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HIDE AND SEEK: VALUES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

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ABSTRACT: Early childhood education and care settings in England and the people who work in them constitute an important sphere of influence, shaping young children's characters and values. But the values and dispositions expected of the early years workforce are missing from statutory policy documentation despite its clear requirement that practitioners will espouse and promote particular 'universal' values in their work. The expectations for young children's achievement by the age of five also reveal a complex approach combining a structuralist and postmodern duality of individualistic and collectivist values. These present challenges and dilemmas for the sector.

Keywords: early years, workforce, policies, implicit and explicit values

1. INTRODUCTION

Educational settings constitute one important element in the environmental influences that shape the character and values of children and young people (Halstead, 1996; Layard and Dunn, 2009; Lexmond and Reeves, 2009). Frowe has argued that this transcends the development of any one individual's (in this case, political) interests because, he says, education has the capacity 'to assist in the cultivation of a diversity of "views, tastes and values" amongst human beings' (Frowe, 2007, p. 282). It can be assumed, therefore, that the professionals who work in educational contexts bear a crucial responsibility for contributing to the development of children's characters and moral dispositions. But a lack of consideration and foregrounding of the place of personal and professional values in policies and the education programmes for those training to work with children 'has led to impoverished discourse' on character and 'has contributed to a lack of coherence in the rationale of the educational system' in England (Arthur *et al.*, 2010, p. 13). This paper presents an exploration of the qualities and values expected of people working in early years settings in England and the values that they are encouraged and required to promote through their work with young children. This exploration has been made through an analysis of early years national policy documents that total nearly 200 pages of statutory requirements and guidance for the sector. Although it is recognised that expectations may differ among policy-makers, practitioners and members of the general public, it is argued that national policy provides a legally binding framework for the provision of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in England and so its influential position cannot be ignored. The position also acknowledges the dynamic and

interconnected contexts in which 'policy' is influenced, written, read, driven and reconstructed in practice (Bowe *et al.*, 1992; Bryan, 2004).

2. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN ENGLAND

It is known that young children's development is nurtured through attentive and mutually responsive relationships with at least one significant person, usually (but not exclusively) an adult and predominantly a parent (David *et al.*, 2003). Research indicates that up to 90 per cent of brain development occurs during the first five years of life and has an enduring impact (Gopnik, 2009; Greenfield, 1997; Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000; Shore, 1997); neuroscientific evidence of this kind has helped to raise the profile of what happens to young children between the ages of birth and five years. This has significant implications for relationships (NSCDC, 2006) between young children and their parents but also for ECEC policies and practice and, in particular, the knowledge, understanding *and dispositions* of people who work in ECEC settings. In England, this refers to out-of-home providers of education and care for children from birth to five and includes childminders, nurseries and early years centres, children's centres, playgroups, pre-schools and schools in the independent, private or voluntary sector and maintained schools (DCSF, 2008a).

The Office of National Statistics (2009, in DCSF, 2010) reports that 92 per cent of three-year-olds and 98 per cent of four-year-olds are 'benefiting from some free early years education' which may be up to 15 hours per week, and which may be supplemented by the payment of fees to provide additional hours. Consequently, the majority of England's three- and four-year-olds are attending some form of out-of-home ECE setting and may do so for several hours a day, some for five days a week, prior to beginning compulsory education in the academic year in which they turn five. As large numbers of the population of children below five years of age spend time in out-of-home early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings, questions arise concerning the focus in policy and practice about the importance of stable, nurturing relationships with all caregivers and about the values that early years practitioners espouse, promote and are encouraged to adopt by national policy guidance for their work. The early years workforce is itself a policy term. A vast array of professionals can come into contact with young children from the moment they are born. This paper is concerned with the people who work with children aged from birth to five years in ECEC settings and schools in England; 98 per cent of these people are women (TES, 21 January, 2009).¹

The national body responsible for supporting the strategic development of the early years workforce in England is the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC). Its stated purpose is 'to lead change in the children and young people's workforce so that employers and partners are able to do the best job they possibly can' (CWDC, 2010).² This is an executive, non-departmental public body, which receives most of its operational funding from the Government's Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). The CWDC states that, 'Working with children is worthwhile, challenging and immensely rewarding'

and that people who are considering a career within the early years workforce need to be energetic and enthusiastic and to have:

- A genuine liking for and interest in children and their development
- Good communication skills with children and Mums, Dads and other carers
- Confidence
- Patience and professionalism
- A helpful, caring and understanding nature
- An ability to work with parents and carers as well as with children
- A commitment to social inclusion
- The ability to work effectively as part of a team
- A commitment to undertake training
- A sense of fun. (CWDC, 2009, p. 1)

Some of these ‘qualities’ and skills mirror priorities that are embedded within statutory national policy and its associated guidance documentation for the provision of ECEC, which are outlined later in Table 1. But there are some notable omissions such as the above references to *team-work*, or a *helpful, caring and understanding nature*. An analysis of statutory policy documentation for ECEC reveals that there is no explicit guidance or requirement concerned with the desired qualities and dispositions of people in the early years workforce, but there are legal, operational requirements concerned with ‘suitable’ people. These are highlighted later. In addition, the policy documentation makes overt and repeated references to particular values that must be espoused and promoted by practitioners in ECEC settings and those that young children are expected to demonstrate by the time they are five years of age. But these are limited, potentially contradictory and often made without reference to the underlying values or belief systems of the people who constitute the early years workforce.

3. THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF POLICY DOCUMENTATION

The introduction in England of the first statutory, national framework to regulate and guide provision for children from birth to five led to a legal requirement from September 2008 for practitioners to read, understand and respond to policy documentation. This framework is known as the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS) (DCSF, revised edition 2008a). In a study conducted in 2009 by the Pre-school Learning Alliance, it was found that 85 per cent of the respondents (n = 144) said that they ‘frequently’ referred to the official guidance for practice for the EYFS (Pre-school Learning Alliance, 2009). It seems reasonable to assume that reference to the *Practice Guidance* (DCSF, 2008b) will have some influence over subsequent practice. Furthermore, with relatively little opportunity for ECEC practitioners to engage in opportunities for guided reflection and other professional development activities that have been shown to lead to numerous benefits both for practitioners and for children (Fiene, 2002; Kreader *et al.*, 2005; Sylva *et al.*, 2003), practitioners

may currently access few alternatives to resorting to national policy documentation to inform and underpin their practice. A current research and development project with practitioners is revealing the very limited sources from which they draw information, advice and guidance (Powell and Gooch, 2010). But one alternative that is promoted within EYFS documentation is the use of self-evaluation materials and approaches developed by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted, 2009a). These, however, are closely allied to the EYFS documentation itself and ratings of the 'quality' of provision in ECEC settings are based on an inspection framework that is linked to the EYFS (Ofsted, 2009b).

4. EXPLICIT VALUES FOR THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE AND ITS WORKFORCE

The *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* became legally binding through its inclusion in the *Childcare Act* (HM Government, 2006). It gives some indications of what the Government expects of its early years workforce. There is an expectation that ECEC settings will undertake to provide a duty of care because,

When parents choose to use early years services they want to know that provision will keep their children safe and help them to thrive. (DCSF, 2008a, p. 6)

The importance of children's welfare – safeguarding and protecting them – has been a significant feature of child and family policies under the New Labour Government. The overarching *Every Child Matters* programme (DfES, 2003) followed a report led by Lord Laming into the failure of children's services to prevent the death of seven-year old Victoria Climbié caused by repeated abuse at the hands of her great-aunt and this woman's partner (Department of Health and The Home Office, 2003). The *Statutory Framework* for the EYFS addresses issues of children's welfare through a series of requirements. But none relates directly to the values and dispositions of the people who form the early years workforce. Despite the aforementioned list of qualities for early years practitioners cited by the CWDC in 2009, the *Statutory Framework's* welfare requirements concerned with 'Suitable People' make no explicit and direct references to the suitability of a person's character, values or disposition.

Providers must ensure that adults looking after children, or having unsupervised access to them, are suitable to do so. Adults looking after children must have appropriate qualifications, training, skills and knowledge. Staffing arrangements must be organised to ensure safety and to meet the needs of the children. (DCSF, 2008a, pp. 19–20)

'Suitability' is concerned with criminal records bureau disclosures; alcohol, other substances and medicines that would affect behaviour or impair practice, qualifications and training and adult-child ratios.

There are extensive sections referring to the need for child protection training, policies and procedures, including record keeping and vigilance about potential

dangers posed by people other than those working within the settings. The minimum requirement is that all staff who will have unsupervised access to the children will have obtained an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Disclosure and that recruitment procedures should involve providers making 'decisions of suitability using evidence from:

- CRB Disclosure;
- references;
- full employment history;
- qualifications;
- interviews;
- identity checks;
- any other checks undertaken, for example medical suitability.

Providers should notify all people connected with their provision who work directly with children that they expect them to declare to them all convictions, cautions, court orders, reprimands and warnings which may affect their suitability to work with children. (ibid., p. 28)

The CRB disclosure is undoubtedly a useful safeguarding mechanism but it is not failsafe, as shown by the 2009 conviction of a nursery worker for child sexual abuse offences (*The Guardian*, 2009).³ The CRB disclosure does not apply to the dispositions of the applicant – although it is not suggested here that it should. But it is argued that the single measure that is legally required and relied upon to provide evidence of a person's 'suitability' to work with children in an unsupervised capacity is one that merely indicates whether or not an individual has any prior criminal convictions, cautions, court orders, reprimands or warnings. There is an underlying assumption that people with such convictions (i.e. they have been caught, accused and found guilty of a crime or misdemeanour) are 'unsuitable', and those without convictions are 'suitable' for work with children, at least in principle. This raises complex legal and moral arguments and has been the subject of considerable media attention recently with the Government's proposals to extend such checks to more informal and *ad hoc* childcare arrangements.

With reference to the suitability of a person to work with young children, The *Statutory Framework* also requires that:

When working directly with children, practitioners must not be under the influence of alcohol or any other substance which may affect their ability to care for children. (DCSF, 2008a, p. 29)

Practitioners taking medication which they believe may affect their ability to care for children should seek medical advice and only work directly with children if that advice is that the medication is unlikely to impair their ability to look after children. (ibid., p. 29)

Adults looking after children must have appropriate qualifications, training, skills and knowledge. (ibid., p. 29)

Providers must meet the requirements for adult:child ratios set out in Appendix 2. (ibid., p. 31)

The document goes on to include information about other legal requirements, but these are concerned with the suitability of premises, the physical environment and equipment.

The *Statutory Framework* claims that:

Children learn best when they are healthy, safe and secure, when their individual needs are met and when they have positive relationships with the adults caring for them. The welfare requirements are designed to support providers in creating settings which are welcoming, safe and stimulating, and where children are able to enjoy learning through play, to grow in confidence and to fulfil their potential. (DCSF, 2008a, p. 18)

Despite reference to the development of positive relationships, the lack of attention to the characters and dispositions of the people involved could imply that these factors are deemed to be less important than the legal criteria that have already been mentioned above. Given the CWDC's list of desired qualities, it seems unlikely that this is in fact the intention. But it is indicative of Arthur's argument (op. cit.) that there is an impoverished discourse on character. Alternatively, this may be an example of reticence in outlining what may be considered an inappropriately universalist stance in a pluralist society. Dahlberg and Moss (2005), referring to both ethics and values in their work, have commented that:

Ethics hardly figures in current discourses about the preschool – or indeed other institutions for children and young people. It has not featured in any of the recent batch of cross-national studies of early childhood education and care and it occupies a very marginal place in national policies. (ibid., p. 11)

5. IMPLICIT VALUES FOR THE EYFS AND ITS WORKFORCE

Since no references were found in the statutory policy documentation to the qualities or values required of the people in the early years workforce, an exploration was made of the accompanying *EYFS Practice Guidance* for practitioners (DCSF, 2008b). This was found to be similarly lacking in overt references to desirable characters or dispositions. However, it does include a section that sets out the features of a continuously improving setting. In such settings, there would be:

well-qualified and experienced staff who:

- are appropriately trained, with up-to-date skills and qualifications; who are motivated and supported to further raise their skills and qualification level to level 3 and beyond;
- engage in regular cycles of planning and review, informed by accurate record keeping, including information on children's learning progress, and the EYFS Profile;
- understand and engage in informed reflective practice – both individually and in groups;

- work collaboratively within the setting to share knowledge, question practice and test new ideas with high aspirations for every child;
- support quality improvement processes in the setting – recognising how these processes can extend effective practice and help improve outcomes for every child;
- are keen to share best practice with other practitioners through local, regional and national networking;
- work together with other practitioners and parents to support transition, both between settings and between setting and school;
- are committed to the development of sustained shared thinking by offering encouragement, clarifying ideas and asking open questions which support and extend children's thinking and help them make connections in learning – while ensuring a balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities;
- work in partnership with parents – sharing information and involving them in their child's continuous learning and development. (DCSF, 2008b, pp. 8–9)

This section from the *Practice Guidance* introduces and stresses the value in the concepts of reflective practice and sustained shared thinking. These concepts embody some implicit values and attitudes (self-awareness, criticality, collegiality and openness, for example) but the section still makes no overt references to individual dispositions.

The *Practice Guidance* includes many more statements that might, it could be argued, reveal implicit values required of practitioners working in ECEC settings and a small sample of these is included in Table 1. It is worth noting that the EYFS is based on 'four guiding principles', so the language of values is not entirely missing from the document's aims and purposes. These principles have been highlighted with emboldened text in Table 1 but they do not make overt reference to the qualities or dispositions of the adults working with young children.

The preponderance of references to diversity and individuality in the implicit values shown in Table 1 presents a dilemma and challenge for practitioners who must offer universal provision but ensure that it is tailored to the specific needs and interest of each child. This argument is not new, but here it demonstrates the Government's priorities in terms of promoting specific, 'universal' values aimed at fulfilling political goals, such as social cohesion and inclusion. Layard and Dunn (2009) have claimed that excessive individualism presents a threat to children's well-being, stating that it should be replaced with a value system that promotes collective pursuits and benefits. It is worrying, therefore, to note that individualism underlies many of the *Early Learning Goals* for children reaching the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. These Goals, which are integral to the *EYFS Statutory Framework*, set out the expectations of what 'most children' will achieve or exceed by the time they are five years of age. They are grouped beneath six areas of learning and development, which are:

TABLE 1: *Implicit values and dispositions required for the EYFS*

Section	Quote	Implicit Values
1.2	Different children will do different things at different times	Respect for diversity; independence
1.4	A Unique Child – every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured	Respect for and recognition of individuality
1.4	Positive Relationships – children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and / or a key person	Loving and caring
1.4	Enabling Environments – the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning	Dependent
1.4	Learning and Development – children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of Learning and Development are equally important and inter-connected	Holistic perspective
1.5	...plan appropriate activities based on the needs and interests of individual children	Responsive to individuality
Heading 1.7	Meeting the diverse needs of children	Responsive to individuality and diversity
1.7	Meeting the individual needs of all children lies at the heart of the EYFS. Practitioners should deliver personalised learning, development and care to help children get the best possible start in life	Responsive to individuality
1.8	You must promote positive attitudes to diversity and difference within all children	Respect for diversity and difference
1.8	In doing this you will help them to learn to value different aspects of their own and other people's lives.	Respect for diversity and difference
1.8	This includes making sure that all children and families feel included, safe and valued	Inclusive, protective, respectful

(Continued)

TABLE 1: (Continued)

Section	Quote	Implicit Values
1.8	...that all children and adults are treated as individuals and are not discriminated against	Respect for individuality and non-discriminatory
1.8	...and that all children are listened to and respected.	Respectful (of children)
1.9	...plan for the needs of children from black and other minority ethnic backgrounds, including those learning English as an additional language, and for the needs of any children with learning difficulties or disabilities	Responsive to individuality
1.9	Providers must actively avoid gender stereotyping and must challenge any expression of prejudice or discrimination, by children or adults	Non-discriminatory; confident (to challenge discrimination)
1.10	You must plan for each child's individual care and learning requirements. The focus should be on removing or helping to counter underachievement and overcoming barriers for children where these already exist	Responsive to individuality
1.10	You should also identify and respond early to needs which could lead to the development of learning difficulties	Knowledgeable, alert, responsive
1.10	There must be appropriate challenges for gifted and talented children	Responsive to individuality

- (1) Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- (2) Communication, Language and Literacy
- (3) Problem solving, Reasoning and Numeracy
- (4) Knowledge and Understanding of the World
- (5) Physical Development
- (6) Creative Development

Those pertaining to Personal, Social and Emotional Development are perhaps the most obviously relevant to an exploration of implicit and explicit characteristics, dispositions and values. This paper includes the findings from an analysis of the goals for this area of learning and development; but implicit and explicit values could equally be sought in an analysis of any of the six areas. In Table 2, the Goals have been categorised as having an educational and / or social purpose and the values have been identified as more obviously having an individualistic and / or collectivist frame of reference.

Some goals promote individuality, others collectivism and others still suggest a combination of the two. The purposes are simultaneously educational and social. Values that were identified as having a collectivist orientation suggest that there exists an agreed, shared understanding of an absolute moral code: *there needs to be*

TABLE 2: *Purposes and values underlying the early learning goals for personal, social and emotional development of children at age 5 years*

Early Learning Goals (for PSE Development)	Purposes	Values
Continue to be interested, excited and motivated to learn.	Educational	Individualist
Be confident to try new activities, initiate ideas and speak in a familiar group.	Social	Individualist
Maintain attention, concentrate, and sit quietly when appropriate.	Educational; Social	Individualist; collectivist
Respond to significant experiences, showing a range of feelings when appropriate.	Educational; Social	Individualist; collectivist
Have a developing awareness of their own needs, views and feelings, and be sensitive to the needs, views and feelings of others.	Social	Individualism; diversity
Have a developing respect for their own cultures and beliefs and those of other people.	Social	Individualism; diversity
Form good relationships with adults and peers.	Social	Collectivist
Work as part of a group or class, taking turns and sharing fairly, understanding that there needs to be agreed values and codes of behaviour for groups of people, including adults and children, to work together harmoniously.	Social	Collectivist
Understand what is right, what is wrong and why.	Social	Collectivist
Consider the consequences of their words and actions for themselves and others.	Social	Collectivist
Dress and undress independently and manage their own personal hygiene.	Social	Individualist
Select and use activities and resources independently.	Educational	Individualist
Understand that people have different needs, views, cultures and beliefs that need to be treated with respect.	Social	Individualist; collectivist
Understand that they can expect others to treat their needs, views, cultures and beliefs with respect.	Social	Individualist; collectivist

agreed values and codes of behaviour for groups of people; what is right, what is wrong and why. But those that were identified as having an individualistic and / or diversity orientation are more inclined to promote unique beliefs or values: *have a developing respect for their own cultures and beliefs and those of other people.* It is difficult to reconcile these different orientations in the context of early years practice; but it is undoubtedly more complex to reconcile the values that appear to have a dualistic orientation, being simultaneously individualistic and collectivist: *respond to significant experiences, showing a range of feelings when appropriate.*

6. VALUES AND EDUCATION POLICY

Since 1997, the New Labour Government has been hesitant in making overt reference to 'values education' in English schools but has introduced initiatives which are clearly concerned with moral and character development. These

include the *Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning* (SEAL) programme (DfES, 2005). This curriculum resource aims 'to develop the underpinning qualities and skills that help promote positive behaviour and effective learning. It focuses on five social and emotional aspects of learning: self-awareness, managing feelings, motivation, empathy and social skills'. SEAL is intended to complement schools' 'systematic attention to the social and emotional aspects of learning through whole-school ethos, initiatives such as circle time or buddy schemes, and the taught personal, social and health education (PSHE) and Citizenship curriculum'.

The resource is also available to ECEC providers of early childhood education to complement existing social and emotional learning and development guidance and goals for children from birth to five years.

But it is not the intention here to argue for or against the promulgation and implementation of statutory 'values education' in the English education system. It is acknowledged that this is a subject that has attracted considerable academic debate and controversy, with views that are often polarised about its characteristics, effects and appropriateness in pluralist societies. But, the intention here is to highlight the intricate relationships and potential dualism that may exist in the values promoted or omitted in policy documents, those of people working in ECEC settings and those that it is hoped young children will develop as they grow. The uncertainty, dualism and consequent concern arise from explicit statements and implicit messages which advocate a wide range of values and practices which cannot all be reconciled in the same package. They may also represent diverse theoretical perspectives in the contexts of policy influence and production. The clash is all the more worrying with the youngest learners. Questions might reasonably arise as to when the individual development needs of the child might need to be combined with the economic and social needs of society and whether there is an inevitable friction, intellectually and practically.

The policy framework for the education of children from birth to five years in England straddles both the pre-compulsory and compulsory education systems. In England, education – normally within mainstream schools – is obligatory from the age of five, although many children start school before this, enrolling in the September before their fifth birthday. Consequently, the values that shape and are integral to compulsory education policies are also relevant.

As part of the independent review of primary education (compulsory schooling for children aged 4–11 years) led by the University of Cambridge, Shuayb and O'Donnell (for the NFER) conducted a survey of the stated aims, purposes and values of primary education in policy documentation from six countries, including England. Although the EYFS documentation was published in 2008 and the NFER surveyed documentation that was published up to 2006, their findings still have relevance to current early years policy. In their report (Shuayb and O'Donnell, 2008), the authors concluded that the system in England has been shaped by both child-centred, progressive education theories, and the country's political and socio-economic goals. Furthermore, they highlight the argument that the latter years of the twentieth and first few years of the twenty-first centuries have been

characterised by a focus in education policy on standards and assessment and contradictions within policy as to the nature and purposes of education (Alexander, 2004; Hartley, 2005) and its relationship to learners. Although the authors add that there were few references to aims and values in much of the policy documentation that they surveyed from England (1965 to 2006), they suggest that:

In recent years a hybrid view of primary education seems to be emerging. This almost contradictory hybrid of child-centred and economically and socially motivated philosophies of education seems to be encapsulated in increasing references across the surveyed countries towards the personalisation of learning. The aims and values of primary education today combine the requirement to *prepare children* for their economic role in society with the need to identify their individual strengths and weaknesses, so as to provide them with the necessary support to achieve targets. The techniques of child-centred education are being adapted not only to ensure the individual child's growth, but also to prepare him or her to fulfil their economic role. (Shuayb and O'Donnell, 2008, p. 29, my italics)

One can legitimately question whether this hybrid can be welcome for the education and care of very young children. Bennett (2005) has alluded to the role of education in England as preparatory. Having led the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reviews of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in twenty member countries (OECD, 2001, 2006), he concluded that ECEC falls into two broad types: that which primarily serves to prepare young children for their subsequent learning in schools and that which predominantly seeks to promote children's social development. The latter was found to be evident among the ECEC provision in Nordic countries, for example. But in terms of the underlying short- and long-term role of these categories it could be argued that both conform to what Pring cited as the instrumental purposes of (some liberal) education policies for serving social goals or meeting economic needs (Pring, 1996, p. 106, discussing Quinton's 1992 Cook Lecture).

Dahlberg and Moss (2005) have argued that 'narrow and technical' debates about education purposes and performance reduce discussions to concerns with competition for league table positions, rendering education a simplistic out-comes-focused endeavour. By contrast, they encourage engagement in dialogue about 'a profoundly complex and political subject' (ibid., p. 10).

When we speak of preschools as sites for ethical and political practice, the issue is not simply one of quantity ... [n]or are we speaking of ethics and politics as subjects for the curriculum, for example the need to have more time allotted to learning the difference between right and wrong or the workings of democracy. For us, the critical questions are 'What ethics?', 'What politics?', 'What sort of practices?'. (ibid., 2005, p. 12)

7. THE CHALLENGE OF DUALISM

This study has attempted to explore and expose the values that are explicitly and implicitly woven into ECEC policy documents so that these may be included in

the context of debating, 'What values?'. In particular, whether or not there is coherence in the *Statutory Framework* and *Guidance* for the EYFS and, if particular purposes are exemplified and values espoused, how clearly and consistently these are articulated. The issue of making explicit the values that underpin education or are promoted within education settings is a contentious matter, whether or not this is formalised through 'values education'.

The analysis of EYFS documentation makes explicitly clear the prominent status of diversity and individuality, equality and inclusion, child protection and safeguarding. These are values that must be upheld and promoted within ECEC settings. They are reinforced by an inspection framework that rewards attention to their embodiment in practice. But by whom? There is little or no comment on the dispositions and values that constitute – or should constitute – the characters of those working in the early years sector as role models for young children; or how these may lend themselves to the work of nurturing the holistic development of young children in close collaboration with their parents and carers. Not only is it unclear what kinds of people policy-makers (and others) would want to encourage to work in the sector, but also what kinds of people it is hoped the country's young children are and will become. The Early Learning Goals encompass a complex combination of educational and/or social purposes and individualistic and/or collectivist value statements. Although the *EYFS Statutory Framework* and *Guidance* are explicit in the promotion of diversity and individualism/uniqueness, the *Early Learning Goals* suggest that collective aims also underpin the policy statements. But these are much less clearly articulated and may easily be missed by busy practitioners as they endeavour to offer the experiences and support that will enable all children to,

develop a positive sense of themselves and of others; respect for others; social skills; and a positive disposition to learn ... emotional well-being to help them to know themselves and what they can do.⁴

Dahlberg and Moss (2005, pp. 68–73) have suggested that practitioners must deal with 'postmodern ethics', without reference to a universal moral code, basing their judgements on Baumann's view that people are morally competent and intuitive (Baumann, 1993). But the analysis presented in this paper suggests that a code of some moral values *is* promulgated by policy-makers. Furthermore, the theoretical perspectives underlying the documents' values statements suggest that the code is a hybrid of structuralism and postmodernity, consisting of explicit and implicit statements and glaring omissions and inclusions.

Critics of early years policies have argued that these have lacked an underlying coherence or clarity of intent; this may have resulted from attempts to represent a combination of views and interests in the contexts of policy influence and text production. Kwon (2002) suggests that this has been between 'Government' and Early Childhood Specialists; Alakeson (2004) and Campbell-Barr (2005) noted the competing priorities of different departments in Government, in

particular between early education and childcare; Potter (2007) has expressed concerns about a system that focuses on social and developmental outcomes while failing to recognise how understandings of child development should underpin these priorities; Bertram and Pascal (2002) saw a conflict in the simultaneous implementation of broad base versus narrow curricular initiatives; and the author has argued elsewhere that policy documents meander between aesthetic and instrumental values (Powell, 2009). Inconsistency is similarly found within the EYFS policy documents. It appears not only to reflect a lack of clarity in terms of intent, but also in the co-existence of seemingly contradictory, broadly structuralist and postmodern perspectives about early education and care and early childhood.

Piaget (1970) wrote that structuralism was represented by a view of a system as a whole rather than numerous parts; an interest in transformations within this system; and a belief that transformations were self-perpetuating and supported the existence of the system itself. The existence of a curricular framework with complementary assessment and inspection systems for all children in all early childhood education settings are examples of this view of structuralism. Furthermore, despite the caveats that some children might not reach or could exceed them, the inclusion of normative early learning goals for the end of the birth to five years period is presented as the intended culmination of most children's learning and development – a collective approach to achieving a common standard. The standard is spelled out in the *Early Learning Goals* and in the outcomes of *Every Child Matters*: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and [achieve] economic well-being. Structuralism is also evident in the inclusion of what might be termed universal values, as exemplified earlier. The existence of a curricular framework with complementary assessment and inspection systems for all children in all early childhood education settings are examples of structuralism. However, the stated principles that underpin the EYFS emphasising children's uniqueness and individuality and the repeated promotion of diversity and equality are values that reflect a postmodern view that has increasingly dominated education theories. Mac Naughton *et al.* (2001) have noted that postmodernism and poststructuralism are complex terms that are often used interchangeably, but whereas with poststructuralism 'the individual is fundamentally incoherent', postmodernism attributes this incoherence to human societies. They also contend that postmodernism is characterised by a rejection of a 'view that each society is at a particular stage of a journey by humanity towards some ill-defined goal or endpoint (telos)' (p. 45). Postmodern perspectives in the contexts of policy influence and text production may account for the hesitation to include more overt references to values that might be deemed universalist. But, the EYFS key principles, which appear to be derived from a postmodern perspective that emphasises difference, are problematic within the context of a framework that endeavours to address the needs (and outcomes) of all children and measure their progress against a normative structure (the Early Learning Goals). How, then, should the notion of 'A Unique Child', applicable to *all* children, be understood

and interpreted in practice? How can practitioners rationalise their work so that it reflects the diversity they encounter in children's characters and development while working to a key principle that may be intrinsically contradictory?

The approach to policy analysis employed for this paper has viewed the production of policy documents as 'state centred' (Vidovich, 2001). The multiplicity of perspectives revealed through an analysis of early years documents suggests that the 'state' is neither fixed nor unanimous in its circles of policy influence or its production of texts (Bowe *et al.*, 1992). The aim of highlighting the inconsistencies in the values and theoretical perspectives has been based on the view that the statutory requirements of policy texts are interpreted, translated and reconstructed in the everyday practices of those working in early years settings. Dahlberg and Moss (2005) have suggested that there is an important role for both 'major' (macro) and 'minor' (micro) politics in a democratic society. This includes the need to 'make visible invisible assumptions and values' (p. 138), which this paper has endeavoured to highlight in the EYFS policy texts. But it is also in the context of policy implementation that the ethos of a setting is realised through the values it embodies, implicitly and explicitly. In the era of personalised learning, it will be a challenge for practitioners to meet the needs and interests of individual children. Coupled with the policy imperative to contribute to social cohesion, seemingly through attention to diversity and inclusion, making sense of policy perspectives and values may become a Herculean task for even the most reflective, analytical and creative of early years practitioners.

8. NOTES

- ¹ Times Educational Supplement (2009) 'Extra Pay Needed to Coax More Men Into Early Years' by Helen Ward, 21 January 2009. Available at: <http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6007504> (accessed February 2010).
- ² Available at: http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/about/faq#Q_378 (accessed February 2010).
- ³ *The Guardian* (2009) 'Vanessa George jailed for child sex abuse. Nursery school worker receives indeterminate sentence for sexually abusing children in her care' by Steven Morris, 15 December. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/dec/15/vanessa-george-jailed-child-sex-abuse> (accessed February 2010).
- ⁴ <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/eyfs/site/requirements/learning/golas.htm> (accessed February 2010).

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