

Problematising the CPD Needs of Early Years Educators in England

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Abstract

Aileen Kennedy's 'most read' (2005) paper not only outlines nine key models of CPD. The paper content provides a fascinating analysis of the capacity of 'the nine models' to support CPD. The success of the paper appears to be based on its reflection on the circumstances that enable the models to be adopted, the forms of knowledge that can result from the models, alongside reflecting on the power relationships that are inherent within these paradigms of CPD. This paper uses Kennedy's (2005) work as a background to exploring the perceptions of CPD from 10 English early years workers in 2015. The qualitative research findings outline uncertainty over the nature and purpose of CPD in this educational context. This links to a key theme of this year's (2015) conference by considering the question 'from what to what?' The theoretical content of the paper problematises the CPD of early years workers in England by applying the work of Barton (1994), Gee (1996) and Tummons (2014). The challenge of transforming CPD from an 'artefact' to an 'event' to a form of innovative 'practice' is revealed.

Keywords: professional development; early years; literacy as social practice.

Introduction

This new research on the professional development of early years educators develops Kennedy's (2005) 'most read' paper. The research project is based on a qualitative exploration of the CPD experiences of a sample of early years educators in the north of England. Kennedy (2005) presents 'nine models' of CPD. The models range from 'training courses' providing 'instruction to novices' through to 'coaching/mentoring' and 'action research'. A key theme within Kennedy's (2005) paper is the concept of 'transformative education'. Any model of CPD can be 'transformative' if the professional experiences of the educators are changed in significant ways. Urban (2009) has previously critiqued the circumstances of early years educators in England because they are portrayed as

needing to be ‘solvers of all sorts of problems’. The critique from Urban (2009) is that the policy-makers and the educators become immersed within a ‘game of representation’ (Rowbottom and Aiston 2006, 143). There is the implication that the educators ought to go to ‘infinity and beyond’ so that they become ‘super teachers’. Schwandt (2004) argues convincingly that working with children and families is more about ‘the messiness of human life’ and less about ‘solving problems’ (or going to infinity and beyond). In England however, the need to solve problems is a key theme within the framing of CPD in early years (Author 2015). The theoretical framework that is applied to the research considers theories of literacy as social practice. This theoretical approach is based on exploring how ‘texts’ shape CPD events. Professional development in this area witnesses text-based literacy artefacts (policy documents like the EYFS- or Early Years Foundation Stage) producing ‘literary events’ – professional development activities ‘where literacy has a role’ (Tummons 2014a, 35). Alongside these professional development activities are ‘literary practices’- subjective interpretations of professional development or ‘ways that people use language in all sorts of social contexts’ (Tummons 2014a, 36). The originality of the paper rests in the application of this epistemological position in interpreting the professional development of early years educators.

Research context

The research explores the experiences of a sample of early years educators in England who are based in either statutory or private settings (with professional experience in both settings). As noted previously, the pedagogy of these practitioners is shaped by The EYFS, introduced in England in 2008 and revised in 2012 (Author 2016a). In the UK, The EYFS applies to England but it does not apply to Northern Ireland, Scotland,

Wales, Guernsey, Jersey and The Isle of Man. Each jurisdiction in the UK has its own arrangements for childcare and early years education so the research that is reported corresponds to England. The themes that are discussed relate to ‘transformative education’. This is defined as education that is based on ‘the principles of empowerment, social justice, emancipation, and freedom’ (McLeod 2015, 256). The research explores the professional development of educators in early years in England. In developing the research focus, a number of authors were consulted in order to establish key themes of professional development in this area (Hadley, Waniganayake and Shepherd 2015, Lightfoot and Frost 2015, McLeod 2015, and Waters and Payler 2015). This literature explores the challenges that are inherent in developing successful professional development with educators in early years. Kennedy (2005) reflects on transformative professional development and its importance. It is interesting that 11 years after the publication of this influential paper, a key area of debate concerns the strategies that are employed in realising transformative education.

The challenges in achieving transformative education in early years are explored by Hadley, Waniganayake and Shepherd (2015), Lightfoot and Frost (2015), McLeod (2015), and Waters and Payler (2015). The authors explore two key themes within their collective work. Reflections are made on the difficulties that exist for early years educators if they are to experience professional development that is transformative. Alongside this theme, runs the concern of establishing forms of professional development that enable practitioners to reflect on their development as professionals. The challenges that exist within the professional development of early years educators are commented on by Waters and Payler (2015). The definition of these professionals and the sector they work in is not clear (Waters and Payler 2015, 161). Professionals working in early years have been referred to as ‘the children’s workforce’ in England or

‘early years educators’ in other cultural contexts (Waters and Payler 2015, 161). In this paper I have used the term ‘early years educator’ in order to mirror the consistency of Waters and Payler (2015). The children who qualify to be in this sector also differ in age according to cultural contexts. Waters and Payler (2015) argue that the general consensus is that children in this sector are aged from birth to seven years. If education is to be transformative within this sector, it is vital to ensure that there are no ambiguities about either the sector of education or the children who are included within this educational domain (Hadley, Waniganayake and Shepherd 2015, Lightfoot and Frost 2015, McLeod 2015, and Waters and Payler 2015). A second key theme within the work of these authors corresponds to providing professional development that enables practitioners to reflect on professional practice in ways that transform their work as educators.

McLeod (2015, 255) argues that the presence of an ‘outcome-driven curriculum’ with ‘targets imposed by the government as part of a top-down approach’ can operate to provide barriers to reflection about professional practice. A number of authors emphasise the importance of enabling critical reflection in CPD (Edwards et al. 2002, Reed and Canning 2010, cited in McLeod 2015) but an obstacle to realising this experience of critical reflection appears with an outcome-driven curriculum. McLeod (2015, 256) argues that an emphasis on an ‘end product’ in education is more likely to result in what Mezirow (1997) and Jacobs and Murray (2010) refer to as ‘oppressing professional customs’. The reflective practice advocated by Dewey (1933) and Schön (1987) is obscured within educational processes that do not encourage ‘a critically reflective approach’ (McLeod 2015, 256). The ‘pressure of targets’ can work against enabling transformative education (Dimova and Loughran 2009, Tickell 2011, and Wilkins 2011, cited in McLeod 2015). There can be an experience producing ‘feelings

of disillusionment', 'anxiety' and 'loss of control' (Lightfoot and Frost 2015, 401). In realising transformative professional development for early years educators, it is important to ensure that professional identity and personal identity are considered together (Hadley, Waniganayake and Shepherd 2015, Lightfoot and Frost 2015, McLeod 2015, and Waters and Payler 2015). By valuing educators as opposed to 'focusing on outcomes' there emerges the possibility of developing professionals who are likely to make a difference to the lives of children and their families (Lightfoot and Frost 2015, 415). This literature formed the background to developing the research questions explored within the project.

Theoretical background

The challenges involved in the successful CPD of early years educators appear to be based on a combination of subjective and objective factors. The policy documents shaping this educational context (for example The EYFS) can be regarded as examples of 'literary texts' (Barton 2007, Barton, Hamilton and Ivanić 2000, Gee 1996). In this paper, I wish to focus on the literary texts, events and practices shaping the professional development of early years educators. I argue that the challenges of professional development with early years educators in England can be understood by regarding professional development in this area as an example of literacy as social practice.

Barton (2007, 34) argues that literacy is a 'symbolic system used for communication'. Policy documents like 'The EYFS' are 'ways of representing the world to others' (Barton 2007, 34). These texts establish the basis of 'literary events' that are explained as 'occasions in everyday life where the written word has a role' (Barton 2007, 35). The professional practice of these early years educators is essentially shaped by policy documents like The EYFS. Strands within The EYFS, such as 'a unique child', and 'positive relationships', form the background texts informing CPD

activities in this area. Other texts such as the QAA (Qualification Assurance Agency) benchmark statements for foundation degrees (2010) and early childhood studies (2014), alongside books encouraging 'reflective practice' in early years (for example Lindon 2012) also shape the curriculum events that are enabled by the individuals operating within this context. Curriculum events are interpreted according to 'literary practices'. Barton defines 'literacy practices' as ways of 'using reading and writing in particular situations' (Barton 2007, 36). Scribner and Cole (1981, 234-8) explain that literary practices are ways of applying literacy to particular situations and in turn linking them to other related situations. This epistemological understanding of literacies as social practice has been applied to the research context in order to explore the CPD texts, events and practices of educators in early years within their respective 'domains' (Barton 2007, Barton, Hamilton and Ivanić 2000, Gee 1996). 'Domains' are outlined by Barton (2007, 39) as being 'different places in life where people act differently and use language differently'. The research has explored the relationship that exists between the texts, events and practices that are associated with the professional development of a sample of early years educators in the north of England. This background has informed the subsequent research question and its methodology.

Methodology

The research focus considers 'the perceptions of selected practitioners in early years about their professional development'. The methodology applies a qualitative interpretive model of research via loosely structured interviews with 20 participants. The analytical questions in the study have considered key texts associated with the policymakers' interpretation of this educational context (The EYFS and reflections on the consequences of this policy- for example Author 2015, 2016a, Tickell 2011, and Urban 2009). A further analytical question has explored the extent to which the

practitioners in the research sample agree or disagree with the vision of early years in England that is presented within this policy document. This question has been pursued by asking the practitioners to reflect on their experiences of professional development in early years. The research sample is constituted of 20 practitioners who are based in the north of England. The practitioners have experience of working in both private and statutory early years settings. Although all the practitioners in the research sample are female, this is not a misrepresentation of the gender profile of early years educators in England. Parker-Rees et al. (2004, 128 cited in Author 2016a) describe this workforce as being ‘overwhelmingly female’. The data was gathered via 20 loosely structured interviews occurring between February 2015 and February 2016. During the research process, the researcher reflected on what are phrased as ‘concerns’ about the ‘credibility’ of qualitative research in education (Brown, Lan, and In Jeong 2015, Thomas 2011). In order to enhance the rigour of the research process, the project was approved by the researcher’s HEI research ethics committee and all the participants were made aware of the voluntary nature of the research (Merriam 2009). Purposive and dimensional sampling enabled the selection of the 20 research participants. The practitioners were selected for the research purposefully because they had experience of working in both private and statutory early years settings. This in turn led to dimensional reflections on the CPD experienced within differing sectors of early years. The participants were informed of the purpose of the research and they were provided with an opportunity to check the research transcripts (Thomas 2011). The research transcripts were analysed initially through NVivo 10 computer software to help generate key emerging themes. This software was not used ‘for the sake of it’. It was used in order to enhance the research paradigm (Tummons 2014b) in helping to collate phrases within research transcripts. The application of NVivo 10 thus helped the process of

thematic analysis by generating ‘a process of working with raw data to identify key ideas and themes’ (Matthews and Ross 2010, 373). Alongside the primary research data, The EYFS contains key themes about the purpose of early years education in England (‘a unique child, positive relationships, enabling environments, and learning and development’ Author 2015, 147). The research methodology has explored the consequences of this policy on the professional development of the early years educators in the research sample. To enrich the data generated from the research participants, triangulation occurred with published research on professional development in early years education (for example, Hadley, Waniganayake and Shepherd 2015, Lightfoot and Frost 2015, McLeod 2015, and Waters and Payler 2015). This strengthens the ‘credibility’ of the qualitative research process (Brown, Lan and In Jeong 2015, 143). The research findings were shared with a community of scholars through a research paper delivered at an international conference at Aston University, UK in November 2015. The subsequent discussions surrounding the paper led to the development of the ‘work in progress’ via a post on the research for ‘The BERA (British Educational Research Association) Blog’ in December 2015. This represents a further way of enhancing the rigour of qualitative research processes in education (Brown, Lan and In Jeong 2015).

Findings

The research findings have been analysed using thematic analysis and the emerging themes were disseminated via social media in a BERA Blog. This led to rapid feedback on the work in progress through academic ‘twitter’ and this contributed to the research process. The themes that have been generated come from the data, alongside this feedback from the wider academic community (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983, 178).

The 20 research participants gave two consistent reflections about their

professional development as early years educators in the north of England. The ‘business facing’ agenda within the private settings (the need to make money and the consequence of getting as many ‘customers’ as possible) can lead to CPD becoming a ‘low priority’ (theme 1). There is also ‘resistance’ from the participants to the concept of CPD. It is regarded as a ‘nuisance’ as it is ‘not paid’. One of the research participants asked to be ‘left alone to teach the children’ as opposed to being sent on ‘training courses’ (theme 2). The following content presents the reflections of the research respondents on these two key themes.

Theme 1: the ‘business facing’ agenda within the private settings (the need to make money and the consequence of getting as many ‘customers’ as possible) results in CPD becoming a ‘low priority’.

During the interviews the respondents reflected on their experiences of professional development as early years educators. The research participants perceive that the private settings are motivated by a need to make a financial profit. This results in CPD becoming a ‘low priority’.

I think we had to work really hard within the private nursery. We had a number of different rooms for the children. At times the noise was deafening! But I soon came to realise that if we weren’t ‘full’, and if we didn’t have children in the nursery, it wasn’t good for business. We are a ‘chain’ of private nurseries so we sometimes had to take extra children to support other nursery settings. Our development as professionals was less important than this financial reality (Sara, currently in a private setting).

The research respondents did experience forms of professional development in private settings, but these experiences were based on ‘transmitting skills’ about working with children in early years. ‘Rachel’, ‘Pam’, ‘Alex’, ‘Liz’, ‘Kelly’, ‘Gemma’, ‘Paige’, ‘Amy’ and ‘Kate’ exemplified ‘Induction’ and ‘First Aid Training’ as the only

examples of CPD they had experienced within their private settings. These practitioners' experiences of professional development were based on 'training' that provided them with the ability to 'do practical tasks'. The perception of CPD from these research participants is that it is 'regarded as an add-on' as opposed to being a central aspect of professional practice in these settings.

We were looked after as staff in the setting. But I had a number of aspects of professional practice I wanted to develop when I went into the private setting. I wanted to learn about different types of play and how this helps children's development- But I never got the chance to experience this through professional development (Sara, currently in a private setting).

'Vicky', 'Katy', 'Catherine', 'Amelia', 'Emma', 'Laura', 'Joanne', 'Kate' and 'Anna' make reference to the 'pressure on budgets' and the importance of 'making money' within private settings. This appears to have consequences for CPD for early years educators who are working within these settings. As opposed to investing in staff so that their potential is developed as they are working with children and families, the importance of 'saving money at all costs' becomes a key factor influencing the professional work of these educators. According to the respondents, in order to maximise revenue, as many children as possible are placed within these settings. The subsequent investment in the staff is managed 'as tightly as possible' (Laura, currently in a private setting). 'Joanne' and 'Jane' regarded CPD as 'important' but 'the settings don't always share this view'. 'Haley' reflected on her frustration at working in a private setting and said that she was 'much happier' when she was working in the statutory sector.

I love my work with the children but the type of setting I'm in does matter. I've found that in the private settings we don't have as much emphasis being placed on CPD- it's really important to make the service-users OK with what we're doing. I think the view is that if we provide a good service for the

children and their parents, this is the most important thing. Anything else is less important than this priority (Hayley, currently working in a private setting).

The nature of these private settings appears to make CPD a ‘low priority’ so that the research participants associate CPD with routine aspects of their daily work. There does not appear to be a transformative experience of CPD from these participants (Kennedy 2005). This view is summarised by ‘Amelia’:

I can’t remember any of the training I experienced in the private nursery really making a difference to how I viewed working with children and families. We did some practical health and safety training, but that was it and it didn’t really make me think outside the box (Amelia, currently working in a private setting).

Although the participants spoke of their enjoyment working with the children, their wider development as professionals within the private sector appears to be less important. The profit margins of the settings are prioritised over the professional development needs of the practitioners. This reflection is given by ‘Laura’:

I love what I do with the children but I know that the setting is under all sorts of pressures and this can mean that there is less investment in the workforce than there could be. I think this is probably true of all organisations like this because of the need to make money (Laura, currently working in a private setting).

‘Catherine’ and ‘Emma’ described the pressures in the private sector as ‘unbearable’ and ‘challenging’. ‘Joanne’ and ‘Jane’ reflected that ‘running costs make everyone uneasy’. ‘Katy’ claims that ‘businesses always put profits first’.

At the end of the day it’s about money- I wish it wasn’t- it sometimes makes me question the organisation because you can’t measure children in pounds and pennies. But the nursery is there to make money and I suppose that’s the

most important thing to take into consideration (Katy, currently working in a private setting).

This fundamental aspect of the private settings appears to produce a sense of ‘tunnel vision’ according to the participants. The practitioners may enjoy their work, but their professional development needs are not always taken into consideration in this type of setting.

Theme 2: the ‘resistance’ from the participants to the concept of CPD. It is regarded as a ‘nuisance’ as it is ‘not paid’.

The second key theme emerging from the research interviews relates to the resistance to professional development that was expressed by the research participants. They all have reservations about completing CPD regardless of the setting they are based in.

Now I’m working in a statutory setting I’ve noticed that there are all sorts of pressures on the staff. My view is that this is coming from Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education). But we have to show that we’re meeting targets within the EYFS and I have been surprised at the pace we work at when we are in the setting. So, in some ways, having to go on a training course for a day can be a nuisance. I’ll give an example of what I mean. We have so much that we need to get covered that I’m stressing if I’m asked to take time out from the curriculum. It just means I’ll have to do even more when I get back to working with the children (Anna, currently in a statutory setting).

‘Rachel’, ‘Pam’, ‘Alex’, ‘Liz’, ‘Kelly’ and ‘Gemma’ expressed similar reflections about the pressure they were under to cover the curriculum. CPD is regarded as an unwelcome distraction from the pedagogy of these research participants. This is amplified by ‘Paige’. ‘We have such a busy curriculum that I’m afraid to go off sick. A day’s training is such a stress!’ ‘Amy’ notes that the ‘CPD’ she is experiencing is ‘a nuisance because it’s unpaid’. This reflection is mirrored by ‘Kate’ who

thinks that there ought to be ‘incentives to complete professional development’.

I’m working really hard in the setting. We’re constantly working towards targets and I think that if we’re sent off on a training course it should lead to more pay because we are more qualified. This is supposed to happen but it’s never fully explained how it will happen (Kate, currently in a statutory setting).

The research participants also reflected on the negative impact Ofsted has on professional development.

I have become aware of how professional development links to Ofsted. I’m currently in a primary school and we knew that we would be looked at over literacy, so we were sent on a programme about ‘better reading’. This would have been interesting- it took about a couple of days to do the programme. I just kept thinking to myself ‘I need to be with the children!’. I also thought that this focus had been selected for us ahead of the Ofsted inspection because the inspectors would be focusing on this. So I’ve become a bit cynical about CPD (Anna, currently in a statutory setting).

‘Sara’, ‘Vicky’, ‘Katy’ and ‘Catherine’ provide reflections that echo many of these sentiments. ‘Sara’ emphasises the need to be ‘paid more’ for completing professional development. The link between Ofsted and professional development is also commented on by ‘Catherine’ who reflected that ‘CPD is about inspection!’. ‘Laura’ also noted that ‘professional development is less about what I want to do and more about the inspection process!’. ‘Jane’ too expresses ‘frustration’ at not being able to be ‘more influential’ about the professional development she experiences.

In an ideal world I’d like to be able to choose my own CPD based on my needs. This hasn’t happened. When I worked in the primary school we had

agendas beyond us as teaching assistants that needed to be covered. I was aware of Ofsted and how the school needed to meet particular targets. But I would have liked to have had professional development that met my own needs rather more. I lack confidence with the interactive board so this is something I would have liked to influenced. I don't think this is the model of CPD we follow (Haley, currently in a private setting).

'Haley', 'Anna', 'Kate', 'Amy' and 'Gemma' also comment on their expectation 'to be led' to professional development. This can in turn lead to feelings of 'frustration'.

'Kate' noted that 'we get sent on CPD, but we don't choose to do this'. To apply an analogy, the participants can be 'led to the water of professional development', but they cannot be 'made to drink'.

I wouldn't say I've chosen my professional development- but I don't think I'm supposed to do this. It's more the responsibility of my head-teacher. I'm not involved with directing my own professional development (Kelly, currently in a statutory setting).

'Alex' expresses critical views about CPD as she does not associate professional development with 'the real reason for being in the setting'. This respondent focuses on the importance of 'educating children' and regards 'CPD as a distraction'.

I work with some really needy children and this is why I went into teaching. I think you've either got it or not got it when it comes to working with these children. It's not something that can be learned from a training programme. I think sometimes people forget this. So whenever I'm away from the setting on a training course I only enjoy it if the content makes me better at what I'm doing. I can't think of any examples of when this has happened (Alex, currently in a private setting).

Although these findings are generated from a relatively small sample of 20 practitioners, the reflections reveal some of the challenges that are inherent

within the professional development of these educators. The challenges appear to come from private settings where CPD is a low priority and statutory settings where the CPD that is provided ‘frustrates’ the participants. The following section discusses the implications of these findings.

Concluding discussion

The research participants appear to be less than complimentary about their experiences of professional development as early years educators. Although the study is localised and confined to a particular sample of early years educators in the north of England, the findings have wider implications for professional development in education. A number of authors writing about professional development in education, focus upon the processes of professional development (Harland and Kinder 2014, Leask and Younie 2013, Loughran 2006, MacFarlane and Cartmel 2012). This collective work situates the challenges of professional development in education within the methods that are employed to enable effective CPD. Harland and Kinder (2014) draw attention to the significance of making emotional connections during the processes of professional development. Leask and Younie (2013) argue for the importance of research informing CPD and Loughran (2006) outlines the implications of competitive funding systems for professional development in education. McFarlane and Cartmel (2012) also emphasise the importance of CPD processes if professional development in education is to become effective. This collective work makes a significant contribution to understanding the importance of developing transformative professional development in education. I argue that the originality of this new research on CPD comes from the implications of the reflections of the early years educators in the research sample. Although the research

participants comment on the negative impact of the commercial priorities of the private settings on CPD, there is, nonetheless, the experience of professional development. The processes of CPD are, therefore, evident even though this professional development appears to focus on the acquisition of practical skills (for example 'Induction', 'First Aid' and 'Health and Safety' training). The research participants 'have been led to water' but the challenge appears to be changing the research participants' perceptions of CPD. Wider structural factors, such as the commercial priorities of the private settings, the pressures to meet teaching targets and the impact of Ofsted appear as mitigating factors within the research participants' conceptualisation of professional development.

To complement research studies like Harland and Kinder 2014, Leask and Younie 2013, Loughran 2006, MacFarlane and Cartmel 2012, I have interpreted this new research on CPD via a theoretical framework that is based on an epistemological interpretation of theories of literacy as social practice. The experience of CPD is based on the relationship between 'texts', curriculum 'events' and pedagogical 'practices' (Author 2016b). The practitioners are influenced by policy-makers and their 'texts' (for example The EYFS, the Ofsted agenda and the encouragement of a mixed economy of childcare provision with private and statutory providers). The professional development events' that are experienced by early years educators have their origins in these 'texts' (Barton 2007, Barton, Hamilton and Ivanić 2000, Gee 1996). The 'practices' (or individual interpretations of these professional development events), are revealed in the statements about CPD that are made by the research respondents. The practitioners reflect on the 'pressures' ('Catherine', 'Laura' and 'Emma') that are impacting on their experience of CPD. These reflections are based on subjective and objective factors (the subjective wish to have meaningful CPD, as revealed by 'Alex', alongside the reaction to processes beyond the individual- the need for the private settings to make a profit). I

argue that these wider structural factors need to be addressed if CPD is to become effective. By exploring the texts, events and practices associated with professional development in this area, it is possible to gain a new insight into the challenges that are inherent in the CPD of these educators. The reflections of the research participants are important because they reveal how subjective practices are informed by texts generating CPD within this context. In understanding 'practices' (Barton 2007) it is important to take into consideration the 'texts' and 'events' that influence what is unfolding in this educational context. The educational context frequented by these early years educators is not just 'some physical stuff' (Tummons 2014a, 40). The policy documents influencing its context (for example The EYFS, The QAA Foundation Degree Benchmarks 2010, The QAA Subject Statements for Early Childhood Studies 2014) are not just documents 'lying on a desk or in a box file, stored on a USB memory stick or on an email attachment' (Tummons 2014a, 40). These texts are shaping CPD processes that are in turn commented on as social practices by the research subjects (Barton 2007, Barton, Hamilton and Ivanić 2000, Gee 1996). The early years educators in the research sample reflect on the nature of professional practice and how this impacts on their CPD. This practice is informed in part by texts that are associated with early years education (The EYFS, the QAA Subject Statements for Early Childhood Studies 2014). These documents make reference to the importance of reflecting on professional practice in order to ensure that each child has a 'unique' experience of childhood. The frustration that is expressed by the research participants is over processes that they view as mitigating against a positive experience of early years education. The importance of the texts that shape the context of the practitioners is heightened if we reflect on the implications of the work of Harland and Kinder (2014), Leask and Younie (2013), Loughran (2006), MacFarlane and Cartmel (2012). The research participants outline

that the experience of professional development depends upon structural factors. An innovative educational context is likely to support innovative CPD. The frustrations that are expressed by the research participants about CPD link to the structural reality of their professional context. In both private and statutory settings there are structural factors preventing a positive experience of CPD (for example, the need to make profits in the private settings and the necessity of achieving teaching and learning targets in the statutory settings).

The contestation of the concept of professional development provided by ‘Alex’ and ‘Anna’ can also be regarded as an example of ‘practice’ (or a manifestation of subjective understandings of professional development). Although the research participants interpret their CPD events in ways that are informed by the policy texts that have shaped this educational context, these policy texts are not necessarily reinforced. As an example, the emphasis that is placed on enabling ‘everyone’ to ‘rise as high as their talents and effort can take them’ (Conservative Party Manifesto 2015, 81) is viewed by ‘Haley’ in a detrimental way. The educational targets that are checked by Ofsted are likewise regarded negatively by the research participants. ‘Anna’ draws attention to the ‘pace’ of the curriculum and this is regarded as having a harmful influence on CPD.

The paper has considered a significant issue in professional development in education. Although it is important to reflect on the processes of professional development, we also need to consider the structural factors influencing CPD. We do need to consider the emotional affective aspects of CPD (Harland and Kinder 2014). The processes of CPD that MacFarlane and Cartmel (2012) reflect on are of course, vital aspects of professional development in education. The originality of this paper rests in the argument that CPD can be understood through applying an epistemological

interpretation of theories of literacy as social practice (Barton 2007, Barton, Hamilton and Ivanić 2000, Gee 1996). The ‘texts’ (for example policy documents like The EYFS) generate professional development ‘events’ that are interpreted in subjective ways by early years educators as social practices. This epistemological stance enables subjective and objective factors to be taken into consideration in understanding professional development within this particular context. Although this research study is small-scale and qualitative, the wider epistemological framework that has been applied to the research can be applied to other models of CPD. Bagley and Ackerley (2006) make reference to ‘hope’ in their research on educational policy in England. I too, ‘hope’ this new research on CPD provides a helpful insight for all those interested in the professional development of educators at national and international levels.

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Word count: 6,564