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THE GENDER FRIENDLY NURSERY: A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

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ABSTRACT

This research proposes an evaluation of the Gender Friendly Nursery (GFN) programme in Glasgow, Scotland. The programme is delivered by the North East Health Improvement Team of the Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) to act as a gender stereotype prevention training for nursery staff. The programme consists of a 12-month accreditation system in which nurseries work to receive an award for good gender practice. At present, only a fraction of the nurseries that have participated in the GFN training have progressed to receive the full GFN award. This proposal has been constructed to evaluate the enactment of GFN in Glasgow's nurseries in hopes of understanding what has prevented nurseries from completing the programme.

A method of semi-structured interviews with nursery staff followed by a discourse analysis is proposed. This method has been selected within the epistemological and ontological stance of post-structuralism. A post-structuralist framework is used to understand the identity formation of Glasgow's nursery staff and how this has influenced their knowledge and experiences of gender and the GFN. It is within this framework that the proposal attempts to uncover the barriers faced by nursery staff when enacting the GFN programme.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As more children around the world are enrolling in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programmes and remaining in these institutions for longer proportions of time, there has been heightened attention on the potential of ECEC educators to combat social inequities (Kulic, *et. al*, 2017; Skopek , *et. al.,* 2017). In Scotland, the government has developed an Early Years Framework to act as an intervention model for transformational change in ECEC that will create more positive opportunities for early aged children and contribute to Scotland's overall national success (Scottish Government, 2008). A significant part of the intervention regards attending to children who have historically experienced poverty, low attainment and poor health through various preventative measures and early interventions (Scottish Government, 2008).

In 2016, the Scottish Qualifications Agency published a report indicating gender disparities are prevalent in schools and increase as students progress, suggesting current practices may be exacerbating the issue (Riddell and Weedon 2018). In response, the Scottish government has begun to analyse participation and attainment trends among boys and girls, however, interventions have arguably been oversimplified as they tend not to acknowledge the role of teachers in the formation of student gender identities (Riddell and Weedon 2018).

Research suggests children experience the influence of socialisation at a very young age (Chick, Heilman-Houser and Hunter, 2002). While it is true that the circumstances of the family will influence a child's initial life experiences, teachers play a large role in the cognitive and social development of students (Kulic, *et. al*, 2017; Boca, Piazzalunga and Pronzato, 2017; Smith, McLaughlin and Aspden, 2019). Early years establishments represent one of the first social experiences outside of the home for children (Gestwicki and Bertrand, 2011 cited in Wingrave, 2018). Because of this, ECEC practitioners are particularly influential on the gender identity formation of children (Baig, 2015; Chick, Heilman-Houser and Hunter, 2002; Lynch, 2015). This makes teachers particularly susceptible to perpetuating dominant gender norms and expectations in their classrooms (Warin and Adriany, 2017).

While the majority of Scotland's nurseries have some form of equity policy, provision is left to the individual institutions which can lead to diversified forms of policy enactment (NHSGGC, 2018). Because of this, robust evaluations of gender equity provisions in Scotland's nurseries are limited. At present, little research has been dedicated to analysing the role of caregivers in developing and perpetuating gender stereotypes in Scotland's nursery schools (Edström, 2009). Of the studies that do exist, it appears that Scottish ECEC educators may be unaware of the ways they can reinforce stereotypes in their daily practices (Wingrave, 2018).

This research proposal outlines one possible method of evaluation for an ECEC gender stereotype prevention programme in Scotland: The Gender Friendly Nursery (GFN) accreditation. The GFN programme is a gender equity training course offered to nurseries around Glasgow, Scotland with the aim of reducing gender stereotyping in ECEC institutions. The programme attempts to assist nurseries in the development a gender friendly environment by offering a recognised award for good gender practice.

It is hoped that by evaluating the programme, insight will be gained as to how gender stereotypes can be addressed in ECEC staff trainings to create the conditions that will lead to successful interventions. In particular, the proposed research will attempt to examine the experiences of nursery staff who have participated in the GFN programme to determine what they perceive as the constraints and enablers of its enactment. It is hoped that this kind of research would assist to reform the programme and make it accessible to more nursery staff around Glasgow.

The proposal will take on a post-structuralist framework to investigate the discourses that exist within ECEC institutions and how these impact the identity formation and policy enactment of educators. The framework has been selected to develop the proposal in hopes of establishing broader understandings of the complexity of participant experiences in the context of Glasgow's nursery schools.

Within this framework, I will begin by conducting a review of the relevant literature. Following the review, I will discuss the research paradigm and epistemological framing which has informed the approach. I will then propose a

methodology of semi-structured interviews with nursery staff followed by a theoretical discourse analysis. The methodology will be guided by the following research question:

(1) What are the barriers and enablers of nurseries and nursery staff pursuing Gender Friendly Nursery accreditation after completing the Gender Friendly Nursery training?

Issues of positionality and methodological limitations will be addressed. I will conclude the proposal by synthesising keys points and articulating why this particular form of research will allow for a robust evaluation that will be beneficial to the GFN and the Glasgow community.

2. CONTEXT: THE GENDER FRIENDLY NURSERY PROGRAMME

The GFN programme was created and delivered by the North East Health Improvement team of the Glasgow City HSCP in collaboration with national organisations including Zero Tolerance, LGBT Youth Scotland, Men in Childcare, Respect*me* and Fathers Network Scotland (NHSGGC, 2018). The GFN was created to act as a training resource and award system for Glasgow nurseries striving for a gender equitable practice (NHSGGC, 2018). The programme encourages nurseries to take an institution-wide approach toward gender equity by generating discussions around gender stereotyping in the classroom and how it relates to broader issues of inequity (NHSGGC, 2018). Following discussion, participants are encouraged to reflect on their own practice to identify what is being done well and what can be further developed to combat gender imbalances (NHSGGC, 2018).

The GFN 'whole school approach' encourages nurseries and staff to explore areas such as leadership, management, resources and public communications to determine how these can be used to develop a more gender equitable nursery (NHSGGC, 2018). As stated in the training manual, the goals of the GFN training are as follows:

(1) "provide the tools to begin to redress the (gender) balance"

(2) "grow nurseries where regardless of gender, children are nurtured in a way which allows them to reach their full potential, and which offers limitless opportunities for all" and

(3) "celebrate and champion gender equality in all aspects of nursery life" (NHSGGC, 2018, p.2).

To accomplish these goals, nurseries are provided resources and support from the Health Improvement Team to create a one-year action plan to attain an official GFN accredited status. The idea behind the use of an accreditation system is for nurseries to exhibit to the community that they are qualified to recognise gender stereotyping and are putting in the work to eliminate gender bias in the nursery classroom (NHSGGC, 2018). The programme provides the following guide for full GFN accreditation:

(1) "Register interest in becoming a GFN and attend a train-the-trainers session"

(2) "Deliver training to the rest of their nursery as soon as possible (support and guidance is provided)"

(3) "Follow up with a whole staff discussion about how to move forward. Complete the audit and next steps agreement and return to the GFN team, along with evaluation materials"

(4) "GFN staff will follow up after 3, 6 and 12 months. Once nurseries have completed the tasks on the next step agreement, the nursery will receive the GFN award" and

(5) "Receive GFN accreditation and continue to share best practices with Health Improvement Team" (NHSGGC, 2018, p.3).

The programme was originally piloted in North East Glasgow between 2016-2018. The pilot was evaluated by the Health Improvement Team in 2018 to determine to what extent it has generated change in the policy and practice of participating nurseries (Heywood, 2018). The pilot evaluation utilised a mixed-method approach of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, online surveys and a review of previously completed post-course questionnaires. A total of 16 staff members and 4 nursery leaders took part in the study.

The evaluation concluded that GFN is successfully improving gender knowledge and practice and is considered to be a useful programme by participating staff members (Heywood, 2018). In particular, the audit process proved to be an essential step toward encouraging gender equitable practice (Heywood, 2018). However, some areas of improvement were identified: (1) more time for post-training discussions, (2) further development of support pack, (3) additional support for sensitive topics, and (4) additional guidance on how to communicate with parents, (Heywood, 2018).

Building off the findings of the pilot evaluation, a revised training-for-trainers model (Figure 1) was developed in partnership with Educational Services to extend the GFN programme to more nurseries throughout Glasgow (Heywood, 2018). In the updated model, staff attending the initial GFN training are provided resources and

support to deliver the training themselves to the remaining staff at their nurseries. While the model has allowed the GFN to extend its reach across Glasgow, there are concerns that the cascade model of delivery may come with the risk of weakening the messages of the initial training and hinder the experiences of participants (Heywood, 2018).

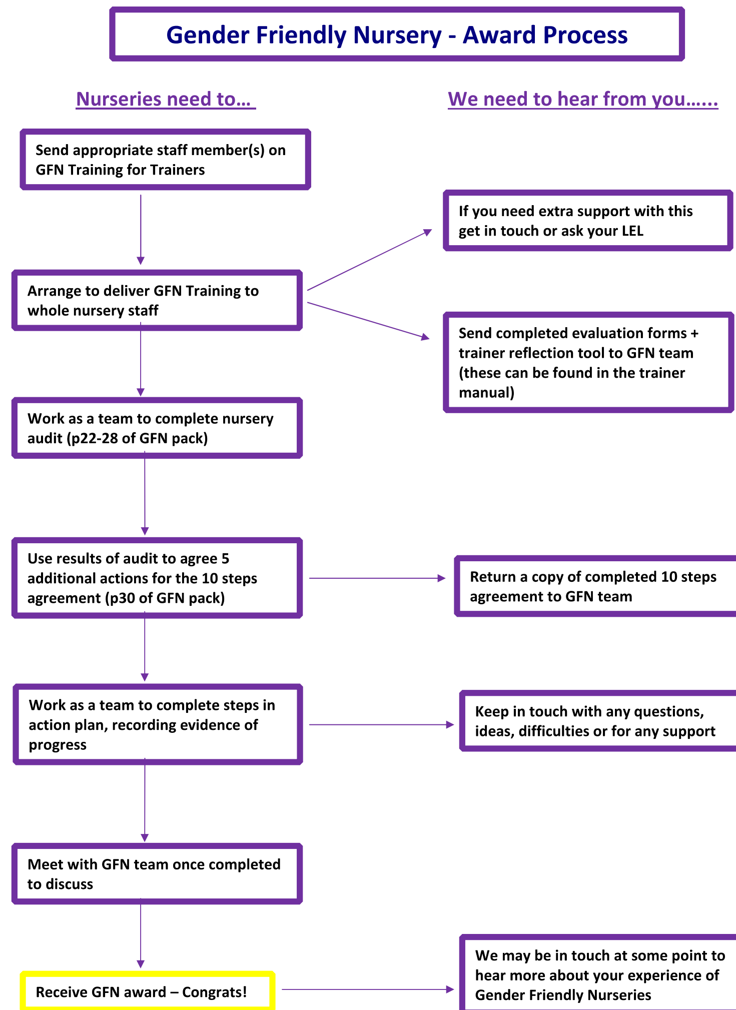

Figure 1 Gender Friendly Nursery – Award Process (NHSGGC, 2020b)

Similar to the pilot programme, not all nurseries who have participated in the revised GFN training have progressed toward the full GFN accreditation (Heywood,

2018). At present, barriers toward the revised accreditation have not been documented. An evaluation of the training-for-trainers model is warranted to determine how nursery staff experience and engage with the updated programme. It is hoped this would highlight the model's strengths and limitations in supporting nurseries to pursue the full GFN accreditation. It is with this aim that the following research proposal has been created. In the next section, I will outline the theoretical framework and background literature which has informed the proposed approach.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This proposal will utilise a post-structuralist framework to analyse the ways ECEC practitioners have constructed meanings of their roles as professionals, educators, policy actors and proponents of social justice in the era of neoliberalism. Post-structuralism focuses on how language and discourse produce meaning among actors, and how this combines with forms of power to determine which practices and assumptions are socially accepted (Fawcett, 2008). This goes beyond the individual to determine how identities are constructed within the societal, systematic and institutional spaces that one participates and the dominating power relationships and structures (Howarth, 2013).

Post-structuralism has been heavily influenced by Foucault (1980) who argues every society holds dominant discourses that are accepted and function as true (MacNaughton, 2005). Collectively, these dominant 'truths' are established and upheld by the language we use which regulates how we think, behave and understand the world around us (Kim and Kim, 2017). For post-structuralists, language is considered deeply political as the words we use to translate experiences cannot be isolated from the broader influences of the politics, time and space in which our knowledge is constructed (MacNaughton, 2005). Individuals create meanings based on their unique background which makes the social world subjective and open to interpretation (Fawcett, 2008). As such, identities are shifting and shaped not only by what is around us but also by the ways we view ourselves, our roles and our circumstances (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Fawcett, 2008). Therefore, the language used to describe our circumstances cannot be a direct reflection of reality (St. Pierre, 2000).

When referencing Foucault (1980), Humes and Bryce (2003, p.179) state that "an understanding of how knowledge is produced, and the value that is attached to it, cannot be separated from an understanding of the exercise of power". From this perspective, 'neutral' knowledge does not exist as it will always be intertwined with power (Gavey, 1989). Post-structuralists consider the demonstration of 'power' as

one's capacity to participate in the dominant discourses of a society (Dickerson, 2010). To analysis this would require an understanding of how "the politics of our time and place influence which stories (of individuals / societies) are told, when and by whom, which is why some stories are heard more often and given greater status than others" (MacNaughton, 2005, p.3).

However, alternative discourse can exist at the local, institutional, or individual-level that can work to challenge prevailing truths (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005 cited in Kim and Kim, 2017; Cohen, 2008). In this sense, individuals do not passively accept dominant discourse, rather, they maintain a degree of choice regarding the discourses in which they position themselves (Gavey, 1989). With a high degree of critical awareness, individuals can begin to confront normalised assumptions by analysing the political role in their development (Harwood, *et. al.,* 2013); unpacking how each experience has been constructed and understood within a certain context.

Post-structuralist themes have been used to describe the ways in which ECEC acts as a strong ground for social and power reproduction (Jobb, 2019). Each ECEC educator inevitably holds their own truths which have been developed with the help of various social, political and power influences (Warin and Adriany, 2017; Jobb, 2019). Drawing on these truths, educators construct a discourse of themselves and 'the child' in which common language and practices are accepted and internalised to shapes one's understanding of what it means to be an ECEC educator (MacNaughton, 2005; Harwood, *et. al.,* 2013).

For the purpose of this proposal, attention will be on the construction of identities and knowledge among ECEC educators and how these inform gender equitable practices in the classroom. The following section will review the literature of neoliberalism in the early years and its implications on the professional identity formation of ECEC practitioners. From here, I will discuss the implications of professionalisation on the responsibilities of ECEC staff and how it relates to policy enactment on the frontline. I then turn to the barriers faced by ECEC staff when enacting equity provisions and gender equitable pedagogies.

3.2 NEOLIBERALISM IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

In the increasingly globalised economy, there is pressure on policymakers to develop a highly productive population to remain internationally competitive (Ball, 2003; Brown, 2015; Davies and Bansel, 2007; Dawes and Lenormand, 2020; Smith, 2012; Sims, 2017; Tan, Gupta and Wilgus, 2019). The vast expansion of neoliberal thought throughout the 1970s has led to strong investments in information technologies among capitalist nations (Harvey, 2005) which has placed heightened attention to the link between academic performance and national economic prosperity (Reed, 1999, cited in Hodgetts, 2008). As neoliberalism has become a dominant political ideology internationally, it has begun to extend its influence into the education sector (Harvey, 2005).

Capitalist nations within the globalised economy have introduced neoliberal discourse in their education systems with the help of international institutions (e.g. OECD, World Bank) that push for increased accountability, efficiency and regulation (Davies and Bansel, 2007; Giroux, 2013; Grek, 2009; Harvey, 2005; Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2012; Rezai-Rashti, Segeren and Martino, 2017). Such organisations have arguably commodified education worldwide through market discourse that measures academic achievement through numeric performance indicators, international comparative exams and high-stakes testing (Harvey, 2005; Rezai-Rashti, Segeren and Martino, 2017). Feher (2009) describes interests in human capital development as a defining feature of neoliberalism in which investments (e.g. education, training) are measured by the returns they produce. From this perspective, education is treated as a tool to achieve a specific end: to develop a population which possesses the knowledge and skills to meet national economic and productivity goals (Davies and Bansel, 2007; Penn, 2011; Heckman, 2011).

More recently, neoliberal policy has extended to include the ECEC sector in response to positive research about the economic benefits of early years interventions (Brown, 2015; Gregoriadis, Grammatikopoulos, and Zachopoulou, 2018; Sims, 2017; Simpson, Lumsden and McDowall, 2015; Tan, Gupta and Wilgus, 2019). Such research has articulated early education as a means of increasing human capital potential by highlighting the significant economic returns of early interventions (Del Boca, Piazzalunga and Pronzato 2017; Heckman, 2011).

Consequently, ECEC has come to be viewed as a cost-effective investment that enhances a nation's economic productivity by preparing children to enter the labour force (Penn, 2011).

While the notion of investing in ECEC to meet national goals may not be problematic in itself, the goals highlighted by neoliberalism tend to be motivated by economics as opposed to the common good (Davies and Bansel, 2007; Sims, 2017; Smith, 2012). For this reason, it has been contended that articulating children as a tool for profit is immoral and harmful to the caretaking aspect of ECEC (Sandel 2009, cited in Penn, 2011). This feeds into wider criticism that measuring one's value by their productive capacities cannot be equated with one's value as a human being (Thurow, 1970, cited in Sellar, 2015).

As indicated by Kilderry (2006), neoliberal reforms have redefined the ECEC sector as an extension of the market (McIerney, 2004, cited in Kilderry, 2006). Due to the extended possibilities of data analytics, abstract concepts in schooling are increasingly datafied and analysed through pragmatic methods that focus on predictability and comparability (Mayer-Schonberger and Cukier, 2013, cited in Lingard, Sellar and Savage, 2014; Lingard, Sellar and Savage, 2014). This marketised framework can cause educators to exist as "calculations" in which they increasingly seek to improve productivity to increase their 'value' (Ball, 2000, p.18).

3.2.1 Pushing-down curriculums

Early childhood practitioners among Western countries have been asked to incorporate more demanding educational programmes to assist students in their future educational careers (Skopek, *et. al.,* 2017; Sims, 2017). This arguably obstructs the traditional caretaking pedagogy of ECEC to prioritise its role in the preparation of children for primary schooling (Roberts-Holmes, 2015). The term "push-down curriculum" has been used to describe the process by which academic subjects typically taught in primary school are being lowered to the ECEC sector (Sims, 2014). Pushing down curriculums increases the responsibility of ECEC educators to teach more complex subjects in addition to other pre-existing tasks (Sims, 2017). While Sims (2014; 2017) documents this process in New Zealand and Australia, the establishment of a 'pushed-down' early childhood curriculum has

become increasingly common in other developed nations, which has been said to create a ‘standardisation’ of knowledge across ECEC sectors (Giroux, 2013; Schweinhart, 2002 cited in Ryan and Grieshaber, 2005).

The United Kingdom government has pushed a series of ECEC initiatives that emphasise building academic competencies and skills (e.g. literacy, mathematics) considered essential for school readiness and long-term success (DfE 2011, p.1 cited in Roberts-Holmes, 2015, p.304). In England, the English Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provides ECEC educators with national regulations and standards to best prepare children aged 0-5 years for advanced schooling (Roberts-Holmes, 2015). A similar strategy has taken place in Scotland, in which the government introduced the Early Years Framework (EYF) as a policy-to-practice resource to develop young students to their highest potential; making specific references to nursery schools’ responsibility to effectively prepare children for a smooth transition to primary school (Jindal-Snape, 2018). Consequently, ECEC practitioners may begin to act more like an ‘investment’ tool as opposed to educators and caretakers of children (Simpson, Lumsden and McDowall Clark, 2015).

Under the guise of objectivity, neoliberal reforms thus change the role of teachers across sectors by diminishing complicated social processes into numeric conceptions that are simple and quantifiable (Ball, 2003). While neoliberal ideology has spread significantly throughout North America, Europe and the developed Pacific, performativity remains a largely unfamiliar territory for ECEC sectors and educators (Sims, 2017; Kilderry, 2015). This has caused tension between those who maintain a humanistic approach to childcare and those who support a more market-driven, human capital approach (Goodfellow, 2005, cited in Kilderry, 2006).

3.3 PROFESSIONALISING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

The concept of ‘professionalism’ in ECEC has received large-scale attention from researchers; however, its definition and what it means to be a ‘professional’ can vary significantly (Evetts, 2011; Gutierrez, Fox and Alexander, 2019; Hargreaves, 2000; Malm, 2009). Broadly speaking, professionalism has been referred to as the

upgrading of the quality, standards, status and standing of educators following an era of 'pre-professionalism' in which teachers historically struggled to garner the resources and recognition necessary to be considered professionals (Hargreaves, 2000). However, the term 'professional' and what it means is a construct that can be interpreted and communicated differently across institutions and actors (Harwood, *et. al.,* 2013; Osgood, 2010; Osgood, 2006).

From a post-structuralist perspective, professionals in the education sector are produced within a particular social, institutional and systemic context (Howarth, 2013). These contexts influence how one understands what it means to be a professional, the policies that are developed and how professionalism is enacted and influenced by the subjective knowledge and language of actors (Howarth, 2013; Jurasaite-Harbison, 2005). The competing demands of policy-makers, institutions and one's personal values can cause ECEC educators to remain in a cycle of re-establishing what it means to be a professional within the dominating discourse of their environment (Kim and Kim, 2017). As such, Molla and Nolan (2019a; 2019b; 2020) question what it means to be a professional in the times of neoliberalism and how educators can exercise professionalism while still maintaining a dedication to the care of their practice (Harwood, *et. al.,* 2013).

ECEC has become increasingly professionalised in response to broader research that suggests staff professionalism is positively correlated with 'quality service' (Molla and Nolan, 2019a). This has created a sense of urgency to professionalise the ECEC workforce through professionalisation agendas in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia (Gillies, 2018; Goodfellow, 2004; Gregoriadis, Grammatikopoulos, and Zachopoulou, 2018; Hargreaves, 2000; Osgood, 2006; Osgood, 2009; McGillivray, 2008; Molla and Nolan, 2019a; Sims, 2017; Wingrave and McMahon, 2015). These agendas aim to solve the perceived 'crisis in education' in which ECEC has been articulated as 'failing', thus, justifying a need for more governmental control and regulation (Osgood, 2006, p.6). In consequence, ECEC educators are experiencing a 're-construction' of their professional roles to meet performativity demands

(Wingrave and McMahon, 2015, p.725) that increasingly commodify and monitor their work (Giroux, 2013; Molla and Nolan, 2019a).

Neoliberal reforms tend to promote a technical-based approach to pedagogy that is measured by children's performance on assessments that determine whether or not they are developmentally on track (Bradbury, 2014; Brown, 2015; Davies and Bansel, 2007; Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2012; Sims, 2017; Smith, 2012). These reforms view a professional ECEC educator as one who is able to prepare students for future success on various performance indicators. However, articulating professionalism in this manner can reduce the capability of educators to incorporate cultural and social responsibilities into the classroom (Kim and Kim 2017; Siegel, 2006).

To address this, Brock (2013) explains the importance of teacher autonomy in professionalisation. In Brock's (2013) model, professional autonomy refers to the degree of influence educators have over the provision, enactment and standards of policy. However, as education systems become more technical, the autonomous decision-making of ECEC educators appears to be reduced (Harwood, *et. al.,* 2013; Novinger and O'Brien 2003).

Osgood (2006, p.6) references Foucault's concept of the 'regulatory gaze' to describe the centralised control that demands accountability, standardisation and performativity of ECEC practitioners which ultimately reduces autonomy through an invisible regulatory power. This creates an environment in which "policy must be seen to be done" (Ball, *et. al*., 2011, p.629); making it difficult for educators to challenge performative discourses as their workloads becomes increasingly constrained by modes of accountability and assessment (Osgood, 2006; Ball, 2003; Bradbury, 2014). This impedes educators' ability to strike a balance between traditional caretaking values and the demands of school readiness and accountability regimes (Roberts-Holmes, 2015).

3.3.1 Professional knowledge

Specialised 'expertise', 'knowledge' and 'skills' have been identified as key dimensions for an occupation to be considered a profession (Brock, 2013; Malm, 2009; McGillivray, 2008; Molla and Nolan, 2019a; Moyles, 2001; Musgrave, 2010;

Pirard, Camus and Barbier, 2018). While specialised knowledge is essential for any profession, actors at different levels in the education system may have contrasting ideas regarding which skills are most desired. Neoliberal professionalisation reforms prioritise teachers' technical abilities, however, many ECEC educators highlight the importance of soft skills and maintaining the 'care' element in their work (Harwood, *et. al.,* 2013; Malm, 2009; MacNaughton, 2000; Moyles, 2001; Osgood, 2010; Sims, 2014; Sims, *et. al.,* 2018). This suggests that among those at the 'street-level' (Lipsky, 1980), teacher-student relationships may be the primary method in which professionalism is exercised and evaluated (Harwood, *et. al.,* 2013).

Australian ECEC educators have indicated expertise can be demonstrated through dispositions such as: patience, empathy, positivity, confidence and resilience (Molla and Nolan, 2019a). In a cross-cultural analysis of the United Kingdom, Australia, Finland, Pacific and Bhutan, ECEC practitioners most commonly referred to the relational and emotional dimensions of their work, discussing the importance of being "loving, supportive and emotionally available adults", demonstrating "warm encounters", "sensitivity" where the "primary focus is nurturing care" (Sims, *et. al.,* 2018, p.4). However, ECEC educators in the United Kingdom have raised concerns that the 'care' in their work is not understood or considered of value outside of the sector (Sims, *et. al.,* 2018).

At the policy-level, emotions in the workplace are thought to be of little value so they are replaced by qualities such as rationality and competitiveness which will help teachers meet performance targets (Osgood, 2006). Consequently, neoliberal discourse encourages educators to maintain an "emotional neutrality" in which decisions are made rationally as opposed to emotionally (Labaree, 2010, p.141, cited in Molla and Nolan, 2019b, p.6). However, a post-structuralist view of ECEC professionalism would contend that such 'emotional neutrality' is impossible as all forms of knowledge and assumptions are constructed within the subjective experiences and interpretations of social actors (Howarth, 2013).

Consequently, ECEC educators will always translate particular truths that are embedded in their language, knowledge and behaviours (Kim and Kim, 2017). As neoliberalism continues to spread, teachers may become accustomed to calculating

themselves in terms of productivity as the dominating discourses of professionalism marginalise alternative definitions (Ball, 2003; Novinger and O'Brien, 2003; Osgood 2006). This subsequently normalises the idea that to be a professional requires a certain kind of recognition that is visible and respected by the public (Burton and Lyons, 2000, cited in Kilderry, 2014).

3.3.2 Credentialism and Recognition

A degree of recognition is necessary for an occupation to be considered a profession. In reference to Molla and Nolan's (2019a; 2019b) model, the dimension of 'recognition' suggests that professional ECEC educators must be valued and respected by their colleagues, families and communities. At present, there is little recognition of the role of educators in professionalisation reforms which arguably marginalises the educational sector and leaves educators' identities to be constructed externally (Kilderry, 2014). Further misunderstandings have stemmed from the inconsistent terminology used for ECEC workers as various titles (e.g. child-carer, nursery worker) are used interchangeably causing uncertainty about the diversity of roles within the sector (Molla and Nolan, 2019b; McGillivray, 2008).

In the era of professionalism, demonstrating 'knowledge' often takes the form of various credentials which indicate an individual has been adequately trained to hold a professional position and to make informed decisions (Molla and Nolan, 2019a). As such, attempts to improve public recognition have included the upgrading of qualification requirements for the ECEC sector (Menmuir, 2001; Tholen, 2020; Wingrave and McMahon, 2015). Tholen (2020, p.284) describes the primary function of credentials as: (1) providing evidence that an individual holds the appropriate knowledge and skill set for an occupation or role and (2) to be used as an "educational marker of group identity" in which individuals can be included or excluded accordingly.

Credentials hold a certain symbolism that communicates the prestige and knowledge of those who obtain them (Tholen, 2017). This can lead to what has been referred to as 'credentialism' in which one's investments are evaluated primarily by qualifications or certifications (Bidner, 2014; Brown, 2001). Credentialism can thus maintain social stratification and dominating power relations in what Tholen (2017)

refers to as 'social closure' whereby individuals maintain advantage by limiting the opportunities available to those without qualifications.

Credentialism in ECEC is intensified by the increased attention on professional development courses as a means of improving 'quality' in response to neoliberal policies of accountability (Menmuir, 2001). Accreditation processes are therefore viewed as a way to hold ECEC educators more strongly responsible for their work and professional title (Sims, 2017). While increasing qualification standards may have the intention of cultivating a highly skilled ECEC workforce (Musgrave, 2010), such professionalism arguably "treats schools and teachers as bearers of variables" in which one is evaluated primarily by their credentials as opposed to the quality of their work (Connell, 2009, p.217; Osgood, 2010).

While credentials are meant to serve as an indicator of one's abilities, they remain subjective as their meanings are constantly being created and re-created by social actors (Tholen, 2020). In this sense, credentials can only be meaningful to the extent they are publicly recognised as relevant and important qualifications (Brown and Bills, 2011). Many accept the 'truth' that credentials hold a certain degree of status and prestige which are imperative for one to be respected and obtain future success (Tholen, 2017).

Among social actors, the desire for credentials can come from the internalised belief that qualifications are an accurate representation of one's skills and knowledge (Brown, 2001; Tholen, 2017). Credentials thus become a symbol for recognition in which societies individually and collectively accept that they transmit a particular message (Tholen, 2017). However, the status associated with credentials and the skills gained through the credential process may not always align (Brown, 2001).

3.4 GENDER AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Gender inequities persist internationally in forms such as the gender wage gap, high rates of domestic violence and the underrepresentation of women in government, executive and STEM positions (Blau, Gielen and Zimmerman, 2013; Boudarbat and Connolly, 2013; Fortin, Bell and Böhm, 2017; Smith, Alexander and

Campbell, 2017; Warren, 2006). While a wide variety of factors play into the differential experiences of men and women, one should not neglect the role socialisation (Erden, 2009; Tracy and Lane, 1999). Societies around the world are built upon gender assumptions that are reflected in the institutions that co-construct our lives and ultimately influence who is given a voice and what constitutes truth (Smith, Alexander and Campbell, 2017). While such assumptions vary across contexts, each society holds dominant gender discourses which shape the thoughts and behaviours of actors (Smith, Alexander and Campbell, 2017).

The values and norms in a society are mirrored in the classroom, therefore, a society which struggles with gender inequity will observe a similar gender bias in its schools (Hyer, *et. al.,* 2008). However, a lack of consensus on the definition and role of equity presents a significant challenge for schools, teachers and policymakers who seek to encourage equitable practices within education systems (Savage, 2013). To develop a deeper understanding of gender inequity requires comprehension of the social environments in which gender patterns arise (Riddell and Weedon 2018).

O'Mahoney and Vincent (2014) contend that inequities are upheld through systematic and institutionalised forces that are created, understood and supplemented by the interpretations of social actors. Post-structuralists understand identity as a construct which adapts to individuals' environment and can vary depending on the context (Butler, 1990, cited in Warin and Adriany, 2017; Warin and Adriany, 2017). In this sense, an individual's thoughts are shaped by internalised perceptions, which are shaped by one's experiences with the world (Reay, 2004). ECEC pedagogy is thus developed by an educator's interactions with, and their degree of immersion into, the wider political and cultural environment (Warin and Adriany, 2017; Jobb, 2019).

Any implicit biases held at the individual-level feed and are influenced by the systematic and institutional hierarchy and norms we observe in broader society (Ellemers, 2018; Howarth, 2013; Hyer, *et. al.,* 2008). This is then passed on to the student as all teacher-student interactions reflect power relations in which some students are placed at an advantage while others at a disadvantage (Ryan and

Grieshaber, 2005). While teachers may believe they treat students equitably it is apparent that female and male students have different classroom experiences (Erden, 2009; MacNaughton, 2000; Marsh, 2000; Myers, 2018; Smith, 2012; Younger and Warrington, 2006).

In an observational study of children's play, Chapman (2016) concluded that teachers send gendered messages through their degree of support, feedback and use of resources in playtime activities. As early as age two, children begin to display preferences in activities that reflect norms associated with their gender (Chick, Heilman-Houser and Hunter, 2002; Lynch, 2015) and construct views regarding what it means to be a boy or girl (Smith, Alexander and Campbell, 2017). This can create a 'hidden curriculum' in which gender biases are perpetuated by teacher attitudes and materials that portray boys and girls in a particular light (Hyer, *et. al.,* 2008). Consequently, children become increasingly aware of the roles associated with their gender through classroom interactions and play activities that abide by the rules of the social world (Lynch, 2015).

These studies indicate that gendered beliefs held by ECEC educators influence the construction of gender in students through various explicit and implicit communication methods that are ingrained in a teacher discourse. Such exchanges can inadvertently perpetuate inequities as children create ideas regarding what is suitable behaviour based on the dominating messages of their environments (Lenz Taguchi, 2004, cited in Karlson and Simonsson, 2011). All of this comes together to send a particular message to those around us (Bourdieu, 1990 cited in Huang, 2019) and determines how we understand inequity and the extent we believe that we can contribute to or combat it. Consequently, daily classroom interactions can uphold the status quo despite any equity provisions or good intentions.

3.4.1 Policy Enactment

While many developed countries use legislative measures to enforce equity, gender disparities continue to persist in all years of schooling (Ellemers, 2018; Bauer, 2000). Policies addressing gender inequity are met with barriers and resistance at different levels of the implementation process, and for different reasons. Those developing gender policies are not typically experts in gender

themselves, which impedes their ability to construct and enforce provisions that adequately addresses the complexity of the issue (Roggeband and Verloo, 2006; Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013). Furthermore, actors within different phases of the implementation process are faced with different enablers and constraints that will ultimately impact the way policy is enacted (Roggeband and Verloo, 2006).

Policy enactment is defined by Braun, Maguire and Ball (2010, p.549) as "an understanding that policies are interpreted and 'translated' by diverse policy actors in the school environment, rather than simply implemented". Based on this definition, policy implementation is a complex process that changes based on its location in the policy cycle and the actors involved (Braun, Maguire and Ball, 2010). Educators themselves are key actors in enactment in how they interpret, replicate or transform policy in the classroom (Braun, Maguire and Ball, 2010; Ball, *et. al.,* 2011; Murphy and Skillen, 2015; Lipsky, 1980). For this reason, policy will look different within and across institutions as educators hold different understandings, capabilities, responsibilities and levels of experience (Ball, *et. al.,* 2011).

Neoliberal and accountability regimes create an environment in which educators are increasingly responsible for the effectiveness and efficiency of the work (Ball, *et. al.,* 2011; Kilderry, 2014). While Ball, Maguire, Braun and Hoskins (2011, p.636) spoke of educators more broadly, their statements can be applied to the ECEC sector by the ways educators experience a "task overload" which reduces their capacity to creatively manage classrooms. When professionals experience an overload of responsibility this can lead to what Pollitt (2009) refers to as "time compression" in which certain tasks are prioritised and others are suppressed. This is problematic in ECEC institutions as educators may suppress time dedicated to caretaking and pedagogical tasks (e.g. overseeing children's safety and health) in order to meet other expectations such as maintaining a 'high quality' practice (Kilderry, 2014; Osgood, 2006). However, time constraints tend not to be a policy concern as they exist primarily at the individual-level as opposed to the structural- or institutional-level (Murphy and Skillen, 2015).

Braun, Maguire and Ball (2010) describe the importance of challenging the idea that 'policy' refers only to legislative or national interventions and instead to

understand it as a process in which social actors are constantly contesting or adapting it within their own context. For education policies to be implemented as intended, policymakers must maneuver the pre-established "regulatory mechanisms" reflected in the structural and cultural contexts of academic institutions (Murphy and Skillen, 2015, p.633) and recognise teachers as policy actors by the ways they interpret, replicate or transform policy in their daily practice (Osgood, 2006).

3.4.2 Pedagogy and Practice

For ECEC educators, curricular and pedagogical decision-making is influenced by a variety of factors that exist within dominating social and political contexts (Kilderry, 2014; Cohen, 2008). Educators hold different values which influence how they understand policy and implement it in the classroom (Ball, *et. al.,* 2011). With regard to gender equity, educators inevitably have different understandings of how the gendering process works; for instance, whether it is understood as biological, psychological or negotiable (Karlson and Simonsson, 2011). Consequently, forms of gender knowledge will be given different levels of legitimacy among educators which impact how equity is incorporated into one's pedagogies and practices (Apple, 2004, cited in Kilderry, 2014).

Despite explicit commitments to gender equity, implicit beliefs can still be influenced by stereotypes which can surpass one's overt intentions to maintain an equitable practice (Ellemers, 2018). Internalised assumptions about gender determine the ways ECEC educators understand gender which ultimately impacts students' overall learning experiences and identity development (Erden 2009; Smith, McLaughlin and Aspden 2019). From a post-structuralist perspective, stereotypes persist because they are so deeply ingrained in structures and language that they become difficult for one to identify (Ellemers, 2018; MacNaughton, 2005). Consequently, educators may not see themselves as part of the problem which can make them less willing to take responsibility for the solution (Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013).

Lombardo and Mergaert (2013, p.302) describe a "mirage of equality" in which one believes equity is already achieved , therefore, any attempts to challenge norms

in the classroom are deemed irrelevant. This mirage is supplemented by neoliberal regimes which seek to invest in a "gender-neutral individual" who can be quantified and regulated (Smith, Alexander and Campbell, 2017, p.2). This reduces 'equity' to numeric conceptions that arguably remove its social and moral dimensions (Lingard, Sellar and Savage 2014; Rezai-Rashti, Segeren and Martino, 2017); supporting an arms-length approach to equity provision which may reduce one's sense of obligation for combating inequity (Blaise, 2005).

This can be compounded by the popularity of ECEC child-centred pedagogy in which children are encouraged to pursue their own interests without intervention of the teacher (Blaise, 2009). Educators with a strong child-centred pedagogy believe they should not use their power to interfere with 'nature', therefore, when students display gendered preferences it can be mistaken for genuine interest exempt from outside influence (Warin and Adriany, 2017). Because of this, Blaise (2009) contends that focusing on child-centred practices can cause one to side-line the responsibility of eliminating stereotypes (Warin and Adriany, 2017). Ellemers (2018, p. 288) highlights this point by stating "As long as people perceive gender-stereotypical task preferences and life choices—including their own—as individual choices, they can maintain the conviction that men and women have equal opportunities and can make counter-stereotypical choices if they want to do so."

Additional tendencies to diffuse responsibilities regarding issues of equity can justify a lack of action (Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013). For instance, Scottish ECEC practitioners have indicated beliefs that families are primarily responsible for the construction and reinforcement of gendered identities (Wingrave, 2018). Others report that nursery-aged children are not old enough to understand gender, therefore, it is not a worthwhile concept to incorporate into ECEC curriculums (MacNaughton, 2000). Additional beliefs that inequity will be resolved naturally are reflected in the notion that treating all students the 'same' is enough to counteract gender disparities (Fereguson, *et. al.,* 2011 cited in Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013; MacNaughton, 2000).

Warin and Adriany (2017) suggest that it is possible for ECEC practitioners to adopt more gender equitable practices so long as they are aware of the ways

stereotyping can occur in the classroom and demonstrate a desire to challenge it. For this to occur, ECEC educators should begin having open conversations with students about gender and find ways to incorporate opportunities for children to critically question their own gender conceptions (Evans, 1998; Blaise, 2005). However, teachers will be unable to encourage self-reflection in their students until they have begun to critically reflect on themselves.

To reduce gender stereotyping in ECEC will require educators to resist communicating gendered messages and instead encourage students to construct their own identities. This has been referred to as a 'gender sensitive' (Karlson and Simonsson, 2011) or 'gender flexible' pedagogy that frees students from the constraints of gender (Warin and Adriany, 2018). To create a gender sensitive classroom, professional development programmes should be provided for educators that "strive(s) to challenge male-dominated world views through the provision of gender training for teachers and the elimination of gender bias in textbooks and curriculum" (UNESCO 2003/2004 cited in Hyer, *et. al.,* 2008, p.137).

As indicated previously, stereotypes are deeply ingrained and can vary between individuals and institutions, therefore, enacting equitable practices will require consideration of multiple overlapping factors (Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013). Kim and Kim (2017, p.304) describe how particular "regimes of truth" are developed within the "dominant theoretical frameworks" of our environment and this constructs the distinct bodies of knowledge and understandings in individuals. However, individuals still hold unique and diverse experiences which causes inequity to appear differently between classrooms (MacNaughton, 2005). To successfully foster a gender sensitive classroom then requires a critical self-awareness of its educators. To develop this, it is essential for educators to become reflexive in their work so they can recognise instances of gender bias within their own assumptions (Riojas-Cortez, Alanis and Flores, 2013).

At present, a lack of attention to gender issues and an absence of adequate gender training for educators is a common downfall of education policy (Hyer, *et. al.,* 2008). For significant change to occur, ECEC institutions must enforce training that will "de-familiarise" educators with traditional discourses of gender by challenging

gendered pedagogies and perceptions (Wingrave, 2018, p.602). While ECEC educators will hold pre-existing discourses accumulated throughout their experiences, this does not mean that ECEC educators are aware of these discourses nor the ways in which they influence their identities or interactions (Kim and Kim, 2017). When confronting the political reality of pedagogy, some ECEC may experience difficulties questioning the beliefs and practices they've always known to be true (MacNaughton, 2005). With this in mind, reflective techniques that help educators to understand their experiences on a deeper theoretical level are essential to address complicated social issues (Riojas-Cortez, Alanis and Floris, 2013).

Post-structuralists assert that teacher training should generate reflections that are an "ongoing, political endeavour to critically examine, play with, and disrupt multiple and competing discourses that operate on and through teachers to make meaning of their experiences" (Kim and Kim, 2017). The use of these themes in ECEC gender trainings will attempt to challenge normative understandings of gender by rearticulating the concept as more complicated and fluid (Osgood and Robinson, 2019). This goes beyond traditional understandings of gender to incorporate the ways teachers construct student identities through language and actions. ECEC educators must begin to view everything they do through a critical lens of gender; understanding how each interaction has the potential to impact children's gendering and how this is materialised into the physical classroom and its resources (Kim and Kim, 2017).

Opportunities to combat gender stereotypes will arise naturally in the daily interactions and meaning-making between students and educators, therefore, teachers must be adequately trained to identify and take advantage of such opportunities (Hyer, *et. al.,*2008; MacNaughton, 2005). ECEC educators should thus be given the freedom to make pedagogical decisions based on their reflections (Harwood, *et. al.* 2013; Riojas-Cortez, Alanis and Flores 2013). However, teachers will still be faced with challenging traditional discourses of gender within the power constraints of their social environments.

MacNaugthon (2005, p.18) references Foucault to describe a 'naturalisation' of power in which current states of oppression are politically and socially normalised.

To prevent normalisation, a deconstruction of truths upholding gender inequity in ECEC is necessary (MacNaughton, 2005). This means ECEC educators must hold sufficient power to challenge their own gendered understandings and to make alternative discourses heard within the dominating power structures of their environment (MacNaughton, 2005).

As previously discussed, power is exercised and reproduced through language (St. Pierre, 2000). The words ECEC educators use to understand their roles already hold the dominant ideologies and discourses of their environments (Howarth, 2013). With regard to equity, it has been suggested that the professionalisation of ECEC has further complicated policy provision as educators may internalise the belief that an upgraded status indicates they are immune to bias (Wingrave, 2018). Consequently, when ECEC practitioners are asked to reflect on their practices, they may respond defensively as it can be mistaken as an attack on their professional identity, which can lead them to oppose a policy altogether (Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013). However, rearticulating 'professionalism' to incorporate self-reflection and a dedication to social justice may have the potential to bring equity to the forefront of ECEC (Harwood, *et. al.,* 2013; Ryan and Grieshaber, 2005).

Incorporating social justice themes into professional training can encourage educators to analyse the politics of teaching and its relationship to social inequity (Ryan and Grieshaber, 2005). Educators can be pushed to question the system of values, beliefs, language and power which are dominant in themselves, a society or institution (Cohen, 2008). An effective training programme would therefore contain a combination of theoretical knowledge, reflexivity and critical discussion coupled with ongoing institutional support (Riojas-Cortez, Alanis and Flores, 2013).

However, post-structuralists would contend there is no singular method for an effective equity training. Rather than following a prescribed curriculum, training can seek to provide educators the theoretical skills to question their practices and seek out alternative perspectives, knowledge and understandings (Ryan and Grieshaber, 2005). From this stance, professional development should empower educators to

self-reflect on biases and understand this as part of their professional responsibilities (Molla and Nolan, 2019a; Molla and Nolan, 2020).

In this era of neoliberalism, finding ways to incorporate professionalism into gender equity training through reward systems and forms of recognition may produce effective results. As literature indicates a rise in credentialism within the ECEC sector, developing an award for equitable practice may fulfill desires for an upgraded status and construct a new kind of professional identity for educators. At present, limited research over this kind of equity training system has been conducted. In Scotland, this approach has been attempted by Glasgow's Gender Friendly Nursery Accreditation programme in which nurseries receive a publicly recognised award for gender equitable practice. However, not all nurseries who begin the training proceed to acquire the full award. The next section will propose an evaluation design of the GFN programme to determine what has enabled and what has prevented nurseries from achieving the full GFN accreditation.

4. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The proposed research will evaluate the Gender Friendly Nursery (GFN) accreditation programme provided by the Glasgow City HSCP North East Sector Health Improvement Team in Glasgow, Scotland. The proposal utilises a post-structuralist framework to investigate how nursery staff construct meanings of their experiences with the GFN programme and how this has impacted programme implementation. It is hoped the evaluation would assist in highlighting the contexts in which ECEC educators' power to promote gender equitable discourse is amplified or marginalised. The proposed methodology was shaped by the following research question:

1) What are the barriers and enablers of nurseries and nursery staff pursuing Gender Friendly Nursery accreditation after completing the Gender Friendly Nursery training?

To address the question, the use of semi-structured interviews and a post-structuralist discourse analysis has been proposed. In the section that follows, I will discuss the research philosophy which supports the selection of these methods and why this proposal would allow for a rigorous evaluation of the GFN programme.

4.1 Research Paradigm and Philosophy

Post-structuralism recognises the existence of an abundance of 'truths'; viewing the social world as subjective with an endless number of interpretations (Humes and Bryce, 2003). Individuals form experiences from within a particular set of political, economic and social contexts which influence how one constructs their knowledge and truths (Banks, 1993). As such, post-structuralists do not seek an objective reality but instead strive to act as "cultural critic(s) offering perspective" as opposed to making "truth-generating epistemological efforts" (Ball, 1995, p.268, cited in, Humes and Bryce, 2003, p.184).

Post-structuralists hold the epistemological view that the social world and its meanings are unstable and unpredictable (St. Pierre and Jackson, 2014). Humans are understood as complex and contradictory who behave differently across contexts (Fawcett, 2008; Gavey, 1989) and hold competing identities and ideas

(MacNaughton, 2005; Jurasaite-Harbison, 2005). The social world is thus thought to be in a constant process of meaning-making that shifts between a particular time and space (Cohen, 2008; Howarth, 2013; Jobb, 2019; MacNaughton, 2005). A post-structuralist ontological perspective then rejects the existence of an objective and observable reality (Gavey, 1989). Instead, humans are thought to behave unpredictably and sometimes irrationally, making them impossible to objectively research as all individuals will hold unique values, assumptions and beliefs that impact how they experience the world (Siegel, 2006).

Post-structuralist research seeks to decipher what an experience means to a participant within a particular context (Dickerson, 2010). With this epistemology, post-structuralist methodology does not attempt to reach any absolute conclusion, nor to accept participants' words as objective truth, but to analyse how participant experiences are situated within broader systems of power, knowledge and agency (Howarth, 2013). This differs from positivist paradigms which maintain the epistemological assumption that the social world can be researched using scientific methods; treating humans as predictable actors in which data can be derived and universal conclusions drawn (Paley, 2008). Post-structuralists reject this assumption and any ontological methodologies that treat data as an objective entity, arguing instead that data is generated as opposed to collected from participants (St. Pierre and Jackson, 2014).

The epistemological view of interpretivist paradigms is more closely aligned to post-structuralism; however, differences still exist. Interpretivism maintains an understanding that the social world will inevitably be subjective; therefore, universal truths cannot be derived from research (Crotty, 1998; Smith, 2008; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006). While post-structuralists recognise that individuals experience the social world subjectively, an important difference between the paradigms is the acceptance of an objective reality. Interpretivist paradigms believe that an objective reality *does* exist, however, it cannot be accessed in research as interpretations of that reality will differ (Smith, 2008). Post-structuralists deny the existence of an objective reality altogether and assert that 'reality' is created through discourse and language (Gavey, 1989).

For post-structuralists, all knowledge, language and culture are said to be produced and represented within a broader system of power, politics and oppression (Koch, 1993) which holds influence over the production of discourse (Foucault, 1980, cited in Koch, 1993). The language people use to represent the world is already situated within broader systems of power that shape social reality, therefore, the social world itself is a construction reproduced through discourse (St. Pierre, 2000). For this reason, post-structuralists maintain the position that data is created by the researcher and participants (Crotty, 1998).

Given these ontological and epistemological differences, the proposed evaluation will take on a critical research paradigm that rejects universal truths and critiques the subjectivity of knowledge by attempting to analyse the influence of power that perpetuates dominant discourse (Hodgson and Standish, 2009). This is particularly useful for issues of gender stereotyping as it allows for analysis of the dominating 'truths' that are reflected and reproduced via language and representation (Hodgson and Standish, 2009). Post-structuralist research that utilises a critical paradigm seeks to expose injustices by challenging and critiquing the taken-for-granted beliefs, structures and assumptions of society in hopes of generating social change (Crotty, 1998).

Power has considerable implications on the research process as well as the entirety of one's experiences and the groups they represent (Howarth, 2013). Therefore, any research conducted within the social world has the potential to justify and reproduce the dominant power relations of society (Crotty, 1998). The aim of post-structuralist research is then to analyse how individuals behave within those influences which are not visible; to seek out the marginalised or invisible stories and recognise how those given more power have influenced the discourse of the less powerful (MacNaughton, 2005). However, it is also recognised that individuals will demonstrate power in some situations and not others based on their various social positionings (Baxter, 2016).

When researching gender, post-structuralists analyse the role of language in reproducing damaging biases and inequities (St. Pierre, 2000). The purpose of such critique is to re-construct gender by analysing the power, language and knowledge

that has historically defined it and maintained unequal gender relations (Blaise, 2005). These relations become mainstream via patriarchal discourses that reproduce assumptions about gender which situate and maintain inequity (Campbell, Smith and Alexander, 2017; St. Pierre, 2000). Oppressive discourses create the stereotypes and norms we consider 'appropriate'; therefore, post-structuralism recognises gender as a performed activity that has been normalised through processes of socialisation, power and language that have constructed its meaning (Blaise, 2005).

Within this framework, research on gender equity policy must acknowledge the inconsistencies of the world, how it is experienced subjectively by its actors and ultimately how we research it. For this study, a post-structuralist methodology will be proposed to deconstruct what is said by participants based on how they have experienced GFN from their own perspective and how these perspectives have been contextualised within the discourses of their environments. In the proposal, attention will be allocated to the role of power, structure and agency in shaping participants' interpretations of gender, the GFN, and how this has helped or hindered the programme's implementation.

4.2 Choice of Methods

Given the ontological and epistemological perspectives discussed above, there is no universally prescribed methodology for post-structuralist research (St. Pierre, 2018; Gavey, 1989). This presents difficulties in designing a study that translates the experiences of participants to the researcher as the study itself and what it represents remain subject to interpretation (Stone, 2008). With this in mind, the use of semi-structured interviews has been selected to allow participants ample opportunity to communicate their experiences in their own words and how these relate to the research topic. Interviews can then be theoretically analysed by the researcher and supplemented by a consideration of how participant experiences have been influenced by the dominating discourse of society.

Semi-structured interviews provide a first-hand account of how individuals connect their ideas, opinions and behaviours (Hochschild, 2009, cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Participants are given flexibility to respond in a way

that most accurately represents their perceived experiences and to express individual points of view. The interviewee is able to guide the discussion towards topics most relevant to themselves as opposed to asking them to identify with a pre-written response that may not be an accurate reflection of their thoughts. However, it is essential to remain aware that topics can only be documented to the extent which interviewees incorporate and translate them into discussion. It is then left to the researcher to interpret responses within the philosophy and post-structuralist framework informing the study (Gavey, 1989; Augustine, 2014).

Post-structuralists maintain the epistemological understanding that the language used in an interview has been previously ascribed with meanings and cannot be taken at face-value (St. Pierre and Jackson, 2014). Therefore, a significant consideration of this methodology remains that one's discourse is subjective (Stone, 2008). During an interview, the interviewee articulates a particular message which is then interpreted by the interviewer in a particular way (Koch, 1993). It is acknowledged that when one speaks of an experience, they are both describing and constructing that experience based on predisposed frameworks and discourse, which are left to be made sense of by the listener (Maynard, 1994, p.23 cited in Fawcett, 2008). This exchange is unique to the individuals, as no other persons will interpret, send or receive the same message.

Because of this, interviews have been described as a 'collaboration' between the interviewer and interviewee in which one utilises their own process of meaning-making (Ayres, 2008a). It is important to acknowledge the potential limitations this brings to the research process. While interviews grant the researcher a first-hand account of participant experiences, interviews alone will not paint the entire picture as other influential elements will be eschewed (Siegel, 2006). Both the researcher and participants will approach the study with preconceived understandings of the topic and discussion (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Throughout data generation and analysis, the researcher will interpret what is said and how the participant behaves, which will determine how they react to the participant and how the participant responds back; ultimately impacting the entire trajectory of the study.

Attention must be paid to the social groups in which each participant belongs (e.g. gender, race, social class) as these influence one's background experiences that subconsciously feed their knowledge and behaviours (Reay, 2004; Wiltshire, Lee and Williams, 2019). While those who are part of the same social group may share more similar experiences than those of other groups (e.g. female, nursery staff), diversity of experience is inevitable within and between members (Wiltshire, Lee and Williams, 2017). It is therefore essential to analyse research on both the collective and individual level (Koch, 1993).

Upon completion of the interviews, a process of discourse analysis (DA) will allow flexibility in interpreting and analysing the data. DA involves studying how language has constructed the social world and one's experiences (Potter, 2008). While the approaches toward DA can vary, this post-structuralist analysis will involve critically reading transcribed texts to determine how particular meanings and outcomes have been created by participants (Weninger, 2008) and how they operate within the dominating power structures (Gavey, 1989). To minimise the possibility of seeking out information to fit predetermined themes, the researcher will draw out themes throughout the analysis process as opposed to beforehand.

DA has been selected as it produces descriptive inquiries that do not attempt to seek out fundamental truths (Ayres, 2008b). This is important for the nature of the study as post-structuralist ontology recognises that data can be examined differently depending on who is conducting the analysis (Gavey, 1989; St. Pierre, 2018). In this sense, analysis is still left to the discretion of the researcher as the meaning behind qualitative data will be continuously interpreted, translated and categorised according to the research questions and theoretical framework (Koch, 1993).

Post-structuralists acknowledge that truths are contextual and arise in a specific time and space (Howarth, 2013). This brings a risk of data loss in terms of losing the complexity of the original interview as contextual factors are removed (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). As such, reaching a universal reading of the data is ultimately impossible as variations in cultural and individual discourses are infinite as are the interpretations of the data (Koch, 1993). However, as previously discussed, the goal of the proposal is not to reach a universal truth but to analyse

the experiences of participants from within their own meaning-making and perceived realities. For this reason, the use of semi-structured interviews and the process of a post-structuralist discourse analysis is considered appropriate.

4.3 Research Design

Sample

A sample of 10 nurseries will be selected to take part in the evaluation. The Glasgow City HSCP Health Improvement Team will contact all GFN trained nurseries via email to inform them they may be contacted to voluntarily participate in a programme evaluation conducted by the student researcher and ask permission to pass on their contact details. Participants will include nursery managers and nursery staff throughout Glasgow that have previously attended the Gender Friendly Nursery training. All participants will be adults above age 18 and competent to give consent. Two groups of participants will be included in the study: (1) nursery staff who attended the GFN training-for-trainers themselves OR sent other staff members to attend the GFN training-for-trainers and are in charge of the GFN implementation (2) nursery staff who attended the cascaded training provided at their nursery by a colleague who attended the original GFN training-for-trainers session.

A list of GFN nurseries will be provided from the collaborating organisation (Glasgow City HSCP). Among this list will be notes indicating at which point the nurseries are in the GFN accreditation process (GFN accreditation achieved / steps taken or indicated to be taken toward GFN accreditation / no steps toward GFN accreditation). A sample of 10 nurseries which have taken steps toward accreditation or have not taken steps toward accreditation will be included. The nurseries will be selected to represent a range of geographic locations and socioeconomic profiles of Glasgow. The final number of participants will depend on the availability and accessibility of nursery staff, with a minimum of 10 and maximum of 25 participants.

Recruitment

The researcher will contact nurseries via telephone or email to request their participation. If the request is accepted, a telephone or face-to-face interview will be scheduled per each participants' preference. Interviews will be held with nursery managers or staff in charge of implementing the rollout of GFN in each nursery.

Permission will be requested from the managers to interview additional nursery staff members who have attended the cascaded GFN training provided at their institution. These staff members will be identified by the nursery manager as being suitable to discuss the topic.

Data Generation

The research will use semi-structured interviews with staff and / or nursery managers at 10 nurseries involved in the GFN programme. Data will be generated via face-to-face or telephone interviews based on each participants' preference. Interview questions will be tailored toward the following categories of nurseries: (1) nurseries that have participated in the GFN training and have taken steps/ indicated steps have been taken toward full GFN accreditation (2) nurseries that have participated in the GFN training and have NOT taken steps toward full GFN accreditation. The same interview questions will be used for each nursery; however, a different set of questions will be used for nursery leaders vs general staff members to ensure relevance.

The first set of interviews will involve nursery managers or staff who were responsible for implementing the rollout of GFN at their institution (see Appendix 1). These interviews will explore the motivations of nursery staff at the beginning of the GFN programme and what they expected to gain from participating. From here, discussion will be guided toward post-training intentions and why these were or were not taken forward. Additional questions will explore what participants viewed as important or problematic in the GFN programme and whether they believe it was relevant to themselves and their nursery context. Lastly, participants will be asked to articulate any personal, institutional or social barriers they faced when implementing the programme.

Separate interview questions will be provided for staff who did NOT attend the GFN training-for-trainers but DID attend the cascaded training provided by a colleague at their nursery (see Appendix 2). These questions will focus on the success of the cascaded model of delivery. Participants will be asked to discuss initial reactions, what they believe could have been improved, and any challenges they faced during the training delivery. Furthermore, participants will be asked what

they would have done differently to make the training more acceptable to themselves and their institution.

While pre-established and open-ended questions will be used across nurseries, additional probes and prompts will be used at the interviewer's discretion to allow participants to clarify and elaborate on key points. Supplementary questions will be used to investigate how participants understand their role within the nursery and how this has impacted their experience with, and the implementation of, the GFN programme. Nevertheless, the interviewer will ensure that the conversation remains on-track with the direction of the study and research question.

The interviews will last between 20-60 minutes depending on the breadth of responses provided by each participant. The option of a telephone interview will be offered as an alternative to in-person interviews to allow flexibility for respondents. Face-to-face interview data will be collected at the location of each participating Glasgow nursery school.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of data generation, audio-recorded interviews will be fully transcribed. This will be followed by a discourse analysis (DA) conducted within a post-structuralist theoretical framework. The DA will interpret transcribed texts by seeking out dominating discourse among nursery staff and how it relates to constructing gender relations and identities of students. Transcriptions will be read carefully to draw out instances of meaning-making as well as any inconsistencies in responses (Gavey, 1989). The texts will not be treated transparently, rather, interview data will be approached as its own entity separate from the individual and their experiences (Potter and Wetherell, 1987 cited in Gavey, 1989).

Post-structuralist themes will be used to highlight how identities are created and defined based on participant language (Baxter, 2016). This will seek to determine how participants identify and perform roles as educators and policy implementers within their social and institutional setting. Particular attention will be paid to the degree of power nursery staff feel they have in promoting alternative gender discourses and generating social change in the classroom. Additional interest will be on the processes of meaning-making participants use to construct

and perform roles in the nursery and how these relate to broader conceptions of gender and professionalism (Harwood, *et. al.,* 2013). These concepts will be used to determine what is enabling and what is hindering the implementation of GFN from the perspective of each participant.

The DA will investigate how data has been generated, negotiated or challenged within a particular context (Baxter, 2016) and how this impacts participants' ability to exercise power over the implementation of GFN. Analysis will not treat transcriptions as descriptive accounts of participant experiences. Instead, data will be understood as being produced within a particular social, political and cultural context that impacts what has, and has not, been said (Gavey, 1989). All transcriptions will thus be evaluated to determine how the language of participants has been constructed within the dominating discourse and the context of one's GFN experience.

To accomplish this, data will be scrutinised to identify power structures exhibited in the nursery school environment and how these are reiterated through the language of nursery staff. Effort will be made to analyse ways the words of participants translate experiences of empowerment vs. disempowerment within one's contextualised environment. A review of literature and post-structuralist texts will be used as supplementary tools in identifying such influences.

Throughout analysis, the epistemological understanding that data is generated within a particular context will be maintained. To avoid 'seeking out' pre-determined themes, no precise steps for analysis can be outlined prior to DA as concepts will arise from interview data (St. Pierre and Jackson, 2014). However, the theoretical works of post-structuralism will be used to interpret and analyse transcriptions to investigate how participant experiences have been constructed and situated within the context of Glasgow's nurseries. This will involve reading over transcribed data and post-structuralist texts to connect overlapping concepts and themes (Augustine, 2014).

Broadly speaking, DA will begin by conducting a denotative micro-analysis of transcriptions in which the researcher will identify common language, concepts and patterns (Baxter, 2016). Although similar to coding, the process will not solely involve

labelling and categorising common phrases. Instead, relevant phrases will be highlighted to be later elaborated and critiqued using post-structuralist themes. Namely, the researcher will seek to identify instances of empowerment vs. disempowerment in participant experiences, language and identity and role formation. To avoid treating data transparently, this micro-analysis will be followed by a connotative analysis in which the more 'invisible' influences (i.e. culture, politics, power) on participant discourse will be incorporated (Baxter, 2016). This will involve mapping out concepts from post-structuralist texts to make connections between theoretical themes, the review of literature and the transcribed interviews.

Throughout the process, transcriptions will be read and analysed continuously to ensure the inclusion of all relevant data. In this sense, DA will consist of moving between the denotative and connotative analysis until all themes and patterns relating to the research question have been identified. However, it is noteworthy that the analysis will remain subjective to the researcher. Post-structuralism recognises that no single interpretation of a text is possible (Gavey, 1989). Any themes identified will reflect what has been perceived as relevant points of analysis by the researcher (Humes and Bryce, 2003). The researcher is then tasked with continuously evaluating their own positionality in analysis to understand the DA as representative of one subjective framing of reality.

4.4 Researcher Positionality

A critical post-structuralist methodology requires one to recognise the researcher's positions and how this impacts the study (Humes and Bryce, 2003, p.186). How the researcher collects, interprets, analyses and presents data will occur within the researcher's own standpoint, discourse and social positioning (Banks, 1993). There is strong epistemological significance of researchers' demographics and social group identities (e.g. race, class, gender) on the research process (Siegel, 2006). Each of these factors will contribute to how the researcher understands their experiences, and ultimately, how they understand those of the participants.

With regard to this project, I have experienced the social world in a particular way which will determine how I arrive and understand the project and what I believe

to be relevant topics of discussion. This will be influenced by my personal demographics, knowledge and language that have led me to construct my own meanings of gender and why I believe promoting gender equity in ECEC is important. As a white female, I approach this proposal with my own gender experiences which cannot be compared to those of other races, sexual orientations, classes, etc. I also come as an outsider in the sense I have not worked in a nursery environment nor am I from Scotland or the United Kingdom more widely. This will inevitably hold limitations in how effectively I communicate with and understand those whose experiences are different than mine. However, as an 'outsider' I could argue I am able to maintain a degree of distance from the study that may be unattainable to those with a more closely related background.

Post-structuralist research requires I constantly evaluate my position and remain reflexive so that I can analyse how my presence is impacting the overall evaluation (Annink, 2017, p.3 cited in Carpenter, 2018). I recognise that I hold particular constructions of reality which limit me to one singular perspective. Despite attempts to remain objective, I will inevitably hold certain biases and assumptions of social encounters that will impact the evaluation. These considerations will be considered at every step of the research process in attempt to reduce the impact of positionality.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

This evaluation has been proposed in collaboration with the Glasgow HSCP Health Improvement Team, therefore, the topic and methodologies have been selected to meet the expectations of the collaborating organisation. This brings the possibility of a positive bias toward the GFN programme. Additionally, because I maintain a strong stance in support of the promotion of gender equity in early education, there is the possibility I may unconsciously seek out views that align with my own. However, my dedication to improving gender equity in Glasgow's nursery schools can be an asset as I attempt to uncover barriers and seek out constructive critiques from participating nurseries and staff.

There will always be a differential level of power which will impact how myself and the participants behave and interact. Because of this, it is possible participants

will feel obliged to respond in a particular way due to the nature of the research. Additionally, participants may hold a certain idea of who a ‘researcher’ is and, because I am a student, there is the possibility that some may not respond in the same way they would if I held a professional title. My lack of experience in the nursery sector may also cause a certain degree of distrust in participants. However, it is also possible this may reduce intimidation and make participants more comfortable in their responses. Alternatively, there is the possibility the status of ‘postgraduate student’ may come with its own intimidations to those who have not pursued the same level of education.

To ensure comfortability, participants will be asked prior to and throughout the interview for consent to participate. Consent will be requested via email prior to the interviews. At the time of each interview, informed consent will be obtained and retained using a written consent form. Throughout the interview, participants will be reminded that participation is voluntary. Upon completion of the interview, participants will be asked for verbal consent that the information obtained in the interview can be included in the research report.

For telephone interviews, a consent form will be sent via email to be signed and returned prior to the interview date. At the time of the interview, recorded verbal consent will be obtained. Interviewees will be reminded throughout the telephone interview that participation is voluntary. Recorded verbal consent will be obtained again at the completion of the interview to confirm that the information provided can be included in the research report.

A relaxed and friendly attitude and demeanour will be maintained to avoid placing pressure on the interviewees to participate or respond in a certain way. To minimise social stress, participants will be notified before, throughout and after the interview that all responses will remain confidential and if there is anything they would like to retract they may do so. They will be informed of measures being taken to ensure participants and responses are not easily identifiable.

Participants will be briefed before each interview that if there are any questions that make them uncomfortable, they may choose not to respond. This is unlikely as the interviews will not cover sensitive subjects. The participants will be

encouraged to ask any questions before, during or after the interview and will be provided the researcher's contact details should they have any concerns. The interviews will focus on evaluating the GFN programme and avoid any sensitive subjects that may elicit emotional or psychological distress. The participants will not be required to discuss sensitive topics, other staff members or children in their nursery. To minimise economic distress all interviews will take place either at the nursery location or over the telephone so participants will not be required to make travel arrangements.

The names of interviewees and nurseries will be removed from transcripts and replaced with pseudonyms prior to the end of the research project to prevent data from being traced back to participants and nurseries. Direct quotes will only be used with written permission from participants. However, participants will be informed that confidentiality may be impossible to guarantee due to the small sample size. If at any point during an interview a participant becomes distressed, the interview will be halted to check on their wellbeing. Support and guidance services will be offered if necessary. Participants will be given the opportunity to withdraw from the research without penalty and their data destroyed. However, this is not expected to occur given the focus of the research.

4.6 Design Considerations

The proposed evaluation is applicable to the GFN programme and cannot be generalised to other gender training programmes, and indeed this is not the intent of post-structural-influenced research. A strength of the evaluation regards its sensitivity to the local nursery environment in Glasgow in attempt to achieve a rigorous analysis from within a localised context. However, there remains the possibility that the nurseries and participants which agree to take part in the study are different from those that do not participate, which may create bias. For instance, nurseries which have not taken steps toward GFN accreditation may be less likely to participate than those which have taken steps. However, the diversity amongst the nurseries that do participate will still allow for a rich and context-specific analysis.

Because this evaluation cannot control how the GFN programme was delivered at each school, differences in training delivery may have impacted

programme implementation by the nursery staff. Each individual will begin the GFN training with preconceived assumptions, values and knowledge that will determine how they perceive and understand GFN themes. This will ultimately influence one's overall motivation and sense of responsibility for programme enactment. Furthermore, the trainer of each session will also hold pre-existing assumptions which will influence how they understood the training-for-trainers session as well as how they deliver the training at their own nursery. However, such differences in programme delivery and reception will allow for a broader understanding of the diverse ways the GFN can be experienced by Glasgow's nursery staff.

Similarly, the evaluation cannot control for nurseries' and individuals' previously-held dedications or policies for gender equity which will likely impact the findings. However, all nurseries voluntarily took part in the initial GFN training which indicates some interest in gender equity at the institutional-level. Nevertheless, how each member of staff understands gender themes will vary within and between institutions. This will offer a breadth of data which can be used to develop richer understandings as to how the GFN programme can be made applicable to more diverse populations and contexts.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

With this proposal, I have attempted to adopt a post-structuralist approach to create a practical and robust evaluation of the GFN training programme that will act as a window into the experiences of ECEC staff in the context of Glasgow's nursery schools. Over the years, the Scottish government has taken strides toward innovating its ECEC sector to create more equitable outcomes for all children (Wingrave, 2018). However, gender disparities persist despite the presence of equity provisions in Scottish schools (Riddell and Weedon, 2018).

One explanation for this may be differences in policy enactment across social actors (Braun, Maguire and Ball, 2010). At the street-level, gender stereotyping can be observed in the daily interactions and language of ECEC educators despite one's overt intentions (Hyer, *et. al.,* 2008). It is with this in mind that the GFN programme was developed with the goal of reducing gender stereotyping in Glasgow's ECEC sector by training staff to identify bias and learn alternative practices that reduce the transmission of gendered messages. Referencing a post-structuralist framework, this proposal highlights how ECEC educators construct knowledge and identities as professionals and social change agents based on the dominating discourse of their environments.

The literature review indicates that neoliberalism has re-articulated the responsibilities of ECEC staff to prepare students for success in future schooling in order to meet human capital demands. Along with this has been various professionalisation agendas which seek to upgrade ECEC qualifications and trainings; causing a reconstruction of staff professional identities. The internalisation of these identities has created desires for upgraded credentials and status among educators which have arguably reduced some of the more emotional elements of ECEC work.

This has consequences on the implementation of gender equity programmes as educators experience an increase in other responsibilities which reduces the time and attention dedicated toward programme enactment (Kilderry, 2014; Osgood, 2006). The accepted 'truths' and identities of ECEC practitioners impact how gender

and gender policy is understood and ultimately delivered (MacNaughton, 2005). However, it is suggested ECEC educators can challenge the status quo by critiquing influences of power and ideology in the construction of damaging social realities and hierarchies, as well as their own beliefs, discourses and assumptions (Howarth, 2013; Jurasaite-Harbison, 2005).

At present, little research has been conducted to determine how ECEC and gender function in the context of Glasgow's nurseries and how these can be addressed in professional trainings. Because gender equity provisions are implemented at the discretion of ECEC institutions (NHSGGC, 2018), robust evaluations of these kind of programmes have not typically been undertaken in Scotland (Edström, 2009).

As the literature suggests, various barriers are faced by educators that can impede a programme's enactment. In the case of the Gender Friendly Nursery, only a fraction of nurseries have taken steps toward full accreditation despite intentions demonstrated at the beginning of training. It is with this in mind that the proposal was structured to address the following research question:

> (1) What are the barriers and enablers of nurseries and nursery staff pursuing Gender Friendly Nursery accreditation after completing the Gender Friendly Nursery training?

Evaluation is an essential step in the policymaking process (Palfrey, Thomas and Phillips, 2012) and until such feedback is recorded and analysed little can be done to adapt the GFN programme to make it attainable to more nurseries and staff. While post-structuralism maintains there is no standardised methodology for conducting an evaluation, the proposed methods have been chosen for their fluidity and adaptability. The use of semi-structured interviews has been selected to allow participants the freedom to articulate their experiences in their own words and to direct the conversation toward topics they consider most relevant. For a more robust evaluation, the proposal suggests a post-structuralist discourse analysis that highlights the political, social and historical influences which have constructed participants' language and experiences of gender and GFN.

The proposed study allows participants to articulate their truths while providing the researcher the theoretical tools to deconstruct language from a post-structuralist lens. This will grant a more thorough investigation into the role of language and its impact on the capacities of ECEC staff to acknowledge inequities and to develop alternative practices. These concepts can then be referenced when investigating the barriers experienced by Glasgow's nursery staff to provide a richer understanding as to why the GFN has not reached its full potential.

A more gender equitable classroom can contribute to a more gender equitable society. The GFN has put in the work to create a more gender friendly nursery environment in Glasgow and the next step is to evaluate its implementation. For this programme to be successful, a thorough evaluation is essential to determine the conditions in which this kind of training can flourish.

This proposal attempts to amplify the voices of Glasgow's nursery staff to allow for deeper engagement of the truths that have constructed participants' experiences with gender and the GFN programme. It is hoped this will generate data that highlights the context in which the power of Glasgow's nursery staff to enact gender friendly practices are being hindered. In return, we will learn more about how Glasgow's nursery staff can resist perpetuating damaging gender stereotypes and how we can work toward a more gender equitable society.

6. APPENDICES

6.1 APPENDIX I - Interview Questions for Nursery Leaders

The following interview questions are for staff managers / leaders who were responsible for the implementation of the Gender Friendly Nursery (GFN) programme and have either (1) attended the GFN training themselves or (2) have sent other staff members to attend the GFN training.

Questions for nursery staff that attended / sent staff to the GFN training but have not taken steps toward the full GFN accreditation

1) Why did you attend/ask your staff member(s) to attend the Gender Friendly Nursery Training session?
2) What did you hope to get out of the session?
3) Prior to attending the session were you aware of the expectations around cascading the training to your colleagues and the expectations of the Gender Friendly Nursery award process?
4) Did you know what you were signing up to in terms of cascading the training / award process etc?
5) Did you intend on taking any steps post training?
    a. If no, why not?
    b. If yes, why were steps not carried out as intended?
6) Does the GFN process place a burden on participants / on nursery establishments?
7) Which aspects of it are most problematic?
8) Is the award important?
    a. What would need to be in place for you to move forward with the award?
    b. What would motivate you to work towards the award?

Questions for nursery staff that attended/ sent staff to the GFN training and indicated steps would be taken but have not yet made progress

1) Why did you attend/ask your staff member(s) to attend the Gender Friendly Nursery Training session?

2) Did you know what you were signing up to in terms of cascading the training / award process etc?
3) Thoughts on the training – what was useful/not useful? Did it equip them to take things back and work towards the award?
4) What has prevented them taking steps so far?
5) Aspects of the award process that you are unclear of or think might be problematic?
6) Is the award important?

    c. What would need to be in place for you to move forward with the award?
    d. What would motivate them to work towards the award?

Questions for nursery staff that attended / sent staff to the GFN training and have taken steps toward full GFN accreditation

1) Why did you attend/send staff member?
2) Did you know what you were signing up to in terms of cascading the training / award process etc?
3) Have you delivered the training to their colleagues yet?

    a) If so, how did it go?

4) Any aspects of the process that are difficult / unclear/ challenging?

5) If you were to giving advice to another nursery looking to take this forward what would it be?
6) What do you think is the best way to ensure that the messages of GFN are cascaded across all Early Learning and Childcare colleagues?

6.2 APPENDIX II – Interview Questions for General Nursery Staff

The following questions are for interviews with nursery staff who were NOT responsible for the implementation of the GFN programme but have attended the GFN training session provided to all colleagues at their nursery.

1. What were your initial reactions about the delivery of the GFN training at your nursery?
    a. What could have been improved in the training's delivery?
2. Did you and other nursery staff respond positively to the training?
3. What did you and/or other staff dislike about the training?
4. What challenges were experienced during the delivery of the training?
5. Did you find the content relevant and important to your nursery environment and to your daily practices?
6. Was there sufficient time for everyone to express their views?
7. Were issues and questions adequately addressed in discussions?
8. What could have made the training more acceptable for you and other staff?
9. Have you made any changes in your daily practices as a result of the GFN training?
10. Do you think the GFN is important?
11. Has your nursery taken steps toward the full GFN accreditation since the GFN training session?
    a. IF YES
        i. What steps have been taken so far?
        ii. What changes have been made in nursery policy since the GFN training?
        iii. What changes have been made in staff practices and / or in classroom resources as a result of the GFN training?
        iv. Are there any aspects of the process that are difficult / unclear/ challenging?
        v. If you were to be giving advice to another nursery looking to take this forward what would it be?
        vi. What do you think is the best way to ensure that the messages of GFN are cascaded across all Early Learning and Childcare colleagues?
    b. IF NO

i. Did you / your nursery intend on taking any steps post-training?
    1. If no, why not?
    2. If yes, why were steps not carried out as intended?
ii. What would motivate you to work towards the award?
iii. Which aspects of the GFN process are most problematic?
    1. Any part of the process that was difficult / unclear/ challenging?
iv. Does the GFN process place too much of a burden on you and / or your nursery establishment?
    1. If yes, please provide sufficient detail:
    2. What (if any) changes to the GFN process could help alleviate these burdens?
v. What would need to be in place for you to move forward with the award?

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