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Parental engagement and transformation as a marker of quality in Early Childhood Education and Care

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Abstract
Despite the extensive research evidence about the importance of high-quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), English policy makers continue to promote nurseries for the 'childcare' they provide, rather than the transformational effects they can have in areas of socio-economic challenge. The aim of this study was to investigate if and how access to early years provision impacted on parents/carers and their children during the Covid pandemic in a newly established early years community research centre, situated in an area of economic and social challenge. Group analysis of interview data by a team of researchers and stakeholders suggests that access to nursery provision and the positive and trusting relationships within the nursery had a transformative impact on children and their parents/carers. Drawing on the data, we adopt an ecological perspective to theorise quality provision as holistic and relational and challenge policy makers to reconceptualise quality as a holistic endeavour. Specifically, this paper offers a new lens for policy makers to revisit existing evidence about the value of integrated care and education centres for improving child outcomes.

Introduction

In many ways, the 2000s were a golden era for early years provision in England. Policies built on landmark publications such as The Rumbold Report (DES, 1990), Start Right (Parker, 1994) and the Quality in Diversity report (Edwards et al., 2003) resulted in the long-awaited statutory child-centred curriculum for 0–5-year-olds. In early 2000, the much-criticised Desirable Outcomes for early learning (School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 1996) was replaced by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS); a holistic curriculum underpinned by the principles of the unique child, enabling environment, relationships and parent partnerships (2000). At the same time, based on extensive international evidence (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1981), the Labour government launched the landmark Sure Start centres, (a network of community based

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early years settings; Glass, 1999) and commissioned leading researchers to investigate the long-term impacts on children and families (Melhuish et al., 2015; Sylva et al., 2004).

However, in 2010, with the election of the coalition government in the UK, early years policy saw a dramatic shift that continues to this day. Sure Start Centres are long gone (Action for Children, 2019) and the early years sector is facing funding cuts, poor working conditions for nursery staff, rising costs to families and a pervasive recruitment crisis that is damaging children's and families' outcomes (Archer, 2022). At the same time, policy is increasingly shaped by neo-liberal discourses about the curriculum and the purpose of early years provision. The most recent revision of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), for example, prioritises formal learning (literacy and numeracy) rather than play and exploration. In the eyes of experts and practitioners in the early years community, these are retrograde steps that run counter to the evidence-base (Kay, 2022) and despite the government's own proclaimed commitment to reducing inequality, (Simpson, 2022) are damaging child and family outcomes (Archer, 2022; Kay, 2022).

It is in the wake of these policy decisions and degradation of early years provision that the Covid pandemic hit. A recent report from the health visitors institute has highlighted how exacerbated by the economic crisis, Covid continues to cast shadows on children's lives (Hogg and Mays, 2022). For disadvantaged children, children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and vulnerable children in particular, Covid has had a significant and ongoing impact on mental health, language and communication and physical development (Fox et al., 2021; House of Commons Education Committee [HCED], 2023; Ofsted, 2022; Hobbs and Bernard, 2021). Job losses and parental isolation have also had a detrimental effect on parents and families (Dillmann et al., 2022) resulting in exposure to more stress and uncertainty, reduced social networks, access to essential services and increased poverty and abuse (Hogg and Mays, 2022).

At the same time, whilst the government provided extra funding to ameliorate the worst impacts of Covid (DfE, 2023), the long-term policy is to expand childcare provision (HCED, 2023) despite evidence that quality early education and care is of most benefit to children in areas of socio-economic challenge (Education Policy Institute [EPI], 2023; Kindred Squared, 2022). As a result, this shift in investment to working parents in wealthier areas has had a negative impact on outcomes for children and families in disadvantaged areas (Foster, 2023; Lloyd and Penn, 2014; Statham et al., 2022).

In the light of these policy shifts and the public health crisis that was the pandemic, it seems apposite at this point to ask: *What constitutes quality early provision in this new social, economic and political landscape and what benefits does quality bring?* Thus, to understand the transformational nature of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), testimony from key stakeholders (namely parents and carers) and their lived experiences of accessing early years provision during the Covid pandemic is a key element.

The article begins with a critical review of current ECEC in England and the contested perspectives on quality early years provision. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (EST) is then used to explore an alternative perspective on quality ECEC. The methods section describes and justifies the research design and approach to data analysis. After presenting the key findings we discuss these in the context of an ecological perspective that recognises the vital part parents' well-being and social connections can play in the child's microsystem. Based on our analysis of interview data we conclude that adopting an integrated and relational approach that puts parents and families at the heart of provision can enhance child and parent outcomes. Thus, in the context of policy makers' preoccupation with performative priorities and the ongoing effects of the Covid

pandemic, the paper examines parents/carers' perceptions of accessing an ECEC centre and the impact it has had on their lives.

Quality in early childhood care and education

According to Eadie et al. (2024), quality is a 'multidimensional concept' where researchers, policy makers and practitioners adopt contrasting perspectives. In terms of assessing quality, for instance, 'common sense' views reflect normative assumptions of quality as measurable, objective and value-free (Hunkin and Grieshaber, 2023). Indeed, this view increasingly dominates policy makers' priorities evident in accountability measures that are over-reliant on comparing children's learning and development against expected learning outcomes (Dahlberg and Moss, 2008; Kay, 2022; Ofsted, 2023).

However, within the early years community, this normative view of quality is contested. In 'Beyond quality', Dahlberg and Moss (2008, p. 23) challenge the idea of quality as 'expert-derived norms' and of 'criteria for measuring the achievement of these norms'. Instead, the meaning making perspective they advocate calls for 'multiple perspectives and ambivalence' about what counts as 'expected' development and how we measure quality (Dahlberg and Moss, 2008: 44). Taking a subjective and pluralist perspective, they argue that evaluating quality should value 'subjectivity, uncertainty, provisionally, contextuality, dialogue and democracy' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2008: 23). Such a perspective recognises the value-laden nature of quality and its measurement and the importance of cultural norms and perspectives in defining and judging quality. Thus, in some cultural contexts, quality ECEC provision as play based learning (DfE, 2024) may be less valued than school-readiness measures such as reading and writing skills (Rosenthal, 2003).

Despite these debates, however, there is consensus about what counts as 'good/desirable' or 'poor/undesirable' (Furenes et al., 2023; Slot 2018). The 'good/desirable' elements draw on a rich tradition of child development theory and research and are generally associated with the 'process' aspects of quality that relate to the child's learning experiences (Bonetti, 2018; Slot, 2018). Developmental psychology and neuroscience research has shown the 0–5 age range as a sensitive period that requires distinctive experiences such as high-quality adult-child interactions, outdoor play and sensory resources as foundations for lifelong learning and skills (Barata, 2018; Kostelnik et al., 2011). For example, encouraging large motor movements in the early stages can benefit later handwriting, and responsive relationships can build social skills.

Structural aspects of ECEC are also critical (Slot, 2018). According to Penn, 'the extent to which the system is coherent and extensive critically determines quality' (Penn, 2011: 10). Desirable structural factors include small adult to child ratio, adequate funding and opportunities for professional development. Pedagogical research has also shown that highly trained and skillful practitioners, enabling learning environments, inclusive resources and anti-racist practice also impact on how well children learn and develop (Harms et al., 1990; Sylva et al., 2006; Veraska and Sheridan, 2018). Nonetheless, whilst the distinction between structure and process is helpful for describing different aspects of quality, structure and process are interdependent. Indeed, evidence suggests that the impact of policy on structure (staff qualification, adult/child ratios) has a powerful effect on quality and long-term impacts on child and potentially family outcomes (Karemaker et al. 2011; Melhuish and Gardiner, 2019).

In this paper, we regard quality as outcomes (as long at the milestones are developmentally appropriate and context-sensitive) and process-based (sensitive adult-child interactions, appropriate learning environment and play-based experiences) and shaped by structural factors. However,

we also consider the extent of parental engagement as highly significant, particularly in the context of the post-pandemic era and current social, economic and political landscape. Indeed, there is extensive evidence to suggest that settings that nurture strong home links (Koshyk et al., 2021) and support parenting and home learning, communication and relationships have positive outcomes for children (Frosch et al., 2021; OECD, 2020). Moreover, in the long-term, settings that prioritise relationships and support parents can build parental trust in education and positively shape 'the pattern of parental involvement in the next educational stages' (Sadownik and Jevtić, 2023: viii). Significantly, and as evidenced in the landmark Head Start ECEC programme in the US (a key influence on the Sure Start programme in England), strong parental programmes can also mitigate the negative effects of socio-economic disadvantage and facilitate social networks that supports parents and families (Bailey et al., 2021; Frosch et al, 2021; Heckman and Karapakula, 2019; Taguma et al., 2012). Thus, in foregrounding parental provision as integral to what the early years settings offer, we concur with Dahlberg and Moss's (2008, p. 23) call for 'the possibility of other languages' to theorise ECEC quality.

Ecological systems theory

The ecological systems theory (EST) is a theory of human development that regards the child's environment as a key influence on their learning and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). Specifically, it proposes that learning and development is influenced by the child's immediate and external environment. The microsystem, (the most significant level), is the first level of EST and represents the parts of the environment that the child interacts with most directly, such as parents, teachers, schools and friends. Thus, supportive and encouraging parents and secure friendship groups are likely to have a positive effect on the quality of the child's learning and development (Kazimirski et al., 2008; OECD, 2020).

The mesosystem, on the other hand, represents the relationship between the distinct aspects of the microsystem such as those between parents and the school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The early years practitioner is key to building and sustaining the mesosystem (Cliffe and Solvason, 2023). In England, the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2024), has a requirement that each child be assigned a Key Person to ensure that their individual needs are met. Practitioners are expected to build strong relationships with parents and children to build in-depth knowledge and understanding of the child and the wider family context. Thus, the nature and extent of the connections between the micro and mesosystem is critical because well-connected microsystems (e.g. knowledgeable and well-trained practitioners) have the potential to 'neutralise inequalities generated at the exosystem and macrosystem in different ways' (Sadownik and Jevtić 2023: 103). Connections between the child's microsystem and the exosystem (government and local policies) can also impact on the child. Thus, when nurseries close due to lack of funding, the child misses valuable educational experiences and parents may find it harder to work.

Despite Bronfenbrenner's later assertion that EST is not deterministic (that individual characteristics can moderate the effects of the environment) (Patel, 2011), EST is commonly used to evaluate the relationship between the micro and meso levels and the impact on children's learning and development (McKee et al., 2022; Sadownik and Jevtick, 2023) However, few studies explicitly draw on EST to theorise quality in ECEC contexts. Bronfenbrenner's concept of 'linkages' (the quality of interactions between different levels), offers a useful way to theorise quality ECEC on the basis that programme and practices that prioritise the child/parent microsystem (through activities that support parental well-being and access to personal development) can 'make the child's

interaction between the microsystems smoother' (Sadownik and Jevtić, 2023: 103) to enhance outcomes for children and families.

Given the increasingly complex societal challenges many face (Fox et al., 2021) and the powerful influence of parents' on children's outcomes, we propose that we need for a more nuanced perspective of what counts as quality ECEC provision (Reupert et al., 2022). Bronfenbrenner's theory therefore can play a role in problematizing the current policy discourses about ECEC quality. This study therefore explores parents' perspectives of accessing nursery provision that aimed to support the family and children holistically during the Covid pandemic. It aims to address the following question:

> What are parents' and carers' experiences of accessing nursery provision during the Covid pandemic?

Methods

This study took place at a refurbished and re-opened former Children's Centre nursery which had closed when funding to these settings was reduced from 2010 onwards. After securing ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee at the authors' institution, a parent engagement worker made the initial contact with all the nursery parents to explain the study and the consent form (BERA, 2018). As the study was exploratory in nature, we used convenience sampling to recruit the participants whose children attended the nursery (Denscombe, 2021). Seven parents consented to participate but only five were able to attend on the days set aside for interviews. We made a single approach to parents and carers due to the challenging context of the pandemic.

We adopted a qualitative approach to examine parents' and carers' experiences of accessing nursery provision for their two-year-olds. To explore their individual perspectives of accessing the provision, we used qualitative semi-structured interviews. Based on the 'miner' metaphor (Ruslin et al., 2022), we used questions and prompts to uncover and 'describe concrete experiences' (Buetow, 2013: 2). The participants were encouraged to expand on their responses through questions such as 'Can you tell me more?' or 'Is there anything else you want to tell us about?' (Rubin and Rubin, 2011).

Five parents/carers took part in the study:

- Father with two children under 3. Family has English as an Additional Language (P1)
- Grandmother with 3-year-old child and 2-year-old grandchild in her care (P2)
- Grandmother with 2-year-old child and 2-year-old grandchild in her care (P3)
- Mother, single parent with two children (P4)
- Mother, single parent, with two children (P5)

The interviews took place in a quiet space in the nursery at a time convenient for the parents and in the presence of a familiar practitioner. To ensure consistency, the researchers and a representative from a partner organisation collaboratively formulated and refined the interview prompts (see Appendix 1). The interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 30–45 minutes. Anonymised data was transcribed and stored in a password protected secure site that was only accessible to the researchers.

Two of the researchers were familiar with the setting (though not the parents) through their seconded roles from the university as strategic lead and training coordinator. Although the parents were unlikely to be aware of their roles in the nursery, it is still possible that they were unable to express any criticism of the nursery (Denscombe, 2021). To minimise this, participants

were encouraged to be open and assured that their responses would not jeopardise their relationship with the nursery.

Analytical approach

We adopted an inductive analytical approach inspired by Braun and Clarke's framework (2006) to examine the perspectives of different research participants (King, 2004). After the data was transcribed, we open coded the findings to collaboratively identify the main topics/categories (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). This process involved researchers reading through the transcripts individually, followed by a collaborative discussion to generate emerging themes related to parents' experiences of the nursery provision (see Appendix 2).

To further deepen the analysis and to identify new connections and insights, we adopted an iterative reflexive approach, inspired by Srivastava and Hopwood's analytical framework (2015). Iterative reflexive approach is seen by Berkowitz as a 'loop-like pattern' involving 'multiple rounds of revisiting the data' and leading to new questions and 'deepening understanding of the material' (Srivastava and Hopwood, 2009: 77). Once the researchers agreed the key themes and collated excerpts of data to illustrate the themes (Appendix 3, stage 3 and 4), we iteratively analysed the data in relation to how the participants articulated their nursery experience, for example, in relation to the contexts and examples they referred to Extracts were chosen to be illustrative of the argument being made and care was taken to ensure extracts were selected from across the participants.

Findings

Impact on children

When reflecting on their views about accessing nursery provision the participants all referred to the transformational impact on their child (Kostelnik et al., 2011). Using words such as 'flourishing', 'blossoming', 'absolute delight' and 'profound change', they were eager to share the positive changes they noticed about their children's learning, development and well-being'. For example, for one family, access to the nursery was a catalyst for the child's transformation from a withdrawn and isolated child to one who was beginning to communicate and make friends. Furthermore, the child's improved language skills also meant that the parents were better able to understand and meet his needs.

> Yes, he has developed, his mixing with people means his communication skills start getting better, whereas before he just wanted something, he cried. Yesterday at home he said 'Susie, Susie. Susie' and his mother wasn't there, and I said what does he mean? No, his mother said it's the kids – he wants to play . . . he already recognises people by name! . . . before, he can't tell us why he's crying, so we are stuck with him, we don't know what to do with him. But now he comes, and if he wants something and we don't understand, he says it *(P1)*.

Other parents also noted changes in language and communication that included relief about a child 'who was 'closed off and quiet', to one who was flourishing and seeking others' company (P2) and surprise at how well their child's vocabulary had developed and the impact this improved language levels had on the family:

> Like she talks all the time, and her vocabulary is just amazing. The words that she says and the sentences that she says. She will tell you when she wants something, she will tell you if she needs something, and she has just become an absolute delight. (P5)

Developments in their child's physical skills was another area of transformation that was significant for the families:

> He is more mobile, trying to get involved and he's walking a lot better than he was when he first came . . . so yeah. It's really helped Jake (P4)

> Yes, she is more confidence. She will climb and she has picked stuff up. Like the nursery slide is higher than what she's got at home, and so her confidence with climbing and running and jumping and stuff like that. (P2)

Impact on parents

As a result of their child's attendance at the nursery, parents also reported significant changes in their own lives (Heckman and Karapakula, 2019). Access to nursery provision meant reassurance about their child's progress, emotional support as well as practical support from outside agencies and networking opportunities. It also meant the chance to enjoy the simple pleasures of an undisturbed cup of tea, a hot bath and a chance to catch up on the housework. As one parent commented, 'it's not just my child who is benefitting from nursery, I am too' (P2). For a parent with a fragile mental health, it meant a chance to recharge her batteries, so that she was better able to cope with the demands of a young child, echoing another participant's comment that 'it's made me feel better, and I'm not on high alert 24/7, 7 days a week' (P3).

More significantly, new possibilities of social connections arose out of being a parent/carer at the nursery (Dillman et al., 2022). It seemed that having children at the same nursery acted as an icebreaker. For example, the morning school run or after nursery pick-ups offered opportunities to make reciprocal child-care arrangements. Connections and relationships were further strengthened through the parents' breakfast club at the nursery and other parental engagement activities, which in some cases were followed up with '*Costa mornings*', where a group of parents met for informal catch ups over a cup of coffee.

The following comment illustrates the significance of recently formed social connections. Responding to a question about what the nursery has meant for her, one parent explains how the social connections and relationship facilitated new friendships and networking opportunities (Kazimiriski et al., 2008):

> Usually I'm the people that drop off and run, sort of thing and I kind of avoid that social contact, but because through the nursery we've been having the breakfast groups and things we've all been socialising and getting to know each other, so now we all do chat to each other and even just like things like having each other on Facebook and I message every now and again 'Are you alright' and just checking in with each other (T6).

As the parent goes on to explain, these social connections also seem to extend beyond 'checking in with each other'. The increased social connectedness also seemed to create the chance to 'pass on information' about holiday playgroups, work opportunities and services; something that happens effortlessly or unconsciously in contexts where parents have these connections through work or childcare.

> I've created a few social groups through the nursery place that it wouldn't have one it she wasn't coming. If course, yea, we all know different things as well, so then . . . we are all passing information on to each other and all learning something new (P3).

The way the parents talked about their experiences of accessing nursery provision also provided valuable insights into the subjective and objective reality of the parents' everyday experiences (Fox et al., 2021). The economic challenges are real, as one parent explained: 'when you're working full time, doing everything that you can. What else can you do? It's a bit hard, to be honest' (P1). Everyday life can also be isolating and pressurised with little time for themselves and full of worries and uncertainties about their child's progress and development. Lacking the cultural capital on how to improve and better their own and their children's lives can be overwhelming as is the anxiety caused by unpredictable life events and consequences:

> I went from no childcare at all, I haven't got much family or friend support. . .before I got this nursery place, I was really like overwhelmed. A bit stressed, and I came to the school – which then introduced me to here, and yeah, I just didn't know where to go and I was feeling like I had a lot, well I did have a lot on me (P5)

The exchange below also highlights the context in which parents/carers make decisions about their day to day lives. As the extract below shows, it was only through the discussions with staff at the nursery that she realised her entitlement to a free place at a local college:

P2:   I did do health and social care at school, is it level 1? I think it's level 2.

R: Yeah, I think it's college or something that does that.

P2:   Yes, again it's funding as well, isn't it. Adults have to pay.

P: If you're on benefits and things there are exceptions. If the threshold is under a certain amount, then you can get a bursary to support. It's something we can look at, certainly.

R: Yeah, it would just be a bit more things to do and then I could understand Lily better as well.

These new beginnings and possibilities were facilitated by the setting's focus on empowering and supporting parents and the practitioners' skills (Cliffe and Slovanson, 2023). Indeed, the participants regularly referred to the practitioners' skills in supporting their own and their children's wellbeing. They valued the practical support they provided such as helping to access push chairs and contact with outside agencies and the learning environment that supported children's learning. Importantly, however, the parents also valued the non-judgemental atmosphere in the nursery and the microsystem of relationships that developed between practitioners, children and parents. One parent articulated a common perspective about the practitioners' approaches and attitudes:

> They've got most of the things, also they've got the respect, they've got the manners. So many things, it makes you happy as a family to be here. The way that they approach the people, and when they take the kids. . . here it is more . . .they put everything behind their back and when they come here they become 100% professional (P1).

The findings offered important insights into parents' and carers' experiences of nursery provision in the context of the Covid pandemic. Whilst the changes in the children's learning and development is to be expected, it was the extent of the perceived impact on parents/carers' that was most surprising. In the following section, we theorise the findings in relation to the ecological systems theory and key literature on quality ECEC.

Discussion

This study's findings suggest that access to early years provision had practical and concrete benefits for the children and their parents/carers. The participants reported surprisingly rapid changes in their children's language, communication and physical development. The findings illustrate the existing evidence base about the value of peer interaction, skilled practitioners and access to play opportunities for young children's (Melhuish et al., 2015; Sylva et al., 2011; Woolfson and King, 2008).

The findings also indicate that access to nursery provision provided valuable respite for parents. Moreover, the trusting relationships between parents and practitioners enabled them to address concerns about their own and their children's welfare (Benchekroun and Cameron, 2023). Indeed, when parents become better informed about provision and services, their children benefit (Bierman et al., 2008; Dillmann et al., 2022; Frosch et al., 2021; Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 2000). The breakfast club was also a key factor in building and strengthening social connections and facilitating parental well-being. Research has shown that facilitating connections and networks may also have intergenerational outcomes through opportunities for personal self-development, managing family life and employment commitments (Heckman and Karapakula, 2019; Woolfson and King, 2008).

By recognising and valuing the significance of the child's immediate and external environment the practitioners maximised the opportunities for children's learning and development. Nonetheless, whilst there is insufficient data to claim that parents' and carers' sense of well-being directly impacted on their children's progress, the robust 'linkages' in the mesosystem (breakfast club) could have enhanced the positive outcomes (Bailey et al., 2021; Brofennbrenner, 1981; Sadownik and Jevtic, 2023).

The pandemic may have ended, but many families continue to experience stress and isolation. The need for a holistic and integrated conception of quality has therefore acquired a new urgency (Dillmann et al., 2022). The study therefore raises questions about how far existing quality discourses consider the needs of parents and children in disadvantaged areas. In other words, if quality discourses solely focus on children's outcomes, they could miss out on key determinates of improved child outcomes (Barata, 2018; Bierman et al, 2008).

Unfortunately, the current early years policy context is not conducive to parents and children in areas of disadvantaged. The focus on 'childcare', poor pay and long hours for practitioners, is undermining provision (Archer, 2022; Kay, 2022). Importantly, funding cuts (Cloney et al. 2013) are resulting in the loss of parental and community services offered by nurseries (Action for Children, 2019). This policy drive is clearly out of step with the many studies about how investment in integrated settings has a 'ripple effect' (Koshyk et al. 2021) with long term intergenerational positive outcomes.

The participants' social isolation, loneliness and minimal social capital could have negatively impacted on their own and their children's well-being. As parents have the most influence on their child, they need to be supported and nurtured so that they can create a positive home environment for their children (Haslam et al., 2015; Reupert et al., 2022). Ultimately, happier and connected parents are more likely to be better parents for their children and to engage in their children's learning and development, creating healthy ecologies for future parent/school partnerships (Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 2000). The findings in this study, therefore, provide evidence to (re)make the case for incorporating work with parents as a maker of quality ECEC.

Limitations

Whilst the study provided helpful insights into the impact of nursery provision it is a small-scale study. Furthermore, our concerns and interests about the setting may have unconsciously foregrounded certain themes and concepts. Overall, however, this study provides a step towards a more in-depth longitudinal study that draws on multiple data sources and co-design principles to gain richer insights into a diverse range of parents' views at key points of their child's time at nursery.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine parents' and carers' experiences of nursery provision in an area of disadvantage. The findings suggest that ECEC settings that emulate the principles of integrated settings have the potential to transform children's and families' lives. The findings could act as a step towards refocusing policy makers' attention on the existing evidence about the transformative nature of high quality ECEC and its renewed urgency in the context of the Covid pandemic and challenge under investment in ECEC and the dominant neo-liberal views about quality. More broadly, by foregrounding parental well-being as a starting point for better child outcomes (Taguma et al, 2012), it highlights how the child's mesosystem necessitates a more holistic, integrated and relational perspective of quality (Fenech, 2011).

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Appendix 1

Interview questions/prompts

1. Tell me what the nursery place has meant for you? And for your child?
2. Have you noticed any differences in your child since they started coming to nursery?
3. Has the nursery place made any difference to your life? Your family life?
4. Has the nursery place led to you or your child getting extra help/support from anyone? (Parent support, Health Visitor, Speech and Language, advice from nursery staff, other local organisations)
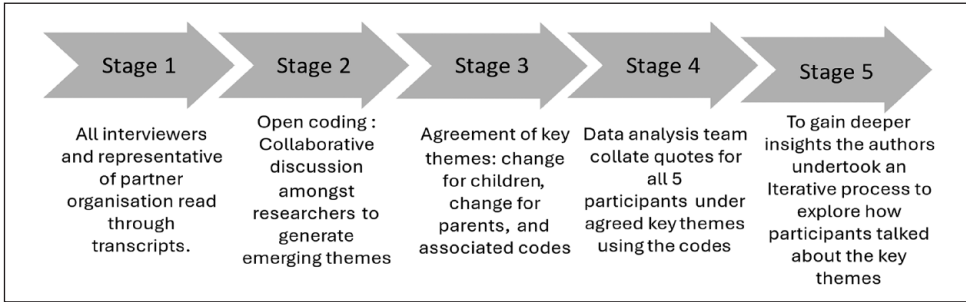5. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experiences at Meadows?

Appendix 2

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5
All interviewers and representative of partner organisation read through transcripts.	Open coding : Collaborative discussion amongst researchers to generate emerging themes	Agreement of key themes: change for children, change for parents, and associated codes	Data analysis team collate quotes for all 5 participants under agreed key themes using the codes	To gain deeper insights the authors undertook an Iterative process to explore how participants talked about the key themes

Figure A1. Stage of data analysis.

Appendix 3

Table A1. Themes and codes.

Theme	Code	Examples
Impact on children	Behaviour change, new skills, improved language, physical development, confidence, social skills	He is more mobile, trying to get involved and he's walking a lot better than he was when he first came . . . so yeah. It's really helped Jake (P4)
Impact on parents	Behaviour, change of perceptions, new relationships, social connection, wellbeing	it's made me feel better, and I'm not on high alert 24/7, 7 days a week' (P3).