation. There was, however, further potential to use his work, not only as a tool to unpick the EY practitioner voice on inspection, but also to bring his work further to the attention of EY practitioners.

Chapter 5 will provide details of the methodology underpinning this thesis.

5 Chapter 5: Methodology

This chapter explains the rationale behind the approach I adopted in this study and puts forward a detailed analysis of the research method employed. It also offers further contextual information about my participant group, explaining why and how they were accessed. Most importantly, it stresses the ethical considerations which were considered throughout the research process.

5.1 Research paradigm and approach

In conjunction with Silverman's (2010) strong injunction that the researcher concentrates on methods, which are appropriate to their research topic and the paradigm in which they are working, I considered that an exploratory qualitative stance was appropriate to generate detailed and high-quality material related to my research aims (set out in 1.1). Although I had previously worked as an EY practitioner and have been, in some sense, close to the field (Silverman, 2013, p. 86), I aimed to achieve a greater understanding by interviewing EY practitioners, than I could have achieved simply by reflecting on my own experience.

I worked within an interpretive paradigm, considering it to be the most appropriate way to research this topic. Interpretivism rests on the basis that any particular social action holds meaning (Schwandt, 2000).

Correspondingly, to understand this meaning, interpretation was required. Hughes (2010:41) noted that the social world is not just 'out there' waiting to be discovered, but 'in here' or 'in us' – it is our interpretations'. I took a qualitative approach (Silverman, 2010:118) primarily to establish more details about participants' views, which I did not consider to be achievable through quantitative methods. I wanted to have a 'closeness to the field' which is unavailable to quantitative researchers (Silverman, 2013, p. 86).

Some would reject the value of the research approach, which is outlined below. Silverman (2010:124), however, thought that 'there are no right or wrong methods. There are only methods that are appropriate to your

research topic, and the model with which you are working'. My study was intended to be non-interventionist (Rugg and Petre, 2006), whereby there was no intention to alter the respondents' behaviour in any way (although this may have happened naturally as participants reflected on their feelings). The intention of my study was simply to discover something more about practitioners' views of inspection and to 'gain a better understanding of the subject matter at hand' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013, p. 7)

5.2 [Research method](#)

The interview method was selected, in part, because I like listening to peoples' stories (Silverman, 2010:119) and I believed that it would be beneficial to the process, as I was comfortable with sharing a conversation. Interviews are the most commonly used data collection tool in qualitative research (Punch, 2014, p. 144), partly because they are very suitable for assessing people's perceptions and constructions of reality (Punch, 2014:144). Through interviews, I could elicit 'open-ended' answers (O'Leary, 2014 :217) from my respondents in order to gain rich materials (Gillham, 2001, p. 11). I designed my interviews to ensure that people could tell me about their views/ideas in their own way, as much as possible.

Through interviews, I was able to establish rapport and trust (O'Leary, 2014 p. 217) with the participants. As Ofsted inspection was a potentially sensitive topic area, this was essential to enabling participants to share their experiences. I was able to respond to verbal, as well as, non-verbal signs from participants, to know when to probe further and when to step back a little.

There are problems associated with most research methods and interviews are no exception. I had to accept that I would be able to identify the participants (O'Leary, 2014 p. 217), which could have influenced what the participants chose to divulge. They are also significant costs involved in the interviewing process, which were essentially paid in my time (which needed to be dedicated to the planning, instigation, transcription and analysis). This

cost was a partial reason behind limiting the number of interviews to thirteen, which, in turn, limited the spread of interviewees. Gaining access to participants can be problematic (O'Leary, 2014 p. 217), and indeed I was not able to access any practitioners who had received an Ofsted rating below 'Requires Improvement'/'Satisfactory', as those that I contacted, who had experienced such an inspection result, demonstrated 'unwillingness to participate' (Flick 2014, p. 161). This was understandable, but naturally restricted me from discovering views from this particular group of practitioners.

Sometimes it is the interviewer who can be the problem, as they might 'lead' the respondents (O'Leary, 2014 p. 219) during the conversations. While I tried to avoid 'leading', there may have been times when interviewees were led, despite my deliberate efforts to refrain from such action.

While there were disadvantages to my method, it was certainly in alignment, or a good fit, with my research paradigm (Thomas, 2009; Silverman, 2010; Roberts-Holmes, 2011; Punch, 2014). Both my planning and executing of the research process were aimed at taking advantage of the benefits of interviewing. I made a host of decisions regarding how to best approach the interviews in order to obtain 'custom-built' (O'Leary, 2014 p. 201) material which would serve my requirements. Guidance was taken largely from Punch (2014, pp. 149-150) as to which questions I needed to ask myself when planning the interviews.

5.2.1 [Interview approach](#)

My aim was to remain 'on target while hanging loose' (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p. 42). O'Leary (2014 p. 218) considered whether an interview would be 'formal' or 'relaxed'. This is a continuum, on which my approach stood midway along. My interviews were formal only to the extent that I wished to remain reasonably objective (within the context of being a subjective being), to try to avoid influencing what the practitioners told me. They were also relaxed in order to nurture trust and build rapport (to elicit the most credible information).

Punch (2014, p. 145) offered a collection of typologies of interviews, but at the bottom line, he observed a continuum between structured (predetermined questions, established through researching the literature or preliminary research (Rugg and Petre, 2006, p. 138)) and unstructured interviews (no predetermined agenda and the interviewer responds in the moment to what is being said (Rugg and Petre, 2006, p. 138)). Both structured and unstructured interviews have certain weaknesses. The former, can limit people's words to the questions that have been asked (Rugg and Petre, 2006), and the latter might be so loose that analysis can elicit only certain information that might have been built upon more productively with more directed questions. The semi-structured interview provided the best of both options, as the interviews could build on my preliminary research and they could also draw on the literature available (see Chapters 2, 3 and 4) which helped to frame the research. This style allowed participants to offer other information, which contributed to a better picture of how practitioners perceived inspection. This approach to interviews gave the respondents 'a chance to describe and explain things which might otherwise be missed completely' (Rugg and Petre, 2007, p.137).

I was interested in perceptions and sought to gain in-depth information, which indicated that less structure would be appropriate. However, because I was keen on considering this phenomenon through the lens of Foucault (chiefly 1977), there were specific topics which needed to be addressed, which may or may not have arisen naturally through conversation. Therefore, I used an interview guide, which allowed for other areas to be raised by the participant, and for me to pursue topics that did not naturally arise. Thus the modus operandi offered a more qualitative than standardised approach (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 79).

My interest in Ofsted inspection had stemmed from emotions regarding inspection, which I had heard about from others and also experienced myself. Emotionalism, as defined by Silverman (2010, p. 106), 'locates the real in the emotional life of the researcher and the respondents'.

Emotionalists are especially concerned with authenticity and favour understanding of experience. Correspondingly, open-ended interviews suit

this purpose (Silverman, 2010, p. 124) and so I also, to some extent, adopted this style.

My cross-sectional study (Thomas, 2009, p. 133) revealed 'a snapshot' of perceptions within (approximately) a twelve-month time frame so that all interviews were situated within a bounded period, within which I anticipated a limited amount of change would take place regarding Ofsted inspection.

5.2.1.1 Power during the interview

I considered power during the interviews (both mine and others') in order to avoid jeopardising 'the integrity of [my] results' (O'Leary, 2014 p. 221) through a power imbalance. Essentially, I wanted power to be fairly evenly distributed throughout the interviews, so I considered my body language, what I chose to reveal and how much I talked. I also considered the relationship between myself and the interviewee (Braun and Clarke, 2013, pp. 85-90).

I knew one participant as a friend, one as a colleague and one as a former student, so while remaining true to myself in the interviews, I still needed to adopt an 'interviewer hat', in order to establish the relationship for the hour or so while the interview took place. I did not know the other participants at all prior to their interview and so I needed to ensure that I allowed sufficient time to establish some rapport before beginning. Braun and Clarke (2013) noted that interviewees might have felt more willing to disclose sensitive information to one who is more similar to themselves. For this reason, I decided to disclose that while I was not a current EY practitioner, I had, in the past, worked in this role. It was easy for me to avoid 'doing expert' (Braun and Clarke, 2013), as I did not consider myself to be expert in what the interviewees thought about inspection, and I was, therefore, not overly worried about their feeling intimidated because of a fear of saying the wrong thing.

While there is often a view that researchers occupy a more powerful position than participants (Olesen, 2000, p. 235) because they are the writers of the

accounts, she also noted that researcher power is only partial. During my preliminary research with potential participants, some were very forthcoming with what they wanted to talk about with regard to inspection. In fact, one potential participant made suggestions as to how elements of the research should be structured in order to take into account issues that she felt were important. From this, I recognised that I needed to be aware that power can become imbalanced on both the part of the participant, as well as, the researcher.

While I was aware that the power could be disproportionately held by the participant within an interview (Braun and Clarke, 2013), I was also aware that power could have been an issue, for example, because of difference in status between myself and the interviewee, or if the interviewee had held a higher position than I had held when I was in practice, or if she had achieved a higher Ofsted rating than I had received. Such a difference could not be avoided, but it was good for me to understand the possible related influence.

5.2.2 [Sample](#)

My sample consisted of 13 practitioners who were selected by non-random, purposive approaches (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007 p. 110). I took specific care to be aware of any 'unwitting bias and erroneous assumptions' (O'Leary, 2014 p. 189) on my part, which may have reflected some of the views I held, which veered towards the negative in relation to EY Ofsted inspection (see section 1.4). For example, in this study I was careful not to assume that EY Ofsted inspection was universally viewed as a terrible phenomenon, and therefore select only people who I thought were likely to hold unfavourable views towards it. I also tried to avoid the assumption that only people in charge of EY settings would be affected by inspection (as I had been in charge for my own experience of EY Ofsted inspection and had experienced it specifically from that point of view), thereby ruling out those who were not in charge.

I aimed for my sample to draw on 'key informants' (O'Leary, 2014 p. 91), who were 'experts and insiders' (Kumar, 2014, p. 247) to ensure robust credibility

of my study. While Kumar (2014, p. 248) suggested that the sample size is determined by the researcher reaching 'saturation point' (whereby no new information is being gained), I decided to stop interviewing when I believed that the group of participants included an acceptable selection of the people who I thought could enlighten me on potentially differing perspectives on inspection.

To some extent, I engaged in convenience sampling (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007 p. 113), in drawing on practitioners that I knew. Others were accessed via a notice in a county-wide news bulletin which an associate had kindly published, inviting people to get in touch if they were interested in participating (see Appendix 2). I interviewed all of the people who expressed an interest through this particular channel. There was also some 'snowballing', as three practitioners who responded directly to me, invited their colleagues to take part (as I had encouraged participants to do this if they wished to, and were able to). Finally, there was an element of opportunism, as towards the end of my material-gathering period, I became aware that a setting had recently received a rating of 'Requires Improvement', and because I did not have many participants from settings in this category, I contacted them to see if they would also participate.

The people I interviewed worked in EY settings. I wanted to talk to them, not simply because they held the answers (O'Leary, 2014) (although they did), but also because I wanted to move 'beyond the usual suspects' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 58). This was not singularly in reference to asking people who did not appear to have been focussed on in previous studies on Ofsted inspection, it was also about accessing people who may have not have had their voice sufficiently heard yet. This could be due to a host of possible reasons (including their views not being considered to be of importance, or their not being accessible because they were not the chief contact point at their setting, or because they were not part of larger organisations such as a union).

I ensured that participants occupied a range of roles including; Childminder, Children's Centre Manager, Nursery School Head Teacher, Nursery Room

Leader, Playgroup Manager, Nursery Manager, Classroom Assistant and Nursery Practitioner, so as to be inclusive of both those who worked as an employee in settings and those who were ultimately responsible for those settings. They were all working (either full time or part-time) in settings which (at least partially) fell under the umbrella of the EYFS, including a children's centre, a nursery school, a playgroup, a childminder's home, a private nursery and a school. The settings were located across two English counties. Only one practitioner worked in Reception (with children aged 4-5 years) on a part-time/part-voluntary basis, so essentially this was a study which mainly gained the views of practitioners who worked with pre-school-aged children (4 years and below). This is important to note as the expectations of children's abilities by the end of Reception may have caused differing pedagogies to be adopted, particularly in Reception, which could be at odds with play-based learning. These issues may not have been so applicable to settings which cater for children of pre-Reception age.

I initially asked potential participants for only a small amount of background information. This was to ensure that I could judge their suitability (in terms of who would be a good fit for the sample), but at the same time not put them off from participating in my study because they had to provide too much information. See Appendix 3 for a blank copy of the background information form.

5.2.3 [Practical considerations](#)

The majority of interviews took place at the settings of the practitioners, or in 'the field' (Rugg and Petre, 2006, p. 70), to ensure minimal disruption to the participant. One took place at the participant's home (as she was a childminder), and another in my office. Sometimes it was a question of finding the 'best possible' place to be. Key considerations that I took into account were; safety (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 88) for both the participants and myself; having a place where participants could feel relaxed (so somewhere that they could not be overheard, and not intimidated); and the

location being quiet enough to have minimal background noise so as not to disrupt the recording.

While I endeavoured to take advice from Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 90) that only one interview should be conducted per day, practicalities limited this possibility. Where more than one interview was conducted in a day, I was sure to make notes after each one, so as to hold it in my mind until transcription could begin. Voice recording was also immensely helpful to enable me to revisit the interviews at a later date.

5.2.4 Before commencing and at the beginning of the interview

At each interview, I allowed a short period of time at the beginning to establish a little rapport and to put participants at their ease. I also established rapport through the sequencing of my questions from the less sensitive, to the more sensitive topics (Braun and Clarke, 2013), thus, allowing me time to read the situation a little, before jumping in (see interview questions in Appendix 4).

I used a checklist, largely guided by Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 94) to remind me about what to do and say before the beginning of the interviews (see Appendix 5). This checklist helped to get myself and the participant talking before the interview, so that participants were at ease before we commenced.

5.2.5 Trust.

I conducted one-to-one interviews (Rugg and Petre, 2006, p. 136) to enable participants to be honest and open with their feelings and views concerning to the topic. I considered these interviews to be conversations which involved me doing more than just asking people questions and listening to the answers. I therefore had to consider what I might divulge during the interview. As a result of being a partial insider researcher, I knew some of the participants and, as such, they may have already known some of my

thoughts about inspection. It was therefore inadvisable to pretend that I had views other than my own on inspection, as this may have eroded participants' trust in me and in turn affected the participants' willingness to talk.

5.2.6 Communication and listening skills

I considered my own strengths in selecting my research method (Thomas, 2009, p. 71). Although I had limited prior experience in conducting research interviews, I had engaged in two face-to-face interviews for a previous Masters dissertation (Ward, 2008), and had conducted telephone interviews to contribute towards another study (Palmer *et al.*, 2014). I had also interviewed witnesses to collect evidence for candidates applying to gain Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). Other than this, I had acted as a mentor for EYPS candidates. This mentoring role taught me to 'listen' appropriately with consideration of body language, eye-contact, not interrupting, and others.

This set of experience and skills that I had previously acquired enabled me to undertake my role as an interviewer for this study into Ofsted inspection. For example, from my experience, I knew to use mostly open ended questions to avoid limited responses (Rugg and Petre, 2006, p. 139). Also, prior experience of conducting both telephone and 'face to face' interviews, informed my decision that the latter were preferable in order to have a better quality interaction, as I could respond to visual clues alongside what was being said.

In order to maintain quality, by both eliciting the information that I anticipated was needed, and by listening more openly to what participants had to say, I also had to manage the interview (O'Leary, 2014 p. 228) so that both were given attention. After asking an initial question about the participant's work role, I moved onto an open question which allowed the participant to talk about anything in relation to their experience of Ofsted. Whilst I was not able to memorise my interview schedule entirely (as advised by Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 95) I was familiar with my questions/prompts so that I could transition with ease between one topic and another and could 'go with the

flow' of the conversation, rather than insisting on sticking rigidly to the schedule. This was aimed at making the interviewee less likely to feel intimidated, talk more freely and enable them to tell me things that I had not anticipated.

In order to encourage participants to talk, I conveyed (genuine) interest (through body language alongside vocal noises and talk) (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 95). I also conveyed (real) empathy which was a result of my being a partial insider researcher (see 1.4 and 5.8). To some extent I had a policy of honesty and openness on my part during the interviews (in the hope that this was reciprocated by the other person), but not to the extent that I talked much about my views (as this was not the focus). Also, I did not aim to overtly disagree with things that interviewees told me, as I considered that this would be counter-productive to listening to them.

During the interviews, I ensured that I engaged in the process of 'self-correcting' (Kvale, 2007, p. 4), whereby I clarified my understanding as we went along, to avoid later questions being based on a misunderstanding. This approach put the interviews on more solid ground (Kvale, 2007, p. 4).

5.2.7 [Question design](#)

Contrary to Silverman's (2010, p. 197) advice against asking a research question directly, I did, more or less, ask participants one of the research questions (or aims) which related to their perceptions of Ofsted inspection (Aim 1). I considered this to be appropriate because of the theory I intended to use to later analyse my material, which would avoid engaging in 'lazy research' (Silverman, 2010, p. 197). Also, it was a good idea to ask this question, as it was broad and allowed the interviewee to steer the conversation in the direction of their choice, within the context of the research. Silverman's advice (2010, p. 197), however, was followed in some instances. For example, in relation to Aim 3, which asked about whether practitioners had ideas about other methods of ensuring quality other than through Ofsted inspection, I did not ask whether they thought Ofsted ensured quality, but instead asked more openly about what they thought would ensure

quality. The aim of this was to avoid using a leading question and to see first if Ofsted was mentioned by the participants, and then probe further on the basis of this information.

I was undecided over how much of Foucault (chiefly 1977) I wanted to incorporate into my interview questions. Prior experience (Palmer *et al.*, 2014) in using interview questions which were very closely aligned with a theoretical framework, had proved difficult for the participant to understand, and may therefore not have produced the best quality responses. I endeavoured not to repeat this mistake, by not explicitly mentioning the Foucauldian concepts in my questions. For example, as mentioned earlier, I did not use the term 'docile body'.

I felt safe that the concepts associated with the theory that guided my research (chiefly Foucault, 1977) and formed the basis of my interview questions, would coincide with what practitioners wanted to talk about. The underpinning reasoning was that I had elected to use Foucault (chiefly 1977) partially in response to preliminary conversations with practitioners regarding Ofsted inspection. I had also selected Foucault (chiefly 1977) to steer my study, partially as a result of considering my own memories and thoughts regarding inspections, and also studies which focussed on teachers' perceptions of inspection (see Chapter 4). So, it seemed likely that during my interviews, without directly mentioning Foucault or his theory, there would still be overlap between what practitioners told me and the concepts which were of interest to me as a researcher.

5.3 [Ethics](#)

Before engaging with participants, I considered what kinds of 'formal and informal regulation' (Thomas, 2009, p. 71) I would need to abide by, as I wanted to ensure that I was 'doing the right thing' (Le Voi, 2006, p. 180). This was important to me personally as a moral issue, was insisted upon in my University Research Ethics Handbook (University of Gloucestershire, 2005) and was advised in the BERA (2011) guidelines. It was also a legal consideration, for example in relation to the Data Protection Act (1998). My

integrity was especially important with my chosen method (interviews), as I was 'the main instrument for obtaining knowledge' (Kvale, 2007, p. 10).

Ethics were considered in advance of the research taking place (Kvale, 2007) and I obtained participants' informed consent (Oates, 2006) (see Appendix 6) prior to commencing the interviews. Participants were offered a brief outline (O'Leary, 2014 p. 219) of my project (see Appendix 1) and they were informed as to how it might potentially be used and of any possible risks to themselves. I also offered them my first supervisor's contact details in case the participants required corroboration of my study.

Participants were informed about the interview process and were made aware that the transcripts would be recorded and analysed. I was fairly open in my introductory information, except for the mention about my possible lens of enquiry (through Foucault (chiefly 1977)), as I did not think that this would be useful to mention or harmful to the participants if not mentioned, and it may have steered our conversations in an undesirable way.

The participants' names, contact details, interview recordings and transcripts were kept secure and confidential throughout my research and in the writing of this thesis all names of participants were changed and no settings are identifiable.

I checked that participants were over 18 so they could take responsibility for their own actions. While there was no therapeutic-type relationship between myself and the participant, the relaxed and open style of the interview might have led them to reveal more than they wished. Correspondingly, the ensured anonymity should protect them from any negative consequences regarding this. O'Leary (2014 p. 193) suggested that one ethical dilemma would be related to getting participants to re-live their own (potentially) unpleasant memories. Because there was a possibility and even a likelihood of this happening, I ensured that I monitored the participants throughout the interviews and, where necessary, reminded the participants that while they were welcome to talk about any upsetting aspects, they could also decide not to. While I did not intentionally encourage participants to relay private and

personal details of others (O'Leary, 2014), if this happened, such details have not been included in this thesis.

Kvale (2007) discussed ties to either 'above' or 'below': 'Above' in relation to funding and 'below' regarding affiliation to the group being interviewed, either of which could cause the interviewer to ignore some findings and place emphasis on others. I was not paid to conduct this research, which freed me from any such pressures. However, as I am subject to Ofsted inspection in my current role, I was aware that I may have been influenced by Ofsted being in a position of power over me. Also, I feel an affinity with the group of participants I was studying, as I spend a proportion of my working day with practitioners/future practitioners and may return to working in an EY setting one day. Throughout my research, I remained acutely aware of these issues.

Overall, I considered the risk involved for the participants was minimal and worth taking because of the possible benefits that the study could produce (Kvale, 2007) (see Chapter 1 for details of such possible benefits). In consideration of the macro-ethics (Kvale, 2007), I ensured that I produced findings that were as credible as possible (through the use of rigorous techniques), so that if others decide to act on my findings, they can feel confident to do so.

Participants will have the opportunity to share my findings at a later date (Roberts-Holmes, 2010, p. 62) as I believe the views of others would also be of interest to them.

5.4 [Recording and transcribing](#)

Interviews were recorded on two devices, just in case one might fail. While this worked well for the majority of my interviews, it was unfortunate that one interview and a portion of another failed to record. I realised this issue very shortly after having been at the setting, and then on the same day, I wrote my memory of the participants' responses in relation to the questions I had asked. The participants in question then confirmed for me that mine was an accurate representation of the interview and their views (In the interview

analysis Chapters 7,8 and 9, my recollections have been written as if they were the participants' words, as all were confirmed as accurate by the participants). The remainder of the interview which partially recorded and all other recordings were transcribed in full to include much detail (including, for example, pauses and intakes of breath). I transcribed some of the interviews myself, so that I could reflect on what had been said during this process. Others were recorded in a basic format by a transcriber. These were then checked by myself against the audio recordings, and I also added details, which the transcriber did not have sufficient time to add. This process of checking and adding detail also brought me to be more familiar with the transcripts, which was helpful with later analysis.

5.5 [Closing the interview and after the interview](#)

Before closing the interview, I ensured that the participants had time to add anything else that they wanted to (another opportunity for their undirected voice to be heard) and thanked them for their time. Later, when they had approved their transcripts and I had made any necessary adjustments, I also sent them a small 'thank you' in the form of a gift voucher. They did not anticipate receiving this gift before or during the interview, and so this gesture could not have influenced their decision to take part or the responses they gave me. Hopefully though, this process indicated that I appreciated their taking time out to talk to me. I will contact all of them, when my research has gone to viva, to let them know the findings of my study.

5.6 [Pilot](#)

To help ensure that I gathered the information that I hoped to elicit from participants, I conducted a pilot study (Bazeley, 2013, p. 55), to enable me to go through the process of 'getting it wrong and putting it right' (Silverman, 2010, p. 198), if necessary. Participants in the pilot study were made aware that their transcripts might also be included in the eventual analysis for this study, which was fortunate as the pilot indicated that I had devised a suitable

approach to elicit the information that I required and therefore the pilot interview material was included in my final analysis.

When reviewing the transcriptions of my pilot interviews, I was aware of the advice by Kvale (2007, pp. 4-5) as to what to pay attention to when considering the quality of interviews. For example, I listened to see if I had posed questions which were clear to understand and I avoided overly engaging in small talk. My overall analysis of the pilot study was that the interviews were of sufficient quality to move forward with a similar approach in the remaining interviews.

5.7 [Rejected approaches](#)

There were alternative approaches which I could have used for this study, which would also have fallen under the interpretive/qualitative umbrella. I had initially thought about engaging in an ethnographic case study (Denscombe, 2011 ; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007), which would have studied inspection 'within its real-life context' (Yin, 2003, p. 13). Although this would have been of great interest to me, I decided against it because it would have been difficult (if not impossible) to plan and execute, due to the limited or non-existent notice of inspections taking place. Also in consideration of participants' possible stress levels during inspection, my presence in the setting at that time might have been ethically questionable.

5.8 [Positionality](#)

In chapter 1, I outlined where I sat on the spectrum of 'insider/outsiderness' (referred to by Dhillon and Thomas (2018)) in relation to this research and I acknowledged that my positionality will most certainly have influenced this thesis. My leanings towards being an insider researcher were advantageous to both hosting the interviews and analysing the data, as I am likely to have had a better understanding about what practitioners were telling me (Braun and Clarke, 2013), than someone who had not worked in EY and experienced Ofsted inspection. In contrast, my 'insiderness' may have caused me to be overly cautious about asking certain questions. For example, I was

uncomfortable in delving too far into participants' perceptions of their own professionalism, as my experience had led me to believe that all EY practitioners would consider themselves to be professionals, and that to question them too much about this might appear to be disrespectful. This is apparent in an extract from an interview taken from a transcript (the full version can be found in Appendix 8).

MW: And this is a question that I always think, oh it might come across as insulting.

D: No that's fine.

MW: I just ask everybody this question. Would you class yourself as a professional?

D: Yeah definitely. Oh gosh yeah, and all the team.

MW: Okay.

D: We're all professionals, yes.

Another example of my 'insiderness' impacting on my interview questioning was a decision not to use the term 'docile bodies', as similar to (and connected with) my being uncomfortable with asking about whether participants perceived themselves to be professionals, I also thought it might be slightly insulting to directly ask if they considered themselves to be 'docile bodies' (see Table 2, section 5.9). This decision, alongside not using any other Foucauldian terminology in my interviews, was also influenced by my 'insiderness', as my experience of working with EY practitioners (both as colleagues and within my lecturing capacity) had contributed towards a belief that such terminology would not be familiar to the participant group.

My 'insiderness' and positionality is apparent in my selection of Foucault to help build the theoretical framework for this thesis (see section 5.9). Phillips and Pugh (2005, p. 42) suggested that a theoretical framework is a minimum requirement for a PhD study and Adams, Cochrane and Dunne (2011, p. 2) warned that avoidance of theory can lead to 'theory creeping in through the back door', stating that, for researchers, 'applying theory to our work urges us

to think more carefully about our taken-for-granted values, our motivation and our place in the research process'. I chose Foucault (chiefly 1977) because his work made sense to me (as a former EY practitioner) in explaining how EY practice is controlled via Ofsted inspection. Section 5.9 provides further information on how and why Foucault (chiefly 1977) was selected, and Table 2 (section 5.9) contains my initial thoughts about areas for interview questions in relation to the concepts selected for focus. These thoughts also related to my 'insiderness' as they were connected to my own experience, and my understanding of the experience of others, before engaging in the interviewing process. For example, in Table 2 (section 5.9), there is evidence of my considering if my participants thought they would be able to defend elements of their practice to Ofsted inspectors. This is highly likely to be related to my own experience of having not felt able to defend an element of my own practice during an inspection.

As Creswell (2009, p. 62) suggested, the theoretical lens (the choice of which was influenced by my former experience) shaped the focus of the interview questions, the probes I employed, and the concepts that flowed throughout this thesis. This said, I took care to allow interviewees to provide information in relation to Foucault (chiefly 1977), whilst still enabling them to have some element of free voice to tell me about their perceptions of inspection, which might fall outside of the theoretical framework. This is apparent from the interview questions, which, for example, included broad and open questions (e.g. 'Tell me about your experience of Ofsted inspection?'), the relaxed conversational style of interviewing that I adopted (which necessitated that I was not too dominant in the process), and the fact that I elected to analyse my interviews through three lenses (see 5.11), one of which contained no 'a priori' coding. This practice, alongside my leanings towards being an outsider researcher, may have helped me to be less influenced by my own views on EY inspection, as I was a little more removed from it, than if I were a total insider. In contrast, my 'outsiderness' may have meant that I was not as well informed about EY Ofsted inspection than I would have been if I had still been working as an EY practitioner.

Power between myself and the participants during the interviews has already been considered to some extent in 5.2.1.1. However, it can be considered in further detail in relation to my 'insider/outsiderness', especially for one participant who was a former student of mine. I had elected not to interview any people who were in my current student group, because of ethical considerations around my powerful position in relation to their studies. That said, one of the participants was a former student. I considered this choice to be ethically sound as, not only had she completed her studies, but she also had no intention of returning to study at a higher level. My position (as a former lecturer of hers) was in my mind in relation to a potential power imbalance during her interview, which may have interfered with her being able to convey her true feelings. Taking this into consideration, it was helpful that my interview with her did not take place at her former place of study, and instead took place at her house. She was, therefore, quite literally on her 'home ground', where she appeared to be relaxed. When I visited, I ensured that I was not too formally dressed, and my disposition (as with all of the participants) was friendly and approachable. All of this combined to give me the impression that she felt less like a student, and for my part, I remained firmly in the role of a researcher (rather than lecturer). Looking back on the interview transcript for this participant, there was not any apparent evidence that she had felt intimidated by my being her former lecturer. Also, as with all the participants, she had volunteered to participate, and was not coerced in any way to do so.

In relation to my 'outsiderness' and power during the interviews, while I took steps (as detailed in 5.2.1.1) to 'park' interviewer power, the fact some participants did not know me, may have made them cautious of being truthful. The message I conveyed to participants regarding my not being part of Ofsted, should have helped with this.

5.9 [Theoretical framework](#)

Deciding on a theorist helped to 'kick-start' (Layder, 1998) this research. The theoretical/analytical framework for this thesis was chiefly based on my interpretation of Foucault's (1977) ideas on panopticism. Although this

section of Foucault's work took centre stage, I also included other aspects of his writing to a lesser extent. For example, his ideas about power/knowledge (1980) were used to explore practitioners' thoughts about the 'truths' currently circulating in EY. Foucault (chiefly 1977) was selected via a process (influenced by Bazeley (2013)) of reflecting on my own experiences of Ofsted inspection (school and EY), the reflections of others (gathered from informal conversations about Ofsted inspection, prior to commencing this study), and the contextual literature I was aware of at the time (included within Chapter 2). The literature I had encountered at that early stage in my research journey, which had used Foucault's ideas about panopticism (1977) to critically analyse Ofsted inspection in schools (e.g. Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Perryman, 2006) and EY regulation in Australia (for example, Fenech and Sumsion, 2007), generated a confidence that Foucault's ideas (chiefly 1977) could be used to good effect in exploring this thesis topic area. It may not be a great surprise to many who are familiar with the work of Foucault, that I have selected a portion of his work to frame my research, as 'the Foucauldian metaphor of the panopticon is frequently deployed or invoked in conceptualisations of accountability and performativity in education' (Courtney, 2016, p. 623) (see Chapter 4).

The literature raised my awareness of some key Foucauldian concepts (docile bodies, hierarchical observation, normalising judgement, examination, truth, power (chiefly 1977)) which I cross referenced with themes which emerged through my analysis of experience (both my own and others'). In Figure 1 and Figure 2 below, the highlighted areas demonstrate where I initially considered there were connections between Foucault (chiefly 1977) and my reflections on my own and others' experience. There was sufficient indication within this process to consider Foucault (chiefly 1977) to be a suitable theorist from which to establish the analytical framework for this study.

Figure 1: Themes emerging from my personal reflections on inspection: factors which might influence perceptions of inspection

N.B. **Highlights** in Figure 1 indicate where I considered there was overlap between my own thoughts and Foucauldian concepts (chiefly 1977).

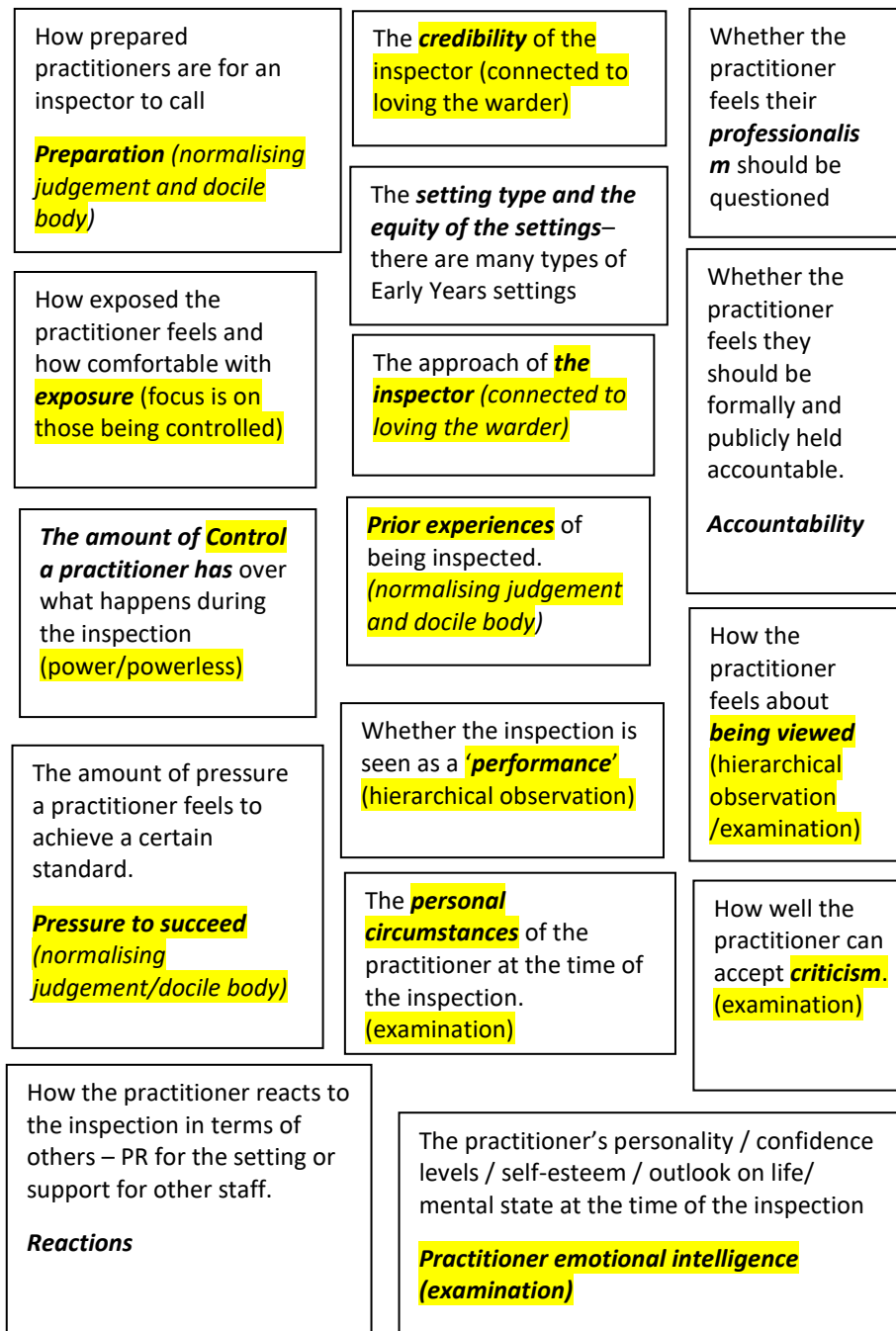


Figure 2: Themes emerging from prior informal discussions with EY practitioners about Ofsted inspection

N.B. **Highlights** in Figure 2 indicate where I considered there was overlap between my reflections on prior discussions with others and Foucauldian concepts (chiefly 1977)

Prior discussion with a Curriculum Lead Practitioner in a children's centre

Non-equitable circumstance - where one county acts differently from another regarding practice – although both receive the same inspection.

Changes to Early Years policy - causing increased workload and changes to inspection

Practitioners **not agreeing** with changes to Early Years policy - but still being inspected regarding this.

Worry (normalising judgement)

Clarity about the inspection process – e.g. which forms will be used and when, or which curriculum is being used. – **Transparency** (spotlight on those being controlled rather than those who are controlling)

Prior discussion with a nursery manager /owner

Stress felt before, during and after inspection by the leader - (examination)

Possible effect on other staff if the leader is **stressed** (hierarchical observation/normalising judgement)

Prior inspection results and how they affect the thoughts of practitioners - **inspection experience** (examination/normalising judgement/docile body)

Health and well-being (examination/normalising judgement)

Prior discussion with a nursery owner / manager and EYF student

Health and well-being (examination/normalising judgement)

Continued on next page...

Figure 2 Continued.

Prior discussion with Early Years practitioners studying for their Early Years Foundation degree

Taking comments by the inspection team personally especially if they were a childminder, or the only one being inspected (examination)

Public exposure- (focus on those being controlled rather than those who are controlling)

Prior discussion with EY practitioners who were also completing their final year of an Early childhood Studies BA (hons)

Inspection coming before the setting is established and then not coming again for a long time - if the report is not so good, this could be a problem

Timing

Inspection depends on **the inspector** – one practitioner wrote to Ofsted to say how good the inspector was (love the warden)

One practitioner said that she **felt good about inspection** (reward)

Prior discussion with a childminder

She was concerned that she had heard that Ofsted would no longer inspect childminders - and to her this would devalue what she does. **Validation** (reward / normalising judgement)

Having been reassured that Foucault (chiefly 1977) was a good choice to use in establishing a theoretical framework (in relation to prior literature and analysis of prior experience (both my own and others' – see Figure 1 and Figure 2 above), I then connected my (former) overarching Research Question 'What are EY practitioners' thoughts regarding their own experience of Ofsted inspection?' with key Foucauldian (chiefly 1977) concepts (see Table 2 below). This finalised the decision that the theoretical framework was suitable for use in this thesis.

N.B. It should be noted that after deciding to use Foucault (chiefly 1977) to create a theoretical framework, my former research questions (detailed in Appendix 10) transitioned into the three research aims (see section 1.1). However, as Research Aim 1 was almost identical to the former Research Question 1 (included in Table 2 below), and the former Research Question 1 remained, in essence, to be a key focus of this study, the transition from the former research questions to the current research aims did not necessitate the rejection of the use of Foucault (chiefly 1977).

Table 2: Use of Foucault to engage analytically with the research question

Initial ideas about areas for interview questions are highlighted in blue – although actual interview questions are included in Appendix 4.

Initial ideas about sub-questions in interviews are highlighted in grey – although actual interview sub-questions are included in Appendix 4.

<p>Concepts →</p> <p>Research question</p> <p>↓</p>	<p><i>Docile Bodies</i></p>	<p><i>Hierarchical observation</i></p>	<p><i>Normalising judgement</i></p>	<p><i>Examination</i></p>	<p><i>Truth/power</i></p>
<p>What are Early Years Practitioners thoughts regarding their own experience of early years inspection?</p>	<p>1. Foucault’s concept that discipline is infused throughout society via panopticism to control the actions of others, will be applied to explore what practitioners think with</p>	<p>1. Foucault’s concept of hierarchical observation will be applied to the observation that takes place during the inspection.</p> <p>How do practitioners behave when they are being observed, while the inspection is taking place?</p>	<p>1. Foucault’s concept of normalising judgement will be applied to explore the possible effects on settings (and the practitioners within them) being ranked against each other.</p> <p>Are practitioners affected by being</p>	<p>1. Foucault’s concept of ‘examination’ will be interpreted as ‘inspection’. A issue with examination / inspection, in Foucault’s eyes is that it results in documentation regarding the individual (or in this case, the setting). This enables power systems to control these individuals.</p> <p>Do practitioners think that the information that is gathered about</p>	<p>1. While Panopticism is the focus of the theoretical framework, also elements of Foucault’s concept of Power-knowledge will be used in a supplementary way to consider if ‘truths’ about working with young children might affect how practitioners think about inspection.</p>

	<p>regard to them possibly being 'docile bodies'</p> <p>Do practitioners think that they act in a certain way because they are being observed?</p> <p>If this is the case - why is this? (is it because they believe they know what the inspector is looking for and change practice accordingly?)</p> <p>Are nerves related to this?</p> <p>If this is not the case and they act as they usually would when an inspector is not present, why is this?</p> <p>Is it because they feel confident that they are</p>	<p>ranked and compared to each other?</p> <p>Do practitioners think of their inspection judgement in isolation, or do they consider it in the context of the judgements of other settings?</p> <p>Are practitioners aware of the grades that other settings receive?</p> <p>Do practitioners know what the norm is for inspection grades?</p>	<p>them, through inspection, is used to control them?</p> <p>If they do think this, how does it make them think about inspection as a result of this thought?</p> <p>If not - why is this the case?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>2.Foucault's concept of examination will also be looked at to consider how the recent up-skilling of the Early Years workforce may or may not have affected practitioners' thoughts about the process of inspection</p>	<p>Do practitioners think that there is any mismatch between what they believe is important about working with children and what criteria they are inspected against? - or do they feel that there is a good fit?</p> <p>Do practitioners think that there is a shared discourse regarding what is best for children?</p> <p>What are practitioners' understandings about changing truths and ideologies with regard to</p>
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	<p>If they do, is this a problem for them?</p> <p>Do they or do they not think that they should be treated as professionals and their judgement trusted?</p>	<p>always doing the 'right' thing?</p> <p>Is it because they are not concerned with the result of the inspection, or the publication of the result?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>2.Foucault's notion of panopticism will be used to look at the idea</p>	<p>Do practitioners compare their grades to the norm amongst all settings</p> <p>At what point, if any, do practitioners think that their setting or their practice is abnormal?</p> <p>In relation to the normalising judgement - do practitioners think that they are subject to the possibility of public humiliation?</p>	<p>Do practitioners think any differently about inspection as a result of their up-skilling?</p> <p>Do practitioners think that they are able to explain and defend their practice when it is judged through the inspection?</p> <p>Do practitioners think that it is their right to explain or defend their practice?</p> <p>Do practitioners think that inspectors understand Early Years practice enough to understand practitioner's aims within the setting?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	<p>children and childcare?</p>
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		<p>that because many Early Years settings have a 'drop in' inspection system, they could be viewed as being constantly observed. Linking to the saying 'every day is an OFSTED day'.</p> <p>Do Practitioners think that they act in a certain way every day, because an inspector could visit unexpectedly on any day?</p> <p>Does this make a difference to how EY practitioners think</p>		<p>3.Foucault's concept of examination will be used to explore how the culmination of observation and normalising judgement in the form of inspection, could affect practitioner well-being.</p> <p>Do practitioners think that inspection has any effect (either positive or negative) on their own well-being?</p> <p>Do practitioners think there is any connection between the inspection and negative or positive stress at work, for themselves or others?</p> <p>Do practitioners think that there are higher workplace demands linked with lower levels of personal control in the workplace?</p>	
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		about inspection as opposed to how teachers reportedly feel?		Do the demands of the job and the level of personal control connect at all with practitioner thoughts about inspection?	
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5.10 Concerns about using Foucault (chiefly 1977),

I had some initial concerns about using the theory of Foucault (chiefly 1977). These are listed below, alongside my responses to these concerns.

Concern 1: The lens of Foucault (chiefly 1977) might have overtaken the project and focussing on one theory might have prevented me from considering something else which was important.

Response 1: This concern was counter-balanced by the advantages of using Foucault (chiefly 1977) and it might have been a waste of the tools of theory available if I had not employed some theory (Layder, 1998), as this became my 'overall orientating lens' (Creswell, 2009, p. 62) through which I could structure my research. Amongst the advantages of using theory was that it created a focus and a boundary (Bazeley, 2013) and established my orientating concepts (Layder, 1998). The key concept emerged as being power, with other associated concepts such as surveillance, observation, examination, normalising judgement, truth and knowledge.

Use of a theoretical framework helped me to recognise my 'position'. Both the analysis of the literature and a thematic reflection on my own experience and the experience of others, as Bazeley (2013, p. 43) suggested, enabled me to identify my assumptions about inspection. Nevertheless, I tried to remain open-minded throughout the research period, in order to be receptive to the information I gathered during my interviews (Layder, 1998; Bazeley, 2013).

Being informed by theory and literature, while also remaining open to what my participants told me, was achieved by initially using the interplay of theory, experience and contextual literature to establish my interview questions. Later, in my thematic analysis I ensured that I used a combination of 'a priori' and 'a posteriori' codes and in doing so, allowed theory to be used flexibly. In effect this enabled me to keep one ear open to listen to what participants were telling me beyond Foucault (chiefly 1977). However, as

evident from the material analysis (see Chapters 7, 8 and 9), my findings comprehensively aligned with the Foucauldian framework.

Concern 2. The theory about power that Foucault (1977) established had its critics, especially, as Fillingham (1993, pp. 144-155) discussed, in relation to 'resistance'. Criticism of Foucault raised queries about the suitability of his ideas.

Response 2. Foucault is an established and recognised social theorist (Ashenden, 2005), and such theorists are likely to have their critics. I determined that as long as I was clear in my own understanding of Foucault (chiefly 1977) and was clear to my readers in how I used his theory, this openness would enable the reader to decide on their views about whether his work was appropriate for use.

Concern 3. Other existing studies had used Foucault to look at inspection in primary schools and regulation in EY in Australia (see Chapter 4). Because of this, I was concerned that not enough of a contribution could be made by my own study, to the body of knowledge on inspection and that I would not be able to elaborate sufficiently on Foucault's theory.

Response 3. My study was related specifically to EY in England, rather than primary education in England or EY in Australia, and thus there was a distinctive contribution to be established within my thesis. Also, the studies which I was concerned about were published some time ago, and circumstances in both EY and inspection change rapidly, necessitating the need for further research.

Concern 4 – Using Foucault (chiefly 1977) might be a sign of potential bias.

Response 4 – While selection of Foucault (chiefly 1977) as my key theorist certainly reflected my views on inspection (see 1.4), I was aware of this issue throughout and took steps to ensure that I did not simply try to 'prove' that panopticism was at play in EY by, for example, selecting only participants who I thought would share my viewpoint, asking only questions which elicited

confirmation of a panoptic situation, and analysing my interviews in such a way as to only listen to the participants' voices when they were confirming panopticism. See section 5.2.2, 5.8, 5.9 and 5.11 for further details in relation to the steps I took in relation to consideration of positionality and use of Foucault.

5.11 Interview analysis

This section details the movement from the transcripts to the conclusions in order to 'support the robustness' (O'Hara and Wainwright, 2011, p. 217) of the findings. The key aim was to analyse the material 'thoroughly and fairly' (Silverman, 2014, p. 110). Before commencing this thematic analysis (influenced by Braun and Clarke, 2013), as the transcripts were substantial, for practical purposes, all interviews were reduced to summaries. This meant that I was able to work with a set of more manageable material. I then began to use the computer program NVIVO because of the advantages it could offer (Creswell, 2013, pp. 201-202) and especially because of the functions it provided to help with coding and storing information in an organised manner (Morris, 2015, p. 135) (for a fully coded example of an interview summary, see Appendix 9).

I established three lenses through which to look at the interview summaries. Two of these lenses consisted of 'a priori' codes (sometimes referred to as 'nodes'): one set which reflected my own experience of inspection / what other practitioners had told me in prior informal conversations about inspection / what the literature had presented in relation to Ofsted inspection (more contextual – see List 1 below), and one set which reflected the conceptual literature – see List 2 below). The other lens was more 'open' and allowed for 'a posteriori' coding from the interview summaries (List 3).

List 1: 'A Priori' Contextual Codes (based on the contextual literature, my own reflections on Ofsted inspection and prior informal discussions with EY practitioners on this topic)

- Accountability of EY
- History of EY
- International EY
- Other commentary on Ofsted
- Practitioners' perceptions of Ofsted

- Power of outcomes-based agenda
- Quality
- What Ofsted is

List 2: 'A Priori' Conceptual Codes (mainly based on Foucault)

- Docile Bodies
- Governance / hegemony/ ideology
- Identity / professionalism / professional identity
- Knowledge /truth
- Power
- Social Constructivism
- Social control/ socialisation/ norms
- Surveillance /observation / visibility / examination / control / panopticism/
- Well-being /Work /stress

List 3: 'A posteriori' codes (also sometimes referred to as 'open coding')

- Views on own inspection
- Views on inspection more widely
- Suggestions for QA of EY
- Associated with inspection
- Less directly related to inspection, but relevant
- Discarded nodes

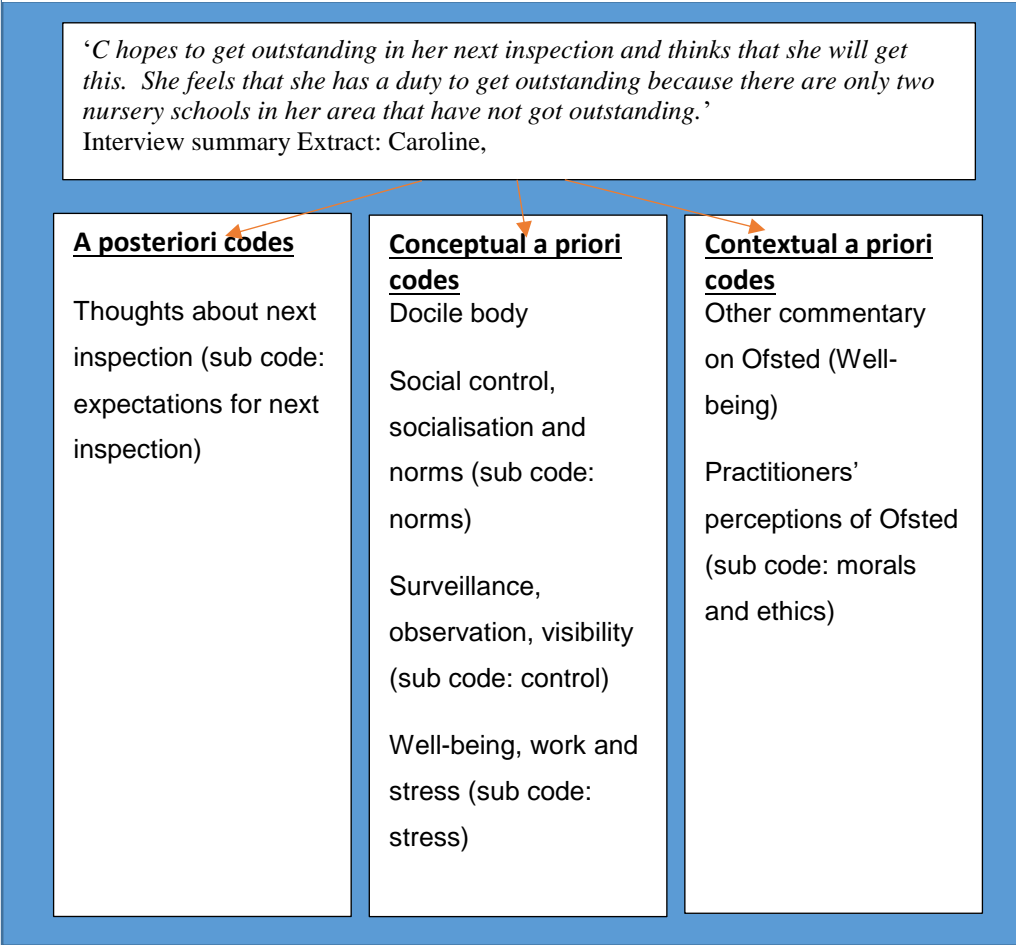
(NB: The discarded 'a posteriori' codes contained a small amount of material which was incorporated into other codes. An example of where this happened was where I had initially set up a separate sub-code for participants' views on their most recent inspection and another sub-code to accommodate their views on their earlier inspections. However, as the coding process progressed, it was often not clear which inspection the participants were referring to. Therefore, this line of enquiry was jettisoned, and the content of these codes was reassigned to other codes).

So as to not be too influenced by the 'a priori' codes and to keep in alignment with an overall interpretive approach, I began by establishing the 'a posteriori' codes, and allocated appropriate material to them. Following this, I worked with the contextual 'a priori' codes, before looking at the material via the conceptual 'a priori' codes.

Once coding from the interview summaries was complete, I returned to the original transcripts (for an example of a full interview transcript see Appendix

8), to see in more detail what the participants had told me, and to look for key quotations to analyse and present. At this point I moved away from NVIVO and began writing about the topics identified above using Microsoft Word. It became evident that there was a great deal of overlap to grapple with, because I had coded interview summary extracts to many different codes. Figure 3 below provides an example of multiple coding in relation to one interview summary extract.

Figure 3: Example of multiple coding of one interview summary extract.



The fact that interview summary material was allocated to multiple codes (an example of which is in Figure 3 above) was unsurprising, as I had selected my conceptual framework, based partially on what other practitioners had told me about Ofsted inspection in prior informal conversations, my own experiences of Ofsted inspection and the contextual literature related to this topic (see section 5.9). However, in order to avoid repetition in the presentation of material analysis it seemed sensible to combine what I had discovered through the ‘a priori’ and ‘a posteriori’ coding and to present the analysis through the three main strands of panopticism: Hierarchical Observation, Normalising Judgement and Examination. If something of

importance did not directly relate to Hierarchical Observation or Normalising Judgement, it related to Examination.

Figure 4 and Table 3 below (**both are related and detail three coded results for one individual**) provide examples to illustrate how the content of the original coding areas in NVIVO transitioned to, and was subsequently presented in, the material analysis chapters (Chapters 7, 8 and 9). The transitions displayed demonstrate why Chapter 9 is so large, as much of the original coding areas were relevant to Examination. However, it should be kept in mind that Hierarchical Observation, Normalising Judgement and Examination are interrelated.

Figure 4: Relationship examples: from original coding to presentation of material analysis: Caroline

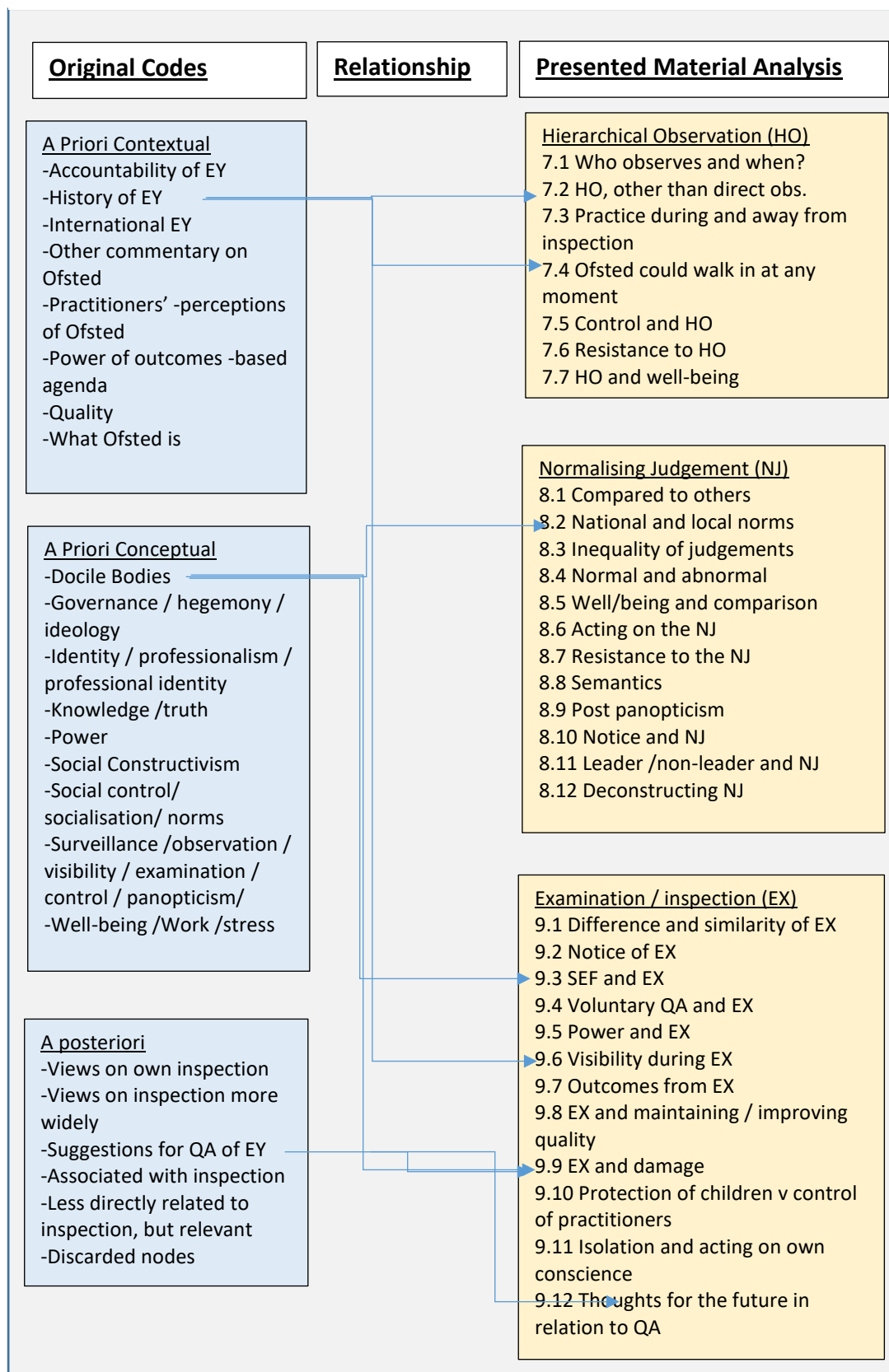
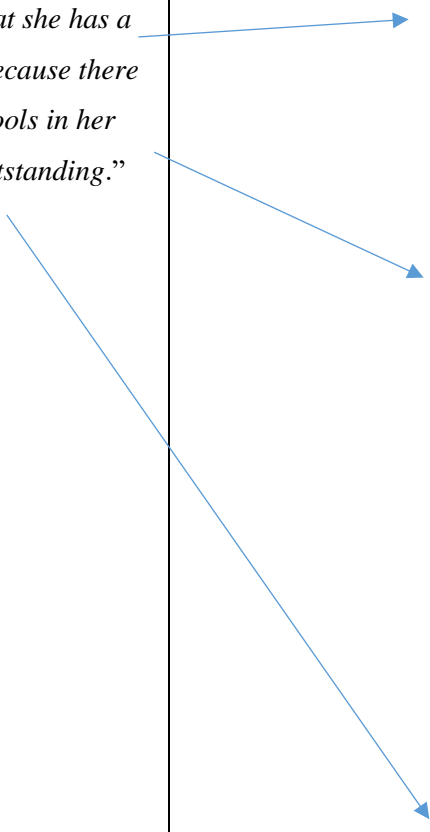


Table 3: Further details of how the example coded materials transitioned to themes in Chapters 7,8 and 9: Caroline

N.B numbers relate to chapters and chapter sections

<u>Caroline: Interview Summary extracts</u>		<u>Presented in Material analysis chapters 7,8 and 9</u>
<p>Coded to 'History of Early Years'</p> <p><i>“as they had had a joint inspection prior to the two separate ones and had got satisfactory - they expected to get another joint one - and this did not happen. C says this is because it is difficult to get consistent information from Ofsted about what will happen with regard to inspection”</i></p> <p><i>“C finds it difficult to keep up with all of the changes rules and regulation - and we discussed this may be worse now that everything is electronic so it is easier to change”</i></p> <p><i>“changes to inspection framework add stress - although she does have framework for nursery school and inspection framework for younger ones - particular”</i></p> <p><i>“Ofsted web site is bad - impossible to find anything”</i></p> <p><i>“C says curriculum is also changing rapidly”</i></p>		<p>Relates to 7.4 regarding practitioners not knowing when their inspection would take place</p> <p>Relates to 9.6 regarding the perceived difficulty in knowing what Ofsted want, as getting information from them is difficult</p>

<p><i>“C said that since the way of measuring communication has changed then the children's progress reports do not look so good - she also”</i></p> <p><i>“C is uncomfortable about the fact that PSHE seems to have taken a lower level of priority for her children - and for them to make a good level of progress then she has to take into consideration the prime areas plus English and maths and she is very unhappy about this”.</i></p> <p><i>“C is concerned about baseline data for entry to reception coming in, as she thinks this may mean more formal preschool”</i></p>		<p>Relates to 7.2 regarding change in practice being steered by dataveillance and measurement of a 'good level of development'</p>
<p>Coded to 'Suggestions for QA of EY'</p> <p><i>“to ensure quality, government need to invest lots of money and have settings which are fully funded with qualified people”</i></p> <p><i>“also invest in Ofsted inspector training and pay”</i></p> <p><i>“if get a bad grade then school would have HMI in and early years would have local authority - and not in a supportive way (like a ton of bricks) - or head is sacked”</i></p>		<p>Relates to 9.12 detailing recommendation to have more money put into the EY sector and to have highly qualified staff. Also, to training inspectors better</p> <p>Relates to 9.9 as Caroline indicated that practitioners receiving a poor grade are not supported</p>

<p>Coded to 'Docile Body'</p> <p><i>“C hopes to get outstanding in her next inspection and thinks that she will get this. She feels that she has a duty to get outstanding because there are only two nursery schools in her area that have not got outstanding.”</i></p>		<p>Relates to 8.2 where Caroline is detailed as feeling pressure to be Outstanding -possibly being steered via the normative judgement</p> <p>Relates to 9.3 as Caroline would judge herself as Outstanding on the Self Evaluation Form- possibly steering her to focus on what the government wants.</p> <p>Relates to 9.9 regarding the damage that inspection can do, as Caroline thinks she needs to get outstanding and would be ashamed and resign if her setting was graded as Requires Improvement</p>
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After the material analysis was presented in relation to Hierarchical Observation, Normalising Judgement and Examination, I returned to the research aims to establish what the material had revealed in relation to these. For example, analysis presented in relation to Examination revealed the overriding message from participants that some kind of monitoring of EY settings was thought to be necessary to ensure quality. This information then transitioned to addressing Aim 2 of this study 'To explore Early Years practitioners' perceptions of Ofsted inspection, apart from their own experiences.

[5.12 Ensuring quality in this study](#)

While there may be 'no absolute criteria for judging whether a piece of qualitative research is any good' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 278), there are steps that qualitative researchers can, and do, take to ensure that their work is of quality. The whole of this chapter (Chapter 5) has essentially focussed on my presentation of how I ensured that my work was 'any good', but the following looks further into this issue.

Le Voi (2006, p. 181) stated that 'the analyst must take care that the analytical findings are a fair and accurate reflection of the corpus of evidence being scrutinised'. In order to achieve this, I scrutinised the transcripts (which I had already listened to and read thoroughly because of my engagement with the transcription process). I have detailed above about how I initially approached the interview material through three lenses, to ensure, as much as reasonably possible, that I had listened to my participants and represented what they had to say in full. This was a systematic and rigorous process to ensure that I had not simply selected the elements that I wanted to bring to the fore. I later explored the themes that emerged from these three lenses.

It was important that my method measured what it was supposed to measure (Thomas, 2009, p. 106), so I ensured that I adhered closely to the topic in focus (Ofsted inspection) and the theory of Foucault that I was employing. While I also listened more openly to what the participants had to tell me, this was still closely aligned with the topic area, because of the interview guide that I constructed. By sticking closely to the topic and also listening to participants' relevant responses, I could offer a truthful representation of the issue being investigated and offered what Edwards (2010, p. 162) described as 'as sound a representation of the field of study' as the research method allowed.

All of my planning for, and instigating of, the interviews (as detailed within this chapter) was aimed at ensuring that my decisions would lead to my study measuring the intended and defined stipulation, and producing an accurate representation of participants' views on inspection. I asked all participants to 'member check' their transcripts, in order to ensure credibility. This contributed to the results from these interviews accurately representing the voices and experiences of the participants (Roberts-Holmes, 2011).

I recognise that the knowledge produced from my interviews was situated in a particular time and place, related to myself and the participants, and was then reconstructed in the transcription and analysis (Kvale, 2007). It was therefore essential that I provided a detailed description of the study (see above for details of the approach I took to the interviews. For example, see the sample involved and the material analysis strategy) so that the reader can decide if there is a transfer value of the knowledge produced.

Overall, I took an essentially 'pragmatic' approach and aimed for my results to be of value and of use (Kvale, 2007).

5.13 [Summary](#)

The above has outlined the methodology underpinning this thesis. Chapter 6 will look at the literature which was visited during analysis of the interviews.

6 Chapter 6: Additional literature consulted after the interviewing period had commenced

Literature came to light both during the interviewing period and also after the interviews were completed. Reasons for this included

1. The process of analysing the interviews illuminated subjects I had not anticipated when designing the interviews, which meant that I needed to consult new literature.
2. The process of analysing my interviews highlighted that I needed to explore some subjects in greater depth, and re-visit the literature
3. Some relevant literature was published either during or after the interviewing period

The remainder of this chapter considers this literature.

6.1 Further change

6.1.1 Ofsted: Further changes

In Chapter 2, I highlighted the rapid change which had taken place in EY and the associated changes to Ofsted inspection. Such change continued during and after my interviewing period. For example, a new Common Inspection Framework (Ofsted 2015a) came into force which was intended to bring greater consistency amongst inspections, to facilitate easier comparison between settings (Gaunt, 2015). While consistency might be welcomed (as it was by the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) (2017b)), the easier the comparison, the more likely the effects of the normalising judgement (Foucault, 1977). Grenier (2017, p. 49) described the change as 'a radically new approach', as a single framework replaced different frameworks for different ages, so that all settings would be judged on the [same] outcomes (Ofsted 2015a, p. 11). 'Radical' might be too strong a term to use in relation to this change as I would still, to some extent, align

with Jones and Tymms (2014, p. 317) in thinking that the 'essence' of Ofsted inspection has remained 'fairly constant' over time.

Nevertheless, this move seemed to be in alignment with the OECD (2015, p. 49) findings that quality assurance for EY around the world, is progressively in line with quality assurance for primary education. One key commonality now shared between EY settings and schools is that everyone (unless Ofsted has cause to be concerned) receives half a day's notice of inspection (Ofsted 2015a). This contrasts to previous arrangements for many EY settings, whereby inspections were unannounced (and having no notice had been the overriding view of the Education Select Committee (2011, p. 4)). This was of interest because the issue of 'notice' was a significant theme within my interviews.

There were two other changes announced by Ofsted:

- i) Withdrawal of the optional Self Evaluation Form (Gov.UK, 2018).
and
- ii) Cessation of using agency inspectors and commencement of using only inspectors who are employed (and presumably trained) by Ofsted (Croyton, 2016).

Morton (2018) explained that the withdrawal of the self-evaluation form was intended to 'reduce the burden on early years providers'. However, as settings were still required to engage in self-evaluation in relation to how well they are meeting children's learning needs, this seemed to be more of a public relations exercise than anything else. While there is no problem with engaging in self-evaluation, it is the 'inherent tension built into the inspection process, since it is aimed at assuring accountability but also of ensuring development' (Plowright, 2007, p. 375) which may still be of concern, as these two aims may not be compatible. Campbell-Barr (2018, p. 39) noted how 'the formal requirement (for self-evaluation) shifts observation and reflection away from being a part of the epistemological base of early years practice to being a surveillance tool.'

The cessation of using agency inspectors was of greater interest because of the concerns raised in the literature about some EY inspectors detailed in Section 1.3.4 (despite England being amongst a minority of countries who engage in pre-service and on-the-job training for inspectors of EY settings (OECD, 2015, p. 58), indicating that we aim to provide a high quality of inspector). The behaviour of inspectors was raised in my interviews, causing me to explore the literature on this topic in more depth. The importance of inspectors' behaviour had previously been presented as being particularly important to teachers (Dean, 1995; Follows, 2001) and Dean reported that having an 'I am the inspector' approach (consisting of holding a clipboard, not communicating, not sharing a joke) did nothing to put the teacher at their ease, and that some teachers did not appreciate a 'standoffish' approach. Follows (2001, p. 27) thought that this was especially important within the 'trusting and caring environment of an infant school' (which could be even more the case for EY settings). However, it must be said that the NDNA (2010) reported that the inspection process was supportive to EY practitioners, indicating that the inspectors were also supportive.

Foucault (1977, p. 239) wrote about systems of discipline which had operated in prisons, whereby the prisoners were reformed, at least partially, because they loved their warder and that they loved the warder because he was 'gentle and sympathetic'. It seems possible then, that were a respect for, and relationship with, the inspector in existence, EY practitioners might be more likely to want to make their suggested 'improvements'. However Chapman (2002, pp. 264-265) found that a lack of respect for Ofsted inspectors of schools was a 'common theme', and Dean (1995) reported that there were concerns expressed if inspectors did not have expertise in the age of child within the school (this still appeared to be an issue some years later (Education Select Committee, 2011, p.25; BERA and TACTYC, 2014, p. 9)). This contrasted with some teachers' positive reflections about engaging in 'professional dialogue' with HMIs, who were seen as being more supportive (Chapman, 2002, p. 264).

6.1.2 [EY: Further changes](#)

There were also a few key changes in relation to EY policy after I completed my interviews, and these were helpful in my analysis. In April 2017 a further version of the EYFS (DfE, 2017) was introduced. Some particular changes brought about within this most recent version of the EYFS were summarised by PACEY (2017a, p. 1) and included clarification of ‘which elements of the EYFS are requirements (indicated by the word ‘must’) and which are provisions which providers must have regard to (indicated by the word ‘should’)’. In my interviews, the issue of ‘clarity of requirements’ had been raised several times, so this change was of particular interest. A new Childcare Act (2016) had also come into force. Amongst other things, this now entitled many four-year-olds to 30 hours of free provision (double the previous funded provision). This potentially meant that children were likely to be spending longer hours in EY settings, making what happened in those setting ever-more important, and raising the relevance of my thesis.

6.1.3 [Post-panopticism?](#)

In Chapter 3 I explored the concept of panopticism. It has now been argued by Courtney (2016, pp. 625-626) that rapid changes in succession to the inspection framework (he was referring to schools, but a similar argument can be applied to EY) represented a change from panoptic control of settings, to post-panoptic control. His argument behind this was that teachers are now so unsure of what is required of them, that they could not possibly be controlled via their efforts at attempting to meet such requirements.

...the ‘norms’ it imposes masquerade as such, but are purposively in flux, transient and fuzzy. Consequently they are not norms at all, (Courtney, 2016, p. 629)

Courtney (2016, p. 629) thought that the government had established a deliberate strategy, which would ‘expose subjects’ inevitable failure to comply’. However, this raises the question as to why the government would take such an approach, as it seems to be counter-productive to getting

schools/ settings to do what they want. Nevertheless, the rapid change detailed in Sections 6.1, 6.2 and in Chapter 2 would reinforce the constant state of 'flux' that Courtney had observed, and would also link to the confusion as to what was required of childminders at inspection which had been reported by the NCMA (2010) (Section 4.2).

6.2 [Quality assurance in Early Years: International update](#)

In Chapter 2, I considered the varied approaches countries took to quality assurance in EY. Slaughter and Carmichael's (2016, pp. 1-15) more recent overview of a host of QA approaches taken around the world (e.g. The Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale' and 'The Observational Record of the Caregiving Environment') added to this literature, and served to further highlight that the various approaches had their own lenses, which reflected different thinking about the purpose of EY. Slaughter and Carmichael (2016, pp. 1-15) helped to confirm that there are different ways to understand what quality is and different ways to approach quality assurance, other than that adopted by the English government, and confirmed that it is not a 'given' that the approach taken in England is the best.

Also, in 2015, the OECD outlined the 'current state of play and trends in ECEC monitoring systems'. This report provided an important update as to what was happening in OECD countries and, most interestingly, found that monitoring was 'on the rise across countries, to ensure accountability of investment in ECEC' and to 'satisfy an interest in quality enhancement'. The OECD (2015, p. 49) confirmed that by now all, bar one, participating country, had external inspection arrangements. However, not all of these arrangements were the same, with variations as to who carried out inspections, who was inspected, and the regularity of inspections. For example, Finland was listed as having inspections, but only if a complaint had been made.

The OECD (2015, p. 203) found that there were challenges to the monitoring of quality in EY, including the difficulties involved in 'defining quality, establishing a coherent monitoring system and ensuring that monitoring

contributes towards quality reform and quality improvements'. Overall though, the OECD (2015) provided more concrete evidence that inspection is now a current feature of EY on an international scale and that monitoring is claimed to be engaged in for the purpose of providing accountability and improving quality. A few of the key messages to take forward from the OECD (2015) were to ensure stakeholders understood what quality is, to have a coherent monitoring framework, and to include the voices and views of different stakeholders.

6.2.1 Does the approach to quality assurance seem to impact on the quality achieved?

Prior to my interviews, I had not thought about whether or not 'quality' in English settings was considered to be of a high standard, so that I might have some indication regarding the efficacy of our approach to quality assurance. The Economist Intelligence Unit (2012), who looked at quality in EY on an international scale, found that England was ranked fourth of 45 countries for quality (after three Nordic countries), which would indicate that overall our EY settings offer quality provision and that our systems for quality assurance are working. However Finland, Sweden, and Norway topped this league table because of 'their long term commitment to prioritising and investing in the early years' (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012, p. 6), which may not be so much the case for EY in England. Also, it is interesting to note that in Finland, an inspection would only be scheduled in response to a complaint (OECD, 2015). Thus, indicating that inspection is not a regular occurrence in Finland, and that inspection may be viewed there as not being of particular importance in ensuring quality in settings.

6.3 Surveillance and 'dataveillance'

6.3.1 Dataveillance

The issue of 'data' related to children, was raised in some of my interviews and this necessitated that I search for literature on this topic. Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 121) published a particularly relevant article, which propounded the view that 'data production was part of an elaborate performance for Ofsted'. The notion of 'performance' had been raised by others who had looked at inspection in schools (Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Chapman, 2002; Perryman, 2007). However, Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 121) also went further to say that 'there was now a need to engage in that performance throughout the year, not just when Ofsted arrive'. The consequence of this is that 'data production and analysis spreads in terms of time as well as in its reach' (Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016, p. 121).

Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 123) also noted how data was not only being monitored by Ofsted, but also by the local authority. A representative from the local authority (one of the participants in the study by Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury) reported that the data from settings was analysed and fed back to the schools so they could all see it, and that it was used to 'compare and rank, locally and nationally with the intention of 'naming and shaming'' (2016, p. 123). This echoed the mechanism of panopticism put forward by Foucault (1977), especially in relation to the normalising judgement.

A deputy manager of a children's centre (in the study by Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 123)) talked of how she had to record progress for children from when they were two years old, up until the end of Reception. This can reflect an 'indefinite discipline, an interrogation without end' (Foucault, 1977, p. 227). Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 121) also reported that their participants were 'overwhelmed by datafication', and noted that a Reception teacher and a deputy-head-teacher of a primary school felt they were concerned about data, in the context of various regulations.

Relating to the use of data to 'discipline' others, Hope (2013, p. 43) drew on Clarke's term 'dataveillance' (1992) when discussing surveillance of pupils in schools. Hope (2013, p. 43) argued that databases 'often linked to other disciplinary devices and practices' and put forward an example from McCahill and Finn (2010, pp. 283-284), who described how computerised records of children's attendance at school would instigate an automatic text message to the children's parents, if the children were absent from school. This was a potentially undesirable outcome for the children who were being monitored, which was associated with the monitoring database. Similarly, in relation to EY settings, scrutiny of data by Ofsted could lead to potentially unwanted attention from both Ofsted and other interested parties. Courtney (2016) and Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) both discussed the consequences of data monitoring by Ofsted. For example, Courtney (2016, p. 9) observed that schools graded as Outstanding would have their data explored by Ofsted and 'declining standards... would prompt re-inspection'. Also, Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 125) highlighted a deputy-head-teacher reporting that if their data did not portray a positive picture of the school, Ofsted would 'drill down into everything' when they visited.

Courtney (2016, p. 631) referred to a head-teacher who thought that there was nowhere to hide in relation to Ofsted and data scrutiny. This thought was echoed by Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 230), who stated that 'processes of governance through data increasingly applies to the early years sector'. While not all EY settings produce the same amount of data, other paperwork can still leave a trail to be monitored. The Common Inspection Framework now stipulates that settings should 'provide evidence that will enable the inspector to report honestly, fairly and reliably about their provision' (Ofsted 2015a, p. 9). Records of planning and records of children's progression and learning, all of which combine together in the Observation, Assessment and Planning cycle (Giardiello, McNulty and Anderson, 2013) and are located at the heart of EY practice, might be examples of such evidence. Such documents allow for surveillance, even if some settings are not providing copious amounts of 'data'.

In relation to surveillance within schools, Hope (2013, p. 43) noted that it is not just how pupils and staff are monitored that is key to a Foucauldian study of surveillance, but 'how such processes then encourage individuals [teachers] to reflect upon and monitor their own behaviour'. In other words, it is key to explore the impact of data monitoring. Both Ball (2003, p. 220) and Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 119) commented on damage to pedagogical practice which can be caused by the need to ensure data is as required (also indicated by Clapham (2015)). Furthermore Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016: 119) argued that 'the current obsession with performance data and its stretch down the age range has the potential to undermine the foundations for children's personal development and learning' and to damage to appropriate pedagogical strategies. For example, they (Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016:124) quoted a Reception teacher (assumed leader of the Foundation phase) who reported 'pushing information on to three-year-olds' and worrying if a child 'doesn't recognise a number or a letter, despite knowing that the child is 'three and not yet ready for it'.

Concerns about Ofsted's (2017) inappropriate views on practice for children in Reception have been strongly voiced (TACTYC, 2017; Early Education, 2018), and would support the concerns expressed by Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 119). Another consequence highlighted by Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 119) was the neglect of some children in order to focus on others who were close to gaining a higher level of achievement. In relation to this, they clearly questioned whether 'the increasing control of early years education through performance data is genuinely a means for school improvement' as it is sold to be.

In recent years, baseline assessments have been trialled in some Reception classes. Some EY commentators were concerned about baseline assessment (BERA/TACTYC, 2014; Early Education, no date) fearing that adopting a national policy for formally assessing pupil achievement in certain academic areas on entry to Reception, could place inappropriate focus on academic areas in pre-school EY settings. While baseline assessment had been postponed (DfE, 2016), schools were still being encouraged to use it by the government (Clark, 2016; Gaunt, 2016) and more recently baseline

testing has been confirmed to commence in 2020 (Standards and Testing Agency, 2018).

[6.3.1.1 Dataveillance versus following the child's lead](#)

Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 119) questioned the purpose of EY inspection, suggesting that rather than improving quality, inspection serves the purpose of reducing it. This is quite possible, as many believe that EY practice should be based on following the child's lead (e.g. Carr, 2001), in order to build positive learning dispositions within the child. In order to take such an approach, practitioners and children need to decide and define what happens in their setting. Pressures on settings to achieve (potentially inappropriate) targets for children (caused by 'dataveillance') may threaten such practice.

There is an acronym 'WYMIWYG', standing for 'what you measure is what you get'. In an earlier study (Ward, 2008) which explored formative assessment practice in a playgroup, I found this to be absolutely the case. When I measured children's progress in terms of a set of subject-based criteria (e.g. physical development or maths), then these were the subjects that I found myself focussing on in terms of supporting children's development in my setting. In contrast, when I measured children's progress in terms of learning dispositions, I focussed my provision on supporting the development of children's learning dispositions. So, it might be asked whether it is 'dataveillance' per se which should be the concern, or whether the concern should really be focused on the areas that the 'dataveillance' is measuring.

[6.3.2 Surveillance: acceptance and resistance](#)

In Chapter 2, I explored resistance to surveillance, and in Chapter 4 I looked at performance/fabrication. Later literature helped me to further consider both resistance to, and acceptance of surveillance. Hope (2015, p. 852)

wrote about schoolchildren becoming 'surveillance tolerant', as they have generally grown-up 'with invasive monitoring technologies as the norm'. Furthermore, others (Clarke, 2012; Clapham, 2015; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016) indicated that there were teachers/practitioners who had also accepted the surveillance to which they were subject. While this may not be the same as 'blindly accepting' 'dominant discourses' or 'ways of knowing' and the 'truths' that they produce (Jones, Marshall and Denison, 2016, drawing on Foucault 1978), it may indicate that there is no way to resist such surveillance. Certainly Clapham (2015, p. 265) indicated that the threat of 'Local Area Underperformance Inspections' of schools (unusually being no-notice inspections) related to a teacher being, predominantly, a 'docile body'. While Clapham only observed three lessons conducted by one teacher, this work still illustrated his point very well. Clapham (2015), Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) and Clarke (2012) all found that, for the most part, what Ofsted required to be happening, was happening in classrooms, and that in one way or another 'inspection is always going on' (Clapham, 2015, p. 274).

Nevertheless, Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 123) contrasted one head-teacher of a nursery school/children's centre who was resigned to the collection of data, with the views of another teacher who fought against datafication in order to protect EY pedagogy. Strong resistance was also noted by Bradbury (2013, p. 123), who specifically reported that some teachers manipulated their data within the EYFS profiles that they sent to their local authority. This form of resistance could be perceived as being similar to that observed by Ball (2003, p. 224), who noted that in relation to performativity, 'truthfulness is not the point' but rather that a part truth is put across in terms of what those who regulate performance will understand.

[6.4 The impact of Ofsted inspection on settings](#)

While Elfer (2015) reinforced an earlier stated view from a selection of EY organisations (Section 2.1.5), that quality was generally higher in settings

because of the presence of Ofsted inspection (and this concurred with the views of some about school inspection (Husbands, 2014; Lee, 2016)), Grenier (2017, p. 3) highlighted the potentially negative impact that Ofsted inspections can have on a setting, stating that ‘many parents who pay for childcare will look first at the Ofsted website, and may rule out anywhere that does not have a positive report’. Grenier (2017, p. 3) also noted that ‘it will be much harder to recruit good staff if you have been judged as a setting which ‘Requires Improvement’ or as ‘Inadequate’, which may well have a negative impact on quality.

Grenier (2017) was commenting on the potential impact of inspection reports on those considering a setting in relation to sending their children to it or those seeking employment in it. In contrast Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 122) considered the effect of inspection on those working within a setting, and reported that the aim of ‘datafication’ (related to Ofsted inspection) was to ensure that ‘no-one can be content but instead has to be constantly self-reforming, self-improving and showing progress’. While this could be construed as a good thing, it was not portrayed positively by Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016), who implied that this had a negative impact on practitioners’ well-being. Tucker (2015) went one step further to discuss teacher suicide in connection with inspection and the related report. Before analysing my material, I had reviewed the well-being of practitioners (Section 4.6.1), and correspondingly the reports from Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) and Tucker (2015) further expanded my understanding of this issue.

[6.4.1 Professionalism, inspection and quality](#)

In Chapter 2, I began to consider professionalism and the EY workforce. More recently, Harwood and Tukonic (2016, p. 589) found that EY practitioners ‘held a strong self-perception of professionalism regardless of their level of education’. As discussed in Chapter 2, exactly what constitutes being a professional, is open to debate, as is the meaning of professionalism within an EY context. However, it is often identified that one feature of being

a professional is the ability to be autonomous (Brock, 2006, p. 2), and the term 'professional autonomy' is a familiar one.

Through comparison of Finnish and Canadian teachers, Orłowski (2016) concluded that better results were achieved for children in Finland because of higher professionalism (read autonomy within this) in, and lower performance evaluation of, teachers. As all teachers in Finland possess master's degrees in Pedagogy and Curriculum (Sahlberg, 2015), Orłowski (2016, p. 22) implied that higher training of teachers is the way forward to higher achievement for children, rather than via evaluation of pedagogical approaches (such as through external inspection regimes). These assertions from Orłowski about secondary schools can be considered in conjunction with earlier commentary from Penn (2011, p. 102), that devolution of responsibility runs alongside a commitment to the professionalism of those delivering the services, as moves towards greater professionalism could reduce the need for inspection.

'Although Ofsted asserts that it wants to see better informed professional judgement, there is considerable anxiety about producing what Ofsted expects to see' (Elfer, 2015, p. 292). From this, Elfer implied that practitioners' ability to act as professionals was lost at the expense of producing results.

6.5 'Beyond Quality', professionalism and Foucault

In 3.1.1.4, I touched upon other related Foucauldian concepts which were less central to the theoretical framework of this thesis, but were connected. Some of these needed to be explored further in relation to the notion of moving 'beyond quality' in EY (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013) (quality here being interpreted as 'prescriptive technology that supposedly holds the secret to 'smart investment' and 'massive returns' (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013, p. viii)), which advocated that the EY sector needed to question the use of 'quality' and instead seek out 'an other (sic) narrative' (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013, p. viii). Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) noted that

others (such as MacNaughton, 2005) had employed Foucault to facilitate this 'moving beyond' and also the consideration of early childhood education and care being viewed in a more post-modern way, in which resistance, where needed, to dominant discourses of 'quality' can be commended.

To add support to why there is a need to move 'beyond quality', Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013, p. 31) applied Foucault's thoughts about disciplinary power detailing how others are coerced into certain behaviours, not in a 'straightforward sense', but 'through the constraint of a conformity which must be achieved'. They used Foucault to highlight how people are guided 'towards a desired end, preferably without their awareness of what is happening'. An example of how this might occur centres around the notions of 'knowledge, truth and discourse', as 'discourses are strongly implicated with the constitution of truth' (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013, p. 32), or knowledge. To exemplify this within an EY context, Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013, p.33) highlighted how 'knowledge' of child development is used to 'shape our understandings of what is possible and what is desirable' in EY settings. Others have also drawn on Foucault and observed 'the power exercised by discursive regimes' (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013, p. 33) in EY. For example, Cannella (2000, p.36) (*N.B. this source predates Ofsted inspection of EY settings*) noted how 'a discourse of education has emerged that legitimizes the belief that science has revealed what younger human beings are like, what we can expect from them at various ages, and how we should differentiate our treatment of them in educational settings'. Also, Leese (2011, pp. 160-161) observed how dominant discourses in relation to families 'dissipate down through (EY) practice guidelines and are embedded within professional training'.

What we accept to be true and what we accept as the mechanisms of how truth is established will periodically change, but only if people question the current way of thinking about these things. This can be a difficult process because discourse about truth and the establishment of truth can be subtle and hard to grasp hold of, before beginning the process of problematising. Nevertheless, Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013, pp. 128-151) put forward Loris Malaguzzi and the EY practice in Reggio Emilia as a fine example of

where those involved in Early Childhood had been brave enough and creative enough to question accepted norms. The 'knock-on' effects of this creativity have been significant in EY (implicit within Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013, pp. 128-151).

Essentially what Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) strived to emphasise is that there are different perspectives on what should happen within EY, and that differing perspectives should be considered. An example of varying viewpoints was highlighted by Mathers, Singler, and Karemaker (2012, pp. 33-34) who found that there were differing opinions amongst stakeholders (parents, practitioners and local authority staff) as to what is important in EY. For example,

Parents generally did not view early years provision as being about 'education', which they equated with school and rigid routines. Other stakeholders were more comfortable viewing and describing provision as being about early years education as well as care. (Mathers, Singler and Karemaker, 2012, p34)

Differing perspectives were also put forward by case study EY practitioners in Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016, pp. 89-104), when asked about their understanding of EY 'quality'. One practitioner (at that moment in time) elected to focus on a view of children as being competent and capable, another chose to focus on staff qualifications and experience.

There are well-thought-out arguments put forward that being a leader/professional in EY would incorporate taking account of stakeholder views and applying them to the context of their setting, for the benefit of the children in their care. Campbell Barr and Leeson (2016, p.128) advocated that

... a post-structuralist approach enables leaders and practitioners to examine and thereby deconstruct their understandings of what constitutes a quality environment for young children and their families and begin to reconstruct a new understanding that has legitimacy for their work in the community. (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016, p.128)

This empowering view extends to being more open to 'bottom up' accountabilities (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016, pp. 66-70) (e.g. to children and parents) and enabling practice to be more co-constructed by practitioners and the community they serve. Such an approach acknowledges that 'there is more than one way to see the world' (Moss, 2016, p. 13), and allows 'an inspection process, such as Ofsted... to be seen as pertaining to just one form of quality' (Campbell-Barr, 2018, p. 42).

Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016, p. 2) note that consideration of post-structuralist perspectives can allow practitioners to 'breakdown the structures that objectify' them and enable understanding that there is no 'one definition of quality'. This viewpoint can contribute towards greater interplay between professionalism and quality, as part of being a professional can involve considering, within one's own context, what quality is, rather than exclusively being guided by definitions of quality determined by organisations such as Ofsted. In addition, EY practitioners and leaders can engage in self-surveillance of their practice as professionals, in order to ensure quality in their settings.

While Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016, p. 93) were clear that it is 'not possible to escape from the panoptic gaze', and recognised 'that meeting external registration requirements... is an important feature of working in the early years' (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016, p. 92), they also drew on EY practitioner case studies to indicate that it is possible for EY practitioners to meet Ofsted requirements, whilst simultaneously maintaining their own understanding of what quality is for their particular context. In particular, one of their case study practitioners shared that it was necessary to ensure 'your vision is underpinned by the expectations set out in the national Ofsted inspection framework' (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016, pp. 90-91), indicating that 'in some instances the ideas of policy can relate to the principles of early years leaders' (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016, p 103). Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016, p. 123) also noted that many reflections from their case study EY practitioners demonstrated that they were not exclusively upholding 'the modernist approach to quality that favours an approach of managing children as a project to get right'. Campbell-Barr and

Leeson (2016, p. 93) also advocated that there is the possibility for EY leaders to look for 'cracks and contradictions' in the national quality framework, which then enables 'an interpretation of quality criteria, rather than a dictation'. This resonated with the views of Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p117), that some practitioners were only accepting interpretations of the EY regulations in Australia, if such interpretation was perceived to be in the children's interests.

The further reading undertaken for this this section particularly heightened my awareness that there is a wide application of Foucault in EY literature.

6.6 [Well-being and Foucault/surveillance](#)

After my interviews were completed, a study was published relating to surveillance and well-being. Jones, Marshall and Denison (2016) used Foucault to explore the effects of professional rugby league players wearing GPS (global navigation satellite) tracking devices, so that their training habits could be monitored and potentially examined. While they appreciated that many recognised the advantages of using such devices, Jones, Marshall and Denison (2016, p. 44) were clearly concerned that this panoptic surveillance led to players blaming themselves for 'failing to adhere to expected norms' and 'wrestling with the powerful emotions of guilt and shame' which were identified as being symptoms of 'undesirable mental health' (p. 45).

Also, Dryburgh and Fortin (2010, p. 95) found that, in relation to ballet dancers...

...positive surveillance is beneficial for a dancer's psychological health; it assists in motivating, guiding and giving them structure throughout their dance career. In contrast, negative surveillance, based on judgement, criticism and the impossible attainment of an ideal body, has a detrimental impact on a dancer's health.

This raised the question as to whether surveillance 'per se' is a concern, or whether it is the way surveillance is put into action, or what is surveyed. Dryburgh and Fortin (2010) found that while there were mostly reports of

negative surveillance (and this was a concern), there were also a few reports of higher motivation through positive surveillance from the dancers. These included the spurring on to achievement as a result of having to 'maintain a certain standard' (p. 99), which indicated that achieving highly benefited their mental health. The dancers also mentioned the importance to themselves of being seen and appreciated and 'the joy of being on stage' (p. 99) (demonstrating that being in the limelight, could not always be construed as a negative thing).

EY practitioners observe children (or put them in the limelight) and this is often considered to constitute the core of what happens in good EY practice (Carr, 2001; Brodie, 2013). A prior study I undertook (Ward, 2008) looked at the use of observations that facilitate children's development. The children I worked with seemed to enjoy being observed and being partners with me in deciding 'what next?' for their learning. When someone has a say in their next steps of development, their motivation to work towards it should become higher (Deci and Ryan, 2016). Dryburgh and Fortin (2010) also commented on the possibilities of surveillance encompassing the dancer's voice in terms of establishing criteria to pursue, although they indicated that none of the dancers had experienced such practice.

Both Dryburgh and Fortin (2010) and Jones, Marshall and Denison (2016) indicated that there were concerns concerning surveillance practices occurring in football and ballet which impacted negatively on well-being, and Foucauldian theory had helped towards highlighting these issues. They also both made at least some mention of the productive possibilities of surveillance: 'Power produces' (Foucault, 1977, p. 194).

[6.7 Emotional well-being and EY quality](#)

To add to the literature considered in Sections 4.6.1.5 and 4.6.1.6, which related to the importance of practitioner well-being, especially regarding the potential impact on provision for children if practitioner well-being is negatively affected, Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016, p.76) focussed

specifically on EY leaders and noted that their seeking out support should not be regarded as 'an indulgence'. Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016, p. 76) were insightful in stressing that EY leaders are 'especially vulnerable to burnout or disengagement, as there is little opportunity for them to gain support for their role', which is of an appropriate nature. They noted that EY leaders may not have received leadership training and, in addition, could be reluctant to confide in other local EY leaders, as they are 'technically business rivals' (Campbell-Barr and Leeson 2016, p. 76). Also, 'because leadership of the setting is a major component of the Ofsted inspection' (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016, p. 72), pressures of inspection may be felt especially by EY leaders.

Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016, pp. 124-125), while enthusing about the value of reflective practice to facilitate appropriate EY provision (a process which is required by Ofsted), also passed on a caution from one of their case study practitioners, that reflective practice can lead to a practitioner being overly self-critical. Therefore, they recommended that 'any reflective process should be carefully supported by good knowledge of the self and the culture within the setting, or by an effective supervision/appraisal framework in the workplace' (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016, p. 125). Such action would be likely to contribute to avoiding high levels of staff sickness and turnover (Manning-Morton, 2013, p. 154) from practitioners who are in the business of constantly giving, and also contribute to further staffing stability in EY, impacting positively on quality (Loeb *et al.*, 2004, p. 59).

6.8 [Summary](#)

Consideration of literature which came to publication (or to my attention) after my interviews had commenced, enabled a more informed view to be established about a variety of topics which I had begun to explore in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 (including professionalism, surveillance, quality, quality assurance and well-being). It also built on my awareness of the use of Foucault in EY literature. New conditions within which EY settings now

operated, including the Common Inspection Framework (Ofsted 2015a), the withdrawal of self-evaluation form (Gov.UK, 2018), the cessation of agency inspectors (Croyton, 2016), a revised EYFS (DfE, 2017), and increased EY funded hours (DfE, 2016), further emphasised the continued constant change in relation to EY which could be construed by some as contributing towards a post-panoptic situation (Courtney, 2016).

The literature considered in this chapter built upon the literature reviewed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Both were combined when analysing my interviews. Details of my analysis are provided in Chapters 7, 8 and 9.

Introduction to Chapters 7, 8 and 9, and meeting the participants

An explanation of why my interview analysis has been split into three chapters (Chapters 7, 8 and 9) has been offered in Section 5.11. In the following chapters quotations from participants have been presented in speech bubbles and each participant has been assigned a specific colour to assist with distinguishing between them (although, because some colours are similar, pseudonyms are also provided within each speech bubble).

Table 4 Information about participants

Pseudonym	Colour	Position	Type of setting
Andrea		Classroom assistant/volunteer	Primary school
Belinda		Childminder	Childminder's house
Caroline		Head-teacher	Early Years setting and maintained nursery school
Dianna		Manager/Early Years Professional	Private Nursery
Eleanor		Early Years practitioner	Private nursery
Fiona		Owner	Private nursery
Gina		Manager	Private nursery
Heidi		Manager	2 playgroups
Imogen		Manager	Workplace nursery
Jane		Early Years practitioner	Workplace nursery
Karen		Manager/Early Years Professional	Private nursery
Leanne		Manager	Children's centre
Martha		Outreach Coordinator	Children's centre

7 Chapter 7: Interview Analysis: Hierarchical observation

While findings related to the participants' perceptions of being observed during inspection have been left mostly until Chapter 9, the following section focuses chiefly on how observed participants indicated they felt when an inspector was not present, and what implications might be attached to this.

7.1 Who observes and when they observe

The settings I visited were often not purpose-built for EY and while the use of CCTV was a possibility (Hope, 2009; Corbett, 2014), it had not been installed by Ofsted. Therefore both the architecture and the digital technology did not seem to be deliberately structured for observation and Ofsted was not using these means 'to know them' (the practitioners) and 'to alter them' (Foucault, 1977, p. 172) through 'a perfect eye that nothing could escape', 'the perfect disciplinary apparatus' (Foucault, 1977, p. 173). However, in many of the settings, a hierarchical network (Hoffman, 2014, p. 31) of people existed, which could support the on-going observation of practitioners. Leanne mentioned the system of 'supervision' (DfE, 2014, p. 20) required in EY settings, which could facilitate hierarchical observation. There was also a non-hierarchical network (Foucault, 1977, pp. 176-177) of potential observers mentioned in the interviews, including parents and visitors to the settings.

One participant (Martha) referred on several occasions to having an open-door policy, whereby other professionals and parents were welcomed into the setting as a norm.

Martha: ...because we let people in all the time...
I've still got an open door policy if it's a professional
.... parents can see their files....

The fairly 'open door' policy that Martha referred to, is often to be seen within EY settings, for example with parents assisting with the running of the setting

(see for example, Scallywags Playgroup, 2016). Karen also mentioned other professionals who may have visited the setting (for example, the speech and language therapist). People who do not work at an EY setting are able to make a complaint to Ofsted if they think it is necessary, and such complaints can trigger an inspection. Although Dianna was not drawing on her own experience of a complaint-led inspection, she was acutely aware that such a thing could happen.

Dianna: You're always feeling that they're the big brother sitting on your shoulder. Um, and you're always worried that a parent is going to make a complaint or something like that and that they'll come down on you like a ton of bricks.

The participants who mentioned 'complaint-led inspection' did not express any disagreement with the fact that parents, staff, or anyone else had the opportunity to make a complaint. Indeed, Karen said:

Karen: I think it's good that if they've got a complaint to make, they can do that

Most participants were familiar with the EYFS which stipulates the governments' requirements of EY settings. Although promotion of the EYFS to parents was not mentioned in interviews, I saw that the EYFS was displayed around some settings I visited for the purpose of interviews. In this way it can be seen that parents may have also been aware (to some extent) of the requirements, enabling both parents and staff to be in informed positions, from which to report back to Ofsted. Two participants (Eleanor and Fiona, from the same setting) shared their memories of a complaint that had been made by a former staff member, which triggered an inspection.

Fiona: The second, and most recent inspection was unexpected as it was a complaint-driven inspection. The complaint had been made by an ex-employee who had left about a week before the 'surprise inspection' took place

Eleanor: ...she worked in the toddler room and didn't agree with (.) most of the things in there:: and then she walked out and didn't come back (.2). and made a complaint to Ofsted ...

Eleanor also talked about staff complaining to Ofsted in another setting where she had worked previously.

Eleanor: erm: (.2) we had, we had a few times when they'd come out, but, because back then, they didn't have to do an inspection for a complaint, they could just come and talk about the complaint .hhhh and like address the complaint by itself, so it probably wasn't, it could have been more than 3::, I can't really remember .hh but like (.3) quite a lot of them were staff:::: [staff-instigated complaints] (.4) erm::::

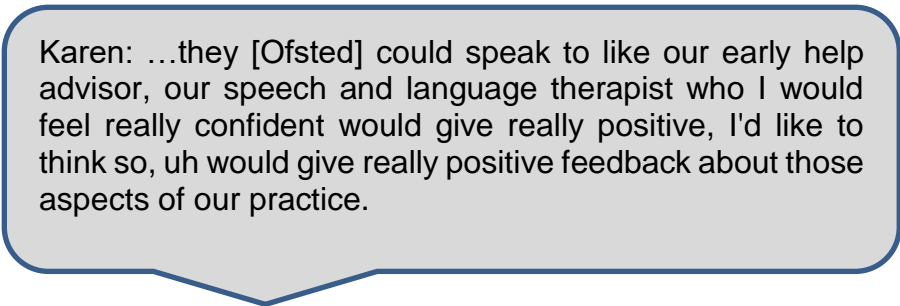
My reason for displaying what some participants said about complaints against them, is to show an explicit awareness demonstrated amongst the participants, that everybody who is associated with the setting is a potential observer for Ofsted and that observation was not purely hierarchical in these settings. Several participants (for example, Karen, Dianna, Eleanor, Imogen and Jane) recalled how, during the inspection, the Ofsted inspector had spoken to employees who were non-leaders, parents and children about practice on days apart from inspection. This provided another opportunity for

Ofsted to tap into potential observers who could be present when the inspector was not.

Hoffman made an astute point (2014, p. 31) when he referred to Foucault (1977, p. 177) to show that the vigilant and multi-directional gazes might make disciplinary power seem 'ubiquitous', but the 'sheer simplicity of its mechanism also makes it seem rather inconspicuous'. This could explain why not all participants mentioned (even in 'roundabout' terms) their observation by people other than those in formal hierarchical positions of authority.

Some participants suggested a feeling of 'visibility' (Foucault, 1977, pp. 170-177) even away from inspection. Karen mentioned that going to work in her setting was like being in a 'goldfish bowl' every day. However, this related to the fact that an inspector could come in, rather than being about others who might be observing her setting.

Karen was in favour of Ofsted inspectors being able to talk with other professionals who could report on the setting and the conduct of those within it. She also thought that the inspection did not allow for this opportunity, when it should.



Karen: ...they [Ofsted] could speak to like our early help advisor, our speech and language therapist who I would feel really confident would give really positive, I'd like to think so, uh would give really positive feedback about those aspects of our practice.

Karen and I talked about the assessment visit conducted to gain the former 'Early Years Professional Status' (Colloby, 2009) that she and I had both experienced, whereby, other people could provide evidence for the assessor about practice which took place on days other than the assessment visit. Karen actively wanted Ofsted to gather knowledge about her setting from a wider variety of sources, so that they could see the good work that was taking place away from inspection.

7.2 Hierarchical Observation (other than people directly observing the setting)

7.2.1 Obtaining and presenting data

Within the context of my research, the term 'data' refers to the material that EY settings gather in relation to the children/families who attend. While the data which EY settings gather and present varies, it might, for example, include details of the progress that children had made in relation to their mathematical development.

Caroline, Leanne and Martha were the only participants who talked with me about the 'data' that they were required to produce for their local authority and which would be considered by Ofsted. These practitioners were working in a maintained nursery school (Caroline) and a children's centre (Leanne and Martha). The requirement for data production for their local authority was different for these settings than it was for the other settings in my study, this was with the exception of Andrea who worked in a community primary school. Andrea may not have been so aware of the data requirements of her setting, because of the position that she held while she was still training (as she was a part volunteer/part classroom assistant).

The requirement to produce data for the local authority (which Ofsted would have considered), could be seen as a method of hierarchical observation. Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 121) noted that whereas previously the 'performance' (Case, Case and Catling, 2000, p. 615; Perryman, 2007) for Ofsted happened at the point of inspection, 'there was now a need to engage in that performance throughout the year, not just when Ofsted arrive' (the broad theme of this was also supported by Clapham (2015)). Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 123) also noted how data was not only being monitored by Ofsted when they visited, but also by the local authority. The representative from the local authority, in the study that they undertook, reported that the data from settings was analysed and fed back to the schools so they could all see it, and that it was used to 'compare and rank, locally and nationally with the intention of 'naming and shaming'' (Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016, p. 123).

My interviews revealed that the local authority can also play a part in providing data for Ofsted. However, Leanne told me that during her inspection, she could not get eighty per cent of the data relating to her setting from her local authority.

Leanne: so we had a big gap and county promised that they was going to provide this data (.) and they didn't.

Caroline, Leanne, and Martha were, to some extent, preoccupied with data in parts of our discussion about inspection (I did not initiate any conversations about this topic). Much of what they told me could be easily aligned with the findings of Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016). For example both Martha, and a deputy manager of a children's centre in the study by Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 123) spoke of how they had to record progress for children from when they were two years old, up until the end of Reception. This can reflect an 'indefinite discipline, an interrogation without end' (Foucault; 1977, p. 227)

When I asked Caroline (as she ran both a maintained nursery school and a preschool) about the main difference between her EY inspection and the school inspection, a key thing that she mentioned was 'data'.

Caroline: Um? Well the nursery inspection is obviously two days, it's a different framework. It's much - it is much more challenging about data, about the progress of children, um::: (.3), about the quality of teaching. (.2) And the impact that has on achievement. The early years one is::, and I hope rightly so::, is about the care of the children, and their education, but it was very much about the care of the children (.2) So we weren't asked for any data...it was far less about what--about data...

I wondered why it was deemed more important by some local authorities to collect data from one type of setting than another, and if the focus is more on care in non-maintained settings (as Caroline perceived), why this should be the case. Possibly, it was because maintained nursery schools and children's centres catered for more vulnerable children, although by the time they get to Reception, data about all children is collected, making this explanation more tenuous. Caroline offered some more practical explanation about why the local authority might not ask for data in her other non-maintained pre-school...

Caroline: Um::, data analysis and that sort of thing I do have to take a step back (.) because the patterns of attendance in pre-school are different every day. Because some of the children are only two years old they might only come twice a week.

This can be contrasted to her nursery school, as described by Caroline below.

Caroline: But on the whole they all started September so we collect data in September, we collect data in December, in March. We've just finished it last week in June:: So you can-- you can match progress really carefully throughout the year. I can compare this year's data to last years. But in pre-school some might only attend twice a week, some might attend eight times a week and the age range. There can be two years one day up to nearly four.

Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 121) described what they were told by their participants about how they felt about data, i.e. that they were 'overwhelmed by datafication', and reported that some felt they were constantly having to be concerned with it. The participant of mine who spoke the most about data was, interestingly, the only non-leader of the three who mentioned data. While Martha spoke about data the most, she (less

surprisingly) seemed to be the least concerned about Ofsted's interest in data, as she said that she would not alter her practice in order to influence the data if she did not think that this was the correct thing to do. In contrast to Martha's views on data, Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 123) reported that a head teacher of a nursery school/children's centre was resigned to the data collection, rather than meeting it with resistance. There also did not seem to be any resistance shown from the two leaders in my study who were subject to data collection. Caroline, however, expressed awareness of how data could, and was, having an impact on her practice.

Caroline: Um:: Well::::? (.2) Obviously there's now seven areas of learning and not six and obviously they broke up speaking, listening and um reading and writing:: Um::, it's the government's crafty way of um:: (.3) making reading and writing the most important areas of the curriculum.

MW: So it has had an impact?

C: Ah reading, writing, maths.

MW: Yeah.

C: I think so.

MW: Yeah.

C: I think so because our (.3) if I'd have looked before our overall communication scores:::: now that it's been split I'd say they're not as good.

MW: Okay and does that impact on what you do in your practice as a setting at all?

C: Well::? (.) Yeah I think it does a little bit. We because all of our children are leaving nursery and going to reception .hh we have, without being formal, we do do all our teachings you know through I hope play and--and delightful experiences. But we have been focusing on school readiness...

Caroline cont...

...C: Yeah and in the role play area we've got school set up and um .hhhh so::: but I think we do-- and we've been you know, we've got sets of books so each child is holding the same books. And we're not going to try and do formal guided reading, but we are getting used to sharing a book, sitting in a group. And they're lovely books so the children really enjoy it.

This connects with the adage 'what you measure is what you get'. While Caroline did not convey that she was unhappy with her practice, she was clearly aware that surveillance was impacting on the activities in her setting.

It can be noted that Martha and Leanne, although preoccupied with data, were a little more laid back about it than Caroline. This was potentially a result of norms of grades in Caroline's locality for nursery schools, as only a few were not graded as outstanding (Section 8.1). Also, Martha and Leanne had little data to present (both because the LA could not provide it and also because they had only been operating for a limited time) and therefore they could have accepted the situation as not being their fault. All three, however, were in situations whereby the 'dataveillance' (Clarke, 1992) they experienced was connected with 'other disciplinary devices and practices' (Hope, 2013, p. 43). Dataveillance could possibly lead to less favourable Ofsted results and potentially unwanted attention, as Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 125) reported from a deputy-head saying that they would be punished if their data was poor. Also Courtney (2016, p. 629) found that schools who were graded as 'Outstanding' would have their data scrutinised by Ofsted and that declining standards would lead to re-inspection.

The settings which had to provide data also received notice of inspection. There may be connections to be made here regarding the stress that Karen, in particular, implied she felt in relation to the inspection day, as data (which her setting was not obliged to produce for her local authority) perhaps provided more of a constant surveillance, potentially placing less pressure on the actual inspection day.

Courtney (2016, p. 631), when commenting on school inspection, wrote about a head-teacher who thought that there was nowhere to hide in relation to Ofsted and data scrutiny. Leanne referred to a school that she was governor for, and how the inspector had looked at the data and decided the outcome, without anyone being able to explain the 'story behind the data', putting into question the point of inspection, if the data will 'tell all'.

Leanne: We had an inspection. And::: the inspectors, the lead inspector (.) had already decided what his outcome was going to be before he stepped foot through the door (.) because he'd looked at the data.

Although Leanne also mentioned that Ofsted had made allowances for her own setting's lack of data, owing to the length of time they had been open.

L: they knew we'd only been open for five years, we--we didn't have the historical data that some children's centres have that we needed for impact.

7.2.2 Paperwork/Tracking/progress

Roberts- Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 230) decided that the 'processes of governance through data increasingly applies to the early years sector'. While not all EY settings were required to produce data, other paperwork can still leave a trail to be monitored.

Participants in this study who were not in a maintained nursery school or children's centre, did not mention having to produce data. Nevertheless, all settings were required to keep records of their children's progress and other paperwork related to their provision. This record-keeping was sometimes referred to by participants as 'progress' and sometimes as 'paperwork' or 'tracking', so all three words were searched for in the interview transcripts.

In all but the interviews with Eleanor and Fiona, the words 'progress', 'tracking' or 'paperwork' were mentioned (although Eleanor did refer to 'learning journeys', which are a written record of children's learning). Also, notably, when Andrea mentioned 'progress' she was referring to the progress of the setting rather than the progress of the children, and therefore she also did not mention any of the search words in relation to records about the children. Finally, it should be noted that some of the paperwork that participants referred to was not paperwork about the children's progress.

Dianna told me about her own tracking system which she had devised as she thought that her Ofsted inspector had approved of it,

Dianna: ...she was very impressed with the tracking and all the rest of it.

Dianna was not required to keep this tracking database, and she openly declared that it had been set up in preparation for her inspection. It is possible that she was 'self-policing' by doing more than was formally required, in the hope that Ofsted would approve of this (which she indicated they did). It is of interest that Dianna reported that she also found the database to be useful to herself, in order to analyse what was happening in her setting.

Caroline (who ran one setting which was not required to produce data) also talked about her county having a good system for tracking progress within the EYFS, which broke progress down into smaller parts, so that greater details on progress could be seen. She was observed to hold a positive attitude towards this.

Caroline: Yeah. No I mean-- we have to show-- we do show progress in--in Early Years Foundation Stage, [this county] have actually come up with a very good system for showing progress. Um:::, so we count steps of progress. So if you've got an age band of 30 to 50 months, we judge the child whether they are entering that band, developing, or they're securing (sic) in that

Similar to Caroline's statements about how data were influencing practice in her maintained nursery school (section 7.2.1), Dianna could also recognise that the way in which children were being measured in relation to the EYFS, was steering children's development.

D: the um EYFS is not actually it--it--it's too rigid on how it's measuring children's development. .hhhhh It's too prescriptive in some ways but it's not giving you enough scope to be able to identify (.2) other areas of development... So I think it--it--it's difficult then:: because I think it's probably being steered by:: uh:: government requirements from they want, how they see it as children, should be developing.

Dianna also mentioned what a big issue 'tracking' was in relation to Ofsted inspection.

D: Uh:::, and the tracking. I mean that's a huge thing.
...I think that was what helped us get the 'good' really because we've got this-- quite a good tracking system.

Many participants spoke of the paperwork trail that they had to keep regarding what happened in the setting away from inspection. These included records of planning and also records of children's progression and learning (all of which are combined in the 'Observation, Assessment and Planning cycle' (Giardiello, McNulty and Anderson, 2013)), even if they did not have to provide 'data'. For example, Jane talked about what an Ofsted inspector would want to look at during an inspection...

Jane: um::: they'd want to look at planning

Imogen was particularly disappointed, as revision of the EYFS in 2012 had been presented by the government as a reduction to the amount of paperwork for EY (DfE and Tether, 2012), and she had found this not to be the case.

Imogen: all this talk about in 2012 where you know working for early years it was going to get less paperwork....Um it--it's increased definitely (.). Yeah::: It's always covering yourself. It's--it's documentation after documentation just so you've always got some way of actually saying 'Ah but this happened' or::: 'This is why we did it'

Others agreed with Imogen...,

Gina: Oh it's definitely increased. I used to be a key worker and run the nursery school for 14 years (.2). And I was heading for a nervous breakdown.

...Because, the type of person that I am, I like everything, I like to be on top of everything and I like everything to work nicely and for all of my paperwork to be up to date

Heidi: Um it's: uh:::: now much more paperwork based so although the sessions are only six hours a day::: the working day:::: is most days I would say are up to ten hours. So they are long days.

... its definitely increasing year by year:::

K: Um I'd say the pressures of paperwork have increased in the eight years that I've been in early years. Um:: whether that's because I've learned more and then put more pressure on myself to make sure that everything is absolutely right and outstanding or whether ignorance is bliss, I don't know. Um but I do feel:: that there's definitely more paperwork to do now than there was eight years ago.

7.2.3 The impact of data monitoring and tracking /progress /paperwork

Some discussion of the perceived impact of data and paperwork monitoring, has already occurred (Sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2). For example, Caroline thought that data requirements were impacting on her setting's practice in relation to literacy, and Dianna thought that children's development was being steered by government requirements. Selwyn (2011, p. 478) noted how some school managers required planning documents of teachers to be 'open' for 'editing' from others, leading to the teachers being more likely to engage in self-surveillance when writing these documents. Similarly, if practitioners know that their EY documentation and data may be seen by inspectors (and they did), they may be more likely to engage in self-surveillance, a key feature of the panoptic mechanism (Foucault, 1977). Such self-surveillance was implicit, especially in the interviews with Caroline and Dianna.

Concerns were raised by Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 119) that datafication 'has the potential to undermine the foundations for children's personal development and learning'. However, Caroline did not seem overly

concerned that the change in practice she mentioned, was necessarily a bad thing (section 7.2.1). Perhaps this may have been an example of where the 'ideas of policy can relate to the principles of early years leaders' (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016, p 103). Also, as Caroline had been working with children for many years, it might be the case that she had the experience to know how to steer her practice so that it both satisfied the 'dataveillance' but also conformed to good pedagogical practice. While the introduction of baseline assessments had been 'shelved' at the point of interviews (DfE, 2016), the government was still encouraging schools to use them (Clark, 2016; Gaunt, 2016). Fears have been expressed that greater 'dataveillance' in the proposed format of baseline assessment could have a negative impact on pre-school pedagogy (BERA/TACTYC 2014), encouraging implementation of more formal teaching practice in pre-school settings.

There are many (e.g. Carr, 2001) who believe that it is important to follow the child's lead in order to build their positive learning dispositions. Pressures on settings to achieve targets for children in certain areas, at inappropriate levels, could negatively affect such a practice. I was surprised that none of my participants particularly referred to this issue. One possible explanation as to why this was not mentioned, was that all participants (bar one) were working in pre-school settings. As success in relation to the Early Learning Goals (Standards and Testing Agency, 2017) is not formally measured until the Reception year, perhaps the impact of 'data' is not fully felt until this time.

Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 122) noted that 'datafication' is there to ensure that 'no-one can be content but instead has to be constantly self-reforming, self-improving and showing progress'. It is difficult to argue against this notion of self-improvement and Caroline mentioned that she did not think that schools should be allowed to coast along on 'Satisfactory'. Nevertheless, there are potential dangers if the criteria for measuring improvement is flawed. For example Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 124) quoted one Reception teacher who reported 'pushing information on to three-year-olds' and worrying if a child did not 'recognise a number or a letter' – despite knowing that the child is 'three and not yet ready for it'.

Although it seems very difficult to do, some teachers/practitioners may try to resist the pressures of monitoring data (Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016), and instead consider their practice more from a post-structuralist viewpoint, as discussed by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) and Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016). It can be seen above (Section 7.2.1) that Martha seemed to resist more than Caroline or Leanne, although Martha was notably not in charge. Bradbury (2013, p. 123) found that some teachers resisted surveillance by manipulating the data in relation to the EYFS profiles, that they sent to their local authority. Some might consider this 'bending of the truth', to be a preferable alternative to employing formal teaching methods to facilitate children's fast-track progress. It should also be noted that even if teachers were presenting a 'fabrication' (Ball, 2003, p. 222), this game can lead to 'capitulation' to government requirements (Ball, 2003, p. 225).

Caroline mentioned data when expressing her views on the EYFS revision in 2012 (Section 7.2.1). When asked if the changes affected practice in her setting, Caroline thought that she could see the impact of the altered curriculum in the accompanying scores for the children. I asked Caroline if she was comfortable with this change and she said...

Caroline: I'm-- what I'm very, very uncomfortable with is the fact that the government have changed the curriculum order now to match the 'good' level of development in Reception. So this is-- this is the scores we've just done (showing me the scores). So the curriculum order is now communication and language, physical development, and then PSED.

... Personal, social and emotional. So that was always the one at the top. Because guess what? If they aren't happy they won't learn but suddenly that's dropped to number three.

...And now, this-- so this is (this county's) overview (.) that was collected, so now (this county) is telling us that the prime areas, plus literacy and maths (are in focus)::, so I now know what percentage of my children::, so this is the percentage who have made four steps of progress.

...

...So in my prime areas and in my literacy and maths, I can see that 45% of my children have made four steps of progress.

MW: But they (this county) pick out prime plus literacy and maths not prime plus...

C: Because that matches the Reception data.

...And the fact that the government are now bringing in entry to reception data is going to be collected, that really worries me that they're going to want nurseries to be more formal.

Caroline mentioned 'entry to Reception' (or baseline) assessment (now confirmed to begin in 2020 (Standards and Testing Agency, 2018)) and reinforced concerns about the potentially negative effects of these on preschool children. Caroline's comments can also reinforce reports from Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016), that the local authority publishes data so settings are encouraged to compare their settings to other settings (see Chapter 8 for more on normalising judgement).

When questioned about the EYFS, most participants indicated that they liked it (Section 9.5.1). Caroline approved because of its focus on problem-solving. However, she was also clearly aware of how assessment data can impact on what is actually happening in settings, regardless of what is recommended/stipulated in the EYFS. It is perhaps the case that the popularity of the EYFS among my participants, had been considered in isolation from assessment data.

[7.3 Was practice perceived to be the same away from inspection?](#)

The ideal situation in relation to hierarchical observation (Foucault 1977) would be for people to be watched constantly. Up until recently (and during

the bounded period in which the interviews took place), Ofsted inspectors could drop in to some EY settings on any working day in order to carry out inspection, while other EY settings would normally receive notice (unless Ofsted were particularly concerned about them). A limited amount of notice is now allocated to all settings (Ofsted 2015a) (unless there is a concern). However, during the bounded interviewing period, the fact that some settings received no notice of inspection, could be interpreted as them being in a state of constant observation, whereby practitioners might feel encouraged or coerced into acting in the way that the government has stipulated, because of the constant observation. The below offers some brief overview of participants' perceptions regarding their practice on a day-to-day basis, in comparison to practice when the inspector is present.

This area presented a complicated scenario for analysis, as there were some mixed messages regarding views about practice being the same whether the inspector was present or not. Some participants reported that they tried to act in the same way regardless.

Andrea: Um::, but you just (.) plod along and get on with it and just try and forget that they're (the inspectors are) there and try and carry on with your day to day: basically as if they wasn't there

D: Well. Did I try to carry on? I did but uh .hhh it was quite difficult to be normal. (laughs)

Heidi perceived that she herself acted normally,

Heidi: We do what we do and--and just like when parents come in we say, "Look, any day, you come any day you'll see us as we are, we don't change anything when you come in."

...but that, actually, her staff changed their practice.

H: Well I think-- I think a couple of staff changed what they did. I think the person who leads the singing on that Wednesday, somebody else did it who is much more confident. So yes, I suppose yes I suppose it did [change when the inspector was in]

Heidi's comment about her staff indicated that practice during inspection may not have always been her staff members' normal practice.

Fiona, who was the owner (rather than the manager) of her setting, was clear that her practice was different during inspection,

Fiona: Things were different for me during inspection as I needed to run around checking on everyone and reminding them to remember to do what the inspector wanted to see

Also, Karen, while wanting to show all of her normal practice, had to act differently during inspection to try to ensure that all of her normal practice could be observed, within a limited amount of time.

Karen: ...a sense of anxiety nearly all day. Um pressure to make sure that that inspector saw everything that I needed her to see (.1) in such a short space of time. And I think because of her manner throughout the day (.1) I felt quite uncomfortable. I didn't feel I could be me. I didn't feel that I did my best to be as I normally would be with the children.

Imogen reported...

Imogen: ...so instantly staff felt very nervous::: and didn't feel at all relaxed

... I think that meant they fell to pieces a little bit more um::: so they--they--they sort of lost the confidence in actually selling themselves to her.

I: ...particularly as they're (inspections are) unplanned. So I mean although they say you should then go about normally through your day...'

MW: Okay so things do change? (when inspectors are in)

I: They do yeah

Notably nobody said that they engaged in completely different practice when the inspector was not there and then just put on a show when the inspector was present, as has been reported in relation to teachers in the past (Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Perryman, 2007).

The general message regarding practice during inspection versus practice away from inspection was that participants tried to be normal during inspection. Being normal was, for some, negatively affected by issues associated with having to accommodate the inspector's needs and also nerves and/or anxiety associated with high stakes inspections (Elfer, 2015; Grenier, 2017). Caroline was in the position of being able to see the difference between inspections of her two settings (one with, and one without notice). Regarding the requirements of herself as a leader, she pointed out that managers/ leaders were not just sitting around waiting for things (such as inspection) to happen. Caroline clearly emphasised that when she had notice of inspection she was able to employ supply staff so that ratios were effectively normal, which was not possible for her no-notice inspection. Although Caroline also stressed that a supply staff member was not the same as her regular staff member. So, even when she received notice, and could book in a supply staff member, practice was still not quite the same as when the normal staff members were at work.

The majority of participants who said that there was no change to practice when the inspector was present were non-leaders (although note that Jane was not directly asked about this issue). There was one leader (Belinda), who said that there was no change in practice when the inspector was present, but Belinda was slightly different because she was a childminder. While childminders received notice, it is probably difficult to get supply cover in for the duration of the inspection.

Several participants reported that practice was normal during inspection and some of these told me that practice was normal during inspection, other than having to facilitate the inspector. All of those who gave this latter response were leaders, the majority of which did not receive notice (Caroline oversaw two settings one which received notice and one which did not). A few participants spoke about not being able to be themselves during inspection. Both of these were leaders who received no notice. Dianna indicated that, although she had to facilitate the inspector's needs and also was a bit nervous, she was basically the same during inspection. Jane told me that she was nervous because of the abrupt manner of her inspector, which indicated that her practice may have been different, but I did not directly ask her whether her practice was the same during inspection.

The overall message that I received during the interviews was that practice was perceived to be the same, or near to the same (allowing for things such as nerves and having to facilitate the inspector), whether the inspector was present or not. This finding is in contrast to earlier studies about teachers (Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Perryman, 2007) who often found that teachers thought that practice was quite different away from inspection. It can be noted that in these studies, the schools involved would have received a greater amount of notice of inspection, than for any of the settings in my study.

The aim of panopticism (Foucault, 1977) is to ensure that behaviour is consistent as people do not know if they are always being watched. While the overall message from my interviews was that practice, more or less, was the same away from inspection, there were indications that practice was not

exactly the same. Participants seemed to be aware that they were not directly being watched away from inspection, but apart from; nerves, having to cope with the inspector's requirements or the inspector's personality, and wanting to show everything in a limited time frame, practice was perceived to be normal. This gives the impression that panopticism could have been operational. I had thought that this might be different for people who received notice than for those who did not, and indeed of most of those who received notice (Andrea, Belinda, Caroline, Leanne and Martha) indicated that preparation for inspection took place. For example, Martha and Leanne reflected...

Martha: I got the phone call.

...Nobody else was here I was like 'Aaaaaaah oooooo' so a bit 'Tizwas' um phoned (colleague) then we put a strategy in place - obviously they want this folder ready, printed out things. .hhh Again, similar to preschool, made sure everything was labelled, cleaned. You know not over over the top but obviously what we knew they were going to look at

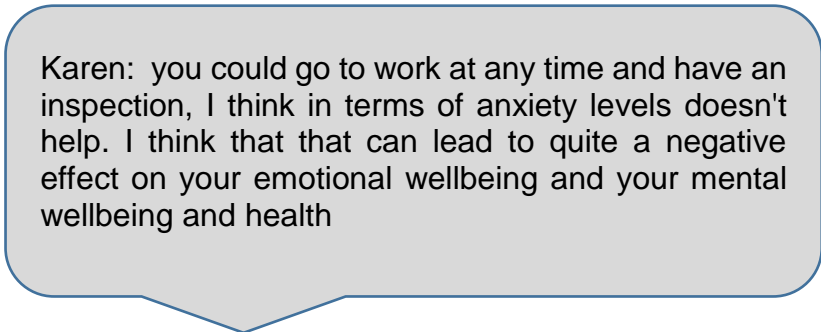
Leanne "Um:::? We thought we had everything ready (.) We had to tweak a few things. Um: spent the whole of those five days working - all day, every day, all night - just to get it all done everything you know from displays to cleaning the toilets to everything."

Nevertheless, because many settings who received notice also had to produce data, in terms of 'practice being the same during and away from inspection', perhaps this advantage of having notice was balanced out.

The participants who most reported not being able to be themselves during inspection (Karen and Imogen) were subject to no-notice and were leaders. For Karen, her angst was partly because of wanting to show everything in a limited time span (Gina also indicated that it was difficult to show everything when settings had no notice) and both Karen and Imogen felt that they could not relax because of the way in which the inspector behaved. Because of this, their perceptions were that practice was not exactly the same when the inspector was present.

There is the issue to raise, that even if practice was pretty much the same during inspection and away from inspection, this does not necessarily mean that practice was in conformance with Ofsted stipulations at any point in time. Martha and Gina both indicated that if they did not agree with something then they would not do it. Also, grades of less than 'Good' received by Belinda, Leanne, Martha, Imogen and Jane, might indicate that practice was not what Ofsted ideally wanted. Indeed, the same might be said for settings which received less than 'Outstanding' (but not to such a great extent).

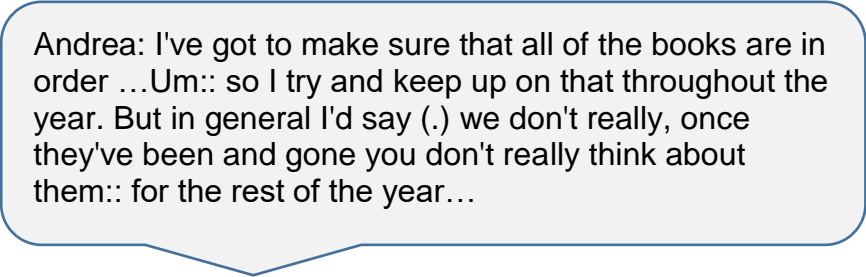
Participants who received notice were not amongst the participants who demonstrated the most anxiety in relation to inspection. This could have been associated with being able to prepare mentally in a way that others could not. Karen wanted to see all settings having notice, partly because of this issue of mental preparation.



Karen: you could go to work at any time and have an inspection, I think in terms of anxiety levels doesn't help. I think that that can lead to quite a negative effect on your emotional wellbeing and your mental wellbeing and health

Since the interviews took place, limited notice of inspection has been granted to all settings. If all practitioners are now able to prepare mentally for the inspection, the shock associated with a 'drop in' inspections could be removed, and practitioners may be able to show themselves at what Karen might describe to be 'their normal best'. Ofsted claimed that this change was to give 'inspectors the opportunity to gather the information needed to help the inspection run smoothly' (Ofsted 2015c, p. 9) and this does make some sense as it could enable practitioners to be both mentally and practically prepared (e.g. having the leader present in order to access documents that the inspector might want to see in order to get a true reflection on the setting, enabling the practitioners to act closer to their normal working selves). Essentially there is now the possibility that Ofsted may get a truer picture of the setting's normal practice when limited notice is given.

Some participants talked about not taking any notice of Ofsted when distinctly far away from inspection. For example, Andrea said



Andrea: I've got to make sure that all of the books are in order ...Um:: so I try and keep up on that throughout the year. But in general I'd say (.) we don't really, once they've been and gone you don't really think about them:: for the rest of the year...

Andrea indicated that she got on with what she thought she was meant to be doing, even when inspectors were not present. When asked about the presence of inspection at some point (away from the inspection) had any effect on her, Eleanor voiced

Eleanor: We are doing everything we should be doing anyway - but it is sometimes in my mind when I am doing things – as I think 'is this the way that Ofsted would want it?'

Again, Eleanor indicated that practice is run according to the inspection criteria even when inspectors are not present. Both Eleanor and Andrea were non-leaders.

Fiona also mentioned:

Fiona: you have to think of it as if an inspection could happen every day

These last two extracts from the interviews alluded to panopticism manifesting through hierarchical observation. However, Eleanor could also have been doing things as she thought Ofsted wanted, simply because she thought that Ofsted held the answers to what should be happening in her workplace for the good of the children, as Eleanor expressed no reservations about the EYFS at all, while many others expressed some reservations about it.

Eleanor: I think that the EYFS is good. It is useful and helpful

Although Eleanor believed that she was doing what Ofsted wanted, she simultaneously believed that she had enough control over what she did at work

Eleanor: I do have enough control and [the owner] involves us with all the decision making for the setting, so we work as a team and have 'ownership'

This again indicated that Eleanor was doing what she thought was right, as well as what she thought Ofsted wanted. 'Ideas of policy can relate to the principles of early years leaders' (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016, p 103) (Eleanor has held various roles, including that of leadership).

To some extent, Ofsted impacted on Leanne's practice, but she thought not too much.

Leanne: ...you do:: revisit what they're going to be looking at and is that going to be a key::: thing that they're going to want to see? So it's always in the back of your mind but it doesn't take over.

Caroline also knew that Ofsted impacted on her practice.

MW: So you would say that Ofsted Inspection impacts on what you do in your practice?

Caroline: Mm hmm.

Some said that Ofsted inspection hung over their heads all of the time (e.g. Caroline and Dianna), but this does not necessarily mean that they acted in the way that Ofsted wanted them to, either during or away from inspection. In other words, they may have been concerned about Ofsted, but still acted in a way that did not comply with requirements. However, this was not the overall impression that I gained.

7.3.1 Relaxing, collapsing or being 'zombified' after inspection

Some participants talked about relaxing whilst away from inspection. This was of interest because it suggested another hint of difference between 'during' and 'away from' inspection.

It was interesting to note that for all settings who were required to provide data, the words 'relax' or 'relaxed' were not used at all during the interview. This is with the exception of Andrea who may not have been aware of the data requirements in her setting. There were also no settings who received notice (apart from the anomaly of Andrea), who used these words. Another point to note was that only approximately half of the participants used this word in their interviews. Of those interviews in which the word occurred, sometimes the reference to 'relax' was not used to imply that they could relax away from inspection. To illustrate this, I can draw on Dianna, who used the word 'relax', to say that she could not relax in the build-up to inspection (even though no notice was given), and also to refer to how she felt as relaxed as she could be during her inspection because of what she saw as the more desirable behaviour of the inspector. Additionally, she used 'relax' to say how another setting which was graded 'Outstanding' was not very relaxed, indicating that this was a bad thing. However, specifically in relation to inspection, Dianna reflected...

Dianna: Oh yeah dreadful I mean you'd go on holiday and people would say they've left your number just in case Ofsted come, you know you just couldn't relax.

Imogen also used the word 'relax' in a differing context, mainly in relation to staff not being able to relax during the inspection, and also how she would like to see a more relaxed approach to EY, without having to record and justify everything for Ofsted. Eleanor used the word 'relax' to indicate that she was pretty much relaxed all of the time because she felt secure that she was doing what Ofsted required and so she was happy for inspectors to just

drop in. She also noted that she was more relaxed because she was not in charge of the setting.

Essentially her view was...

Eleanor ... I don't really think about Ofsted when, well I do obviously like (.3) when there's changes and things like that:: but it doesn't make me stressed out or anything, I think that the key is to be relaxed all the time and then, you know, you can sort of, the day, the day goes easier when you're like, not stressed out::

Also, Jane used the word 'relax' to explain how she had been relaxed during one inspection, in comparison to another.

For some others, they certainly used this word to describe a perception of being able to relax away from inspection. For example, Gina said that after her inspection...

Gina: But I've got the time-- I've got time to just relax for a little bit

Also, Karen mentioned that away from inspection for about a year, the children in her setting experienced a more relaxed staff team.

Karen: If anything I think they had more chilled out relaxed staff.

While Andrea was talking about the time directly after inspection in the quote below about relaxing, she also said that she thought that everyone in her setting did not really think about Ofsted when the inspectors were not around.

Andrea: Relieved. Once it was all over everything seems (.2) everybody calms down: and you feel more relaxed but then you've still got to wait for the (.) results to come back to you

It can be noted that Gina, Karen and Andrea all received a grade of good or above from their most recent inspection, and therefore would normally not receive an inspection for some time. Their comments about relaxing when away from inspection tally with the findings of Perryman (2007, p. 185) in relation to school inspections.

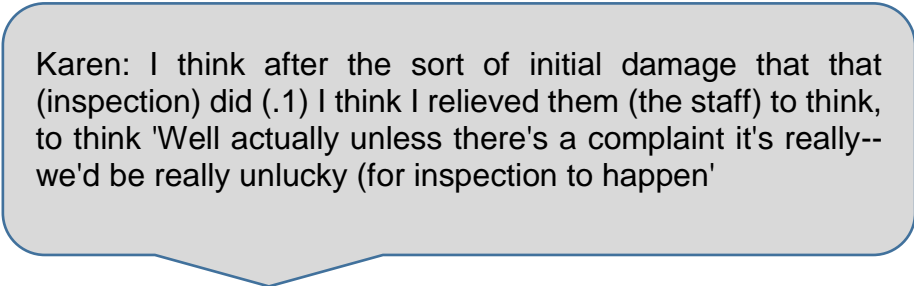
Leanne, who worked at the same setting as Martha, talked about the short-term aftermath of the inspection for about a week and a half afterwards. This was not so much referring to relaxing, but more as being in a state of shock or fatigue.

Leanne: And then um::: for the week after, so the inspection finished...we just wiped it out almost, the whole team. (.) So we--we had a group running on the Thursday morning, we did the group (.) and then we had a group that runs itself on a Friday .hhh but the rest of the time we were like zombies.

Again, practice during this period of aftermath, was not perceived by Leanne as being normal, and the implication was that they were only able to deliver practice on a 'need-to-do' basis. Also, Imogen appeared, to some extent, to be in a state of shock during my interview with her (which took place very shortly after her most recent inspection). Her setting had received a grade of 'Requires Improvement', just as Leanne's had. In addition to this, it can be mentioned that Fiona, reported having been extremely stressed during a prolonged period in which her setting could have received a possible grade of 'Requires Improvement'. This was during an appeal process, before ultimately her setting received a grade of 'Good'.

The notion of relaxing for all of the time away from inspection may not have been so possible for practitioners receiving a grade of Requires Improvement. Leanne reported that she thought she could have another inspection within eighteen months, but that she did not know how soon the inspection would be. Imogen was also aware that re-inspection would happen.

There were a few participants who received a grade higher than 'Requires Improvement/Satisfactory', who also indicated a negative aftermath, whereby they perceived their staff as being initially in a state which was other than relaxed. For example, Karen reflected...



Karen: I think after the sort of initial damage that that (inspection) did (.1) I think I relieved them (the staff) to think, to think 'Well actually unless there's a complaint it's really-- we'd be really unlucky (for inspection to happen'

This memory from Karen, of what happened after receiving a grade of 'Good', was perhaps a reflection that she strongly believed that her setting was deserving of a higher grade and that she thought her staff shared this view.

Foucault (1977) was not explicitly concerned about how the people being controlled were feeling. Nevertheless, from a Foucauldian perspective, if practitioners are relaxing or feeling 'zombified' after inspection is out of the way, causing them to act differently away from the inspection, this would imply that panopticism is not totally effective.

7.3.2 Making changes to practice after the inspector has visited

Several participants reported making changes to practice as a result of inspection advice, which would lean towards an impression that practice, as requested by inspectors, was taking place when the inspector was not present, thereafter. Eleanor recalled that after her inspection, within her

setting, the team went through the report to find anything that the inspector was not happy with, so that they could make the necessary changes. Caroline also said that she would make any suggested changes right away. Finally, Karen put suggested changes in place so that the said changes could not escape the inspector at the next inspection

Karen: (.4) Only I would say (.1) because we're conscious of making sure that the next inspector will be looking for that so we need to be all singing, all dancing and make sure that it hits them in the face [laughs] but it's that obvious that it's there

On the other hand, there were those who were not so intent on making the changes suggested by inspectors. Belinda, for example, was a bit more laid back about acting on what the Ofsted report had advised, because she took it with 'a pinch of salt', which would align with the findings of a lack of change reported in studies about teachers and inspection (Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Chapman, 2002; Perryman, 2007). Although, Belinda also indicated that, to some extent, the report had informed her practice. Both Gina and Martha stated that if they did not agree with something, they would not do it, indicating that they felt able to act on their professional judgement.

7.3.3 Notice, leadership and hierarchical observation

Karen could not understand how a setting could get a bad inspection report if notice was given to them. During the interviewing period, the majority of participants did not receive notice. While some participants were always in receipt of notice, this would have been limited. I was interested to see if practitioners felt as if they were being constantly watched, and if this was particularly the case for those who did not receive notice. I was also

interested to see if there were any connections to be found between notice (or lack of notice) and participants' perceptions of their inspections being 'stage-managed' (Case, Case and Catling, 2000, p. 605) or a performance (Ball, 2003, p. 222) put on for inspection.

It was difficult to make a sweeping comment about whether being given notice impacted on participants' responses on feeling as if they were constantly watched. To illustrate this point, it can be said that two participants (Leanne and Dianna) mentioned 'Big Brother' (Orwell, 1954), implying that to some extent, they thought that they were always being watched. Leanne received notice and Dianna did not.

Dianne: You're always feeling that they're the Big Brother sitting on your shoulder

Leanne: I do think it's-- it's almost like I've got this vision in my head of Big Brotherish

Without using the term 'Big Brother'— Karen (who received no notice) said something similar. So more people who did not receive notice than did, referred to Big Brother (Orwell, 1954) or something similar. However, this difference was slight and there were more people in the participant group, who did not receive notice. It can also be noted that Leanne, Karen and Dianna (who mentioned something akin to 'Big Brother') were all leaders of their settings. Again, it should be noted that there were more leaders in this study than non-leaders.

7.4 Operating as if Ofsted could walk in at any moment

There was no glaring difference between the participants who worked in settings which received notice and those who worked in the other settings (although see below), regarding whether they perceived that they operated generally as if Ofsted could walk in at any moment. For example, Dianna (no notice) told me that Ofsted was hanging over her head so that from the day she started her job, she treated every day as an Ofsted day. However, Caroline reported something similar and for one of her settings, she received notice.

More participants implied that Ofsted was always on their minds than did not imply this (suggesting an ongoing effect of hierarchical observation), and there was a slight indication that those who received notice were less concerned with Ofsted in their day-to-day practice. The interview material also revealed that leaders tended to indicate to a greater extent (than non-leaders) that Ofsted was always on their minds. For example, Heidi said:

Heidi: so I knew that any time now there they were going to come so that year was (.2) .hhhh yes you're constantly aware that whenever somebody knocked on the door it could be. And then the fact that it was then four years rather than three years (.) for the second one, that yes, that year the sort of stress of thinking, 'Any day now::' and every time the doorbell went it was, 'Oh it could be. It could be' Um, yes I think that was-- that really sat on uh with me yeah so the well-being before, the well-being afterwards...

For a few leaders, it was not so much a case of Ofsted not being on their minds, but that Ofsted did not worry them. For example,

Gina: I wasn't worried about and I kept saying to the-- to the staff, "They can come any time. Everything is fine."

... (G indicated that her county quality standards are higher than Ofsted standards). So Ofsted never really bothers me.

Nevertheless, generally, the leaders had a great awareness of Ofsted, and had it at the back of their minds in the way that they ran their settings. There was one non-leader who seemed to indicate that she was thinking of Ofsted often (Eleanor). It can be noted that Eleanor had previously worked in settings where she had been (at least temporarily) in charge and had experienced several complaint-led inspections.

My findings that the role the practitioner held seemed to impact on their perceptions of Ofsted, aligned with findings by Chapman (2002) who reported that there were differing perceptions of Ofsted inspection, depending on whether people worked as teachers, middle management or head teachers.

7.4.1 Practice as normal during inspection because of no notice

While there was a perception from participants that practice was normal during inspection because of a lack of notice, as explored in Section 7.3, practice might not quite have been as it normally was because of the settings effectively being a staff member short, or because of unease about high stakes inspection (so potentially of a lower standard than normal). However, I think that my participants, when they commented on things being as they really are during no-notice inspections, were referring to practice being no better when the inspector was present.

There were mixed opinions on whether or not settings should have notice, and while this has been explored in greater depth later in Section 9.2, the largest response when asked about this issue, was that no notice should be given, so that settings could be seen in their true colours. This implied that practice was perceived as more likely to be the same during inspection as away from inspection if no notice was allowed and reinforced the view that entirely normal practice is not seen by inspectors when notice is given. In relation to some settings receiving notice Gina commented...

Gina: I think it's very unfair - because they--they dress up the school, you know.

7.4.2 Not knowing when inspection will be (whether notice is given or not)

To some extent all settings in this study (whether they had notice or not) shared some vagueness about the scheduling of their inspections. For example, after her setting received a grade of 'Requires Improvement', Ofsted had said they might have another inspection at Leanne's setting within a year or eighteen months. However, because of her setting being re-commissioned, there were some questions around how this would impact on the timescale. Also, Imogen had expected an inspection after a period of three years, and received one after a five-year period. While there did seem to be some differences between the settings which received notice and those that did not, there was still some uncertainty of timescale, even for those who received notice.

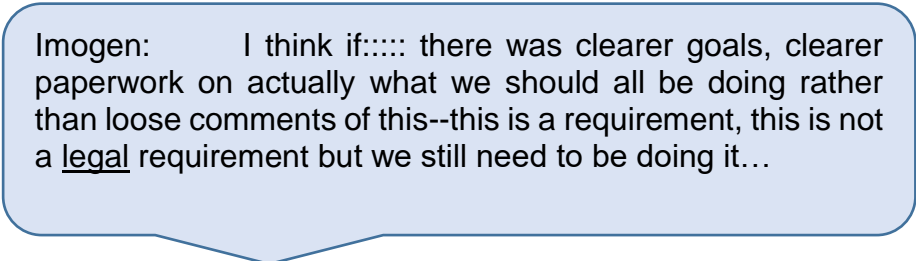
7.4.3 Leadership, monitoring and Hierarchical Observation

Foucault (1977, p. 174) reflected on 'the great workshops and factories' whereby, in order to avoid fraud, there was less emphasis on purely having inspectors but a developing need for 'continuous supervision'. Ofsted inspectors report on the management and 'supervision' in a setting, and may use this to see if the 'trickling down' of government requirements is occurring. Dianna indicated that her setting was run every day as an inspection day and that to have this approach in the setting is good for her staff. Dianna expanded that her staff would say that they had better do something, just in case Ofsted arrive. Ofsted essentially provides a framework within which leaders can manage and supervise their staff and Dianna's comments seemed to indicate that staff could be 'galvanised into action' (Chapman, 2002, p. 261) by leaders via the power of Ofsted.

7.5 Control and hierarchical observation

Although none of my participants used the word ‘surveillance’, some referred to a feeling of being constantly watched. This could indicate that participants generally adhered to government guidelines on how settings should operate. However, as Hope (2013) illuminated, there are limitations to how much can actually be observed constantly by an observation system such as CCTV. Similarly, there are limits to what Ofsted can know about in relation to what happens at settings, away from inspection, even for those who have no notice of inspection. If the doorbell does not ring at around 9:00 AM, practitioners might assume that an inspector would not be coming on that day and potentially ‘relax’. Also, some participants told me that they could relax a bit after a ‘Good’ (or above) inspection had taken place (section 7.3.1).

Simon (2005, p. 7) stressed that people must know the rules in order to abide by them. Many participants mentioned a lack of clarity regarding what the government required from settings. For example,



Imogen: I think if::::: there was clearer goals, clearer paperwork on actually what we should all be doing rather than loose comments of this--this is a requirement, this is not a legal requirement but we still need to be doing it...

This lack of clarity had also previously been raised by the NCMA (2010), and Courtney (2016). Even if the rules are known, because there are limits to surveillance systems, the government has to rely on the hope that practitioners agree to abide by these rules. Participants declared that they generally agreed with the EYFS (Section 9.5.1). However, many also had some reservations about it, and Leanne simply thought that it was inappropriate. If people agree with what they are required to do, then limits to surveillance are not so much of a concern. It is when there is a difference in opinion that self-surveillance (in relation to perceptions of what Ofsted wants) away from inspection may break down. Gina said she would not do something if she did not agree with it and explained that in the past she had

rejected a government-stipulated way of operating, because she did not think it was appropriate for her setting. Martha was also confident that she would not change a particular practice as advised by Ofsted if she did not agree with the advice. In the case of Gina and Martha, perhaps the perceived benefits outweighed the potential punishment (Hope, 2007). It should be noted that even though Gina and Martha appeared to not be engaging in self-surveillance to ensure they did certain things which they thought Ofsted required, that does not mean that they were not engaging in self-surveillance of their practice. It is quite possible that they were acting as agentic professionals and leaders of their own practice, who had decided to take the course of action which they thought was best.

Continuing with the theme of control, while the majority of participants seemed to be wanting to, or feeling that they had no choice but to comply with the government's requirements, the participants still generally thought that they had high (leaders) or medium (non-leaders) level of control. A low level of control was reported by one participant. However, this was Andrea, who was an anomaly as she was still training.

It was not surprising that those in positions of power in their settings reported higher levels of control from those who were in less powerful positions. On the other hand, it was interesting to see that the leaders reported such high levels of control, when others might perceive that all participants had limited levels of control, because of the gaze of Ofsted, and its influence on every-day practice.

Some explanation as to why a teacher might consider themselves to be in a position of power/control might come from Ball (2003, p. 217) who discussed 'the appearance of freedom in a 'devolved environment'', indicating that although schools appeared to have more freedom of choice, actually 'performativity...requires individual practitioners to organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations' (Ball, 2003, p. 215). So even though my participants might have felt as though they were in control, this may have only been to the extent that they were meeting the stipulated government expectations.

I looked to see if there was any connection to be made between perceived levels of control and notice of inspection. Of those who received notice, there was no consensus regarding how much control over their work they considered they had, as these were split between perceptions of high, medium and low control. Having said this, some of those who received notice, reported high levels of control (all those in leadership positions). Also, for those who did not receive notice, commonalities seemed to be attributed more to participants' position in the organisation rather than to notice of inspection. Participants did not perceive themselves as generally being too controlled, perhaps because we are all so used to being told what to do and monitored to see that we do it, that it increasingly goes unquestioned (Levin, Frohne and Weibel, 2002, p. 18).

N.B. The notion of inspection being about protection of children, rather than control of practitioners is addressed in Section 9.10.

7.6 [Resistance to hierarchical observation](#)

Resistance has already been explored a little, both in terms of deliberately not doing what Ofsted requires away from inspection (Section 7.5), and in relation to relaxing/acting differently when inspectors are not present because of not being nervous or having a full staff quota because nobody needs to attend to the inspector's needs (Section 7.3). In general though, there was little evidence of deliberate resistance reported during the interviews such as 'false conformity, avoidance, counter-surveillance and playful performance' (Hope, 2013, p. 45). One might wonder why this was. Hope (2013, p. 42) questioned Foucault's (1977, pp. 201-202) indication that an invisible observer would be a guarantee of order (in relation to pupils) on two counts. One was that school surveillance was rarely 'continuous and ubiquitous' (just as inspectors were not always present). The other was that 'students do not always respond in a 'disciplined manner' to potential observation.' It is this latter thought by Hope (2013) that would seem to apply to Gina and Martha as their reason for not always responding in a 'disciplined

manner', was that they did not agree with Ofsted/government advice. Although it was minimal, this was a slight message that there are some practitioners who feel able to take a more post-structuralist view of their practice, as discussed by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013), Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016) and that they were perhaps finding 'cracks' (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016, p. 93) in England's EY regulation, as they still avoided receiving a grade of 'inadequate' from their Ofsted inspection.

Some participants (especially Karen) accepted that they had to abide by regulations in order to receive government funding allocated to pay for children at their setting. Karen also reported having given up trying to resist, indicating that this was not possible. Many reported agreeing with the EYFS generally, and thus it followed, more or less, that they might share the government's views on what should be happening in EY. Their practice away from inspection might therefore not be attributable to hierarchical observation, but more to the fact that some practitioners share the government's views (as put forward as being possible by Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016).

Hope (2013, p. 42) recognised that central to Foucault's discussion of panopticism was 'the potential to encourage people to engage in observation of the self', so that 'observation is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action' (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). Hope (2013, p. 42) also drew on Simon (2005, p. 7) to address a flaw he saw in Foucault's argument as, in order for people to self-police, they must 'understand the rules,... evaluate when an act is in conformity... and recognise the signs of the supervisors' presence', thus eliminating the 'blind, ignorant or irrational' (Simon, 2005, p.7). Several participants, but chiefly Imogen, conveyed that government requirements were simply not clear enough, and so they were left in 'ignorance' by the DfE. In connection with this, Courtney (2016) described the current situation in English schools as being 'post-panoptic' because teachers did not know what they were meant to be doing.

7.7 [Hierarchical observation and Well-being](#)

Bentham's (1969) panopticon prison was designed so that prisoners would always think they could be being watched. Although Bentham's intention was simply to rehabilitate, it could be argued that constant observation would be a punishment in itself and could negatively impact on prisoners' well-being. The process of rehabilitation can be difficult and some will not be rehabilitated, either because they are unwilling or unable to do so. Some participants were unable to deliver what Ofsted wanted for various reasons, ranging from a perceived lack of clarity from Ofsted or the government (Imogen), to a perceived lack of appropriate circumstances that would enable them to reach a certain grade (Belinda). A few were unwilling, when it came to certain issues, and would not comply, but these were in the minority (Section 7.6). Several appeared to comply, despite being opposed to certain things in the EYFS. It was concerning that there appeared to be little perceived escape from Ofsted's gaze, and I wondered about the effect of this on the participants' well-being. See Section 9.9.3 for more on well-being.

7.8 [Summary and reflexivity](#)

Practice away from inspection did not appear to be exactly the same as during inspection for a variety of reasons reported by the participants, including:

- Feeling able to relax at certain times between inspections
- Feeling stressed during inspection (perceived to be attributable to either the behaviour of the inspector, or because of the importance of inspections)
- Having to accommodate the inspector when they were present (leaders) - taking them away from their normal practice.
- Being in state of shock in the aftermath of inspection
- Being able to prepare for inspection

Nevertheless, these were generally minor differences, as, essentially, the participants' perceptions rested around the notion that practice was more or less the same, or similar, whether or not the inspector was present.

Further findings in relation to leadership and notice were:

- Non-leaders tended to indicate that practice was normal when the inspector was present.
- Leaders tried to be normal during inspection, but for those leaders who had no notice, this was thought to be more challenging.
- Leaders tended to say that Ofsted was always on their mind. A greater proportion of practitioners in settings which received notice, said that Ofsted was not always on their mind.
- Participants in settings that received notice generally reported preparing for inspection directly before it. However, there was also suggestion that participants in no-notice settings prepared for an approximate time of inspection.

Other findings included:

- The grade that practitioners received in their most recent inspection seemed to influence their ability to 'relax' when away from inspection.
- There was awareness demonstrated by some participants, that people other than Ofsted inspectors could be watching them whilst away from inspection.
- The issue of data and paperwork monitoring was mentioned by many participants and a few highlighted how this impacted on their practice.
- Because practice was perceived as being more normal during inspection when no notice was given, the majority of participants thought that no notice should be given.

Although present to some extent, there was no substantial suggestion of resistance to hierarchical observation, although discussions related to 'relaxing' away from inspection and also preparing for inspection could indicate subtle or subconscious resistance. Also, there is the possibility that

participants did not share everything with me in terms of resistance taking place, and this inhibition could be attributable to trust issues.

My analysis suggested that there could be an effect of hierarchical observation in operation for these practitioners, as practice was perceived as generally being the same during and away from inspection. While the use of CCTV is not required by Ofsted in EY settings, I am left with the thought that the mechanism of hierarchical observation was rendering the camera unnecessary.

It is noteworthy that, had I not selected Foucault (chiefly 1977) as my key theorist (in part, as a response to my own prior experience), it is unlikely that this study would have had such great insight into the possible effects of Hierarchical Observation. This is an example of where my prior experience and connected choice of theorist had an influence on this research.

8 Chapter 8: Interview analysis: Normalising judgement

When I initially asked participants about what Ofsted inspection meant to them, only three participants mentioned that it (at least partially) existed to offer a rating/scale.

Caroline: an authority that regulates all the schools in (.) England um::: and make judgements on them

Karen: ...and rating our practice so that parents apparently can make a choice on what is a quality setting.

Martha: ...hhhh and that's when you get your sort of rating.

However, many said that Ofsted was there to check if settings were meeting the minimum stipulated requirements.

The grades that they received as a result of their inspection were generally important to my participants. The following will focus in on how norms and normalising judgement seemed to be either connected or not connected to the thoughts and actions of the participants in this study. As an overarching statement in relation to this chapter, there was evidence of social control operating in and around the participants. At least in part, this could be attributed to the normalising judgement.

8.1 Compared to everyone else

I explored participants' awareness of the inspection grades awarded to other settings. Some compared the grades of their own settings to those of other settings and some were clear that they compared their grades with settings

that they considered to be comparable to their own. For example, if they worked in a playgroup they would compare to other playgroups. A few participants compared themselves with one other specific setting (Dianna, drew comparison with a setting that she was advised to go and look at, and Eleanor compared her current setting to her previous setting). Andrea told me that it would theoretically be good to look at other inspection reports, but she had not done this yet. Even when they were not particularly looking to compare themselves to others, participants often still had awareness of some grades of some other settings. For example, Gina recalled that she saw the results on banners, which had been hung outside of settings, and Belinda's awareness of the grades of others came from engaging with childminder online chat rooms. Although she was aware, Belinda thought that there was no point in comparing to other childminders, as nobody could have the same house as herself. This was interesting that she focussed on the physical element, rather than other aspects.

Belinda: unless they've got an identical house to me .hhhh and an identical situation, there's absolutely no point (.) in doing that

Jane clearly stated that she did not compare, as...

Jane: We are what we are.

So, practitioners differed in how much attention they considered they paid to the judgements of other settings. Jane seemed to be particularly unaffected by the normalising judgement and this could be considered in the light of post-structuralist notions (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013; Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016) whereby what is right in one setting might not necessarily be right in another setting, and therefore it is not appropriate to compare one's own setting to another. In contrast, Caroline appeared to be particularly affected.

Caroline: ...there's only two nursery schools in [this county] that aren't 'outstanding' so that I feel that I (.) have a duty to make sure that we get to 'outstanding'

Caroline reported having a big network of support with other head-teachers (which she implied other practitioners might not have), with whom she could speak about inspection. While Caroline saw this support group as a positive thing, it is reasonable to assume that frequent discussion about inspection could potentially have increased the impact of the normalising judgement upon herself.

8.2 Perceptions of national and local norms

Caroline talked about other local settings (schools) which had recently received the grade of 'Requires Improvement'.

Caroline: So many [of this county's] schools have gone into it [RI]

Caroline was clearly taking note of other local school settings, and did not mention so much, the national average for her own type of setting. For those participants who compared to other settings, their view also often seemed to be, at least partially, localised (Caroline, Eleanor, Dianna, Heidi, Karen, Leanne, and Martha). While Belinda stated that she did not compare to other settings, she considered herself to have some awareness of the normal grade for other childminder settings in her area, as she mentioned that she thought that childminder grades must be not so high. This was because she knew that she had received a grade of 'Satisfactory' and Ofsted had not been to inspect her for a long while (and not since she had returned from studying and re-established her childminding business), indicating to her that there

were other priority cases, over her own (and which had a lower grade than her own).

Belinda: ... so daily ((laughing)) she (the Ofsted inspector) must have been getting:: priority cases over me

Also Belinda thought that the norm (assumed national) for a childminder rating would not be 'Outstanding', as she thought that there would be a very limited number of childminders who would receive this high grade. The NCMA (2010) also raised the issue that their members had experienced inspectors who would comment that they did not award 'Outstanding' to childminders.

Belinda: it's a pretty (.2) known (.2) thing, that not: many childminders get outstanding ... :: unless you've got quite a big house" and "... amongst childminders(.) you're going to be pretty up there if you get an outstanding:"

This perception of the grades which other settings received was a form of comparison to others. Even though Belinda demonstrated some resistance to normalisation, by stating that comparison was pointless, it is likely that on a sub-conscious level, some comparison was in effect.

8.3 Inequality in judgements between settings

Belinda thought that childminders could not really be judged on the same grounds as group settings and stated,

Belinda: I really do feel that they need to adapt (.3) erm (.) the way that they inspect a home based, setting

Others also mentioned inequality in judgements between settings. For example, when Heidi looked at national statistics regarding grades for 'pack-away' settings, she realised that her setting really had done well, considering that they were a pack-away playgroup.

Heidi: knowing that it is possible for an Early Years packaway setting within the church to get an Ofsted grading (of outstanding) has--has made me feel much more positive

Caroline mentioned the grades of settings such as Heidi's pack-away setting, and indicated that her own setting would need to do better than one like Heidi's, because her own setting received such generous funding. Perceived inequality between settings may explain why many participants seemed to compare their grades to the grades of other settings, which they viewed as being comparable to themselves. This has implications for the effect of the normalising judgement on these practitioners, and could also have implications for their morale (see Heidi above).

It appeared that there was not a perceived 'level playing field' for the practitioners in this study, despite this being the intention for all EY settings when the 2008 Ofsted Framework for Inspection was established (Jones 2010, p. 64). O'Leary (2007) made the interesting comment that social control, can be explored as a means for maintaining the inequality that exists in all societies. Possibly the normalising judgement was reinforcing inequality amongst settings, because of the perceived differences about Ofsted ratings. The transcripts seemed to suggest that, at least for some practitioners, this was the case. For example Belinda was not trying to obtain a grade of Outstanding because she thought that this was rare for childminders to receive.

Belinda: "I want a good:: (.) not really fussed about the outstanding, because I don't think I'm going to get it anyway"

Also, Caroline felt great pressure to achieve 'Outstanding' as this was her perceived norm for maintained nursery schools. On the other hand, Heidi was striving to achieve 'Outstanding' for her playgroup, despite believing that this was not the norm for this type of setting (although she had already received an 'Outstanding' grade, so she was certain it was possible).

I did not ask these practitioners whether they were aware of what the national average (or norm) was regarding grades for EY settings, but two participants (Heidi and Dianna) shared that they were aware of the national statistics that Ofsted had published. Dianna recalled that, when she checked...

Dianna: It was 67% or something... were 'good.'

8.4 [Normal and abnormal](#)

In order to find out if participants perceived any grades as 'abnormal', I asked them if there were any judgements, which would cause them alarm, either by being particularly high, or particularly low. Most practitioners talked about lower grades as potentially causing them alarm, and thus, I think, being perceived as abnormal for their type of setting.

Technically, Belinda was operating without a grade. However, before she temporarily closed her childminding business (for fear that she would not pass her next inspection, unless she engaged in some further training), she had been judged as 'Satisfactory'. This possible grade has now been removed by Ofsted and altered to 'Requires Improvement', and it was the grade of 'Requires Improvement' that Belinda would be alarmed about. This could be related to the semantic change or the perceived levels of 'Satisfactory' or 'Requires Improvement'. While Andrea was not questioned about which grade might cause her alarm, she said that she did not want the school to slip back, and also that she might feel slight humiliation if the head-teacher was judged to not be running the school well. It was implicit from her

interview that Imogen was alarmed at the grade she currently had of 'Requires Improvement', and also implicit that Karen would be alarmed at a grade of 'Requires Improvement'.

Roughly half of the participants stated that they would be alarmed at the grade that was below their current grade, and many of these practitioners referred explicitly to the grade of 'Requires Improvement', with a few participants saying that they might resign if they received this grade and a few saying that they would be devastated (or something akin to this). Also, it was implicit from the interviews with Belinda, Imogen and Karen that they did not want to get 'Requires Improvement'. This indicated to me that there is a strong disincentive to receiving the grade 'Requires Improvement', even though a setting can still operate at this level. While it can still operate, a judgement of 'Requires Improvement' would ensure that another inspection would take place within one year (Ofsted 2015b).

Hillier (2012), when discussing school discipline in relation to Foucault (1977, p. 177), noted how all disciplinary systems function with 'a small penal mechanism' in place. Hillier talked about 'micro-penalties' for small deviations from required behaviour and offered examples of this as being humiliation or minor deprivation. Re-inspection within a year could be seen as a punishment, but punishment could also come in the form of the humiliation which practitioners might feel if they received a grade that they perceived to be below their measure of normal.

I asked my participants whether inspection results could be a source of humiliation or pride (*also see Section 9.9.3*). Foucault (1977, p. 180) was clear that 'punishment is only one element of a double system: gratification – punishment'. He also drew upon Demia (1716, cited in Foucault, 1977) to highlight the point that the attraction of rewards would be more effective than the avoidance of punishment. On their website, Ofsted specifically mentioned that settings who are awarded 'Outstanding' can display the logo on their stationery, and yet no mention is made regarding what might happen with any of the other judgements, thereby keeping the focus on aspirational achievements.

During the interviews none of the participants had mentioned which grade would cause them alarm (or which grade they wanted to avoid) before I specifically asked them about it. There were only two participants who said that no grade could cause them alarm, and they were notably both non-leaders at their settings.

It seemed clear that anything below 'Good' was generally deemed to be abnormal by these participants, and indeed 'Good' was the average grade for EY settings at the point of interviews (Ofsted 2018).

[8.5 Perceived connections between inspection, well-being, and reported levels of engagement in comparison of other settings](#)

While most participants at least had some awareness of the grades of other settings, Caroline seemed particularly aware and was open about the fact that she frequently read the reports of others. Caroline was also clear in saying that inspection affected her level of well-being. This led me to consider if there was a connection between how much focus participants placed on comparisons, and their reported views on connections between well-being and inspection. Jane was particularly clear that she did not compare to the grades of others and did not think there was any connection between inspection and her levels of well-being (to be explored further in Section 9.9.3).

[8.6 Acting on the normalising judgement](#)

Foucault details how people might act on the normalising judgement either because of a fear of punishment or because of a hope of reward (Smart, 1985: 86). Apart from considering the grades that others received, participants also gave details about how they were considering improvements to, or maintenance of their own grades. This is potentially affected by the normalising judgement, as awareness of normative grades

can impact on personal aspirations. The following considers how participants were considering the judgement they might receive in their next inspection, indicating that the normalising judgement was likely to be impacting on their practice.

Unsurprisingly, no participants indicated that they were aiming for a lower grade than their current grade. Regarding the few practitioners who were either not explicitly asked or gave no clear response, it was implicit from their interviews that they hoped to either maintain or improve their current grade (for these practitioners, I interviewed them soon after relatively traumatic inspections had taken place, so I think that I may not have dwelt on this question with them, because of this). Notably, both Gina and Heidi already had a grade of 'Outstanding' and therefore could not report that they wished to improve their grade. Andrea stated that she wanted to avoid slipping back a grade.

All participants (except for Martha and Andrea, both non-leaders) reported that they would usually act on the advice given to them in their previous report as to how they could improve (and therefore move in the direction of a higher grade). Leanne said that she had to make a plan focussed on how their setting was going to act on the inspector's advice regarding improvement, and that this plan was being monitored. This was because of receiving a grade of 'Requires Improvement', so it can be safely inferred that Imogen also had to do this as she was also the leader of a setting which received this grade.

Leanne and Imogen both seemed positive about the improvements that they were making at the setting since their inspection, and Leanne shared that she thought her setting had improved considerably because of it. Imogen had not yet had much time to make improvements, as I interviewed her very shortly after her inspection. Nevertheless, both Imogen and Jane (who both worked at the same setting) stated that they were being supported by the local authority, in order to make the suggested improvements. Also, it can be noted that the NDNA (2010) reported that the inspection process was supportive for EY practitioners. Chapman (2002, p. 264) drew on a teacher's

reflection that in order to receive support, they had been labelled as having 'serious weakness' by Ofsted. While labelling with lower grades or as having weaknesses might lead to support, damage can also be brought about from such labels (Chapman, 2002; Grenier, 2017)

Some practitioners discussed how they were happy to make the improvements suggested by the inspector. Dianna told me that she was making improvements to how her setting engaged parents of children with English as an Additional Language and felt that she wanted to make improvements along these lines, irrespective of the inspection feedback. This can be linked to Campbell-Barr and Leeson's (2016, p103) note that 'in some instances the ideas of policy can relate to the principles of early years leaders.' Some practitioners were not really happy to make the changes, but made them anyway, because they had been asked to do so. For example, Caroline had been advised by the inspector to encourage more independence at mealtimes for her very young children, which she did not really think was an appropriate change to make in her particular circumstances, but she made the change regardless of her views.

Rather than improving her practice, Karen considered that certain things only needed to be made more visible at her next inspection (see quote from Karen in Section 7.3.2). Jane also indicated that she reflected on the advice of the last report, to remember what to show at the next inspection.

Martha stated that she did not act on some of her report's advice, as she did not agree with it, thus demonstrating some resistance (Section 8.7). She added that improvements in a certain area had happened anyway, purely by coincidence. Andrea was also continuing with her normal practice as there had been no action points for her in relation to her own personal work in the report. Apart from Martha and Andrea (both non-leaders), the participants were taking steps to move towards the aspired judgement. This was often in the form of acting on the advice from the previous inspection.

8.7 Resistance to the normalising judgement

Some resistance to the normalising judgement was implicit in the interviews (Martha and Belinda), but this did not emerge as a strong theme. Most participants were aware of the grades of other settings and it seemed to be impacting on how they thought about inspection.

8.8 Semantics

While the normalising judgement could have impacted on participants regardless of the nomenclature of the Ofsted ratings, they do have emotive labels. Imogen had told her setting's parents that 'Requires Improvement' was the new 'Satisfactory', and indeed it seemed to be seen as such by several of my participants. Dianna, although she did not express a preference for either term, thought that it was not so much that the words were important for the judgement, but the positioning of them. So she would not have wanted to receive 'Satisfactory' or 'Requires Improvement', although she thought that 'Requires Improvement' sounded worse, which was clearly the intention of Ofsted when it made the switch (Page, 2013, p. 11).

Caroline voiced,

Caroline: I wholeheartedly agree with it. You know 'satisfactory' isn't good enough and it isn't. And I think schools were coasting on 'satisfactory'

Caroline was not clear-cut in her thinking about this, as she could see the damage that a grade of 'Requires Improvement' could cause, and she wanted more flexibility in how judgements were arrived at, in order to distinguish between genuine reasons for falling below a standard, as opposed to schools just coasting along. Caroline also suggested that maybe having no grades being published at all might be the answer.

Both Heidi and Dianna thought that whatever the grade taxonomy, anything placed below 'Good', still meant something undesirable to them. I acknowledge that four participants did not express a preference for either

'Satisfactory' or 'Requires Improvement', either because I did not ask them, or because their response did not make their preference clear. This said, twice as many participants, who expressed a preference, preferred 'Requires Improvement' as the term for this level of grade (six in comparison to three). Of those who chose 'Satisfactory', two of the three had received a grade of 'Requires Improvement' at their most recent inspection. Also, Karen shared that while 'Satisfactory' should be good enough, she was not sure that she would send a child of hers to a setting which had been awarded that grade. No participants who would have preferred the term 'Requires Improvement' had received this grade in the most recent inspection at their own setting.

8.9 [Post-panopticism](#)

Courtney (2016: 625-626) argued that rapid changes to the inspection framework had led to a post-panoptic situation. Leanne commented that inspection frameworks kept changing.

Leanne: hhh And I don't think it's fair. It's not a fair-- I mean it's not an honest judgement because you're judging on different things.... It's not consistent. I think that's the whole thing about Ofsted it's not consistent.

Leanne was concerned with fairness in her quote above, and many participants were unhappy with the frequency of change in EY. Imogen stated that she had not engaged in certain practices, simply because she did not think they were still obligatory. Another example of change was reported by Dianna in relation to grading levels,

Dianna: She [the inspector] said, 'Really the level you're achieving is the old 'outstanding' but the new outstanding is inspirational'.

Leanne also mentioned this 'moving of goal posts'. If practitioners do not know what they are aiming for looks like, then one can sympathise with Courtney's views about post-panopticism.

8.10 Notice and normalising judgement

Because some participants received notice and some did not, it was questionable whether they, therefore, would only compare themselves to settings which received the same amount of notice. This appeared to be the case (Section 8.1).

8.11 Leader or non-leader and normalising judgement

While there was negligible clear distinction between what leaders and non-leaders said in relation to the normalising judgement, a few participants who specifically mentioned that Ofsted was there to make judgements, were leaders. This suggested that the judgement might relatively loom larger in the minds of leaders. Also, I searched the interviews to see who mentioned the language of the Ofsted judgements (Inadequate, Satisfactory, Requires Improvement, Good, Outstanding) the most (see Figure 4) There was a little evidence to suggest that those who were non-leaders of settings talked about the judgements more than those who were leaders. This could indicate that the non-leaders were more interested in the judgements, or felt more able to talk about such matters, although it is impossible to know for sure. The two participants who were out of sync in relation to this overarching statement were Belinda (a leader's transcript in which judgements were mentioned more) and Andrea (a non-leader's transcript in which judgements were mentioned less). Both were anomalies in the group, as Belinda was a childminder and Andrea was still in training.

8.12 Deconstructing the normalising judgement and returning the normalising gaze

I intentionally did not use the term 'normalising judgement' during the interview, when asking participants for their views in relation to this topic (or purposefully, any Foucauldian terms, see Section 5.2.7). Nevertheless, participants could have independently elected to talk with me about Foucault and his theories and concepts, including 'normalising judgement', and this did not happen. From these interviews, there was no evident awareness of Foucault and his concept of the normalising judgement amongst these practitioners, or at least none that they elected to share with me. Setting aside that the participants did not use the terminology of 'normalisation', participants also did not share any particular awareness of the power mechanisms which Foucault would believe were in operation around them (although brief mention of power was made by Karen, and brief mention of 'Big Brother' was made by Leanne and Dianna).

The transcripts suggested that my participants may have been affected by the normalising judgement, but also that they may not have considered what the possible effect of the normalising judgement was upon themselves. Ord and Rosemary (2013) reported on the use of the technique of enabling a counselee to understand the impact of the normalising judgement, in order to 'return the normalising gaze' (Ord and Rosemary, 2013). This 'returning the gaze' might also be a useful process for practitioners to undertake, in order to contemplate this power mechanism, which could be at play. Also, further consideration of the notion of moving 'beyond quality' (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013) could further enhance resistance to the normalising judgement in EY settings, as it could bring about further questioning of whether comparison to others is always an appropriate technique.

8.13 Summary and reflexivity

Many participants seemed to be affected by being ranked and compared to each other through the mechanism of inspection, as they were generally aware of the grades which others had received and all but three, declared that they drew comparisons. Although responses showed some implicit evidence of resistance to the normalising judgement, it was limited. For the most part, these practitioners had visions of what they hoped to get in their next inspection, and most explicitly reported actions they were taking to try to reach these goals. For example, they were acting on the advice/directives from the inspector. It can be noted, though, that sometimes participants agreed with the actions they were advised to take in their inspections.

Similar to my discussion on reflexivity at the end of Chapter 7, it is unlikely that without the use of Foucault (chiefly 1977) as my key theorist (in part, as a response to my own prior experience), that this study would have had such great insight into the possible effects of the Normalising Judgement.

9 Interview analysis: Examination

This section analyses the participants' responses about the actual inspection and the subsequent report. In this thesis 'examination' has been translated into 'inspection', because the inspection closely resembles Foucault's 'examination', but I have used the two words interchangeably.

9.1 Difference and similarity in relation to inspection

Participants, spoke about the differences in the way they were inspected. These differences were both about the amount of notice given for inspection, and also about what happened during the inspection. Caroline had a special view of the situation as she was the head teacher of a setting which encompassed both a maintained nursery school (received notice) and also a preschool (no-notice). A significant difference between the two inspections was that one was classified as a school inspection and one was not. The former took place over two days, and the latter lasted for only one day. The former was conducted by school inspectors, and the latter by EY inspectors (who were employed by an agency). Caroline's view was that the focus of the two inspections was different, the nursery school's being more about data (Section 7.2) and evidence of academic progression, and the preschool being more about whether or not the children were happy. Caroline gave the impression that the nursery school inspection was the more thorough of the two and said that she found herself offering up extra evidence to the EY inspector about her preschool so that her achievements could be recognised.

The two parts to Caroline's setting, and the difference she perceived in the way they were inspected, highlighted the issue that different types of settings received different types of inspection, even though all fell under the umbrella of the EYFS. In addition, maintained nursery schools and children's centres often serve areas of deprivation and will have had slightly different (government-stipulated) agendas from other EY settings. The funding

circumstances for these settings were perceived by Caroline as being particularly good.

All settings, regardless of who inspects, circumstances around funding, whether notice was received, and focus of examination, were all graded in the same way. This aligns with Foucault's (1977, p. 181) writing about the 'Ecole Militaire', which would rank every child according to the same scale regardless of their age. Similar to the children mentioned by Foucault, the settings in my study had differing levels of advantage. The difference between the children in Foucault's example and the settings in this thesis, was that the settings were all expected to be at least 'Good'. Whereas in Foucault's example, children who were younger, might have been expected to receive a lower rank, because of their age.

Some participants mentioned that conditions for settings were not equal. Caroline thought that there were schools which had been unfairly judged because of a lack of understanding of the specific circumstances of that school/setting. She would have liked to see this approach altered. Heidi also pondered on the impact that different circumstances could have on grades. While she initially thought it was acceptable for some settings to be less likely to get outstanding, because this would then be a call for them to improve, she then posed an interesting question.

Heidi: where—where:::: do you make the difference I think would be my concern... ...Which bit of the EYFS inspection and regulations could you actually do differently? - inspect differently?

In other words, Heidi was saying that although settings might be in different circumstances, there is no part of the EYFS that could/should be held as less important for some children. So, Caroline wanted greater account to be taken of settings' circumstances when considering their rating. Heidi's view, however, was that all settings needed to be inspected against the same criteria. The following will look into similarities and differences in inspection for the settings involved in this study (although see Chapter 6 for details of changes in regulation since the interviews took place).

9.2 [Notice of inspection](#)

Notice has been touched upon in Chapters 7 and 8, because it was an important consideration when analysing hierarchical observation and normalising judgement. This section looks at notice for inspection in greater depth.

Many thought that no notice should be allowed. Ofsted's recent changes (2015a) were actually to allow all settings some notice, which could be interpreted as moving a little away from the panoptic model (Foucault, 1977) (as I am suggesting in this thesis that having no notice of inspection could contribute towards practitioners never knowing whether they will be watched or not).

It was interesting to study the reasons participants gave for either thinking that notice should or should not be given (Sections 9.2.1 – 9.2.3), as this offered some clues as to whether a possible panoptic mechanism was accepted by the participants. Several participants indicated that there should be a uniform rule about notice for all settings, in order to ensure equitability in the system of inspection (similar to the views of the Daycare Trust (2011) and the NDNA (2011)). So, in terms of equity, participants would have been pleased with the changes that Ofsted (2015a) made regarding notice in recent years. However, Ofsted did not make the change in the direction that the majority of participants wanted to move.

9.2.1 [Participant view that settings should not be given prior notice of inspection](#)

The Education Select Committee (2011) and Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson (2010) put forward messages that unannounced inspections should be the norm. Similarly, Dianna thought that it was best not to have notice of inspection (even though it was not pleasant for practitioners during the period

when they estimated that their inspection was looming), because it was good for her staff to treat every day as an inspection day.

Dianna: So I think it's better not to know really
...That--that they're coming.

MW: And would you say that you generally run
your setting as if an Ofsted inspector could walk
in?

D: Yes.

Dianna treated every day as an inspection day, which indicated that the panoptic mechanism (Foucault, 1977) could be doing its job. Jane, Gina, Martha, and Belinda thought that no-notice was preferable, to avoid things being not as they would usually be when the inspector was present, again indicating that panopticism (Foucault, 1977) was at work (NB: Jane ultimately decided that settings should have notice).

Jane: ...(if you have notice)...then it's very fake.

Gina: Oh I think it's the right thing to do (to have no notice).

Martha: Um I think it should be (no notice). Because if you're doing it correctly day to day and there's no safeguarding problems and we're all locking things away and printing data and working...

Fiona: I think that there should be no notice for all settings. It is quite right to be this way

B: I think that if you're doing things (.) right, and as you should be doing them, erm: (,) then it shouldn't matter.

Heidi and Eleanor thought not having notice would not only ensure that settings would be viewed as they regularly are, but also limit stress levels for practitioners.

Heidi: Um:::, but actually we-- it's right we should be ready all the time and I think when we had the first-- that--that bad inspection although it was over--hhh. because it was over two days I then spent the whole of that weekend as I know schools do. so--so I think (.) yes just coming, (unannounced)

Eleanor: I don't think you should be given notice when Ofsted come, because .hhhhh it's just too::: fake...

... like XXXXXXXXXX is really determined for us to stay a good nursery:: and I think that we always will, if they just come off their own back...

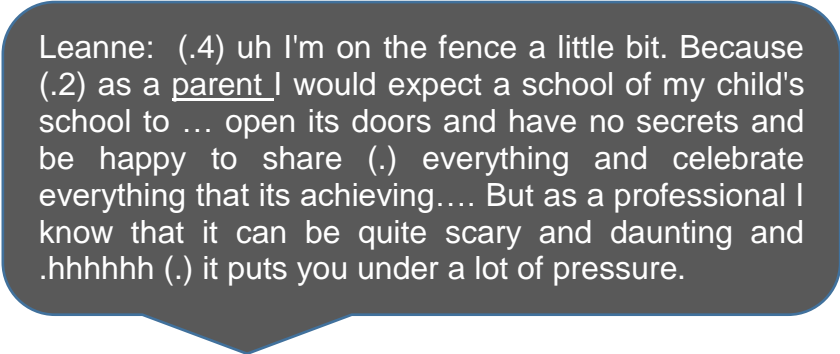
... I think we'll be a lot more relaxed, if they're just (drop in)

However, while Heidi and Eleanor settled their decision on having no notice, Heidi would have liked to know in which term inspectors were arriving, so that she could ensure that policies were up to date. She added that a little notice might be nice. Most of the participants who expressed a preference for no notice of inspection indicated that if practice was as it should be every day, then it is fine to have a drop-in approach to inspection. This could indicate that they were happy to be subject to panoptic mechanisms (Foucault, 1977). However, there are other possible explanations. For example, a couple of those who preferred to not have notice thought that this approach lowered stress levels associated with inspection, which could further contribute to practitioner well-being. Also, while Gina and Heidi both opted for having no

notice, they hoped that inspectors would take it into consideration if they were having a challenging day (e.g. Gina: staff sickness, Heidi: all children had just started on that day). Heidi thought that her setting was having a very good day when she received the 'Outstanding' grade.

9.2.2 Participants who were undecided as to whether settings should receive notice of inspection or not.

Leanne expressed her views both as a parent and as a practitioner in the following response,



Leanne: (.4) uh I'm on the fence a little bit. Because (.2) as a parent I would expect a school of my child's school to ... open its doors and have no secrets and be happy to share (.) everything and celebrate everything that its achieving.... But as a professional I know that it can be quite scary and daunting and .hhhhh (.) it puts you under a lot of pressure.

Leanne thought that having no notice (while better for parents) could negatively affect practitioners' well-being.

9.2.3 Participant view that settings should have notice of inspection

Participants who thought that settings should have notice (Caroline, Karen, Imogen, Andrea and Jane - five of thirteen) were clear that only a small amount of notice should be given (ranging from having a phone call on the night before the inspection, to having two days' notice). Reasons for this related to staffing,

K: I think everybody should--should be told at the end of the working day today that they'll be in tomorrow. You can't change anything in an evening.... But you could-- at least if I knew someone was on a course ...I would know that I had to deal with that that next day. Or I would know that if um I had a member of staff who ...maybe they're feeling a bit poorly but they could probably get through....But not to have to be inspected by Ofsted. I'd probably say to them 'Well you make the decision whether you feel you can cope with an inspection.

Caroline: it would be half a day's notice

...Well (.4) you know we're a very small school so:: I may be needed in ratio if a member of staff suddenly phones up sick, ...I haven't got a deputy, I haven't even got a full-time secretary.

MW: Yeah you can't speak to them (the inspector).

C: Yeah

Karen and Imogen also expressed the view that they thought it would enhance practitioner well-being to have some notice, as at around the time when an inspection was due, they were very reluctant to go on holiday.

Imogen recalled former Social Services inspections of EY, whereby, settings were given prior notice.

Imogen: my previous manager used to say it's like granny coming for tea::, it's--it's a case of you know you would--you would sort of just tidy up a little bit

...It was just we were-- we were-- we were emotionally and psychologically ready for them it was 'yes they're coming, let's just get on with our day'.

Karen wanted to avoid the feeling of perhaps being watched (Section 7.1), connecting strongly to the notion of simulated surveillance.

A few participants who would prefer to have notice, gave reasons for only having a short amount of notice. Caroline thought that there would be excessive stress in a longer period of notice (which can be considered in light of comments in Section 9.2.1, where limited stress was associated with no notice at all), and Andrea thought that a short amount of notice would be sufficient to allow settings to have 'a bit of a tidy up' before the inspection took place.

A: I'd say two days is because if the school is being run properly...

...Then the school will be organised how it should be but a couple of days to have a bit of a tidy up, whiz round, make sure things aren't out of place, then I think that's ample of time 48 hours

Andrea's comments, indicated that only minor alterations to the setting could be made during this period of time. Andrea, along with the others who preferred to have notice, recognised that with a short amount of notice, not a great deal could be done to alter the setting. These views might be in line with the reasoning by Ofsted in its decision to provide all settings with notice

(Ofsted 2015a), as even with notice, the panoptic mechanism could still be effective.

9.3 SEF (self-evaluation form) and inspection

While the self-evaluation form (SEF) has now been withdrawn (Gov.UK, 2018), some participants discussed the self-evaluation form in terms of their tactics for completing it prior to inspection, rather than how it was being used to control them. For example, some said that they thought that in order to receive a grade of 'Outstanding' that they needed to grade themselves as 'Outstanding' on their form. While Caroline acknowledged that some settings had no choice (because of their data) but to write on their form that they 'Required Improvement', she also mentioned...

Caroline: I think we'll I've got to be-- what I have got to be strong about:: is I have got to say right up front, "We are outstanding and you prove it if we're not."

Dianna thought that her most recent inspector had to some extent been guided by Dianna's SEF.

Dianna: A lot of her judgements were--were I think taken from our um our SEF, you know where we'd done the--the review ourselves and assessed ourselves where we were.

Gina, in her most recent inspection, for the first time, had declared that she thought her setting was 'Outstanding' on her SEF, and she did then, for the first time, receive a grade of 'Outstanding'.

Gina: You need to say at the bottom that you are 'outstanding' in this area. It's the first year that we did

Although Heidi indicated at first that she would not self-evaluate her setting as 'Outstanding', after thinking it through, she decided,

Heidi: So yeah, I probably would put 'outstanding' because I really think they (her staff) work incredibly hard

Karen mentioned that she had put her setting as 'Outstanding'. However, it was unclear whether she had done this in inspections before, or whether or not she thought this might influence the decision of her next inspector.

None of the participants suggested that they viewed the completion of the SEF as a method of Ofsted controlling them or their practice (even though Campbell-Barr (2018, p. 39) viewed it to be a surveillance tool). It was quite the opposite, as these participants indicated that they were, manipulating the inspectors through writing what they thought was required in order to get the grade they wanted. Ball (2003, p. 225) warned that this game could ultimately lead to 'capitulation' alongside any slight resistance.

9.4 Voluntary quality assurance paperwork

In order to continue the theme of practitioners' words contained within documents in relation to inspection, Karen expressed that she would like to see inspectors take more notice of the setting's own voluntary quality assurance documentation, which reflected a process that they had undergone over significant periods of time with external bodies (other than Ofsted). Such quality assurance schemes were advocated by Mathers, Singler and Karemaker (2012), who also asserted that Ofsted inspection should only be one part of a judgement about quality. Participants spoke about the positive effects of this process

Karen: obviously that's hugely increased the amount of paperwork but I would say with that that I can see positive benefits from the reflective journey. I think what is difficult is trying to manage that along with the SEF when I actually feel that the ***** Standard is a better reflective tool

Karen thought that quality in her setting had been enhanced by this quality assurance scheme, but was frustrated by a lack of acknowledgement from the inspector.

Karen: ...gave it lip service but didn't really look through and I think, had you used that as part of the inspection process... I--I wish it was almost compulsory that you did have to do it and that the inspector ... has an hour.. (to look at it)

Karen was shocked that one of her inspectors did not actually know about her quality assurance package. Gina, on the other hand, considered that the fact that she had completed her local quality assurance process, in itself reassured her that everything was in place for the Ofsted inspection. Therefore, it did not seem to be so important to her that inspectors would take notice of such documentation. If leaders are engaging with voluntary quality assurance packages, they are likely to be acting professionally and engaging in self-surveillance of their practice, even if this might not be quite the same self-surveillance that Ofsted would like to see happening.

9.5 [Power and the inspection](#)

The word 'power' only arose in a limited amount of interviews. The use of this word was most prominent in Karen's interview. She talked of a power imbalance and reported a feeling of powerlessness in relation to the inspection.

Karen: I think it's a power [im]balance um::: I don't think it should be because I don't see that they (inspectors) are really anymore professional than anyone that works in an early years setting. In my mind I think that, but in reality (.1) I do think that there's a power--I as I say I—they (inspectors) are the only people I feel (.1) powerless with. Um you know I don't when the local authority come in for example.

MW: Um why--why do you feel powerless with them?

K: I think it's because of the experiences I've had, you know. I have made a complaint about the inspection report and I don't feel it was taken seriously at all so then I think 'Well what could I do next time if I didn't agree with the inspection report?' um:: and I followed your procedure, I-- I did what you asked me to do in terms of your complaint pro-- um procedure and I don't feel-- and then the feedback that came back from that was even more ridiculous than what was in the inspection report.

Karen reported that she felt powerless because she thought that there was no acceptable way of arguing against the judgement of the inspector.

Karen: .hh I don't think I really let myself reflect on whether it's (the EYFS) OK, because I just accept that I if I want to pass an Ofsted inspection and I want to meet all of the legal requirements for the local authority and to kind of maintain the funding, as dire as it is that we get, um I have to do it. So I think uh a few years ago I used to let that eat me up inside whereas now I just accept there's a--I'm powerless against doing...

... anything about it.

It was a shame that Karen reflected on her experience in this way, as it indicated that she thought that there was no way of resisting government stipulations, all because of the judgement that would be awarded during the inspection. This echoes Osgood (2004, p. 18), who observed 'fatalistic resignation' amongst EY practitioners, as they also thought 'resistance was futile'. Osgood recognised the notion of performing without believing in something as being connected with Foucault's (1977, p. 294) ideas about 'technicians of behaviour' which led to 'bodies that are docile and capable'.

Dianna mentioned the word 'power' when she referred to another setting that she perceived as having more power in relation to Ofsted, because it was part of a chain of EY settings. This indicated that she considered she had less power in relation to Ofsted than someone else, but she was not directly commenting on a power imbalance between herself and Ofsted. Eleanor spoke about using Ofsted as a vehicle so that she had the power to say to her supervisor, that she needed time to finish (for example) her Learning Journeys (observations of children) (Carr, 2001). While Eleanor did not actually use the word 'power' I reflected with her that this was what she was indicating. If one considers Learning Journeys/Stories to be good for children's progress (Carr, 2001), then Eleanor's comment aligned with Fenech and Sumsion (2007) who found that EY practitioners sometimes used regulation to their advantage. In this instance, Eleanor's comment would fall into Fenech and Sumsion's (2007, p. 116) category of 'resistance that used regulation to mitigate perceived threats to quality'

While the word 'power' was not present abundantly in responses gathered during the interviews, I endeavoured to elicit how powerful participants thought they were in relation to inspection, by asking them about what they did during the inspection. One of the things that might have indicated that practitioners felt empowered during the inspection was if they voiced any opinions, which conflicted with the views of the inspector (Sections 9.5.1 and 9.5.2).

9.5.1 [Having opposing opinions](#)

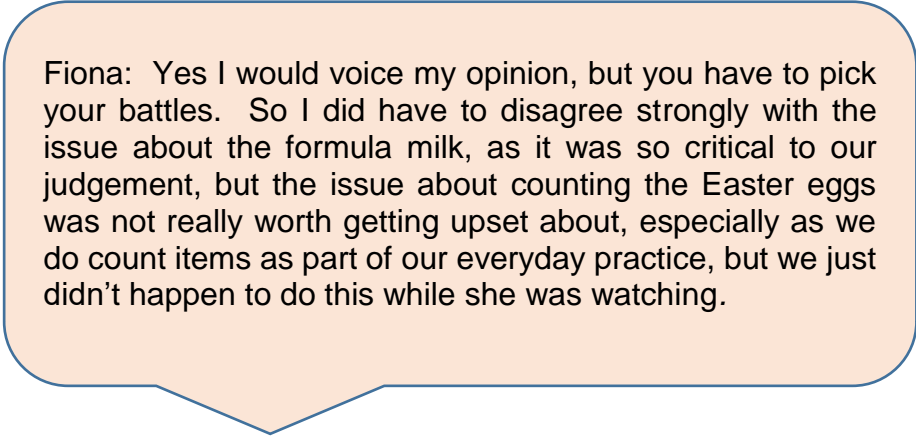
I established in Sections 3.1.1.4.1 and 6.5 that there are different ‘truths’ (especially see Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013; Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016) about the best way to approach the education and care of young children. Participants may have had different truths to those contained in the EYFS. However, there was widespread support indicated for the EYFS ‘truth’ amongst the participant group. This support could be explained by a consideration put forward by Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p. 113), that following regulations was perceived by some practitioners as part of being professional and delivering quality practice. Also, it does not automatically follow that because people align themselves with regulatory documents, they are consciously acting as ‘docile bodies’. They may quite simply agree with those documents and see them as enabling (Fenech and Sumsion, 2007, p. 117). Some of my participants indicated that they did not want to operate without the EYFS. Reasons given for this included that it was a support for staff who were not qualified, it was used as a management technique, and that it was used to fight off ideas which might impact negatively on quality. A curriculum which protects what practitioners view as effective pedagogy, even if constraining in some ways can be viewed as a ‘double-edged sword’ (Fenech, Sumsion and Goodfellow, 2006).

Not all participants thought that the EYFS was without fault. In relation to this, Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p. 113) suggested that feeling constrained by regulation could be an indication of agency from EY teachers, although perhaps it would be more desirable if this agency were expressed. Although not many faults with the EYFS were specifically mentioned by the participant group (N.B. this was not the focus of the interviews), some faults were identified, thus confirming that there had been scope for disagreements between inspectors and participants in their inspections, simply because there were things that participants disagreed with in the EYFS. For example, because Karen contested elements of the EYFS approach to teaching phonics, if her phonics practice had been criticised by the inspector, then disagreement might have occurred. Similarly, as Caroline had concerns about the EYFS having reduced focus on the children’s personal social and

emotional development, there might have been a mismatch between the inspectors view of this area and Caroline's. Thus, presenting opportunities for disagreement.

9.5.2 Voicing opposing opinions

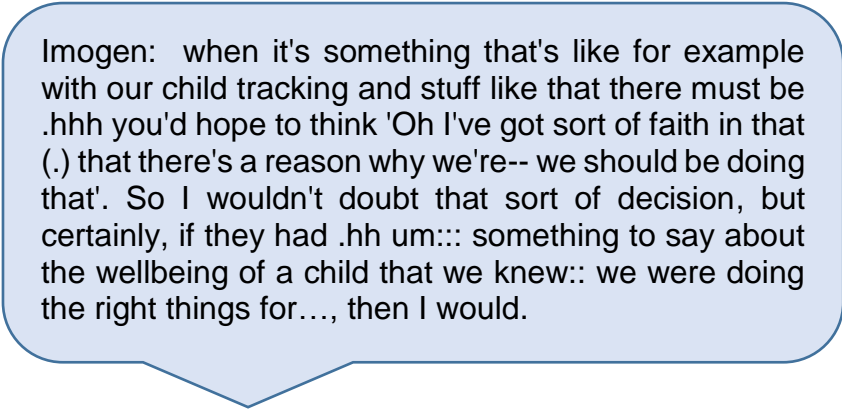
Hope (2013: 44) was in agreement with Foucault when he stressed that sometimes accepted truths need to be questioned. Without exception, all participants confirmed that if there was something that the inspector said that they disagreed with, they would mention it. This indicated that they felt some sense of power in order to do this. To add some further detail, not all participants would speak up about all things that they disagreed with. Fiona, for example, indicated that she would speak up about something if she thought it was worth her while to do so, or if it would impact on her grade.



Fiona: Yes I would voice my opinion, but you have to pick your battles. So I did have to disagree strongly with the issue about the formula milk, as it was so critical to our judgement, but the issue about counting the Easter eggs was not really worth getting upset about, especially as we do count items as part of our everyday practice, but we just didn't happen to do this while she was watching.

Gina was also prepared to let some minor things go that the inspector commented on. Fiona's approach (and to some extent Gina's) echoed findings of Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p. 118), who viewed resistance as incorporating when the practitioner was 'strategically deciding when to

acquiesce and when to 'fight'. Imogen would only speak up about certain areas, as there were things which she felt she could not voice. This latter was related to areas of the EYFS/inspection that Imogen felt she simply had to accept and trust there was a good rationale behind the government requirements.



Imogen: when it's something that's like for example with our child tracking and stuff like that there must be .hhh you'd hope to think 'Oh I've got sort of faith in that (.) that there's a reason why we're-- we should be doing that'. So I wouldn't doubt that sort of decision, but certainly, if they had .hh um::: something to say about the wellbeing of a child that we knew:: we were doing the right things for..., then I would.

The second part of this quote from Imogen had similarities with findings of Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p117), that Australian practitioners were 'openly resisting interpretations of the regulations, when such interpretation is perceived not to be in the children's interests.' However, reading between the lines, in the first part of Imogen's quote, she seemed to be having to blindly accept that the authorities were correct in their demands.

Eleanor indicated that she would question the inspector, but not forcefully, because she thought that inspectors would know best. Eleanor also noted that, essentially, the inspectors were the ones awarding the grade, so they needed to be listened to.

Eleanor: I'd question it:: I'd question it but I wouldn't sort of argue it out, I'd listen to what they were saying, definitely, because at the end of the day they are the base, that's how, you know, if we want to do better, then we need to listen to what they say, because at the end then they'll just come back, so:::

... I'm sure that they're the ones that are going to be right, so they're the ones that will come out and inspect us and give us a good rating, if:: you know if we do, do what they sort of suggest

Although Eleanor and Karen (Section 9.5) both connected doing what inspectors would favour because inspectors would be awarding the grade, their tones in discussing this matter were quite different. Karen considered this to be a restraining situation, whereas Eleanor did not imply that it was really problematic. This could be attributed to the participants' levels of experience and work roles (Karen held a higher position and was more experienced in EY).

9.5.2.1 [Would participants expect the inspector to take notice of their conflicting views?](#)

Only four of thirteen participants (Andrea, Eleanor, Gina, and Fiona) expressed that they would expect/hope to be listened to when they voiced their opinion. For example,

MW: And do you think you would feel listened to?

Andrea: (.)Yes

MW: And (.) would you feel heard do you think?

Leanne: (.) Yeah because there was a couple of incidences (.) during our inspection...

A few (three of thirteen), who had in the past, and would in the future express their opinions, did not necessarily expect to be heard. When asked, they responded...

Caroline: (.3) phhhh No.

Karen: No.

Martha: No, no.

Heidi, because of mixed experience of inspection, thought that whether her views were listened to or not, would depend on the inspector.

Heidi: Again that would probably depend on--on--on the--the personality of the person who--who came in

It was found that participants would express their views to inspectors to varying extents and with varying expectations. There were signs within their thoughts and actions in relation to this issue, which could indicate that they were engaging in some form of resistance (according to the views of Fenech and Sumsion (2007)), and that they thought their views should count for something. However, there were also indications that they were powerless at

the point of inspection and were experiencing something like a 'fatalistic resignation' (Osgood, 2004, p. 18).

9.5.2.2 Expressing a conflicting view and professionalism

All participants said they would express conflicting views to the inspector and also, without exception, viewed themselves as professionals. These were two areas which had universal agreement amongst the group, and could be connected. When asked if they were a professional, they typically responded...

Dianna: Yeah definitely. Oh gosh yeah, and all the team
...We're all professionals, yes.

Gina: Absolutely. Absolutely no doubt

This was the case, despite them working in multiple disparate positions and having varying amounts of experience and qualification levels. Harwood and Tukonic (2016, p. 589) also found that 'all the [EY] educators held a strong self-perception of professionalism regardless of their level of education'. Although several participants said that their own personality would be sufficient for them to feel able to speak up, should they feel it necessary (Leanne and Belinda), many (eight of thirteen) also told me that because that they were a professional, this supported them in expressing their views during inspection.

9.5.2.2.1 Reasons given on self-perception of being a professional

Some of my participants did not give explanations as to why they considered themselves to be professionals, but those that did, offered the following reasons:

9.5.2.2.1.1 [Importance of working with young children / high level of responsibility](#)

The word 'professional' was used the most often in Karen's interview. Karen and others associated their being a professional with the level of responsibility involved in their work, because of the importance of their role.

K: I think because ultimately not just me but our nursery has responsibility for the most important um age range that there can be.

Andrea: Um::, you do have a lot of people that (.) have a lot of faith in everybody that works in a school. You must-- you must be able to feel that parents and teachers can come and talk to you about things or ask for your opinions

Imogen: hhhhhh. I think the expectations on us as a childcare provider nowadays it's not-- it's not just about looking after children it's--it's the, it's the education, it's--it's getting the broad depth of um::: knowledge that you would like to offer that child and things. It's-- there's--there's more to it than just a babysitting service.

9.5.2.2.1.2 [Being qualified](#)

Belinda thought she was a professional because she had a qualification, which enabled her to understand what the EYFS requirements were all about, instead of just accepting that the EYFS was appropriate.

Belinda: ...so for me::: I went off to learn: about that and so yes I would say that I'm a professional

9.5.2.2.1.3 [Working in a recognised profession](#)

Leanne mentioned that her job title was recognised as being professional, but also went further to say that she followed structures and an ethical code.

Leanne: (.2) Because::--because what I do is a recognised profession and it is a professional (.) role ... and (.) I am a professional person in what I do and the structures that I follow and the ethics and (.) ethos around what I do is professional.

9.5.2.2.1.4 [Doing things correctly](#)

A couple of participants talked about doing things correctly as part of their being professional

Martha: Um:::: because um::: I do do my--well I feel I do my job to a higher standard and I report things that need reporting to the right people at the right time.

Jane: (.2) Um I have high expectations (.) of um working with children.
... Yeah. Um I like things done: (.) my way [laughs]. Um::: you know if things aren't done correctly you sort of say 'Oh if I did that (.) I'd want it done this way'

Jane was commenting on doing things precisely in relation to being a professional (maybe more like a technician) but actually, she referred to 'her' way rather than 'the' way (in the quote above), possibly indicating some autonomy in her work.

9.5.2.2.1.5 [Having a business background](#)

Finally, Fiona offered,

Fiona: I would describe myself as a professional, because of my business background

9.5.2.2.1.6 [Overview of self-perceptions as professionals](#)

The reasons that these participants offered about why they classified themselves as professionals were varied, although we did not spend an extended amount of time discussing this matter. Some of their reasoning resonated with Brock (2006), as they mentioned knowledge, skills and ethics. Participants also mentioned more emotive factors, which resonated somewhat with Simpson (2010). However, they did not mention the emotive issues when explaining why they were professionals. This could have been attributable to a more general understanding of what being a professional represents, for example, having skills and autonomy (Brock, 2006, p. 2). Although there were some areas that overlapped between my participants' explanations and the definition of professionalism by Brock (2006, p. 2), for example in relation to specialised knowledge, there was little mention of autonomy, except for Jane who mentioned that she wanted things to be done 'her' way. However, Jane also said that this was the correct way, hinting that 'her way' was that stipulated by the EYFS.

9.5.2.2.2 [Reasons participants gave for saying that professionalism would help them to confront inspectors](#)

Belinda and Gina explained that their being a professional gave them the confidence to express their views. (Belinda connected knowing more through being qualified, to being a professional.)

Belinda: || I think that erm I'd feel (.) I would always
erm:: voice my opinion: anyway but I think I'd do it
with a little bit more confidence now, because I
would feel that I knew more::: of what I was talking
about.

MW: Um, does your answer earlier about being
professional impact on being empowered to do that?

Gina: Yep

Gina explained further that she considered herself to be on top of things all of the time, and because of this she felt that she had as much of a right to an opinion as Ofsted. Imogen said that her perception of herself as a professional impacted on whether she voiced her opinion, as she has a wide extent of experience and good knowledge of the children at her setting. Three other participants thought that their levels of experience and professionalism would impact on them feeling more able to voice their opinions. However, some remained unconvinced that less experienced or younger practitioners might feel the same way. Caroline, for example said:

Caroline: Um:: (.) I mean possibly as a qualified teacher
and somebody with over 30 years experience...

...It's possibly easier for me,

While some participants indicated that they were professionals and that this would help them to confront inspectors, they did not indicate that this 'articulating alternative ways of 'doing'' would earn them respect as a professional, as suggested by Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p. 117). Two participants, Jane and Leanne, initially indicated that they would not let their

professionalism get in the way of expressing their views to the inspector, although they both later clarified that they meant that professionalism would support them in expressing their views.

MW: because you consider yourself to be a professional does that impact on whether you would say something to the inspector if you disagreed?

Jane: (.) No because I think that she needs to know what we do, why, and my views:: of (.) um:: if she thinks it should be done differently then I--I need to speak up and say 'Well we do it this way because'.

MW: Okay, but is that part of you being a professional?

J: Um::? (.2) Yeah, yeah I'd say, yeah.

MW: ...does this being a professional impact on whether you feel you can voice things to Ofsted inspectors?

Leanne: No I don't think it does. I don't have a problem with that.

MW: Does it support you? So being a professional does it support you to say what you think?

L: Oh yeah of course it does.

Karen also indicated that in some way it was unprofessional to speak out against Ofsted (in this instance Karen was referring to speaking to parents)

Karen: Because I'd like to think I'm too professional to slag off a body that's meant to be governing or inspecting...

The initial comments by Jane and Leanne and the comment by Karen could be connected to an image of a professional as respecting the inspecting authority.

9.5.2.2.3 [Examples of challenges to the inspector during inspection](#)

Some participants provided examples of when they had disagreed with the inspector. However, the sorts of things they were contesting were not in opposition to the current EY 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980d, p. 131), the EYFS. Instead participants were trying to highlight that they were strongly complying with the EYFS. Fenech and Sumsion, (2007, p. 115) found that their EY participants exercised 'resistance against regulation', although this resistance also seemed to offer alternative ways of still meeting the regulations. As such, my participants were acting in line with their Australian counterparts. However, in both instances this was different from completely resisting the regulations.

Fiona: I did have to disagree strongly with the issue about the formula milk, as it was so critical to our judgement.

Belinda: I said I did have paper towels, but I've stopped doing that because the toilet got blocked twice.

Heidi: yet children were taken out to wash their hands::::. And children were guided. The toilets were clean. If there was ever a queue the children were taken to the other toilets...

...We've done the risk assessment and said, "Actually to let the children in and out we can't because they could get down to the rest of the church that's what it had been like the 35 years before."

Jane: and then she questioned me if I detoxed the mat prior to using it and I said 'No::, I've just asked the staff um is it clean? They said yes. But we always detox it-- detox it afterwards so then it's always fresh for the next person...

Karen: I (.1) explained to her you know the situation of things um and I appreciate that that wasn't a healthy lunchbox but if that had gone on for a couple of days I would have brought it up with the parent but not when mum's gone into labour and they had other things on their mind

Leanne: Um so I had to explain to her this is the story behind the data, this is why it doesn't match. Because she questioned me on it. .hhhh And once I'd explained it and obviously we had the evidence she was-- it was fine.

Martha (below), shared that she demonstrated to the inspector her compliance with the regulations, but then continued to take no notice of the inspector's advice. Martha thought that the inspector's advice was not appropriate, and that her practice was compliant enough.

MW: and it wasn't specified (in the requirements) that you had to do that?

Martha: No. No. That's what I'm saying as long as we're offering it.

...And we're contacting the families and I'm thinking 'What else do you?' and they were like 'No you need to-actually go and knock their door'.

MW: So do you do that now?

M: No. Because I--I just-- if someone did that to me I would be upset.

Gina also told me that if she did not agree with something then she would not implement it at her setting, although she did not clarify if she had mentioned this to her inspector. She explained that in the past there had been things that she did not want to do at her setting which prevented her from receiving a grade of 'Outstanding', and that she was quite happy to accept this outcome. This demonstrated resistance to the reward of a higher grade, but still sufficient compliance to ensure a grade of 'Good'

Gina: For years we were just 'good' not 'outstanding' because there were bits that we refused to do and we were quite happy to stay 'good', to be able to do the things that we felt we wanted to do the way-- and we had the parents (.) agree with us.

Both Martha and Gina seemed to be taking more of a post-structuralist view of their practice, as discussed by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) and Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016).

In relation to demonstrating resistance during the inspection, my participants offered scarce examples which indicated that they thought they could resist the regulations completely. In several instances, they challenged the inspector's views, in order to demonstrate that they were complying with requirements. Explanations for this could be attributable to the fact that, for the most part, they agreed with the EYFS. This could, in turn, connect with 'the propagation of discourses that position regulation as legitimate and as a guarantor of quality ECEC' (Fenech and Sumsion, 2007, p. 113). Other possible explanations could be that they felt that they had no choice but to demonstrate that they were meeting (or surpassing) the expected standards at the point of inspection, and were compliant, even if some would then not take notice of what the inspector advised, after the inspection.

It may also be relevant that my participant group was working almost exclusively in pre-school settings, and criticism of the EYFS has often been related specifically to the Reception year (when children have started school). This criticism is often focussed on the outcomes expected of children by the end of the Reception year (Defries, 2009, p. 21; BERA and TACTYC, 2014, p. 12).

While Karen expressed that she had some reservations about the EYFS, she felt powerless to resist (Section 9.5) and implied that she was being forced into certain actions because of inspection. This can connect with Orłowski's (2016) discussion about lower evaluation of teachers leading to greater professionalism and better provision for children (see Chapter 6). This is because evaluation in the form of inspection can be seen as restricting practitioners' professionalism (and autonomy), and in turn lowering the quality of children's provision.

'Autonomy' (Brock, 2006, p. 2) was fairly absent from my participants' reasoning behind being professionals (see above). This is telling in terms of why participants were able to defend their practice, but just so long as it was complying with the EYFS/inspection criteria. Also, Foucault's lack of attention to resistance in his initial discussion of panopticism (1977) might explain why limited resistance was evident. My participants seemed to be

showing resistance during the inspection in similar ways to those identified in the study by Fenech and Sumsion (2007), i.e. resisting..., but ultimately resisting in order to comply with regulation, at the point of inspection. Participants also generally did not mention resistance in other arenas, than at the point of inspection (see Chapter 3 for discussion on practitioner opportunity to influence government policy in other arenas, such as through EY organisations, for example BERA Special Interest Group and TACTYC (2014)), apart from Karen, who stated,

Karen: Every, you know, time a new framework has come out I complete the feedback online so I try to be proactive.
...I don't really know what voice that actually has but um::
(.1) not as much maybe as I'd like it to have.

In expressing her opinion in this way, perhaps Karen indicated an appreciation that there are various interpretations of what is best for children (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013; Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016; Moss, 2016; Campbell-Barr, 2018), and that she tried to put alternatives views forward.

9.5.2.2.4 Complaining about the inspector/inspection

The ultimate challenge to inspectors could come in the form of a practitioner raising a complaint about inspection. Some participants reported that they complained to Ofsted about their inspection and this can be compared to 'utilizing complaint mechanisms', which was reported by Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p. 9) as a resistance strategy. Three participants told me about their complaints, with varying levels of satisfaction reported. Although Heidi, tried to complain she was prevented from doing so because the regulations were so clear on the topic she wished to complain about (even though her setting had been engaging in that particular practice in question

for over 30 years – see Section 9.5.2.2.3). Karen remained very unsatisfied with the response to her complaint as,

Karen: the feedback that came back from that (the complaint) was even more ridiculous than what was in the inspection report.

Finally, although Fiona eventually had her complaint upheld, she reported that she found the process of complaining to be so stressful that she had considered closing her EY setting because of it. The topics of the complaints by Karen and Fiona were related to disagreeing with their inspector's judgements in relation to the required standards, rather than putting forward a case for a completely different approach to that taken in the EYFS. So once again, resistance was within the realms of compliance. Heidi's complaint was slightly different as she was trying to argue against the regulations, on the grounds that she was doing something that had been in operation in her group for over 30 years and which she felt was a good practical solution. It is interesting to note that her grievance would not be considered at all by Ofsted, thereby, indicating that there is no opportunity for resistance against the regulations. This has clear implications in relation to opportunities for practitioners to be creative in their ideas about working with children.

9.6 Visibility during inspection

Visibility was variable for participants during the inspection as the length of inspection varied between the participants' settings. Also, the inspector might not have been able to see the whole of the setting in action for the whole period of the inspection. Karen recalled how, when she was a teacher, she could be fairly sure that she would only be directly observed for a short period of the inspection (not Ofsted, but a private school inspecting body), whereas she felt observed for the whole time during the inspection of the EY setting that she managed.

Karen: I was a year three class teacher then so I knew by five minutes into my lesson if they weren't with me I had another half hour or an hour of just not having that (.1) constant being watched whereas our early years setting is very small so they are in your room for the entire day.

To some extent, this feeling of greater visibility could be attributed to Karen feeling responsible for everything that happened at her current setting, in comparison to her experience of inspection as a class teacher.

Karen: ...but I wasn't in charge of absolutely everything [when she was a teacher in a school] whereas I think that's what makes me fear Ofsted now is what if I have missed something?

Karen also recalled that her staff were,

Karen: ...being observed for the entire day they couldn't go to the loo without the inspector knowing about it.

It may be normal for one person to be ultimately responsible for everything in an EY setting, similar to the role of a headteacher, although pay and conditions of employment may be very different between someone in charge at an EY setting and someone in charge of a school. Overall, Karen implied that leaders may feel especially visible during the inspection because of their level of responsibility, although my participants did not use the words 'visible' or 'visibility' at all during the interviews. However, they did describe the feeling of being watched. Even if participants tried to carry on as normal when the inspector was there, the majority indicated some kind of alteration either in themselves or in their staff when they were visible to the inspector. For example, Andrea, described feeling 'nerve-wracked'

Andrea: It's scary. [laughs] Um:::, having somebody follow you round:: or watching your every move::, making sure that you're doing things properly: is quite nerve-wracking

As Foucault said, 'The examination transformed the economy of visibility into the exercise of power' (1977: 187). The element of power may have been contributing towards the discomfort that some practitioners reported, as it is likely that this discomfort was related to the high stakes associated with inspection, and many mentioned this issue.

Because there would be a report published on line after the event, really it was not just the inspector watching these participants, but potentially anyone with access to the internet. Not all participants were uncomfortable with the visibility and some considered it their opportunity to be noticed. Dianna reported that some of her staff who were not spoken to during inspection seemed to be disappointed. Imogen, because of her experience of inspection, prior to her most recent one, had been fairly relaxed and advised her staff to just show off what they were doing.

Imogen: Um::: (.) those previous experiences have always sort of made me think 'no it's okay girls, you know they're coming in:::, you know just show off what you're doing..

This message seemed to have translated through to one of her staff members, who said that inspection was her chance to shine.

Jane: my time to shine. This is my work, this is what-
this is what we do

9.6.1 Was practice the same during examination (when directly visible)?

Please see Sections 7.3 and 7.4, to note that while practice may not have been entirely the same, whether or not the inspector was there, it was perceived as being more or less the same.

9.6.2 The perception that not everything was visible – or not everything was acknowledged by the inspector

A few participants reported that aspects of practice were being well-scrutinised. Caroline said that the timing of her inspection enabled the inspector to see what they were capable of doing.

Caroline: we had some major issues when--when the Section 5 inspector was in.

...And she was amazing. And um so it had to be 'carry on as normal'.

...Um, she was absolutely amazing about it all and I think it showed her how caring we are and how we put the whole child at the centre of everything we're doing.

Also, Gina perceived that inspectors really scrutinised every bit of the setting to see if it was meeting requirements.

Gina: Um:::, they dig into every little bit that needs to be

However, even Gina thought that her own quality assurance was more detailed, and she also thought it hard to show everything in one day, especially when no notice is given.

The majority of participants voiced their concern that not everything was being illuminated sufficiently during the inspection. Despite paperwork/data

being available at the examination (Section 7.2), several participants felt that not everything could be shown at the point of inspection, and thus there was sometimes a thought expressed that the correct judgement was evasive. Foucault (1977, p. 184) described the examination as a mechanism to establish the 'truth'. If the truth is not being established, then part of the disciplinary technique is not working.

Karen offered explanations as to why a setting might not be demonstrating their normal practice during the inspection, because, for example, the setting was having a bad day, or that it was a newly established setting, or just that a manager had missed something because of the multiple requirements of EY settings. Three participants reported (what appeared to be) the same setting that they thought was fantastic, which received a grade of 'Requires Improvement', because of one mistake (which they considered to be unfortunate, but implicitly one that any of them could have made).

If practice was not being fully illuminated during the inspection, then there are problems with this disciplinary technique. If the examination is being used 'to quantify, to classify and to punish' (Foucault, 1977, p. 184), then the judgement made during the examination needs to be accurate and full, otherwise it may be counterproductive. For example, Karen reported that practice not being noticed, resulted in staff feeling that they may as well not bother with engaging in the practice that Ofsted required.

Karen: But I still don't think it's a clear reflection and then I think my staff in terms of the impact that that's had feel well 'What's the point (name anonymised) they don't acknowledge what we're doing?'

Participants offered different reasoning as to why they thought that not enough was being seen (see below).

9.6.2.1 The inspector not being clear enough about what she wanted to see

Some participants reported that they thought that some inspectors failed to have sufficient clarity about what they wanted the practitioners to show them

during the inspection. Belinda reflected that certain toys had been put away – implying that she would have got them out if the inspector had requested this.

Belinda: I think she said that there wasn't many erm, little, sort of little people, sort of toys, you know

In contrast, Jane thought that she knew that the inspector would want to see certain things.

Jane: they'd want to look at planning, like discuss what they want to look at, what things they might ask you

Although she also stated that she had learned throughout her experience of inspections to,

Jane: ...have everything out (.) to show them, everything needs to be visual (.) I've learnt in the past

This seemed to suggest that she had encountered an experience where something had not been on show, when it should have been.

9.6.2.2 [The inspector not allowing the practitioner to explain the setting's practice](#)

Karen stated that,

Karen: she asked me a question and I'd start answering it and I'd be in the flow and I don't think I was repeating myself but she cut me dead sometimes or:: didn't let me expand on things and then in the report (.1) some of that impacted negatively on what was written.

and this indicated that time had not been allowed for practice to be explained.

9.6.2.2.1 [The inspector not noticing things](#)

Some participants thought things had not been noticed.

Gina: I know on previous reports that we had um there were comments that we didn't really agree with but I thought, oh it's not worth really faffing about it....Because didn't we always do those things but on that day even though we did do it, they just didn't see it.

Karen: Just as an example uh the inspector hadn't seen any construction outside, well there's bricks, there's blocks, there's children's choice of boxes with stickle bricks with large blocks, wooden materials and I thought 'What does it take me to do to actually walk you over to it and see it?'

9.6.2.3 [Insufficient time for typical practice to be demonstrated.](#)

Karen and Gina were concerned that the time allocated to inspections was too short.

Karen: There for a day yeah. Um yeah nine-- arrived at about quarter to nine and was doing the feedback by about sort of quarter to three? Three o'clock?

...a sense of anxiety nearly all day. Um pressure to make sure that that inspector saw everything that I needed her to see (.1) in such a short space of time

Gina: You know it's difficult because they want to see everything, but you can't do everything on a day, especially if you haven't planned for it.

9.6.2.4 The inspector putting people on edge so they could not demonstrate normal practice

In section 7.3 it is demonstrated that some participants thought that they were unable to demonstrate their normal practice. This was because they felt uneasy in the inspector's presence.

9.6.2.5 Other comments which related to not everything being visible

EY practitioners are frequently involved in assessing children. Karen commented that practitioners are advised to avoid making snapshot judgements of children, and yet this is how she perceived the process of Ofsted's assessment of her own practice. The comments above relate to practitioners thinking that not enough of what they were doing right was being seen/recognised by the inspectors. However, this could also be considered against concerns that inspectors were not seeing enough of what Ofsted might uphold as bad practice (Penn, 2002; A+ Education, 2010; Jones, 2010).

9.6.3 Control during the inspection, in order to be more visible

Karen, who was expecting an inspection in the near future, was hopeful that a recent change to the inspection framework would enable her to show a greater quantity/variety of her practice, and be more visible.

Karen: ...the newer-- newer inspection frameworks um they do sound that I will have a bit more of a choice about how the inspection goes. I felt very powerless if I was to be honest. I don't feel I had a choice about being able to say 'Would you like to come and see this?' or 'You haven't seen that' or I didn't really feel by the end of it whether it was my fault that I hadn't sold our setting enough 'cause I still have sleepless nights about the guilt of that now and this is three and a half years on or whether actually reflecting back I wasn't given the opportunity to do it. And it's not like that was my first inspection where you could have thought well nerves would have made me not be able to do it. And I think I'm reasonably articulate although on this it might not sound like it [laughs] Um

Reports from Heidi, who had experienced one of these newer types of inspections, indicated that she was able to control the process a little more. However, she attributed her being able to take control largely to having more experience and having attained her Early Years Professional Status (Children's Workforce Development Council, 2012b). Part of the process of being accredited with EYP was having a setting visit in which the candidate would need to show the assessor evidence of what he/she had done to improve the setting. During this assessment visit, the candidate would have been very much in control. Below are two quotes from Heidi, the first relating to an earlier inspection when she did not feel in control, and the second to a later inspection when she did feel more in control.

Heidi: I didn't have-- probably didn't quite have the same confidence, I'd only been a manager for a year although I've been here for a long time. So I probably wouldn't have led it but I don't think she probably would have allowed me to anyway.

Heidi: ... because I could go, 'Right this is not going to be very different to what you did six months ago (when H had an EYP setting visit), just keep thinking about what it was you needed to show--show off the setting.'

Caroline said that she always took control of the inspection

Caroline: And I've always taken control and said, "So can I meet you at 8 o'clock tomorrow morning and I'll have that evidence?"

Caroline's comment is associated with the difference in lengths of time for inspection, as some settings only had an inspector for one day, and could not prepare things for the following day.

In relation to control, there was certainly a strong theme, which emerged throughout the interviews, that participants were becoming more conscious of the idea that everything needed to be made visible (Section 9.6.2) to the inspector, as they thought that otherwise the inspector would report that it did not exist.

Dianna: Afterwards we said, "Oh wish we'd said that, wish we'd done that, wish we'd taken her out and about and seen a bit more of .hhhhh what we offer."

MW: So would you do it differently in the future?

D: Mm:::, yeah, I'd know better (.4) how to play the game, (.) yeah

Jane: Yeah 'Oh let's get that up because they'll be...
...they'll be looking for that sort of thing.

Belinda: you know you have to make sure that you show(.)you show them everything

Belinda thought that people who were new to inspections were at a disadvantage, as they did not know to show all the activities and relevant paraphernalia.

9.6.4 [The focus of the examination](#)

Participants mentioned three key issues in relation to the focus of inspections

1. Themes being decided by Ofsted because they were 'flavour of the month'
2. Inspectors particularly paying attention to their own individual areas of interest
3. Frequent change in EY frameworks (such that focus and requirements were sometimes unclear)

These factors were all identified as problematic to the participants, as they led to uncertainty and confusion regarding the expected happenings on the day of inspection. Also, all three things could indicate a non-panoptic state of affairs, because for people to comply with requirements, they need to know the specific requirements. When students sit a written examination, they often do not know what questions will be asked (or what the focus will be). They have a syllabus that they must learn and then a sample of topics will be selected for the exam paper. Because they do not know what will be in this sample, they must learn everything. This is what people are used to in examinations. So, although one might wonder why these participants were unhappy about the three identified features above, the following adds greater clarity to why this might be.

9.6.4.1 Focus being decided by Ofsted because it was 'flavour of the month'

Several participants considered that there were themes which constituted the focus of inspections, and that they were not privileged with the information of what these themes would be from Ofsted. Instead, they reported that they had to find out what the focus would be, for example, from asking colleagues working in settings that had recently had an inspection.

Karen: I do feel that they you know have something that they want to hone in on. I don't know if it's a monthly thing [laughs] or if it's a six monthly thing... ...There always seems to be something. I think 'Well that's come from somewhere' um::: you know I've got the vibe at the moment that it's you know maths... And then you think 'Well what's the kneejerk reaction to that?' I've spoken to people who have had a couple of inspections in the last coup--few months and it's been very much maths, maths, maths, maths, maths.
...I shouldn't have to know what their bee in the bonnet is, they should--maths should be one little part...

I can confirm that there seemed to be areas for focus from inspectors emerging from the interview transcripts. For example, several participants said that the focus was on maths, and several indicated that the focus was the fostering of independence in children. According to the panoptic system (Foucault, 1977), practitioners would need to know what Ofsted wanted them to focus on, in order for them to focus on it. Nevertheless, Ofsted can put these focus areas into the inspection report as 'areas for attention', and thereby strongly encourage settings to pay attention to this area before their next inspection (although a different inspection focus might have been established by that point in time).

9.6.4.2 Inspectors particularly paying attention to their own individual areas of interest

Several participants believed that inspectors had their own areas of interest on which they particularly focused. When Caroline had her last inspection, she had recently spoken to other head-teachers who had already had the inspector in question to visit them.

Caroline: But (.) I'd made lots and lots of notes because I knew we were due. So actually before the lady (inspector) even walked in I (.) had an idea of what her likes and strengths and idiosyncrasies were and, so we you know that's great

Inspectors should represent Ofsted's values and concerns, rather than their own. Nevertheless, Imogen reported.

Imogen: It--it to me it's just hhhh. all of these inspectors have their own sort of personal .hhh perspective on:: um what they're coming out to see (.) ... I'm wary that different:: inspectors have different perceptions of what they want to come out and actually you know (.) see.

It was this issue that was making Imogen nervous about her next inspection

Imogen: Since the (most recent) inspection (.2) I've probably lost confidence in that because I think the goalposts and the expectations of different... .. inspectors is--is different so I feel very wary: um:: and very nervous about our next inspection.

Imogen also reported that her EY advisor had said that all inspectors have their own perspective of what they are coming out to see. Other practitioners shared similar views. For example, Martha reported,

Martha: .hhh as much as you get your agenda of what they're looking for I think some people have got a different agenda when they actually arrive. I know that's-

-

MW: You mean-- you mean individuals.

M: Individual inspectors..

MW: Have got their special things that they looking for.

M: Yeah, yeah like there's adult learning or a two year old funding.

Although Dianna was very happy with her inspector, she had heard that some inspectors are very rigid about what they inspect.

Dianna; From--from the sort of talk that goes around the other settings you know, sometimes you get people that are not very open minded and just got they're very rigid about what they're going to look at and what they're going to see.

If inspectors have their individual areas of focus and this area is of no special importance in the eyes of Ofsted, then there would be a 'chink in the armour' of the panoptic mechanism.

Returning to the written exam analogy mentioned above (Section 9.6.4), it is usual for an exam paper to be a little unpredictable regarding the questions. However, there is usually an indication of how many marks are available for each section. Some participants (in other words) indicated that an inappropriately large proportion of attention was being allocated to areas that

had either been decided by Ofsted or by the individual inspector, without any prior alert to the practitioners. This resonated with the 'bug bears' of inspectors referred to by Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson (2010, p. 26).

9.6.4.3 [Frequent change in the Early Years curriculum \(EYFS\)](#)

Participants shared a common feeling that there was an unacceptably fast pace of change in EY policy (see Chapters 2 and 6 for examples of this). Karen noted that the changes were hard to keep up with and she felt that her inspectors were essentially trying to trip her up rather than find out what her setting was doing well. Imogen thought that her most recent inspection had not gone well because changes that she thought had been instated since changes to the EYFS in 2012, had in fact not been initiated.

K: I think that we do get kneejerk reactions (from the government and therefore from Ofsted) to 'Oh my goodness our children are illiterate, right let's put synthetic phonics in and never mind if the children aren't ready' .hhhh um and I think kneejerk reaction where the training isn't in place. You know we're expected to take on a new framework where there's been very limited training for staff...

Imogen: ...we thought we were on the right road but (we had) completely gone off into the wrong direction actually.

The issue was also raised that it can be quite difficult to get any information from Ofsted to clarify what is or is not required. Caroline told me...

Caroline: you frequently send emails or make contact with Ofsted asking questions:: and I could do it on one day, the nursery-- another nursery head in the north of [this county] could do it on another day and another one and we would get three separate answers (.) I can promise you that.Um so (.) it can be difficult to find out information (from Ofsted)

High frequency of change, alongside unknown areas of focus (whether they be related to what Ofsted is currently interested in, or what the individual inspector is interested in) are all reasons that would argue against a panoptic model being in action, as they can result in the practitioners not knowing what is required of them and a possible post-panoptic (Courtney, 2016: 624) situation. Courtney (2016: 629) argued that this was a deliberate strategy by the government to 'expose subjects' inevitable failure to comply'. My interview transcripts would corroborate Courtney (2016), that requirements were not always clear to participants.

Practitioners in my study seemed to have accepted that they needed to play the examination game. They were, though, unhappy that the rules of this game were not known to them.

9.7 [Outcomes from the inspection](#)

The following details what participants told me about the outcomes from their inspections.

9.7.1 [Feedback](#)

Participants reported different ways in which inspectors shared their feedback, including through informal comments being voiced during the inspection and through oral feedback at the end of the inspection. The feedback that the inspector gave (before leaving) often went first to the

leaders before being disseminated to the remainder of the team. For example, Martha remembered that when she ran a setting,

Martha: Yeah that was me, myself and the--the head. And then we fed back all to the staff because they were all like you know we didn't want them going home and sort of panicking as well.

The way in which feedback is given to school teachers was reported as important by Dean (1995). Certainly, Leanne indicated that she appreciated receiving feedback from her inspectors separately from her staff team.

Leanne: They fed back to me on my own before anybody else.

MW: And did that make a difference?

L: Yeah it did.

However, Leanne also reported having witnessed a school inspection feedback session, which was delivered to her as a governor of the school at the same time as the head-teacher.

L: Um::: four of the governing-- we saw him together. He was quite rude. He-- we prepared a pack for him with minutes and various other forms of evidence, .hhh he wasn't interested.(.) So that was awful. And the outcome was awful. And the way it was delivered was (.) heart-breaking. It was horrible. It was horrible.

... But the whole process just brings you down.

... Um and it kind of puts you in limbo a little bit

Both of Leanne's experiences reported above resulted in grades which were below 'Good'. However, the way in which feedback had been given alongside understanding of the stories behind the data, made a difference to the way in which Leanne reflected upon them. Other comments from my

participants mirrored some of the findings of Dean (1995), who found that teachers wanted feedback directly after their lessons and they wanted to be given a chance to respond to the inspector's comments. Many of my participants also wanted to be able to respond to feedback, although they were often disappointed in the reaction from the inspector in relation to this. This 'inspector's response' was sometimes put in writing within the report (Section 9.7.2).

Dean (1995) reported that the way in which feedback was delivered was important and that school teachers were very critical when this was not done well. Belinda reported that feedback from her inspector was given well,

B: ...And she was pleasant(.).hhhhhhhh ((slow intake of breath here)) and it(.).yea and she she was nice and it went, the - the, inspection went okay really. ((quite a flat voice here))

Other participants, however, were critical of feedback, both oral and written, but in particular, they were critical if they thought that the feedback was lacking in 'truth' (Section 9.7.2).

Clarity of feedback was mentioned by some participants, for example Heidi reflected that in one examination,

Heidi: ... we had lots of sort of little comments and she went round and said, "Oh this is looking-- this is" What was one of the comments? "If--if it looks like, if I think that it might be good then I really start (.) checking." So it was like, 'Oh okay. Well I think we are quite good.'

However, the grade Heidi received was 'Satisfactory'. Also, Dianna reported the following

Dianna: the feedback I was getting I--I by lunch time I was beginning to think well maybe we will get an 'outstanding', may--maybe she is seeing all those extra things that we're doing. Um:: and she was very impressed with the tracking and all the rest of it. But then when she actually phoned back she said, "Oh it was a 'good'. So I challenged...

Dianna indicated that this was an inadequate response from her inspector, and that she had felt misled by comments during the inspection. From Martha and Leanne's accounts (below), it was suggested that between their two inspectors they had one who gave negative comments and one who was more positive, and this seemed to be an acceptable approach to them.

Martha: Good cop was giving us ideas of 'Why don't you do that?' and maybe you should try this. And 'I know you haven't got the data for that but maybe'

...So she was being really very helpful I thought.

...You know so uh .hhhh and then the bad cop was the bad cop [chuckles] 'Why do you do that?' and 'That shouldn't be allowed'.

Dean (1995) found that if the inspector was willing to look for reasons as to why things might be lacking, this was more acceptable to the school teacher. Karen reported that she tried to explain why 'free-flow play' (children moving freely between areas) was less possible in her building than another building, but she did not feel that her inspector was very appreciative of the specific circumstances of her building when this was later written about in the report (Section 9.7.2). In contrast Leanne indicated that her inspector appreciated some of her difficulties, when delivering feedback, and this made a difference to Leanne, even though her grade was not altered as a result of the circumstances.

Leanne: And the way that they fed back to me as well .hhhhh was (.) you know because some of it they knew we'd only been open for five years, we--we didn't have the historical data that some children's centres have that we needed for impact.

Leanne had also been part of an inspection in which she thought that the circumstances of the setting's performance were not taken into account.

Leanne: ... the inspectors, the lead inspector (.) had already decided what his outcome was going to be before he stepped foot through the door (.) because he'd looked at the data. And he hadn't (.) you know he hadn't given every.. anybody the opportunity to tell the story behind the data. (tuts)

Similar to Dean (1995), the general approach of the inspector, both throughout the inspection and during feedback, was important to my participants and that an 'I am the inspector' approach was not helpful. Jane reported,

Jane: Um asking questions. Um:: (.2) I just found her very um::: (.) how can I describe it? (.4) I--I couldn't ask her things. Usually I sit with the inspector and I--I have lunch with her, our last Ofsted inspector I was just chatting away what she did:: and I felt like I was a bit reserved and I couldn't ask her [the most recent inspector] anything like that.

This experience for Jane seemed to contrast with the approach of Leanne's most recent inspector who offered her informal feedback.

Leanne: And she was--she was so nice. She had a couple of off the record conversations with me::: .hh on how we could change things or improve things or 'This is what you need to do for next time' and .hh and that kind of stuff

This was to the point that Leanne felt nurtured through feedback (almost!).

L: I felt (.) almost (.) nurtured (.) by this lead inspector.

The implicit message from comparing the experiences of Jane and Leanne, was that, with Jane, the inspector may have missed an opportunity for sharing feedback which was acceptable to her. In the panoptic model and other ideas about discipline that Foucault (1980; 1977) has expressed, the ultimate aim is to get one party to do what the other party wishes. Inspectors might consider this when deciding on an approach, as one might be more effective in getting practitioners 'on board'. Similar to Jane, school teachers in Dean's (1995) study did not appreciate the inspector taking a distant approach. Moreover, reflecting on Jane's comments, it might appear that such an approach can be counterproductive to improvement, as Jane might have been able to discuss improvements with an inspector who was perceived as being a little friendlier.

Heidi also commented on feedback during the inspection. As her inspection began on Friday and was completed on Monday, Heidi acted upon her feedback over the weekend and acquired some bikes that had been suggested by the inspector.

Heidi: ...Monday when she came in we'd acquired a bike... She said, "Well I hope it's been inspect-- I hope it's been checked properly and it's safe." Oh please that's not the attitude, surely it should have been, (.) "Well done..."

Heidi thought that she was doing a good thing in reacting so swiftly to feedback, but received what she interpreted as a negative, rather than encouraging response.

Although there were some mixed comments expressed by participants in relation to feedback (largely falling on the side of negative), Belinda

expressed that Ofsted inspection was the only opportunity for her to receive feedback as a childminder.

Belinda: .. but::: it is the only place really that you're going to get a bit of feedback

9.7.2 The report

The examination (and subsequent report) makes each setting a 'case' (Foucault, 1977, p. 191; Smart, 2002, p. 87; Guittar and Carter, 2014, pp. 136-137). Practitioners in my study were interested in the grade that they received (see Chapter 8), but many were also concerned about what was written in the report. While Fiona was less concerned about what was actually written, so long as she still received the grade she perceived she needed, others revealed that they were very concerned about this text. These viewpoints are understandable because of the potential impact of the report (Grenier, 2017, p. 3).

Karen was concerned about the length of time between successive inspections, and therefore, the amount of time that a report could have an impact. The length of time between inspections was also raised by Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson (2010, p.26), especially in relation to PVI settings, because much could change over a period of three years. Karen thought that the report would 'capture and fix them' (Foucault, 1977, p. 189), making them 'legible and docile' (Foucault, 1977, p. 188).

Karen: I'm powerless against doing...
...anything about it

Karen's report could be viewed as an example of descending individualisation (Foucault, 1977, p. 189) (see Section 3.1.1.3.2), whereby she was written about, in order to control her. This was reflected in her

anxiety that the report would not accurately reflect the inspection. Unfortunately, Karen thought that her inspector had failed to write about items that had been on display and did not reflect the impression the inspector had given about aspects of building management.

Karen: it said something along the lines of you know children would benefit from more choice about where they play outside or inside. And I thought 'Well no because you've just in the meeting given us positive feedback about the way we manage our building'.

Belinda also reflected...

B: sometimes when you read it (the report) back afterwards you just think (.) .hhh right, okay, well I don't really remember that happening

Belinda was disappointed that the inspector had not asked to see items which were later put in the report as being missing at the setting. Karen also told me about items which were on display, but which were not included in her report.

The things written in the reports were fundamental in controlling the behaviour of several participants. This demonstrated control through the mechanism of the report (also see Section 9.7.2.3).

[9.7.2.1 Collaboration on the report \(or lack of it\)](#)

Dean (1995) found that while what was written in the report might be negotiated between inspector and teacher, there was not the opportunity for

school teachers to influence the views of the inspector with regard to the grade. In relation to influencing her grade, Dianna reported,

Dianna I felt it was set in stone and I'd got no chance (chuckles) of changing her mind

There was also no indication from other practitioners that they had been successful in changing the mind of an inspector, once a grade had been allocated. Only one of my participants reported successful challenging of a grade, and this was through the formal process of appeal. Fiona reported that this took several distressful months, and may only have been successful because she had obtained an expert opinion on the matter. The general message that my participants conveyed was that what was written in the report, was also non-negotiable. For example...

Caroline: ... what was frustrating was she came about three days before we broke up for Easter and I said, "We are stopping hot dinners on Friday, please don't make that our target." ...But she did.

9.7.2.2 [Accuracy of the report](#)

From their comments, some participants indicated that different people reporting on the quality of their settings, might produce different reports, thereby, questioning the accuracy of the reports, and aligning with the inconsistency in inspection judgements reported by others (A+ Education, 2010; NCMA, 2010; Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson, 2010; Mathers, Singler and Karemaker, 2012). Leanne reported differences in opinions between the county council and the inspector.

Leanne .hhh both reports contradict each other. They're completely different (.) And it makes you (.) wonder...

Many participants told me that they did not think that their report accurately reflected their setting. For example,

Imogen: our report I feel doesn't actually reflect on totally who we are at the moment.

Karen: I've never had a-- well not in the last two, a report that I feel genuinely is accurate enough for me to feel proud about

9.7.2.3 [Influence of the report on practice](#)

The reports, for the most part appeared to be successful in controlling the actions of these participants.

Eleanor ...we... go through the report we've been given... so now we can put those ... into practice:: so if they come again:: we're, we're doing it.

Heidi: and anything that was in that report was dealt with within a few weeks.

Gina: I do make sure that I do it immediately, fix it up immediately.

Andrea: I'd ...change it: to the way that they'd expect it be when they come in next.

Fiona: I make changes in the setting based on this (the report)

Imogen: we're already looking at ways of actually (.)
tweaking what we-- what we need to do so

While speaking to me, participants did not focus on the report being used to control them. This may have been because they did not think of the inspection's primary aim as being to control their actions (Section 9.10). Dianna stated that the inspection report had advised her to do something she wanted to do anyway,

MW: Is it because of the Ofsted report?
Dianna no::: I think we'd already identified
M: So actually you're working towards
something that you'd want to be working
towards anyway?
Dianna: Anyway. Absolutely

and this suggested that she did not think that she was being forced into anything. This was also the general tone from many who commented, perhaps indicating that there was some alignment between what Ofsted wanted and what the participants considered to be good practice. This would connect with the views of Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016), who indicated that there can be some alignment between what Ofsted want to see and what practitioners believe to be appropriate.

Fiona: so far I have generally agreed with what the
inspector said and so was fairly happy to make the
changes

The comments from Eleanor and Heidi above demonstrated no signs of force or acting against their will. Eleanor accepted the changes because Ofsted

did not like certain things, and prior to inspection she had not known if things were being done correctly.

Eleanor: we didn't know if we were doing it right:: exactly

Also, Heidi accepted the changes because they were 'written down' in the EYFS rules and regulations. Based on the responses, only Karen's comments had a slight edge to them (Section 7.3.2), as they indicated that she was cynical because she believed the inspector's advice to be inappropriate (because the inspector's observations had been inaccurate). Karen did not say that she disagreed with the practice required, rather that, in her view, this practice was already happening.

Only one participant (Martha) said that she had disagreed with the advice and had therefore not followed it. A few others when hypothetically considering what they would do if they disagreed with the recommendations, said that they would not do it, and/or consider resigning.

Gina: I don't agree with it, I won't do it.

Heidi: I would find that extremely difficult and I think I would think about actually maybe it's time for me to get out.

There was a slight element of resistance demonstrated by Jane, Andrea, and Karen, as they were less concerned with immediately putting advice into action, and were more focussed on ensuring that it was in place for the next inspection (which they might reasonably expect to be some time away).

Jane: 'Oh yeah I need to do that for next time'

The above demonstrated that participants seemed generally happy to put the report's advice into action. A few said that if they really did not agree with the report's recommendations, then they would either not do it and/or they would be considering leaving EY. Only one participant said that she did not carry out advice, and did not indicate that she had considered leaving. This suggests that few thought that they had the option not to act on the report, but fortunately they generally did not appear to be compromised too much, as they were often in agreement with the given advice.

9.7.2.4 [Influence of the report on parents](#)

While there was scepticism from some participants surrounding the accuracy of the inspectors' judgements and reports, Eleanor saw the inspection as an opportunity to confirm for her that their setting was doing well, partly for her own reassurance and partly because this then provided parents with the confidence to send their children to her newly established setting.

Eleanor: and as soon as we did get a 'good' on our first inspection which was brilliant, .hhhh erm: we had floods of children coming in and starting

Nobody actually reported that parents withdrew their children because of receiving a grade which was below 'Good'. However, others noted that as soon as they got a grade of 'Good' or 'Outstanding', from a former lower or non-existent grade, that they had an increased interest from parents intending to send their children to their setting.

9.8 [Examination and maintaining /improving quality](#)

I highlighted in Chapter 1 that EY quality is a slippery term (Cottle and Alexander, 2012, p. 644) and is, to some extent, subjectively considered based on individual perception (Slaughter and Carmichael, 2016).

Nevertheless, participants' perceptions of whether inspection improves quality can still be explored.

The issue of whether or not Ofsted inspection improves quality has been open to debate. Some have indicated that it does (e.g. A+ Education, 2010; Daycare Trust, 2010; NCMA, 2010; NDNA, 2010; Husbands, 2014; Elfer, 2015; Lee, 2016), others have been more sceptical (e.g. Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Ferguson *et al.*, 2000; Shaw *et al.*, 2003; Rosenthal, 2004; Perryman, 2007; Jones and Tymms, 2014). My participants held mixed views as to whether or not inspection ensured/improved quality, although almost all participants thought that something like Ofsted inspection was necessary for EY.

Largely my participants did not see the inspection 'per se' as an unnecessary thing. This may have been related to many participants viewing regulation as being related to protection of children, rather than controlling their practice (Section 9.10).

Several participants referred to other quality assurance schemes that they employed which they regarded highly as a tool to improve quality (see Section 9.4 where it can be seen that Gina thought that there was a correlation between engaging in her voluntary quality assurance and achieving a high rating at Ofsted inspection, possibly adding to the argument that Ofsted encourages quality in settings).

Jones and Tymms (2014, p. 324) identified that feedback (Section 9.7.1) was one of the strategies employed by Ofsted to improve standards, although Coe (1998) found that the notion that people performed better when they received feedback could not be confirmed. Nevertheless, I have already established (9.7.2) that what was written in the report was generally taken note of by my participants, and alterations were made to practice. Jones and Tymms (2014, p. 326) drew on the 'nudge' mechanism (Thaler and Sunstein, 2009), whereby Ofsted would not actually cause improvement, but would nudge others into action. This would align with O'Farrell's (2005, p. 99) writing about Foucault, that subjects still have a choice as to how to act. Whether or not people are forced to act, are nudged to act or choose to act, it

is the actions that they undertake which are relevant here and whether or not they serve to improve quality.

When participants were asked about what Ofsted was, apart from the most popular response that it was a legal requirement, many responses included things which related to quality. While participants generally recognised that maintaining quality was Ofsted's purpose, they also identified shortfalls with Ofsted's approach (Section 9.9). Participants acted on the advice given in an Ofsted report (Section 9.7.2), because many agreed with the advice given, and therefore it is likely that they would think that it would lead to improved quality. The following sections provide greater details on connections between inspection and raising quality.

9.8.1 Reasons behind participants' beliefs that inspection improved practice/quality

Jones (2010, p. 64) noted that the Ten Year Strategy (DfES and DfWP, 2004) provided a rationale for the inspection process, as it gave settings evaluation of practice to lead to improvement. There were indications from some participants that they thought inspection improved practice, for a variety of different reasons (see below).

9.8.1.1 Inspection improves practice because of the follow up action plan (compulsory with a grade of RI)

Although she did not provide reasoning as to why, Leanne had particularly strong feelings that her inspection follow up action plan had improved practice in her setting.

MW: so you feel like things have improved as a result of it?

Leanne: Amazingly improved

9.8.1.2 [Receiving an outstanding grade improved practice](#)

Gina believed that receiving a grade of 'Outstanding' was key in the inspection positively impacting on her setting.

Gina: It really inspired them to do even more than what was required.

9.8.1.3 [Inspection and the 'learning curve'](#)

Several participants associated the term 'learning curve' with Ofsted inspection. Whether it was a learning curve to improve quality or a learning curve towards receiving a better grade from Ofsted was unclear. For example, Eleanor said,

Eleanor: I do think it's a learning curve for everyone, everyone learns from Ofsted, because when you do something, you think oh, Ofsted said this about that, so I'll do it a different way

In relation to her report, she recalled,

Eleanor: we ... went through those points and now have put them into practice, so:: hopefully they come again, we could get an outstanding,

Martha reflected,

Martha: it's give us a learning curve because the ...Good cop was giving us ideas of 'Why don't you do that?' ...So she was being really very helpful I thought.

Although Imogen was disappointed with the grade her setting received, she had decided,

Imogen: I'm--I'm--I'm using it as a learning curve.

9.8.1.4 [Inspection improving practice when there are shared beliefs in the correct direction in which to improve](#)

Dianna told me,

Dianna: ...I'm sure Ofsted must have some sort of impact

Thus, demonstrating a belief in the impact of the process. Although Dianna added that as a staff they had decided to improve things for themselves anyway (indicating some shared beliefs between Ofsted and Dianna and her team).

9.8.2 [Indications that inspection improved practice, but which were not acknowledged by participants.](#)

The following section details indications that inspection improved practice. However, these things were not acknowledged by the participants as 'cause and effect'.

9.8.2.1 [Inspection improves practice because of preparing for inspection](#)

Belinda decided to go back to college and temporarily stop practising. This was so that she could improve in time for her next inspection. However, she did not acknowledge that inspection may have indirectly improved her practice.

9.8.2.2 [Learning from reports from other settings](#)

Heidi reflected that, as she read Ofsted reports about other settings, she got ideas on how to improve, and this indicated that she believed other inspections were helping her to improve practice in her setting.

9.8.3 [Mixed thoughts about whether inspection improves practice](#)

There were mixed messages from Gina, as on the one hand when asked if inspection impacted on what she did in the setting, she replied,

Gina: we need to make sure that we're on top of things

Thus, indicating that the promise of inspection had some part in ensuring that she did keep on top of things. However, she also said that she would be on top of these things anyway, regardless of Ofsted inspection. Karen also thought that if no inspection was coming, that they would still follow the EYFS to some extent.

Karen: I think I'd carry on doing what I do now which is doing them in a fashion to tick the box but I'd do them in a way that's meaningful for my children

Although Karen thought that she would continue to practice more or less as the government stipulated, regardless of inspection, she was concerned that other settings might not do this, and therefore, thought that inspection was necessary for those settings.

Karen: ...if you haven't got a really passionate staff team that are committed to maintaining quality, if it's not inspected or assessed...

...a little bit like at uni, if it's not assessed do students worry about it as much?

Caroline thought about the connection between quality improvement and inspection for quite some time before telling me whether or not she thought that inspection improved quality (indicating that this issue is open to question),

Caroline: (.14) I would say it did in nursery, I'm not sure about the early years one over there. Um? (.6) I suppose it--it must do because if it helps you to strive to be better, then it must do.

Finally, while Belinda indicated that the thought of inspection pushed practitioners to be better and to do things properly, she also thought that inspection did not really impact on her own practice (also see quote above from Belinda regarding returning to college)

9.8.4 Good inspectors improving quality

Participants indicated that having (what they regarded to be) a good inspector contributed to quality improvement through inspection. Many (seven) participants indicated that they had experienced a 'good' inspector. They thought that a 'good' inspector would be one who is knowledgeable and experienced in EY (Heidi and Caroline), approachable and able to put people at ease (Imogen, Jane, Leanne and Martha) and nurturing (Leanne).

Caroline reflected on one inspector who she respected, trusted, and perceived as having significant experience in EY. Because of this trust and respect, Caroline thought that she could have informal conversations with the inspector about 'where next?' for the setting. According to her, this was good, as it focused on where they jointly thought improvements could be made. This indicated that her intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2016) would be raised when working towards future improvements. Jane recalled that one inspection occurred just after she had been on a course and she

had lots of ideas which she felt able to discuss with the inspector, because the inspector had made her feel relaxed enough to do so. Jane and Caroline appreciated their inspector acting partly as a consultant. Finally, Martha and Dianna and Caroline admired inspectors that they considered to be knowledgeable and with specific EY experience, which reinforced the views of Dean (1995) in relation to school teachers.

Professionalism in the inspector was considered to be important. For example, Gina said that inspectors needed to be professional in order to make a correct judgement in the short amount of time available for inspection. Some participants reported that they thought that inspectors were professional (Eleanor, Fiona, Jane and Martha). One participant reported that she 'hoped' inspectors were professionals (Heidi), and one reported that some inspectors were professionals and some were not (Leanne). (Also see Section 9.9.3.3 for details of participants who considered that they had experienced inspectors acting in a non-professional manner)

9.8.5 Other help to 'improve' after an inspection

Jane and Imogen recognised that there were people from the Local Authority who were there to help them improve in the aftermath of a less successful inspection. In contrast, Leanne reported that when her setting also received a grade of 'Requires Improvement', that there was little support from her Local Authority.

9.9 Examination and damage

It can be seen from Section 9.8, that the actual system of inspection, was not generally disputed by participants. However, there was also a belief expressed by some participants that damage could be done if inspection practice was lacking in some ways. This could be an example of an unintended consequence (Jones and Tymms, 2014, p. 315) of inspection.

9.9.1 Perceived shortcomings of, and damage caused by the Ofsted inspection regime

Damage related to inspection has been detailed before (Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Chapman, 2002; Perryman, 2007; Clapham, 2015; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016). Details of any damage that had been, or could be, connected with inspection, are set out below.

9.9.1.1 Fear of, or too much focus on inspection

Dianna considered that inspection could impact negatively on a setting because of practitioners concentrating on ticking boxes for Ofsted, which drew attention away from focusing on, for example, the well-being of staff or children. Dianna thought this would be even worse if the setting had previously received a grade of 'Inadequate' or 'Requires Improvement' as she thought that practitioners would be even more focused on those criteria rather than thinking more broadly.

9.9.1.2 Lull after inspection

It was reported by some participants (Dianna and Leanne), that little improvement was made directly after inspection, as there was a lull. For example...

Dianna: since we've had the Ofsted because I mean we're only talking what three months or something? It's taken us all that time to pick ourselves up, and be able to move forward.

This can be compared to the anti-climax Perryman (2007, p. 182) reported as happening directly after inspection.

9.9.1.3 [The negative impact of inspection feedback](#)

My participants reported some negative outcomes of feedback in the written report, one of which was dispirited staff. For example, Karen considered that her staff were demotivated because their efforts had not been recognised.

Karen: What's the point [name anonymised] they don't acknowledge what we're doing?

9.9.1.4 [The negative impact of a lower inspection grade](#)

There are high stakes associated with inspection (Elfer, 2015; Grenier, 2017), implying that the consequences of an allocated low grade can potentially be terrible. Caroline talked about this.

Caroline: so now if it's a 'requires improvement' or 'non-satisfactory' that school is going down a very, very rocky path and then it becomes a vicious circle um:::,

9.9.1.5 [Appeals procedure](#)

Karen reported that the appeals procedure for settings who were contesting their inspection report, had led to her team losing respect for Ofsted as an organisation. The perceived poor appeals system also damaged Karen's feelings of relative power between herself and Ofsted. This lack of respect for Ofsted echoed findings by Chapman (2002, p. 264). Fiona was also disappointed by the complaints procedure, reporting it as being stressful, and as stress that she considered avoidable, as her appeal was upheld.

9.9.1.6 ['Proving' not 'improving'](#)

A+ Education (2010) noted that there was sometimes an emphasis on 'proving' rather than 'improving' practice through Ofsted inspection. Imogen

reflected that one of her views of Ofsted was that she continuously had to keep paperwork to provide evidence of what she was doing with the children in her setting. Similarly, Karen was clear in stipulating that in contrast to her local quality assurance scheme, Ofsted did not facilitate improvement, but rather ensured that she was constantly checking that they were complying with the constant changes in EY policy.

9.9.2 [Poor inspectors.](#)

The interviews revealed that perceptions of inspectors were mixed and views about some inspectors were that their conduct and judgement was poor. Details about poor conduct or poor judgement have already been presented in section 9.6 (relating to inspectors not taking notice of other quality assurance related to the setting, inspectors not noticing things that participants thought were obvious, and inspectors deciding for themselves what they considered to be important). The following extends upon this topic. There was a general shared thought amongst the participants that in order to get an accurate judgement of the setting, the role of the inspector was critical.

9.9.2.1 [Poor inspector behaviour](#)

While poor inspector behaviour has already been mentioned in relation to Hierarchical Observation (Chapter 7), the following section provides further details.

Some participants reported that the inspector's approach may not have put people (parents, practitioners, children and others who were at the setting) at ease, and this may have affected practice on the day of the inspection. Correspondingly, Imogen reported,

Imogen: she just pushed straight past me, didn't say "Excuse me" or anything like that she just went straight past me it was like 'Oh'....
...she went around the whole time with her coat on and her laptop... staff felt very nervous::: and didn't feel at all relaxed
I: .hhhh (a parent...) felt that there was no way (.) that the inspector was going to let her out of the door until (.) she'd answered these questions
I: I think the children pick up on that because the staff are sort of on edge

Karen reported that her inspector's manner was off-putting (Section 7.3), alongside Leanne, Heidi and Jane who also reported perceived incidences of poor inspector behaviour. The approach of inspectors has been reported as being very important in studies of schools (Brimblecombe and Ormston, 1995; Dean, 1995)

9.9.2.2 [Not allowing practitioners to explain fully what they do](#)

Karen reported that the inspector had not allowed her to speak in detail about her practice (Section 9.6.2.2). Not only did this seem rather rude to Karen, but was also perceived by Karen as resulting in a less than accurate inspection report.

9.9.2.3 [Lack of professionalism in inspectors](#)

Although many participants reported that they thought inspectors were professionals, they also reported that professionalism in the inspectors (as they viewed it) was sometimes lacking. Karen gave details of an inspector leaving early and arriving late unnecessarily

Karen: I just felt 'You're not being professional, you could have telephoned to say' (that you would be late) that I think puts immense pressure on staff completely unnecessarily

Another incident that Karen reported, implied that the inspector was unprofessional, and that her actions were inconsiderate of a child's feelings.

Karen: the inspector stood over the child who was opening the lunch up um and actually said "Well that's not particularly good" in earshot of a pre-schooler who would know exactly what she was talking about

Karen was quite clear in saying that she thought that inspectors should be professionals in order to be able to make accurate judgements, but reflected that,

Karen: ...I don't necessarily feel in practice that that is always the case...

Inspectors' professionalism was perceived by Gina to be critical if they were to make a judgement in a short period of time, so it is of concern that inspectors' professionalism was sometimes questioned by participants. It is possible that inspector professionalism may be associated with Ofsted's more recent decision to directly employ their inspectors (Croyton, 2016), rather than using agencies.

9.9.2.4 [Inspectors not knowing about the EYFS](#)

While Belinda assumed that the inspectors had knowledge of EY practice, others shared contrasting opinions regarding the inspectors' knowledge of EY. For example, Caroline thought that there was a problem with one of her inspectors as she appeared to have no knowledge of the EYFS. This naturally could affect the quality of the inspection judgement. Dean (1995) found that school teachers reported concerns about the credibility of their inspectors, especially if the inspectors only had experience with settings in a

different age range (for example if they had experience teaching secondary school children, but were inspecting the primary age range). Variability of inspectors knowledge of EY had also been voiced before (A+ Education, 2010; NCMA, 2010; NDNA, 2010), and BERA and TACTYC (2014, p. 9) stressed that Ofsted inspectors needed to be 'highly knowledgeable about play and its value in order to make informed judgements' in EY (indicating that they were not already doing this).

9.9.2.5 Poor inspectors not knowing how to accurately evaluate settings

Perceived shortcomings of inspectors often ultimately led to the notion that some inspectors had not been capable of making an accurate judgement about the setting. Belinda thought that one of her inspectors had been too lenient in the grade allocated to Belinda's setting. However, generally, comments indicated that participants thought that a lower than fair judgement had been made. Concern about inconsistency in EY inspection judgements had also been raised before (A+ Education, 2010; NCA, 2010, Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson, 2010; Mathers, Singler and Karemaker, 2012).

9.9.3 Practitioner well-being and inspection

In Chapters 4 and 6 I established that while Foucault (1977) did not write explicitly about well-being, many have used Foucault to explore surveillance, both in relation to education (Ball, 1990; Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Ball, 2003; Perryman, 2007) (although, note that Ball (1990) predates Ofsted inspection of schools) and other areas (Dryburgh and Fortin, 2010; Jones, Marshall and Denison, 2016), and have simultaneously considered effects of surveillance on well-being. I also established that there have been concerns raised about lower-levels of well-being within teaching and EY (Holmes, 2005; Preston, 2013; Elfer, 2015). I wondered if these might be amplified by inspection.

In the following 'stress' is interpreted as 'negative stress', and is viewed as being connected with lower levels of well-being. The word 'stress' would not necessarily conform to a medical definition.

9.9.3.1 Participant perceptions of connections between inspection and well-being

Several participants reported perceived connections between inspection and lower levels of well-being (Caroline, Dianna, Fiona, Heidi and Karen), and others reported a potential for this. This corresponded with the findings of earlier studies which reported back from school teachers (Brimblecombe and Ormston, 1995; Jeffrey and Woods, 1996; Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Follows, 2001; Chapman, 2002; Ball, 2003; Perryman, 2007; Education Select Committee, 2011). The below provides details of participants' views on this issue.

9.9.3.1.1 Leaders vs. Non-leaders and well-being

Those who thought that there was no connection between inspection and well-being were all non-leaders, potentially indicating that non-leaders found the inspection process to be less distressing. This was emphasised by the fact that all of those who were sure of a connection with lower well-being, were leaders. Comments that leaders made regarding connections between feeling stressed and inspection included one report about being questioned about how they would obtain an 'Outstanding' grade, during her interview for her current position...

Dianna: How are you going to get the setting up to an 'outstanding'? .hhhhhh Um so that-- the pressure was on right from the beginning

Also, Heidi highlighted the worry involved in not knowing when inspectors would arrive.

Heidi: Yes:: I mean for example those three years of--of having um::: well that year waiting for them to come was very stressful thinking they were coming.

To reinforce the connection between lower well-being inspection and leadership, Eleanor reported having previously been a leader and that inspection had impacted on her well-being in that role, but she did not feel that this was so much the case now that she was a non-leader. I considered that some participants (only) possibly thought there to be a connection between inspection and lower levels of well-being for the following reasons:

Gina - as she thought that inspection might have led to lower well-being for others but not for herself

Imogen- as she thought that although her last inspection had been quite a negative experience, she considered inspection not to affect her on a day to day basis

Leanne - as she said that it did not impact on herself. However, she also noted that she ensured she gave 'supervision' to staff and paid for external supervision for herself, to counteract any negative effects of inspection

So, for some, even though they did not connect inspection with their own lower well-being, they could imagine that it had the potential to do so. Regarding Leanne, this seemed implicit in her ensuring supervision in relation to the inspection, and for Gina, she recognised that inspection might affect others in a negative way. Also, while Imogen did not think that there was a connection to her own well-being, if I were to give my overall impression of her interview with me, it would be that her very recent inspection (graded at 'Requires Improvement'), had taken its toll on her.

Leanne, Gina and Imogen were all leaders. Other leaders included Heidi, who talked in depth about an inspection in which her setting was graded as 'Satisfactory', which affected her in a very negative way. I summed up what Caroline had been talking to me about in relation to lower well-being and a

continuous 'presence' of Ofsted, and I asked her if she thought things would be different if Ofsted did not exist. Her response was,

*Caroline: Yes.
...Very different.*

Caroline thought that she would feel ashamed if she was awarded a grade of 'Requires Improvement' and would consequently resign, thus, a lot was riding on inspection for her. She also said that because of the favourable circumstances for her setting, there was more pressure on her to get the 'Outstanding' grade. Both Caroline and Dianna spoke about Ofsted being 'over their heads' all of the time and Dianna referred to it as '*Big Brother*' sitting on her shoulder (Section 7.1). Dianna clarified that, while her actual inspection was fine, it had been the build-up to it which had been stressful. Fiona talked of a strong connection between inspection and lower well-being, both for herself and for almost all of her peer-group associates (assumed to be leaders in different settings). She also talked about the aftermath of her most recent complaint-driven inspection as being extremely stressful. Karen mentioned feelings of guilt and sleepless nights, because she did not feel that she really 'sold' her setting to the inspector.

Karen and Leanne, both found their inspections to be more stressful when they were in charge of their EY setting, than previous inspections when they had been teachers in schools, as previously they had held lower positions of responsibility within the setting/school. Karen, in particular, said that she felt enormous pressure in the run-up to her current setting inspection.

Both Karen and Fiona considered that any day could be an inspection day, and while Fiona was comfortable with the 'drop-in' arrangements, Karen considered that it was just too much for practitioners' emotional well-being. The difference of opinion here could be attributed to differences in Karen's and Fiona's experiences of inspection, as only Karen had experienced notice of inspection in a prior role. Although I considered Imogen to only possibly connect inspection with lower levels of well-being, she shared that she worried

much more about inspection now than ten years ago and she had been in charge of her setting for many inspections. She thought that this was partly because she could not prepare for an inspection, as she did not know when it would happen. Imogen could be compared to Karen who had previously experienced inspections where notice was given, and now she did not receive notice.

Karen reported that the thought of inspection generated feelings of panic in her team. This could have added greater pressure to her as a leader, if she considered her role as being partly responsible for the well-being of her staff.

As an overall comment there were many indications that inspection had a negative impact particularly on leaders' well-being. This would corroborate findings of other studies related to teachers in schools (Brimblecombe and Ormston, 1995; Jeffrey and Woods, 1996; Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Follows, 2001; Chapman, 2002; Ball, 2003; Perryman, 2007; Education Select Committee, 2011), but go one step further to underline the particular connection to stress amongst leaders of EY settings. Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016, p. 76) noted that EY leaders might especially need support in their work and advised that seeking support should not be seen as an 'indulgence'. As Leanne (leader of a children's centre) was the only participant to mention supervision for herself, it may be the case that limited funding was impacting on leaders' ability to access support.

[9.9.3.1.2 Lower well-being and previous inspection results](#)

Although I looked, I found no glaring connection between the grade that participants had received in their previous inspection and their views on connections to lower well-being. The only thing that stood out was that all of the participants (Belinda, Imogen, Jane, Leanne, and Martha), who had received a grade below 'Good', were also not sure that there was a connection between inspection and lower well-being. While Leanne thought that Ofsted was always at the back of her mind, she was determined that it would not take over. Martha talked of her staff team being on tenterhooks or walking on egg-shells during the inspection and feeling disappointed with the results afterwards. Although, she reported that this did not impact negatively

on her own well-being. Finally, Jane said she felt upset after her most recent inspection, but then reasoned that the inspector was just doing her job.

[9.9.3.1.3 Notice of inspection and lower well-being](#)

Of the few participants who stated that there was no connection between Ofsted inspection and lower levels of well-being, most received notice and it was notable that Andrea and Martha talked about rushing around and getting everything ready for the inspection. This indicated to me that they at least felt prepared for the event, and may have linked in to why they considered their well-being not to have been negatively connected.

[9.9.3.2 Inspection results being a source of pride or humiliation](#)

In order to try to delve a little further, I asked participants about whether they would or could feel either pride or humiliation in relation to inspection results. Again, this was a mixed bag of responses, but the most common response to this question (although only marginally), was that participants could not feel humiliated in relation to an Ofsted grade. This was promising in terms of considering connections between Ofsted inspection and lower well-being.

Those who said that they could potentially feel humiliation in relation to an Ofsted grading were all leaders except for Andrea, who was an anomaly in the participant group (as she was still in training). Some participants said that they could not feel pride in relation to an inspection result. Karen reported that she could not be proud of her recent Ofsted reports because they were not accurate. In relation to pride, Karen mentioned that one of her personality traits was to generally focus on negatives rather than positives. While Karen said that she tried not to pass these feelings onto her staff, she mentioned that there was no-one to support her in a similar way. This can be compared to Leanne, who ensured that she bought in external supervision to help her to mentally process her experience of inspection. It is unlikely that non-maintained settings, such as Karen's, could afford to do this.

Participants who said they could not feel humiliated, still indicated that they could be affected by inspection results. For example, Dianna said that she

would have felt awful if she had received a grade of 'Requires Improvement' and Eleanor and Fiona said that they would potentially feel upset if they received a lower grade than they already had. Some practitioners were quite relaxed about how they could feel about an inspection result. Belinda thought that it is okay to admit it when you need help and Eleanor saw a lower inspection result as being about being on a 'learning curve'.

9.9.3.3 [Workload, control, well-being, and inspection](#)

Karasek (1979, p. 285) found that the 'combination of low decision latitude and heavy job demands ...is associated with mental strain'. Because higher workloads might be required in preparation for inspection, and lower control might be present because of inspection, this notion was of interest.

9.9.3.3.1 [Workload](#)

Practitioners generally reported high and increased levels of workload in recent years. There was a clear message from the practitioners that they considered their workload to be high.

Caroline reported...

Caroline: A massively higher than average workload.

...Um::? (.2) It's increased since I became a head teacher. It's slightly more balanced:: now(.3) But now it tends to be (.) seasonal. (.) But I can hand on my heart say when I took on-- because I was acting head, I was asked to come in on quite short notice::, um:: (.3), I can honestly hand on my heart say I was (.) working 16 hour days.

...For the first year.

...49 weeks of the year.

Continued overleaf...

Caroline continued

... Now I would say I am better:: (.), I try to switch off the computer by 10 o'clock every night now.

...So that's a 14 hour day now.

...But-- yes so better than 16. (laughs)

...And if I had my weekends:::: I could manage but it's seven days a week.

...2) My choice. ((with a higher lighter tone))

Heidi: (.4) It's-- it's certainly more than a full-time post. Um it's: uh:::: now much more paperwork based so although the sessions are only six hours a day:: the working day:::: is most days I would say are up to ten hours. So they are long days. (.) Um.

Karen Higher.
... And beyond [laughs].

Participants sometimes attributed working hard to their disposition of being a perfectionist (Dianna), or to the desire of seeking an 'Outstanding' grade (Caroline). Many, however, confirmed that their workloads had simply increased over the years.

Several participants commented on the increased amount of work to do in EY settings, and for the few that said that their workload had gone down

(Caroline and Fiona), they told me that this was only because their workloads had been so excessively high when they initially went into their current role. Caroline talked of working sixteen-hour-days, and Fiona explained that she had been setting up her nursery business at first, and therefore the workload had levelled off once the business had become more established.

Andrea and Belinda said that their workload had stayed the same. Both of these practitioners had slightly different roles from the others. Andrea was a (partly voluntary, and still training) classroom assistant and Belinda was a childminder. So apart from the anomalies of Andrea and Belinda, there was a strong message that participants had seen a rise in workload and of those that reported a reduction in work, it was only because their workload had been so exceptionally high when they first went into the role.

Whistance (2013, p. 10) considered the workload of school teachers and highlighted that despite the workload agreement in 2003 (entitling teachers to a weekly half-day non-contact time) a DfE survey in 2010 found that teachers were working a minimum of 46 hours per week. My participants also reported that their workloads were high, but they generally did not have the protection of the workload agreement for school teachers. An alarming statement that Whistance (2013, p. 10) made was that 'teacher suicide rates (were) a third above that of the national population'. If correct, this has implications for EY staff members who may be experiencing 'top down' pressures, for example the threat of national tests for 5-year-olds (Griffiths, 2013b).

Participants offered various reasons as to why they thought their workload had increased. Karen, Imogen, and Heidi mentioned an increase in paperwork. Jane and Eleanor indicated that workload had increased in relation to the EYFS (which can include paperwork). Besides paperwork, Heidi said that her workload was sometimes high because of her electing to get involved in research projects, which she indicated was her own choice to do so. Notably, these practitioners did not explicitly connect workload with inspection, when we specifically discussed workload.

Holmes (2005, pp. 42-79) observed the hidden and obvious cause of teacher stress. One obvious cause was excessive workload, so what my participants told me could be cause for concern, if their interpretation of 'high' moved into 'excessive'. Holmes also mentioned that striving for perfection was a hidden cause of teacher stress. Dianna mentioned her need for perfection, and others, while not using that term, also indicated this (Caroline, Gina, Karen). Some practitioners said that they were striving to get 'Outstanding' (mentioned by Karen and Caroline) and this could also be seen as wanting perfection. Those who indicated that they wanted to reach perfection were all leaders.

9.9.3.3.2 [Control](#)

Control has already been explored in Section 7.5, where I found that participants generally believed that they had a high level of control over what they did. To elaborate further, notably many participants were in leadership positions and all who reported that their level of control was high were leaders of settings. This could have influenced their responses because they were responsible for organising the day-to-day operations of the settings. Nevertheless, it was still interesting to see that these leaders, when directly asked about control, did not indicate that the government had a high level of control over what they did. This would contradict Holmes (2005, p. 49), who commented that because of the curricula and amongst other things, the extent of inspection that schools undergo, teachers had less control than some people might assume. Although Holmes' statement was not in relation to EY, there are similarities between teaching and EY in terms of curricula and government involvement.

Participants did not explicitly associate their levels of control over work and the inspection regime (other than when the inspection was actually taking place – see Section 9.6.3), although some did mention the omnipresence of Ofsted (Caroline and Dianna).

Some participants elaborated on the issue of control and the practicalities of working in an EY setting. For example, Belinda said that while she had a high level of control, the children dictated her actions. Similarly, Fiona and Imogen said that while they had control over what they did, they also responded in the moment, for example to parents' needs. Caroline talked about doing the work that a caretaker would usually do. In the same vein, Karen talked about, on the one hand being in control, and on the other hand being a general 'dogsbody', as ultimately the buck stopped at her regarding anything that needed doing. Dianna talked about being in control but also being answerable to many different bodies, including the college that her setting was attached to and the parents.

9.9.3.3 Workload/control balance in relation to well-being

In relation to Karasek (1979, p. 285), only one practitioner fell into the category of having a perceived high workload and a perceived low level of control. This was the participant who was a classroom assistant, working on a part-voluntary basis in a school and only sometimes in Reception, and therefore was not typical of the participant group. Her response alone, therefore, did not indicate that Karasek's work could explain a cause of lower well-being in relation to a higher workload and lower levels of control (which may have in turn been related to the Ofsted regime).

9.9.3.4 Control/power during the inspection

Feelings of control and power/powerlessness have been discussed in a few sections above (Sections 9.5, 9.6.3). Karen especially reported powerlessness during the inspection which contrasted to Heidi, Caroline and Fiona, who reported higher levels of control during the inspection. Despite this difference, all four reported lower well-being in relation to inspection. Many who received notice of inspection, reported preparing for it, including Andrea, Leanne and Martha, which may have enabled them to feel more in

control. These three did not report clear connections between lower well-being and inspection.

9.9.3.5 Protecting staff in relation to Ofsted inspection

Some of the participants (who were in positions of leadership) talked to me about how they tried to shelter their staff from inspection. In the follow up to her inspection, Karen said that she tried to tell staff how good they were rather than focus on how bad she, herself, felt. Fiona, when appealing her 'Requires Improvement' judgement, did not tell her staff that she was doing this, as she did not want them to feel demoralised. Leanne talked about giving her staff supervision to reflect on the experience of the inspection. It was worrying to note that some practitioners in positions of leadership told me that, while they offered support to their staff, there was no such support which was ordinarily available to them (Karen and Leanne) and Leanne said that she had to allocate funding from her setting to gain support for herself in the form of clinical counselling (supervision). Leanne was the only leader who mentioned that she could specifically pay for this service and it can be noted that Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016, p. 76) stressed that EY leaders have 'little opportunity for them to gain support for their role', which is of an appropriate nature.

9.9.3.6 Work-related well-being despite the presence of inspection

While many thought that there was a connection between lower well-being and inspection, all reported or indicated very positive attitudes towards their work roles. Dianna told me that she has the best job in the world, and that it was a very fulfilling and fascinating job, with so much to it. In relation to her job, Caroline simply said 'I love it', and she described her setting as a 'lovely place to work'. Gina said that she worked in a happy wonderful place and described her job as the best job in the world. Jane absolutely loved her job, as did Martha. These positive reports suggest that even if lower well-being could be connected with inspection, this was compensated for in their overall experience of work.

[9.9.3.7 Good surveillance and enhanced well-being](#)

Two participants mentioned how their well-being was in some way enhanced through inspection. Heidi reported that gaining her 'Outstanding' result made her happy, and Leanne reported that she had felt almost nurtured by an inspection that she underwent, which relates to an EY organisations' report, which states that the inspection process was supportive (NDNA, 2010). These comments could reflect findings of Dryburgh and Fortin (2010) who found that positive surveillance related to a dancer's better psychological health.

[9.9.3.8 Practitioner well-being and quality](#)

The OECD (2012) noted that better working conditions for practitioners could improve the quality of EY services. In contrast, if inspection has a negative impact on work conditions (indicated by participants' reports about connections between inspection and well-being), then it could have a negative effect on quality. Also, high staff turnover is an undesirable feature of EY (OECD, 2011, p. 156) and higher staff turnover (associated with lower child outcomes (Loeb *et al.*, 2004, p. 59)) could be exacerbated when the matter of inspection is added to the mix. Leaving or closing the setting was mentioned by some participants (Fiona, Gina, and Heidi) in relation to lower inspection grades, so inspection could impact on staff turnover, which can, in turn, lead to a decrease in quality. Also, I was unable to interview people who had ever received a grade of 'Inadequate'. While not making any assumptions, it is possible that practitioners who had received a grade of 'Inadequate' either had such low levels of well-being in relation to inspection, that they did not want to talk with me about it, or that they had left the profession.

[9.9.3.9 Summary of well-being and inspection](#)

The overarching message (especially from leaders) was that they considered that there were connections between lower well-being and inspection.

Although there were reports of inspection impacting negatively on well-being by some, participants also spoke very enthusiastically about their work roles, indicating that there may be some compensation for any negative effects of inspection. Lower practitioner well-being could be aligned with lower levels of quality, yet improving quality is a key aim of Ofsted inspection.

9.10 Protection of children rather than control of practitioners

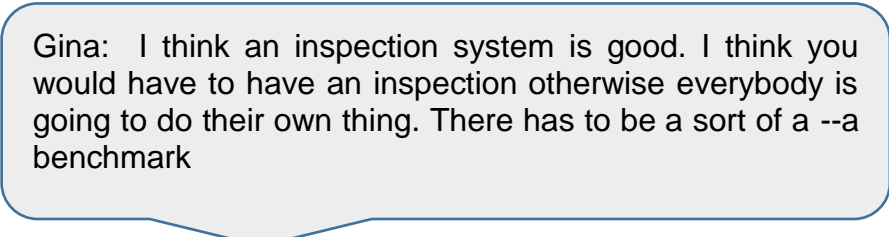
In section 9.8, I outlined participant voices on whether or not they thought that inspection should exist. Most participants indicated that they wanted some sort of surveillance of settings to be in place, in order that 'quality' could be ensured. There was a clear message that most would keep Ofsted inspection (with some suggested changes). I wondered if these views about either keeping or jettisoning inspection, related to the other aspect of surveillance, so that participants were more concerned about protection (of children) rather than control (of their practice). Looking at the reasons that participants offered about a need for inspection/surveillance, helped me consider this issue.

Protection instead of control was more prominent in the participants' minds. Karen clearly stated that monitoring was necessary to regulate and check that children are not at risk. Also, one might reasonably assume that participants who offered certain reasons for inspection (helps practitioners to do better (Caroline, Belinda, Martha), have a benchmark for quality (Gina, Fiona), to receive external feedback (Belinda) and to counteract the effects of non-engaged practitioners (Karen)) were also thinking about these things in relation to protecting children's best interests.

Fiona and Eleanor wanted to have external validation for their setting, which could correspond to the wider society possibly needing to believe that quality is being achieved in settings. This might also resonate with Karen's views on accepting that she needed to be accountable (to the government, and thus the wider society). Karen accepted inspection as accountability for the government money she received via the families who used her service.

Bertram and Pascal (2002) also reported that inspection and quality assurance were related to the issue of accountability.

Only one practitioner (Gina) reported that inspection would stop practitioners doing their own thing, which aligned more strongly to control of practice.



Gina: I think an inspection system is good. I think you would have to have an inspection otherwise everybody is going to do their own thing. There has to be a sort of a --a benchmark

From a Foucauldian perspective, receiving a reward or an affirmation of practice (mentioned by Caroline) could be seen as controlling, but this was seen by Caroline as more of a celebration rather than a controlling action.

Clarke (2012, p. 2) found, in relation to headteachers, that ‘they have accepted the surveillance strategies used by Ofsted’. There was a strong message from my participants that they also accepted some element of surveillance. The rationale of the majority of my participants being that surveillance was needed to maintain standards and protect children, rather than being about controlling their practice, although some reported engaging in practice that they had to do, but which they did not agree with (Section 9.5.1).

It was interesting that there were so few negative reports from participants about being controlled by Ofsted. In fact, when asked, participants generally reported that they had high levels of control over what they did at work (Section 9.9.3.3.2). It is possible that this mismatch could be attributed to a differing interpretation of the word ‘control’ between myself and the participants. They may have interpreted ‘control’ as meaning control over who puts the paints out, or whether they would play outside on that day, whereas my questions were intended to focus on bigger things, such as how qualified they think their staff should be, or whether or not children should reach certain levels by certain ages. However, I could not confirm this either way.

'Control' was mentioned most prolifically by Karen (9 times), which was in contrast to Gina's interview in which 'control' was mentioned only once, but Gina was clear in what she said.

MW: would you say - you'd say you had a high degree of control over what you do?
Gina: Oh absolutely yeah

MW: Do you feel you have enough control over what you do at work?
Karen: Yes. Too much. [laughs]
MW: Um does that change at all? In relation to inspection?
Karen: No.
...I sometimes feel I'm jumping through hoops because of an inspection. (.1) But that doesn't mean I'm any more or less responsible in an inspection before or after it.

In the quote above, it can be seen that Karen had interpreted my question about 'control' as being about 'responsibility'.

It is fair to say that there was a lack of evidence to support the idea that participants saw the inspection regime as controlling (although in discussions about control, there may have been a lack of shared understanding about the meaning of the word). Even so, participants seemed to convey a feeling that something was not right, I think. Some demonstrated that they were cross or upset, and this may have been because of being controlled. However, they may not have fully realised the extent of the effect of Ofsted's surveillance upon themselves.

9.11 Isolation and acting on their own conscience

Foucault (1977, p. 238) wrote about prisoners who were not allowed to talk to any other inmates, only the wardens. EY settings sometimes operate in relative isolation and Caroline noted that not all had the support network that she did. This can be exacerbated by settings effectively competing with each other (see Chapter 8). Foucault also wrote about the act of isolation for prisoners, which theoretically enabled the prisoners to wrestle with their own conscience in order to reform (Foucault, 1977, p. 239). Participants' perceptions of their own hard-work, indicated that they were conscientious (Section 9.9.3.3.1), and likely to wrestle with their conscience in their relative isolation.

9.12 Participants' thoughts for the future in relation to quality assurance

The two extracts below embody the participants' views that some kind of external monitoring of EY settings was necessary (similar to views put forward by Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson, 2010) (also see Section 9.8), but that it needed to be executed well.

Martha: Yeah:: I think they should be monitored otherwise there are settings out there that aren't right... look at us

Karen: we should (.1) you know have a regulatory body that makes sure the children aren't at risk, that children are in good settings. Um I just think that you need the practice to go with that theory.

Participants were asked what they would advise the government to do in order to ensure quality in settings. If they did not mention Ofsted inspection

in their reply (which most initially did not), I probed further about this issue to find that generally participants thought that Ofsted inspection, or some kind of monitoring was necessary. This corroborated Clarke's (2012, p. 2) findings, that head-teachers now accepted surveillance by Ofsted, along with 'the disciplinary power wielded when the Ofsted model is not met', or what Foucault referred to as 'legitimate harm' (Foucault, 1977, p. 238).

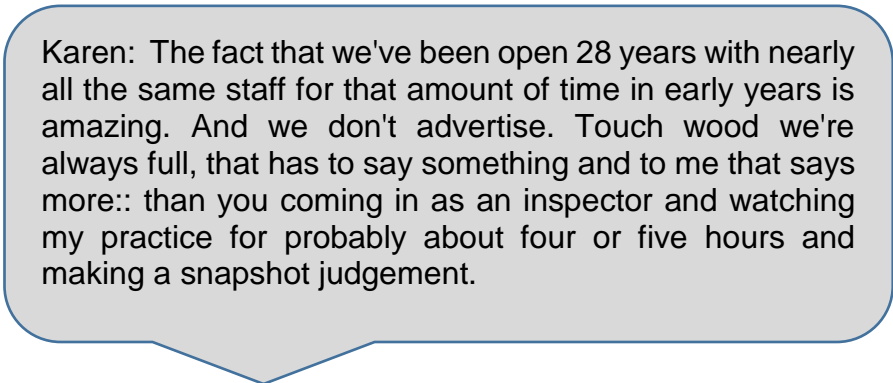
Some transcripts (for example Karen's and Caroline's) indicated that there was a mantra which had come into existence in EY- that 'if it is not 'Good', it is not good enough.' This mantra may have come about with the replacement of the grade of 'Satisfactory' to 'Requires Improvement'. If this mantra has been internalised by participants, then it is easy to understand how a 'below 'Good'' grade could lead to participants accepting the 'legitimate harm' as a consequence. This was the impression I got from Imogen, who was trying to view the impact of her most recent 'Requires improvement' inspection in a positive light, but appeared to be somewhat knocked by the examination process. In contrast, Caroline thought that the 'harm' that arose from having a low grade was sometimes too great.

EY inspection has moved from a system not adopted by all to something which is now the norm on an international scale (Bertram and Pascal, 2002; OECD, 2015). Perhaps this had reinforced my participants' views that we needed some kind of regulation in order to protect children's experiences in settings (Section 9.10). I cannot confirm whether participants agreed with monitoring/examination because it was now a norm, or because they wanted the EYFS to be upheld, or because their views were the result of certain discourses at play in modern times about EY. Leese (2011, pp. 160-161) noted (albeit in relation to views of parenting) how dominant discourses 'dissipate down through practice guidelines and are embedded within professional training'. The need for Ofsted inspection, could be an example of a 'dominant discourse'.

In Section 9.10, the reasons that practitioners gave for keeping inspection were analysed and confirmed that these practitioners perceived inspection as being about protecting children. This is a powerful rationale as to why they

believed surveillance was necessary, but perhaps it also masks potential problems, which could occur as a result of inspections (Section 9.9). In Section 7.2.3, I suggested that some concerns which have been voiced about the dangers of inspection leading to inappropriate pedagogical strategies (Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016, p. 122) may not have been experienced by my participants, as they were generally not working in the Reception year.

Alternatives exist as to how to ensure quality in EY settings (Penn, 2011; Slaughter and Carmichael, 2016, pp. 1-15) (see Chapters 2 and 6). Penn (2011, p. 102) associated local autonomy with enabling creativity in EY practice, and commented that this could not exist in England because of national regulation. Participants did not really touch on this issue. England reported itself to engage in both external evaluation through inspection and internal evaluation through observation from parents, EY staff and management (for quality) and external evaluation only for regulation compliance (OECD, 2011, pp. 308-309). Karen indicated that she was already informed that her setting was operating well (without inspection), because of her setting being consistently full and also because staff had been retained for so long.



Karen: The fact that we've been open 28 years with nearly all the same staff for that amount of time in early years is amazing. And we don't advertise. Touch wood we're always full, that has to say something and to me that says more:: than you coming in as an inspector and watching my practice for probably about four or five hours and making a snapshot judgement.

Receiving messages from parents and staff was clearly a form of quality assurance for Karen. The following sections offers further details of participants' advice as to how to ensure quality in settings.

9.12.1 Suggested improvements if Ofsted inspection is to remain in place.

Participants indicated that if Ofsted (or something like it) were to maintain its current role, improvements could be made. While there were several comments from participants reflecting on how good some of their inspectors were (Section 9.8.4), the top recommendation in order for the inspection system to work effectively, was to train inspectors well. Caroline reported that the inspector for her maintained nursery school was a 'proper' Ofsted inspector and the one for her non-maintained setting was from an EY agency. Caroline's preference for the 'type' of the inspector seemed to be clear and it can be noted that training for inspectors could potentially be improved by Ofsted's cessation of using agency inspectors (Croyton, 2016).

Other recommendations also related to inspectors, as three participants thought that inspectors not only needed to be trained in inspection, but that they also needed to have expertise in EY (similar to former views indicated by, for example, A+ Education (2010), NCMA (2010) and NDNA (2010)).

9.12.1.1.1 Inspectors to collaborate more with the setting staff

David, Powell and Gouch (2010, pp. 33-34) asserted that countries should have 'a participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance' (echoing Bertram and Pascal's (2002) findings). Some participants wanted to be able to engage in discussions about practice with inspectors. While Jane reported this happening with one inspector, generally it was not reported as being a feature of Ofsted inspection by participants. The reasoning behind this seems likely to be the power imbalance between the inspector and the inspected. Caroline commented,

Caroline: But it can be difficult to discuss them without highlighting...

...

C: ...faults.

Some participants indicated that they would like to have what sounds more like a mentoring arrangement with the inspector, whereby evaluation of their settings would be done with them rather than on them. This could also have been a similar approach to assessment that they took with children in their settings.

Dianne: it's being done to them rather than a-- than a facilitative programme... it needs to be an empowering process

Karen: I would just like to see it in a ...more meaningful way that meant settings went through a learning journey rather than a 'Let's jump that hurdle and then we can have three or four years without worrying about it . Then let's hurdle that again'.

Karen mentioned the term 'Learning Journey' (or learning story (Carr, 2001)), which is undertaken based upon close observation and children having a part in deciding what to work on next to improve. This approach may also closer reflect quality assurance approaches for EY in Hong Kong (Ho, Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2010, p. 254) 'whereby quality improvement is the focus of the inspection and it is generated by stakeholder 'buy-in'. Furthermore, it could be more like the approach advocated by Plowright (2007, p. 387) in which there would be a 'more supportive link between Ofsted inspection and school self-evaluation' to reduce the 'inherent tension built into the inspection process, since it is aimed at assuring accountability but also of ensuring development' (Plowright, 2007, p. 375).

[9.12.1.1.2 Recognise the context of the setting on the inspection day](#)

Heidi thought it was important that the inspector needed to be able to recognise if something less than ideal was affecting practice on the day of inspection. She thought that the inspector needed to understand the context of the setting, such as if all children were new on that day (and potentially upset because of this). This was perhaps especially important given the short length of EY inspections (Section 9.12.1.2)

[9.12.1.1.3 Have more than one inspector](#)

Heidi referred to a Reception class which was at first judged by a school inspector (who found it to be not so good), and then the same class was judged again by someone else and found to be fine. So, Heidi thought that possibly two inspectors might sometimes be necessary. In the Netherlands where employers had to make a contribution to the costs of QA, there were complaints from employers that the quality agenda was getting too costly (Bertram and Pascal, 2002). I mention this only to make the point that employing more inspectors, would have cost implications.

[9.12.1.1.4 Inspectors to be familiar with the setting's voluntary quality assurance](#)

Participants who reported engaging with a voluntary quality assurance system (Karen, Dianna, and Gina), considered it effective in ensuring quality in their settings. Karen wanted inspectors to see long-term evidence of how their setting had improved quality, through making it compulsory for inspectors to look at records of voluntary quality assurance packages. Karen also reported that she thought that her voluntary quality assurance system encouraged staff to come forward with ideas for improvement.

9.12.1.1.5 Inspectors to put practitioners at ease

Jane and Imogen advised Ofsted to have inspectors who knew how to put people at ease, so that they were able to demonstrate their normal practice. They had both experienced inspectors who were able to do this for them.

Imogen: Um the ones in the middle have been very positive I mean we've had some really good inspectors that came out::: and have been complimentary um they've come in, they've--they've spoken to the children:: You know they've--they've put people at ease::::. They've been friendly.

Foucault (1977, p. 239) wrote about systems of discipline operating in prisons, whereby the prisoners were reformed at least partially because they loved their warder (because they were gentle and sympathetic). It seems possible then, that practitioners might want to make improvements because of respect for and a relationship with the inspector. There may be connections to be made with the participant suggestion to have more regular inspections (Section 9.12.1.2), possibly with the same person – so that they would know their inspector well and he/she would know them.

9.12.1.2 More regular and longer examination

In relation to Ofsted inspection, Jones (2010, p. 64), similar to Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson 2010), put forward the question as to whether a setting could be truly judged in such a short time period. Gina and Karen were also concerned about this and Karen thought that there was currently too much of a snap judgement approach taken (in agreement with Mathers, Singler and Karemaker, 2012). Karen and Dianna both stated that, if inspection is to take place, then it needs to be held more regularly, indicating that they wanted to be 'seen' more. Concerns about the length of time between inspections were also raised by the Daycare Trust (2011) the NDNA (2011), the NCA (2011) and Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson (2010). Dianna wanted to see inspections happening once a year, which might address the problems that Imogen

reported experiencing. For Imogen there was such a large gap between inspections, that significant changes to the curriculum had taken place and she felt unclear about what was required of her.

Both suggestions for longer inspection and more regular inspections indicated that some participants wanted to be seen more (Section 9.6), and reinforced the general feeling amongst them that they accepted being made 'visible' (Foucault, 1977, p. 214)

Karen: ...regular visits throughout the year and discussions and... ...So it wasn't, I just feel to base an inspection report that hopefully if you get good, ...or outstanding, will last three to four years and be online and the first thing that a lot of parents see. It's asking an awful lot I think and in terms of the pressure you have as a setting to sell your business.....in about five hours? I mean what other walk of life are you expected to do that? Really?...

9.12.1.3 Focus on smaller specific things during inspections

Alongside having more regular inspections, Karen also wanted to know exactly what to focus on at each inspection

Karen: Um I think if they did, you know even if they did smaller you know where they came "We're going to have a chat about this and watch part of that" you know I just think that would be: (.1) far more comfortable for staff and would give you a more accurate perception of what the setting was really like.

This comment by Karen was still geared towards the ‘truth’ being established about them during the inspection and did not indicate that she was trying to ‘get away’ with anything.

[9.12.1.4 More control over what is seen when the inspector visits](#)

Karen was hoping that with the (then) new inspection framework (2014) she would have more say about what happens during the inspection to empower her to be able to show what she thought needed to be seen. This could still be in alignment with the panoptic mechanism (Foucault, 1977).

[9.12.1.5 Have a different regulating body](#)

Although she thought that there needed to be external regulation, Dianna did not think that the regulator needed to be Ofsted, and could alternatively be a professional body. In a similar vein, Heidi thought the regulator could be her local county quality assurance team, which echoed the quality assurance approach taken to EY inspection prior to it falling into the hands of Ofsted (see Table 1 in section 2.1.1). These suggestions may have been connected with calls for expertise in EY amongst inspectors (Section 9.12.1.1).

[9.12.1.6 Inspectors to speak to others who are in contact with the setting](#)

Karen would like Ofsted to be able to speak to others that EY settings work with, for example the speech therapist. This is explained in greater detail in Section 7.1.

[9.12.1.7 Cease ‘pushing’ children](#)

Imogen wanted the government to reconsider what she saw as the ‘pushing’ of children, or the ‘too much, too soon’ agenda, a theme which is often to be found in EY related literature (BERA and TACTYC, 2014; Roberts-Holmes

and Bradbury, 2016; Early Education, 2018). She thought this was particularly important as she had one child in her setting who attended for over 40 hours a week, who she viewed as needing to relax as he would have done if he were at home. Imogen's view, alongside views from Cannella (2000, p. 36) might question a certain 'discourse of education... that legitimizes the belief that science has revealed what younger human beings are like, what we can expect from them at various ages, and how we should differentiate our treatment of them in educational settings.' (N.B. this source predates Ofsted inspection of EY settings and refers to early childhood settings in the USA. However, the point still stands).

[9.12.1.8 Clarity about what is inspected](#)

Imogen wanted greater clarity as to what Ofsted was inspecting, making it absolutely clear what is a legal requirement and what may not be a legal requirement but is actually still expected to be done. Gina also thought that the EYFS guidelines needed to be made clearer, and both agreed with a request put forward by the NCMA (2010) to clarify what is expected. A lack of clarity might put practitioners into a post-panoptic (Courtney, 2016) situation.

[9.12.1.9 A more gentle approach](#)

Leanne wanted to see something softer and less 'Big Brotherish' than the current Ofsted inspection approach for EY, which would be more supportive. Leanne thought this might be especially important for the people who were running some EY settings (such as playgroups). Similarly, Imogen thought a return to the previous seemingly softer social services' approach to inspection might enable settings to return to being more 'homely.' A gentler approach might also lead to practitioners loving their 'warder' (Foucault, 1977, p. 239), and perhaps encourage greater compliance.

9.12.1.10 [Recognise the different types of settings](#)

Karen thought it important to recognise that not everyone had funding to operate like a children's centre, and that this needed to be considered when a framework for practice/inspection is established. Penn (2002, p. 879) had also questioned whether inspection could 'take account of the complexities and diversities of early years provision' and although Penn's commentary was put forward some time ago, Karen's comments indicated that this may still be a concern.

9.12.1.11 [Remove the grade from the system of inspection](#)

Caroline suggested that a grade should not be allocated as a result of inspection, because of the potential damage that grades can cause. If the ultimate consequence of punishment (in the form of a low inspection grade) is to make standards decline (because of a drop in numbers of children attending, funding dipping and the setting struggling to attract staff (Grenier, 2017, p. 3)), this may be counterproductive to panopticism.

9.12.1.12 [Improve the appeals system about Ofsted inspection](#)

Karen and Fiona wanted to see a better appeals system to be established. Fiona recommended that appeals should not be handled by Ofsted. Both were clearly not satisfied that Ofsted essentially handled its own appeals, and for Karen in particular, this seemed to make her feel powerless in relation to inspection (Section 9.5)

9.12.1.13 [Notice](#)

While it was confirmed above that a greater number of participants thought no notice of inspection was preferable, there were still five participants who believed that changes needed to be made in the other direction, and that notice for all settings should be instated. Karen explained that this would

make things more equitable for all settings, and would also contribute to practitioners' well-being. As already indicated in Chapter 6, at the time of writing, but not at the time of interviewing, Ofsted now give notice of all inspections they undertake (Ofsted 2015a).

[9.12.2 Other ways of ensuring quality](#)

As detailed in Section 9.12, when asked about how the government could ensure quality in settings, most did not initially mention inspection. The following offers details of the other prominent suggestions as to how to ensure quality in EY.

[9.12.2.1 Education/training/valuing practitioners](#)

The most prominent suggestion put forward to ensure quality in settings was to ensure practitioners were well-qualified and well-trained (in agreement with Sylva et al. (2003, p. 2) and Pugh (2010, p. 15)). There has been a surge in people engaging in education and training related to EY (Children's Workforce Development Council, 2012a). However, there has been limited development in requirements for staff to be more highly qualified (despite the Nutbrown Review (2012)), and in funding to pay highly qualified staff. Gina wanted practitioners to have a 'heart' for the job, indicating that there are other issues to consider apart from qualifications, although she was not entirely sure how this could be vetted.

G: How do you vet a--a staff member who has got a heart for a child?

Participants saw a clear connection between having qualified staff and investment into EY (Section 9.12.2.2). For example...

Leanne: I don't think we value the members of staff that work in early years. .hhh They're certainly not paid enough and I'm not talking about me, I'm talking about early years professionals that have studied

9.12.2.2 Greater investment into EY

There was also a strong message that the government needed to invest more into EY (having clear connections to Section 9.12.2.1). Martha stressed that this funding should be ongoing rather than intermittent.

Martha: Uh well put some more money in. Because they keep trying to take it away all the time. And they keep saying early years intervention.... and then all of the sudden they put it in and then all of the sudden it's gone.
...So yes definitely more money, more training.

9.12.2.3 Less frequent change in Early Years

It was put forward that the government needed to avoid having such rapid change in EY. When changes are made (see Chapters 2 and 6), the intention is presumably to improve quality. However, there was a strong message from these practitioners that rapid change was counterproductive to this aim.

Karen: because we've had so many changes in quite a short space of time in comparison to how long the national curriculum is reviewed for, for example....And the amount of training and everything that's gone on for that. And let's give you a year to imbed it. Here you go in early years let's have three new curriculums in the space of five years or whatever it was um I think that again shows that the government doesn't have any understanding of how long it takes to really imbed good practice

Rapid change has also been seen as counterproductive to panopticism (Courtney, 2016).

9.12.2.4 Focus more on care than attainment

Imogen advised to cease pushing children and to focus more on their being able to build trusting relationships. This aligned with Caroline's concerns that social and emotional aspects of learning were being side-lined a little. Also, see Section 9.12.1.7.

9.12.2.5 Listen to parents and practitioners

Andrea wanted the government to listen more to parents and both Andrea and Karen thought that the government needed to listen more to teachers and practitioners. Both of these suggestions would fit with a more collaborative approach and a more even balance of power within EY.

Karen: Um I think maybe to give us time to reflect and time to feel part of policy making would be good. You know I'm part of a national day nursery association and some aspects of it is really good.... Um but even with them I still don't feel early years has a strong voice in government and whether that's just my naivety I don't know but I--I don't feel that we are well represented.... I don't necessarily feel that a lot of the politicians understand what quality early years is about...

9.13 Summary and reflexivity

My summary of findings pertaining to 'examination' which was originally in this section, would have been especially close to the summary of findings in relation to my research aims (which are provided in Chapter 10 below). Therefore, in order to avoid too much repetition in close proximity, the summary of findings for Chapter 9 has been placed in Appendix 7.

The analysis in Chapters 7 and 8 was certainly 'broadened' because of being guided by Foucault's concepts of 'hierarchical observation' and 'normalising judgement'. However, because the third part of panopticism was 'examination' (which I have used interchangeably with 'inspection'), the same 'broadening' of analysis (because of the theoretical framework) was not so evident in Chapter 9.

10 Contribution of this study, reflections upon it, and suggestions for future research

This final chapter details the original contribution to existing knowledge that this study can offer. It also provides my reflection on this research and proposes suggestions for future explorations (based mainly on the limitations of this study, and what I was unable to find out).

10.1 Substantive contribution

This study captured knowledge that other scholarly literature had missed about Ofsted inspection, because its focus was on teachers in schools (e.g. Brimblecombe and Ormston, 1995; Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Ball, 2003; Chapman, 2002; Perryman, 2007; Clarke, 2012; Clapham, 2015) While comparisons can be drawn with these studies, the participants in my study contrasted to teachers in schools because of some, or all, of the following reasons:-

- The participant spoke from a differing perspective (as EY practitioners generally had differing qualifications and terms of employment from teachers (Dean, 2005; Cooke and Lawton, 2008; DfE, 2013))
- The participant spoke about a differing approach to inspection (as interviews took place prior to the existence of the Common Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2015a))
- The participants worked in EY settings, many of which received no notice of their inspection (whereas schools had ordinarily received notice (Ofsted, 2013))
- The participant worked in differing types of settings (ranging from childminders' homes, to settings offering provision for large numbers of children).

My research also builds upon studies which either considered, or explicitly focussed on inspection of practitioners working with 0-5 year olds (e.g. Penn, 2002; Cottle and Alexander, 2012; Roberts-Holmes, 2015; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury 2016), as they had been less orientated toward PVI (private,

voluntary, independent) settings. The literature which incorporated PVI settings to a greater extent (e.g. A+ Education, 2010; Jones, 2010; Daycare Trust, 2010; NCMA, 2010; NDNA, 2010; Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson, 2010; Mathers, Singler and Karemaker 2012; Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016; PACEY, 2017) did not provide sufficiently detailed views from EY practitioners about Ofsted inspection. Therefore, my study findings are equipped to address these gaps and provide the following new knowledge (set out in relation to the research aims).

10.1.1 New knowledge found in relation to Aim 1 – To explore Early Years practitioners’ perceptions of their own experiences of Ofsted inspection.

While there were some exceptions, which had either been identified by my participants, or which I surmised from what they told me (Sections 7.3 and 7.4), the overall message that practice was perceived to be, for the most part, the same, regardless of the presence of an inspector, is accurate. This was in sharp contrast to some earlier studies related to schools, in which teachers indicated that inspection was ‘stage-managed’, and that practice returned to normal after the inspector had left (Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Perryman, 2007). There were several possible reasons for this disagreement, none of which I am able to confirm, but one plausible explanation is that these earlier studies were set in an era of inspection, in which longer periods of notice were given. This possible explanation seems more plausible when considering more recent studies (Clarke, 2012; Clapham, 2015), which both indicated teachers’ and head teachers’ overall compliance with Ofsted, which existed in an inspection era in which lesser notice was given. The plausibility of my potential explanation is also strengthened by Roberts-Holmes (2015, p. 302) who raised concerns that for EY teachers (chiefly working in Reception classes), practice was constrained by ‘increased inspection and surveillance’.

So, it would appear that things may have changed in this more recent era of Ofsted inspection and that both schools and EY settings are, to a greater

extent, doing as the government requires, whether an inspector is present or not. I can offer further insight into this matter as, during the stipulated interviewing period of this study, many participants had experienced no notice at all of inspection, which was different to Clarke (2012) and to the main settings in focus in Roberts-Holmes (2015). Although participants who received notice confirmed that they prepared for their exact inspection date (rather than a wider approximate time at which inspection might take place), they also (because their setting's data was often being monitored) perceived that they acted more or less the same whether or not an inspector was present. As all of my participants indicated that, for the most part, practice was the same all of the time, it appeared that either having limited notice or no notice made little difference amongst the perceptions of participants, regarding their practice during, and away from, inspection. Therefore, the change to all settings having limited notice (Ofsted, 2015a) is likely to have brought about little change in terms of settings attempting to do as the government requires on an on-going basis.

Because of being strongly guided by Foucault (1977), I particularly looked at Hierarchical Observation, to consider if participants acted as though they were constantly being watched, especially because most did not know when an inspector might visit their setting. This, alongside parents and visitors being able to share any concerns with Ofsted (Section 7.1), may have offered an explanation as to why participants were generally trying to comply with government requirements. However, because there was strong support demonstrated for the EYFS (Section 9.5.1), it was not possible to tell if a feeling of constantly being watched was the reason for their perceived compliance, or whether they were, for the most part, in agreement with the government and had a shared 'truth' (which was put forward as being possible to some extent by Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016)) regarding the best way to practice, and therefore acted as they would choose to do, rather than as they felt forced to do. It should not be forgotten, however, that 'truth' can facilitate the operation of power mechanisms (Foucault, 1980c) and form part of a system of governmentality whereby, 'multiform tactics' (Foucault, 1991, p. 95) are employed so that others can 'guide or control' (Brass, 2015,

p. 10) people's conduct, or so that people can govern their own conduct. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) drew on Foucault's concepts of discourse, truth and knowledge to caution against acceptance of one 'truth' or one set definition of what constitutes quality in EY and implored the EY community to always be questioning what is right for children in any particular context. Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016) shared in this view that EY practice should be contextually appropriate, but also noted that practitioners' understanding of what quality is can sometimes be married together with EY regulation (EYFS / Ofsted inspection criteria).

Consideration of the normalising judgement led to a discovery that, despite concerns expressed that inspection grades (either their own or others) were not always accurate, participants often seemed to be aware of the grades of other settings, and of what they considered to be, a 'normal' grade for their own setting. Some practitioners indicated that they had visions of what rating they hoped to get in their next inspection, and many explicitly reported actions they were taking to try to reach their goal. This indicated that part of the panoptic mechanism (Foucault, 1977) had encouraged 'individuals to reflect upon and monitor their own behaviour' (Hope, 2013, p. 43) because of an awareness of their comparative positioning to others. This persuasive influence of the normalising judgement (Section 3.1.1.2) indicated that 'power produces' (Foucault, 1977, p. 194), as many practitioners were being prompted to act. There were a few participants who thought that they did not particularly compare their setting's inspection grades to those of others, which hinted towards more post-structural thinking (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013; Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016) behind their practice.

Despite some indication of confusion from participants regarding what they were meant to be doing (in their day-to-day practice and during inspection), there was an overarching and strong message that participants were trying to get things 'right' according to the inspection criteria, and that they needed the inspector to see how right they were getting it. This seemed to be, in part, because of concerns emphasised by Grenier (2017, p. 3) of the consequences of receiving a bad report and also related to Clarke's (2012, p.

114) commentary about the terrible effects of a poor inspection result. Such punishment seemingly outweighed any potential reward from not behaving as required for inspection.

Unfortunately, participants did not always think that the inspectors made accurate judgements about their own or others' settings. Concerns about the accuracy (or consistency) of EY inspection judgements had also been raised by Penn (2002), Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson (2010. P. 26), A+ Education (2010), Jones (2010), and NCMA (2010). A+ Education (2010) and Penn (2011, p. 99), in particular, were concerned that poor practice in settings was not being identified. While this was raised as an issue in my interviews, for the most part, participants indicated that they thought that some things which they considered they were getting 'right', were not being noticed by Ofsted inspectors. This 'need' to be seen to be getting things 'right' can offer further explanation for why practice was perceived, for the most part, as being the same regardless of the presence of an inspector, as perhaps the safest way to ensure practice would be as inspectors desired on inspection day, is to practice in this way all of the time.

Because participants were so fixated on being seen to be meeting requirements and reported generally practicing in the same way regardless of the presence of an inspector (see above), I found limited evidence of strong resistance amongst the participants (although see Sections 7.6, 8.7 and 9.5). There was some indication of the types of behaviour which Fenech and Sumsion (2007) had interpreted as resistance against EY regulation from practitioners in Australia (although their interpretation of resistance was sometimes questionable). There was also a slight whisper of deliberate resistance in relation to some participants not doing things because they did not agree that they should, but this was not necessarily during inspection and was also minimal. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) and Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016) advocated that EY practitioners should be able to consider what practice is contextually appropriate for their setting and that a post-structuralist way of thinking in EY can be encouraged. Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016) also indicated that sometimes there can be alignment between what is contextually appropriate and also required by Ofsted.

Some participants deliberately filled out their self-evaluation form for the inspector, judging themselves to be 'Outstanding' (Section 9.3), because they believed it was a strategy to achieve an 'Outstanding' result. While this was not quite an 'act of fabrication' (Ball, 2003, p. 225), there was still a risk in this slight game-playing, as warned of by Ball, because it could lead to 'capitulation', or settings asking 'the same questions of themselves as inspectors ask' (Jones, 2010, p. 72). Campbell-Barr (2018, p. 39) also noted this self-evaluation to be a surveillance tool. It is possible though, that participants, as a result of their professionalism, were engaging in private self-surveillance of their practice, which was separate, and in addition to, completing the self-evaluation required for Ofsted. Generally though, the overall lack of resistance reported by the participants, aligned with reports from teachers working in both the Foundation stage and other key stages of education (Clarke, 2012; Clapham, 2015; Roberts-Holmes, 2015) and this was plausibly a 'fatalistic resignation' because 'resistance was futile' (Osgood, 2004, p. 18).

Because of the close connections between professionalism and autonomy (Section 3.1.1.4.4), and the conflicts between being panoptically controlled and being able to be autonomous, the confirmation from all participants that they considered themselves to be professionals, was of interest. While their self-perception was unsurprising because of prior studies about EY and professionalism (Osgood, 2006; McGillivray, 2008; Miller, 2008; Osgood, 2011; Murray, 2013), it indicated that EY practitioners still felt this way, despite their possibly having no choice but to comply with regulations, with which they were sometimes not in entire agreement (Section 9.5.1).

Some participants expressed that their professionalism helped them to voice their opinions to inspectors, and they all confirmed that they would be inclined to 'speak up' where needed (despite only a small proportion expecting to be listened to). However, their opinions were usually voiced in order to demonstrate their compliance with government expectations. This was similar to voicing 'alternative ways of doing', which Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p. 117) considered to be a form of resistance, although it seems that this is resisting in order to comply.

Allegiance with a curriculum can be seen to be an aspect of professionalism (Fenech and Sumsion, 2007, p. 113), and this can offer further explanation regarding why participants viewed themselves as professionals and yet were generally complying with regulations (even if they did not completely agree with them). However, they may have experienced the feeling of professional autonomy, but only in so far as to meet government requirements (Ball, 2003, p. 217).

Many participants thought that not all of their 'good practice' was seen and recognised, because the inspector; did not ask about it, did not allow it to be shown, was not observant enough, or did not have enough time during the examination. This can be connected with questions about time spent at settings for inspection and the approach of inspectors raised by Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson 2010 and Mathers, Singler and Karemaker (2012). Also it may work against any success of the panoptic mechanism (Foucault, 1977), as one leader reported that her team questioned engaging in certain practices which were required of them, if these were not going to be acknowledged by the Ofsted inspector. It may also contribute to a lack of trust in inspection grades.

Just as Clarke's (2012, p. 113) school inspection study had previously alluded to, when mentioning the 'mist of inspection' through which head teachers had to navigate, many participants thought that Ofsted lacked transparency. It was reported that Ofsted inspectors would focus at certain times on certain topics, either because something was of personal interest to the particular inspector (referred to as 'bug bears' by Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson (2010, p. 26)), or because a topic was 'flavour of the month' for Ofsted. Frequent change to EY legislation and inspection frameworks (see Chapters 2 and 6) was also thought to be unhelpful to the practitioners, in terms of knowing what was expected of them. This lack of understanding about exactly what was required, whispered towards a 'post-panoptic' (Courtney, 2016) situation, in which a person could not comply to requirements, simply because they did not know what the requirements were.

Delivery of feedback was important to some participants (similar to earlier views expressed by teachers (Brimblecombe and Ormston, 1995; Dean, 1995)), and some were particularly upset if feedback was conflicting between what the inspector had said during the inspection and what was written in the subsequent report. While several participants desired a chance to respond, they were mostly disappointed with how inspectors reacted to what they said, if it was at odds with the inspector's views. Feedback seemed to be given as a monologue, from the inspector to the participants, and there seemed to be little opportunity for these practitioners to respond to Ofsted about it. Amongst the three appeals against Ofsted inspection judgements which had been made by participants, only one was upheld (and this was only with the support of expert opinion being brought in by a third party).

Most participants reported that there either was a connection between the inspection regime and lower levels of practitioner well-being, or that there could be a connection. This was presumably an 'unintended consequence' (Jones and Tymms, 2014, p. 315) of inspection, and it echoed reports from teachers (Brimblecombe and Ormston, 1995; Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Follows, 2001; Chapman, 2002; Ball, 2003; Perryman, 2007; Education Select Committee, 2011) and studies which looked at topics other than Ofsted inspection, but still related to surveillance (Dryburgh and Fortin, 2010; Jones, Marshall and Denison, 2016). Participants who did not think that there was a connection between inspection and lower levels of well-being were, as might be expected, non-leaders. Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016, p. 76) noted that in relation to upholding quality, EY leaders might especially need support, and advised that seeking out such support should not be seen as an 'indulgence'. When asked if they could feel humiliated by an inspection result, participants tended towards indicating that this was not the case, but only marginally.

While it might have been expected that their past Ofsted ratings might have affected participants' reports about well-being and inspection, interestingly, those who were recently graded as being below 'Good' were also not absolutely sure about a connection between inspection and lower levels of well-being (Section 9.9.3.1.2). This may indicate that they were less worried

about any damage which could befall them as a result of the 'punishment' of a less than 'Good' Ofsted report.

High workloads (due to government expectations) and low control (because of panoptic surveillance / Ofsted inspection) could have caused workplace stress (Karasek, 1979) amongst the participants. However, this did not appear to be an explanation for the connections between lower well-being and inspection amongst the practitioners I spoke with. While they generally reported their workloads to be high, they also considered that they had enough control over what they did. Nevertheless, it should be noted that a devolved approach in education can actually mean that one may have the feeling of being in control, but just in so far as to conform to requirements, resulting in only an 'appearance of freedom' (Ball, 2003, p. 217)

Despite connections to lower levels of well-being being identified in relation to inspection, all participants reported or indicated very positive attitudes towards their work overall (Section 9.9.3.6). This could indicate that they did not feel too repressed by Ofsted. While panopticism contains an element of repressing individuals into acting in a certain way, Foucault (1980a, p. 59) was later not happy with the term 'repression' (in relation to power) because 'power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress'. This could explain why they did not feel too repressed. Also, although not a prominent message, two participants mentioned how their well-being was enhanced through inspection (section 9.9.3.7). This could reflect the work of Dryburgh and Fortin (2010, p. 95) who found that 'positive surveillance' could lead to better psychological health.

There appeared to be 'unintended consequence[s]' (Jones and Tymms, 2014, p. 315) of Ofsted inspection. Perceived connections between Ofsted inspection and lower well-being levels have already been outlined above. Lower levels of well-being can lead to lower levels of staff retention, and ultimately impact negatively on quality in EY (Section 4.6.1.5). Also, although participants did not report having been off work sick, or leaving their roles (as Perryman (2007, p. 184) reported after a school came out of 'special measures'), one of my participants reported being 'zombified' after an

inspection, which may have impacted on the quality of provision for a short period.

A small number of participants reported a negative impact on EY provision in relation to inspection, for example because it steered emphasis onto literacy and maths, rather than social and emotional development. This raised the question that it may not be how Ofsted behave during inspection which causes problems, but what they are focussing on (Section 6.3.1.1).

Connections can be made here with Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) who assert that there are various interpretations of what is good for young children. Also, Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016, p. 36) drew an analogy with Malaguzzi and Reggio Emilia, that 'there are 100 ways to define... understandings of quality early years practice'

[10.1.2 New knowledge found in relation to Aim 2 – To explore Early Years practitioners' perceptions of Ofsted inspection, apart from their own experiences.](#)

In order to avoid repetition between the aims, there is only one key finding positioned in relation to Aim 2. As with prior studies relating to school inspection (Brimblecombe and Ormston, 1995; Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Follows, 2001; Chapman, 2002; Perryman, 2007) and literature commenting specifically on EY inspection (Penn, 2002; A+ Education, 2010; Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson, 2010; Daycare Trust, 2010; Jones, 2010; NCMA, 2010; NDNA, 2010; Mathers, Singler and Karemaker, 2012), many participants voiced concerns about faults with the current approach to inspection (in this case EY) (Section 10.1.1). Despite this, there was an almost unanimous consensus amongst participants on the necessity of some kind of monitoring of practice across settings (similar to the consensus of opinions from EY organisations for the Education Select Committee report; *'The Role and Performance of Ofsted'* (2011), and views expressed within Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson (2010). While many thought that they personally could be responsible for ensuring quality in their own setting, they accepted that the monitoring of all settings was necessary to ensure quality

across the board. Apparently, from their perspective, the inspection was more about protection of children and of good EY practice, than about control of practitioners (Section 9.10). These views on maintaining some form of monitoring were stronger than in prior studies about teachers' experiences of Ofsted inspection (Brimblecombe and Ormston, 1995; Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Follows, 2001; Chapman, 2002; Perryman, 2007). Although, even amongst these prior studies, there was not an especially strong message put forward that the whole monitoring process should be completely jettisoned.

Section 9.8 (either from what they directly told me or from what I deduced from what they said) displayed that inspection sometimes seemed to improve practice in the settings, and some participants confirmed that they were happy to act on the improvements suggested by the inspector because they thought they were a good idea. This aligns with the view from Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016), that one's own ideas about quality do not have to always conflict with those of Ofsted. Alongside this, Section 9.10 presented the reasons participants gave for considering it necessary to maintain some kind of monitoring of settings, chief amongst which was protecting children and their experience of EY. This rationale might have masked more hidden issues related to damage to appropriate pedagogical strategies (Clapham, 2015; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016, p. 119) .

The participant message that some kind of monitoring of EY settings is needed, may reflect the issue that, as a society, we have become more surveillance tolerant (Section 3.1.1.1.1), and it could also be related to the rewards that a positive inspection result can bring (see 10.1.1). Plausibly, for many, they were not experiencing inspection as being entirely repressive, but as productive, which would align with Foucault's (1980e, p. 92) views on considering power as purely repressive, being 'inadequate'.

10.1.3 New knowledge found in relation to Aim 3 - To discover whether Early Years practitioners had any suggestions about quality assurance for settings, other than through Ofsted inspection.

Prior to this study there was limited detailed literature, which represented what EY practitioners wanted to see happen in relation to quality assurance in EY. The following section has addressed this gap.

When questioned about how to ensure quality in EY settings, it was somewhat telling that inspection was not generally the first thing which came into the participants' minds and they mostly had to be prompted for their views as to whether inspection was an effective way to ensure quality in settings. This was a surprise as some EY organisations in 2010 had indicated that they very much wanted the single inspectorate (Ofsted) to be operational (Section 2.1.4), because of a perceived positive impact on quality.

The main two suggestions as to how to ensure quality in EY settings were for the government to invest more money into the sector and to ensure that EY practitioners were trained well. This finding was unsurprising as the importance of having highly qualified practitioners was well-established in the literature (e.g. Sylva et al. (2003, p. 2), Pugh (2010, p. 15) and Nutbrown (2012)), and Funding to train and pay such practitioners is in alignment with this.

By far the strongest message put forward to improve Ofsted inspection was to train inspectors well, although other recommendations were also made. As can be seen from Section 10.1.2, it was confirmed that almost all participants wanted to maintain either Ofsted inspection or instigate some sort of monitoring of EY settings, indicating that to some extent they agreed with Elfer (2015); A+ Education (2010), Daycare Trust (2010), NCMA (2010) and NDNA (2010), who asserted that Ofsted inspection had improved quality in EY settings (although contrasting to some earlier studies of school inspection (Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Perryman, 2007)). Nevertheless, there were also many suggestions put forward as to how we could improve

our approach to inspection in England (Section 9.12.1).

The strongest suggestion for improvement centred around having inspectors who were knowledgeable about the age of the children in the setting they were inspecting (in agreement with Dean (1995), A+ Education (2010), NCMA, (2010), NDNA, (2010), and BERA and TACTYC (2014), and who were well trained in how to inspect settings. This was held to be important amongst some participants (similar to the findings of Dean, 1995; Follows, 2001, in relation to school inspection), both in terms of assuring their own well-being in relation to inspection (10.1.1) and in terms of being able to show their practice as it really is (10.1.1). Ofsted's more recent move to have all 'in-house' inspectors (as opposed to using agencies) (Croyton, 2016), however, may have altered the training of inspectors since my stipulated interviewing period, and this may have created greater consistency in behaviour amongst inspectors.

Suggestions were also put forward for having longer and more frequent inspections (the latter being in line with suggestions from the Daycare Trust (2010), The NCMA (2010), and the NDNA (2010), and aligning with some views expressed within Campbell-Barr and Wilkinson (2010), even though doing so would make settings more 'visible'. This offered a strong indication that these participants felt they had nothing to hide (a constant, subtle theme through all of the interviews) and also indicated that they acted as if they could be being watched all of the time (Foucault, 1977). The reason given for wanting to be seen more was to avoid some of the problems which they thought stemmed from being seen for too short a time (10.1.1), resulting in their good practice being missed. Concerns that inspections were inappropriately short for EY settings had also been voiced by Jones (2010, p. 64), although Jones' concern was that poor, rather than good, practice was being missed. Wanting to be seen more regularly was suggested by some participants, in order to avoid permanent and long-term judgements to 'capture and fix them' (Foucault, 1977, p. 189), especially if the inspection judgement was not considered to be accurate (10.1.1).

Some participants indicated that a different approach might be taken to the assurance of quality in EY, which would be more collaborative and empowering, than punitive (aligning with the participatory approach discussed by David, Powell and Gooch (2010, pp. 33-34)). This could reflect an approach advocated for assessment to encourage progression in children (Carr, 2001), in which children have a say as to 'where next?' in their progression, in the hope of heightening intrinsic motivation and self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 2016). This approach could make particular sense to EY practitioners as it may be embedded in their everyday practice in relation to supporting children. It may also be an approach which better reflects quality assurance approaches for EY in Hong Kong (Ho, Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2010, p. 254) 'whereby quality improvement is the focus of the inspection and it is generated by stakeholder 'buy-in'. Furthermore, it could be more like the approach advocated by Plowright (2007, p. 387) in which there would be a 'more supportive link between Ofsted inspection and school self-evaluation'. Unfortunately, recent change by Ofsted (Gov.UK, 2018) to remove the self-evaluation form from EY inspection is unlikely to ensure practitioner 'buy in' and the benefits which might be brought with this. This more collaborative approach might also be ensured through another suggestion put forward by some participants, which was to have a more appropriate appeals system in place, in order to address the balance of power between practitioners and Ofsted inspectors.

A few participants did not consider it necessary that Ofsted should function as the regulators of EY and that a county/local authority quality assurance team (as had previously been the arrangement for EY inspections prior to Ofsted taking over – see Table 1, Section 2.1.1) or an EY professional organisation might take on this role. This reflected the approval they expressed for the local quality assurance schemes some participants were engaged in (which were externally assessed, but not by Ofsted, and likes of which were also condoned by Mathers, Singler and Karemaker (2010)). The suggestion of a possible move away from Ofsted as the regulators, could partly be a product of a history of negative commentary (in relation to schools) about Ofsted (e.g. Brimblecombe and Ormston, 1995; Jeffrey and

Woods, 1996; Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Penn, 2002; Shaw *et al.*, 2003; Rosenthal, 2004; Perryman, 2007; Courtney, 2016). However, there are also those who have upheld the benefits of the role Ofsted plays (e.g. A+ Education, 2010; Daycare Trust, 2010; NCMA, 2010; NDNA, 2010; Husbands, 2014; Elfer, 2015; Lee, 2016).

While several participants felt strongly that notice of inspection should be given to settings, more participants thought that having no notice was the preferable option (Section 9.2), as this could reduce the stress of preparation and also show settings as they truly are. Ofsted (2015a) has now altered its arrangements in order to allow a limited amount of notice to all settings (despite advice against this by the Education Select Committee (2011)). It is possible that this could alter the panoptic model to some extent, although it can be noted that notice is still very limited and Ofsted maintain the right to arrive unannounced if they are sufficiently concerned to do so. Therefore, this change to notice seems unlikely to have any significant impact (Section 10.1.1).

Greater transparency was called for regarding what was required of EY settings, and both Hope (2013, p. 42) drawing on Simon (2005, p. 7) and Courtney (2016) indicated that this is essential to the effective operation of a panoptic mechanism. Also, some participants wanted to have a stronger voice during the inspection, in order to equal out the balance of power between Ofsted and themselves (this could be helped along by suggestions above for a more collaborative approach to quality assurance, which could perhaps facilitate practitioners to consider their practice in a more post-structuralist way (as considered by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) and Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016)). It must be strongly stated that overall, participants were relatively happy to 'play the inspection game'; they just wanted the rules to be fair and known to all. It would seem that this would also aid the working of a panoptic mechanism (Foucault, 1977).

10.2 Theoretical contribution

This study reinforces the pre-existing and wide repertoire of studies which provide evidence that Foucault (1977) is useful in the exploration of surveillance. It particularly adds to the studies which have used Foucault to look at Ofsted inspection, as it specifically focussed on EY and many participants were in the unique situation of experiencing 'no-notice' inspections (adding significantly to the concept of never being quite sure whether or not somebody will be watching). While there was other earlier literature which connected panopticism (Foucault, 1977) with EY Ofsted inspection (e.g. Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016)), this thesis has delved much more deeply into how panopticism can help to understand the phenomenon of Ofsted inspection from the EY practitioner's viewpoint. While it could not be completely confirmed that panopticism was operational in relation to these participants' practice, or even that they thought that they were in a panoptic situation, their reports of very limited resistance strengthened the theory behind the panoptic mechanism and provided further indications that panopticism is in action. This adds to many prior studies which also supported the concept of panopticism being operational in education. Alongside this, there was some, albeit very limited, evidence of participants not being so panoptically controlled by Ofsted, and rather reflecting Foucauldian illumination of the notion of truth (Foucault, 1980d) and rejecting some Ofsted views of quality in order to take a more relational approach to EY practice. This can strengthen support for Foucauldian concepts of truth (plus knowledge, discourse and power) and the fact that Foucault asserted that there is always a choice as to how to behave (O'Farrell, 2005, p. 99), and add to views previously put forward by others in EY that practitioners must be able to find their own view of what 'quality' is (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013; Campbell-Barr and Lesson 2016).

My conclusion that Foucault (1977) was not helpful in exploring well-being in relation to inspection (Section 10.2), is a contribution to theory, as others who have used Foucault to look at Ofsted inspection and also recognised connections between Ofsted inspection and well-being (for example, Case,

Case and Catling, 2000) had not sufficiently highlighted that Foucault (1977) had not been especially helpful in relation to this.

As I undertook research to inform this thesis, it became more apparent that the work of Foucault had been widely used in EY literature (e.g. Cannella, 2000; MacNaughton, 2005; Fenech and Sumsion, 2007; Cohen, 2008; Leese, 2011; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013; Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016). However, this thesis provided further indications that Foucault is not 'a household name' amongst EY practitioners, as participants could have elected to speak with me about panopticism (as my questioning was related to Foucauldian concepts), and they did not choose to do so. It must be acknowledged that Foucault (1977) stressed that panoptic control is pervasive throughout society (Gutting, 2005, p. 87), and perhaps the normality of such surveillance had rendered it 'unseen' to my participants. This might also suggest that a study such as this one, will help to highlight possible power mechanisms, should they be in operation. Therefore, this thesis will contribute towards a greater awareness of Foucault's work (especially 1977) for EY practitioners, and will potentially assist with enhancing understanding about power mechanisms and of potential questioning of (or resistance to) current approaches to EY practice.

10.3 Limitations of the findings

While the findings of this study met my research aims and produced some of the new knowledge I had hoped for, there were limitations and areas of uncertainty regarding the findings. To begin, while I have been able to report my interviewees' perceptions that their practice as EY practitioners remains (for the most part) the same whatever the circumstances, i.e. whether they are undergoing Ofsted inspection or not. I did not obtain direct information (by observation, for example) that their perceptions were accurate in terms of their actual practice. Consequently, I am unable to report with confidence that panoptic forces were working effectively, although the interviewees' perceptions of their way of working provides some circumstantial evidence to that effect. Even if practice had been confirmed as being the same in

settings, whether or not the inspector was present, it could not be determined if this was because these EY practitioners had been 'panoptically coerced' into doing this, or if other factors had led to their uniform practice in either scenario. For example, it could have been because there was confluence of government requirements and practitioners' principles, as highlighted to be possible by Campbell -Barr and Leeson (2016, p.103).

While it was possible that knowledge of panopticism may not have been common amongst my participants (MacNaughton, 2005), this assumption restricted my vision. Had I made a different assumption (or decided to introduce the concept of panopticism to participants, should they have not been aware of it), my aims might have been extended further and accommodated for finding out about participants' views about whether they thought they were subject to panoptic power at work. This might have had the dual effect of introducing the concept of panopticism to EY practitioners (if not already known), or bringing this concept to the fore (if already known), so that it was not only my eyes which were looking through the lens of Foucault (1977), but many eyes. A similar statement can be made in relation to Foucault's work (1980d) surrounding concepts of 'truth'.

While a review of the literature led to my focusing particularly on EY practitioners' perceptions of Ofsted inspection, it might have helped me to understand their viewpoints, if I had also interviewed representatives from Ofsted (inspectors and otherwise), and also parents of young children and members of the public who did not work in EY. Also, had I included Reception teachers' views, findings may have been significantly different, because of their position at the end of the Foundation Stage where 'end of stage' outcomes expected of children may have worked against the principles of the EYFS (Section 1.3.2). In addition, I had wanted to include practitioners who had received a grade of 'Inadequate' for an Ofsted inspection, but while attempts were made to do this, it is possible that my own assumptions that their experience of inspection would have been especially distressing, prevented me from successfully recruiting such participants. This shortcoming could have been related to a negative effect

of being a part-insider researcher.

Because of the practicalities associated with part-time study, I conducted the interviews some years prior to the submission of this thesis, and both EY and Ofsted inspection have moved on since then (Section 6.1). Therefore, it must be appreciated that the perceptions held by these participants related purely to that moment in time when their interview took place, and the time period before they were interviewed. Furthermore, because Ofsted's inspection practice and EY regulation changes (fairly rapidly) over time (see Chapters 2 and 6), it must be noted that it was not always clear which inspection regime, and which version of the EYFS were being talked about by the participants. While there was clarity sometimes (because it was thought to be of particular interest, either by myself or by the participant), I did not always insist on this clarity during the interviews. There were various reasons for this happening. For example, sometimes participants were talking about inspection and regulation more generically and thus it could not be pinpointed to a specific time and place. Also, because of there being so many different versions of the Ofsted inspection handbook and the EYFS, it may have become unwieldy during the interviews to always insist that the participants identified which version they were referring to. It may also have interrupted the flow of our conversation and I was unwilling to risk this happening, as my strategy was to hear participants' voices, partly facilitated by ensuring ease of conversation.

The overall message I received from the interviews was that Ofsted was perceived as being in a position of power over these participants. As participants were identifiable to me, this could have influenced what they decided to divulge. For example, because only two participants mentioned that they would not do certain things, whether or not Ofsted were happy with it, it is possible that others held back on sharing such information.

10.4 Recommendations

Despite its limitations, this thesis has produced important new knowledge pertaining to Ofsted inspection (see 10.1 and 10.2). Readers of this document will be able to decide for themselves which parts are important in relation to their particular situation (I detail some areas which especially resonated with myself in 10.7 below). However, the main recommendations to convey to EY stakeholders are as follows.

The recommendation for Ofsted and the government is to listen to participants' views on changes that could be made to improve the EY quality assurance process in England, as O'Leary (2007, p. 104) noted that 'governance would not be fully effective if potential contributions and needs of relevant stakeholders were not thoroughly considered'. While there was an underlying belief expressed that EY should have some monitoring of settings, further training for inspectors is needed to ensure that they have a shared understanding of how to address their inspection task. Clarity is also desperately needed for practitioners, who are (from the impression given in this study) generally happy to engage with the inspection process and just want to have greater confidence in it.

This study offers the unique opportunity to take detailed EY practitioners' views into account. Policy makers should be particularly alert to the fact that for almost all participants, Ofsted was not the most prominent thought (Section 10.1.3) which came to mind when they were asked about how to ensure quality in settings. Rather, they conveyed that what was needed was increased funding for EY and well-trained practitioners (the payment of whom would be associated with increased funding). While there has been a substantial financial input to EY in recent years (Gov.UK, 2017), it has been criticised (National Association Of Headteachers, 2018) due to its insufficiency to fund the hours of provision expected. Therefore, what is needed is increased funding per hour of provision, and to have a 'long term commitment to prioritising and investing in the early years' which has been observed in Finland, Sweden and Norway, countries which are all rated highly for their EY provision (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012, p. 6).

One message from the participants was that, although they believed some kind of monitoring of settings needs to be in place, it did not have to be Ofsted who carried out this role. Therefore, the government could also consider adopting the more localised quality assurance measures (which were highly respected amongst those participants who spoke of them), or putting quality assurance of EY into the hands of a professional body (Section 9.12.1.5). Clarke (2012, p. 127) also questioned the appropriateness of having a 'single inspectorate for all organisations, settings and services'. Whoever is responsible for this role, it must be remembered that they have a significant impact on EY settings and so it is critical for them to get it right. It is also worth remembering that routinely inspecting settings is not the only choice a government can elect to take for quality assurance in EY (Section 6.2). Varying views had previously been expressed as to whether or not inspection improves quality (Matthews and Smith, 1995; Ferguson *et al.*, 2000; Shaw *et al.*, 2003; Rosenthal, 2004; A+ Education, 2010; Daycare Trust, 2010; Ho, Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2010; NCMA, 2010; NDNA, 2010; Clarke, 2012; Jones and Tymms, 2014) (Section 2.1.5). As there was insufficient evidence in the literature to be certain that it did, attention should be paid to Orlowski's (2016) study which conveyed that better results were achieved for children in Finland because of higher professionalism (read autonomy within this) in, and lower performance evaluation of, teachers.

The Economist Intelligence Unit (2012), who looked at quality in EY on an international scale, found that England was ranked 4th of 45 countries for quality (after three Nordic countries). This would indicate that overall our EY settings offer quality provision. If we want our EY settings to be ranked as the best in the world, perhaps we need to reconsider our approach to quality assurance, and to decide if England is doing pretty well because of Ofsted inspection, or despite it.

On a different note, EY lecturers, trainers, practitioners and students should use this study as a vehicle to further facilitate understanding about Ofsted inspection. The reports of lower well-being in relation to inspection, which many participants shared, might be mitigated for others in their future

inspections, through greater understanding of this phenomenon. The chief rationale behind this claim is associated with Ord and Rosemary (2013), who detailed how empowerment was achieved for a counselee through greater understanding of the normalising gaze (Section 4.5).

While Foucault appears in the EY literature, his work may not be so familiar to EY practitioners. Therefore, practitioners finding out more about his work could be beneficial. The circumstantial evidence pointing towards panoptic forces (Foucault, 1977) possibly being operational for those in this study, could be a springboard to open up new ways of thinking about Ofsted inspection and related topics and may encourage the questioning of some accepted EY 'truths' (Foucault 1980d). In relation to this, Clarke (2012, p. 199) raised the interesting question about what would happen if all schools chose to ignore certain (unsuitable) government requirements. This possibility is supported by Foucault who, in his later work stressed that there is always a choice as to how to behave (O'Farrell, 2005, p. 99), as power can be both relational and reciprocal. Nevertheless, as I am also subject to Ofsted inspection, I recognise that this may be all very well to write about, but in practice be very difficult (as panopticism would suggest). At the least, Foucault's work can encourage further consideration of issues related to apparent autonomy and professionalism, whilst also being subject to tight, and yet meandering, regulation. In relation to this, Fenech and Sumsion (2007, p. 113) remind us that 'propagation of discourses that position regulation as legitimate and as a guarantor of quality', is a tactic designed to maximise compliance.

[10.5 Aspects this research left untouched and opportunities for further research.](#)

The limitations outlined in Section 10.3 present clear opportunities for future research. To address these limitations, close observation could take place over an extended time period in a selection of EY settings to try to determine whether practice is actually the same, whether or not an inspector is present.

Also, EY practitioners could be asked for their views on whether or not they consider themselves to be subject to panoptic discipline, inviting them to include their reasoning for arriving at their conclusions. In relation to the limited range of participants in this study, a wider net could be cast to consider the views of others who might offer greater understanding about EY Ofsted inspection. Future researchers might also eliminate a lack of clarity about various versions of documents, by sharing an interest with the participants about knowing exactly which version of the EYFS and which inspection framework they are referring to, in order that the participants can clarify this.

In relation to the time period in which the interviews took place, and the changes which have occurred both within the EYFS and the Ofsted inspection framework in recent years (Section 6.1), an update of this thesis will be required at some point in the future. Future researchers will be especially interested in the new Ofsted inspection framework (Ofsted, 2019b) and the Early Years Inspection Handbook (Ofsted, 2019a) implemented in September 2019. Key changes related to these documents are that there will be less emphasis placed on 'data' and that 'Quality of Education' is a new area of judgement being introduced. While there have been a few minor concerns voiced from EY organisations about this new inspection approach (e.g. regarding clarity about certain terms being used (Lawler, 2019)), overall it has been 'cautiously welcomed' by the EY sector (Gaunt, 2019). The term 'cautious' perhaps reflecting some prior disappointments with Ofsted inspection, which participants have demonstrated in this thesis.

Finally, future research ensuring greater anonymity for participants (even from the researcher/s) could help to address possible barriers to their being able to be fully open when discussing an organisation which is in a powerful position above them.

10.6 Reflection on whether a focus on panopticism (Foucault, 1977) was the right choice for this research

Looking retrospectively at whether Foucault's concept of panopticism (1977) was the right choice for this research, leaves me with positive and negative views in relation to this issue. In one respect, consideration of panopticism (Foucault 1977) led to my having much greater insight into possible reasoning behind why many participants thought that they were not really able to deviate from government directives, which were perceived as not always being in line with their own views on best practice in EY. Participants' concerns about a lack of clarity as to exactly what they were meant to be doing (potentially related to varying interpretations of regulations) were also usefully explored by the notion of post-panopticism (Courtney, 2016), contemplation of which necessitated firstly considering panopticism.

While panopticism dominated my research, EY literature connected with Foucault and related more to the Foucauldian concepts of truth, knowledge and discourse, was also useful to this study. This aspect of Foucault's writing seems to have been embraced by the EY literature to a greater extent and led to assertions by many that it is necessary for EY practitioners to contextualise practice to the needs of the children and families who use their settings (e.g. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013; Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016). This might not always fit with the government's view of what is important to EY provision. While there was limited evidence that my participants felt able to stray very far from what the inspector would like to see, it is perhaps the case that my choice to focus more on panopticism did not fully allow for views to come forward about how they took a more contextualised approach to their practice. However, there were a few instances when this did come to light in the analysis of the interviews.

The initial concerns I held about using Foucault to help to guide and structure this research (set out in Section 5.10), were mainly unfounded. My hesitance about using a theorist (any one theorist), because they could block any wider understanding of any particular phenomenon, were rightly discarded, as despite Foucault's ideas providing substantial focus and structure, it was still

possible to remain open to other findings which presented themselves. Nevertheless, the focus Foucault (1977) provided, led me to explore concepts which I would not naturally have been drawn to otherwise, especially Hierarchical Observation and Normative Judgement. Both of these concepts are substantial parts of panopticism and both proved to be worthy of exploration in terms of the rich discussions they helped to elicit between myself and the participants. The same can be said for his thoughts about 'truth' (Foucault, 1980c).

Section 3.1.1.4.3 presented the debate over whether or not Foucault paid sufficient attention to resistance, and whether subsequent studies which used Foucault presented the same failing. My experience of using Foucault (chiefly 1977) in this research was that I was constantly looking for resistance (as seems natural when focusing on the compliance for which Foucault (1977) is more famed). While his writing about panopticism (1977) was not especially helpful in relation to resistance (other than it seemed implicit that this would be the whole reason for outlining his thoughts on panopticism), his other works considered it to a greater extent (Dean, 2013, p. 233). For example, Foucault (1980b) contributed to my awareness that the topic of resistance might arise in the interviews (also see Section 3.1.1.4.3). In addition, I was particularly encouraged to look for resistance amongst my participants because of earlier studies (related to schools and EY) which had considered either or both Foucauldian concepts of panopticism and truth/knowledge/discourse and also identified that resistance was evident (e.g. Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Ball, 2003; Fenech and Sumsion, 2007; Hope, 2013).

In prior studies on Ofsted inspection which drew on panopticism (Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Ball, 2003; Perryman, 2007), lower levels of well-being amongst teachers had also been presented. Therefore, I had expected a connection between Ofsted inspection, panopticism and lower levels of well-being. What I had not fully appreciated was that Foucault's work of 1977 would be pretty unhelpful regarding connections between well-being and panopticism. In other words, in 'Discipline and Punish' (Foucault, 1977),

Foucault made little mention of the effect that panopticism might have on people (other than to control their actions). This led to my initial drawing on Karasek (1979) to seek an explanation for why participants might report lower levels of well-being in relation to Ofsted inspection. However, this line of enquiry did not prove fruitful. Fortunately, later studies which had used Foucault to consider panoptic surveillance (Section 6.6) were able to assist in my thinking about why such surveillance could be detrimental to health. Also, Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016, pp. 124-125) (who were aware of both panopticism and practitioner well-being) made the point that reflecting on practice in order to improve it is important, but must be coupled with support for leaders in our EY settings.

There are those who think that 'so widespread is the literature on the panopticon, that the very mention of the term in conferences immediately leads scholars to roll their eyes in boredom' (Caluya, 2010, p. 621). However, my study has reinforced implicit beliefs that his work is absolutely still relevant (e.g. Downing, 2008, p. 85; Hope, 2013, p. 48; Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016, p. 120) and it was helpful to this study. This was further enhanced by connections to his later work on truth/knowledge/discourse (1980) which was particularly highlighted in Foucault's contribution to EY literature (e.g. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013).

[10.7 Reflection on how the similarities and differences between the participants shaped both my research and myself](#)

In Section 5.9, I made it clear that the focus of this study and the key theorist selected to help steer the study, were both partially the result of my prior experience and thoughts, especially in relation to Ofsted inspection. Because I was aware that I came into this study with pre-existing views, I took steps throughout (see Section 5) to ensure that I still listened to what the participants had to tell me. This careful listening somewhat reshaped both

the research and myself. The differences and similarities between the participants were fundamental to this. For example, a similarity amongst the participants was that they generally had a lot to say on this topic. This meant that the amount of wordage in the interview transcripts was substantial after only 13 interviews. An awareness of the depth in which I intended to analyse the interviews, led to the decision to stop interviewing at this point (as I already had an acceptable range of participants). Had my participants have had limited things to say about Ofsted inspection, I may have recruited further people to interview, which in turn may have altered the findings of this study, and led to my views being altered in slightly different ways.

While I had conducted a literature review before hearing anything these participants had to say, what they told me sometimes necessitated that I look at new literature prompted by their revelations (included within Chapter 6). This could have been because a participant stood out as being different in some respect, or because there was a similar way of thinking amongst many participants. Either way, this steered the analysis in slightly different directions. For example, because a sub-group of participants (those who worked in a nursery school or a children's centre) shared a similar focus on the issue of 'data', I sought out literature on 'dataveillance' (Clarke, 1992) (see section 6.3) and then used this literature to engage in more detailed analysis about this aspect of what they told me.

It should not be a surprise that similarities and differences between the participants also shaped me, and yet it was a surprise. Strangely, I had envisaged emerging from this research process having much the same views on Ofsted inspection as when I entered into it, albeit being more aware of what others' views were. This was not the case, and nor was it likely to be, as 'engaging with research can become part of one's life history' (Musgrave, 2019, p. 15). An example of the ways in which similarity between the participants shaped me, is that, in response to the almost unanimously shared view that some sort of external quality assurance system is necessary in EY, I have been swayed towards thinking that this may be the case. Although I would rather see a system whereby high allocation of funding to EY and the presence of highly qualified (and trusted) practitioners translates

into less focus on inspection (as, for example in Finland – see Section 6.2), the consistency of views about this issue from my participants leaves me with an awareness that external quality assurance can be considered first and foremost about child protection/safeguarding. Nevertheless, the underlying mantra amongst many participants that ‘every day is an Ofsted day’, while absolutely right in relation to protecting children, still causes me concern when government-stipulated aspects of practice might not be so desirable for children’s development.

Differences between the participants also made an impression on me. One example of this was Karen, who was the only participant to explicitly articulate that she felt powerless against Ofsted. This poignant message from Karen was coupled together in my mind with a statement from Leanne, who was the only leader to have sought external supervision/clinical counselling which helped her to mentally process her most recent inspection. These two independent statements (coupled together with a more generalised message that leaders’ well-being seemed to be negatively affected by Ofsted inspection) led me to think that the option to have external supervision should be a more realistic/routine option for all EY leaders. Support for EY leaders was also emphasised by Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016, p. 124-125).

10.8 Reflection on what I have learned as a researcher and as a professional through undertaking this study

Because of the nature of my job, there is overlap between my overall professional role and more specifically my role as a researcher, as the latter is a subcategory of the former. Regarding the research element of my job, Dhillon and Thomas (2018) and Musgrave (2019) have especially enabled me to become more aware of the importance of positionality within a research project, and of the benefits of engaging in reflexivity. There were also practical skills that I picked up along the way, such as working within NVIVO, Endnote and organising long documents in Word. My learning, particularly in relation to working within NVIVO, is that I would elect in future

to engage in coding from the start using the original transcripts, rather than summarising interviews first for coding, and then returning to the transcripts later. Although coding interview summaries was quicker in the short term, returning to the transcripts at a later date probably saved no time overall.

In general, better time management in splitting my attention between teaching and research might have helped to finish this study earlier. This would have been desirable in order to be more expedient in conveying the findings and recommendations to key stakeholders.

Finally, in terms of learning about my subject area (which is EY), I have developed a deeper understanding of the practice of EY practitioners, not only regarding their views on inspection, but also their working lives more generally. In relation to theory, as Foucault was entirely new to me, it has been excellent to find out more about his work, and also to see how it is championed in the EY literature (e.g. Cannella, 2000; MacNaughton, 2005; Fenech and Sumsion, 2007; Cohen, 2008; Leese, 2011; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013; Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016).

[10.9 Closing word](#)

This thesis has provided significantly greater insight into how Ofsted inspection has been experienced and considered by a selection of EY practitioners, alongside clear messages from the field as to how improvements could be made to EY quality assurance. It has added to the collection of voices and views of different EY stakeholders, as recommended by the OECD (2015).

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Informed Consent

Practitioner Perceptions of Ofsted Inspection:

Participant Information Sheet

The aim of this research project is to explore Early Years Practitioners' perceptions of Ofsted inspection. My interest in this area stems from my own feelings and thoughts that emerged before, during and after Ofsted inspections when I worked as a teacher and as Early Years practitioner. To date the voice of the Early Years practitioner is not being heard regarding this topic and I hope that through eliciting and analysing practitioner views, a greater understanding from the practitioner view point will emerge. This research is the focus of my PhD study which is being conducted in line with the University of Gloucestershire's ethical guidelines. Because I will be exploring views about an organisation that is in a position of power above practitioners, I will ensure that confidentiality is maintained and that no real names of participants or settings are used. Also, any information gathered will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

Participation would involve a confidential interview, conducted by myself. This would last for around one hour, and take place at a time that suits you. Interviews will cover a range of topics related to Ofsted inspection. As this will be an in-depth discussion of a personal topic, there is a slight chance you might find it upsetting in some way, although I hope that this will not be the case and that you will find it to be an interesting experience. The interview would, with your consent, be audio recorded, and will be transcribed either by myself or by a third person hired specifically for this purpose. Should a third person be involved, they would be required to retain strict confidentiality regarding the information transcribed.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you would be able to withdraw from the research, without giving reasons, prior to, and during, the interview. You would also have the opportunity to withdraw all or part of your interview material from the study for up to one month after the interview has taken place. A transcript of the interview will be sent to you, so that you can check that it is a true record of the conversation we had. As I have an ongoing research interest in the area of Early Years, with your consent, I would like to keep your interview material for use in future publications and research which is not strictly within the scope of this project. If this did happen, once again the rule of confidentiality applies

If you would like to verify anything about this study with my supervisor, then Professor Mary Fuller can be contacted by email....

If you have questions that you would like to ask me about any of the above, then please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Best wishes

Michelle

Michelle Ward
Senior Lecturer
Early Years

Appendix 2: Advertisement for participants

Early years practitioners perceptions of Ofsted inspection

Comments (0)

The aim of this research is to explore Early Years practitioners' perceptions of Ofsted inspection and is being carried out by Michelle Ward from the University of Gloucestershire.

Michelle's interest in this area stems from her own feelings and thoughts that emerged before, during and after Ofsted inspections when working as a teacher and as an Early Years practitioner. To date the voice of the Early Years practitioner is not being heard regarding this topic and she hopes that through eliciting and analysing practitioner views, a greater understanding from the practitioner view point will emerge.

This research is the focus of a PhD study which is being conducted in line with the University of Gloucestershire's ethical guidelines. As Michelle will be exploring views about an organisation that is in a position of power above practitioners, she will ensure that confidentiality is maintained and that no real names of participants or settings are used. Also, any information gathered will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). Informed consent will be sought from all participants, through ensuring that they know the purpose of the study, how it might potentially be used and any possible risks to themselves. Risks will be minimised primarily through treating all material with scrupulous confidentiality.

Michelle has written an [introductory letter](#) and an [expression of interest form](#) for those who wish to participate in the research.

Appendix 3: Participant information form/ expression of interest

Practitioner Views of Ofsted Inspection: Expression of Interest **Confidential** Background Information

Please complete the following information

If there is information requested below that you do not feel comfortable sharing with me at the moment, then please just complete all that you are happy to fill in. The essential information that I need is a contact telephone number/email for you, the name of your current setting (or most recent setting) and confirmation that you have experienced at least one Early Years Ofsted Inspection. The other information is only requested, because it is important for me to speak to a range of practitioners who may have had differing experiences of Ofsted Inspection.

Name:

Male or female:

Age:

Number of years working in Early Years:

Address:

Telephone number:

Email:

Setting name:

Setting address:

Setting telephone:

Setting email number:

Please provide details of the Ofsted inspections you have been involved in: Start with the most recent inspection and then work backwards to the inspection that took place the longest time ago.

Inspection 1 (most recent)

Type of setting (Please circle - if necessary, circle or more than one):

'Childminder' 'Children's Centre' 'Private Nursery' 'Playgroup'
'Preschool' 'Local Authority Nursery School' 'Early Years Setting attached to a school' 'Reception Class' 'Other' (please give details):

Your role at the setting when the inspection took place (Please circle - if necessary,

circle more than one): 'EYP/EYT' 'Early Years Practitioner' 'Teaching Assistant'
'Setting Manager' 'Room Leader' 'Volunteer' 'Teacher' 'Other' (please give details):

Were you in charge at the setting when the inspection took place? (please circle):

'Yes' 'No'

Date of inspection:

Ofsted judgement (please circle): ‘Outstanding’ ‘Good’ ‘Satisfactory /
Requires Improvement’

‘Inadequate’

Inspection 2 (second most recent)

Type of setting (Please circle - if necessary, circle more than one): ‘Childminder’
‘Children’s Centre’ ‘Private Nursery’ ‘Playgroup’ ‘Preschool’ ‘Local Authority
Nursery School’ ‘Early Years Setting attached to a school’ ‘Reception Class’
‘Other’ (please give details):

Your role at the setting when the inspection took place (Please circle - if necessary,
circle more than one): ‘EYP/EYT’ ‘Early Years Practitioner’ ‘Teaching Assistant’
‘Setting Manager’ ‘Room Leader’ ‘Volunteer’ ‘Teacher’ ‘Other’ (please give
details):

Were you in charge at the setting when the inspection took place? (please circle):

‘Yes’ ‘No’

Date of inspection:

Ofsted judgement (please circle): ‘Outstanding’ ‘Good’ ‘Satisfactory /
Requires Improvement’

‘Inadequate’

Inspection 3 (third most recent)

Type of setting (Please circle - if necessary, circle more than one): ‘Childminder’
‘Children’s Centre’ ‘Private Nursery’ ‘Playgroup’ ‘Preschool’ ‘Local Authority
Nursery School’ ‘Early Years Setting attached to a school’ ‘Reception Class’
‘Other’ (please give details):

Your role at the setting when the inspection took place (Please circle - if necessary,
circle more than one): ‘EYP/EYT’ ‘Early Years Practitioner’ ‘Teaching Assistant’
‘Setting Manager’ ‘Room Leader’ ‘Volunteer’ ‘Teacher’ ‘Other’ (please give
details):

Were you in charge at the setting when the inspection took place? (please circle):
‘Yes’ ‘No’

Date of inspection:

Ofsted judgement (please circle): ‘Outstanding’ ‘Good’ ‘Satisfactory /
Requires Improvement’

‘Inadequate’

Inspection 4 (*fourth most recent*)

Type of setting (Please circle - if necessary, circle more than one): ‘Childminder’
‘Children’s Centre’ ‘Private Nursery’ ‘Playgroup’ ‘Preschool’ ‘Local Authority
Nursery School’ ‘Early Years Setting attached to a school’ ‘Reception Class’
‘Other’ (please give details):

Your role at the setting when the inspection took place (Please circle - if necessary,
circle more than one): ‘EYP/EYT’ ‘Early Years Practitioner’ ‘Teaching Assistant’
‘Setting Manager’ ‘Room Leader’ ‘Volunteer’ ‘Teacher’ ‘Other’ (please give
details):

Were you in charge at the setting when the inspection took place? (please circle):

‘Yes’ ‘No’

Date of inspection:

Ofsted judgement (please circle): ‘Outstanding’ ‘Good’ ‘Satisfactory /

Requires Improvement’

‘Inadequate’

If you have experienced more than 4 Early Years inspections, please give some brief details of these at the end of this form.

If you have now discontinued working in Early Years, please tick here

Thank you for providing these details.

Appendix 4: Interview question cards

NB: Question cards are not in order (to preserve paper when printing them), but can be connected by their colour groups. During the interviews, questions were not necessarily asked in order to enable a more conversational flow.

A 1 If we met at a party, how would you explain to me what you do for a living?

A4 prompts

Own experience and expertise

EYFS

Your manager

The children's needs

Developmental theory

A2 How would you describe the quantity of your workload? – higher, lower, average?

A5 Would you say you have a higher degree of control over what you do, or a lower degree of control?

A3 Has your workload increased, decreased or stayed about the same in recent years?

A6 Would you consider yourself to be a professional? - *please explain why*

A4 Who or what decides what you do on a day to day basis?

D3 Do your thoughts about your professionalism impact on the way you think about inspection?

B1 What does 'Ofsted inspection' mean to you?

B2 If you were talking to someone from a different country about what Ofsted is- what would you tell them?

See if independent and impartial, or being able to share generic 'gaps' comes up

C1 Tell me about your experience of Ofsted inspection

C2 How did you feel during the inspection?

C3 How did you feel before the inspection?

C4 How did you feel after the inspection?

D1 If there was a mismatch between what you think is good practice and what the inspector thinks....

Would you voice your opinion?

Would you feel heard?

Do you have any experience of this?

D2 Would you answer about professionalism before impact on whether you would voice your opinion?

D4 Do you consider Ofsted inspectors to be professionals?

E1 What do you think about no- notice inspection?

E2 Do you have notice for your inspections?

Can you tell me if this impacts on the way you think about inspection?

F1 What are your thoughts on inspection reports being made public?

F2 Are inspection reports potentially a source of pride or humiliation – or not so much?

Tell me why you think this is

F3 Does what is written in the report affect your practice?

Tell me about this

F4 Tell me whether you tend to compare the grading of your setting to the grading of other settings?

Why?

F5 Are there any gradings that would cause you alarm (could be especially high or especially low)

G1 Tell me if the presence of an Ofsted inspection occurring at some point, has any effect on you

(so away from the inspection actually taking place)

G2 Tell me about your own well-being and whether or not there might be any connection between your own well-being and the system of inspection?

(before, during, after, quite away from the inspection)

H1 you said that decides what you do on a day to day basis, tell me whether this changed at all during the inspection

How did this make you feel?

H2 would you say (or would you not say) that the presence of a possible inspection at some point, impacts on your practice?

H3 tell me about whether you feel that you have enough control over what you do at work

Does this change if we consider it in the light of inspection?

H4 Tell me what you think about the EYFS

I1 if you were an advisor to the government, how would you advise them about how to ensure quality in EY settings in England?

See if the department which is responsible comes up and also ECERS (Early childhood environment rating scale)

Optional I2 I notice that you haven't mentioned Ofsted inspections within this – can you tell me why this is

Appendix 5: Check list of things to do with participant directly before commencing interview

Checklist for conducting the interviews

Guided by Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 94)

1. Begin by thanking the participants
2. Recap on purpose of research
3. Have a copy of PIS for them to recap on and ask any questions and then sign
4. Emphasise that there are no wrong or right answers and that the interviewees are the experts of what they think
5. Copy of consent form to participant and also one for me
6. They check and sign while I finish setting up
7. Ask are they happy to switch on and begin?

Appendix 6: Participant consent form

Practitioner Perception of Early Years Ofsted Inspection

Participant Consent Form – Participant Copy

I can confirm that I have read the Participant Information Sheet and give my consent to participate in this project.

I am over 18 and have been involved in at least one Early Years Ofsted inspection.

I know that the data collected in the interview will be transcribed and returned to me so that it can be verified as a true record of the conversation that took place.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw at any point before and during the interview, and up to one month after the interview has taken place.

I expect the data collected to be treated as confidential with no real participant names or setting names being mentioned in any publication

Signed:.....

Date:

Appendix 7: Summary of findings of Chapter 9

The following summarises the key findings in relation to the examination/inspection.

- Ofsted inspection appeared to help ensure that what was required by the government to happen, did actually take place in settings. There was an overarching message that these participants were trying to get things 'right' according to the inspection criteria, and that they needed the inspector to see how right they were getting them.

- What was written in the report was not always thought to be accurate from the viewpoint of the participants

- There was little suggestion of resistance from participants in relation to inspection, although some indicated that they were learning how to 'play the inspection game' to a very limited extent by strategically filing in the Self-Evaluation form

- Paperwork which may be required at inspection was perceived as being too great. Some participants thought that this paperwork (in order to provide evidence) was taking focus away from the children.

- Participants who reported engaging with their voluntary external quality assurance were very happy with how this enhanced quality at their settings. Some would have liked more notice to be taken of this alternative quality assurance during the inspection and others reported feeling confident for inspection because of having engaged with this voluntary quality assurance procedure.

- Only one participant mentioned 'power' and her powerlessness in relation to inspection. This participant stated that at one time she would have allowed herself to become frustrated with government regulations she disagreed with, she now simply accepted that in order to pass inspection, she must comply.

- The Ofsted inspection appeals procedure was thought to be lacking by those who reported having used it

- All participants said they would voice their opinion if they disagreed with the inspector, but only so that they could demonstrate how well they were meeting government standards

- Participants generally liked the EYFS, although there were some reservations

- All participants viewed themselves as professionals. Some participants said that their professionalism and their experience helped them to voice their opinions with inspectors. However, their opinions were usually voiced in order to demonstrate their compliance

- When participants appealed about inspection, they did so in order to prove their compliance to government requirements

-There were different views expressed about being visible in relation to inspection. One participant reported feeling as if they were in a 'goldfish bowl', another said it was her 'chance to shine'.

-The majority reported that either they or others acted slightly differently during the inspection. They attributed this to nerves, feeling uncomfortable, or practicalities of facilitating the inspector

-Many thought that not all of their 'good practice' was seen because the inspector either did not ask about it, did not allow things to be shown, was not observant enough, or did not have enough time during the inspection

-Some participants reported being able to take control during the inspection and therefore show more of what they perceived they needed to show. One participant reported looking forward to being able to take more control under the inspection framework which had just been introduced.

-Some participants thought the focus of the inspection was not transparent because of the following

- Themes being decided by Ofsted because they were 'flavour of the month'

- Inspectors particularly paying attention to their own individual areas of interest

- Frequent change in EY frameworks

-Delivery of feedback from inspectors was important to participants. They were particularly upset if feedback was conflicting between oral feedback during the inspection and the report. They desired a chance to respond to feedback but were mostly disappointed with how inspectors reacted to their response. However, the childminder I interviewed said that inspection was her only opportunity for feedback.

-Some participants thought that the inspection report influenced parental choices to use the setting and that the report fixed the setting at a certain standard for several years.

-Most reported acting on advice for improvement listed in the inspection report.

-Many thought that inspection maintains or improves quality and participants generally believed that inspection or monitoring of some sort was necessary in order to protect children's interests. On occasion, the transcripts indicated that inspection improved quality, even if participants had not recognised this

-While not disputing whether inspection was necessary, some participants reported that if not instigated correctly, inspection could cause damage. For example, if an inaccurate judgement was allocated to a setting, this may demotivate the practitioners and give parents an inaccurate view of the setting. There were many

comments that indicated that participants perceived some setting reports to be inaccurate.

-Lower levels of practitioner well-being could impact negatively on quality. Many reported that there was a connection between the inspection regime and lower levels of well-being. Any who did not think that there was a connection between inspection and lower levels of well-being were non-leaders. It was encouraging that, when asked if they could feel humiliated by an inspection result, that they mainly said they could not.

-Participants generally considered their workload to be high and to have risen in recent years. They also generally perceived that they had a high amount of control over what they did. High workload and low control could be associated with the inspection regime, as there are high demands and seemingly little chance for resistance. However, this was not an explanation for reported connections between inspection and well-being.

-It was difficult to determine whether panopticism/examination was affecting the actions of these practitioners, as they did, for the most part, agree with what they were being asked to do in their settings. Whether or not this was the result of current discourse, was unclear. There were, however, some examples of where participants disagreed with what the government was asking them to do. Alongside this there were very few reports of having been able to, or thinking that they could resist against these requirements, without leaving working in EY settings (just one participant, who did not intend to leave her job, reported not doing something that she had been asked to do by Ofsted).

-These practitioners generally accepted inspection and the possible harm that might arise from receiving a poor grade, because they believed it would protect children.

-In order to ensure quality in the future, participants had a variety of suggestions for the government. These included greater investment in EY and having highly qualified/trained practitioners. They also (when probed) thought it necessary to keep some kind of surveillance/monitoring/inspection in place, but recommended that inspectors needed to be knowledgeable and well trained, to have longer and more frequent inspections, and to have an appropriate appeal system in place. While several participants felt strongly that notice should be given for inspection, a greater number of participants thought that no notice should be given to settings in the future.

Appendix 8: Example interview transcript

KEY:

MW- Michelle Ward

D- Dianna

F- Female (who enters the room during the interview)

MW: Okay. Hhhhhh. Right. If we met at a party how would you explain to me what you do for a living?

D: Oh the best job in the world. (laughs) Um (.2), yes how would I explain? Well I think people uh yeah, it's quite a difficult one to explain actually isn't it because people think, 'Oh a nursery, early years, oh dear.' But actually it--it is a very fulfilling job and a very exciting one. Like you, I've been out of it for a long while.

MW: You appreciate it more.(laughs)

D: I appreciate it much more.

MW: When I go around to the settings it's (laughs)

D: Yeah I love it. I absolutely love it.

MW: Yeah.

D: I've only been doing this job for about 18 months.

MW: Okay.

D: So I've only been back practicing about that time so um, yeah I just think it's-- I mean it's all about the children, it's all about the families, there's so much to it. There's so many elements that you--you--you just have to be careful you don't go off on a tangent all the time and keep yourself focussed but it's, yeah it's a fascinating job.

MW: Thank you. Would you say you have a--a--a high level of workload? A lot of work to do? Or a lower?

D: Oh very high level. High level.

MW: Yeah.

D: Yes definitely. Um, (.2) I probably make it higher than it is um because I'm trying to strive for perfection all of the time (laughs) so I think yeah, I do make it quite a high level.

- MW: Okay, (.) because of your commitments to the-- to the role of the job?
- D: Mm, definitely.
- MW: Has it increased-- I mean obviously you've only been back in early years for a couple of years, so maybe I could ask you if there's-- if you notice a difference between before when you were practicing and now. Has there been any increase? Any decrease in your workload?
- D: It's difficult to say because I've not actually ever worked in day-care before, I trained as a teacher. Um::: and the workload then was pretty high. Um:::, I've noticed it's increased since I've started um::, that the-- that the complexity it seems to have gotten more um and the demands I think are higher, but whether that's because I'm understanding the job role more or whether it is external pressures it's difficult to say really.
- MW: Okay thanks. So who or what decides what you do on a day to day basis?
- D: I pretty much decide what I do on a day to day basis. Um:::, but I'm in very much a position of having to answer to the college ((this setting is owned by a college of further education that it is attached to)), to Ofsted (.) and to local authorities, so you've got almost like three masters that you're-- plus the parents. They should be first really shouldn't they? The parents and the children, so you've got lots-- and the staff (laughs). So you've got lots (laughs) of elements...
- MW: (Laughs)
- D: ...that actually determine.
- MW: Yeah.
- D: You know what you, what you have to do and it's--it's a constant juggling job of--of trying to prioritise. I think we're in a more:: stressful position because we're owned by a college. Um, because we um:: you know we have to do things their way which don't always fit with an um an early years setting so you're always sort of kind of trying to do what you want to do in the setting but also meet their needs as well.
- MW: Okay and are they um focussed on Ofsted requirements or are they more focused-- they...
- D: They're-- well they're due an Ofsted Inspection in the college.

MW: So they--they are in the realm with that.

D: They are very focussed yes.

MW: Okay.

D: And certainly when we had our Ofsted Inspection, Head of Quality ((from the college of FE)) came across straight away um:: to support us so:::

MW: Okay.

D: And when we got the feedback the principal came so they are very aware of--of Ofsted and yeah, the need to get good grades.

MW: Okay thank you. And do you feel like you have enough control over what you do on a day to day basis? Or not enough:: control? Or::: about normal or?

D: I don't think I've really got enough because of the college really. I think if we were an independent nursery then it would be a lot easier.

MW: Thank you. Um::: (.4). So, what does Ofsted Inspection mean to you?

D: Terror. Fear. (laughs) Yeah it was hanging over my head from the minute I started. I was actually interviewed ,hhhh um on:: how I would achieve an 'outstanding' in Ofsted so the pressure was on right from the start.

MW: That was one of the interview questions okay.

D: Absolutely. How are you going to get um?

MW: Did the college interview you?

D: Yes they did, yeah.

MW: Okay.

D: How are you going to get the setting up to an 'outstanding'? .hhhhh Um so that-- the pressure was on right from the beginning.

MW: Was it 'good' at the time? Was that the rating?

D: It was 'good' at the time.

MW: Yeah.

D: But it hadn't had an inspection for about four years.

MW: Mm hmm.

D: It was about four and a half, yeah we-- because it came this year so yeah that was about four and a half years.

MW: Which is a long period of time, yeah.

D: A long period of time and there'd been, I was the third manager in that period of time so um really the Ofsted that they'd had wasn't a reflection at all of--of the Ofsted that we've just had because everything had changed and uh (.2) yeah the criteria had changed um and the emphasis has changed hasn't it? Much more towards learning and development.

MW: Yeah.

D: So um a lot of pressure right from the start::: um, (.) but when I started reading the new criteria I knew that there was no way we were going to get an 'outstanding' at the first inspection, so I was drip feeding that into the college right from the start. Because I actually thought we'd get an 'unsatisfactory' because of the learning and development side of things.

MW: How did you know that you weren't going to get an 'outstanding' then?

D: I knew I wasn't going to be able to achieve it. Not with the staff I'd got.

MW: Did you know what was-- what was-- what you'd need to have in order to get an 'outstanding'? Did you have a clue or an idea?

D: I don't now no. I don't-- I--I thought I had a clearer idea before they came.

MW: Yeah.

D: Uh, now I don't have a clear idea of what they're looking for (.2) at all. (.2) .hhhhh Because when you read our report you think, why didn't they give, why didn't they give an 'outstanding' because the things that I'd been concerned about, the learning and development, actually by the time she came we had improved a huge amount and she saw them as a real strength, so the things that she actually picked up that we had to develop were quite-- not, they weren't large difficult things, they were-- they were things like, well almost impossible to achieve like um

getting EAL ((English as an additional language)) parents more involved. It's really, really difficult and there's a language barrier. And improving the--the way we record:::: our outdoor provision, so very, very minute things.

MW:

Mm.

D:

So when challenged as to why we weren't an 'outstanding' she said it was because we weren't inspirational. And you think, right. ((the word 'right' indicates that D was left wondering exactly what that means))

MW:

So you asked-- so you asked her at the time did you?

D:

Yes.

MW:

Okay.

D:

"Why haven't we got an outstanding?" Because as the day was going, and she was feeding back to me during it, she was brilliant actually, she was really nice:: and everything was very um (.) carefully done and um::: very fair.

MW:

It's important all these things, very important, yeah.

D:

Oh yeah::::, she--she was very good, couldn't fault her. And it was a nice experience actually on the day it's the build up to it isn't it? .hhhhh Um::, (.3) yeah when I--I the feedback I was getting I--I by lunch time I was beginning to think well maybe we will get an 'outstanding', may--maybe she is seeing all those extra things that we're doing. Um:: and she was very impressed with the tracking and all the rest of it. But then when she actually phoned back she said, "Oh it was a 'good'." So I challenged and she said um:::, "Well you need to be inspirational now::::." She said, "Really the level you're achieving is the old 'outstanding' but the new 'outstanding is inspirational."

MW:

But I mean you hadn't had one since 2012.

D:

Yeah.

MW:

Okay so it's a recent one.

D:

Yeah, yeah, and [crosstalk 07:35]

MW:

And she actually said that?

D:

She actually said that.

MW:

That's interesting.

D: And I think she--she would have given us an 'outstanding' under the old grading.

MW: That's very...

D: Yeah.

MW: And did you try to um:::: offer her something that would change her mind when she-- when you said that...

D: No::::: I felt it was set in stone and I'd got no chance (chuckles) of changing her mind.

MW: Okay.

D: Yeah::::

MW: Yeah.

D: Afterwards we said, "Oh wish we'd said that, wish we'd done that, wish we'd taken her out and about and seen a bit more of .hhhhhh what we offer."

MW: So would you do it differently in the future?

D: Mm::::, yeah, I'd know better (.4) how to play the game, (.) yeah.

MW: From the experience that you'd had.

D: Yeah, yeah, it was a bit-- unless they change the goalposts again. (laughs)

MW: (Laughs) Okay so if you were explaining what Ofsted was to somebody else, so somebody came over from::::: Istanbul and said um.

D: Mm.

MW: How would you explain it?

[A child enters the room and leaves – some transcript missing here as it relates to a child entering the room, getting something and leaving – both D and myself are encouraging and praising of the child]

MW: Sweet that they could just come in and do that, aww::::.

D: Yeah we try to get them as independent as possible.

MW: Yeah.

D: My nickname is ***** [removal of nick name to avoid identifying participant] (laughs) that's terrible isn't it?

MW: Why?

D: Well because they were um, it was a few months ago now that they were doing rhyming words.

MW: Okay (laughs).

D: And ***** [removal of nick name to avoid identifying participant]

MW: (Laughs)

D: So now you know they're out there and they're shouting it, it's awful.

MW: (Laughs)

D: It's lovely, I love it but you know I wish they'd chosen something a little more.

MW: Well it could be worse-- it could be definitely worse.(laughs)

D: I could be definitely worse. (laughs) Sorry explaining Ofsted.

MW: Okay so yeah if somebody comes from a different country, how would you explain it to them?

D: Mm:::, well I think it's-- I would hope that it's a quality assurance type body that um is trying to standardise good practice across::--across the um::: the profession. Um:::::. I feel it has a very strong political element though and I'd rather, you know, I think that's a shame really, I think that that sort of is very much guided by what the::: politicians want to achieve um to suit the voters or whatever.

MW: And you feel that--that's a shame.

D: I do::: think that's a shame yes, yes. Because I don't think-- I don't have faith that they have people at Ofsted that (.) really understand::: the early years professional or the, the teaching profession.

MW: Okay and what would-- so what would you like to see? I might come back to that.

D: Okay.

MW: But while we're there, what-- how would you like to see it?

D: I think it should be um some sort of professional body (.) that does it on the-- that does (.2) regular visits:: (.) because now we--we've got this whole you know we--we were inspected in February and now we've got to wait however many years before they come back::, um so we've got that chance to raise that grade to that standing now for another four years and it's kind of left us in limbo. So I think it would be better if you had more regular visits, inspections. I'm not sure it should be local though because I think the local advisors that we have .hh get too::: bogged down in what they think it should be:: um and it's not um:::, it's not a clear vision, which you need for a national.

MW: Mm-hmm.

D: But I do think it should be run by people that really understand (.2) where you're coming from.

MW: Okay.

D: So:: practitioners maybe. Practitioners doing it for practitioners would be really (.2) really good.

MW: Do you think it's a problem or not a problem that the Ofsted would come in and inspect the EYFS. Do you think that's--that's okay for them to come in and inspect the EYFS? [inaudible due to audio interference 11:24] ((I asked about how D felt about the EYFS and the relationship of inspectors inspecting against this 'curriculum'

D: That's a tricky one isn't it. Again, it's that political element isn't it? Because I feel that they're looking for certain things and if you don't actually manage to match that um:::, for example the tracking, now we--we've developed a system, my deputy has got a very whizzy um partner who has developed this um system for us so that we can input everything and then get nice little graphs at the end and really see where our gaps are. She's been inputting for this term this week. Now her own little boy comes here::: and he's flagging up as not meeting developmental levels.

MW: Developmental norms?

D: Developmental norms.

MW: Yeah, yeah okay.

D: So we had a look (.) um and she was showing me a little bit-- some pictures on her phone now bearing in mind that he's only, I think he's about 20 months I think, 21 months? He's created these amazing Lego models, all on his own.

MW: 20 months?

D: At 20 months.

MW: Mm.

D: Models that I'd be really impressed to see in the oldest ones, the three and four year olds.

MW: Yeah.

D: I'd be, I'd think 'wow' but with him I was just astounded. And what we were saying was (.) that the um EYFS is not actually it--it--it's too rigid on how it's measuring children's development. .hhhhh It's too prescriptive in some ways but it's not giving you enough scope to be able to identify (.2) other areas of development so for example his:: cognitive skills there are huge um:: (.2) but you're not able to-- that is not being reflected um when you then actually come to--to judge as to what level he is on. So I think it--it--it's difficult then:: because I think it's probably being steered by:: uh:: government requirements from they want, how they see it as children, should be developing.

MW: Mm-hmm.

D: But it's too narrow.

MW: Okay.

D: So I think that's-- that can be a disadvantage really when they come in and--and sort of have a look at (.2) the EYFS that they're--they're looking at it very-- in a very narrow way and not really looking at it (.) wide enough.

MW: Overall would you say you agree with the EYFS as a want for a better word curriculum?

D: Yeah, yeah.

MW: Or overall would you not agree with it? So overall you would agree with it?

D: I think it's good to have um::: guidelines definitely. Um and I think yeah, I think it's pretty functional.

MW: Okay.

D: Yeah it's pretty good.

MW: Thank you. Okay so let's get onto um we've already started talking about your experience of Ofsted Inspection so you've had::: one since you've been here.

D: Mm-hmm.

MW: Were you involved in Ofsted Inspections at the college?

D: Yes, yes.

MW: And if you're a teacher before did you have any Ofsted Inspections in schools?

D: No. Because I taught too long ago for Ofsted. (laughs)

MW: Okay [crosstalk 14:20]

D: I have--I have sort of experienced it through my husband. (laughs)

MW: Is he a teacher as well?

D: Yeah he's a teacher, local secondary yeah.

MW: Okay so you've got something to put it into context as well.

D: Mm:::. Mm.

MW: Tell me about your experience of-- well let's just talk about this Ofsted Inspection then, what's your experience of this-- of early years Ofsted Inspection?

D: Uh well it was very good actually on the day, she was brilliant. But I think it depends on who you get:::. From--from the sort of talk that goes around the other settings you know, sometimes you get people that are not very open minded and just got they're very rigid about what they're going to look at and what they're going to see. She was::: brilliant. I mean she came in, immediately put you at ease, um, very keen to interact with the children, loved the-- I mean the children and that were cuddling her by the end of the day so she was very involved.

MW: Mm.

D: And you felt she was trying to support you and get you as good a grade as possible.

MW: So as relaxed as you could be.

D: Absolutely.

MW: So that you could really show.

D: Yes, yes.

MW: Yeah okay. And...

D: And asking the right questions and if she didn't have enough .hhh um material then sort of asking you for something else or.

MW: So not assuming that it's not there but giving you the opportunity.

D: Yeah, yes, so we were very lucky I think.

MW: I'm--I'm getting the impression that you agreed with her judgement?

D: Yeah pretty much I did actually.

MW: Okay.

D: A lot of her judgements were--were I think taken from our um our SAR you know where we done the--the review ourselves and assessed ourselves where we were.

MW: Yeah. What did-- what did you call it?

D: Uh the SAR, the Self Assessment Review.

MW: Oh okay yeah.

D: It's the SEF actually isn't it?

MW: Okay right. (laughs)

D: The SAR, the SAR is what I actually do...

MW: [crosstalk 15:58]

D: No it's--it's for what I do for the college but yeah the SEF sorry.

MW: Okay.

D: Yeah so I think a lot of it was based on that so pretty much yes I agreed with her.

MW: Okay, okay. And just as an aside, what-- do you know what you expect to get in your next inspection?

D: Oh we're going to go for an 'outstanding' next time. ((slight sarcasm in D's tone – but still serious that this is her aim))

MW: Okay.

D: We're thinking about how we can be inspirational. (laughs)

MW: Okay is there an inspir-- okay so inspirational to get the 'outstanding'? Or...

D: Well because she said that we needed to be inspirational...

MW: Yeah okay.

D: ...we're trying to think how we can be.

MW: Okay and (.2) do you know what that looks like? I'm not being rude but do you?

D: No:::::, no, no.

MW: No.

D: It's--it's because it's my--my opinion and it's very difficult. But I think in terms of us it will be a bit of thinking out of the box a little bit.

MW: Mm.

D: Because I've got a different background to a lot of nursery managers I'm trying to use that background to make us a little bit different

MW: Yeah.

D: to--to other settings so we started doing um::::: baby massage, we're going to do baby yoga and we've started doing like coffee mornings and things like that so it's bringing the parents in before they--their children start and building that relationship so.

MW: Yeah.

D: And we're working on the ESL parents as well to see where-- how we can work with the college um, they're going to help us with translating forms and helping parents to fill forms in and

that sort of thing so we get to know what the children are like before they start.

MW: Okay and I get the impression from your tone as you're saying it that that's what you want to do.

D: Yes. Yes.

MW: Is it because of the Ofsted report

D no::: I think we'd already identified
M: So actually you're working towards something that you'd want to be working towards anyway?

D: Anyway. Absolutely.

MW: Okay.

D: Yes, yes.

MW: So you felt fine during the inspection.

D: Mm-hmm.

MW: You actually enjoyed the inspection.

D: Yeah it wasn't bad actually (laughs) once I got over the initial shock. (laughs)

MW: So--so you don't get notice.

D: No, no.

MW: What--what do you think about the notice or not notice?

D: I prefer no notice.

MW: Okay.

D: Because when we were in the college you used to know they were coming in like six weeks and it was ridiculous the pressure and the stress

MW: Yeah.

D: leading up to it. So I think it's better not to know really.

MW: Okay.

D: That--that they're coming.

MW: And would you say that you generally run your setting as if an Ofsted...

D: Yes.

MW: ...inspector could walk in.

D: Yes.

MW: Okay. And is that something that gives you [crosstalk 18:19] It's assurance?

D: Yes.

MW: It--it makes you feel more confident in doing that?

D: Yes, yes.

MW: Okay.

D: I think it's good for the staff as well.

MW: Okay. And because you-- because you didn't have a um a date to or notice, I can't really ask you what you felt like before but you've indicated that there was a build up to it.

D: Oh there was a huge build up yes.

MW: Because you generally knew it was coming.

D: Yes and it was ridiculous.

MW: And how did you feel [unclear 18:43] when it was generally on the horizon?

D: Oh I wish they'd come. (laughs)

MW: Yeah.

D: Because it was you know, it--it kind of. Oh yeah dreadful I mean you'd go on holiday and people would say they've left your number just in case Ofsted come, you know you just couldn't relax.

MW: Yeah.

D: And um the staff were very twitchy, they'd go, "Oh we better do that in case Ofsted comes." and oh it was just:: ridiculous really. But it's been very interesting since we've had the Ofsted

because I mean we're only talking what three months or something? It's taken us all that time to pick ourselves up, and be able to move forward.

MW: So how long four--four, five months?

D: I think it's February so, February, March, April, May, June, four months. Yeah four or five months.

MW: So there was a...

D: A lull.

MW: A lull.

D: There was.

MW: Yeah that's a good word okay.

D: Yeah we had to absorb it I think and then reflect and, 'Right okay, now they've gone we're doing it for our own sake now that we want to improve our practice.

MW: Okay so we've touched on well-being in what we've been talking about there in terms of your:::: well-being in terms of stress and things like that.

D: Mm.

MW: Um, do you think that there is a link between your::: well-being as a practitioner and Ofsted Inspection or would you say there isn't really, they--they can be separated and...?

D: Oh no I think there's a very strong link. You're always feeling that they're the big brother sitting on your shoulder. Um, and you're always worried that a parent is going to make a complaint or something like that and that they'll come down on you like a tonne of bricks. I know they've change their complaint procedure haven't they? So it's only really um:::: safeguarding issues that they come now.

MW: Yeah and they make a decision don't they...

D: Yes, yes.

MW: ...on whether it's...

D: Yeah but no, I think it always sits there a bit on your shoulder. Yeah.

MW: And what about, because you are in charge of the setting.

D: Mm.

MW: What about for people who aren't in charge of it, I mean I know you can't really speak for them but is there anything that you observed in terms of--of--of well being?

D: Yeah well I think there's, yeah. Oh they were very stressed beforehand. Really, really worried about not letting anybody else down. One of our um, one of the girls downstairs Reema, she was so anxious and she would keep (.) making us um ask her questions like, "Who are the designated safeguarding officer?" and things like that. And in the end I had to say to her, "Look, if Ofsted come I will be by your side."

MW: Yeah.

D: And did I remember that? No. (laughs)

MW: (Laughs) Well because you were in a different state on that day.

D: Yeah absolutely.

MW: Yeah.

D: And--and she--she was fine, she was fine because when she knew they were in the building her and a couple of others in the room they were just going through, "Yeah who is such and such and what's that?" you know, all those silly things that are actually, they're you know they are important but--but you kind of get lost when your thinking about the relationship with the children, they're not as important on a day to day basis but she was yeah, frenetic about it.

MW: Oh wow. (laughs)

D: Really frantic. (laughs)

MW: Yeah, no, I can relate to that.

D: And then some though were quite disappointed that they hadn't been spoken to during the day by the inspector.

MW: Is that because they'd prepared...

D: Yes.

MW: ...to do that and then it didn't happen. Yeah.

D: Yeah exactly.

MW: Yeah. And did they feel slighted?

D: Yes.

MW: Did they?

D: "Why didn't they-- why didn't she speak to me I'd got such and such to tell her."

MW: Oh okay so it's...

D: And "I wanted to show her this." Yeah.

MW: So they thought it was something, they--they felt important if they were...

D: Yes.

MW: ...spoken to. okay.

D: Yes.

MW: That's interesting.

D: Because they'd had the chance to show off their nursery I think.

MW: Yeah, yeah. Oh okay. And do you think Ofsted is a good opportunity for that?

D: I think it probably was on that day because she ((the inspector)) was open to that.

MW: Yeah.

D: Um, I'm not sure it would be with most people ((most inspectors)). Because we find with like our early years advisors one-- we've got one (laughs) um we've got two that come, one--one is lovely and friendly and--and warm, the other one is very strict and um she's still got loads of knowledge and things but she frightens the staff to bits.

MW: Mm.

D: And I think if she'd have come round, or somebody like her, they would have been so terrified they wouldn't have been able to (.2) you know do their--their best.

MW: Yeah:: okay so it's important the attitude is.

D: Absolutely, yeah absolutely.

MW: Okay um, hhhh. if there was a mismatch between what you think is good practice and what the inspector thinks is good practice, would you voice your opinion?

D: Definitely. Yeah and I would definitely challenge. Yeah. I think I'm old enough and wise (chuckles) enough now. And I've got so much experience, I think if you were (.) um::: less: experienced and less confident in your own judgement, you probably wouldn't.

MW: Mm.

D: But yes I think I would. I would challenge.

MW: And this is a question that I always think, oh it might come across as insulting.

D: No that's fine.

MW: I just ask everybody this question. Would you class yourself as a professional?

D: Yeah definitely. Oh gosh yeah, and all the team.

MW: Okay.

D: We're all professionals, yes.

MW: Somebody asked me while I was forming these questions, she said, "Do you think they will?" and I thought, "Yeah." (laughs)

D: I don't' think other people see early years though.

MW: No that's interesting, she wasn't an early years person. It's just...

D: No, I don't think they do and I think that's the-- I think that's the root of the problem really (.) that um people don't see us as professionals.

MW: Mm. And does the fact that you see yourself as a professional impact on you voicing your opinion?

D: Mm.

MW: Yeah. Okay and--and this inspector obviously did hear you because you felt that she was um:

D: Oh she was a good listener yeah she was.

MW: Okay. Um (.3)

D: I think what was good about her is that she definitely had an early years background. When we were inspected in--in the college um::: we were inspected by people that didn't have an early years background, and I think that really does impact (.2) with um in the lecturing role.

MW: Yeah. So they were non EY people, they were lecturing inspectors?

D: Mm:::

MW: Yeah okay.

D: Mm. Yeah completely different, they didn't understand at all early I don't think.

MW: Yeah, yeah. Okay so background is important, their background.

D: Yeah definitely.

MW: So would you class um Ofsted inspectors as professionals?

D: (.3) (Laughs)

MW: That sounds like a rude question as well doesn't it? I'm not trying to be rude (laughs).

D: Yes I think so. Yes I would yeah.

MW: Okay. Um, we talked about no notice and notice inspections. (.3) What are your thoughts on inspection reports being made public?

D: (.3) .hhhhhhh I think it's quite difficult because I don't (.) think it's very clear to the public or parents (.) what they should be looking for.

MW: Mm-hmm.

D: And I think they very often get mis--mislead by an inspection report. Um::, for example there's a really good nursery, local nursery run um day care, run by two ex teachers and they had a recent Ofsted and they were unfortunate in that um a member of-- um one of the-- one of the parents let a second inspector in without anybody realising so they immediately um went down

to 'unsatisfactory' (.4) Because they say it was a safeguarding issue. Um::, and we've had parents come round here and said, "I went to the ***** ((name of setting withheld)), that's the one it was. I went to look at***** ((name of setting withheld)), I'm not sending my child there because they're Ofsted Inspection report (.) is 'unsatisfactory'.

MW: And actually really didn't show.

D: No. And I've said to them, "Well actually no, that's a really, really good setting and I wouldn't hesitate to send (.) my child there if I had a child of that age." Um, and--and yet that's completely yeah (.) upset their--their local standing if you like.

MW: Okay.

D: Yeah it's difficult really isn't it? It's very difficult. Because parents do need to know what's going on and um but I think it takes a professional to read those reports to know really what's--what's happening.

MW: Read between the lines you think or?

D: Read between the lines, yeah.

MW: Okay so would you...

D: Mm.

MW: So I'm--I'm going to try and press you for...

D: I think.

MW: ...an answer about whether they should be.

D: Yeah maybe they shouldn't. They could be (.3) but I think they perhaps need to be written in a different format? Maybe? I don't know, difficult to say really, but (.2) I don't think they're very helpful, no.

MW: Okay.

D: No.

MW: So they're not helpful to the parents or to the people in the settings or?

D: (Laughs) I don't think they're helpful to anybody really.

MW: Okay.

D: Oh that's a bit-- no that's a bit mean. Um:: (.2)? I don't know you see my--my line manager he's just well, I've lost him now but my previous line manager just asked me to read a report where his son's going because it's 'unsatisfactory'. And reading between the lines I could see why. (.2) But he couldn't see that, even though he's you know a very intelligent man, he could see some of it but not all of it because he's not a professional.

MW: Mm hmm.

D: So they've either got to be really honest in the reports um::: I think that's what it is. I think they decorate the reports up too much with jargon and:: um:: they're so conscious that if they say something that could be libellous so they...

MW: Right.

D: So they're not very-- I don't think they're very honest the reports.

MW: So if they are going to do it [crosstalk 27:56] they need do it on the parent seeing it, they need to put it in parent friendly language.

D: Absolutely. Yes.

MW: Okay so if they did would you think it would be a good idea?

D: Yeah then I think it would be a good idea, yes. Yeah.

MW: Um:::, do you think inspection reports are potentially a source of either pride or humiliation::: or?

D: Yes definitely. I mean as soon as the report was out we were avidly reading it. You know, what has she said about us and yes they were very proud of what she'd written.

MW: Yeah.

D: But it could so easily have been the other way.

MW: Okay. And--and at what point could that be a--a source of humiliation? What...

D: If they don't get it right I think. If--if their judgements are not fair um and a good reflection of the-- of the setting then I think yes it could be. And also if um:: you're deemed to be 'unsatisfactory' um:: (.3), I think that would be absolutely dreadful really, I think everybody would feel terrible.

MW: Okay so that is the-- that's where alarm bells would ring.

D: Yes:::, yes.

MW: And um, it's changed now, we've got the 'requires improvement'.

D: Mm::::.

MW: Does that make-- what do you think about that change?

D: Mm it's still the same I think.

MW: It means the same thing.

D: It still means the same, yes.

MW: Okay you don't think it--it means that they'd get more support or?

D: Yeah probably but that still rings, no you've still not done a good job.

MW: So to you...

D: Mm:::.

MW: ...'requires improvement' or 'satis--unsatisfactory.'

D: 'Unsatisfactory.'

MW: So--so actually 'requires improvement' has replaced, 'satisfactory'

D: 'Satisfactory' yes.

MW: So, what do you think about those two?

D: Dreadful. I think it's...

MW: So you wouldn't want 'satisfactory' either?

D: No::::. Oh no, 'satisfactory' is fine, it's the 'unsatisfactory' and it's the um 'outstanding' 'good' and then not having that 'satisfactory' layer I think is-- will cause lots of problems because .hhhhhh you slip, you know you go from that 'good' to the 'requires improvement' so quickly. Um:::, I think anyone will- - would perceive 'requires improvement' as being::: you know terrible.

MW: Okay so do you think-- so do you think, but before would you think 'satisfactory' would have been not so terrible?

D: That would have been, yeah, that was not so terrible. Yes.

MW: And do you think is it the same level we're talking about as 'requires improvement' and 'satisfactory'?

D: No I don't think it is.

MW: No, so you think that system has...

D: I think there's a bigger gap.

MW: Yeah.

D: Yes.

MW: Yeah.

D: Yes definitely.

MW: And is that good or bad?

D: I think it's bad.

MW: Okay.

D: Yeah definitely. Yeah. I think the 'outstanding' is almost impossible to achieve:::, the 'good' is not giving a wide enough band for people to be::: um (.) we're just not reflecting the variance I think in--in standards.

MW: Because most people are 'good'? I don't actually know but is that what you're saying?

D: Yeah, I think it sits-- well I think, well I have actually-- they haven't brought out new figures have they since this September.

MW: Yeah, I've--I've seen...

D: We saw the ones before that.[crosstalk 30:41] It was 67% or something...

MW: And-and actually you think there were bands...

D: ...were 'good.'

MW: ...within that 'good'.

D: I think so, yes.

MW: Okay.

D: Yes. Yeah.

MW: Okay thank you. Um::: (.5). Do you tend to compare gradings of your setting to other settings?

D: Yeah. (laughs) ((D is almost embarrassed to say this and thinks it is a little bit funny to admit))

MW: You do. Okay.

D: We do. We look up to see. (laughs)

MW: Who--who do you compare to?

D: Um, well it's a bit of a joke really because um (.) my old line manager he's got his children in one of the ***** ((name of nursery group withheld)) nurseries in ***** ((name of town withheld)) and he sent us over there, he said, "Go and have a look. Go and have a look." So we went and had a look, and we hated it. Um:::, so we always look, we had a look there when they had an Ofsted and of course they got an 'outstanding' and we thought 'uh:::': (laughs) So we compared with them um and we do think...

MW: They're another nursery are they?

D: They are another day nursery yes.

MW: Okay.

D: But very corporate. They wouldn't have the mess that we've got here. It's all very pristine and...

MW: Yeah, that you'd find the same thing in any other of their branches.

D: Yes::: exactly. So yeah we did have a look at that and say, "Well why did they get an outstanding?" (chuckles) Um.

MW: And could you determine why they did?

D: Yeah.

MW: From the reports?

D: Yeah. I think it's because they've got the corporate image-- the corporate behind them.

MW: Yeah.

D: So everything is um [unclear 32:06] (coughs) There's a lot of weight behind them::: you know, they're--they're--they're very powerful.

MW: Mm.

D: Um I think Ofsted would be very scared of actually...

MW: That's quite interesting, so you perceive them because they're a

D: (Coughs)

MW: Do you want to go and get a drink of water?

D: Yeah, is that alright?

MW: Yeah, yeah.

D: Oh good thank you. It's very warm in here.

MW: It is:::

D: I know we've got so much problems with um:::, um bees and things outside that we had all the doors shut yesterday.

MW: Yeah.

D: [Inaudible 32:40]

[D leaves the room to get some water]

[Background noise of the nursery]

D: I think this is the hardest time of the year, they're all starting to leave:.

MW: Yeah:::..

D: I don't like it. (laughs)

MW: I know, it is, you really miss them.

D: You do.

MW: I always feel a bit a left behind when my kids moved.

D: Yes.

MW: When the kids moved on, I just thought, 'I'm still here.' Until I get the next batch and then I'm you know.

D: Mm.

MW: But yeah it's a funny time isn't it? Yeah.

D: I like that age range the best as well.

MW: Is that the pre-school age where?

D: Yeah.

MW: Yeah they're lovely. I mean actually yeah they're all nice but I do like...

D: Yeah they are but...

MW: I think it's teacher-- what age...

D: Teacher yeah.

MW: ...did you-- did you teach before?

D: Um 4 to 9's.

MW: Okay so me too. Yeah.

D: Yeah.

MW: Oh 4 to 9's?

D: Yes.

MW: So is that, may be a different system because we had...

D: Um it was because I trained in ah ***** [name of county withheld] and they had the middle school.

MW: Middle schools, yes.

D: Yeah.

MW: Okay yeah so I don't know if that's why we like that particular...

D: Yeah probably.

MW: ...age group I don't know.

D: And then I ran a pre-school for a while, while my children were little so yeah, I just love that age. (laughs)

MW: Yeah. Yeah they are lovely. And there's-- well there's quite a-- a reasonable amount of freedom to do what...

D: Yes::.

MW: ...they want to do.

D: Yes exactly.

MW: Different from school isn't it?

D: Yeah, you have to have a look at our garden, we've got a fantastic garden.

MW: Yes I will, I'd love to.

D: Mm.

MW: So you do compare the gradings from other settings and you-- you were saying that you think the--the--the, the chain nursery...

D: Yeah, yeah have a lot more power.

MW: Potentially have a lot more power.

D: Mm.

MW: And actually it might intimidate Ofsted Inspections?

D: Yes, yes. Yes.

MW: And do you feel like you don't have so much power as a one off nursery?

D: Mm, yeah probably, mm. It does feel like that. It's probably unrealistic because I'm sure that they-- you know they--they have standardisation and--and so much training that they had-- you know they should be, they should be standardised across all of their inspections but it does feel a bit that way because .hhhh you go into one of the ***** nurseries [name of nursery chain withheld on request of the participant] and there's no children's work on the-- on the walls. There's no interaction between the manager and the child-- and the children. And actually what was quite interesting as well was I mean I can talk

to any child and normally get a response and there I couldn't get a response from any of the children it was almost like they were too frightened to speak or (.) you know there was a-- there was a sort of-- everything was perfect but-- but you weren't...

MW: I know what you're saying.

D: Yeah. You weren't getting the feel of--of a real sort of like learning environment.

MW: Yeah::.

D: So I was quite surprised that they'd got an--an 'outstanding'.

MW: Yeah. It doesn't sound very relaxed.

D: I bet the paperwork was really good. (laughs)

MW: Yeah.

D: No it wasn't relaxed at all.

MW: Yeah.

D: No the manager didn't um:, when the parents came in she didn't communicate with them and they didn't with her. They sort of scuttled in and scuttled out and (laughs).

MW: And do you think the paperwork is (.) important? Not--not do you think it's important, do you think Ofsted inspectors think the paper side of it is...

D: Certain aspects I think they do.

MW: Yeah.

D: Yes. Um certainly the safeguarding seems to be one of the big issues that they um, they hone in on and um sort of incident and accident reporting. Uh:::, and the tracking. I mean that's a huge thing.

MW: Yeah.

D: I think that was what helped us get the 'good' really because we've got this-- quite a good tracking system.

MW: Okay as it that the ***** [name of county withheld] tracking system?

D: No we don't use that.

MW: Oh so you--you've created your own haven't you?

D: Yeah no, we've created our own, yes.

MW: Okay, and is that a requirement or do you just do that because it shows that Ofsted and...

D: Yes, yes.

MW: Do you do it for Ofsted or do you do it for...

D: We did it for Ofsted really.

MW: Yeah okay.

D: But now that we've got into it, we're quite enjoying the fact that it's--it's showing up things like for example when we first did it, it--it showed up that, all the way through the nursery the girls and the boys were pretty even. And then when they got to ***** [name of group within the participant's setting withheld] the top lot, the boys were falling off::.. So...

MW: In what area were they falling off?

D: Most areas actually.

MW: Oh okay, that's interesting.

D: Yeah most areas. Even physical development.

MW: Ah.

D: So yeah, really fascinating.

F: Hi ya.

D: Have you not gone? Are you going?

F: Yeah.

D: This is Michelle, this is my deputy.

F: Hi ya.

D: She might come back because I said you might be interested in talking as well.

F: Yeah, yeah.

MW: I do want to-- so yeah I might be in touch again if that's okay.

F: Yeah.

D: I'm just talking about our tracking.

F: Yes.

D: And how we- we identified those--those boys weren't doing so well in...

F: Yes.

D: In ***** [name of group within the participant's setting withheld]

F: That's gone now.

D: It's gone yeah. Because we were out-- we saw it...

F: you addressed it.

D: And highlighted it and talked to the staff.

F: Yeah.

D: Yeah. [crosstalk 37:34] Are you coming here first?

F: I am. I think he wants me to come here for eight because its busy tomorrow so.

D: Oh okay.

F: So I'll come in to cover.

D: Okay.

F: Because they need it.

D: Alright and I'll come in earlier.

F: What time do we need to be over there?

D: I think it's nine o'clock.

F: Oh is it?

D: Yeah.

F: so even if I, I'll just help cover for like for 45 minutes or something.

D: Okay. We don't need to wear our uniform or anything do we?

F: No.

D: No. (laughs)

F: You're the manager, do we have to?

D: No. (laughs)

F: (Laughs)

MW: (Laughs) Executive decision.

D: (Laughs) Well neither of us really in it today so. (laughs)

F: But I'll see you tomorrow.

D: Alright then. Good luck this afternoon.

F: Thank you bye. Nice to meet you.

MW: Bye.

D: Bye. She used to be one of my-- one of my students when I was a lecturer here.

MW: Oh [inaudible due to audio interference 38:11] I've got a student who has just gone through the degree that I teach, who I taught in reception.

D: Oh gosh::::.

MW: I know god that's horrible. (laughs)

D: That is horrible. (laughs)

MW: Exactly so it's really nice to catch up though and it was my first teaching position.

D: Oh.

MW: And so I always-- you-- I had loads of photographs from that particular year and I really strongly remember that particular year group.

D: Oh.

MW: So it was nice to catch up.

D: Oh how lovely.

MW: But then you just see...

D: Yeah.

MW: ...you know she's a grown up and you just think what does-- what does that mean? (laughs)

D: Yeah where did that go? (laughs)

MW: Thinking about that yeah. (laughs)

D: It's great though. (.3) Um what were we talking about? I've lost it. I-- it was something about the tracking wasn't it? But I can't remember what.

MW: Oh yeah, so--so would you say that even though you did it for Ofsted:: actually you found that to be, its its an improvement?

D: Yes. Oh definitely.

MW: Okay.

D: Yes definitely. I'm sure it must-- I'm sure Ofsted must have some sort of impact on improving your practice.

MW: Okay so that's, you do believe that.

D: Mm.

MW: Um. We've talked about well-being I think so . Um:: (.6). So just remind me when I said, what--what determines what you do on a day or who decides what-- and you said you

D: Mm.

MW: pretty much decide what you do on a day to day basis. Did that change at all when Ofsted were in?

D: No.

MW: No.

D: No.

MW: Would you say you carried on as...

D: I just tried to carry on.

MW: Yeah.

D: Well. Did I try to carry on? I did but uh .hhh it was quite difficult to be normal. (laughs)

MW: Yeah, yeah.

D: Yes.

MW: Because of the other things we talked about?

D: Yes absolutely.

MW: Okay we've already said that definitely the presence of an Ofsted-- the possible presence of an Ofsted at some point does impact on what you do in the setting. But would you say that it doesn't impact negatively?

D: (.4) I think it does-- can impact negatively.

MW: Yeah.

D: Um::: because you can be so busy concentrating on trying to tick all the boxes that you miss something else which is happening in the nursery um::: and it might be that you concentrate too much on sort of getting a good grade but you forget about your staff's well-being or--or the children's needs::.

MW: Yeah.

D: I think yeah, I think it definitely can.

MW: Okay thank you.

D: I think it would probably be even worse if you'd got the um 'unsatisfactory' or 'requires improvement' because I think you'd be in a bit of a panic of trying to-- so you'd even more sort of hone in on those um:: on those criteria rather than thinking broader than that.

MW: So that fact that you've already got a 'good' makes you put that ((the requirements for inspection)) into perspective?

D: Yes.

MW: For what's going on now in terms of...

D: It feels like it's a base that we can build on now.

MW: Yeah okay.

D: Yeah:::. Because we know what 'good' looks like.

MW: Okay. And what do you expect to get in your next inspection?

D: Oh we're going to get 'outstanding' (laughs).

MW: Okay.

D: Probably not. We probably won't.

MW: I'm not saying you won't.

D: No, no.

MW: I'm just saying, are you joking or do you expect?

D: Yeah I really expect to get that but, I think it's very, very hard to achieve.

MW: Mm.

D: And I'm not sure it's even doable because when you look at the criteria it's very geared towards a teaching background, not so much um::: people that have come up through the vocational route. I mean I'm quite lucky because um ***** ((name of practitioner)) got a BA and another member of staff is just about to go off to do hers and I've got an EYP on board as well.

MW: Yeah.

D: But it--it--it expects an awful lot of staff, of staff that really haven't been trained in::: (.) extending children's learning and...

MW: It does yeah.

D: And stimulating and challenging them.

MW: Yeah.

D: I mean that's an awful lot to [crosstalk 42:03]

MW: Yeah.

D: Yeah I mean I think when I first came in, what I was very aware of is that they were very, very good at the care side of things.

MW: Yeah.

D: Which I think is pretty typical of day nurseries isn't it? Um, but the learning and development just wasn't there. Uh and we've really had to work hard on that to get them to see that they are actually able to do it themselves.

MW: Is it what-- is it that they didn't recognise they were doing it?

D: Yeah.

MW: So were they doing it but not noting it down?

D: I didn't think they were::: I don't think they were putting an emphasis on it, I mean, now you can see we've got like mark making, you've got-- they're using the whiteboards, there's a lot more sort of visually going on in here and through the rest of the nursery I think.

MW: Yeah.

D: That's related to learning and development.

MW: And it reflects.

D: Yeah.

MW: The- more of a focus.

D: Yeah it's a bit like the end of the day they were-- they were feeding back to parents and what the children had eaten and-- and um::: how long they'd slept and things like that. And I said to them, "Well as a parent, I wouldn't care a lump (laughs) two-penneth about that." But I'd want to know what they'd been doing so I...

MW: Are they really interested in Lego.

D: Yeah exactly.

MW: Or are they-- or they had...

D: Yeah.

MW: I don't know, managed to put their--their [unclear 43:14] on the paper.

D: Yes.

MW: Something like that what we would describe as something you can...

D: Yes.

MW: Yeah a bit of learning.

D: (Laughs)

MW: Yeah and maybe, yeah.

D: Yeah.

MW: Yeah okay and there just wasn't that...

D: No.

MW: ... it was much more on the care yeah.

D: Absolutely.

MW: Okay.

D: It's interesting because the previous manager was actually an old Ofsted inspector herself, so it was quite interesting.

MW: However, I don't know what time period she was an Ofsted inspector, was that pre? Because it did used to be...

D: Yes.

MW: ...very much as I understand it, very much on the care side.

D: Yes. Absolutely.

MW: And it's actually when I first had my early years inspection was when they just had-- changed over to the-- it was care and education at the same time.

D: Yes, yes.

MW: Which is all a bit of a-- big--big change actually yeah.

D: Yeah a big change. I expect a lot of these girls though, I mean you know, I think we're quite lucky because we've got a real range of ages and backgrounds and things.

MW: Support.

D: Yeah they support each other mm.

MW: Yeah. Yeah no that is good. But you're right it does-- it's a big ask.

D: Yes. Yeah it is.

MW: So you're an advisor to-- say you're an advisor to the government, um, have we already-- I don't--I'm getting really confused. (laughs)

D: (Laughs) We might have done. (laughs)

MW: Have we? Have we?

D: I don't know, go on.

MW: How--how would you say, how would you tell them that they should ensure we have quality early years provision in England? What would your advice to them be?

D: Well in a previous role, I was a Cache chief examiner.

MW: Mm-hmm.

D: So I would say that it-- you need that-- you need the um, you need the training, you need the good quality qualifications ,hhhhh and, I think you need to put more money into early years that--that--that is the same as:: um::: reception or--or primary or secondary. You need to value it exactly the same if not more so.

MW: Mm-hmm.

D: So you need to be paying your staff more to encourage more graduates in and um you don't have to-- you know I think vocational qualifications are really good::: but you need to build into those reflection and uh reflective practice so that they're...

MW: Time, money and time.

D: Money and time yes.

MW: Yeah.

D: Yes, I mean I think that's the key and then I think to standardise you really need to understand the early years so people like yourself, people that are in the universities doing the research you know, they're the sort of people that should be::: um::: looking at settings and trying to get them all as-- you know as inspirational as say Pen Green or wherever.

MW: Okay so you'd be happy to have something similar to an Ofsted Inspection just to make sure that they are all early years.

D: Yes.

MW: Be very experienced early years people.

D: Yes.

MW: But the actual system of inspection, you would definitely keep.

D: Yes.

MW: Okay.

D: Yes, yeah. (,) But as I say a bit quicker.

MW: Yes.

D: You know on a yearly basis.

MW: Yeah.

D: And--and for it to be more facilitative and empowering than punitive and 'done to'

MW: Yeah.

D: So yeah.

MW: Okay. And do you know how they'd set about that? How they'd ensure it was more empowering rather than punitive?

D: Um:::: better image for Ofsted - so not having someone, I mean I can't remember the name of the guy that's just taken over the early years section but he's come out and said things like, "Two year olds need to be in schools." And sort of...

MW: It's not Michael..

D: Yeah yeah, it's not Michael Gove, it's Michael something isn't it?

MW: yeah, I can't remember his surname.

D: yeah I don't know. It used to, Lorna Fitz John used to be our, used to work here and she was the early years one. Yeah, no he-- yeah so somebody who doesn't sort of-- is non-political um and is able to um::::: put across the right image of Ofsted if you like.

MW: Mm.

D: To--to practitioners uh because I think-- I think it's even more terrifying in schools, I think they're you know even more sort of feel that they're—that they're coming, it's being done to them rather than a-- than a facilitative programme. And then I think it's about the training that you give out-- you give to:::: your Ofsted inspectors. It's about sending that message from the top out to them to say, right you know it needs to be an empowering process. It--it needs to encourage people to be able to really show of their best-- their best um abilities and their best practice. And perhaps clearer--clearer about what best practice is.

MW: Yeah.

D: Yeah.

MW: And to be able to ask for help do you think?

D: Yes. Definitely, definitely.

MW: Yeah and do you currently feel like you could ask for help through the Ofsted Inspection?

D: Not with Ofsted, no.

MW: No.

D: No, I wouldn't raise my head about the parapet. (laughs)

MW: And are there places that you can get help from if you-- if you wanted?

D: Um well we have got these local advisors um:: she's coming in next week. Um they--they've been brilliant.

MW: Do you have to-- do you have to pay for them so they come in?

D: No, no. It's absolutely free at the moment.

MW: Yeah.

D: Yes, yes, yeah. [crosstalk 48:30] yeah and there's a network and there's the children's centre so there are.

MW: Yeah.

D: There are people you can talk to yeah.

MW: Okay (.4) good. Um:: I think I have asked you but you think it's okay that Ofsted .hhh um come and inspect the EYFS?

D: Mm.

MW: With the-- with the provisos that we've--we've talked about.

D: Mm.

MW: Um, do you think there's one right way of early years provision? Do you think there's one?

D: No. (laughs)

MW: No, okay. Could you tell me about that?

D: Um. .hhh I suppose the fundamentals are--are you--you could have a fundamental sort of basis which would be right for all of best provision, but you have to adapt on the ground to what you've got really and the sorts of children that you've got coming in. So there's no really one way of doing it. I mean I--I always say that I think if you're kind to the children and you care about them, actually everything else follows.

MW: Yeah.

D: And I think the difficulties are when you--you haven't got that kind and caring workforce because then your children are scared or--or they're not treated properly or they're not um developed properly.

MW: Yeah.

D: So I think there are core things that are fundamental and...and should be there in every setting, but then every setting will be different because of the nature of children and staff interactions, communications, all those sorts of relationships.

MW: Yeah there's a lot of differences.

D: Yeah there's a lot of differences, yeah.

MW: Okay. I think (.3) Do you run as a business here or is...

D: Yes.

MW: or as a uni--or as a college?

D: Yes no we do.

MW: University-- are you an independent business of the college?

D: Yes, yeah. We our--our well any profits we make feed into the college and we are actually all paid by the college.

MW: Okay.

D: So um.

MW: Okay and is--is there any connection between Ofsted Inspection and business operations? Your business operations?

D: No.

MW: No?

D: No not at all.

MW: It doesn't impact on your business at all?

D: No, no.

MW: Okay. Um would you say Ofsted is independent and impartial?

D: No I'm not sure they are. No.

MW: We've touched on that.

D: Yeah that's where my thoughts are with the big chains.

MW: Yeah.

D: Yeah I think they have a bit too much power.

MW: Okay. I've asked everything that I would like to ask.

D: (Laughs)

MW: And I'll give you just a minute to just think about whether there's something that you'd like to say that hasn't been covered.

D: Um, I don't think there is anything really. I think, I mean it's very difficult trying to standardise isn't it? Um, and you get...

MW: I--I suspect it is yeah.

D: I suspect it's almost impossible to do. I mean I know when we used to try and standardise essays how difficult that was. .hhh

Um. But yeah I just-- I just would like to see a different attitude towards the early years really and I think that has to come right from the-- from the top.

MW: And would you have an early years, or I expect we have got someone in charge of early years in Ofsted haven't we? I just...

D: Mm.

MW: I-- but I don't know if they're overpowered by the general approach...

D: Yes.

MW: ...to Ofsted that covers...

D: Yeah.

MW: ...big--big age range.

D: Yeah possibly.

MW: Um would you like to see it-- would you like to see it separate?

D: Stand alone. Yes I think.

MW: Or just early years?

D: Mm, that would be really good.

MW: So you would like that?

D: Yeah--yeah I think that would be good. Yeah. Or maybe champions you know in government that actually know what they're talking about (laughs) in terms of early years.

MW: Yeah. Because of the connection between inspecting...

D: Yes.

MW: What the government decides and yeah.

D: Yes exactly.

MW: Yeah.

D: Yeah. Fascinating questions.

MW: Thank you very much. Thank you very much for that it was really-- I'm going to--

D: [unclear 52:27]

MW: For a start I love coming-- was--was it?

D: (Laughs)

MW: Did it feel like sorry.

D: No.

Appendix 9: Example coded interview summary transcript (from NVIVO) – including 4 pages of interview summary, each with 5 pages of corresponding coding.

D has the best job in the world, she thinks that others might think 'oh dear - early years' but is a very fulfilling and fascinating job with so much to it. D especially appreciates it as she was out of EY for so long

D has a high amount of work to do as striving for perfection - also thinks work has increased since she started 18 months ago, perhaps because she understands the role more (had previously been a teacher and worked in FE). D decides what she does - but is answerable to many including the college she is attached to, the LA, Ofsted, parents, children..!

The college that D's nursery is attached to is very aware of need to get good Ofsted grades and when D had her inspection representatives from the college were involved

D thinks that she does not have enough control because of the college

Ofsted to D is 'terror' 'fear' (laughing). D is very focused on Ofsted and in her interview for her job the college asked her how she would move the nursery from good to outstanding

Ofsted was hanging over my head from the minute i started - there was a lot of pressure right from the start

D thought that she would get unsatisfactory because of the increased emphasis from Ofsted on learning and development - so she was prepping her college that they would not get outstanding. She thought that she knew what was needed for outstanding and didn't think she had it in terms of staffing - since the inspection she is now unsure of what is needed to get outstanding

D was surprised at the inspection report as she was pulled up on little (almost impossible) things rather than the bigger things that she thought she might be pulled up on.

The inspector was very good and fair throughout the day and

D asked why they had not got outstanding. The inspector said it was because they were not inspirational and D indicated to me that this was not a satisfactory explanation

D said the inspection was nice on the day but it was the build up to it

The inspector said that D was performing at what would have been the old outstanding and now she needed to be inspirational. D did not try to change her mind on this judgment as felt it was set in stone

D thinks that now she has had one inspection, next time she would know how to play the game and would show more stuff - unless Ofsted change the goal posts again!

D hopes that Ofsted is a quality assurance measure but thinks that they are very influenced by the government and what voters want and that this is a shame because people at Ofsted may not understand early years or teaching

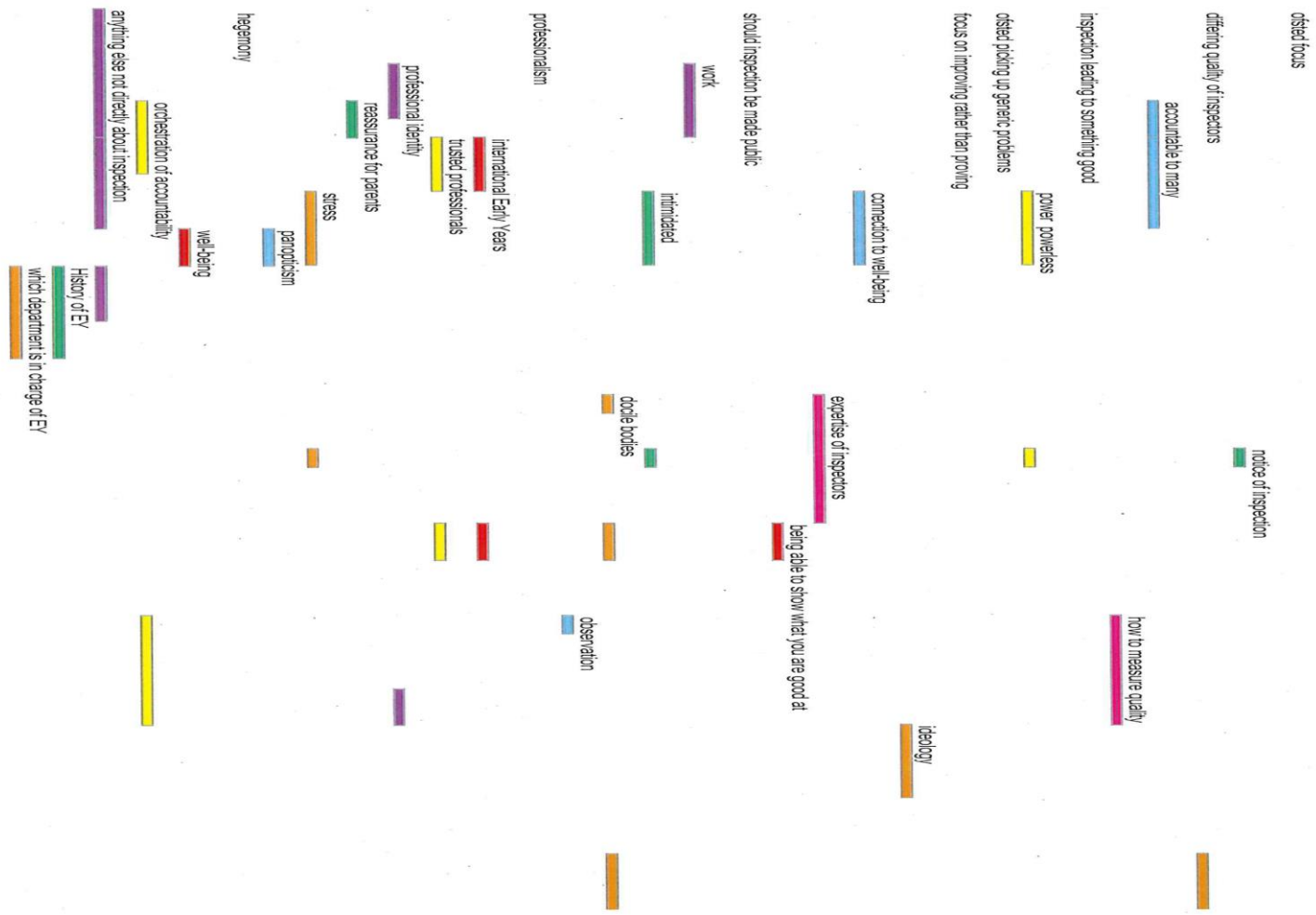
D's ideas for quality assurance are that it should be a professional body which visits regularly (because otherwise you have the same grade for a long time) D does not think it should be local as this could just reflect what the local people think is important and D does not necessarily agree with her local authority and their focus on data. D thinks it should be national. It should be run by people who understand where you are coming from - run by practitioners

D has her reservations about whether Ofsted should be inspecting against the EYFS as she thinks it does not always reflect the full range development areas - eg cognitive development/ thinking skills - as the gov have own agenda on what they think is important and it is more narrow than the whole EYFS is. D quite likes the EYFS

D has had experience of inspection in further education

D's inspector was very nice and she thinks this because she has heard from others that some Ofsted inspectors are rigid about what they are going to look at and what they are going to see. this inspector put d at her ease and interacted and cuddled the children. D felt that the inspector was trying to support her and give as good a grade as possible. She asked good





what do you do for a living
 wellbeing
 how would you describe your workload
 national body
 what is Ofsted inspection
 describe Ofsted inspection to a foreigner
 power
 professionalism
 surveillance
 leadership styles
 grade that would cause alarm
 independent and impartial
 is quality judged on context
 inspection reports
 professional body
 inspection impacting negatively
 professionalism and trust
 constant change in EY
 should there be notice of inspection
 talk with others about Ofsted
 did the report affect your practice
 money
 thoughts about next inspection
 expectation for next inspection
 change in grade system
 feelings directly after inspection
 vague information from ofsted
 inspection against the EYFS
 top down ideas
 pressure of prescribed practice
 power of outcomes based agenda

someone running the organisation who is EY
 does being a professional impact on whether you would voice your opinion
 separate qa for early years
 practice the same if inspector is here
 do you consider yourself to be a professional
 identity
 how inspector was
 more regular inspections
 advantage of having had an inspection before
 feelings during the inspection
 the stamp of quality
 changes to ofsted inspection
 return on funding for EY
 who decides what you do on a day to day basis
 would you operate the same if there were no inspection system
 is inspection a source of pride or humiliation
 right and wrong for educate
 have an ey champion in government
 lots of changing rules which are difficult to keep up with
 run by people who understand EY
 prior experience of scho
 change in gov and in ey
 experience of inbetween inspection
 what you measure is what you get
 inspection has improved in recent years
 comparing grades to other settings
 more empowering than punitive
 qualifications for practitioners
 comparing experiences of inspection with others
 disagreeing with inspector
 other talking about inspection
 change in gov and in ey
 experience of inbetween inspection
 what you measure is what you get
 comparing grades to other settings

should this include osted inspection
are osted inspectors professionals
all settings registered and inspected
difficult to standardise

questions to enable you to give her information. D thinks that they were lucky with the inspector and she agreed with the grade. The inspector seemed to agree with D's own SEF. At her next inspection D wants to get outstanding. she knows she needs to be inspirational to do this - but she does not know what this looks like. She thinks she needs to think out of the box. D's out of the box thinking does seem to link to what the inspector said she needed to do in terms of engaging with EAL parents as she is doing parent and baby sessions before the children join nursery to build a relationship with the parents from the start and also getting help from the college with translation issues. although D says that this is what she would have wanted to do anyway - which is good 6 weeks notice in college was too much pressure and stress

D thinks of every day as an Ofsted day - and this is fine as D says it is good for the staff. Although no notice for this inspection there was a general build up as they knew roughly when they would come and D said it was dreadful. D didn't want to go on holiday, she couldn't relax, she left her contact number. People would say - we had better do that just in case Ofsted comes.

It took 5 months or so after the inspection to pick themselves up and move forward. There was a lull. Once picked up they had to think right now we are doing it for our own sake to improve practice.

D enjoyed the inspection once she got over the shock

D prefers no notice - as e.g. six D is always thinking that there is a big brother sitting on her shoulder and thinks that there is a strong link between her own well being and Ofsted inspection. always worried that a parent might make a complaint and an inspector will come in

D also thought that her staff were stressed and did not want to let anyone down - one girl was frantic about it. D said that although staff might have been worried they also seemed disappointed if they were not spoken to and D thinks this might be because they were not held to be so important or that they didn't get the chance to show off their nursery.

D thinks that on this inspection that it would have been a good chance to show off because of the good inspector - but is not sure this is always the case. She seems to indicate that it is about the nature of the inspector - if she can put at ease then people can relax and show off. D would challenge if she disagreed with inspector as she has experience - but not sure if less experienced would

D thinks that her and her staff are professionals

D thinks that others do not see EY as professionals

D thinks that her being a professional helps her to voice her opinion to inspector

D thinks that it makes a difference if the inspector has an EY background as she has had a college inspection when this was not the case

D thinks she would class inspectors as professionals

D doesn't know about reports being made public - whether they should or not as she is not sure that the parents really understand them - she gave an example of an unsatisfactory being given because an inspector was not asked for id but it was a very good EY place - this meant that parents didn't want to send their child there. Although she did deliberate because parents do need to know - but that it takes a professional to really interpret the report - maybe have a different format? - eventually D decided on no. D does not think that the reports are that helpful to parents (she jokes or to anyone). D thinks Ofsted are worried about liable so they do not necessarily say what they mean - and D says if they do reports for parents they should be e in parent friendly language

other commentary on Ofsted

stress

norms

what is quality

identity professionalism professional identity

Do practitioners have suggestions about how quality could be maintained in Early Years settings, other than through OFSTED inspection

achieving excellence

visibility

stress

associated

Accountability of Early Years

wellbeing work stress

knowledge

truth

control

examination

what Ofsted is

Quality

governance

practitioners' perceptions of Ofsted

governance hegemony ideology

social control

knowledge truth

power

social control socialisation norms

surveillance observations visibility examination control peripateticism

What are Early Years practitioners' thoughts regarding their own experience of OFSTED inspection apart from their own

What are Early Years practitioners' thoughts regarding their own experience of OFSTED inspection

thoughts about inspection generally in relation to experience

Diana Summary

Coding Density



what do you do for a living
 national body
 well-being
 how would you describe your workload
 what is Ofsted inspection
 describe Ofsted inspection to a foreigner
 power
 is quality judged on context
 surveillance
 leadership styles
 grade that would cause alarm
 inspection against the EYFS
 top down ideas
 pressure of prescribed practice
 power of outcomes based agenda
 inspection impacting negatively
 inspection reports
 professional body
 constant change in EV
 should there be notice of inspection
 talk with others about Ofsted
 did the report affect your practice
 money
 thoughts about next inspection
 expectation for next inspection
 vague information from ofsted
 change in grade system
 professionalism
 independent and impartial
 professionalism and trust
 feelings directly after inspection

prior experience of school inspection

someone running the organisation who is EY

separate qa for early years

practice the same if inspector is here

how inspector was

more regular inspections

advantage of having had an inspection before

more empowering than punitive

qualifications for practitioners

feelings during the inspection

the stamp of quality

changes to ofsted inspection

return on funding for EY

who decides what you do on a day to day basis

would you operate the same if there were no inspection system

is inspection a source of pride or humiliation

right and wrong for educate

have an ey champion in government

lots of changing rules which are difficult to keep up with

run by people who understand EY

disagreeing with inspector

other talking about inspection

comparing experiences of inspection with others

change in gov and in ey

experience of inbetween inspection

what you measure is what you get

inspection has improved in recent years

comparing grades to other settings

does being a professional impact on whether you would

do you consider yourself to be a professional

identity

should this include ofsted inspection

all settings registered and inspected

difficult to standardise

 are ofsted inspectors professionals

D thinks reports are a source of pride or humiliation - they were proud of theirs and avidly read it to see what had been said about them. she said they would feel dreadful if it had been unsatisfactory.

d thinks that unsatisfactory would be terrible whatever it is called (even if they changed this name also . Even though satisfactory has gone to requires improvement - she thinks either is still pretty terrible to receive - but that RI is worse than satisfactory

D thinks that there is a lot of variance within the good band - which needs distinguishing between

D thinks it is almost impossible to get outstanding

D looks at the reports and compares to other settings. One which she does not like (a corporate one) got outstanding and D thinks this may be because they are corporate and Ofsted may be intimidated by them (power of the setting)

D thinks that the chain nursery probably had good paper work and this might be important to Ofsted

D thinks that her paperwork on tracking children did impress the inspector. they had done it for Ofsted but now quite liked it anyway.

D is sure that Ofsted must have some impact on improving practice

D said she still controlled what she did while inspector was here and tried to carry on as normal

D said that Ofsted inspection can impact negatively on a setting as if you are concentrating on ticking boxes for Ofsted then you might miss your staff or children's well being or something else. It would be even worse if you got unsatisfactory or RI as you would be even more focused on those criteria rather than thinking more broadly

D expects to get outstanding in her next inspection but also knows that it is hard to achieve as

D thinks that Ofsted inspection criteria is very teacher ish and implies that as she has a BA and an EYP and another doing her BA that they are quite lucky in this respect

D indicates that people who have come up through the vocational route were good at care but she had to work with them regarding learning and development and she says that they now have mark making and white boards (as examples of more learning and development) - and that Ofsted were looking more for the teacher stuff

D says that she encouraged her staff to report back to parents not just on what they had eaten/ slept etc - but if they had managed to put something on to paper - or like lego as this is what she would be interested in.

D used to be a cache chief examiner - and she thinks that to get quality in settings you need good quality qualifications and you it needs to feel less like it is being done to them and more done with them. Ofsted inspectors would need training in this approach. It needs to encourage people to show off their best. and it needs to be more clear about what best practice is to put more money into early years - as much as primary and secondary or more. You need to pay people more to encourage high levels of learning which incorporate reflective practice. You need people like EY lecturers going into settings to get them as inspirational as Penn Green - I think she means lecturers being Ofsted inspectors -but she could mean EY people going in to just enhance settings through research -but it is not clear. so all should be early years inspectors, and once a year for inspection and for it to be more empowering than punitive. Someone running the organization who is early years rather than political - in order to put the right image across of Ofsted to practitioners. . I suggest that people could ask Ofsted for help and D agrees but she could not do that at the moment - she has got others that she could ask for help.

D thinks that there are some things which are fundamental to good early years e.g. being kind to the children - - then there are variations on a theme

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Diana Summary

Coding Density

ofsted focus

notice of inspection

differing quality of inspectors

accountable to many

how to measure quality

inspection leading to something good

power powerless

ofsted picking up generic problems

focus on improving rather than proving

ideology

connection to well-being

expertise of inspectors

being able to show what you are good at

should inspection be made public

work

intimidated

docile bodies

observation

professionalism

international Early Years

trusted professionals

professional identity

reassurance for parents

stress

participism

hegemony

well-being

orchestration of accountability

anything else not directly about inspection

History of EY

which department is in charge of EY

what do you do for a living

national body

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how would you describe your workload

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professionalism

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D does not think there is any connection between Ofsted inspection and her business operations

D thinks it is very difficult trying to 'standardize'

D would like to have a EY quality system which is separate from the other age ranges

D would like to EY looked upon differently and that this has to come from the top.

Have EY champions in government who really know what they are talking about.

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perceived
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Appendix 10: Former research questions

Former Research questions (altered and adapted into the research aims which guided this study – see section 1.1)

Question 1: What are Early Years practitioners' thoughts regarding their own experience of OFSTED inspection?

Sub-question A: What, if anything, do Early Years practitioners think is positive about OFSTED inspection?

Sub-question B: What, if anything, do Early Years practitioners think is negative about OFSTED inspection?

Sub-question C: Do practitioners have suggestions about how quality could be maintained in Early Years settings, other than through Ofsted inspection?

