

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### Nursery Schools or Nursery Classes? An analysis of national and local policy in England 1918-1972

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**Nursery Schools or Nursery Classes? An analysis of  
national and local policy in England 1918-1972**

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of PhD

School of Education  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis makes a contribution to the study of education policy in England by analysing decisions taken by the Board of Education and its successor bodies from 1918 to 1972 concerning whether self-governing nursery schools or nursery classes attached to infant schools should be the preferred institution for pre-school education. It draws on documentary sources from Board/Ministry of Education files at the National Archives, from Local Authority records, and from the archives of other interested organisations, offering a qualitative analysis influenced by policy and decision-making theory. It argues that these decisions were determined both by fundamental beliefs about what nursery education was for, with schools seen as more suitable for promoting physical well-being and classes as better for easing transition to formal schooling, and by the fact that nursery education was a low political priority in which the limited resources made available were not sufficient for all children to experience the ideal. It demonstrates that the Board/Ministry operated largely as a policy making elite in this area, and neither the voices of the established policy network of educationalists nor marginalised constituencies such as working parents had a significant influence on the decisions. This exclusion militated against the successful implementation of policy.

The thesis also analyses decisions made within four Local Education Authorities (LEAs): two which invested almost exclusively in nursery classes and two which established both schools and classes. These differences emerged prior to World War II and were caused by the varying values and beliefs of the education committees. Despite increased central control after the war, the established paths constrained new developments so that the original patterns largely persisted. Therefore, the local picture offers a small correction to the elitist model of

policymaking as it demonstrates that some voices outside central government had an impact on the implementation process.

## Prefatory Note

I have previously published an article in *Paedagogica Historica* which draws on an early draft for chapter six of this thesis:

Palmer, Amy. "Nursery schools for the few or the many? Childhood, education and the state in mid-twentieth century England." *Paedagogica Historica* XLVII, no. 1 & 2 (2011): 139-154.

I have also published a chapter in an e-book which draws on material from a draft of chapter eight:

Palmer, Amy. "Prudence or Madness: The History of Leicester's Nursery Classes 1927-1967." In *Children and Childhood: Practices and Perspectives*, edited by Chadni Basu and Vicky Anderson-Patton, 31-44. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2013. <https://www.interdisciplinarypress.net/online-store/ebooks/ethos-and-modern-life/children-and-childhood>

# **Nursery Schools or Nursery Classes? An analysis of national and local policy in England 1918-1972**

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Prefatory Note.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Chapter One: Introduction.....</b>	<b>11</b>
1:1 Overview of the thesis.....	11
1:2 A personal rationale.....	13
1:3 Early years provision in England today.....	14
1:4 The shape of the historical investigation.....	18
1:5 Underpinning theory.....	22
1:6 Research questions and structure of the thesis.....	24
<b>Chapter Two: Literature Review.....</b>	<b>27</b>
2:1 Introduction.....	27
2:2 Definitions.....	27
2:3 Theoretical underpinnings: Policy analysis.....	29
2:4 Theoretical underpinnings: Application of policy theory to the history of education.....	38
2:5 A historiography of nursery education policy in England.....	44
2:6 Contextualising literature: The wider history of English education policy.....	56
2:7 Contextualising literature: History of education and Local Education Authorities .....	62
2:8 Summary of existing knowledge regarding the nursery school/nursery class question.....	71

2:9 Conclusion: Justification of the research questions.....	75
<b>Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods.....</b>	<b>77</b>
3:1 Introduction.....	77
3:2 Location within the field of history of education .....	77
3:3 Overview of research design.....	81
3:4 Ethical considerations.....	85
3:5 The selection of documents.....	89
3:6 Reading and interpreting documents.....	94
3:7 Gathering data, coding and retrieving.....	102
3:8 Interpretation: Building a coherent account.....	103
3:9 Interpretation: Answering the research questions.....	107
3:10 Conclusion.....	114
<b>Chapter Four: “The purely experimental stage”: The 1918 Education Act... </b>	<b>115</b>
4:1 Introduction.....	115
4:2 Early reports on educational provision for the under fives.....	118
4:3 The Education Bill of 1913-1914.....	124
4:4 The recommendations of the Office Committee.....	127
4:5 A nascent advocacy coalition for nursery schools.....	130
4:6 Other participants in the process: Elements of dissent.....	135
4:7 First draft of the 1918 Education Bill.....	141
4:8 Revision of the Education Bill.....	143
4:9 The impact of the nursery school clause in the 1918 Education Act.....	149
4:10 Conclusion.....	153

**Chapter Five: Solutions for Normal and Abnormal Children: The 1933 Hadow Report.....157**

5:1 Introduction..... 157

5:2 The reverberation of the 1918 Education Act: questions of definition..... 161

5:3 The reverberation of the 1918 Education Act: a “stop-go” policy.....163

5:4 The significance of the advocacy coalition in the 1920s..... 169

5:5 The referral to the Consultative Committee..... 172

5:6 Formation and working of the committee..... 174

5:7 Teachers and the nursery school/class question: Muddy waters.....177

5:8 The Board’s inspectors and medical officers and the nursery school/class question: A continuum of opinion..... 179

5:9 Local Education Authorities and the nursery school/class question: Circumspection.....182

5:10 Other educational organisations and the nursery school/class question: An alternative model..... 183

5:11 Non-educational organisations: Maintaining the frame..... 186

5:12 The committee’s position..... 188

5:13 Nursery education after Hadow ..... 193

5:14 Conclusion.....198

**Chapter Six: Nursery Schools for the many: The 1944 Education Act.....202**

6:1 Introduction..... 202

6:2 Nursery education prior to World War II..... 207

6:3 The decision between education and childcare.....208

6:4 Early plans for education after the war..... 212

6:5 A sudden change of perspective.....216

6:6 The position in the White Paper..... 221

6:7 The Nursery School Association: Useful for propaganda..... 223



6:8 National Union of Teachers: Selfish concerns.....	228
6:9 Local Education Authorities: Demands for flexibility.....	230
6:10 Working mothers: Obfuscation and disempowerment.....	234
6:11 The fate of the policy in the post-war period.....	235
6:12 Conclusion.....	239
<b>Chapter Seven: “An ad hoc amalgam”: The Plowden Report.....</b>	<b>243</b>
7:1 Introduction.....	243
7:2 The 1950s: The descent of the great freeze.....	246
7:3 The impact of the great freeze on the Ministry’s preference for nursery schools .....	252
7:4 The impact of the great freeze on nursery education advocates.....	255
7:5 An increase of pressure in the 1960s.....	256
7:6 Referral to the Plowden Committee.....	259
7:7 The views of the policy network.....	261
7:8 The Plowden Committee and the question of working mothers.....	265
7:9 The final recommendations.....	266
7:10 The impact of the Plowden Report: Labour’s interpretation.....	269
7:11 The impact of the Plowden Report: The Conservative interpretation.....	277
7:12 The subsequent position of the nursery school/nursery class question.....	281
7:13 Conclusion.....	282
<b>Chapter Eight: A “Correctional Coda”: Explaining diversity in four urban education authorities.....</b>	<b>286</b>
8:1 Introduction.....	286
8:2 Response to the 1918 Education Act.....	291

8:3 The stop-go policy of the 1920s.....	295
8:4 From the Hadow Report to World War II.....	303
8:5 Response to the 1944 Education Act.....	310
8:6 Coping with the 1950s freeze.....	322
8:7 The impact of the Plowden Report.....	327
8:8 Conclusion.....	333
<b>Chapter Nine: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>338</b>
9:1 Overview of the thesis.....	338
9:2 Key findings of the thesis.....	339
9:3 Research question 1a: Factors influencing the preferences of the Board and its successors for either nursery schools or classes.....	342
9:4 Research question 1b: Voices heard and not heard in the decision-making process.....	346
9:5 Research question 2a: Reasons for differences in the distribution of nursery schools and classes in four English cities.....	351
9:6 Research question 2b: The balance of power between central and local government with regard to choices between nursery schools and classes .....	354
9:7 Contribution to knowledge.....	356
<b>Archives and Record Offices.....</b>	<b>360</b>
<b>Bibliography of Primary Sources.....</b>	<b>362</b>
<b>Bibliography of Secondary Sources.....</b>	<b>366</b>

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## Introduction

### 1:1 Overview of the thesis

This thesis investigates choices made between nursery schools and nursery classes by the Board of Education and its successor bodies (the Ministry of Education and the Department of Education and Science) in England from 1918 to 1972. Despite frequent avowals among politicians of all hues that nursery education was a good thing of which the country needed more, development of these services throughout the period remained sluggish, with the influential Plowden Report, published in 1967, reporting that only 7% of children under five were being provided for.<sup>1</sup> This lack of provision meant that whenever nursery education moved up the political agenda, politicians felt that they had something like a blank slate on which to design a system and fundamental questions were asked about what sort of institution would be most suitable. There were a variety of “policy alternatives”<sup>2</sup> from which they could choose, but the two which were overwhelmingly dominant were the nursery school, detached from other institutions and run independently, and the nursery class, an integral part of an existing elementary, primary or infant school.

The thesis argues that the Board/Ministry/DES made its choices between these policy alternatives based in part on dichotomous beliefs about what nursery education was for: promoting the health and wellbeing of the child or preparing him/her for formal schooling. The former motive tended to result in a conviction that nursery schools were ideal, the latter that nursery classes were more suitable.

However, choices made between the two were also constrained by a belief that

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<sup>1</sup> Central Advisory Council for Education (England), *Children and their Primary Schools* (London: HMSO, 1967), 293.

<sup>2</sup> John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Longman, 2003), 3.

resources for nursery education were limited and that it might well be necessary to make do with second best if anything at all were to be achieved. The thesis also argues that the choices were made by a small group of politicians and civil servants within the Board/Ministry/DES and there was little influence from other people. Educationalists, including academics, teachers and their unions and other interest groups such as the Nursery School Association (NSA), were given time and space to present their views but their impact on the final decision was minimal. Other individuals and groups whose lives would be affected by nursery policies, most notably working mothers, were largely excluded from the process. This exclusion had a detrimental effect on the actual usefulness of the proposed institutions and hampered the implementation process.

The thesis also analyses how choices were made between the alternatives of nursery schools and nursery classes within Local Education Authorities (LEAs). It was LEAs who were responsible for policy implementation within their administrative areas. Their freedom to act was constrained by national policy and there were many periods during which central government severely restricted or banned new developments. Nonetheless, different LEAs had markedly different numbers of nursery schools and nursery classes. Some LEAs were committed to establishing nursery schools and maintained a comparatively large number of these in addition to nursery class provision. According to the Plowden Report, nursery schools were “concentrated in a broad crescent” from London through Birmingham to Bradford and then to Durham and barely existed outside this area.<sup>3</sup> Other LEAs were committed to maximising the number of nursery classes provided and had no or

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<sup>3</sup> Central Advisory Council, *Children and their Primary Schools*, 117.

very few nursery schools. This thesis argues that this difference is explained by the fact that local politicians exerted a considerable influence on the choice between nursery schools and classes in the period before World War II and their values and beliefs influenced the services provided in each area. After this period, central government attempted to curtail this relative freedom and to impose its own views more forcefully. Nonetheless, for a variety of emotional and practical reasons, its success in doing so was limited.

## **1:2 A personal rationale**

From 1995 until 2009, I worked as a class teacher in infant schools (for ages 3 to 7) and primary schools (ages 3 to 11), and was based for part of this time in the nursery classes. Throughout my career, I had opportunities of meeting with other nursery class teachers and became aware that many of us experienced the same challenges. The views frequently expressed by my colleagues were that the environments in which they worked were far from ideal: indoor space was limited, suitable outside play areas even more so, and resources of all types far from plentiful. Moreover, they felt that there were difficulties involved in sharing space with the rest of the school, such as disagreements around the noise levels of the young children playing (or learning through active experiences) while the older ones were “working” (sitting at tables and writing). More subtly, nursery classes were frequently expected to take part, and be seen to take part, in the wider school activities, even when these activities were arguably inappropriate for such young children, such as sitting through lengthy assemblies.

One day, however, during the mid-2000s, I was given the opportunity to visit a nursery school for children aged 3 to 5. This school was a short walk away from the primary school where the nursery class in which I was working was situated. It was run by the same LEA and served an identical population of children in terms of its ethnic and socio-economic composition. The differences between what these children and my class experienced was striking. The school was spacious, with a large open plan area supplemented by a series of cosy annexes set up, among other things, as art areas, construction areas and sensory areas and there was easy access to a large garden with an imaginatively designed climbing frame. This was quite a contrast to my nursery class set in two ordinary classrooms, with an outdoor area of a tiny L-shaped piece of concrete on which we just about had room for our rather rusty set of A-shaped metal frames and splintering planks. The nursery school had a very favourable staff to pupil ratio: eleven adults worked directly with the 59 children on roll. In my nursery class, four members of staff worked with 52 children. Problems that we experienced frequently in the nursery class regarding being expected to join in with activities more suitable for older children did not exist at all in the nursery school. I felt both aggrieved and intrigued. How could the LEA justify such an apparent discrepancy? How could such a situation have arisen? This was the emotional seed of the journey which I have undertaken in this PhD.

### **1:3 Early years provision in England today**

Nursery classes and nursery schools of the type analysed in this thesis have a great deal in common. Firstly, they are both a form of state provision and are free to parents (private settings may also use the term “nursery school” to refer to

themselves, but these are not considered here.) Secondly, they are *educational* establishments and the responsibility of the Department of Education. This means that they are part of an educational rather than childcare tradition, and thus have a long history of focusing primarily on the developmental needs of children rather than meeting the requirements of working parents. Thirdly, they are specifically intended for children below the age of compulsory schooling. This is currently age five in England, with children required to start school at the beginning of the term following their fifth birthday.<sup>4</sup> In these ways, nursery schools and classes are linked together and are jointly differentiated from other institutions in which young children may be found, which may be private, not educational and not exclusively designed for children in this age group.

The most recent government statistics concerning the number of children in different early years institutions date from 2009.<sup>5</sup> These report that 96% of 3 and 4 year olds are “benefitting from some free early years education.” However, only 59% are attending maintained nursery schools or primary schools, so that the private and voluntary sector is actually making provision for many children, whilst claiming some money back from the state. In such a complex system, the government does not give prominence to statistics regarding the types of maintained education which children are attending, and numbers in nursery schools and nursery classes are reported together. 27% of the population of 3 and 4 years olds are either in nursery schools or nursery classes. This is 322 600 children. (The discrepancy between this

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<sup>4</sup> Directgov, “School attendance and absence: the law,” United Kingdom Government, [http://www.directgov.uk/en/parents/schoolslearninganddevelopment/yourchildswelfareatschool/dg\\_066966](http://www.directgov.uk/en/parents/schoolslearninganddevelopment/yourchildswelfareatschool/dg_066966)

<sup>5</sup> Department of Education, “DCSF: Provision for children under five years of age in England January 2009,” <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000848/sfr11-2009.pdf>



and the 59% figure is explained by large numbers of children in Reception classes for 4 and 5 year olds).<sup>6</sup> Combining this figure with data about the number of nursery schools shows that the overwhelming majority of these 322 600 are in nursery classes: there are only 437 nursery schools in England,<sup>7</sup> most of which cater for somewhere between 50 and 100 children.

It is clear from the form in which these statistics are presented that the difference between schools and classes is not seen as particularly significant by the government. However, nursery schools have passionate advocates who claim that what they offer is qualitatively different from that being offered elsewhere (although a direct comparison with nursery classes is not often the focus). The National Union of Teachers (NUT), for example, produced a briefing document in 2006, arguing that nursery school staff have a knowledge and experience of early years pedagogy which exceeds that of staff in other settings because they are able to focus exclusively on the needs of 3 to 5 year olds and resist external pressures to fit in with older children more effectively. They can also be more responsive to the particular needs of the parents of the age group. In short, they provide a model of good practice which has benefits for other settings in the geographical area.<sup>8</sup> The group Early Education has similarly run a campaign to preserve the traditional nursery school, also arguing that the staff have developed a particular and valuable expertise. It cites 2007-2008 figures from the national inspectorate, OFSTED, showing that 47% of nursery

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<sup>6</sup> Department of Children and Families, "Statistical First Release: Provision for children under five years of age in England: January 2009,"

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/sfr112009pdf.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Early Education, "Nursery Schools Now: Maintained Nursery Schools in England and their role in supporting the evolution of early childhood services 2009," <http://www.early-education.org.uk/sites/default/files/Nursery%20Schools%20Now%20report.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> National Union of Teachers, "The Case for Nursery Schools: An NUT Briefing – September 2006," [www.teachers.org.uk/.../EYC%20CASE%20FOR%20NURSERY%20SCHOOLS\\_KDR.doc](http://www.teachers.org.uk/.../EYC%20CASE%20FOR%20NURSERY%20SCHOOLS_KDR.doc)

schools were judged to be good or outstanding, compared to 3% of institutions in the early years sector as a whole (a figure which, however, excludes nursery classes as these are not graded separately from the primary or infant school in which they are situated).<sup>9</sup>

There is research evidence which suggests that these advocates are right in associating nursery schools with a quality of provision which is superior to that found elsewhere, including in nursery classes, and that differences between the institutions do have a significant impact on children's development. The most important research in the area is the 1997-2004 government funded Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project, whose authors claimed, with some justice, that it was the first large-scale research into "the effects of different kinds of pre-school."<sup>10</sup> The EPPE project attempted to quantify the quality of different institutions, using a variation on the internationally established Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale: Revised (ECERS-R). This involved grading settings on a variety of characteristics, including physical environment, organisation and routines, and social interaction, based on observation and discussions with staff. The project concluded that although there were settings of all types which were of good quality, overall quality was likely to be higher in the newly established "settings integrating care and education" (children's centres, often developed from a traditional nursery school) and in nursery schools.<sup>11</sup> Nursery classes were, as a

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<sup>9</sup> Early Education, "Nursery Schools Now: Maintained Nursery Schools in England and their role in supporting the evolution of early childhood services 2009," <http://www.early-education.org.uk/sites/default/files/Nursery%20Schools%20Now%20report.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Kathy Sylva, Edward Melhuish, Pam Sammons, Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Brenda Taggart, *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE Project): Final Report – A longitudinal study funded by the DfES 1997-2004* (Nottingham: DfES, 2004), 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, ii.

group, of lower quality than these institutions, although higher than the other forms of setting considered. The research established clear links between the settings deemed high quality and “better intellectual and social/behavioural outcomes at entry to school.”<sup>12</sup> The EPPE project demonstrated, then, that a child who attends a nursery school or integrated centre starts with an advantage in life. If some children are advantaged by the system, then others are disadvantaged. The English system is fundamentally unfair.

#### **1:4 The shape of the historical investigation**

This thesis analyses why state run nursery education in England includes both the nursery school and the nursery class, thereby propagating a lack of equality in what is offered to young children. Research into patterns of inequality is important: there is a need to understand how policy has developed and how power has been exercised in order to see policy and power as humanly constructed rather than natural phenomena. This is the necessary groundwork to understanding when and where things might be changed and how this could be achieved. The question of the choice between nursery schools and nursery classes has not been investigated systematically and in a focused way before, and thus this represents a significant contribution to knowledge.

This project is situated within a specific time period, which is 1918 to 1972. The Education Act of 1918 represents a convenient starting point to the story, as this permitted LEAs to support nursery schools financially for the first time: it had already been possible for them to designate a class within a public elementary school

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., iii.

as a “nursery class” although the definition of the term was rather vague.<sup>13</sup> The mixed system thus had its origins here. The 1972 White Paper, *Education: A Framework for Expansion*,<sup>14</sup> was the last serious attempt at a national level to make a decision about whether nursery classes or nursery schools were the most suitable form of provision for young children. From this point on, to take a phrase from New Labour’s 1997 White Paper *Excellence in Schools*, “standards would matter more than structures.”<sup>15</sup> The 1972 White Paper recommended that all future expansion should be in nursery classes not nursery schools and this is very largely what happened. This is indicated by the similarity in the number of nursery schools in the 1960s and today. A report by Early Education claims that there were 437 English nursery schools in existence in 2009.<sup>16</sup> According to a Working Party for the Plowden Report, the number was 458 in 1963.<sup>17</sup> Thus the period 1918-1972 is the one where the crucial decisions were made and the one which is vital for an understanding of how the system of nursery schools and nursery classes developed.

Throughout the 1918 -1972 period, the number of children actually receiving education in nursery schools or classes was very low. Nursery schools spread very slowly in the 1920s, so that, according to a Board of Education memorandum, there

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<sup>13</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1918, clause 19; Lewis to unknown recipient, May 20, 1918, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1), ED 24 760. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Education and Science, *Education: A Framework for Expansion* (London: HMSO, 1972).

<sup>15</sup> Stephen J. Ball, *The Education Debate* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2008), 90.

<sup>16</sup> Early Education, “Nursery Schools Now: Maintained Nursery Schools in England and their role in supporting the evolution of early childhood services,” <http://www.early-education.org.uk/pdf/NSN%20download%20version.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Central Advisory Council, *WP3 Paper 13*, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports ED 146 85. National Archives, Kew.

were only 27 in existence in 1929.<sup>18</sup> By 1938, there were 105 and in 1947, there were 278, an increase caused by Local Education Authorities creating schools out of emergency war-time accommodation.<sup>19</sup> In 1952, the number was 457 and it remained at this level until 1958 because financial problems limited expansion.<sup>20</sup> In 1963, there were 458<sup>21</sup> but the number had dropped to 420 by 1965.<sup>22</sup>

It is very difficult to plot the growth of nursery classes in the same way, as the definition of what did or did not constitute a nursery class was much less precise. There was also, for most of this period, no need for local authorities to consult with central government about the establishment of nursery classes and therefore figures were not collected centrally. When Phoebe Cusden, a member of the Nursery School Association, requested information on the subject from the Board in 1937, she was told that “the number of children under 5 in Public Elementary Schools is about 158 000 but the Board’s records do not enable them to say how many of these children are in classes which can be regarded as Nursery Classes.”<sup>23</sup> Officials in 1951 estimated that the number of nursery classes was “rather more than 2000,” catering for about 60 000 children.<sup>24</sup> The Plowden Report put the total number of

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<sup>18</sup> WHR (M Section), Under 5s Committee, Memorandum on Nursery Schools, November 29, 1928, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1), ED 24 1468. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>19</sup> Ainsworth and Maudslay, Memorandum, November 24, 1938, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 5. National Archives, Kew; MB(unclear) (on behalf of Strong) to Barker, June 21, 1947, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 37. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>20</sup> Lloyd to Tewson, November 7, 1958, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 54. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>21</sup> Central Advisory Council, *WP3 Paper 13*, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports ED 146 85. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>22</sup> Central Advisory Council, *Children and their Primary Schools*, 109.

<sup>23</sup> Strong to Cusden, July 7, 1937, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 5. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>24</sup> Mannington (unclear) to Murton, October 27, 1951, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 38. National Archives, Kew.

classes at 1017.<sup>25</sup> It would seem that nursery class provision was considerably more extensive than nursery school provision throughout the period, but still only developed on a small scale. The Plowden totals of schools and classes together represented only 7% of children under five.<sup>26</sup>

This matters, because it meant that supporters of nursery education throughout the 1918-1972 period were almost always involved in, or perceived themselves to be involved in, a struggle to either expand provision, or, in the darker times, to protect what had already been established. They had to put much of their campaigning energies into finding a place for nursery education on the political agenda. Only when nursery education rose on this agenda were policy-makers likely to engage in focused debate about the possible “alternatives” of schools and classes.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the thesis is structured around the four decision-making points, or “policy windows,”<sup>28</sup> when the question of a choice between nursery classes or nursery schools became a live issue. Two of these are during the creation of major pieces of wide-reaching education legislation which positioned nursery education as part of the national system, namely the 1918 and 1944 Education Act.<sup>29</sup> The other two occurred during the writing of reports by the government’s advisory councils where nursery education was a key consideration: *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools* in 1933 (a Hadow Report) and *Children and their Primary Schools* in 1967 (the Plowden Report).<sup>30</sup> Politicians were by no

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<sup>25</sup> Central Advisory Council, *Children and their Primary Schools*, 109.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>27</sup> Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, passim.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, passim.

<sup>29</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1918; United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1944.

<sup>30</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools* (London: HMSO, 1933); Central Advisory Council, *Children and their Primary Schools*.

means obliged to follow the recommendations in these reports, but they were certainly expected to consider them and formulate some sort of a response. It is, however, impossible to fully understand the context of these decision-making points and the nature of the discussion without being aware of the events in the intervening times which impacted on the decision-makers and nursery advocates and the analysis of each decision necessarily includes discussion about how it arose in the first place, and also its immediate consequences.

The fact that marked differences are apparent between different LEAs means that an analysis of the policies of central government is not sufficient for a full investigation of this policy area. It is also necessary to consider how LEAs made their choices between nursery classes and nursery schools, as they were the bodies responsible for the implementation of the policy. Therefore, the thesis compares the development of the two forms of provision within four urban areas (as this was where the overwhelming majority of nursery education of any sort was situated during the 1918-1972 period). Manchester and Leicester represent LEAs who invested heavily in nursery classes but not nursery schools whereas London and Birmingham represent LEAs who developed both forms of provision. This analysis provides a degree of correction to the idea that central government had complete control of the policy area, and demonstrates that local voices were significant, particularly in the period prior to World War II.

### **1:5 Underpinning theory**

The thesis uses the term “policy analysis” in its title. This term is used in many ways by political theorists, but is here taken as an equivalent of educational

sociologist Trevor Gale's "policy genealogy" which is an investigation of how policies change over time, with an emphasis on who is involved in managing the change and the processes whereby policy actors relate to each other.<sup>31</sup> The application of policy theory to the history of early years education is very atypical of the field (as is discussed in depth in chapter section 2.5) and therefore using the theories below to investigate decision-making in this area represents a contribution to academic knowledge.

The thesis is informed by theories from the field of public policy studies and analyses how power operated in the decision-making around this particular question. Policy theorist, Michael Hill, has identified a "strong division" between pluralist theories, which state that many individuals and groups may have a hand in determining policy, and elitist (or neo-Marxist) beliefs, which see power as resting solely in the hands of a select few.<sup>32</sup> At each of the key decision-making points identified above, these competing theories are investigated by examining the perspectives of groups and individuals which directly expressed interest in nursery education, such as campaigning groups, teachers and teaching unions, academics and local authorities and also groups who would be affected by nursery education policies, and analysing how these fed into the process. The thesis concludes that in fact impact was slight and the elitist model provides the best fit.

Another key theoretical interest in the thesis is policy change over time. The thesis demonstrates the applicability of the punctuated equilibrium theory, proposed

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<sup>31</sup> Trevor Gale, "Revising Policy: The *Who* and *How* of Policy Production," in *The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Education Policy and Politics*, ed. Bob Lingard and Jenny Ozga (London: Routledge, 2007), 220-235, 221.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Hill, *The Public Policy Process*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Harlow: Pearson Educational, 2009), 8.



by Jones and Baumgartner, to this policy area. This theory holds that political change is usually gradual and incremental but that sudden shifts can occur due to external crises or issues rising up the wider political agenda and attracting the interest of fresh participants.<sup>33</sup> In the case of nursery education policy at the national level, incremental development was disrupted by sudden shifts which occurred during World War II and in response to the Plowden Report. In contrast, at the local level, LEA policy in the cities investigated developed incrementally with no dramatic punctuations.

The theory of “path dependency,” which holds that policy decisions have a restrictive influence on subsequent options,<sup>34</sup> is useful for explaining the different patterns of change at the national and the local level. As the national government made very little investment in nursery education in the 1918-1972 period, and very few of the decisions made about forms of institution were ever implemented, changes of direction could be made without significant consequences. However, in LEAs where significant investment had been made in one form or another and infrastructure was in place, sudden change was difficult, financially and politically.

## **1:6 Research questions and structure of the thesis**

The research questions flow from this nexus of interests, and are:

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<sup>33</sup> James L. True, Bryan D. Jones and Frank R. Baumgartner, “Punctuated-Equilibrium Theory: Explaining Stability and Change in Public Policy,” in *Theories of the Policy Process*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Paul A. Sabatier (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2007), 155-187.

<sup>34</sup> Adrian Kay, *The Dynamics of Public Policy: Theory and Evidence* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2006), 29.

- 1 (a) Which factors influenced the Board of Education and its successor bodies in indicating or failing to indicate a preference for either nursery classes or nursery schools in its pre-school education policies in England from 1918 to 1972?
- 1 (b) Which groups/individuals were able to make their voices heard and which groups/individuals were not able to make their voices heard in the decision-making process?
- 2 (a) How does one account for differences in the distribution of nursery classes and nursery schools in four major English cities?
- 2 (b) What was the balance of power between central and local government in the choices made between nursery schools and nursery classes in these English cities?

The thesis begins with a Literature Review (chapter 2), which analyses the relevant existing research concerning the history of English nursery education policy, theories of policy formation and the decision-making process, key developments in the history of wider English education policy at the four identified decision-points and the role of LEAs in the development of nursery education. This chapter offers further justification for the research questions in terms of their ability to generate new knowledge and make a contribution to the field. Chapter 3, the Methodology and Methods chapter, explains in detail how data was gathered from a

wide variety of archival and published sources and analysed in order to generate answers to the questions. The following four chapters analyse each of the decision points in turn. These give contextual information about how the need to make a decision arose in the first place, explore the views of the relevant participants, track the decision process with a view to judging which participants and which arguments carried weight, and also give an indication of the immediate aftermath of the decision. In the case of the Plowden and Hadow chapters (7 and 5 respectively), this is complicated by the fact that there was a double decision to be made: one by the advisory committee and one by the government in response. The chapters flow from each other in chronological order and the pre-decision and post-decision sections ensure that in fact the whole of the period 1918-1972 is considered. Chapter 8 examines the decision-making process within the four local authorities. The method used to answer the research questions here is to compare decisions made by each authority in various periods of time both with each other and with the advice and recommendations of the Board/Ministry of Education. Reasons why the policy within the LEAs complies or does not comply with the national agenda are suggested. Finally, the Conclusion (chapter 9) restates the arguments presented above in more detail, drawing on and summarising the evidence in the chapters which precede it.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2:1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the academic literature which is relevant to policy in the area of nursery education in England from 1918 to 1972. After a definition of key terms used within this thesis, the underpinning theories from the field of policy analysis are presented and the use of policy theory in the History of Education is considered. The chapter then offers a historiography of nursery education policy in England and provides an overview of contextualising literature with regard to relevant key points in the history of English education and to the history of English local education authorities (LEAs). A detailed analysis of existing research about the specific question of choices made between nursery schools and nursery classes leads into a justification for the research questions.

### **2:2 Definitions**

This thesis is concerned with state educational provision for children below statutory school age in England. “Educational” provision is that established and maintained by LEAs under the ultimate jurisdiction of the Board/Ministry/Department of Education. In recent decades, the establishment of “grant-maintained schools,” “academies” and, most recently of all, “free schools” have disrupted the link between LEAs and some state schools within the geographical area of their responsibility, but this is not of relevance to the period under consideration. The terms “nursery class” and “nursery school” are used for different forms of educational provision. The most enduring definition of the difference between them is that which is listed second in the 1933 Hadow Report’s extensive list of their

distinguishing features: “a nursery school is usually a separate educational unit under its own superintendent whereas a nursery class forms an integral part of an infant school.”<sup>1</sup> Before 1933, the terms were more fluid, with the term “nursery school” sometimes encompassing the “nursery class.” This was implied by the 1918 Education Act, and definitions from this period will be explored in detail in chapter four.

Another key term in this thesis is “policy analysis.” According to Knoepfel and colleagues, this is an “interpretative process, involving the reconstruction (or designation) of a policy as a group of decisions and actions taken and implemented by private and public actors and aimed at the resolution of a clearly defined public problem.”<sup>2</sup> The use of the term “interpretative” implies that the researcher must decide him/herself what is and what is not important in understanding a particular policy. The elements that feature in the analysis are thus dependent on the precise questions asked.

Some policy analysts have tried to divide the field into different areas or categories. One example is Michael Hill, who makes a distinction between an analysis of “policy content,” the emergence, implementation and results of a policy, and of “policy process,” which concentrates on “how policy decisions are made and how policies are shaped in action.”<sup>3</sup> However, these categories seem to blur a great deal in practice: it is surely difficult to talk about “implementation,” for example, without considering how the policy is shaped in action.

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<sup>1</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools* (London: HMSO, 1933), 110.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Knoepfel, Corinne Larrue, Frédéric Varone and Michael Hill, *Public Policy Analysis* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2011), xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Hill, *The Public Policy Process*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Harlow: Pearson Educational, 2009), 5.

Analysts differ with regard to the extent to which they see their work as offering a direct model of how policy should ideally be formulated and implemented. Ham and Hill have described this as a divide between analysis “of” policy-making and analysis “for” policy-making.<sup>4</sup> However, in his call for a “critical” approach to policy analysis, Trevor Gale has argued that such a distinction is of limited usefulness.<sup>5</sup> A contribution to the understanding of how power operates will necessarily inform and empower those who wish to influence the process.

The “policy analysis” in this thesis is concerned both with Hill’s content and process and considers the elements which he assigns to each of these aspects. However, in the particular case of decisions about nursery classes and schools, policies at national level were rarely fully implemented and therefore most discussion centres on policy emergence and the consequences of non-implementation for the next policy configuration. Within the arena of local policy, the thesis investigates the implementation element more fully. It does not set out to provide a blueprint of how the policy process should ideally operate, but nonetheless it casts a light on how power functions in this arena and is therefore of value, particularly for those groups who have struggled in the past to make their voices heard.

### **2:3 Theoretical underpinnings: Policy analysis**

Policy analysts are fundamentally interested in the nature of power. Hill has identified four “main approaches to power:” These are “representative government,”

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Ham and Michael Hill, *The Policy Process in the Modern Capitalist State* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1984), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Trevor Gale, “Critical policy sociology: historiography, archaeology and genealogy as methods of policy analysis,” *Journal of Education Policy* 16, no. 5 (2001): 379-393.

which sees a relatively unproblematic relationship between voters' wishes and parliamentary activity; "pluralist government," where competition between groups is the driving force in the policy process; "government by an unrepresentative elite," which could, for example, be a bureaucratic elite such as the civil service, and "chaotic" government.<sup>6</sup> Thus the distinguishing characteristic of the four models is the breadth of participation within the process, and the effectiveness of that participation. One would anticipate variance from one political system to another, between different policy areas (such as health, transport or education) and across different time periods.

The policy analyst may work within a particular framework, where a particular theory has been accepted in advance. On the other hand, s/he may be interested in exploring "competing and contradictory explanations," or in developing a "synthetic theory," which picks and mixes elements from different sources.<sup>7</sup> In practice, these two latter aims may overlap. The classic example of a researcher testing the strength of each model for a single context is Graham Allison's *Essence of a Decision* about the Cuban Missile Crisis, which was published in 1971.<sup>8</sup> Contemporary theorists Knoepfel and colleagues suggest a similar approach and have devised a method of analysis in which the researcher "remains completely open" to all hypotheses about the exercise of power.<sup>9</sup> This does not preclude the development of a synthetic theory. Cairney suggests "a multiple lenses approach" which enables the production of a "checklist of questions." If these questions draw

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<sup>6</sup> Hill, *Public Policy Process*, 26.

<sup>7</sup> Cairney, *Understanding Public Policy*, 266.

<sup>8</sup> Wayne Parsons, *An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Policy Analysis* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Knoepfel et al., *Public Policy Analysis*, 13.

on different theories, then it is likely that the researcher will generate a synthetic theory in order to explain a particular policy situation.<sup>10</sup> All of these approaches suggest the continuing value of the individual case study. McFarland believes that fresh case studies are “not likely to bring major change” to policy theory in general but are nonetheless of crucial importance to those who have an interest in particular policy areas.<sup>11</sup>

Of Hill’s four approaches to power, the concept of “pluralist government,” or pluralism, is the one most in need of further explanation, as definitions and understandings of it differ. Hardy and Clegg have identified the work of Max Weber as important in the development of pluralist theory.<sup>12</sup> Whereas Marx focused on ownership of capital as the source of political power, Weber believed that “the concept of power is sociologically amorphous. All conceivable qualities of a person and all conceivable combinations of circumstances may put him in a position to impose his will in a given situation.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, for Weber, power was more evenly distributed in society than might at first appear, and the ruling classes needed to consider the needs of others and negotiate with them.

The disputes about the definition of pluralism concern the extent to which pluralist theorists believe that participation is equally available to all, thus resulting in a fair and open system. Several recent theorists suggest that this is indeed what pluralists believe(d) and that this is an untenable notion which renders the theory

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<sup>10</sup> Cairney, *Understanding Public Policy*, 282.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew S. McFarland, *Neopluralism: The Evolution of the Political Process Theory* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Cynthia Hardy and Stewart Clegg, “Some Dare Call it Power,” in *The Sage Handbook of Organization Studies* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Stewart R. Clegg, Cynthia Hardy, Thomas B. Lawrence and Walter R. Nord (London: Sage, 2006), 754-755,755.

<sup>13</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An outline of interpretative sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 53.



obsolete. Knoepfel and colleagues identify pluralism with a conception “of the state as a ‘service hatch,’ whose purpose is to respond to social demands” and therefore see the theory as fanciful because many social demands are not heard.<sup>14</sup> Joan Roelofs dismisses pluralism in a similar way: “the pluralist view of the US political system maintains that democracy is vindicated through the interest group process. Aggrieved minorities have simply to organise and put pressure on the system and so will achieve at least some of their goals.”<sup>15</sup> Roelofs argues forcefully that this idea is simplistic. However, such interpretations of pluralism should be treated as suspect: Pluralists have rarely been so naïve as to suggest that the system is completely fair and everything will work out for the best. As McLennon has pointed out, even Robert Dahl, the author of the seminal pluralist text, *Who Governs?*, calls the idea that all groups have equal access to power “rather absurd.”<sup>16</sup>

One policy theorist who makes a case for the continuing usefulness and relevance of pluralist theory is Andrew S. McFarland. He holds that the keystone of pluralism is viewing the policy process as “a fluid, shifting interaction of politicians, groups, governmental agencies and political parties, all affecting one another over time” and accepts this as a valid description of political reality.<sup>17</sup> He defends classic pluralist authors from charges of naivety, but nonetheless implies that the theory has developed over the years, through “a research sequence, not a paradigm shift,”<sup>18</sup> and that recent formulations are much clearer than pluralism does not automatically lead

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<sup>14</sup> Knoepfel et al, *Public Policy Analysis*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Joan Roelofs, *Foundations of Public Policy: The Mask of Pluralism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 121.

<sup>16</sup> Gregor McLennon, “The Evolution of Pluralist Theory,” in *The Policy Process*, ed. Michael Hill (Hemel Hempstead: Wheatsheaf, 1993), 59-68, 61.

<sup>17</sup> McFarland, *Neopluralism*, 22.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

to political/social justice. He uses the term “neopluralism” to describe the point the theory has now reached. Neopluralism has been enriched, he claims, by the infusion of new ideas about how interest groups are maintained, how social movements contribute to the policy process and by the admission that there is a “possibility for government agency autonomy”<sup>19</sup> and so has become a “more developed, synthetic theory with a broader scope.”<sup>20</sup> It is a theory which hoovers up and absorbs into itself other theories, whether or not their original authors would choose to place their work under that banner.

Among the contemporary concepts which McFarland draws into the scope of neopluralism are the network approach and the advocacy coalition framework. The key idea of the network approach is that policies are managed by a group of actors who “are dependent on each other because they need each other’s resources to achieve their goals.”<sup>21</sup> The relationship, however, can take different forms with either “conflict,” “bargaining” or “cooperation” being the dominant characteristic.<sup>22</sup> Particularly in the case of policy areas of low public interest, participants in such a network may be able to negotiate policy between themselves without much interference. Terms such as “policy community,”<sup>23</sup> “policy subsystem,”<sup>24</sup> and “iron triangle,”<sup>25</sup> are used to describe this phenomenon.<sup>26</sup> These terms seem to overlap

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>21</sup> Silke Adam and Hanspeter Kriesi, “The Network Approach,” in *Theories of the Policy Process* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed Paul Sabatier (Boulder, Co: Westview, 2007), 129-154, 129.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>23</sup> Jeremy Richardson, “Government, interest groups and policy change,” *Political Studies* 48 (2000): 1006-1025.

<sup>24</sup> Paul A. Sabatier and Christopher M. Weible, “The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Innovations and Clarifications,” in *Theories of the Policy Process* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Paul Sabatier (Boulder, Co: Westview, 2007), 189-220.

<sup>25</sup> Cairney, *Understanding Public Policy*.

<sup>26</sup> Silke Adam and Hanspeter Kriesi, “The Network Approach,” in *Theories of the Policy Process* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Paul A. Sabatier, (Boulder, CO: Westview), 129-154, 129.

somewhat. Cairney, following Marsh and Rhodes, suggests a continuum from the community, which is tightly structured and closed, to the network which is larger, looser and encompasses more conflicting groups.<sup>27</sup> In his view, it is the “policy community,” “rich in resources” with “high-shared values” which has been most influential in British politics.<sup>28</sup>

The Advocacy Coalition Framework, initially developed by American policy theorists, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, and later developed by researchers from around the world, is a theory, or cluster of related theories (hence the use of the term “framework”)<sup>29</sup> which take an expansive view of who is involved in the policy process and is additionally interested, for example, in the roles of academics and journalists. The subject of study is the way in which “actors from a variety of institutions who share a set of policy beliefs” interact in order to work towards goals.<sup>30</sup> In this framework, ideas and beliefs are clearly of high importance. Sabatier and Weible make a useful distinction between “deep core beliefs,” which are a person’s perspective of fundamental issues such as the left/right divide, “policy core beliefs,” which are “subsystem-wide in scope,” and “secondary beliefs,” which are narrower and relate to a specific policy. The first two are extremely hard to change, the third is easier.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Cairney, *Understanding Public Policy*, 178.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher M. Weible, Paul A. Sabatier, Hank C. Jenkins-Smith, Daniel Nohrstedt, Adam Douglas Henry and Peter deLeon, “A quarter century of the Advocacy Coalition Framework: an introduction to the special issue,” *Policy Studies Journal* 39, no. 3 (2011): 349-360.

<sup>30</sup> Paul A. Sabatier, “The Need for Better Theories” in *Theories of the Policy Process* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Paul Sabatier (Boulder, Co: Westview, 2007), 3-17.

<sup>31</sup> Sabatier and Weible, “The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Innovations and Clarifications,” 194-196.

McFarland acknowledges that the reputation of pluralist theory has been plagued by the question of “nonissues.”<sup>32</sup> Classic pluralists preferred to concentrate on observable decision-making rather than the reasons why certain issues do not rise to the attention of the policy-makers, or the way in which policy-makers exercise their “capacity to keep issues off the agenda which they control.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, critics have argued that a pluralist study of the operation of power is necessarily incomplete. According to McFarland, this criticism is no longer justified and he argues that it is possible to study the “limitation or repression” of ideas: how they are opposed by the economically powerful or treated with indifference by the politically powerful within a neopluralist framework.<sup>34</sup> An analysis of agenda-setting can be incorporated into a neopluralist study.

John Kingdon, a leading theorist in this sub-field, defines an agenda as “the list of subjects or problems to which government officials and people outside of government clearly associated with those officials are paying some serious attention at any given time.”<sup>35</sup> The idea that people in public positions cannot possibly pay attention to all issues at the same time is a key concept, described as “bounded rationality.”<sup>36</sup> The question is, then, why some issues catch their attention and some do not. This is a matter that is easier to answer by considering policy change over time, rather than by taking a snapshot of practice at a specific moment. Kingdon uses the metaphor of various “streams” coming together in ways that influence the agenda. There is a “political stream,” which includes “swings of national mood,

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<sup>32</sup> McFarland, *Neopluralism*, 125.

<sup>33</sup> Parsons, *Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Policy Analysis*, 135.

<sup>34</sup> McFarland, *Neopluralism*, 128.

<sup>35</sup> John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Longman, 2003), 3.

<sup>36</sup> Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), xxii.

administration and legislative turnover and interest group pressure campaigns,”<sup>37</sup> and also a “problem stream,” which consists of “conditions or external events themselves” but with a “perceptual, interpretative element” (a situation has to be recognised by someone as a problem).<sup>38</sup> Events in either stream may place an issue on the agenda and open a “window” for action.<sup>39</sup> A third stream, “policy proposal,” the domain of a “hidden cluster” of actors, including experts and specialists, constantly generates “alternatives” which bubble in a “policy primeval soup.”<sup>40</sup> When the window is open, “policy entrepreneurs” have the opportunity to “push their pet solution” from the soup.<sup>41</sup> It is this combination of factors which drives the policy process forward.

Other key theories for this thesis also relate to policy change over time. One example of these is incrementalist theory, particularly in the form of “path dependency,” which holds that for both psychological and practical reasons changes of direction become difficult.<sup>42</sup> Policy theorist, Adrian Kay, has summarised criticisms of the path dependency concept (he prefers not to call it a theory) in the policy study field. One key point is that it is very difficult to demonstrate that “what did not happen could not have happened,” in other words that a lack of change was inevitable.<sup>43</sup> Kay also argues that path dependency cannot explain change when it does occur, focusing as it does on reasons for stability. Nonetheless, he believes

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<sup>37</sup> Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, 20.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-110.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>42</sup> Kirsten Scheiwe and Harry Willekens, eds. *Child Care and Preschool Development in Europe: Institutional Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>43</sup> Adrian Kay, “A critique of the use of path dependency in policy studies,” *Public Administration* 83, no 3 (2005): 554.

that the concept does have value both in his own field and in others, but must be used alongside related ideas in order to widen its applicability.

The theory of “punctuated equilibrium,” developed by Jones and Baumgartner, is one such theory which can offer refinements to path dependency.<sup>44</sup> It is based on the empirical observation that “political processes are generally characterized by stability and incrementalism, but occasionally they produce large-scale departures from the past.”<sup>45</sup> The explanation rests on the idea that policy networks can frequently manage areas quietly and away from the spotlight, but that occasionally (and unpredictably) issues will “be forced onto the macropolitical agenda” and consequently the course of events will deviate from the established path.<sup>46</sup> They may be forced there for a variety of reasons, including shocks to the system caused by external events and changes in the way that the issue is understood, or “framed,” which is to say who and what it concerns and who and what it does not concern. Cairney writes about punctuations in equilibrium being caused by the fact that “participants may try to minimize or expand frames.”<sup>47</sup> An issue may become more prominent because participants (perhaps in advocacy coalitions) have successfully persuaded others that they should become involved. Conversely, a policy network can regain sole control of a hot issue by framing it as “solved,” “dull” or “technical.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> James L. True, Bryan D. Jones and Frank R. Baumgartner, “Punctuated-Equilibrium Theory: Explaining Stability and Change in Public Policy,” in *Theories of the Policy Process*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Paul A. Sabatier (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2007), 155-187, 155.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>47</sup> Cairney, *Understanding Public Policy*, 175.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 177.

This thesis draws on all of the ideas above in its analysis of English nursery education policy. It is fundamentally interested in the concept of power and who was and who was not able to influence decision-making in this area. It weighs which of the models of power presented by Hill is the best fit at points in the process. It analyses the extent to which policy participants in the process were able to work together in a network and who was excluded from that network. It offers a perspective on why nursery education rose or failed to raise on the agenda at various points in the process and why changes of direction occurred or failed to occur.

#### **2:4 Theoretical underpinnings: Applications of policy theory to the history of education**

The field of history of education has traditionally concerned itself with the development of national educational systems and, moreover, has generally constructed its histories with a “top-down tendency” to prioritise the views and experiences of the policy makers.<sup>49</sup> One might therefore anticipate that the use of policy theory by historians of education would be very widespread and well established. This is not the case, and is perhaps indicative of the field’s traditional reluctance to engage in theory.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, there is a body of work which makes use of some the ideas and concepts discussed above. The number of historians of education looking for applications of these theories may indeed be increasing: in his overview of research into his area of interest, secondary education, McCulloch has noted an increase in articles of this nature in *History of Education* over the last two

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<sup>49</sup> Gary McCulloch, *The Struggle for the History of Education* (London: Routledge, 2011), 78.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

decades, which he ascribes to increasing state activity and prescription in the policy area.<sup>51</sup>

Theories of the nature of power within the state have been explicitly addressed by some historians of education. Some have tried to determine whether educational policy formation, within a particular time and space, could be characterised as, for example, elitist or pluralist. The elitist position would suggest that policy is made by a small number of leading politicians/administrators. With regard to England, arguments have been made on both sides, by historians investigating different time periods. Gail Savage, who focuses on 1919-1939, sees policy in this period as dominated by civil servants who were drawn from a particular social elite.<sup>52</sup> Lodge and Blackstone also claim that civil servants have been “a vitally important source of influence on policy making – indeed in some instances, the single most important source of influence” right up until the time of writing in the early 1980s, and see this as a brake on innovation and social progress.<sup>53</sup> Gewirtz and Ozga, who analyse the behaviour of the Ministry of Education as Local Education Authorities were drawing up their post-war development plans in the late 1940s come to a similar conclusion.<sup>54</sup> The work of all these researchers demonstrates how elitist theory is closely related to Marxist theory, which posits the existence of an elite consciously or unconsciously working to preserve the economic status quo.

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<sup>51</sup> Gary McCulloch, “The history of secondary education in *History of Education*,” *History of Education* 41, no. 1 (2012): 25-39.

<sup>52</sup> Gail Savage, *The Social Construction of Expertise: The English Civil Service and its Influence 1919-1939* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996).

<sup>53</sup> Paul Lodge and Tessa Blackstone, *Educational Policy and Educational Inequality* (Oxford: Martin Robinson, 1982), 18.

<sup>54</sup> Sharon Gewirtz and Jenny Ozga, “Partnership, pluralism and education policy: a reassessment,” *Journal of Education Policy* 5, no. 1 (1990): 37-48.



Others have argued that there is evidence of a pluralist approach to English educational policy making within certain contexts. In his examination of the 1938 Spens Report and the 1943 Norwood Report, McCulloch argues that “despite its monolithic appearance,” the educational policy arena in this period was a “forum of vigorous contestation between different ideologies and theories” and that policymakers had to pick their way between these.<sup>55</sup> The period from World War II until the mid to late 1970s is frequently viewed as a time when the pluralist model of policy making had particular relevance. According to Dale, “standard treatments” of this period suggest a “tripartite partnership” between central government, local government and the teaching profession.<sup>56</sup> Dean has argued that in the late 1940s, there was a “powerful residue of wartime goodwill,” so that the Ministry of Education actively sought out and expected positive outcomes from partnerships. By the late 1950s, however, complaints from the Ministry about “entrenched vested interests and selfish pressures” became more common, and those partnerships came under pressure.<sup>57</sup>

Any discussion about who was or was not able to contribute to policy formation within a specific context is relevant to these debates and can be seen as an aspect of work in this area. Research around the writing of Education Acts often makes a contribution here. Batteson, for example, argues that the 1944 Education Act is widely seen as developing from “wide-spread consultation” but in fact was

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<sup>55</sup> Gary McCulloch, “‘Spens v. Norwood’: contesting the educational state?” *History of Education* 22, no. 2 (1993): 180.

<sup>56</sup> Roger Dale, *The State and Education Policy* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1989), 97.

<sup>57</sup> D.W. Dean, “Consensus or conflict? The Churchill government and educational policy 1951-1955,” *History of Education* 21, no. 1 (1992): 33, 34.

“constrained and coloured” by a small group of civil servants.<sup>58</sup> Further examples of research of this kind are discussed in section 2:6 of this review.

Another key site for this type of work is the formation and operation of educational advisory committees. Brehony has described the development of the Consultative Committees from 1868 to 1916, arguing that they constituted “a permanent forum for the representation” of emerging interests, such as “organized labour, elementary school teachers and women.”<sup>59</sup> However, he argues that the effectiveness of this forum was limited. In a similar vein, but in the Welsh context, Roderick has analysed the representation of interests in the 1881 *Report of the Committee on Intermediate and Higher Education in Wales* through considering the social background of the participants.<sup>60</sup> He concludes that these middle class committee members unsurprisingly generated recommendations which reflected exclusively “middle-class views.”<sup>61</sup> Swinnerton, however, sees evidence in the “tensions and contradictions” which are apparent in the second Hadow Report (1931) that there was an effort to encompass strong opposing positions and diverse views.<sup>62</sup>

Some contributions to research in the field of history of education draw on other aspects of policy theory discussed above. Network theory and advocacy coalitions, for example, are starting to prove fruitful. In a 2007 introduction to a special issue of *Paedagogica Historica* which was concerned with the topic of

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<sup>58</sup> C.H. Batterson, “The 1944 Education Act reconsidered,” *Educational Review* 51, no. 1 (1999): 8,14.

<sup>59</sup> Kevin J. Brehony, “The ‘school masters’ parliament’: the origins and formation of the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education 1868 - 1916,” *History of Education* 23, no. 2 (1994): 192, 172.

<sup>60</sup> Gordon W. Roderick, “‘A fair representation of all interests?’ The Aberdare report on intermediate and higher education in Wales, 1881,” *History of Education* 30, no. 3 (2001): 223-230.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>62</sup> Bronwen Swinnerton, “The 1931 Report of the Consultative Committee on the Primary School: tensions and contradictions,” *History of Education* 25, no. 1 (1996): 89.

networks in the history of education, Fuchs complains that network analysis “has hardly found its way into historical scholarship in general and the history of education in particular” but is nonetheless able to point to several examples of its previous use.<sup>63</sup> Atkins’ work on the 1934-45 Milk in Schools Scheme is another early example of a study which considers a “network of power and influence” in the legislative process.<sup>64</sup> Early childhood education seems particularly well served in this respect, with a number of studies considering networks of Froebelian and Montessorian educators,<sup>65</sup> although the focus of the research is not necessarily on the impact on policy. Helen May explores advocacy in the early childhood policy in New Zealand, describing it as a “key driver” of development.<sup>66</sup>

There has also been some interest within the field in looking at agenda-setting, particularly in considering the power that decision-makers have to shape an agenda and the consequent powerlessness of others to achieve agenda prominence for their concerns. Researchers at the Centre for Contemporary Studies (CCCS), a University of Birmingham Research Centre, adopted this approach in 1981, claiming that their account of policy development in England would focus “less on intent than on tendency, less on what is said than what is hidden or implied.”<sup>67</sup> Such an

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<sup>63</sup> Eckhardt Fuchs, “Networks and the history of education,” *Paedagogica Historica* 43, no. 2 (2007): 85.

<sup>64</sup> Peter Atkins, “The milk in schools scheme, 1934–45: ‘nationalization’ and resistance,” *History of Education* 34, no. 1 (2005): 1.

<sup>65</sup> Peter Cunningham, “Innovators, networks and structures: towards a prosopography of progressivism,” *History of Education* 30, no. 5 (2001): 433-451; Kristen Nawrotzki, “‘Like sending coals to Newcastle’: Impressions from and of the Anglo-American Kindergarten Movements,” *Paedagogica Historica* 43, no. 2 (2007): 223-233; Jane Read, “Froebelian women: networking to promote professional status and educational change in the nineteenth century,” *History of Education* 32, no. 1 (2003): 17-33.

<sup>66</sup> Helen May, “‘Being Froebelian’: An Antipodean analysis of the history of advocacy and early childhood,” *History of Education* 35, no. 2 (2006): 245.

<sup>67</sup> Steve Baron, Dan Finn, Neil Grant, Michael Green and Richard Johnson, *Unpopular Education: Schooling and Social Democracy in England since 1944* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), 15.

approach, however, particularly in the form taken by this group of scholars, has been subject to criticism on the grounds that empirical data is not robust enough to support the theorising.<sup>68</sup> Within works which touch on the history of English early years education within a social policy and childcare context, there is a marked interest in non-decision-making and agenda-setting because of the slow pace of development of early years provision. Key theorists here are Naima Browne,<sup>69</sup> Jennifer Marchbank<sup>70</sup> and Vicky Randall.<sup>71</sup> This is discussed further in section 2:5.

Theories of policy change over time have a clear relevance to and have been used by those working in the field of history of education. Atkins, for example, uses the concept of “path dependency”<sup>72</sup> in the article about the Milk in Schools Scheme discussed above, suggesting that “structural features” made the policy very difficult to change until the status quo was broken by the crisis of wartime.<sup>73</sup> Path dependency theory is also a reference point in two major international comparisons of early childhood care and education published recently: Scheiwe and Willekens’ *Child Care and Preschool Development in Europe: Institutional Perspectives* and Hagemann, Jarausch and Allemann-Ghionda’s *Children, Families and States*.<sup>74</sup> The view of both sets of editors is that the theory has a great deal of explanatory power in

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<sup>68</sup> Andy Hargreaves, “The Politics of Administrative Convenience: The Case of Middle Schools,” in *Policy-Making in Education: The Breakdown of Census*, ed. Ian McNay and Jenny Ozga (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1985), 65-83.

<sup>69</sup> Naima Browne, “Review: English early years education: some sociological dimensions,” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 17, no. 3 (1996): 365-379.

<sup>70</sup> Jennifer Marchbank, *Women, Power and Policy: Comparative Studies of Childcare* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>71</sup> Vicky Randall, “The irresponsible state? The politics of child daycare provision in Britain,” *British Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 3 (1995): 327-48.

<sup>72</sup> Kay, “Critique of the use of path dependency in policy studies,” 554.

<sup>73</sup> Atkins, “Milk in schools scheme, 1934–45,” 21.

<sup>74</sup> Kirsten Scheiwe and Harry Willekens, eds. *Child Care and Preschool Development in Europe: Institutional Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Karen Hagemann, Konrad H. Jarausch and Cristina Allemann-Ghionda, eds. *Children, Families and States: Time Policies of Childcare, Preschool and Primary Education in Europe* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011).

many international contexts. As Adrian Kay suggests, however, it is useful to supplement path dependency theory with others, such as punctuated equilibrium, and this would be a useful direction for future research.<sup>75</sup>

Bringing theoretical perspectives to histories of education and childcare is an important research agenda, and this thesis aims to make a contribution here. In-depth studies of particular policy areas in a variety of historical contexts are needed in this relatively early stage of theoretical development in order to enrich, and potentially challenge, the developing picture of how policy formation worked in practice. This thesis analyses the applicability of theories about participation in power and about change over time to a specific empirical context. In particular, it continues the investigation into the applicability of path dependency in the area of early childhood education, combining the concept, as Kay suggests, with punctuated equilibrium theory in order to suggest explanations for both change and lack of change.

## **2:5 A historiography of nursery education policy in England**

State nursery education is a part, albeit a non-compulsory part, of the national education system, the development of which has traditionally been a key area of interest for historians of education, both in the UK and in other countries.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, one might anticipate those works which aim to give a comprehensive overview of the development of English education would weave the story of the development of nursery education into their accounts. However, this is rarely the case to any large extent. Nursery education is generally dealt with in a fairly cursory

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<sup>75</sup> Kay, "A critique of the use of path dependency in policy studies."

<sup>76</sup> McCulloch, *Struggle for the History of Education*.

fashion within most of the well-known and oft cited histories, and the reader with an interest in this particular topic needs to work hard to piece together the scraps.

Examples of this type of history which do include some analysis of early years policy are Curtis' *History of Education in Great Britain* and Lowndes' *The Silent Social Revolution*, from the 1960s,<sup>77</sup> Lawson and Silver's *A social history of education in England* from the 1970s,<sup>78</sup> Brian Simon's series of histories, published from the 1970s to the 1990s,<sup>79</sup> Roy Lowe's *Education in the Post-war Years* from the 1980s<sup>80</sup> and Gordon, Aldrich and Dean's *Education and Policy in England in the Twentieth Century* from the 1990s.<sup>81</sup>

Typically, these works contain brief accounts of the work of the McMillan sisters, nursery school pioneers from the early twentieth century, and make rather unsubstantiated claims about their influence on the 1918 Fisher Act: claims disputed by Bradburn, Margaret McMillan's biographer.<sup>82</sup> A handful of references are then generally made to the slow development of nursery education from this point on. The reasons given for the slow pace vary. Some have argued that the patriarchal attitudes in society are to blame for this. Gordon, Aldrich and Dean blame pronatalism, the desire for an increase in the birth rate and for mothers to stay at home with their children, for a lack of enthusiasm in official circles.<sup>83</sup> Roy Lowe

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<sup>77</sup> S.J.Curtis, *History of Education in Great Britain*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: University Tutorial Press, 1967); G.A.N. Lowndes, *The Silent Social Revolution: An Account of the Expansion of Public Education in England and Wales 1895-1965*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

<sup>78</sup> John Lawson and Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England* (London: Methuen, 1973).

<sup>79</sup> Brian Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform 1920-1940* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974); Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991).

<sup>80</sup> Roy Lowe, *Education in the Post-war Years: A Social History* (London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1988), 29.

<sup>81</sup> Peter Gordon, Richard Aldrich and Dennis Dean, *Education and Policy in England in the Twentieth Century* (London: Woburn Press, 1991).

<sup>82</sup> Elizabeth Bradburn, *Margaret McMillan: Portrait of a Pioneer* (London: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>83</sup> Gordon, Aldrich and Dean, *Education and Policy in England in the Twentieth Century*.

similarly argues that patriarchal views regarding working mothers slowed the development of nursery education, quoting a parliamentary secretary claiming that “the proper place for a child under two was with his mother.”<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, Lawson and Silver simply state that wide-scale development was not possible because of “economic difficulties.”<sup>85</sup> Simon consistently sees the lack of development in this area in the context of sustained squeezing of all areas of the education services which might be seen as benefitting working class people, mentioning nursery education as one item in a long list of unfulfilled promises. In fact, he claims that nursery education often suffered less than provision in other educational domains, particularly in the interwar period and in the 1970s.<sup>86</sup>

Another area where the history of early years education policy is sometimes touched on is in histories of social policy, particularly those which focus on childcare services. As Helen Penn has pointed out, care and education have an “intertwined history.”<sup>87</sup> Scheiwe and Willekens, policy researchers whose work focuses on historical comparisons, have noted that the provision of nurseries may spring from one of two “policy motives,” one being the perceived need to educate young children appropriately and one being to provide childcare services for working parents (usually understood as mothers) but claim that “no actual existing system conforms in its entirety to the logic of one of the ideal types.”<sup>88</sup> Therefore, histories of childcare can illuminate histories of early years education.

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<sup>84</sup> Lowe, *Education in the Post-war Years*, 29.

<sup>85</sup> Lawson and Silver, *Social History of Education in England*.

<sup>86</sup> Simon, *Politics of Educational Reform 1920-1940*; Simon, *Education and the Social Order*.

<sup>87</sup> Helen Penn, “Round and Round the Mulberry Bush: The Balance of Public and Private in Early Education and Childcare in the Twentieth Century,” in *Public or Private Education? Lessons from History*, ed. Richard Aldrich (London: Woburn Press, 2004), 75-97, 94.

<sup>88</sup> Kirsten Scheiwe and Harry Willekens, “Introduction: Path-dependencies and Change in Childcare and Preschool Institutions,” in *Child Care and Preschool Development in Europe: Institutional*

As is the case with the histories of education, histories of the development of childcare often take a marked interest in the question of why services, both education and care, for families with young children failed to develop. Many of these researchers also point to the impact of a patriarchal society, and in particular the wide-spread acceptance of the theory, stemming from John Bowlby's work on parent/child attachment,<sup>89</sup> that it was psychologically beneficial for young children to be with their mothers at home. Denise Riley has convincingly made the case that these factors were not significant in the crucial period immediately following World War II, when a failure to translate temporary to permanent facilities could be blamed instead on "a mundane story – of misrepresentations, imaginative failures, evasions and indifference."<sup>90</sup> However, Riley does see the influence of these beliefs increasing in the following decades. Naima Browne argues that this was still a key cause of slow development in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>91</sup>

Counter-arguments for this interpretation are, as Vicky Randall has pointed out, that other equally patriarchal societies have indeed developed extensive provision<sup>92</sup> and campaigns for other feminist issues, such as legislation for equal pay, have been more successful.<sup>93</sup> Randall has claimed that a "liberal ideology" in Britain led to unwillingness on the part of government to make policy which might intrude on matters which were seen as the preserve of individual families.<sup>94</sup> In her

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*Perspectives*, ed. Kirsten Scheiwe and Harry Willekins (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1-22, 4.

<sup>89</sup> John Bowlby, *Maternal Care and Mental Health: A Report prepared on behalf of the World Health Organisation as a contribution to the United Nations Programme for the welfare of homeless children* (Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1951).

<sup>90</sup> Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery* (London: Virago, 1983), 116.

<sup>91</sup> Browne, "Review: English early years education: some sociological dimensions."

<sup>92</sup> Vicky Randall, "The irresponsible state?"

<sup>93</sup> Marchbank, *Women, Power and Policy*.

<sup>94</sup> Randall, "The irresponsible state?" 348.



later work, she draws on theories of policy communities to argue that pressure groups for childcare/early education were not sufficiently unified to effect policy change.<sup>95</sup> This chimes with Marchbank's suggestion that the women's movement can only fight on one front at once.<sup>96</sup>

There is a small body of work which focuses more fully on the particular field of the history of early education in England. A large proportion of these texts are biographies of the great pioneers and educators, with early works tending to take a hagiographic approach. Mansbridge's 1932 account of the life of Margaret McMillan is one example of this.<sup>97</sup> General histories of English early years education tend to be a succession of potted biographies. This is true of Rusk's *A History of Infant Education* published in 1933<sup>98</sup> and largely true of *Early Childhood Education: History, Philosophy and Experience* by Nutbrown, Clough and Selbie published in 2008,<sup>99</sup> although this does include a very brief summary of relevant legislation and also an account of developments in Sheffield in the 1950s and 1960s. Chapters and sections about English pioneers can also be found in international works which aim to give a global view of early years history. Wolfe's *Learning from the Past: Historical Voices in Early Childhood Education*, published in Canada, includes a biographical chapter about the infant school pioneer, Robert Owen, (actually active in Scotland, but influential on the development of English schools) and the American *The History of Early Childhood Education* by Lascarides and

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<sup>95</sup> Randall, *Politics of Child Daycare in Britain*.

<sup>96</sup> Marchbank, *Women, Power and Policy*.

<sup>97</sup> Albert Mansbridge, *Margaret McMillan, Prophet and Pioneer: Her Life and Work* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1932).

<sup>98</sup> Robert Rusk, *A History of Infant Education* (London: University of London Press, 1933).

<sup>99</sup> Cathy Nutbrown, Peter Clough and Philip Selbie, *Early Childhood Education: History, Philosophy and Experience* (London: Sage, 2008).

Hinitz has similar chapters on nursery school campaigner Grace Owen and on Margaret McMillan and her sister.<sup>100</sup>

Some work, typically more recent work in the field, takes a biographical starting point but reaches out to make links with diverse theoretical perspectives. For example, Kevin Brehony has analysed Nancy Astor's campaigns for nursery schools using theories drawn from Marxist traditions.<sup>101</sup> Kristen Nawrotzki and Jane Read have both researched the achievements of Froebelian women in England using networking theory relating to the spread of ideas.<sup>102</sup>

There is some research which focuses specifically on policy development in the area of early years education. Again, much of the focus is on the lack of development and the fact that "the state system has blown hot and cold.....but mostly cold."<sup>103</sup> This is perhaps less evident in some of the earlier works, whose authors had less experience of the "cold." Phoebe Cusden's 1938 history, *The English Nursery School*, was written at a time of optimism for the nursery school movement and makes only brief mentions of delays to development during periods of economic crisis.<sup>104</sup> Cusden's work can be characterised as Whig History,<sup>105</sup> conforming to a tendency where history is presented "unproblematically as a story of

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<sup>100</sup> Jennifer Wolfe, *Learning from the Past* (Mayerthorpe: Piney Branch Press, 2002); Celia Lascarides and Blythe Hinitz, *The History of Early Childhood Education* (New York: Garland, 2000).

<sup>101</sup> Kevin J. Brehony, "Lady Astor's campaign for nursery schools in Britain, 1930-1939: attempting to valorize cultural capital in a male-dominated political field," *History of Education Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2009): 196-210.

<sup>102</sup> Kristen D. Nawrotzki, "Froebel is dead; long live Froebel! The National Froebel Foundation and English education," *History of Education* 35, no.2 (2006): 209-223; Read, "Froebelian women: networking to promote professional status and educational change in the nineteenth century."

<sup>103</sup> Jill Kent and Pendarell Kent, *Nursery Schools for All* (London: Ward Lock Educational Company, 1970), 15.

<sup>104</sup> Phoebe E. Cusden, *The English Nursery School* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Truber, 1938).

<sup>105</sup> Mark Knights, "The Tory Interpretation of History in the Rage of Parties," in *The Uses of History in Early Modern England*, ed. Paulina Kewes (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 2006), 347-366.

continual improvement and refinement.”<sup>106</sup> Written at a similar time, Thomas Raymont’s *A History of the Education of Young Children* forms an interesting contrast.<sup>107</sup> Although there is an overall sense of things moving forward, Raymont is quite clear about periods of “slow progress” and expresses some frustration at the shift, evident in the 1920s and confirmed by the Hadow Report of 1933, towards the idea that nursery schools were merely a special service for the most deprived.<sup>108</sup>

At the beginning of the 1970s, two major works were written about English nursery education: *The Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School* by Nanette Whitbread and *A Fair Start: The Provision of Pre-School Education* by Tessa Blackstone.<sup>109</sup> Both authors engage with the issue of slow progress in the development of the service. Blackstone in particular is fundamentally interested in “the reasons for the gap between the social demand for nursery education and its supply.”<sup>110</sup> However, both books offer quite a full picture of the development of government policy in this area. Between them, they establish a narrative of the growth of nursery schools and classes, highlighting key periods of policy change and offering perspectives on the causes and consequences. These are summarised below.

In her discussion of the 1918 Education Act, Whitbread describes the pre-war disquiet about the suitability of elementary schools for the under fives and the consequent measures to exclude them from these schools, which led to the

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<sup>106</sup> Gary McCulloch and William Richardson, *Historical Research in Educational Settings* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000).

<sup>107</sup> Thomas Raymont, *A History of the Education of Young Children* (London: Longmans Green, 1937).

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>109</sup> Nanette Whitbread, *The Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School: A History of Infant and Nursery Education in Britain, 1800-1970* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972); Tessa Blackstone, *A Fair Start: The Provision of Pre-School Education* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1971).

<sup>110</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*, 1.

possibility of alternative provision rising on the agenda.<sup>111</sup> Blackstone claims that a growing awareness of the health problems of poor children at this time was the “main factor” in the decision to finance nursery schools with public money<sup>112</sup> and argues that Margaret McMillan “probably” was the reason for the inclusion of the nursery school clause.<sup>113</sup> With regard to the failure of the Act, Blackstone and Whitbread both acknowledge the general economic difficulties after World War 1, but also blame the LEAs for not taking advantage of their discretionary powers to fund nursery education.<sup>114</sup>

The 1933 Hadow Report receives attention from both Whitbread and Blackstone. Whitbread calls the report “a landmark in the theory of nursery education”<sup>115</sup> and is complementary about the weight of academic evidence on which the committee drew in order to develop their understanding of young children’s physical and mental needs. Because of this, the educational approach suggested was progressive and a “severe blow” to those who advocated formal instruction methods.<sup>116</sup> Nonetheless, Whitbread emphasises the overriding importance the committee gave to the issue of physical health and the role that nursery schools could play in promoting this. Blackstone writes almost exclusively about this aspect, and seems to suggest that the committee’s interest in the potential educational advantages was minimal.

The inclusion of the nursery education clause in the 1944 Act is also a key area of interest for both historians. Blackstone notes that the Act made a clear break

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<sup>111</sup> Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*.

<sup>112</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*, 39.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>114</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*; Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*.

<sup>115</sup> Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*, 75.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

with the pre-war notion of nursery education as a special service for a minority of disadvantaged children, and set up a clear expectation that it would become universal. It failed to deliver, in her view, because of the post-war teacher shortage, the increase in the birth-rate, and national financial difficulties. These are the reasons put forward by the Ministry of Education.<sup>117</sup> In Whitbread's view, the clause was not implemented because nursery schools failed to inspire "the public imagination" and the post-war focus turned to secondary education.<sup>118</sup>

The Plowden Report was written very much at the end of the period these authors were researching, but does receive some attention. They focus, in particular, on the events in the 1960s which might have influenced the committee in its recommendation that nursery education should be expanded. Whitbread points to the success of campaigning groups in bringing this about.<sup>119</sup> Blackstone puts more emphasis on societal factors in the early 1960s which "put pressure on the structure of the family."<sup>120</sup> These included the isolation of young mothers in a more mobile society and an increase in the numbers of women in work.

These two works remain the key texts in the field. As both were published over forty years ago, this is clearly problematic. The chief sources of information for both are documents published or circulated by the government. With archives for much of the period under investigation still closed when the books were written, it was difficult for the researchers to look in detail at why decisions were made.

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<sup>117</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

<sup>118</sup> Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*, 105.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*, 69.

Both works are under-theorised: Whitbread's work makes no use of theory, while Blackstone claims her study is mostly "descriptive,"<sup>121</sup> as there is a necessity to present a great deal of information which has not previously appeared in any academic source. She does, however, make some use of Smelser's theory of structural differentiation.<sup>122</sup> This describes a process whereby industrialisation leads to pressures on the family which leads eventually to social action with consequences for the form of family life. As Blackstone herself points out, however, this is a theory of limited explanatory power. Smelser describes a detailed series of stages which may occur in the process, but then allows that each step is not in itself necessary and could additionally occur at many different points and in many different circumstances. This means that the theory describes such a vast array of possible events that it is "non-refutable."<sup>123</sup>

A few pieces of scholarship from the early 1970s, by educational policy researchers, Kogan and Packwood, and early years educationalist, Lesley Webb, offer some useful perspectives on nursery education in the context of the Plowden Report. The precise nature of the Plowden Committee's attitude to working mothers is controversial. Kogan and Packwood believe that part of the reason for the proposed expansion of nursery education was to accommodate the "rights of parents who might wish to go to work and thus improve the variety of their life-style."<sup>124</sup> Lesley Webb, on the other hand, believes the report is "high-handed and patronizing" on the subject of working mothers, and accepts that some women may

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>124</sup> Maurice Kogan and Tim Packwood, *Advisory Councils and Committees in Education* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974).

not be at home with their children only with regretful resignation.<sup>125</sup> Kogan and Packwood also provide a useful perspective on the implementation of the nursery education recommendations of the Plowden Report. They describe how there was enthusiasm within the Ministry/DES as the report was initially being drafted, but by the time of its publication, there was “a coldness” towards it.<sup>126</sup> There had been a change of government and also of leading civil servants in the department. Nonetheless the Labour government picked up on the idea of Educational Priority Areas and began to expand nursery education within these.<sup>127</sup> The following Conservative government proposed an expansion of nursery education, which did not materialise because of another economic crisis.

The amount of work concerned with English nursery policy written since this time has been small. Some of it merely summarises past research about the 1918-1972 period, relying heavily on Whitbread, but is significant for the continuation of the narrative into the 1980s, 1990s and beyond. Elizabeth Smith’s *Educating the Under-Fives*, published in 1994, falls into this category<sup>128</sup> as does Peter Baldock’s recent volume about the development of early childhood services, integrating discussion of childcare and education.<sup>129</sup> Other work continues to ponder the lack of development in the early and mid-twentieth century. Denison Deasey, for example, whose *Education Under Six*, was published in 1978, includes a chapter on this subject but the author admits to finding the English situation very difficult to

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<sup>125</sup> Lesley Webb, *Purposes and Practice in Nursery Education* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974),174.

<sup>126</sup> Kogan and Packwood, *Advisory Councils and Committees in Education*, 71.

<sup>127</sup> Tessa Blackstone, “Some issues concerning the development of nursery education in Britain,” *Paedagogica Europaea* 9, no. 3 (1973): 29.

<sup>128</sup> Elizabeth Smith, *Educating the Under-Fives* (London: Cassell, 1994).

<sup>129</sup> Peter Baldock, *Developing Early Childhood Services: Past, Present and Future* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, McGraw-Hill Education, 2011).

understand, pointing to the fact that economic depression in other countries led to increased not decreased nursery development.<sup>130</sup> Other researchers have continued to offer explanations: in an essay in an edited volume which focuses on development from World War II to the New Labour era, Brehony and Nawrotzki characterise the earlier part of this period as a time when early years education received very little attention, making links with pronatalist ideas.<sup>131</sup> The possible impact of the English class system has also interested some scholars, including Tessa Blackstone in work from the 1980s, co-written with Paul Lodge.<sup>132</sup> The authors blame politicians for concentrating on balancing the books in the short-term rather than making long-term plans for development which would benefit the working-class. They argue that the fundamental problem is that “social control of the education system is concentrated in the hands of groups that, for the most part, enjoy varying degrees of educational advantage.”<sup>133</sup> Helen Penn and Thomas Bahle have also both written chapters which examine the impact of class on development. Both see the fact that policy-makers believed that working-class and middle-class children had different needs as a significant factor which inhibited universal provision.<sup>134</sup> Bahle’s work is also of interest in that it asks whether recent developments in England are “path-breaking or path-continuing,” concluding that the answer is difficult to determine, as

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<sup>130</sup> Denison Deasey, *Education Under Six* (London: Croon Helm, 1978).

<sup>131</sup> Kevin J. Brehony and Kristen D. Nawrotzki, “From Weak Social Democracy to Hybridized Neoliberalism: Early Childhood Education in Britain in 1945,” in *Children, Families and States: Time Policies of Childcare, Preschool and Primary Education in Europe*, ed. Karen Hagemann, Konrad H. Jarausch and Cristina Allemann-Ghionda (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 237-256.

<sup>132</sup> Lodge and Blackstone, *Educational Policy and Educational Inequality*.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>134</sup> Helen Penn, “Public and Private: the History of Early Education and Care Institutions in the United Kingdom,” in *Childcare and Pre-School Development in Europe*, ed. Kirsten Scheiwe and Harry Willekens (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 105-125; Thomas Bahle, “Public Child Care in Europe: Historical Trajectories and New Directions,” in *Childcare and Pre-School Development in Europe*, ed. Kirsten Scheiwe and Harry Willekens (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 23-42, 29.



understanding of what constitutes a path varies with the values and beliefs of individuals.<sup>135</sup>

Research in this area has, then, sketched out the basic narrative of the historical development of nursery education in England and it is clear when key periods of policy-making occurred. Questions about that development, particularly its very sluggish pace, have been asked and recent work is starting to use a variety of theory to generate potential answers. However, the field of English early childhood policy remains under-researched. There is a need to develop the established narrative by looking at specific aspects in more detail: the place of the nursery class has not been a particular focus in any of the works cited above. There is also a continuing need to explore the usefulness of contemporary theoretical perspectives in seeking answers to the questions that are being raised. This thesis aims to contribute to this process.

## **2:6 Contextualising literature: The wider history of English education policy**

Edward Boyle, Minister of Education 1962-1964, believed that “mostly, the starting point for educational questions was the educational world itself.”<sup>136</sup> An understanding of the history of English nursery education policy needs to be framed by an understanding of the history of English education policy more generally. Decisions by the Board/Ministry of Education about nurseries were taken within a context of other decisions about education, and need to be analysed with knowledge of that context and the way that officials and politicians understood the whole range

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<sup>135</sup> Bahle, “Public Child Care in Europe.”

<sup>136</sup> Gordon, Aldrich and Dean, *Education and Policy in England in the Twentieth Century*, 87.

of their responsibilities and how they should be prioritised. The repeated claims by governments that provision of nursery education was not possible because of financial restraints, for example, can only be evaluated with knowledge of whether education in general was being squeezed or whether other aspects of the services were favoured.

The historiography of nursery policy has suggested that there were a number of significant decision-points in regard to nursery education: the 1918 Education Act, the 1944 Education Act, and decisions triggered by the Consultative Committee Reports, the 1933 Hadow Report and the 1967 Plowden Report. The purpose of this section of the review is to analyse research into education policy at these key points in order to contextualise the nursery elements. However, the Hadow Report only affected nursery and infant education and therefore very little useful material about this has been published. The Plowden Report had a slightly wider remit in that it concerned the whole of the primary sector but its influence on policy for the older children has mainly concerned pedagogical approaches with little financial impact.<sup>137</sup> Therefore in this case too, little of relevance to the nursery aspect has been published. There is, however, a body of relevant research concerning the two Acts of Parliament. Analyses of education policy in the period between World War II and the Plowden Report, a period of stasis for nursery policy but not for other areas, also needs to be considered here.

An important question for both nursery policy and English educational policy more generally is the influence of war. Sherrington claims that the idea that war acts

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<sup>137</sup> A.H.Halsey and Kathy Silva, "Plowden twenty years on," *Oxford Review of Education* 13, no. 1 (1987): 3-11.

as a catalyst for change in English education was widely held among historians at the time of writing (the late 1970s), as it revealed unpleasant truths about the state of the nation and therefore galvanised the state into passing legislation to remedy the perceived problems.<sup>138</sup> However, with regard to the 1918 Act, he demonstrates that many major policy changes incorporated within it had in fact been suggested by a Cabinet Committee by 1913.<sup>139</sup> With regard to World War II and the 1944 Education Act, Peter Gosden asserts that the war did substantially alter policy. He cites evidence that Cleary, head of the Elementary Branch in the Board of Education at the time, argued that war had produced a more unified nation and that R.S.Wood, the Deputy Secretary, felt that if the Board failed to produce policies which reflected this reality, its plans would be marginalised.<sup>140</sup> Kevin Jeffries demonstrates convincingly that the Board adopted progressive reforms in wartime which it had argued against in 1939.<sup>141</sup>

Another point of interest for educational policy historians, and of particular relevance for this thesis, is who was able and who was not able to influence the policy formation process during these key periods. In the case of the 1918 Act, Sherrington argues that the war led to an increase in the influence of a wider range of voices in the policy process and a particularly increased prominence for the Workers' Educational Association (WEA).<sup>142</sup> Andrews also describes increasing

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<sup>138</sup> Geoffrey Sherrington, *English Education, Social Change and War 1911-1920* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), 117.

<sup>139</sup> G.E. Sherrington, "The 1918 Education Act: origins, aims and development," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 24, no. 1 (1976): 66-85.

<sup>140</sup> P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War: A Study in Policy and Administration* (London: Methuen, 1976).

<sup>141</sup> Kevin Jeffries, "R.A. Butler, the Board of Education and the 1944 Education Act," *History: The Journal of the Historical Association* 69, no. 227 (1984): 415-431.

<sup>142</sup> Sherrington, *English Education, Social Change and War*.

pressure on government from a wide range of voices in this period.<sup>143</sup> Neither historian is, however, able to demonstrate the impact of most of these policy participants but both show that some groups were able to bring about modifications in the final stages of the process. Local Education Authorities were able to exert pressure for some revisions to be made regarding the clauses concerning the balance of local and central power. Opposition from employers and workers in industry, particularly the cotton industry, had an impact on plans for “continuation schools” for adolescents.<sup>144</sup> There is less unanimity among historians about the sources of influence on the policy content of the 1944 Act. Michael Barber claims there were “many contributors” to the Act, including campaigners,<sup>145</sup> but most scholars have been primarily interested in whether Butler himself can be regarded as the most significant author, or whether he passed most of the responsibility for this to his civil servants. There is a continuum of opinion here. Wallace represents one extreme, claiming that Butler had little influence. Jeffries, on the other hand, calls Butler’s input “considerable.”<sup>146</sup>

A further point of interest for historians has been the implementation, or lack of implementation of the Acts. The 1918 Act was not implemented to any significant degree. Andrews lists an array of contributing factors to this failure, including economic cuts, “increasing pressure from business and commercial interests” and a lack of enthusiasm from the general public.<sup>147</sup> Sherrington

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<sup>143</sup> Lawrence Andrews, *The Education Act, 1918* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976).

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*; Sherrington, *English Education, Social Change and War*.

<sup>145</sup> Michael Barber, *The Making of the 1944 Education Act* (London: Cassell, 1994), 115.

<sup>146</sup> R.G. Wallace, “The origins and authorship of the 1944 Education Act,” *History of Education* 10, no. 4 (1981): 283-290; Jeffries, “R.A. Butler, The Board of Education and the 1944 Education Act,” 429.

<sup>147</sup> Andrews, *Education Act 1918*, 69.

emphasises the failure of the Act to address the question of religious control of schools, which was seen as vitally important to many within the education world.<sup>148</sup> He also claims that “administrative difficulties,” caused by a lack of consideration of the practicalities of introducing the continuation classes for older children, were to blame for post-war inaction and that too much was left to the discretion of the LEAs.<sup>149</sup> Dent agrees strongly with the focus on the LEAs: “they had plenty of excuses, if no good reason” to avoid introducing new services.<sup>150</sup>

With regard to the 1944 Act, it has been established, for example by Michael Barber, that implementation was partial. Successive governments cherry-picked policies to develop from the vast array which had been included.<sup>151</sup> Scholarly debate concerns whether the impact of the Act was significant and whether it achieved what its author(s) intended. There are disagreements about whether the Act was progressive or not.<sup>152</sup> Some historians have celebrated its “vision for the future”<sup>153</sup> and its “remarkable cycle of reforms.”<sup>154</sup> Others, such as Brian Simon and Baron and colleagues at the CCCS, have argued that the Act did not really represent a radical change of direction. They condemn the fact that it left many divisive aspects of the education system, such as public and religious schools, in place.<sup>155</sup> Ken Jones argues that the Act was “blurred, contradicted and compromised,” which left it vulnerable to thwarting by entrenched interests.”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Sherrington, “The 1918 Education Act.”

<sup>149</sup> Sherrington, *English Education, Social Change and War*, 176.

<sup>150</sup> H.C. Dent, *1870-1970: Century of Growth in English Education* (London: Longman, 1970), 86.

<sup>151</sup> Barber, *Making of the 1944 Education Act*.

<sup>152</sup> Ken Jones, *Education in Britain 1944 to the present* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 16.

<sup>153</sup> Barber, *Making of the 1944 Education Act*, x.

<sup>154</sup> Gary McCulloch, *Educational Reconstruction: The 1944 Education Act and the Twenty-first Century* (Ilford: Woburn Press, 1994), 6.

<sup>155</sup> Brian Simon, “The 1944 Education Act: A Conservative measure?” *History of Education* 15, no. 1 (1986): 31-43; Baron et al, *Unpopular Education*.

<sup>156</sup> Jones, *Education in Britain 1944 to the present*, 16.

The narrative of what occurred in English education in the 1950s is well established. Simon demonstrates that the earlier 1950s were a time of “cheese-pairing restraint” within the Ministry of Education generally.<sup>157</sup> The role played by Butler, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, in pressurising the Minister of Education to restrict spending has been noted by Dean.<sup>158</sup> Dean cites the Conservatives desire to be seen as the party opposed to “extravagance and waste” in the difficult economic climate as a strong motivating factor here.<sup>159</sup> By 1954, however, the party hoped that its reputation for miserliness would be reversed and this was signified by the appointment of David Eccles.<sup>160</sup> Unlike his predecessor, Eccles was able to secure the funds to usher in “a remarkable decade or so of investment in educational facilities,” sometimes identified as “golden years.”<sup>161</sup> Vaizey and Sheehan list his priorities as teacher training, further and higher education, secondary education and university expansion.<sup>162</sup> These aims can be linked with an increasingly prevalent belief at the end of the decade that “investment in education was causally connected to economic growth.”<sup>163</sup>

This thesis aims to integrate an understanding of nursery education policy into these established narratives. It is important to understand that those Education Acts which made provision for nursery education also aimed to introduce a whole raft of other policies, some with similar aims of improving the lives of the poorest in

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<sup>157</sup> Brian Simon, “The Tory government and education 1951-1960: background to breakout,” *History of Education* 14, no. 4 (1985): 287.

<sup>158</sup> Dennis Dean, “Conservative governments 1951-1964 and their changing perspectives on the 1944 Education Act,” *History of Education* 24, no. 3 (1995): 247-66.

<sup>159</sup> D.W. Dean, “Consensus or conflict? The Churchill government and educational policy 1951-55,” *History of Education* 21, no. 1 (1992): 15-35.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Peter Gosden, *The Education System since 1944* (Oxford: Martin Robinson, 1983), 16,19.

<sup>162</sup> John Vaizey and John Sheehan, *Resources for Education: An Economic Study of Education in the United Kingdom, 1920-1965* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968).

<sup>163</sup> Jones, *Education in Britain – 1944 to the present*, 39.

society. The failure to implement the nursery school clause of the 1918 Act must be seen within the context of the general failure of that piece of legislation. In relation to the 1944 Act, the situation is more complex and questions about why the nursery school clause in particular failed become more valid. In the period of the great freeze in nursery school expansion, the 1950s and 1960s, it is important to remember that this encompasses a “golden age” for investment in other areas of education, and questions about the low priority of nursery education become very pertinent indeed.

## **2:7 Contextualising literature: history of education and Local Education**

### **Authorities**

In any discussion of education policy making in England, there is a need to consider the role of Local Education Authorities. As the bodies responsible for implementing decisions, their study often provides a “correctional coda”<sup>164</sup> to the national story, presenting alternative versions of events on the ground which enrich a perception gathered from central government sources alone. Moreover, LEAs had considerable decision-making powers and were in a position to generate and experiment with new ideas which might then be adopted more centrally.<sup>165</sup> In the field of nursery education, the LEAs and the decisions they took were of vital importance because this was frequently an area in which they had discretionary powers – the freedom to act or to choose not to act.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Norman Morris, “The Contribution of Local Investigations to Historical Knowledge,” in *Local Studies and the History of Education*, ed. T.G.Cook (London: Methuen, 1972), 153-167, 153.

<sup>165</sup> D. E. Regan, *Local Government and Education*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979).

<sup>166</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

Two particularly useful overviews of the field are Sharp's "Central and Local Government" chapter in Aldrich's *A Century of Education*,<sup>167</sup> and a 2008 summary article by Roy Lowe for the *Journal of Educational Administration and History*.<sup>168</sup> These both point towards many of the key works by educational historians, many of which inform the discussion below. However, these can be usefully supplemented with works by sociologists/political theorists writing in the same period as or just after the events which they analyse. These scholars examine their own context and frequently cast an eye over events which led up to their present. In this way, a work which may be wholly outdated in the field of political science, as the role of local government has changed significantly since 1972, can nonetheless prove invaluable to history of education research. Key examples here are Pedley's *The Pergamon Guide to The Educational System in England and Wales* from 1964, Dent's *The Educational System of England and Wales* from 1969 and Jennings' *Education and Politics – Policy-making in Local Education Authorities* from 1977.<sup>169</sup>

Many of those writers interested in LEAs in the early to mid-twentieth century, both historians and sociologists from the period, are interested in questions of participation within the policy process, both within the authority (who is able to make their voices heard within the LEA?) and in terms of the relationship between the LEA and central government (how did LEAs impact on national policy and how did national policy constrain the actions of LEAs?). With regard to the former

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<sup>167</sup> Paul Sharp, "Central and Local Government" in *A Century of Education* ed. Richard Aldrich (Abingdon: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002), 93-116.

<sup>168</sup> Roy Lowe, "Trends in the administration and history of education," *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 40, no. 1 (2008): 55-60.

<sup>169</sup> H. C. Dent, *The Educational System of England and Wales* (London: University of London Press, 1969); Robert Jennings, *Education and Politics: Policy-making in Local Education Authorities* (London: Batsford, 1977); Francis Pedley, *The Pergamon Guide to The Educational System in England and Wales* (London: Pergamon Press, 1964).



aspect, several researchers emphasise the enormous role of powerful individuals in key posts such as Director of Education or Chief Education Officer.<sup>170</sup> Lowe describes this as a “patriarchy” where individuals were able to direct policy according to their own opinions and interests.<sup>171</sup> On the other hand, other researchers paint a picture of committees, and above all sub-committees, making decisions in smoke-filled rooms behind doors which are firmly shut. Gosden makes the point that business was devolved to sub-committees because members of these bodies could speak freely, away from the press scrutiny at full council meetings, or even education committee meetings in some cases.<sup>172</sup> Pedley claims that it was in sub-committees that “the most controversial matters” were decided.<sup>173</sup>

Dent and Stoker argue that these bodies were largely uninfluenced by party politics. Many committee members were unaffiliated in any case to a particular party and few issues seemed to provoke ideological disagreements, although these were more likely in urban areas than in shire counties.<sup>174</sup> Byrne and Jennings claim that the space for local people and pressure groups to make their voices heard was limited. Byrne finds “no discernible influence from pressure groups before 1965” in her case study<sup>175</sup> and, in a comparable project in the early 1970s, Jennings finds that there was very little consultation with interested parties outside the council, although it was possible for local campaigners to exert influence as long as they did this

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<sup>170</sup> Eileen Byrne, *Planning and Educational Inequality: A Study of the Rationale of Resource Allocation* (Windsor: NFER, 1974); Lowe, “Trends in the administration and history of education.”

<sup>171</sup> Lowe, “Trends in the administration and history of education,” 57.

<sup>172</sup> P.H.J.H. Gosden, *The Development of Educational Administration in England and Wales* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966).

<sup>173</sup> Pedley, *The Pergamon Guide to the Educational System in England and Wales*, 66.

<sup>174</sup> Dent, *Educational System of England and Wales*; Gerry Stoker, *The Politics of Local Government* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan, 1991).

<sup>175</sup> Byrne, *Planning and Educational Inequality*, 306.

through “appropriate channels” and above all avoided scandal in the press.<sup>176</sup> Rene Saran, however, who studied decision-making in “Townley” from 1944 to 1964 identities influence from both political parties and from interest groups.<sup>177</sup> The body of evidence as a whole seems to be patchy. As Brighouse has pointed out, the degree of local autonomy means the LEAs were very different to each other.<sup>178</sup> This makes any generalised understanding about their internal workings in any given period challenging to achieve and a broad view of how these may have changed over time even more so.

Historians and political scientists alike seem more able to draw generalised conclusions about relationships between central government and local government throughout the period, and common threads of a narrative emerge. Local authorities had considerable autonomy in the interwar period. The 1918 Education Act formalised an “active and constructive partnership”<sup>179</sup> between the two administrative layers, although the power of LEAs was in fact limited compared to similar bodies in the rest of Europe, as they were only able to act in areas which the Board of Education determined should be their proper business.<sup>180</sup> This settlement broke down during World War II, when the Board of Education developed a strong feeling that education was “the nation’s concern”<sup>181</sup> and that the sharp differences in provision in different areas was not acceptable. However, LEAs did retain some autonomy after the war. Chitty argues that despite an increase in centralisation, the

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<sup>176</sup> Jennings, *Education and Politics*, 103.

<sup>177</sup> Rene Saran, *Policy-Making in Secondary Education: A Case Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

<sup>178</sup> Tim Brighouse, “The view of a participant during the second half - a perspective on LEAs since 1952,” *Oxford Review of Education* 28, no. 2 (2002): 187-96.

<sup>179</sup> George Cooke and Peter Gosden, *Education Committees* (Harlow: Longman, 1986), 37.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> Peter Gosden, “From Board to Ministry: The impact of the war on the education department,” *History of Education* 18, no. 3 (1989): 183.

existence of local powers was still seen as vitally important: this was “a peculiarly *British* response” which could protect against Fascism.<sup>182</sup>

The nature of the relationship between central and local government in the period after World War II has generated differences of opinion among scholars. Sharp argues that the post-war period was a “golden age,” where central and local government worked together as true partners in a productive relationship.<sup>183</sup> Chitty suggests that this was enabled by the fact that there were few significant political conflicts in the field of education in the 1950s, and the “general climate of expansion” created a sense that there were no lost causes.<sup>184</sup> He identifies the financial crisis of the 1970s as a factor in the eventual breakdown of that partnership, along with political disputes about secondary education. Bogdanor also points to financial wellbeing/difficulty as the cause of the making and breaking of consensus.<sup>185</sup>

Several historians have, however, disputed the idea that the immediate post-war relationships were easy and comfortable. Lowe has written that the relationship often turned out to be more “contest” than partnership.<sup>186</sup> Gary McCulloch presents the development of local policy regarding secondary education after World II as a complex interplay of “accommodation, collaboration and subversion.”<sup>187</sup> He draws a convincing picture of both local resistance to and compliance with central

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<sup>182</sup> Clyde Chitty, *Education Policy in Britain*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 21.

<sup>183</sup> Sharp, “Central and Local Government,” 110.

<sup>184</sup> Chitty, *Education Policy in Britain*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 116.

<sup>185</sup> Vernon Bogdanor, “Power and participation,” *Oxford Review of Education* 5, no. 2 (1979): 157-168.

<sup>186</sup> Roy Lowe, “A century of Local Education Authorities: what has been lost?” *Oxford Review of Education* 28, no. 2 (2002): 158.

<sup>187</sup> Gary McCulloch, “Local Education Authorities and the organisation of secondary education, 1943-1950,” *Oxford Review of Education* 28, no. 2 (2002): 244.

directives, making the point that compliance does not necessarily imply that the LEA was acting against its own assessment of what should be done.<sup>188</sup>

As most nursery education in the 1918-1972 period was situated within cities,<sup>189</sup> the field of urban education also provides useful contextual information for this thesis. Urban historians and sociologists have suggested that the city environment is particularly likely to act as a seedbed for educational ideas and thus to act as a distinct source of policy to inspire or to challenge the centre. Finkelstein points to the variety of people and culture within a small space as an inspiration for original thinking on matters of policy<sup>190</sup> and Reeder and Hill have both discussed how fears about delinquency and degeneration within cities have led to a desire to work for improvements.<sup>191</sup>

There is a body of literature about educational developments in many major English cities. London is, not surprisingly, particularly prominent. Jones calls London County Council “the most innovative of local authorities<sup>192</sup> and Martin claims the education committee “was the most singularly visible” of all LEAs.<sup>193</sup> The most comprehensive study of education in this city is Maclure’s *A History of Education in London 1870-1990*, which is a hymn to wise management and continued social progress, at least until the abolition of the Inner London Education

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

<sup>190</sup> Barbara Finkelstein, “Redoing urban educational history,” in *The City and Education in Four Nations*, ed Ronald K. Goodenow and William E. Marsden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 172-192.

<sup>191</sup> David Reeder, “History, Education and the City,” in *The City and Education in Four Nations*, ed. Ronald K. Goodenow and William E. Marsden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-9; Dilys M. Hill, *Citizens and Cities: Urban Policy in the 1990s* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994).

<sup>192</sup> Jones, *Education in Britain*, 24.

<sup>193</sup> Jane Martin, “Engendering city politics and educational thought: elite women and the London Labour Party, 1914-1965,” *Paedagogica Historica* 44, no. 4 (2008): 399.

Authority in 1990.<sup>194</sup> Birmingham has also been seen as “very special” because of its progressive educational policies.<sup>195</sup> Myers and Grosvenor claim that Birmingham became “a beacon of educational reform” from the 1860s on.<sup>196</sup> Nash and Reeder have similarly pointed to Leicester’s reputation for innovation, pointing out that “these efforts to be in the vanguard of educational movements, however, created problems when ideas changed.”<sup>197</sup>

There have been a very limited number of historical studies looking at nursery education within specific local areas. David Parker has written about debates concerning the possible establishment of nurseries in Hertfordshire from 1915 to 1939, arguing that the issue was “an acid test of the county’s attitude towards the extension of publicly funded facilities and services.”<sup>198</sup> He explores in detail the relationship between the Board and the LEA, noting the control the Board exercised in approving or failing to approve particular districts as suitable for nursery schools. Another recent close examination of nursery education within a particular local context is an unpublished thesis by John Robert Bell, which traces the development of provision from its beginnings until 1967 in the North-East of England. Bell argues that local authorities in the region played a minimal role in the establishment of institutions, the overwhelming majority of which were founded by

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<sup>194</sup> Stuart Maclure, *A History of Education in London 1870-1990* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1990).

<sup>195</sup> Kenneth Newton, *Second City Politics: Democratic Processes and Decision-Making in Birmingham* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 1.

<sup>196</sup> Ian Grosvenor and Kevin Myers, “Progressivism, control and correction: Local Education Authorities and educational policy in twentieth-century England,” *Paedagogica Historica* 42, no. 1 (2006): 232.

<sup>197</sup> David Nash and David Reeder, *Leicester in the Twentieth Century* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1993), 123.

<sup>198</sup> David Parker, ““Giving the children back to their parents’ – the Hertfordshire nursery schools controversy 1915-1939,” *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 30, no. 1 (1998): 35-58.

voluntary organisations. He also emphasises the importance of the Nursery School Association and its local branches in promoting and protecting this provision.<sup>199</sup>

There have been a number of studies which attempt a comparison between the development of early years provision, both care and education, in various local authorities. The focus is invariably the amount of provision in different areas and an attempt to account for the variation. Examples of those who have looked specifically at the issue of care are Jennifer Marchbank, Vicky Randall and Kimberly Fisher, and Helen Penn and Kathryn Riley.<sup>200</sup> Marchbank has compared two anonymised Scottish authorities, looking at points in the decision-making process and the various “barriers” which were encountered.<sup>201</sup> She points to the commitment and determination of nursery enthusiasts in one area and “tactics of issue perversion, branding and issue suppression” in the other.<sup>202</sup> Randall and Fisher conducted a study of six local authorities, and concluded there was a statistical link between provision and “need,” as measured by the number of working women, but this could not account for all the differences. They found that high levels of provision were found in areas with “strong majorities of both Labour and Conservatives,”<sup>203</sup> although a stronger link with Labour began to emerge in the 1970s, and that there was also a correlation between larger numbers of female councillors and high overall provision. Individual councillors and their enthusiasms and priorities were of crucial

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<sup>199</sup> John Robert Bell, “The Provision of Nursery Education in England and Wales to 1967 with special reference to North-East England” (PhD Diss., Durham University, 2011) <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1401>

<sup>200</sup> Marchbank, *Women, Power and Policy*; Vicky Randall and Kimberly Fisher, “Child day care provision: explaining local variation,” *Children and Society* 15 (2001): 170-180; Helen Penn and Kathryn Riley, *Managing Services for the Under Fives* (Harlow: Longman, 1992).

<sup>201</sup> Marchbank, *Women, Power and Policy*, 91.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>203</sup> Randall and Fisher, “Child day care provision,” 175.

importance. Penn and Riley's study is not detailed, but they note that differences between authorities are caused by "differing, local political priorities."<sup>204</sup>

In the area of specifically educational provision, Owen and Moss have written a comparatively recent article in which they note the link between "high levels of material disadvantage" and high levels of nursery education.<sup>205</sup> It is, however, Blackstone's 1971 book which again provides the most detailed and interesting attempt at comparing nursery education in local authorities.<sup>206</sup> She attempts a quantitative study of all local authorities, with the aim of identifying factors which might suggest high or low levels of provision. By her own admission, she fails to do so. Although she is aware that provision is high in "urbanized, industrialized areas,"<sup>207</sup> her study found no link between the wealth of the area governed by an LEA and the extent of maintained provision. Blackstone seems to find this rather dispiriting and suggests that it indicates that decisions about establishing nursery education have been "haphazard."<sup>208</sup> This seems a bit odd: a more obvious conclusion would be that nursery education is situated in those LEAs where great social need presses against pockets of wealth. This would be consistent with the theories of urban education discussed above. Blackstone develops her research with a qualitative survey of policy formation within LEAs, and conducts case studies of Hertfordshire, Kent, Smethwick and Burton-on-Trent. She concludes that variation is caused by "difference in the attitudes of the policy-makers, by the distribution of power amongst the officials...and, up to a point, the effectiveness of

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<sup>204</sup> Penn and Riley, *Managing Service for the Under Fives*.

<sup>205</sup> Charlie Owen and Peter Moss, "Patterns of preschool provision in English local authorities," *Journal of Education Policy* 4, no. 4 (1989): 309-328.

<sup>206</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

pressure groups.”<sup>209</sup> She identifies two particularly important times in the decision-making process: the point at which councils did or did not convert war nurseries into nursery schools and their response to cuts in the early 1950s.

This thesis aims to contribute to research about the history of LEAs by continuing the investigation into the relationship between them and central government in a specific policy area which has received relatively limited attention. As the LEAs had a relatively large amount of discretion concerning nursery education, this is an important part of the picture. It also continues the investigation into why different areas have vastly different nursery education services, although the focus is not on quantity but on the institutional form of the provision.

## **2:8 Summary of existing knowledge regarding the nursery school/nursery class question**

The question of national policy concerning choices made between nursery classes and nursery schools has not been analysed comprehensively and systematically. However, the issue is touched on in some of the existing research. There are some extremely sketchy discussions of the matter in some of the more general histories of English education discussed above and, as one might expect, a little more detail in the work of specialists in the history of nursery education. Nanette Whitbread and Tessa Blackstone’s rather dated works remain the most comprehensive accounts of the development of this policy.

Whitbread notes the establishment, following the 1918 Education Act, of both nursery schools, on the McMillan model, and nursery classes, achieved through

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 147.



the upgrading of existing facilities for the under fives.<sup>210</sup> Blackstone claims, with reference to a speech by Fisher in the House of Commons, that the Board's preference at this time was for open air schools, on the grounds that this would best serve the purpose of improving children's health.<sup>211</sup> This would strongly imply that the nursery school, as developed by Margaret McMillan, was seen as an ideal, an argument which is consistent with Blackstone's position that McMillan had influence in the framing of the Act. This raises the question why the term "nursery school" was defined so flexibly in the final wording so that the term "nursery school" encompassed the "nursery class."<sup>212</sup> Kevin Brehony claims that support for nursery classes came from Nonconformists who feared that because schools were frequently established by religious groups, a preference for schools rather than classes would lead to the sector being dominated by the Anglicans and Roman Catholics.<sup>213</sup> Lawrence Andrews similarly argues in his study of the 1918 Act that Nonconformists were hostile to nursery schools for this reason.<sup>214</sup>

Both Whitbread and Blackstone describe the position taken by the Hadow committee on the question of whether nursery schools or classes should be preferred: nursery schools should be provided for the most deprived children; nursery classes would suffice for children from urban, working-class districts which were not classified as slums, whereas the family home was the best place for more privileged children. There is a need for more research to establish precisely what led the

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<sup>210</sup> Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*.

<sup>211</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

<sup>212</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act, 1918*, Section 19 (1).

<sup>213</sup> Kevin Brehony, "This abominable State intervention,' The nursery school in the debates around the 1918 Education Act," (paper presented at ISCHE 31, Utrecht, The Netherlands August 26-29, 2009).

<sup>214</sup> Andrews, *Education Act, 1918*.

committee to this conclusion and what effect it had on the Board's policy. In terms of the LEA response, Blackstone claims that they tended to favour nursery classes above nursery schools in the this period, citing an article published in *Education* in 1936, but shows that a number of different approaches were taken in different Local Education Authorities.

Whitbread claims that the proliferation of nursery classes in World War II led to a widespread belief that this should be the preferred form of provision but that “the nursery school lobby” exerted influence on the writers of the 1943 White Paper so that the nursery school was seen as preferable.<sup>215</sup> This was reflected in the 1944 Act, which nonetheless did allow for nursery classes, although Whitbread does not explain why. She blames the fact that nursery education was not integrated into the infant system on a lack of public enthusiasm for development and on the fact that it was thus vulnerable to cuts in times of economic hardship. Blackstone makes little comment on government views concerning the question of nursery schools and nursery classes in the post-war period, seeming to see no implied preference in the wording of the 1944 Education Act, despite noting the issuing of a memorandum in the late 1940s which “advocated small self-contained nursery schools.”<sup>216</sup> In her discussion of developments in Hertfordshire, she is surprised by “an extraordinary letter,” sent in 1956, in which the Ministry pressed for nursery schools rather than nursery classes, claiming “its interpretation of the 1944 Act ... was entirely new.”<sup>217</sup>

Penn agrees with Whitbread's view that the “the nursery school became the basis of

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<sup>215</sup> Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*, 104.

<sup>216</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*, 64.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

post-war construction”<sup>218</sup> but does not discuss the evidence for this or investigate the cause.

The Plowden Report recommended that expansion should be encouraged through a wide-variety of methods, which educationalist Lesley Webb describes as “an ad hoc amalgam of the least thoughtful, least expensive and least expert practices of custodial care.”<sup>219</sup> She condemns what she sees as the move towards childcare from a purely educational focus. In her view, the authors of report failed to understand the distinctiveness of different institutions and therefore the recommendations were potentially damaging for young children. Whitbread also claims that the Plowden Committee’s recommendations were “confused.”<sup>220</sup> She feels that the committee ignored the advantages of nursery classes in not endorsing them more whole-heartedly and adopting the ambiguous “nursery groups” which could come to resemble informal playgroups. Blackstone does not comment on this aspect of the Report.<sup>221</sup>

The question of local authority decisions concerning the type of nursery education they should provide has not been addressed in a comprehensive and systematic way. There are, however, snippets of discussions about the issue in particular times and places. Shena Simon’s *A Century of City Government – Manchester 1838-1938*<sup>222</sup> describes the widespread development of nursery classes in the city, driven by the forceful Director of Education, Spurley Hey, and the bitter

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<sup>218</sup> Penn, “Round and Round the Mulberry Bush,” 86.

<sup>219</sup> Webb, *Purposes and Practice in Nursery Education*, 50.

<sup>220</sup> Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*, 131.

<sup>221</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

<sup>222</sup> Shena D. Simon, *A Century of City Government – Manchester 1838-1938* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938).

controversy it sparked with “whole hogger” nursery school enthusiasts.<sup>223</sup> Cusden writes with enthusiasm about the innovations in Leicester nursery classes in the 1930s.<sup>224</sup>

There are thus a significant number of aspects of this decision-making process which warrant further research. The preferences of the Board/Ministry during the formation of the 1918 and 1944 Acts still seems open to debate. The reasons behind these preferences, and whether the demands of various policy participants were ceded to or not also need clarifying. Similarly, the decisions of the Hadow and Plowden Committees have not been analysed and theorised. The question of the choices between nursery schools and nursery classes in local areas is significantly under-researched and there is clearly a need to develop accounts of what occurred here.

## **2:9 Conclusion: Justification for the research questions**

My first pair of research questions, which are stated in full in chapter 1:6, asks which factors influenced central government’s indication, or conversely failure to indicate, a preference for either nursery schools or nursery classes, and which groups or individuals were able to influence the decisions about policy in this area. The most significant research to begin to address these questions remains the works from the early 1970s by Blackstone and Whitbread.<sup>225</sup> Neither focused heavily on the issue and neither author had the benefit of access to crucial government archive

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>224</sup> Cusden, *English Nursery School*.

<sup>225</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*; Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*.

material, much of it still being subject to the 30 year confidentiality rule.<sup>226</sup>

Therefore the reasons behind the choices of decision-makers remain obscure.

My second set of research questions ask how the differences between the distribution of nursery classes and nursery schools in different local education authorities can be explained and how power was divided between central and local government in the policy area. Existing studies concentrate heavily on the variation in the quantity of early years provision between different local authorities and little is known about choices made between different sorts of provision.

The decisions about nursery schools and nursery classes have not previously been theorised in an adequate way, and this thesis will go some way to filling this gap. Drawing on policy analysis theory, the thesis describes which model of power best describes policy-making in this area at various points in the process. Drawing on both path dependency and punctuated equilibrium theory, it also explains why the policy changed or failed to change over time both at the national and the local level. The methods through which these questions will be investigated are discussed in the following chapter.

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<sup>226</sup> The 30 year rule review, "An independent review of the '30 year rule,'" <http://www.30yearrulereview.org.uk/background.htm> (accessed 24<sup>th</sup> March 2011, site now discontinued).

## **Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods**

### **3:1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to detail the procedures used in answering the research questions outlined in the previous chapters in the belief that clarity about choices made and methods employed will be of use to the reader in his/her assessment of the validity of the conclusions drawn. It describes the location of the thesis within the field of history of education and argues for the value of approaching this particular topic in such a way. It gives an overview of the research design and explains the choice of documentary analysis as the research method. It describes the sources available and explains when and how selections were made from these sources and also how the data was analysed in order to produce a coherent and credible account.

### **3:2 Location within the field of history of education**

The starting point of my interest in researching nursery schools and nursery classes was that it seemed very odd to me for one Local Education Authority (LEA) to fund both nursery schools and nursery classes, institutions which offered very different experiences to children, despite there being no obvious differences in the needs of those children. Within the locality in which I was working at the time, I was very aware that both sorts of institution had existed for decades. Therefore, although contemporary politicians may have views about which sort of institution might be best and have made choices about either continuing or cutting funding, the key decisions which initiated the system had to lie in the past. My research therefore consists of a search for the origins of nursery schools and nursery classes and an

analysis of the subsequent course of their development and is therefore located within the field of history of education. For reasons which have been discussed in chapter 1:4, the period in which most significant developments took place was 1918-1972, and therefore this is the period on which I have focused.

Histories of the development of national educational systems have always been a key, if not the key, element in the field.<sup>1</sup> For most of the twentieth century, those responsible for teacher training used to take it for granted that their students should be informed about these matters and histories were written to fulfil the needs of this constituency.<sup>2</sup> In 1972, historian Norman Morris wrote, apparently without irony, that “The year 1870 is in many ways the 1066 of English education. It is the date which all students know.”<sup>3</sup> However, priorities within teacher education have since changed dramatically and the purpose of history of education research can no longer be taken for granted. Recent priorities at national level might seem to throw considerable doubt on its worth. The Labour government (1997-2010) was keen to promote a certain type of educational research which became characterised as looking for “what works.”<sup>4</sup> It believed that in the past an insufficient amount of research was actually usable by teachers<sup>5</sup> and it therefore began to prioritise work which could directly bring about improvements in schools, which was understood as enabling children to score better in academic tests.<sup>6</sup> There is no sign of the Coalition

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<sup>1</sup> Gary McCulloch, *The Struggle for the History of Education* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Norman Morris, “1870: The Rating Option,” in *History of Education – Volume 1*, ed. Malcolm Seaborne (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1972), 23-42, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Geoff Whitty, “Education(al) research and education policy making: is conflict inevitable?” *British Educational Journal* 32, no. 2 (2006): 159-176.

<sup>5</sup> Suzy Harris, “Modernising governance: the impact on policy and research communities in the United Kingdom,” *International Studies in the Sociology of Education* 12, no. 3 (2002): 325.

<sup>6</sup> Phil Hodgkinson and John K. Smith, “The Relationship between Research, Policy and Practice,” in *Evidence-Based Practice in Education*, ed. Gary Thomas and Richard Pring (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2004), 150-163.

government (2010- present) retreating from this principle, and, in the current hostile financial climate, researchers whose work does not fulfil such criteria have to fight even harder to justify their professional existence.

Geoff Whitty has suggested making a distinction between “education research,” research about education in the widest possible sense, and “educational research,” which is “consciously geared towards improving policy and practice.”<sup>7</sup> This distinction has wide relevance but seems particularly pertinent to those working within history of education. As McCulloch and Richardson claim, researchers in the area have long been aware of “an uneasy tension between those ... who have espoused a liberal arts view of educational history for its own sake and others .... who have wanted to see historical studies in education put to use in addressing contemporary problems and controversies.”<sup>8</sup> Within the former camp is the Belgian historian, Marc Depaepe, who warns against “wanting to write a history that interferes with the present.”<sup>9</sup> This is because there are no “concrete lessons to be drawn from the educational past.”<sup>10</sup> It is not possible, for example, to recreate the institutions or teaching methods from one era and transfer them unaltered to the present. The changed context of society would mean that any simplistic attempt to copy practice from the past would have very different to results today. Gary McCulloch, on the other hand, has argued that historians should not take the attitude that “the present day is none of their concern” and argues for the concept of the

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<sup>7</sup> Whitty, “Education(al) research and education policy making,” 172.

<sup>8</sup> Gary McCulloch and William Richardson, *Historical Research in Educational Settings* (Buckingham: OUP, 2000), 27.

<sup>9</sup> Marc Depaepe, “The ten commandments of good practices in history of education research,” *Zeitschrift für Pädagogische Historiographie* 16 (2010): 32.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.



“usable past,” so that the historian adds voices from the past to current debates.<sup>11</sup>

Tyack and Cuban, who regard history as a “whole storehouse of experiments,” believe, for example, that the past has demonstrated again and again that parents need childcare, and that if this could be made audible to policy-makers, they might be persuaded to avoid repeating the mistake of ignoring this need.<sup>12</sup>

My own research was motivated primarily by a desire to understand the past and the motives of people in the past. I did not set out to directly bring about change, and therefore I have a natural inclination towards a liberal arts view of history of education and to Whitty’s “education” rather than “educational” research. However, I feel, as do the vast majority who take this position, that such research is nonetheless of deep value which can have positive side-effects for the present. It contributes to a broad base of knowledge about education which counteracts an idea that we can always have “quick wins”<sup>13</sup> and definitive answers. It helps us to understand that education is complex and multi-faceted and that educational values are bound up with a huge range of wider values, so that the idea of “progress” can never be straightforward and uncontested. Historical research helps practitioners in the field to develop “pride and a shared memory.”<sup>14</sup> They are able to put current developments in a meaningful context, understand more fully the value-systems behind what they are asked to implement and are able to articulate problems and issues as they arise with far more confidence. Practitioners, parents and other people who care about young children are empowered by this type of research as it

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<sup>11</sup> McCulloch, *The Struggle for the History of Education*, 70.

<sup>12</sup> David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia – A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 6.

<sup>13</sup> Harris, “Modernising governance,” 329.

<sup>14</sup> Dorothy Hewes, preface to *History of Early Childhood Education*, by V. Celia Lascarides and Blythe F. Hinitz (London: Garland, 2000), xv-xvi, xvi.

strengthens their ability to argue that governments do not always know best and alternative views are possible.

Change is inevitable and sometimes change is needed, but policy-makers also need to be reminded about what, or who, may be lost in the relentless push forward. Two key elements from my project, the nursery school and the LEA, have been subject to so much change recently that some believe their very existence is in peril. Many traditional nursery schools were absorbed into children's centres under recent Labour policies.<sup>15</sup> The Coalition government is profoundly altering the role of LEAs with its push for free schools and academies which operate outside their control.<sup>16</sup> Studying these things in their historical context, and understanding where they were of use and value (and, indeed, where they were not) ensures that policy-makers have a much more rounded picture before they make decisions with consequences that may be hard to reverse.

### **3:3 Overview of research design**

My first pair of research questions concerns the Board/Ministry of Education's policy regarding nursery classes and nursery schools, and the reasons behind its preferences. I investigated this decision-making process with a view to discovering which groups or individuals were able to wield influence and which arguments proved decisive. The method employed was documentary analysis. With the passing of forty years from the end of the period under investigation, there is a high likelihood that the vast majority of decision-makers are now deceased. It was

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<sup>15</sup> Rona Tutt, *Partnership Working to Support Special Educational Needs and Disabilities* (London: Sage, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Ed Dorrell, "Editorial – From big beasts to endangered species," *TES Magazine*, March 18, 2011.

therefore in no way realistic to hope to identify many people actively involved in these decisions and to ask to interview them as one might do when investigating more recent periods. Tracking down a few survivors would be a large investment in research time for what would almost certainly be a very small return. The only realistic option was to base the investigation primarily on records kept by decision-makers themselves and by those groups who tried to influence them, supplementing this with published material, including newspapers. The selection of documents, the nature of the data collected and the methods of analysis will be discussed in the following sections.

The second pair of research questions concerns the policy choices about nursery schools and classes in LEAs. Again, the main method of research was documentary analysis with the same justification. As my interest and concern is in the details of motives and discussions within specific contexts, I rejected the idea of a large quantitative comparison of different authorities in favour of a more detailed, fine-grained study of a small number of examples. Educational policy theorist, Barbara Finkelstein, has championed qualitative case studies in urban contexts, as she feels that too often quantitative researchers have “lost track” of the “human dimensions,” and sacrificed “complexity and richness” in their accounts.<sup>17</sup> I have chosen to carry out four case-studies and therefore have analysed the development of nursery education in London, Birmingham, Leicester and Manchester. These are in no way representative of LEAs in general: it will be noted that all four of them are large cities. This is because for most of the twentieth century the vast majority of

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<sup>17</sup> Barbara Finkelstein, “Redoing Urban Educational History,” in *The City and Education in Four Nations*, ed. Ronald Goodenow and William E. Marsden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 172-192, 173.

early years educational provision was based in such urban areas because they were given priority when funding was available. Therefore, they were able to seize opportunities to develop provision if they chose to do so, whereas rural areas rarely had such chances. I chose these particular cities because I wished to analyse examples of two distinct patterns of development. A sharp division can be drawn between those cities which placed significant value on nursery schools and established a network of these alongside nursery class provision, and those which focussed their energies on building a larger number of nursery classes. This study therefore includes two in the former category (London and Birmingham) and two in the latter (Leicester and Manchester).

A pertinent question here is whether these studies of the histories of policy development in these LEAs were undertaken “for their own sake” or “in order to derive general laws from them”: in David Carr’s terms, whether they are “ideographic” or “nomothetic.”<sup>18</sup> I believe that these case studies are of intrinsic interest and therefore do not need to be representative of others in order to be worthwhile. Policy in these areas mattered to the large numbers of people within their boundaries and who lived with the consequences, intended or unintended, of council decisions. It is also true that these cities were players on the national stage: the large amount of correspondence between them and the Board /Ministry /Department is evidence that they had access to the national decision-makers and their views were heard, and could potentially influence policy. Their prominent position also meant that they had the potential to be role models to others.

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<sup>18</sup> David Carr, “History, Fiction and Human Time: Historical Imagination and Historical Responsibility,” in *The Ethics of History*, ed. David Carr, Thomas R. Flynn and Rudolf Makkreel (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 250.

However, these case studies also serve as a source of suggestions for how decision-making might work in the population of which they form a sample, which is to say urban councils which had some opportunities of developing nursery provision. They act as evidence for theories about which factors have been important in such councils and which have not. The work of Robert Yin, who has written extensively about this method, supports using case studies in this way. Yin believes the case study method is simply not suitable for the researcher to attempt a “statistical generalization,”<sup>19</sup> in other words to select cases because they are representative of the whole population. The number of cases in this type of work will always be too small to “assess the incidence of phenomena.”<sup>20</sup> S/he should aim instead for “analytic generalization,” in which “a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study.”<sup>21</sup> As Yin acknowledges, however, “for some topics, the existing knowledge base does not lend itself to the development of good theoretical statements, and only an exploratory case study is likely to result.”<sup>22</sup> In these cases, the aim of the research is to provide initial explanations of the phenomenon under investigation which can serve as a template with which others can be compared. As the history of early years policy in LEAs is very much under-researched, this is the approach which I took here. When starting the research, I acknowledged the possibility of finding that the factors which led to the decisions in each case were wholly different: as policy historian, David Angus, points out, “perhaps each city is unique.”<sup>23</sup> This would in

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<sup>19</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, rev. ed. (London: Sage, 1989), 38.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-38.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

no way diminish the value of the research. Either a resulting theory about common causes or a theory that there are no common causes could potentially be used as a template for future research in the area.

My final research question concerns the nature of the relationship between the national government and local authorities, with regard to the development of policy in the four cities. Within the documentary material available, both in local and national archives, there are examples of data relating to this question, either in correspondence between the Board/Ministry and the LEA or in reports of discussions in either arena about an appropriate response to action from the other body. In addition to comparing the LEAs to each other, I also employ a mode of analysis in which I compare the actual pattern of development within each LEA to a theoretical model of the development which would occur if an authority was closely following Board/Ministry advice and policy preferences. This approach is inspired by historian Gary McCulloch's 2002 study of the development of secondary education.<sup>24</sup> The advantage is that it helps to uncover patterns of resistance and compliance and is useful in generating theories about the distribution of power.

### **3:4 Ethical considerations**

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) has published ethical guidelines which apply to educational research, which includes research into the history of education.<sup>25</sup> These give guidance to researchers concerning their "responsibilities to participants," "responsibilities to sponsors of research" and

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<sup>24</sup> Gary McCulloch, "Local Education Authorities and the organisation of secondary education, 1943-1950," *Oxford Review of Education* 28, no. 2 (2002): 235-246.

<sup>25</sup> British Educational Research Association, "Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research 2004," [www.bera.ac.uk/system/files/ethica1\\_0.pdf](http://www.bera.ac.uk/system/files/ethica1_0.pdf)

“responsibilities to the community of educational researchers.”<sup>26</sup> I will address these issues in turn.

There are no research participants in this project, as this is normally understood within social science, because data is gathered from documents. Issues of gaining consent for participation and informing participants of their rights to withdraw do not therefore apply. However, I do have responsibilities towards any living people who are the subject of the investigation. The Data Protection Act, in force since 2000, applies to “information about living identifiable individuals.”<sup>27</sup> Many of my data subjects are deceased. This is sometimes possible to ascertain for certain in the case of public figures. In other cases, it is usual to presume a life-span of one hundred years (Birmingham Archives, for example, require researchers to sign a form promising they will act on this presumption in order to access documentary records.) This means that I need to treat data from anyone actively involved in the political debate from approximately 1930 on as if it concerns a living person, unless there is evidence to suggest the contrary. This is based on an assumption that in order to be so involved, the person was an adult but may potentially have been as young as eighteen at the time. If the person is known to have been older, then the assumption can be adjusted.

When data is stored in public archives and is not in a structured form, where “specific information about specific individuals” is “readily available,” then the Data Protection Act does not apply.<sup>28</sup> However, once information is processed by the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>27</sup> Roger Tomlinson, *Data Protection: A Guide to the Data Protection Acts and their Implications for Managers in the Arts and Entertainment Industry* (Cambridge: Arts Marketing Association, 2000), 12.

<sup>28</sup> National Archives, “Data Protection Policy Statement,” <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/legal/pdf/policy04.pdf>.

researcher into another form and removed from the archive, then the Act does indeed come into force.<sup>29</sup> The Modern Records Centre in Warwick gives clear advice about how to proceed. The two main considerations are that “the data are not processed to support measures or decisions with respect to particular individuals” and “that the data are not processed in such a way that substantial damage or substantial distress is, or is likely to be, caused to any data subject.”<sup>30</sup> If the individual concerned is a public figure then the fact the information is likely to be already in the public domain and also that disclosure may be considered to be in the public interest may be taken into account in the researcher’s ethical decisions. In other cases, the advice is to anonymise data.

With regard to this thesis, then, the identification of politicians, both national and local, in the context of the exercise of their official duties and to all behaviour which has a direct bearing on these, would seem to be justifiable. The public has a right to know how power is exercised within the bodies which make decisions on its behalf. The same arguments would seem to apply to members of pressure groups or other organisations which can be demonstrated to have an influence on government. However, an argument about public interest is more difficult to make in the case of naming members of the public, who have perhaps written to politicians and organisations detailing their personal circumstances (for example, in order to plead for increased nursery provision, telling tales of difficulties they are having without it). It is also difficult to make in the case of individual teachers who are identified in inspection reports, such as those stored in the National Archives. These reports do

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<sup>29</sup>Modern Records Centre, “The Data Protection Act 1998,”  
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/using/dpa/>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



frequently contain information which might be seen as sensitive, such as comments on people's personalities or ability to do their jobs: "The Matron is pompous in her attitude," is one example.<sup>31</sup> In these circumstances, names have been omitted. It will, however, be noted that documents including this information have been referenced in the usual way. This is because it would seem most likely that "substantial distress" may be caused by someone happening on their own name or the name of a relative in the course of reading the thesis. The likelihood of someone having an academic interest in following up a particular reference and then finding that the point in fact referred to themselves or an individual known to them would seem vanishingly small.

Most of BERA's recommendations about obligations to sponsors do not apply to this project. The Incorporated Froebel Educational Institute, a registered charity with an interest in Froebelian education, have paid my tuition fees for two years of my PhD, but have in no way commissioned the report or placed me under any restrictions with regard to the content of the research or the methods employed. My obligations are that I "make interim presentations and updates to the Committee," provide them with a copy of the final thesis and acknowledge their support in any presentations or publications.<sup>32</sup>

My responsibilities to the community of researchers include the need for intellectual honesty, not "falsifying research evidence" or distorting it in order to make the findings seem more significant.<sup>33</sup> The inclusion of this substantial

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<sup>31</sup> Llewellyn and Greaves, Inspection Report, April 21, 1942, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 12. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>32</sup> Froebel Educational Institute, "Grants," <http://www.froebel.org.uk/grants.html>.

<sup>33</sup> British Educational Research Association, "Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research 2004," [www.bera.ac.uk/system/files/ethica1\\_0.pdf](http://www.bera.ac.uk/system/files/ethica1_0.pdf)

Methodology and Methods chapter within the thesis demonstrates that I have sufficient knowledge to carry out the research properly and is a form of external scrutiny.

### **3:5 The selection of documents**

At an early stage of this research project, it was necessary to identify the relevant archival holdings and which specific files were likely to contain pertinent documents. Board/Ministry/Department of Education (and Science) official files are held in the National Archives in Kew and typically contain letters to and from other departments, members of the public, professional organisations and pressure groups; minutes of meetings; internal memoranda and copies and drafts of forthcoming legislation or circulars. The easiest starting point was to look for series of files in the “education” section of the bound indexes on the reference shelves. The two most obviously relevant series for this project are ED66, which is entitled “Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education, Registered Files (N Series)” and covers the dates 1918-1966, and ED102, “Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education, General Files,” covering 1917-1968. Series of documents relating to the 1933 Hadow (ED10/49) and Plowden (ED146) Reports can be identified in the same way. I found additional material by searching using keywords in the electronic catalogue, although this felt like a fairly hit and miss affair. When I searched the term “nursery education” from 1918-1970, specifying the education series, for example, only fifteen results were produced, whereas “nursery schools” for the same years produced seven hundred and twenty-

nine. Once these files had been located, I then needed to decide whether or not they were likely to be useful for my research through the use of the titles and the record summaries listed in the catalogue. This was a difficult process, as many entries are brief and incomplete. I decided it was realistic to read all files which were placed in series which I had identified as relevant, and also to look at the other files located by the search function with titles and summaries with a clear link to the research questions. It is, of course, possible, that some potentially interesting material was missed.

Groups that were influential in the discussions on this subject can be identified from the Board/Ministry/Department files. The quantity of meetings and correspondence with the Nursery School Association (NSA) and the National Union of Teachers (NUT) suggest that these organisations were particularly important. Both these organisations have their own archives, held at the London School of Economics and at the Modern Records Office in Warwick respectively. The NSA records are all relevant to some degree, and are relatively small in quantity. I was therefore able to look at all the material held there and further selection of material was not necessary. Many of the NUT records are not, however, directly relevant, as the union has had wide interests. It was therefore necessary to use the catalogue to identify useful files. The Education Committee Minutes appeared to be the only holdings which were likely to have a bearing on this topic. This committee was responsible for discussing issues concerning the union's stance on various education policy matters. As these are not particularly extensive, I was able to view all of these in a relatively short period. From these committee records, it is clear that there was a Nursery Sub-committee which was "appointed by the Education Committee to

consider the question of the Provision of Nursery Schools” in 1917.<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately, records for the sub-committee are not extant, but there are examples of the reports which it wrote in the main Education Committee Minutes.

Historians Tosh and Lang make the point that “the public records tend to give too much prominence to administrative considerations” and are less informative about “the political pressures to which ministers responded.”<sup>35</sup> I therefore also investigated parliamentary debates about nursery education using Hansard, the official parliamentary record online.<sup>36</sup> Articles from the national, educational and local press also provided different information and perspectives. Some of these were discovered by looking through paper copies, stored in the British Library or in local archives. Others were identified by searching with key words in electronic archives such as Times Online. Other relevant material, such as political memoirs or commentaries by educationalists, was discovered in the course of conducting the literature review.

All four of the local education authorities under investigation have records stored in the local city archives, which provide enough data to piece together an account of the development of nursery education policy. The amount and nature of the records kept in the different archives varies, as do the manner of working in each authority and the precise titles of the committees or sub-committees with an interest in nursery education. It was therefore necessary in each case to look through the catalogues and request some sample files of different sorts before making a final decision about how to proceed. My intention was to read as many documents as

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<sup>34</sup> National Union of Teachers, Education Committee Minutes, September 22, 1917, MSS 179/EDU/1/1/25-26 (1916-1919). Modern Records Office, Warwick University.

<sup>35</sup> John Tosh, with Sean Lang, *The Pursuit of History*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2006), 105.

<sup>36</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, “Hansard 1803-2005,” <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com>.

possible that related to nursery education from each archive, although the quantity of information in some of the archives meant that I could not read every file with a conceivable link from cover to cover and had to make choices about what to select. The possibility that something may have been missed, such as a discussion of the issue among bodies who were not directly responsible for the area, has to be acknowledged.

In Leicester, the smallest archive, I was in fact able to read the whole of the Elementary/Primary Education Sub-committee minutes from the dates relevant to my study in chronological order. As these are very brief and lacking in contextual information, I also read the entire set of Education Committee minutes.

In Manchester, I read both the Elementary Education Sub-committee and the Education Committee minutes from 1915 (with some earlier samples) until 1941. For the period after World War II, all minutes of sub-committees are only available as inserts into the Education Committee minutes, which makes these files very unmanageable. I found it necessary to make a selection of Education Committee minutes for this period, and initially looked at files from every third year, checking back if I found evidence of any significant change of policy since the last file I had viewed. Where I had additional information, for example from newspaper sources, that discussion of the issue had occurred, I then also requested files from these months.

In Birmingham, I read the Elementary Education/Primary Education minute books, which are very detailed. Samples of the main Education Committee minutes, taken from each relevant decade, suggested that analysing these would be unlikely to yield much information which was not already included in the Elementary

Education/Primary Education minutes and I therefore chose not to read the Education Committee minutes in their entirety. I did, however, use the catalogue to locate other files of potential interest, such as the one containing the “History of Birmingham Education Committee” written by M. G. R. Adams.<sup>37</sup>

A similar approach was necessary in London, where the amount of educational material stored in the Metropolitan Archives is extensive. I began by accessing the files of the Day Schools/Elementary/Primary and Secondary Sub-committees and the Children’s Care Sub-committees. Even these are too extensive to be read from cover to cover, but, fortunately, they are indexed, which means that finding information directly relevant to nurseries was manageable. Nonetheless, challenges remained: index terms are relatively unstable, and the indexes needed to be checked carefully for a variety of terms such as “children under five” or “five, children under.” I read some samples of the Education Committee minutes, concentrating on years of particular significance, such as those when key Acts were passed. I also looked at the Education Officer’s Department files, and located files about nursery education policy within these.

I found some material relevant to Local Education Authorities within the archives which I was visiting with the primary aim of looking at the national context. A catalogue search at the National Archives using the various local authority names and “nursery” enabled me to locate some files with very useful material. This included correspondence between the LEAs and the Board/Ministry. Material also came to light in the archives of the NSA. I found, for example, documents relating

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<sup>37</sup> M.G.R.Adams, History of Birmingham Education Committee, Undated, BCL: Miscellaneous Education Files. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

to Spurley Hey, the Director of Education in Manchester 1914-1930, his addresses to the association and subsequent correspondence with members.<sup>38</sup>

### **3:6 Reading and interpreting documents**

In her seminal article about documentary research, Platt describes how the “specific characteristics of documents which raise the greatest problems are that the available stock normally exists already and cannot be created to order”<sup>39</sup> and explains how the researcher “must use what he (sic) can get.”<sup>40</sup> Even in the case of official bodies who are obliged to keep detailed records, not every occurrence of significance may be reflected in documentary form. Minds may have been changed on crucial issues by informal conversations or telephone calls which are lost to history. Some information will remain permanently inaccessible.

An additional problem is that even when relevant documents were created, they may not be available. The National Archives, for example, do not keep every document produced by government departments. The back cover of some files<sup>41</sup> makes reference to the Public Records Act 1958, and provides instructions designed to inform staff members about what should or should not be retained. According to these instructions, when the file is considered complete, an official within the department must specify whether, after the passing of five years, it should be destroyed or reviewed. At the review, it can either be destroyed or retained for a

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<sup>38</sup> British Association of Early Childhood, Early Documents File, 13/4. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>39</sup> Jennifer Platt, “Evidence and proof in documentary research: 1, Some specific problems of documentary research,” *Sociological Review* 29, no. 1 (1981): 33.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>41</sup> Department of Education and Science and related bodies, Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 1. National Archives, Kew (one such example).

second review twenty-five years after the date of the first entry. At this second review, it is either destroyed, retained for further review, or subject to “weeding” and transferred to the Public Record Office. The 1958 Act was subject to revisions, the most thorough being in 1967, but this procedure did not materially alter until the introduction of the Freedom of Information Act in 2000.<sup>42</sup> The intention behind all of this legislation was to preserve documents of historical interest but decisions about retention and destruction were ultimately subjective and there were many opportunities for documents relevant to a particular research question to be removed. Other organisations and those responsible for their archives also have policies about what should and what should not be retained and not all of these are made explicit.

In addition to these systematic losses, documents can be misplaced or destroyed by accidents. The NSA Executive Committee Minutes prior to 1941, for example, were lost when the Secretary’s flat was bombed during World War II.<sup>43</sup> It is also possible that files which contain particularly sensitive information may remain closed for longer than the usual period, which is currently twenty years (and was thirty years during the period when I was collecting data).<sup>44</sup> At the London Metropolitan Archive, for example, I was refused permission to read the files of the Special Education Committee, because these included the medical details of individuals and were therefore closed for one hundred years.

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<sup>42</sup> The National Archives, “The History of the Public Records Act,” <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/policy/act/history.htm>.

<sup>43</sup> British Library of Political and Economic Science, “The collection of British Association for Early Childhood Education 1910-1973,” <http://library-2.lse.ac.uk/archives/handlists/BAECE/BAECE.html>.

<sup>44</sup> The National Archives, “Move to 20-year rule begins,” <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/news/797.htm>



Platt calls on the researcher to consider whether s/he faces either “an inadequate quantity of data” or a “qualitatively unsatisfactory distribution of data.”<sup>45</sup> An inadequate quantity would, in terms of this project, perhaps be indicated by such large gaps in the record that it becomes impossible to sense any thread at all to the narrative and to understand the basic chronology of the decision-making process. With regard to the national picture on the nursery school/nursery class question, there is a very large quantity of data available and I did not feel that this situation occurred. However, there are some points where material becomes a bit thinner and I did have some questions that could not therefore be answered. I regret, for example, that more detailed records of informal discussions within the Central Advisory Committee Working Party 3, responsible for investigating nursery education for the Plowden Report, do not exist as it is difficult to discern who was influencing whom within this small group. Local education authority records can be very dry and formal and do not always record background discussion to motions carried. I came across a large number of frustratingly vague entries in minute books, such the one in an education file in Manchester, which simply stated that the Elementary Subcommittee had submitted minutes and that it had been “resolved that the proceedings now submitted with the recommendations contained therein be approved and adopted.”<sup>46</sup> However, with regard to the LEAs under investigation here and my research questions, there is fortunately enough information available to construct a basic map of key events and discern causes behind changes in direction. Both the national and local pictures so constructed could potentially be radically altered by

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<sup>45</sup> Platt, “Evidence and proof in documentary research:1, Some specific problems of documentary research,” 35.

<sup>46</sup> Manchester County Council, Education Committee Minutes, January 24, 1918, Volume 7. Greater Manchester County Record Office.

subsequent research, should evidence from a new source come to light. This does not, however, imply that an attempt to answer the questions with what is currently available is not worthwhile.

Qualitatively unsatisfactory distribution of data in the case of these records might, for example, be caused by the removal or the suppression of a substantial amount of government correspondence to one particular pressure group, or the views of a particular individual consistently having been omitted from accounts of meetings and interviews. It is difficult to imagine a motive for such action on the part of any individual or group of individuals in many cases. However, it is conceivable that jealousies and rivalries, or the wish to conceal the existence of discord, might lead to such behaviour. The early years of the NSA were, for example, marked by arguments between Margaret McMillan and other leading members about key policy issues, including the question of whether nursery classes should be promoted by the organisation,<sup>47</sup> and it is possible that someone may have wished to suppress some of the records about this in order to preserve the reputation and status of the association. It is extremely difficult, in the absence of physical signs of tampering with documents, to recognise if this is happening, although I tried at all times to be alert for inconsistencies which might indicate the full story was not being told. I did not come across any such instances.

John Scott has also discussed methodological issues relating to the use of documents in social research.<sup>48</sup> Like Platt, he is concerned with the

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<sup>47</sup> McMillan to de Lissa, May 8, 1929, British Association of Early Childhood Education: Early Documents File, 13/8. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>48</sup> John Scott, *A Matter of Record* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

“representativeness”<sup>49</sup> of documents: whether the documents which are actually present in an archive accurately reflect the documents produced at that time by a person or organisation. He also raises the question of documents’ “authenticity” – whether the documents are what they purport to be (and are not forgeries).<sup>50</sup> The authenticity of the documents I used is generally not a significant cause of concern in comparison to those used in many other types of historical work. They are from a relatively recent period, have often been produced by officials specifically tasked with keeping accurate records and are stored in modern, secure archives. Although it is sensible to be aware of the possibility of forgery, it would not be a reasonable use of research time to conduct any extensive investigations into the matter. What is vital to remember, however, is that care must be taken in establishing the author, date and place of writing, whenever it is possible to do so.<sup>51</sup> In terms of the government files, I found that this was usually easy to establish, as letters, reports, and memoranda are generally dated and signed. Reading some signatures was challenging, however, particularly in the case of memoranda, which are frequently just initialled. I found, though, that when reading a series of documents, I would usually find at least one instance where a particular signature could be confidently ascribed to its owner, by appearing over a printed name, for example. Some documents were undated, which I found to be particularly the case for those from the earlier periods of the investigation. However, they were usually stamped with the date in which they were placed in the file, which gave a rough indication of when they were written, and at least set a final date after which this would have been impossible. I also came across

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>51</sup> Gary McCulloch, *Documentary Research in Education, History and the Social Sciences* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004).

some fragments of reports and other documents which could be neither attributed nor dated. My general rule was that a document was inadmissible as evidence unless I knew, as a minimum, the year in which it was produced and knew at least the role of the person who produced it. There are, for example, some instances of documents which I have used in the following chapters which I have referenced as having been written by, for example “a Ministry official.” I have made a very occasional exception to my rule regarding the need to know the year of production in the cases of documents clearly produced for a specific purpose, such as providing evidence for the Hadow or Plowden Committees. At all times, preference in my accounts is given to evidence from documents whose origins are fully known.

Scott also discusses the need to establish the “credibility” of documents: whether documents give an accurate record of the events they describe.<sup>52</sup> This issue is not always relevant within this thesis: many documents, including reports, circulars and drafts of legislation are examined as part of the process, not as a commentary upon it. Some documents do, however, report on events and it is possible that the author could have been mistaken about aspects of the events s/he was reporting. There may, for example, be factual errors about the times and places of meetings and who the participants were. Where there are opportunities to corroborate information of this kind, such as accounts by different parties of the same meeting, I take them. However, it is unfortunately the case that many of these errors, if they exist, are destined to be repeated in the thesis.

Judging “credibility” may also involve a consideration of whether the description of events is in some way distorted by the views of the document’s author.

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<sup>52</sup> Scott, *Matter of Record*, ix.

It is necessary to be aware, for example, that a writer may over-emphasise the importance of his or her own role in proceedings. The NSA, for example, in their descriptions of meetings with politicians sometimes mistook politeness and an attempt to ingratiate as evidence of influence. For example, the Executive Committee minutes of 5<sup>th</sup> June 1943 express “the congratulations of the Committee to the Chairman on the result of the deputation” on the occasion of a meeting with R.A. Butler, President of the Board, in which he had done nothing but restate the policy already established by his department.<sup>53</sup> It is important, therefore, to read documents in context, compare differing accounts of the same sequence of events and to be alert for self-promotion and rhetorical flourishes.

Scott also considers that the “meaning” within a document should be considered carefully.<sup>54</sup> The meaning of individual words and phrases can change over time. For example, the magazine *Nursery World*, first published in 1925,<sup>55</sup> which now promotes itself as the “leading publication for practitioners and decision-makers across the early years education and childcare sectors,”<sup>56</sup> originally carried the strap-line “for mothers and nurses.”<sup>57</sup> Investigation of the content made clear that “nurses” in fact referred to professional nannies and therefore the use of the word “nursery” in the title referred in the early decades of the publication to the children’s quarter within a middle-class or upper-class household – potentially misleading a researcher as to the usefulness of this material for understanding state

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<sup>53</sup> Nursery School Association, Minutes of the NSA Executive Committee, June 5, 1943, Executive Committee Minutes File 14/2. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>54</sup> Scott, *A Matter of Record*, ix.

<sup>55</sup> Nursery World, “From 1925 to 2010 – Nursery World’s 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary,” <http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/article/1044398/1925-2010---nursery-worlds-85th-anniversary>

<sup>56</sup> Nursery World, “About us,” <http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/go/aboutus/>

<sup>57</sup> Nursery World, Front Cover, January 5, 1927.

provision. It is important to be aware of possible misunderstandings such as these, and to be as informed as possible about the publication or other context in which a piece of evidence is found.

Understanding “meaning” in texts could refer to more complex, theoretical issues. The field of hermeneutics, with origins in uncovering the correct interpretations of sacred texts, provides one philosophical approach to the problem. Lawrence K. Schmidt has traced development in this area from the work of the German theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who believed that the aim of an enquiry into the meaning of the text was to “understand the author better than he understood himself”<sup>58</sup> to contemporary thinkers, such as the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) who believed that “there is no truth or meaning but rather only many different perspectives.”<sup>59</sup> In other words, Derrida has downgraded the status of the author and raised that of the reader(s). There is a school of “reader-orientated” theorists within the field of literacy criticism, two key examples being Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish, who similarly believe that “reading is always radically subjective, historically conditioned and endlessly revisable.”<sup>60</sup> Alarming though such a prospect would initially seem to be, the idea has the potential for engendering fruitful directions in documentary research. Policy documents, for example, as Codd has argued, “contain divergent meanings, contradictions and structured omissions, so that different effects are produced on different readers”<sup>61</sup> and it is therefore necessary to consider the “meaning” of a text

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<sup>58</sup> Lawrence Schmidt, *Understanding Hermeneutics* (Chesham: Acumen, 2006), 12.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Appleyard, *Becoming a Reader: The Experience of Fiction from Childhood to Adulthood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 7.

<sup>61</sup> John A. Codd, “The construction and deconstruction of educational policy documents,” *Journal of Educational Policy* 3, no. 3(1988): 235.

both from the point of view of the writer and from the point of view of the reader(s), and to recognise discrepancies where these exist. This idea chimes with Fish's concept of an "interpretative community": our understanding and therefore our ability to interpret are determined by our position within a specific society and groups within that society.<sup>62</sup> For example, in the 1944 Education Act, local authorities were asked to "in particular, have regard (b) to the need for securing that provision is made for pupils who have not attained the age of five years by the provision of nursery schools or, where the authority considers the provision of such schools to be inexpedient, by the provision of nursery classes in other schools."<sup>63</sup> The meaning of "inexpedient" was, I argue, understood differently by the authors of the Act and by some of those who had responsibility for its implementation.

### **3:7 Gathering data, coding and retrieving**

I read the documents identified above and noted down details which I considered to be useful. Using a laptop computer, I created a word document for each day which was spent in the archives. When I came to a document which I considered relevant to my purposes, I noted down the file in which it was found, the author and the author's position, the date, a description of the document in terms of its purpose and its addressee or intended audience. I then copied out relevant sections. Any comments or summaries of my own were put in red ink, to ensure they were not later confused with direct quotes. I selected documents with explicit discussion of the nursery school/nursery class question and any background

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<sup>62</sup> Stanley Fish, *Is there a Text in this Class?: The Authority of Interpretative Communities* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>63</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1944, clause 8.

information which might illuminate it. Details were collected of comments which revealed beliefs about the value of nursery education in general, and the relationship between nursery education and daycare services. In addition, I collected information relating to other educational issues, where these would seem to impinge on this question, perhaps because of competition for resources. Finally, information about the wider social, political and economic climate was noted where there was reason to believe these affected decisions made. This was clearly a subjective process, and increasingly so the further one moves from the core questions to the contextualising issues.

After a day's work in the archives, I transferred these data into Word document files where information was gathered in chronological order. I kept one file for "national government" decisions, one for each of the local governments under investigation, and one for each interest or professional group. Thus these files contained information from multiple sources. The purpose of this was to ensure that I understood the sequence of events properly. Although it is important to avoid the "post hoc propter hoc" fallacy,<sup>64</sup> presuming that one event caused another simply because it came first, it is very difficult to form any sensible hypotheses about causation when chronology is confused. The use of Word documents means that terms are searchable – thus easing the process, for example, of tracing the role or opinions of an individual over the years.

### **3:8 Interpretation: Building a coherent account**

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<sup>64</sup> Tosh and Lang, *Pursuit of History*, 149.



I needed to transform this raw data into a coherent narrative account. The general order of events was, of course, that I collected the data and then created the narrative, although this is a slightly simplistic account of the process. I thought about and began to write about some parts of the narrative before the entire data collection process was complete, and then revised these sections as my ideas developed and/or new information came to light. It was necessary to do this in order to ensure that I was collecting useful data and to understand the extent to which I would eventually be able to answer the research questions.

Jupp and Norris have identified three traditions of documentary analysis, “positivist,” “interpretative” and “critical.”<sup>65</sup> The positivist position is aligned with methodology in the physical sciences and seeks to create objective truth, whereas the interpretative is grounded in “the basic assumption that social phenomena are of an essentially different order from natural ones”<sup>66</sup> and the perspective of the researcher will necessarily influence the analysis. The critical tradition implies an interest in power structures in society, with the researcher committed to the principle that the status quo is in some way unjust.

In practice, it may be possible to draw from all of these positions. Philip Gardner makes the point that an interpretation is always “constrained and disciplined by the stages that precede it.”<sup>67</sup> The sources (or “traces,” as he prefers) will only support a very limited number of interpretations of certain characteristics of past events, such as when and where they took place. However, they also have “surplus meaning,” or characteristics which do allow a variety of interpretations depending on

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<sup>65</sup> Victor Jupp and Clive Norris, “Traditions in Documentary Analysis,” in *Social, Research, Philosophy, Politics and Practice*, ed. Martin Hammersley (London: Sage, 1993), 37-51, 40.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>67</sup> Philip Gardner, *Hermeneutics, History and Memory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

the interests or questions of the researcher.<sup>68</sup> These questions may include those that relate to Jupp and Norris' "critical" tradition, exploring issues of (in)justice. The worldview of the text's author, for example, may be discernible in ways in which s/he was not aware through the language and structure of what s/he has written. In picking up these features, researchers can create many different pictures of the society in which the text was produced.

Gardner's perspective has informed my understanding of what I aimed to achieve in this research project. The underpinning narratives of how, where and when decisions were made and who made them can be seen as factual, although new evidence could potentially come to light which would cause such "facts" to be revised, so in this sense they are provisional. However, I am aware that the narrative I have created would never be created in the same way by anyone else and is in that sense an interpretation. As leading post-structuralist Keith Jenkins has claimed, "empiricism, as a method, just cannot account for the significance it gives to the selection, distribution and weighting of "the facts" in finished narratives."<sup>69</sup> There is no way of being absolutely systematic about this, when the "facts" come from diverse sources. However, all the historian can do is to be as honest as possible about where the "facts" came from and the factors which are likely to have influenced him/her in their selection. This is the reason why I have explained as clearly as possible within this chapter exactly where I looked for data and the methods I have used.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>69</sup> Keith Jenkins, "Introduction: On being Open about our Closures," in *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. Keith Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1997), 1-25, 10.

It might be suggested, however, that my interpretation is in particular danger of being unduly biased, in that I have chosen a historical topic to research which is intimately connected to my personal experiences, and indeed frustrations, in my professional life (see Chapter 1:2). Educational historian, Marc Depaepe, has expressed unease about being too close to a subject in this way: “a little distance is necessary to be able to look at the past critically.”<sup>70</sup> Although I have kept this potential criticism in mind, I feel that the nature of the research questions offer some protection from an accusation that I have been overly emotionally involved. I have not asked whether nursery schools were better than nursery classes but how such a system developed, and I did not have a strong existing view as to which answers I either expected or wished to find. I was very prepared to find that there were indeed excellent and compelling reasons why classes rather than schools might have been preferred at a particular point in time and space.

Platt has raised the question of the extent to which the researcher should present all the evidence on which each assertion in the finished account is based.<sup>71</sup> She discusses the work Langlois and Seignobos, who decree that “each “fact” should be accompanied by a reference to its source and estimate of the value of the source”<sup>72</sup> and contrasts this with Elton, who believes that “the reader . . . .has to accept the writer’s conclusions on authority.”<sup>73</sup> I aimed to follow Platt’s compromise position in “proceeding by way of illustrations,” whilst ensuring that “any generalizations can be supported by several different examples.”<sup>74</sup> Sometimes

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<sup>70</sup> Depaepe, “The ten commandments of good practices in history of education research,” 32.

<sup>71</sup> Jennifer Platt, “Evidence and proof in documentary research: 2, some shared problems of documentary research,” *Sociological Review* 29, no. 1 (1981): 53-60.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

a “fact” might be regarded as common knowledge and accessible in multiple secondary sources (such as the dates of office of a prime minister). In these cases, it was not necessary to make reference to either primary or secondary sources. However, this line was occasionally difficult to draw, and I needed to make some decisions about what might be considered common knowledge and what might be the preserve of a more specialist community. Equally, the distinction between a “generalization,” which needs several examples, and a statement, which only needs one, is not always straightforward: what would, be necessary, for example, to demonstrate a troubled relationship between two people? It is a subjective decision which had to be taken on a case by case basis. Openness about the nature of the sources and the quality of evidence seemed an appropriate way to proceed. This approach naturally leads to the citing of a large number of archival sources, and this is the reason why throughout the thesis I have used a Chicago Footnote System (Taylor and Francis Reference Style K), which is the style used in *Paedagogica Historica*,<sup>75</sup> and other respected journals in the field. Placing a large number of references from unpublished sources of very similar dates at the end of a long thesis, in the manner of Harvard referencing, for example, is irritating and confusing for the reader.

### **3:9 Interpretation: Answering the research questions**

The first pair of research questions concerns the development of policy at national level, the arguments which carried weight with the decision-makers, and the

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<sup>75</sup> Taylor and Francis, “*Paedagogica Historica*,” <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?issn=0030-9230&linktype=44>.

individuals or groups which influenced them. In order to answer these questions, I have chosen to look in detail at four key decision-making points. This particular policy question lends itself to this approach because it is very clearly a live issue at some points and not at others. These live points occur at the time of the writing of major government reports (Hadow, 1933<sup>76</sup> and Plowden, 1967<sup>77</sup>) and during the formation of the 1918<sup>78</sup> and 1944 Education Acts.<sup>79</sup> In policy theorist, John Kingdon's terms, nursery classes and nursery schools are "alternatives," which are only of immediate concern to policy-makers when the broader policy issue, nursery education, has risen on the agenda and a decision has been made to take action.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, my research gathers itself around these particular focal points.

It is necessary to devise a procedure for dissecting the decisions which have been identified. In his overview of the field of policy analysis, Parsons has suggested a number of different approaches to this.<sup>81</sup> The "model of the personality"<sup>82</sup> developed by Greenstein, which looks at the "biological underpinnings"<sup>83</sup> of an individual, his/her relationships, political opinions and how s/he understands his/her own environment would seem to point in a useful direction. It is, however, extraordinarily challenging to unpick anyone's "biological underpinnings" decades after the events under investigation. Although these aspects would certainly be relevant where they can be discovered, this is an approach much

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<sup>76</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools* (London: HMSO, 1933).

<sup>77</sup> Central Advisory Council for Education (England), *Children and their Primary Schools* (London: HMSO, 1967).

<sup>78</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1918.

<sup>79</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1944.

<sup>80</sup> John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, 2003).

<sup>81</sup> Wayne Parsons, *An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Policy Analysis* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1995).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 368.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

more obviously suited to observation in contemporary settings. The ideas used by Kaufmann in her studies of local government also have some useful elements: she writes, for example, of the individual decision-maker operating within nested contexts: the individual operates as part of an organisation, which functions within a political environment, which is within an “interests environment,” which is within an “events environment.”<sup>84</sup> In the context of nursery education, one would therefore look at individuals working within the Board of Education, which forms part of the government. The “interests environment” consists of those individuals or groups with an interest in education or other forms of early years provision and the “events environment” might be, for example, a war or economic events which have an impact on resources. These are certainly all important aspects which should be considered.

It is the model developed by Geoffrey Vickers, who, according to Parsons, has made a “seminal contribution” to the field,<sup>85</sup> which seems to me to be the most appropriate one on which to base this research. It provides a blueprint for the process of examining the decisions, which includes an investigation of individual preferences and the contexts in which they occur. As with the models discussed above, it was primarily designed for work in a contemporary context where multiple sources of evidence are available. It is not, therefore, possible to call this, in Parsons’ terms, a “Vickerian analysis,”<sup>86</sup> but the approach used has been developed from Vickers’ concepts and insights.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 372.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 395.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 363.

The first point in the analysis is to determine why the decision arose in the first place through an examination of the context in which it occurred. In addition to a consideration of the broad political and economic conditions, this entails an exploration of the starting position of key players. Vickers uses the term “appreciative system” to refer to people’s tendency “to distinguish some aspects of the situation rather than others and to classify and value these in this way rather than in that.”<sup>87</sup> These systems affect both “reality judgements,” the understanding of how things are, and “value judgements,” the understanding of how things ought to be, and “instrumental judgements,” how to move from how things are to how they ought to be.<sup>88</sup> Both the appreciative systems of individuals and of groups working within institutions need to be considered. In addition, it is necessary to analyse the systems of the individuals and the organisations which are trying to influence the decision-makers. The next stage is to consider the decision itself as “a process of interaction”<sup>89</sup> between the players, and within each player as s/he responds to events and information: “that state of the deciding mind, when it reaches its decision, is not the state at which it started.”<sup>90</sup> It is particularly important to understand that a decision is always made in the context of other decisions: “Questions in the form, “Why is he (sic) doing that?” are misleading unless both the asker and answer supply the suppressed termination “Why is he doing that *rather than something else?*”<sup>91</sup> Finally, one should examine the fate of the decision, how it resulted, or failed to

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<sup>87</sup> Geoffrey Vickers, *The Art of Judgment: A Study in Policy Making*, Centenary ed. (London: Sage, 1995), 82.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, xix.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

result, in actual changes and how the path thus embarked upon leads up to the next decision-point.

Therefore, for each of the two Education Acts identified, my narrative account includes an explanation of why such a decision was made at this time and an analysis of the context in which it was being made. This includes the previous policy of the Board/Ministry and the existing views of the organisations which form the policy network (as defined in chapter 2:3) which is interested in or affected by the policy. I track the progress of the debate, noting where key players seemed to change their minds and trying to determine which people and/or arguments seemed to be decisive in the eventual outcome and which people were not able to make their voices heard. One tool for doing this is to use the questions suggested by policy theorist, William Browne: asking “who wants what” and “who got what” as a way of interrogating interests and the success of policy participants in furthering those interests.<sup>92</sup> I then analyse the fate of the policy in the immediate implementation period. In the cases of the two reports by the advisory committees, a broadly similar approach is used. There is, however, an additional stage in the process to consider. This is the way in which the decision of the committee influenced the subsequent decisions of the policy-making body.

Through describing the context and the consequences of decisions, I have in fact created an overarching narrative which covers the whole of the 1918-1972 period. It was vital to do this in order to develop a full understanding of the policy process. Firstly, minor changes in government policy did occur frequently, often

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<sup>92</sup> William P. Browne, “Organized interests and their issue niches: a search for pluralism in a policy domain,” *Journal of Politics* 52, no.2 (1990): 484.



made in response to external pressures or a perceived need to make financial savings. These were sometimes officially announced in government circulars. Subtle shifts in direction or prioritisation sometimes emerged in correspondence or discussions in meetings. Secondly, the times where advocates of nursery education were less successful in getting the issue on the political agenda had a significant effect on the next decision-point. Debates occurred among experts and advocates in these fallow periods about what nursery education was and who it was intended for which then coloured the perspectives which these people carried forward into the next time the policy became a focus amongst the decision-makers. Shifts in thinking in these years had a significant influence on whose voices were heard at the decision-points: the inclusion or non-inclusion of employers and childcare (as opposed to nursery education) experts is an example of this. In addition, the frustrations caused by a lack of success in gaining control of the agenda had an influence on participants' behaviour when action finally seemed possible and, in particular, on the amount of flexibility about policy alternatives they were prepared to contemplate.

The second pair of research questions refers to decision-making in Local Education Authorities. As with the research into the national picture, data for the whole chronological period was collected and analysed. I made no assumptions about when major decisions in each local area would occur. There are examples of nursery schools and nursery classes being discussed at many points for many different circumstantial reasons or simply because of the interest of individual members of the education committees. However, central government directives and shifts in policy did occasion a need to respond in some manner (although this might be in the form of a decision to ignore the Board/Ministry as far as practical). I

therefore decided to use the periods demarcated by the national decisions as a method of organising the local narratives. This facilitated my ability to make comparisons and to answer the research question concerning the relationship between central and local government.

In looking at a series of related decisions and non-decision-making periods at both local and national level, I related my findings to a body of theory in the area of policy analysis. In answering questions about who was and who was not able to make their voices heard, it was possible to devise a theory about the exercise of power in this area. My thinking was influenced by questions about models of power, which have been discussed in the Literature Review (chapter 2:3), and in particular, a consideration of whether power within this area was exercised according to an “elite” or a “pluralist” model.<sup>93</sup> Rather than start with a presumption of which model was the more useful, I took an approach which resembled that advocated by policy theorist, Paul Cairney, who suggests starting with a “checklist of questions” to discover which model might be the best fit for the empirical evidence in a specific context.<sup>94</sup> Although I did not formulate an actual list of questions, I devised a list of key ideas from contemporary policy theory in order to see if they were applicable to the data collected. These ideas, which are discussed in the Literature Review, include the concepts of policy networks and the Advocacy Coalition Framework and ideas about policy change over time, such as path dependency and punctuated equilibrium. The ideas which I have chosen to work with in this way form part of

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<sup>93</sup> Michael Hill, *The Public Policy Process*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Harlow: Pearson Educational, 2009).

<sup>94</sup> Paul Cairney, *Understanding Public Policy: Theories and Issues* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 282.

my identity as a researcher, and are a key factor in the distinctive and individual characteristics of my particular narrative account.

### **3:10 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have discussed my reasons for studying the question of choices made between nursery classes and nursery schools within the field of history of education, and discussed why I think this approach is of interest and value. I have outlined my research design, explaining how I examined the development of national policy regarding the nursery school/nursery class question by looking at the decisions of the Board/Ministry/Department of Education (and Science), together with an analysis of periods when nursery education was not high on the political agenda, and also how I have approached an analysis of policy in local education authorities with the use of four case-studies: London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leicester. I have justified the selection of documentary research as the method of investigation and explained my methods of selection, coding and retrieval. I have discussed the interpretative stance I have taken, acknowledging that my own interests and perspectives, including the theoretical questions in which I am interested, have affected which data have been collected. I have also described how I have moulded that data into a narrative and ultimately into the arguments which answer the research questions.

In the following chapters, the key decisions identified are dissected, with a chapter dedicated to each. As has been described above, each chapter discusses the context in which each decision was made and also the aftermath of the decision. The local authority case studies are presented after the investigation into national policy.

## Chapter Four: “The purely experimental stage:”<sup>1</sup> The 1918 Education Act

### 4:1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is clause 19 in the 1918 Education Act. This Act empowered, but did not compel, Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to provide financial support for free-standing nursery schools, unattached to existing educational institutions. Following its passing, LEAs who were interested in making provision for children below statutory school age had a choice between establishing unattached nursery schools and providing facilities within elementary schools, as many of them had already been doing. In effect, this was a choice between “nursery schools” and “nursery classes” as these terms were to be understood in succeeding decades. In 1918, however, the nomenclature was fluid and part of the task of the decision-makers and others involved in the policy process was to work out exactly what nursery schools and nursery classes were. The final phrasing of the clause referred to “nursery schools, which expression shall include nursery classes,”<sup>2</sup> suggesting that the class was a subset of the school, but at the same time recognisably distinct. This was unwieldy, did not reflect the way in which these terms were being used in the contemporary pedagogical discourse and left a legacy of confusion which hampered the implementation process.

The war “raised new demands for and expectations for change” in the education system, but the impact of these demands was in fact fairly limited, as the programme which was developed for the 1918 Education Act was substantially the

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<sup>1</sup> Board of Education, Office Committee on Nursery Schools, Report, May 1917, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1464. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>2</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1918, clause 19.

same as that proposed before the war.<sup>3</sup> This strongly suggests that opportunities for voices outside the Board of Education to be heard in the policy formation process were limited, despite the fact that the President of the Board, H. A. L. Fisher, was a politician who liked to operate with consensus and to avoid conflict.<sup>4</sup> One significant exception here, however, was the case of the LEAs who were able to influence policies concerning the relationship between central and local government.<sup>5</sup> By his own admission, Fisher simply “bowed to the storm” when attacked on this issue.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter presents the thesis that the policy formation process with regard to the question of nursery schools and nursery classes differs from the general pattern in that the existing policy of the Board before the war, which was to promote a certain type of unattached nursery school,<sup>7</sup> did undergo significant alteration through the consultation process. Flexibility, co-operation and consensus were the watchwords of the Board where nursery education was concerned. Its aim was to ensure flexibility in the type of institutions which might be developed and to accommodate the wishes of all members of the nascent policy network as far as possible. The lack of clarity in the final phrasing was a direct result of this attempt to please everyone. Such an approach was indicative of a lack of genuine commitment to the clause, and suggests that even as it was being written, the Board was already convinced that it was unlikely to be implemented.

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<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Sherrington, *English Education, Social Change and War 1911-1920* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), 62.

<sup>4</sup> W. Dean, “H.A.L. Fisher, reconstruction and the development of the 1918 Education Act,” *British Journal of Educational Studies* 18, no. 3 (1970): 259-276.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Andrews, *The Education Act, 1918* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> H.A.L. Fisher, *An Unfinished Autobiography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 107.

<sup>7</sup> Tessa Blackstone, *A Fair Start: The Provision of Pre-School Education* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1971).

The chapter is structured in accordance with the principles set out in the Methodology and Methods chapter. It traces the origins of the nursery education debate from the first decade of the twentieth century and, in particular, from two influential reports: one produced by the inspectorate of the Board of Education in 1905 and one by the Consultative Committee in 1908.<sup>8</sup> It describes the development of the policy during the draft Education Acts of 1913-1914. In this way, the Board's initial "appreciative system,"<sup>9</sup> or manner of understanding the current situation and beliefs about how it should change, is analysed. Other participants in the policy process and their positions are identified. The decision-making process and the outcome are investigated in order to determine "who got what," in accordance with the methodological approach suggested by Browne.<sup>10</sup> The chapter also offers an analysis of the reasons behind the lack of implementation of the clause: a failure which had significant implications for the reconfiguration of policy at the next identified decision-making point, the writing of 1933 Hadow Report.<sup>11</sup>

The chapter contributes to the theoretical concerns of the thesis, particularly in the examination of participation in decision-making and which model of power is the best fit for the empirical evidence at this point in the policy's history. As this was the initial formulation of a national policy concerning nursery schools and nursery classes, the theories of change over time, such as punctuated equilibrium and path dependency, are less prominent here.

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<sup>8</sup> Kevin Brehony, "Stat och förskola i England och Wales, 1900 – 1918," in *Förskolans aktörer: Stat, kär och individ i förskolans historia*, ed. Johannes Westberg (Uppsala: Författarna, 2011), 23-47.

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Vickers, *The Art of Judgment: A Study in Policy Making*, Centenary ed. (London: Sage, 1995), 82.

<sup>10</sup> William P. Browne, "Organized interests and their issue niches: a search for pluralism in a policy domain," *Journal of Politics* 52, no.2 (1990): 484.

<sup>11</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools* (London: HMSO, 1933).

#### 4:2 Early reports on educational provision for the under fives

In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two key reports concerning the welfare of children under five at school were produced. These were the 1905 report by a group of women inspectors from the Board of Education<sup>12</sup> and a Consultative Committee Report from 1908.<sup>13</sup> These reports, together with the introduction of Acts which permitted the provision of school meals and medical inspections (1906 and 1907 respectively)<sup>14</sup> provide evidence that the issue of child welfare was framed by the Board of Education and educational experts as one which educational administrations had a responsibility to address. The authors of these reports offered possible “policy alternatives”<sup>15</sup> to address the perceived problem of deprived and disadvantaged children in schools and decision-makers were able to select from these should they choose to do so. The arguments presented about the advantages and disadvantages of each policy alternative are those which are prominent in the 1918 debate and also crucial in later debates. Cost was seen as important, with an implication that there was a conflict between quantity and quality of provision. Other factors reveal aspects of the authors’ understanding of what education for young children should be and what it should achieve.

Public elementary schools had from their inception commonly accepted children below the age of compulsory schooling, in some cases admitting children as young as eighteen months to what were referred to as “babies classes.”<sup>16</sup> Freda

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<sup>12</sup> Board of Education, *Reports on Children under five years of age in public elementary schools by women inspectors of the Board of Education* (London: HMSO, 1905).

<sup>13</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee upon the School Attendance of Children below the age of Five* (London: HMSO, 1908).

<sup>14</sup> Brehony, “Stat och förskola.”

<sup>15</sup> John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Longman, 2003), passim.

<sup>16</sup> Brehony, “Stat och förskola.”

Hawtreay, a leading figure in the Nursery School Association, claimed in her 1935 *History of the Nursery School Movement*, prepared for Lady Astor, that there were 615 607 children between the ages of 3 and 5 in school in 1900, 43% of the total population in that age bracket.<sup>17</sup> Concerns that the school experiences offered to these children were inappropriate and potentially damaging were voiced by a number of witnesses to the 1904 *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration*.<sup>18</sup> The 1905 report by a group of women inspectors from the Board of Education concentrated on the issue and provided a detailed discussion of their own views based on their professional experiences.

The report was fairly damning about school conditions for these young children. Parts of it, indeed, were highly alarming. The contribution by one of the inspectors, Katherine Bathurst, full of criticism of everything from poor ventilation to a problem of tramps in the children's toilets, was clearly highly embarrassing to the Board and was prefaced with a disclaimer that it contained "many statements, the accuracy of which is, at least, open to question."<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the conclusion, as stated in the introduction by the chief inspector, Cyril Jackson, was that three to five year olds "get practically no intellectual advantage from school instruction," and so those from "good homes" should be ideally be left in them.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, universal provision was not recommended. However, Jackson claimed that school did have a noticeably positive effect on the physical well-being of "poor children" and it was

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<sup>17</sup> Freda Hawtreay, *History of the Nursery School Movement*, January 16, 1935, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 4. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>18</sup> Brehony, "Stat och förskola."

<sup>19</sup> Board of Education, *Reports on Children under five years of age in public elementary schools by women inspectors of the Board of Education*, 35.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, i-ii.



therefore necessary to continue to provide this service in some form or other. The recommendation was that this should be in “a new form of school,” or “nursery schools rather than schools of instruction.”<sup>21</sup> Jackson acknowledged that there was still work to be done in defining exactly what such a nursery school might offer and called for the nature of such institutions to be given “careful attention” and the “fullest consideration.”<sup>22</sup>

The body of the report, the comments from the women inspectors themselves, made it clear that what they had in mind was essentially an improvement of the extant babies rooms, although a change in name was seen as important in signalling a definite break with the past. Munday, for example, described an “ideal nursery” in terms of a room within a school and claimed that “although the ordinary baby rooms in our schools differ very considerably from the one just sketched, yet there is no reason why they could not be altered and improved.”<sup>23</sup> Bathurst’s comments are somewhat confused but it seems that she was advocating much the same. She wrote of the need to continue with existing laws so that “town children” would continue to be admitted to schools.<sup>24</sup> The same buildings could be used, but this would in some way be a new “nursery system” which would be cheaper than existing arrangements, presumably because rural children would be excluded. Bathurst wished to signal the change by using the term “national nursery” rather than “school” for the classes to which these children were admitted. It was something to which she attached “great importance.”<sup>25</sup> That the new name should be “nursery”

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., ii.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., iii.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 58.

rather than the Froebelian “kindergarten” is rather intriguing. It is clear that all the inspectors were very much influenced by Froebelian approaches: Munday, for example, regretted a lack of Froebel trained teachers and Bathurst suggested that teachers should have knowledge of “Froebelian methods.”<sup>26</sup> However, Bathurst claimed that the word “kindergarten” had been tarnished by the mechanical and thoughtless use of kindergarten materials in elementary schools.<sup>27</sup> The use of “nursery,” with its connotations of a homely atmosphere was thought more likely to produce the required results.

As a result of the report, LEAs were given permission to refuse admission to under fives if they wished to do so.<sup>28</sup> This sparked discussion within the authorities about the age group. London County Council (LCC) informed the Board that the refusal to admit vulnerable children would be an “injury” to them, a “grave inconvenience to the parents” and would probably cause older children to be kept away from school. The question of where these children should best be placed then arose. The LCC’s inclination was that “the best answer is to point to the babies’ classes in some of the Council’s most modern and best organised infant schools,” although the possibility of an alternative along the lines of an institution like the “Ecoles Maternelles” of Paris was briefly raised.<sup>29</sup> Through this discussion, one can see a pair of alternatives developing: the council perceived that there was a choice to be made between provision within existing schools and establishing independent

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>28</sup> Freda Hawtrey, History of the Nursery School Movement, January 16, 1935, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 4. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>29</sup> William Garnett to Board of Education, July 30, 1907, enclosed in London County Council, Education Committee, Day Schools Sub-Committee Minutes Jul-Nov 1907, October 15, 1907, LCC MIN 3258. London Metropolitan Archives.

institutions. This very much foreshadows the later distinction between nursery schools and nursery classes.

An authoritative contribution to the development of policy alternatives was made through the Report of the Consultative Committee in 1908. The committee firmly endorsed the view that “in ideal circumstances” home is best, but felt that it was obvious that “at the present moment such homes are not always found.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore some sort of provision was necessary. This provision should be educational in intention, “something more than mere nursing,” and therefore conducted under the auspices of the education authorities.<sup>31</sup> This was a very clear statement about how the issue should be understood and framed and who should be involved and who should not. According to the committee, educational provision as it existed was of two types: “old-fashioned” schools with formal teaching methods and other schools where the “special needs of small children are met by the provision of special rooms, special curriculum and special teaching.”<sup>32</sup> As might be anticipated by this form of description, the committee was not in favour of the “old-fashioned” approach and preferred the “special” consideration. These more enlightened institutions should, the committee suggested, be designated “nursery schools.” However, the report makes clear that the term “nursery schools” should also be used to describe “any other institutions where the arrangements of the younger infants approximate to those of the Kindergarten or Day Nursery.”<sup>33</sup> The institutions which might “approximate” kindergartens and day nurseries (which are

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<sup>30</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee upon the School Attendance of Children below the age of Five*, 16.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

nonetheless not themselves kindergartens or day nurseries) would seem to be putative self-standing state-funded schools for the under fives, which is to say a nursery school in the modern sense. As was the case with the LCC, the report's authors believed that a choice had to be made by state providers between two plausible solutions to the perceived problem: provision within existing institutions or outside of them.

When the committee made its choice between these two alternatives, it came down in favour of the upgraded babies' class within the existing institutions. This more closely resembles the modern term "nursery class" than the modern "nursery school." Nonetheless, the insistence on the term "nursery school" marks a clear desire to make a break with previous bad practice and also to give the resulting settings a degree of autonomy and power to resist pressure to conform to the practices of the elementary school. The reasons behind the preference were partly to do with the fact that such an approach would be cheaper.<sup>34</sup> Other reasons mentioned are that older children could take the younger ones to school, that this would make transition to the main school easier and the presence of the nursery would have a "beneficial effect upon the teaching and curriculum" of the rest of the school.<sup>35</sup>

The committee were, however, perfectly content for privately-funded independent institutions to exist, particularly in areas "where it might be unreasonable to compel the Authority to provide a nursery school," presumably because the children were insufficiently needy. Thus, the committee proposed a

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 53.

mixed system of public and private provision for the consideration of decision-makers.

### **4:3 The Education Bill of 1913-1914**

The Board of Education had an opportunity to consider its response to these reports in detail and to formulate its early years' policies during the writing of a wide-ranging Education Bill in 1913-1914, a Bill which was in fact never to pass into law. By 1912, pressure was growing on the Liberal government to develop a new Education Act. Notes to cabinet committee meetings make it clear that the impetus for this came from Nonconformist unhappiness about the funding of denominational schools, and a public pledge from the Prime Minister to take action.<sup>36</sup> The influence of the Nonconformists on the Liberal party was significant in this period.<sup>37</sup> However, as Sherrington has noted, members of the Board and Haldane, the Lord Chancellor, were keen to take the opportunity to achieve wider goals, consistent with the party's orientation towards social reform.<sup>38</sup> The education of the under fives was one possible area for development. The Report of the Consultative Committee and a decrease in grant for the under fives had led to many of these children being excluded from public elementary schools. In the House of Commons, on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1913, Pease, the President of the Board, announced that in 1911-1912, numbers of children of this age group in school had dropped by 20,094.<sup>39</sup> According to Selby-Bigge, Permanent Secretary to the Board, Pease's

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<sup>36</sup> Unsigned, Cabinet Committee, December 19, 1912, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 638. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>37</sup> Sherrington, *Social Change and War 1911-1920*.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> HC Deb April 10 1913 vol 51, c1388.

critics were “always denouncing the injustice” involved in this and pressing for compulsory provision.<sup>40</sup> Pease took a “special interest” in introducing a clause to the proposed Bill which would “turn their flanks.”<sup>41</sup>

In his notes to the Cabinet Committee written on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1913, Pease wrote: “it is suggested that a provision should be inserted to the effect that the powers of a Local Education Authority...shall include a power to make provision, *otherwise than in a Public Elementary School*, for the care and training of children under the age of 5, by providing or aiding “Nursery Schools” or other institutions for the purpose” (italics in the original).<sup>42</sup> The explicit mention of provision *outside* of the public elementary school was not meant to suggest that no provision should ever be made *inside* them. Such provision was already possible and Local Authorities were indeed providing it, although for decreasing numbers. Nonetheless, a Bill specifically aimed at establishing separate institutions denotes a marked difference between the Board of Education’s thinking and the recommendations of the Consultative Committee with regard to the various policy alternatives which had been generated for provision for the under fives. In the same document, Pease described how he understood the role and purpose of the institutions he was proposing. The emphasis on independence and managerial separation was pronounced, despite the point being made that the “nursery schools” would “conveniently form part of the same block of buildings” as existing public

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<sup>40</sup> LASB to Sir Arthur T. Thring, May 3, 1913, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 637. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>41</sup> LASB to Sir Arthur T. Thring, May 3, 1913, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 637. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>42</sup> JAP, Education Bill, 1913 – Cabinet Committee, March 17, 1913, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 638. National Archives, Kew.

elementary schools.<sup>43</sup> The orientation towards physical care, a matter which “intimately concerned” Local Education Authorities<sup>44</sup> was also very marked.

The inspiration behind Pease’s thinking in this matter was the School Medical Service and its Chief Medical Officer, George Newman. Pease made the point that the form of school he was suggesting “would be entirely in accordance with the line in which the School Medical Service is developing.”<sup>45</sup> On 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1913, Newman presented a memorandum to the cabinet entitled “Some Notes on the Physical Basis of National Education.”<sup>46</sup> In this, he made his own views about the form of future nursery schools clear. Their main object was that children should enter the elementary schools “healthy and well-nourished,” “receptive and ready to learn, though not necessarily formally prepared in any way for the ordinary work and lessons.” In order to achieve this, there should be “ample provision for rest and sleep,” intense medical supervision and opening hours should be extended beyond those of the normal school day.<sup>47</sup> In successive drafts of the Bill, this emphasis on health care in the schools was increased still further by the nature of the sub-clauses with which it was positioned. A revision dated 25<sup>th</sup> April 1913 linked the nursery schools clause to a sub-clause promoting “baths and bathing places” and playgrounds in elementary schools.<sup>48</sup> In April 1914, proposals were made for the

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<sup>43</sup> JAP, Education Bill, 1913 – Cabinet Committee, March 17, 1913, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 638. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>44</sup> JAP, Education Bill, 1913 – Cabinet Committee, March 17, 1913, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 638. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>45</sup> JAP, Education Bill, 1913 – Cabinet Committee, March 17, 1913, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 638. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>46</sup> George Newman, Some Notes on the Physical Basis of National Education, March 22, 1913, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1) ED 24 629. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>47</sup> George Newman, Some Notes on the Physical Basis of National Education, March 22, 1913, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1) ED 24 629. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>48</sup> Board of Education, Draft Education Bill, April 25, 1913, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1) ED 24 638. National Archives, Kew.

clause to include a raft of other medically-orientated services, including schools for mothers and medical centres.

This Education Bill never made it to the statute books because of the pressures caused at the outbreak of World War I.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, it is a clear indication of the Board's understanding of a "nursery school" before the war and forms the starting point for its war-time decision-making.

#### **4:4 The recommendation of the Office Committee**

In 1916, against the background of the financial pressures of wartime, the Committee on Retrenchment in the Public Expenditure made the recommendation that all grants to LEAs in respect of children under five were to be stopped on the grounds that the Board of Education would not regard the curtailment of their schooling as "a serious matter," presumably alluding to the 1905 inspectorate report which stated that the children gained no intellectual advantage from attendance.<sup>50</sup> The President of the Board, Arthur Henderson (a Labour MP, who held his position as part of a wartime coalition government<sup>51</sup>) admitted in the House of Commons on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1916, that this was a "serious and substantial reduction in the expenditure on education" and made a rather disingenuous appeal for LEAs not to economise in this respect where there was a need for provision due to "unfavourable" homes, which may be a result of women engaging in war work.<sup>52</sup> Henderson hinted, however, that the government would make more generous arrangements in the future, claiming that

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<sup>49</sup> Andrews, *Education Act, 1918*.

<sup>50</sup> H. Bompas Smith, "A national system of nursery schools: an opportunity and a danger," *The Athenaeum* 4619, July 1917: 333.

<sup>51</sup> Stephen J. Lee, *Aspects of British Political History 1914-1995* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>52</sup> HC Deb 18 July 1916 vol 84 cc869-984.



“it may be safely said with satisfaction that this War is, at any rate, assisting in the creation of a greater body of public opinion in favour of a more liberal expenditure on education.”<sup>53</sup>

In Autumn 1916, H.A.L. Fisher was appointed as President to the Board.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps in response to public opinion, and as part of the general plans for post-war reconstruction, an Office Committee on Nursery Schools was established by the Board of Education in the spring of 1917.<sup>55</sup> The Board’s starting point was, as had been the case before the war, that nursery schools were needed, and the committee’s brief was to consider “the lines on which Nursery Schools should be organised and the conditions under which they should be aided.”<sup>56</sup> This naturally touched very closely on whether these “schools” should or should not be part of or attached to the public elementary schools. F.H.B.Dale, the Board’s Chief Inspector, was the chair, and it was he who suggested who the other members should be, opting for a mixture of Board officials and inspectors.<sup>57</sup> Only four meetings were held and the circle of people from outside the group invited to contribute was small: only Professor Bompas Smith from Manchester University and Robert Blair from the LCC are acknowledged in the final report, produced in May 1917.<sup>58</sup>

In this report, the committee called for particular prominence to be given to care and to medical supervision in the contemplated nursery schools. Their purpose

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<sup>53</sup> HC Deb 18 July 1916 vol 84 cc869-984.

<sup>54</sup> Fisher, *Unfinished Autobiography*.

<sup>55</sup> Dale to Secretary, March 8, 1917, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1) ED 24 1464. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>56</sup> Board of Education, Office Committee on Nursery Schools, Report, May 1917, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1) ED 24 1464. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>57</sup> Dale to Secretary, March 8, 1917, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1) ED 24 1464. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>58</sup> Board of Education, Office Committee on Nursery Schools, Report, May 1917, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1) ED 24 1464. National Archives, Kew.

was to meet medical needs which could not be met under the ordinary arrangements within the public elementary schools, and they were therefore positioned as a special service for particularly neglected children.<sup>59</sup> Newman's conception of what a nursery should be was a clear influence for this approach. However, the committee avoided giving a clear lead as to the precise institutional form which the nursery schools should take. The schools were at a "purely experimental stage," and time was needed before a decision could be made regarding what kind of arrangement would be most satisfactory.<sup>60</sup> The report described three types of "nursery school" – "the Nursery School attached to a Day Nursery or Crèche, the Nursery School attached to a Public Elementary School and the independent Nursery School."<sup>61</sup> Within the category of school attached to a public elementary school, two possibilities are considered: firstly, an institution running separately on the same premises and secondly, facilities which formed "an integral part of the Infants' Departments."<sup>62</sup> All of these possibilities might be called a "nursery school," as long as the requirements for enhanced medical care and physical conditions were met. It is clear from the committee minutes that this flexibility was being encouraged because of a feeling that in the great pressure of post-war reconstruction, it would be wise to take advantage of all avenues of development to maximise the chances of any sort of progress at all. The acknowledgement that many of these variations might be made to be work satisfactorily seems to be made with an air of rather

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<sup>59</sup> Board of Education, Office Committee on Nursery Schools, Report, May 1917, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1) ED 24 1464. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>60</sup> Board of Education, Office Committee on Nursery Schools, Report, May 1917, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1) ED 24 1464. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>61</sup> Board of Education, Office Committee on Nursery Schools, Report, May 1917, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1) ED 24 1464. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>62</sup> Board of Education, Office Committee on Nursery Schools, Report, May 1917, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1) ED 24 1464. National Archives, Kew.

depressed resignation. For example, the minutes of the third meeting stated “the Committee felt that they had to reckon with the fact that Voluntary Nursery Schools were already there and that Voluntary effort was likely, at all events in the initial stages of the experiment, to supply a good part of the requisite driving force to make the scheme a success.”<sup>63</sup> Within the final report itself, the idea of an attached nursery school in a PES is introduced with the statement, “It is certain that some Local Education Authorities will be in favour of this arrangement and we are satisfied that the Board will find it necessary to entertain such proposals.”<sup>64</sup> There is a feeling of making the best of a bad situation. Newman’s vision of the nursery school was still seen as an ideal, but the Board’s commitment to promoting and supporting it financially was wavering.

#### **4:5 A nascent advocacy coalition for nursery schools**

In order to analyse the process of decision-making at the Board and, in particular, the extent to which other people were able to bring influence to bear, it is useful to include at this point the positions of other interested parties in this period. Nursery education policy operates in a wide political arena. It is the concern not only of educationalists but also of those interested in providing childcare for social reasons and in order to facilitate parental employment. It has the potential to affect many individuals and groups, all of whom should be considered as a “potential

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<sup>63</sup> Board of Education, Nursery School Committee – Third meeting, April 4, 1917, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 1. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>64</sup> Board of Education, Office Committee on Nursery Schools, Report, May 1917, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1) ED 24 1464. National Archives, Kew.

actor” in the debate.<sup>65</sup> Not all such potential is realised, however. Active participants in a process may seek to strengthen their bargaining position by co-operating with other participants. The extent of co-operation and co-ordination between participants determines whether or not it is possible to think in terms of an “advocacy coalition.”<sup>66</sup> It is necessary to uncover as much as possible about the views of the potential actors and to determine the extent to which they saw themselves as active participants who were entitled to have their voices heard by decision-makers, and also to understand the extent that participants were interested in working together in order to achieve goals.

There is strong evidence that such a coalition was emerging in the years preceding the 1918 Bill. In August 1917, members of various educational organisations and prominent individuals with an interest in nursery education were in sufficiently close contact to unite in a delegation to the President of the Board, H.A.L. Fisher.<sup>67</sup> Deputies included distinguished academics such as Michael Sadler and Percy Nunn; the nursery school pioneer, Margaret McMillan; Grace Owen, Secretary to the Manchester Nursery School Association; representatives of the Froebel and Montessori Societies; the Birmingham People’s Kindergarten Association and the Worker’s Educational Association.<sup>68</sup> These groups and

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<sup>65</sup> Peter Knoepfel, Corinne Larrue, Frédéric Varone and Michael Hill, *Public Policy Analysis* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2011), 40.

<sup>66</sup> Paul A. Sabatier and Christopher M. Weible, “The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Innovations and Clarifications,” in *Theories of the Policy Process* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Paul Sabatier (Boulder, Co: Westview, 2007), 189-220.

<sup>67</sup> Unsigned, Memorandum of the Deputation on Nursery Schools received by the President on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 1917, August 16, 1917, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files ED 102 1. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>68</sup> Unsigned, Memorandum of the Deputation on Nursery Schools received by the President on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 1917, August 16, 1917, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files ED 102 1. National Archives, Kew

individuals were united in the “policy core belief”<sup>69</sup> that the state should provide nursery education and they were interested in working together to press for its introduction.

With regard to the sort of institution which the deputation wanted, Fisher summed up their position by stating that a “corpus of doctrine was already taking shape gradually. .... there appeared to be a consensus of opinion that Nursery Schools should be small and near the homes, with ample space for play and a garden, or at any rate a yard, and that special precautions would be necessary against infection.”<sup>70</sup> He believed, in other words, that the deputation supported precisely the kind of detached nursery school which was envisioned in the proposed 1913/1914 Bill and which the Board still believed was the ideal.

This seems a reasonable interpretation, although within the meeting the issue was addressed only in a rather oblique fashion. Many delegates did indeed emphasise separateness and the initiation of something new. Nunn, for example, said that the nursery school “should not be a mere continuation downwards of the Infants’ Department of the Public Elementary School but should differ from it essentially.”<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, deputees varied as to the strength of their commitment to the Board’s picture of a nursery school as the only possible model and also with regard to their understanding of how such a model might relate to the education

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<sup>69</sup> Sabatier and Weible, “The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Innovations and Clarifications,” 194-196.

<sup>70</sup> Unsigned, Memorandum of the Deputation on Nursery Schools received by the President on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 1917, August 16, 1917, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files ED 102 1. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>71</sup> Unsigned, Memorandum of the Deputation on Nursery Schools received by the President on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 1917, August 16, 1917, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files ED 102 1. National Archives, Kew.

system as a whole. The deputation did not have a united vision regarding the roles which nursery schools and nursery classes might play within that system.

Margaret McMillan was a strong advocate of the detached nursery school as the only acceptable form of provision. She had founded a model nursery school, the “babies camp,” established as part of a wider open-air school in Deptford in 1914.<sup>72</sup> Board inspectors recognised this camp as being run along the lines consistent with the sort of school which was being proposed and believed it would be a suitable case for funding if grants were to become available.<sup>73</sup> Her interest was clearly in being able to continue her work here and to encourage more institutions of a similar nature. Her later comments provide evidence that she saw this as the only way forward. In the decade after the passing of the Bill, she became extremely outspoken in her criticism of the nursery class, calling it a “danger” and “an extravagant investment failing to provide a good return.”<sup>74</sup>

The Froebel Society was similarly committed to the establishment of detached nursery schools. However, it was less certain than McMillan that this was the only possible form of provision. Members of the society had a long-standing commitment to improving the circumstances of the under fives in elementary schools, as was demonstrated by the Froebelian influence on the 1905 report by the

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<sup>72</sup> Janet Campbell, Miss McMillan’s Clinic and Camp Schools at Deptford, July 13, 1914, Department of Education and Science and predecessors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Special Schools' Files, ED 32 87. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>73</sup> Janet Campbell, Miss McMillan’s Clinic and Camp Schools at Deptford, July 13, 1914, Department of Education and Science and predecessors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Special Schools' Files, ED 32 87. National Archives, Kew; George Newman to unknown recipient, September 9, 1914, Department of Education and Science and predecessors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Special Schools' Files, ED 32 87. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>74</sup> Nursery School Association, Report of Open Meeting, January 3, 1925, Early Documents File, 13/4. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

women inspectors.<sup>75</sup> The society had, in the same year, at the request of Coventry Education Committee, presented suggestions as to how existing institutions could be made better.<sup>76</sup> When under fives began to be excluded from these schools, the society was gravely concerned about the impact of this policy. In 1906, the Manchester branch informed the Board that in its view “reform of the infants’ schools and not the exclusion of the children is what is required.”<sup>77</sup>

However, the society was disappointed at the extent and pace of reforms which it had suggested. In 1914, E.E.Lawrence, its Principal, wrote that “suggestions have been carried out a bit here and a bit there.....a great deal has, I believe, not been carried out at all, or not universally or adequately.” She referred to the idea of “nursery schools” as something which had not yet been obtained and painted a picture of ideal standards that were far higher than those in the majority of schools at this time.<sup>78</sup> The society therefore supported the idea of new institutions which would meet these standards. It also had clear financial and other interests in the passing of such legislation. Its own free kindergartens, which were attended by deprived children, would be clear beneficiaries. If LEAs were allowed to support detached nursery schools, this would open up funding streams which would allow existing free kindergartens to continue and others to be established. The society’s

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<sup>75</sup> Board of Education, *Reports on Children under five years of age in public elementary schools by women inspectors of the Board of Education*.

<sup>76</sup>The Froebel Society of Great Britain and Ireland, “The child under five: suggestions for the improvement in the organization and curriculum of the babies class in Infant Schools prepared by the Froebel Society at the request of the Coventry Education Committee,” *Child Life* 7, no. 25 (1905): 10-14. <http://studentzone.roehampton.ac.uk/library/digitalcollection/froebel-archive-child.life-1905/index.html>

<sup>77</sup> The Froebel Society of Great Britain and Ireland, “Exclusion of children under five from the Infant Schools,” *Child Life* 8, no. 29 (1906): 30 <http://studentzone.roehampton.ac.uk/library/digitalcollection/froebel-archive-child.life-1906/index.html>

<sup>78</sup> E.E.Lawrence, “Supplement: Nations and Nurseries,” *Child Life* 16, no. 91 (1914) <http://studentzone.roehampton.ac.uk/library/digitalcollection/froebel-archive-child.life-1914//index.html>

delegate made a particular plea that “existing Kindergarten Schools which had done pioneer work should share in the grant.”<sup>79</sup>

The Workers’ Education Association (WEA), founded in 1903 for the promotion of the education of working-class adults, provides an example of an association which formed part of this deputation without having a deep commitment to Fisher’s model of what a nursery school should be.<sup>80</sup> The association supported provision for the under fives with enthusiasm, but, according to its correspondence with the National Union of Teachers (NUT), “had decided not to enter into administrative detail.”<sup>81</sup> It had no policy on the issue of whether nursery education could best be provided in free-standing schools or in classes within the elementary schools, as was already possible. The association’s representative made no comment about this in the meeting with Fisher. It was in its interest to maintain the appearance of unity in order to achieve the core policy goal.

#### **4:6 Other participants in the process: elements of dissent**

A notable absence from the deputation is the National Union of Teachers. Grace Owen had invited the union to participate, but it had refused on the grounds that no resolution on the subject of nursery education had been passed by its Executive Committee.<sup>82</sup> In previous years, the union had ignored the issue. In its response to the Board of Education regarding the proposed 1913/1914 Bill, there was

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<sup>79</sup> Unsigned, Memorandum of the Deputation on Nursery Schools received by the President on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 1917, August 16, 1917, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files ED 102 1. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>80</sup> Workers’ Educational Association (WEA), “Welcome to the WEA!” <http://www.wea.org.uk/about>

<sup>81</sup> National Union of Teachers, Education Committee Minutes, May 4, 1918, MSS 179/EDU/1/1/25-26, 1916-1919. Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

<sup>82</sup> National Union of Teachers, Education Committee Minutes, September 22, 1917, MSS 179/EDU/1/1/25-26, 1916-1919. Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.



no mention of the subject at all.<sup>83</sup> A union statement on “Educational Progress” made in November 1916 also omitted any discussion of it.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, the Education Committee had appointed a sub-committee to explore the question. This sub-committee, which reported in September 1917, took the position that the union should indeed support nursery schools.<sup>85</sup> However, despite a comment that “open-air” sites were to be recommended, its statement regarding the ideal form of provision was more in line with the 1908 Consultative Committee recommendations than the Board’s current view of the ideal arrangements: “On the grounds of educational advantages, economy and convenience of administration, it is considered such nursery schools should, as a rule, be attached to public elementary schools.”<sup>86</sup> In other words, the union’s understanding of “nursery schools” equated with what would later be designated nursery classes. The NUT was not in favour of Fisher’s model nursery school, and their presence at the deputation would have been disruptive to the idea of consensus.

A further group of potential policy actors who did not join in the 1917 deputation were the Local Education Authorities. Many were very focused at this time on the proposed threats to their autonomy embodied in the proposed Act.<sup>87</sup> This very independence means that generalisation about their stance on the nursery school/class question is difficult. Positions adopted included enthusiastic support for

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<sup>83</sup> Yoxall to Pease, January 3, 1914, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers series 1, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 639. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>84</sup> National Union of Teachers, Education Committee Minutes, November 18, 1916, MSS 179/EDU/1/1/21-24, 1914-1916. Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

<sup>85</sup> National Union of Teachers, Education Committee Minutes, September 22, 1917, MSS 179/EDU/1/1/25-26, 1916-1919. Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

<sup>86</sup> National Union of Teachers, Education Committee Minutes, September 22, 1917, MSS 179/EDU/1/1/25-26, 1916-1919. Modern Records Office, Warwick.

<sup>87</sup> Andrews, *Education Act 1918*.

the unattached school as a major, but not the only, form of provision; a desire to prioritise the development of nursery classes and a lack of commitment to any form of education for the under fives.

London County Council was enthusiastic about detached nursery schools, but saw them as an addition to the existing system of attached nursery schools, or nursery classes. London had a commitment to providing for the under fives within elementary schools. In 1905, there were 72 605 children under five within its schools.<sup>88</sup> The report by the women inspectors and subsequent discussion about school conditions in the press led to some parents deciding not to send their young children to school and a consequent reduction of these numbers by 6000 between 1905 and 1906.<sup>89</sup> The council determined that it should nonetheless continue to admit those children whose parents still required the service. According to Robert Blair, the Education Officer, the 1908 Consultative Committee's recommendations to provide upgraded facilities within existing infant schools were very much in line with the LCC's existing position.<sup>90</sup> By 1912, the Education Committee was reasonably satisfied with what was being achieved in the area: it pointed to "the extension of kindergarten methods in the infants' schools," and "the numerous opportunities open to teachers to develop their knowledge of child life" as evidence

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<sup>88</sup> London County Council, LCC Day Schools Sub-Committee Minutes, October 15, 1907, Education Committee: Sub-Committees: Day Schools Sub-Committee (Continued as Elementary Education Sub-Committee from March 1911) July- November 1907, LCC/MIN/3258. London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>89</sup> London County Council, LCC Day Schools Sub-Committee Minutes, December 3, 1907, Education Committee: Sub-Committees: Day Schools Sub-Committee (Continued as Elementary Education Sub-Committee from March 1911) Dec 1907-Mar 1908, LCC/MIN/3259. London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>90</sup> London County Council, Education Committee, Supplemental Agenda for Day Schools Sub-Committee, November 9, 1909, Education Officer's Department: Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education: Subject and Policy files – General: Children under school age, 1905-1928, LCC/EO/PS/1/16. London Metropolitan Archives.

that things were progressing well.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, the LCC responded enthusiastically to suggestions for “the provision of nursery schools” when this was announced in the first war-time drafts: it expressed “strong approval of these provisions,” and considered that they constituted “an educational reform of great magnitude.”<sup>92</sup> A mixed system was contemplated, as is confirmed by the later development of the post-war plans.<sup>93</sup>

Manchester is an example of a council which was particularly committed to improved provision through the development and upgrading of existing facilities. Its priority was to focus resources on maximising the number of children who would benefit from early years education. As the Board Inspector, H.Ward, put it: “Manchester has never sympathised with the view that children are better in the streets than in schools”<sup>94</sup> and the council rejected the idea of the ideal for the few if it meant nothing at all for the many. As its Director of Education, Spurley Hey, consistently claimed, Manchester was far from hostile to the idea of a few detached schools, and indeed established a small number in the post-war period,<sup>95</sup> but its intention was always that most children would be accommodated within nursery classes.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> London County Council, Education Committee Minutes (extract), January 31, 1912, Education Officer’s Department: Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education: Subject and Policy files – General LCC/EO/PS/1/16. London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>92</sup> London County Council, Education Committee Minutes of Proceeding Jan-Dec 1918 (London: London County Council, 1918), January 23, 1918.

<sup>93</sup> London County Council, Minutes of Elementary Education Sub-committee, October 21, 1919, Education Committee: Sub-Committees: Day Schools Sub-Committee (Continued as Elementary Education Sub-Committee from March 1911), minutes April 1919-March 1920, LCC/MIN/3291. London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>94</sup> H.Ward to Spurley Hey, December 29, 1917, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files ED 102 1. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>95</sup> Nursery School Association, Report on Open Meeting, January 3, 1925, Early Documents File, 13/4. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>96</sup> Shena D. Simon, *A Century of City Government – Manchester 1838-1938* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938).

Many other LEAs remained largely uninterested in nursery education. In some cases, this may have been because they did not have the kind of deprived and needy populations which the Board was targeting with the clause. However, some areas with these populations were also uncommitted. Dale expressed his concerns about this in June 1918: “I have no doubt that many of the great Authorities, eg London and Manchester will do all that can be done on their own, but I do not think we shall get the smaller Authorities, in whose areas there are often a number of children for whom Nursery Schools are really imperative, to move without putting on more pressure than is given us by exhortation.”<sup>97</sup>

The families of children under five who used or wished in the future to use educational services had a clear and obvious stake in this policy area and therefore can be considered part of the policy arena and as potential policy participants. However, the position which they took is hard to discern in the historical records. There is some evidence to suggest that many parents relied on the provision in schools and wanted its continuance. For example, when the LCC was considering whether or not to continue to admit under fives following the concerns raised in 1905, one of the arguments made in favour of continuation was the fact that the refusal to admit such children “would cause very grave inconvenience to the parents,” and would result in “serious complaints from the public.”<sup>98</sup> There is not much evidence, however, to suggest whether or not parents had any particular views on what form of provision would be most desirable. Lord Sheffield, taking part in

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<sup>97</sup> Dale to Secretary, June 8, 1918, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1), ED 24 760. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>98</sup> London County Council, LCC Day Schools Sub-Committee Minutes, October 15, 1907, Day Schools Sub-Committee (Continued as Elementary Education Sub-Committee from March 1911) Jul-Nov 1907, LCC/MIN/3258. London Metropolitan Archives.

the debate in the House of Lords on the 1918 Education Bill, expressed the opinion that parents in poorer districts, where nursery schools were likely to be situated, were unlikely to be particularly informed on the detail of the services available to them:

“My experience is that the poor parents in the crowded towns never take the initiative. They have not such knowledge of these affairs, nor the energy.”<sup>99</sup>

Whether or not this was true, this is indicative of the attitude of the decision-makers, and it is unlikely that parents’ views on the matter were seriously considered.

The position taken, broadly speaking, by the coalition of educationalists in favour of nursery schools as the preferred policy alternative was not held by all persons within the policy arena. There was a diversity of views among the authorities who would be responsible for the implementation process, a preference for nursery classes among the professionals who would be required to staff them and little evidence of interest in the issue among potential service users. This was potentially problematic for Fisher, who preferred to work with consensus.<sup>100</sup>

However, the situation did have potential advantages from the Board’s perspective. In the meeting with the educational delegates, Fisher assured them he fully supported the idea of establishing nursery schools of the sort which he identified with their consensus position. Nonetheless, he sounded a note of warning: “progress might not be as rapid as they who believed in Nursery Schools would like.” It was necessary to “experiment now, and in two or three years’ time wisdom would emerge.”<sup>101</sup> In fact, as was apparent in the Office Committee’s

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<sup>99</sup> HL Deb, 1 August 1918, vol 31 cc250-368.

<sup>100</sup> Dean, “H.A.L.Fisher, Reconstruction and the Development of the 1918 Education Act.”

<sup>101</sup> Unsigned, Memorandum of the Deputation on Nursery Schools received by the President on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 1917, August 16, 1917, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files ED 102 1. National Archives, Kew.

recommendations, the Board's commitment to the nursery school it presented as an ideal was already wavering. The likelihood of it making the substantial financial commitment necessary to provide such institutions was receding. The existence of differing opinions about the policy alternatives could potentially provide the Board with room to manoeuvre without being perceived as obstructive and confrontational.

#### **4:7 First Draft of the 1918 Education Bill**

The broad-based, rather woolly definition of what a “nursery school” might be which was suggested by the Office Committee was carried forward to the draft of the Education Bill, which was presented to the Cabinet in May 1917.<sup>102</sup> Clause 17 of this Bill read that Local Authorities would be given the power for “supplying or aiding the supply of nursery schools for children over two and under five years of age (or such later age as may be approved by the Board of Education) whose home conditions are such that attendance at such a school is necessary or desirable for their healthy physical and mental development.”<sup>103</sup> The attached notes make the point that the Bill was intended to be as “elastic as possible” as regards the form which nursery schools might take.

The Bill's use of the blanket term “nursery school” to describe both a separate school and a part of an infant department soon came into question and under pressure. The difficulty was picked up by the inspector, H.Ward, who was asked to look at provision being set up in Manchester. Manchester was planning to establish a range of different sorts of nursery school, which included those inside existing

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<sup>102</sup> Board of Education, Draft Education Bill, May 1917, War Cabinet and Cabinet: Memoranda (GT, CP & G War Series), CAB 24 13. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>103</sup> Board of Education, Draft Education Bill, May 1917, War Cabinet and Cabinet: Memoranda (GT, CP & G War Series), CAB 24 13. National Archives, Kew.

elementary schools. The first plan taking shape was to use two classrooms within a “huge school in St Mary’s Rd.”<sup>104</sup> Ward commented that the proposal was for “a Nursery Class really, not a Nursery School; ie it will take out of the ordinary Babies’ class children of 3 and keep them for a year.” In so doing, he introduced a term to the Board’s discourse which had not previously been present and admitted that any equivalence between all the different sorts of possible institutions was going to be extremely difficult to maintain. Ward made the point that there was nothing to prevent an LEA taking an action of this sort, and the Board would generally welcome an improvement in the babies’ classes. However, the enterprise posed questions about what should and should not be a “nursery school.”

In the subsequent discussions among Board members, many felt that it was quite clear that arrangements such as Manchester were proposing were not ideal. Fawkes, who had been secretary of the Office Committee, wrote: “On a general review of the proposal from the premises aspect, it seems to me that an arrangement of this sort is less likely to make a satisfactory Nursery School than a separate house.”<sup>105</sup> Miss Campbell, a Board inspector, added, “It looks as if we may have to draw a definite distinction between Nursery Classes of the kind described by Mr Ward and Nursery Schools as recommended by the Committee ..... Nursery Classes in Infant Depts would be all to the good but they would not fulfil the functions of a Nursery School if organised as proposed in Manchester.”<sup>106</sup> Dale

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<sup>104</sup> Ward to M Branch, October 27, 1917, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files ED 102 1. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>105</sup> Fawkes to Campbell, November 11, 1917, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 1. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>106</sup> Campbell to Fawkes, circulated to M Branch, November 13, 1917, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 1. National Archives, Kew.

commented that “Mr Ward’s minute is very interesting and important as showing the difficulties we may have to face in bringing home to LEAs and others the specific principles and needs of Nursery Schools.”<sup>107</sup>

The Board’s position at this point can be summarised thus: if there was any chance for “nursery schools” to be established at all, there would have to be a large degree of flexibility in the form such institutions should take. This flexibility would need to encompass establishments within elementary schools, which was perhaps to be regretted. However, it was felt that some of the provision which Local Authorities would try to designate as “nursery schools” would not really meet the necessary standard. All the same, the Board wanted to do nothing to discourage even small improvements to the existing arrangements for children under five and was therefore reluctant to clearly state that any efforts in this respect did not go far enough. The woolly definition of “nursery schools” was already disintegrating and there was a dissonance between the Board’s stated position and its long-term vision and intentions. This did not bode well for the future of the clause.

#### **4:8 Revision of the Education Bill**

Although the reception of the first draft of the Bill seemed very positive, the hostility from Local Education Authorities concerned about the proposed reduction of their powers, led to its withdrawal for revision.<sup>108</sup> During this period of scrutiny and discussion, opposition to the nursery clause was focused on the issue of the relationship between local authority control and potential provision by voluntary

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<sup>107</sup> F.H.Dale to M Branch, November 20, 1917, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 1. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>108</sup> Andrews, *Education Act, 1918*



bodies. This was essentially the “religious question” which had so dominated education debates in general in the pre-war period and which had been the trigger for the 1913/1914 Bill. As W.R.Barker, a civil servant with particular expertise in legal issues,<sup>109</sup> wrote to the Secretary to the Board in December 1917, opposition to the proposed nursery school system came on the one hand from supporters of denominational schools who felt that the voluntary schools would be treated less favourably than any local authority schools, and on the other from those, often Nonconformists, who were concerned that denominational (usually Anglican or Roman Catholic) nursery schools would be the only option available for many children.<sup>110</sup> Those in the latter camp inclined to the view that all new nursery schools should be given the status of public elementary schools, which would prohibit the promotion of a particular denominational position. Selby-Bigge argued that LEAs were not in favour of such a move, but that it would be “politic” to ensure that the local authorities were always consulted about the establishment of voluntary schools in their area and to give them the right of inspection.<sup>111</sup> This attempt at appeasement was duly made in the revised Bill, where the relevant clause (now designated 19) also proposed that LEAs could appoint up to a third of the managers in all schools which received grants.<sup>112</sup>

It is important to be clear, however, that calls for nursery schools to be designated as public elementary schools were not the same as calls for nursery

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<sup>109</sup> Fisher, *Unfinished Autobiography*.

<sup>110</sup> W.R.Barker to Secretary, December 14, 1917, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 11. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>111</sup> Selby-Bigge to President, December 22, 1917, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 11. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>112</sup> HC Deb 1 July 1918 vol 107 c1476.

schools to be *part of* existing schools or calls for “nursery classes” in the sense which Ward was using the term to describe the proposals in Manchester. There was, however, one very powerful voice which was indeed championing the nursery class. This was Joseph King, Liberal MP for North Somerset. It was King who proposed the amendment to the draft Bill which introduced the words “which expression shall include nursery classes” to Clause 19.<sup>113</sup> Brehony argues that King’s demands for nursery classes stemmed from his association with the Nonconformist cause and therefore King’s proposal for the recognition of nursery classes was a last ditch attempt to achieve something close to the desired public elementary status for nursery schools.<sup>114</sup> It would seem worthwhile, however, to examine the evidence for this in detail, not least because King himself claimed to disapprove of the fact that denominational concerns had so dominated educational debate: “This religious question” he claimed, “is altogether omitted from this Bill. No one is more glad that it is so than I am. I do not attach great importance to it.”<sup>115</sup>

It is hard, however, not to feel that statements of this kind are somewhat disingenuous. King had argued passionately for nursery schools being designated as PESs, making use of the rallying cry of “Rome on the rates,” which had been heard frequently when legislation allowing church schools to receive funding from local taxation was passed in 1902:<sup>116</sup> “Quite a number” of current nursery schools, he claimed, “have been established by Roman Catholic fraternities and sisterhoods. It is very good work, no doubt, but why should this sort of institution get large grants and

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<sup>113</sup> HC Deb 15 July 1918 vol 108 c854.

<sup>114</sup> Brehony, “Stat och förskola.”

<sup>115</sup> HC Deb 16 July 1918 vol 108 cc965-89.

<sup>116</sup> Malcolm Pearce and Geoffrey Stewart, *British Political History 1867-2001: Democracy and Decline*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2002).

help from the rates..?”<sup>117</sup> King believed that publicly funded schools should be available to the whole of the public, not specific sections of it.

Nevertheless, King had additional motives for proposing his amendment. His belief that public schooling should be universally available influenced him in other areas too. He disliked the idea of nursery schools being available only to a small percentage of the most needy children and objected to the proposed clause “on the ground that it is offering a certain class of education to those who live in slums, and saying to those who live in decent houses, ‘No, these schools are not for you.’”<sup>118</sup> As detached nursery schools were very expensive, “an ideal which is absolutely impossible of realisation in a large industrial community,”<sup>119</sup> King’s preference was for a system which could reach more children in the short term and all children eventually.

King also advanced a number of other arguments in favour of the nursery class which may have been less fundamental to his worldview but may nonetheless have been sincerely held. These included the idea that placing young children in infant schools provided a better basis for future academic success. He was particularly concerned about children at the upper age limit of potential nursery school intake, those of five or six. Infant schools were, he claimed, doing excellent work teaching these children reading and arithmetic and this would be placed in jeopardy if children were to be “palmed off on to schools which are for children of two.”<sup>120</sup> King also adopted the view, previously put forward by the 1908 Consultative Committee, that it would be more convenient for older children to bring

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<sup>117</sup> HC Deb 18 March 1918 vol 104 cc 674-779.

<sup>118</sup> HC Deb 18 March 1918 vol 104 c 774.

<sup>119</sup> HC Deb 30 May 1918 vol 106 cc 1030.

<sup>120</sup> HC Deb 30 May 1918 vol 106 c 1092.

the younger ones to a class in the same building than to a separate school, thus the use of nursery classes rather than detached schools would lead to better attendance and punctuality for both groups of children.<sup>121</sup>

The reasons why King was successful in getting his amendment passed also need to be examined. The clause was met with a flat refusal on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1918 in the committee stage in the House of Commons. The reason given by Fisher was that it was unnecessary. Local Education Authorities could already establish classes should they wish to do so: “I think that it would be very confusing if, in a new Clause, which is intended to confer a new power upon local education authorities, we were to confer a power which already exists and which is exercised freely.”<sup>122</sup> However, two weeks later, on 25<sup>th</sup> July, during the report stage of the Bill, the amendment was accepted with no discussion.<sup>123</sup> This is puzzling.

It does not seem likely that it was King’s personal charisma and influence which achieved the change in policy. The cut and thrust of political debate in the Commons admittedly calls for a certain hectoring style, but all the same, his speeches frequently give an impression of bumbling incompetence and self-regard. In the course of the discussion on the Education Bill on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1918, for example, he was first called to order for making personal attacks on opponents and then commented on his own previous contributions with the words, “I am quite surprised, in reading my own speeches, how good they were.”<sup>124</sup> Relations between King and the Board of Education seemed tinged with frostiness. During the debate on 1<sup>st</sup> July, for example, members of the Board seemed to have found him rather irritating. This

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<sup>121</sup> HC Deb 01 July 1918 vol 107 cc 1475-89.

<sup>122</sup> HC Deb 01 July 1918 vol 107 cc1475-89.

<sup>123</sup> HC Deb 15 July 1918 vol 108 c 854.

<sup>124</sup> HC Deb 30 May 1918 vol 106 cc1005-81.

is suggested by a curt reply of Lewis, the Parliamentary Secretary, to King's suggestion that there had been "ignorant and stupid" hostility to the participation of Scottish members in the debate and also in a laconic, even sarcastic response to King's confusion between day nurseries (childcare facilities) and nursery schools.<sup>125</sup>

Another possible explanation might lie in the fact that the Board felt unable to resist King's views because it did not want to alienate the powerful grouping of Nonconformists with which he identified. However, the Board had successfully resisted the demands of this group with regard to the demand for PES status for nursery schools. Having done so, it would not be likely to capitulate so suddenly on this minor issue simply in order to appease these parties.

Memoranda passed between members of the Board about the amendment shed some light on reasons for the sudden adoption of King's nursery class clause. Most members of the Board believed that the adoption should be resisted because it gave a misleading impression of what the Board believed was the ideal nursery.

Pelham, an official who had sat on the Nursery School Committee, felt, for example, that the Board's acceptance of the clause would undermine the idea that the nursery school "should really have a separate life and existence of its own" and argued that the use of "class" would "tend to have a restrictive influence which would be at least unfortunate."<sup>126</sup> On the other hand, Dale was keen to capitalise on possible positive effects for the babies' classes.<sup>127</sup> Lewis, the Parliamentary Secretary, suggested side-stepping the matter by deflecting King with the argument that the amendment was

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<sup>125</sup> HC Deb 1 July 1918 vol 107 cc 1475-89.

<sup>126</sup> Pelham to Phipps, April 13, 1918, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1), ED 24 760. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>127</sup> Dale to Phipps, May 10, 1918, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1) ED 24 760. National Archives, Kew.

“unnecessary” because nursery classes were already permitted.<sup>128</sup> Unfortunately for the members of the Board, King called their bluff. When the only argument against the clause was that it was unnecessary, the Board did not really have a satisfactory answer to King’s point: “As these Amendments do not seem to conflict with any principle which the Board of Education have in mind, I think that they ought to be accepted ...They clearly point out an alternative. The Board of Education say that it can be adopted. If so, why not put it in the Bill?”<sup>129</sup>

A little more honesty from Board members about their own views of the ideal solution, and their perception of the likely compromises to be made in a post-war environment, might have avoided the adoption of the rather unwieldy formulation which passed into the 1918 Education Act. Although he had claimed to be pointing to an alternative approach, King’s amendment was expressed in such a way that “nursery classes” were to be regarded as a subset of “nursery schools.” The phrase both implied a distinction between the two types of institution and then smothered all debate about it. Ward’s evidence had suggested that more clarity was needed. This clause could only lead to more confusion.

#### **4:9 The impact of the nursery school clause in the 1918 Education Act**

The Board issued clarification of its position in the “Regulations for Nursery Schools,” prepared by Selby-Bigge and signed by him on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1918.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Lewis to unknown recipient, May 20, 1918, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (Series 1) ED 24 760. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>129</sup> HC Deb 1 July 1918 vol 107 cc1475-89.

<sup>130</sup> L.A.Selby-Bigge, Regulations for Nursery Schools 1919, December 31, 1918, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 2. National Archives, Kew.

These were formally issued on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1919.<sup>131</sup> This document contained a number of statements which in effect made the development of either schools or classes rather unlikely. Selby-Bigge claimed that “present circumstances,” by which he meant the aftermath of war and its economic consequences, made it “as a rule....impracticable to provide buildings specially designed for Nursery School purposes.” This was a good thing, he claimed, because of the need for “further experimentation” before significant quantities of money were spent. However, no shift of preference towards nursery classes was intended: “A proposal to establish a Nursery school or class in the premises of a Public Elementary School would need careful consideration and it should generally form the subject of early consultation with the Board.” The general tone is all rather discouraging. The need to “experiment” before making a significant financial commitment had become a very handy fig-leaf.

The initial impact of the act was indeed to generate “experimentation.” Lilian Wilson, a member of the inspectorate, suggested that Board approval should be given “to types of Nursery Schools which vary within wide limits,” including McMillan’s open-air school for 200-300 children and schools in artisan cottages in Manchester.<sup>132</sup> London, in particular, picked up on the idea and set about trying to establish both schools and classes in order to evaluate which would work best.<sup>133</sup> However, these projects had barely any time to get off the ground before they were stifled, and discouragement became prohibition. Circular 1190, issued in 1921, asked

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<sup>131</sup> Grace Owen, *Nursery School Education*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Methuen, 1928).

<sup>132</sup> Lilian Wilson to Bosworth Smith and A.H. Wood, July 19, 1920, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 11. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>133</sup> London County Council, Education Committee Minutes of Proceedings Jan-Jun 1919, insert Report of the Central Care Sub-Committee, June 4, 1919 (London: London County Council, 1919).

LEAs not to “incur any new expenditure” and effectively halted opportunities for “experimentation” in an unproven field.<sup>134</sup> In March 1922, Ethel E. Froud, General Secretary of the National Union of Women Teachers, referred to the “Geddes Axe” which had begun falling on education in general.<sup>135</sup> These were stringent economy measures introduced by the government in response to the financial crisis.<sup>136</sup> As Froud pointed out, however, with regard to nursery education, the axe was falling on “a scheme already mutilated beyond recognition and from which the spirit has long since departed.”<sup>137</sup> Nurseries were not by any means the only victim of the axe. Historian Brian Simon has described how “one provision after another fell victim during the years of post-war crisis” and accordingly considers the implementation of the whole of the 1918 Act to be a “severe disappointment.”<sup>138</sup> Nevertheless, the slow and confused start caused by “experimentation” which never had a resolution left a legacy of loose threads which was to prove difficult to pick up again. As G.G. Williams, a Board inspector, put it, “tender plants cannot grow in soil which is constantly being harrowed.”<sup>139</sup>

Another reason why the implementation of the clause was problematic was the confusing use of language of the Act. “Nursery schools” and “nursery classes” were clearly two distinct phenomena, but the Board had effectively deprived interested parties of a useful way of discussing the issue. G.G. Williams attempted to grapple with this in December 1921, claiming that the “phraseology of the

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<sup>134</sup>Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

<sup>135</sup> Ethel E. Froud, “The education axe,” *English Review*, March 1922, 236-242.

<sup>136</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 184.

<sup>137</sup> Froud, “Education axe,” 236.

<sup>138</sup> Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1965), 363.

<sup>139</sup> G.G. Williams, Scope of the Nursery Class and School, December 20, 1921, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 1. National Archives, Kew.



Act.....was unfortunately taken by many to indicate a distinction between concrete PESs and concrete Nursery Schools.”<sup>140</sup> In other words, despite the Act saying quite the contrary, it seemed to set up an opposition between “nursery schools” on the one hand and “nursery classes” on the other, so that being detached and independent “came to be regarded as inherent in the nature of Nursery Schools as such.”

According to Williams, a better explanation was all that was needed to make it clear that “detached” nursery schools were the preferred model for the most deprived areas but that “Nursery School conditions could exist quite well in any PES.” This would seem to be an unwarranted over-interpretation on his part, however. In the same memorandum, he demonstrated how easy it was to get tangled up in the terms. He wrote “the main thing to realise is that in any case the detached Schools will be the exception rather than the rule, while the main system of nursery teaching develops along the lines of Nursery schools (corrected in pen to “classes”). The schools (corrected in pen to “classes”) have made considerable headway in London...”<sup>141</sup>

A further potential source of confusion was whether or not the phrase suggested an equivalence, in terms of facilities and resourcing, between a detached institution and the “nursery class.” In 1936, The Nursery School Association, referring to the Education Act of 1921 where the phrasing of the clause was repeated, claimed that it was “clear that no difference in objective was envisaged – in the nature, or in the standard – between Nursery Schools and Nursery Classes.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> G.G.Williams, Scope of the Nursery Class and School, December 20, 1921, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 1. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>141</sup> G.G.Williams, Scope of the Nursery Class and School, December 20, 1921, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 1. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>142</sup> Cusden to Stanley, September 21, 1936, enclosed, Memorandum of the Nursery School Association of Great Britain on the Educational Needs of children under seven years of age, Board of

When the Secretary of the association sent a letter to the Board arguing this position, there was an investigation into the matter. Cecil Maudslay, a Board official, commented that the purpose of King's amendment which had led to the claim was "not altogether clear" and had been accepted "without discussion," but that he found nothing to support the association's interpretation.<sup>143</sup> This episode suggests that the clause provoked a profound state of confusion which was not resolved for decades.

#### **4:10 Conclusion**

The first research question which this chapter addresses is which factors influenced the Board in its choices during the writing of the 1918 Act concerning the form which nursery institutions should take (research question 1a). Both the Board's understanding of the purpose of nursery education and its trepidation about the financial implications of wide-spread investment in new institutions played key roles in the decision. Influenced by its Medical Officer, George Newman, the Board planned in 1913/1914 for legislation to encourage health-orientated, detached nursery schools which would be free from the constraining influences of existing public elementary schools. The purpose of nursery education was, in its view, to promote the well-being of children from the most deprived parts of society.

However, its commitment to implementing this measure was weak and Board members were unwilling to commit significant funds to such institutions. In 1916, its Office Committee regretfully declared that it would be necessary to be "flexible"

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Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 4. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>143</sup> Cecil Maudslay, Note on the Memorandum of the Nursery School Association, October 9, 1936, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files ED 102 4. National Archives, Kew.

about the actual form the schools would take and declared itself content that nursery schools could be attached to the PESs. However, through the plans of Manchester County Council in 1917 and the discussion engendered by the inspector, H.Ward, it became apparent that this would lead to “nursery classes,” which were not compatible with the Board’s vision. Nonetheless, the Board was unwilling to criticise such classes and so jeopardize the possibility of financial investment to improve the conditions in babies’ classes within elementary schools. The lobbying of Joseph King forced the Board into a position where it either had to condemn outright or declare its acceptance of the nursery class. It tried to hide behind the argument that King’s amendment was simply “unnecessary” but found that this was not sufficiently convincing. The result was that the nursery school clause in the 1918 Act indicated that detached nursery schools and attached nursery classes were alternatives between which potential providers could choose freely and no preference for one or the other was expressed. This meant that there was a dissonance between the Board’s public position and the real views of its members.

The chapter also addresses the research question of which individuals and groups were able to make their voices heard in the policy process in this period (research question 1b). Despite Fisher’s reputation as a man who went to great lengths to avoid conflict, the substance of the 1918 Education Act in most areas was barely influenced by the consultation process, although the clauses concerning a reduction in autonomy for Local Education Authorities were an exception here.<sup>144</sup> This would suggest an elitist model of policy making, with no real opportunities for participants outside the Board to wield influence. However, this chapter has

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<sup>144</sup> Sherrington, *English Education, Social Change and War 1911-1920*.

demonstrated that where the nursery school clause was concerned, this model needs to be modified to the extent that the elite saw significant advantages in working to maintain co-operation. Board members knew that funding nursery schools would be low on the political agenda in the financially difficult times to come after the war and therefore the nursery clause would need as many enthusiastic advocates as possible in order to achieve any level of implementation. Therefore the policy was formulated with a view to maintaining the support of as many members of the nascent policy network as possible, including nursery enthusiasts, teachers and their unions and also the LEAs.

Maximum flexibility was the Board's priority from 1916 on. All suggestions from across the policy network were folded into the eventual clause as viable options. Determining "who wants what" and "who got what"<sup>145</sup> as a means of tracking influence is ineffectual because everyone got what they wanted in terms of their preferred form of institution being permitted. Equally, no particular group or individual was able to dominate the debate to the extent that its/his/her preference became the only acceptable approach.

Writing in 1930, Margaret McMillan pointed to a "flood-tide" of opportunity for developing nursery education which came in 1919 but was not utilized.<sup>146</sup> The Board's flexibility, which resulted in tentative experimentation on the part of local authorities rather than decisive investment, served the cause of nursery education ill in the post-war crisis. Very little actual provision was established before developing new projects was prohibited altogether. The following chapter analyses how

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<sup>145</sup> Browne, "Organized interests and their issue niches," 484.

<sup>146</sup> Margaret McMillan, *The Nursery School* (London: J.M.Dent, 1930), viii.

national policy regarding the as yet ill-defined concepts of “nursery class” and “nursery school” evolved once the most acute difficulties lifted and possibilities for establishing nursery education of one variety or another emerged again.

## Chapter Five: Solutions for Normal and Abnormal Children: The 1933 Hadow Report

### 5:1 Introduction

The publication of the *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools* in 1933<sup>1</sup> has been viewed by historians of early years education as a significant moment in the development of English national policy in their area.<sup>2</sup> The report formed part of a trilogy providing a blueprint for the whole of the English school system, all conducted under the chairmanship of Sir Henry Hadow, and was comprehensive and wide-ranging in its discussion of the nature of provision for the under fives. The Board of Education initially framed the remit of the inquiry in such a way as to avoid an investigation into the respective merits of various types of institution<sup>3</sup> but nonetheless the definitions of “the nursery school” and “the nursery class” and the proper uses of each became a key feature of the finished document. This put an end to the confusion of the terms which had been generated by the awkward phrasing of the nursery school clause in the 1918 Education Act, where the nursery class seemed to be a subset of the nursery school.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of a nursery school, in the committee’s view, was to improve the physical well-being of the poorest children in society. The nursery class, it believed, should be a slimmed down version of the same: a cheaper alternative suitable for

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<sup>1</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools* (London: HMSO, 1933).

<sup>2</sup> Nanette Whitbread, *The Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School: A History of Infant and Nursery Education in Britain, 1800-1970* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972); Kristen Dombkowski Nawrotzki, “The Anglo-American Kindergarten Movements and Early Education in England and the USA 1850-1965,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Aubrey Symonds to Henry Hadow, January 17, 1930, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1226. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>4</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1918, clause 19.

somewhat less needy areas.<sup>5</sup> Because each institution was suitable for a different socio-economic group of children, and therefore each had a distinctive role to play in the national education system, the committee propagated the idea that the existence of both should be a long-term norm rather than a short-term expediency.

The Consultative Committee was an advisory body established so that the Board of Education could benefit from expert knowledge and in order to provide a forum in which different interests could be represented.<sup>6</sup> Its members came from variety of educational backgrounds, but because they were “selected, not elected,”<sup>7</sup> the link between them and the interests of their supposed constituency was weak. However, in the process of conducting their enquiries, the committee reached out to a wide circle of educational experts, professional unions and other interested parties and in this way had the potential for acting as a conduit for a much wider range of voices. As historian Bronwen Swinnerton has indicated, a key academic debate revolves around the question of whether the existence of the committee was merely a sop to the various interest groups, containing and tending to limit their power to influence the policy process, or whether it genuinely provided an arena where competing interests could engage with each other and have a significant impact on the thinking of the Board.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of this report and the particular question of whether nursery schools or nursery classes should be the preferred mode of provision, the committee

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<sup>5</sup> Tessa Blackstone, *A Fair Start: The Provision of Pre-school Education* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1971); Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*.

<sup>6</sup> Kevin J. Brehony, “‘The school masters parliament’: the origins and formation of the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education 1868-1916,” *History of Education* 23, no. 2 (1994): 171-193.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>8</sup> Bronwen Swinnerton, “The 1931 Report of the Consultative Committee on the Primary School: tensions and contradictions,” *History of Education* 25, no. 1 (1996):73-90.

did not seem to provide an effective forum for representing diverse interests. Witnesses gave muted statements, seeming to make strenuous efforts to appear reasonable and co-operative. This is surprising because there had been bitter arguments, played out in the national press, between those who felt that only nursery schools were appropriate on the one hand and those who were demanding widespread investment in nursery classes on the other. It was most certainly a live issue, and one with considerable heat. In the context of giving evidence to the committee, however, most participants were anxious to stress that they saw merit on both sides of the argument. The policy theory of Sabatier and Weible offers an explanation here. Sabatier and Weible differentiate between “deep core beliefs,” “policy core beliefs” and “secondary beliefs.”<sup>9</sup> For many of these policy participants, the “policy core belief” was the need to expand nursery education. They had had experience of how difficult that could be even when permissive legislation had been passed. The choice between the policy alternatives of nursery schools and nursery classes was a “secondary belief,” which diminished in importance (perhaps to the participants themselves; perhaps in their public presentation of their views) when it might prove an obstacle for the implementation of the policy core belief. The Consultative Committee was thus presented with a continuum of rather mild views on the nursery school/nursery class question. The effect was that the witnesses did not have a decisive effect on the committee’s decision-making process. This chapter argues, therefore, that with regard to this particular issue, the Consultative Committee did not provide an effective mechanism

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<sup>9</sup> Paul A. Sabatier and Christopher M. Weible, “The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Innovations and Clarifications,” in *Theories of the Policy Process*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Paul Sabatier (Boulder, Co: Westview, 2007), 189-220.



for pluralistic policy making and an elitist model of power is the best fit in this context. Ultimately, the thinking and outlook of the Board of Education and the government were the dominant influence in the final recommendations.

Despite the prominence of this report in the histories of early years education, it did not in fact mark a significant change of policy direction regarding the choice between nursery schools and classes. The committee's recommendations were in line with the approach which the Board had been developing in any case and the report caused only a small shift, or rather a tightening and formalising of policy. This is consistent with theories, such as punctuated equilibrium theory, which suggest that most policy is incremental and significant changes occur only infrequently.<sup>10</sup> The reason for a lack of radicalism was that, like the witnesses, the committee was heavily influenced by the ruinous impact of financial restrictions on the implementation of the 1918 Education Act and therefore paid close attention to the potential cost of the different forms of institutions. Therefore, the committee's understanding of what nursery education was and what it should achieve was constrained by its belief that it was obliged to recommend a system which would be seen as affordable by a parsimonious state. However, it is difficult to argue that the committee was constricted by "path dependency"<sup>11</sup> in this particular policy area, as the lack of implementation in the previous decades and the continuing spirit of experimentation in the area meant that the question of preference between nursery

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<sup>10</sup> James L. True, Bryan D. Jones and Frank R. Baumgartner, "Punctuated-Equilibrium Theory: Explaining Stability and Change in Public Policy," in *Theories of the Policy Process*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Paul A. Sabatier (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2007) 155-187.

<sup>11</sup> Adrian Kay, *The Dynamics of Public Policy: Theory and Evidence* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2006).

schools and nursery classes had not yet been clearly established and embedded in the education system.

The content of the report has been discussed by a number of historians, notably Blackstone and Whitbread,<sup>12</sup> who both emphasise the importance the committee attached to the role nursery education could play in promoting health and welfare and who describe the decision about the respective roles of nursery schools and nursery classes. This chapter contributes to research in this area with an analysis of how the committee reached its decision, the respective weight of the various voices which were heard in the policy formation process and the relationship of the content of the report to early years education policy up until the outbreak of World War II. It is structured so as to offer an analysis of events before, during and after the decision-making process of the committee, and includes an analysis of “the appreciative system”<sup>13</sup> of key policy participants.

## **5:2 The reverberation of the 1918 Education Act: questions of definition**

The issues which mattered to policy makers and other policy participants in the years preceding the writing of the report had an impact on the way that the Consultative Committee framed its questions and developed its findings. It is therefore important to understand the issues which arose during the period from the passing of the 1918 Education Act. One of these was the vagueness of the terminology enshrined within the Act.

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<sup>12</sup> Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*; Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey Vickers, *The Art of Judgment: A Study in Policy Making*, Centenary ed. (London: Sage, 1995), 82.

The language of the 1918 Education Act, where nursery classes were confusingly designated a subset of nursery schools, was untenable and inadequate for a clear discussion of the realities of provision. It is clear that many educationalists found it difficult to use the terms as the Act indicated they should be used. In the 1920s, policy-makers and nursery advocates often used the term “nursery school” to designate only detached settings whereas “nursery class” was used for provision within the public elementary schools. This can be seen, for example, during a debate about nursery education organised by the Nursery School Association (NSA) in January 1925.<sup>14</sup> Spurley Hey, Director of Education in Manchester, made a clear distinction between “nursery schools,” of which there were four in Manchester, and “nursery classes within the infant school,” which he was establishing in much larger numbers.

However, as the official terminology remained in place, it continued to cause confusion. This is demonstrated and discussed in a 1929 publication, *The Case for Nursery Schools*, produced by the Education Enquiry Committee, an off-shoot of the Consultative Committee.<sup>15</sup> According to the authors, although the 1918 Education Act quite specifically included the “nursery class” as form of “nursery school,” it is “obvious” that its creators intended nursery schools to be something quite different.<sup>16</sup> In order to provide some clarity, the book included a chapter on “The Relation of the Nursery School to – Nursery Classes.”<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, the Enquiry Committee did not avoid falling into ambiguity itself in that the term “nursery school” is used

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<sup>14</sup> Nursery School Association, Report of Open Meeting, January 3, 1925, Early Documents File, 13/4. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>15</sup> Education Enquiry Committee, *The Case for Nursery Schools* (London: George Philip and Son, 1929).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

throughout as the default term for early years educational provision. The children in Manchester nursery classes were, for example, receiving “nursery school education.”<sup>18</sup> The precise definition of a “nursery class,” in terms of how it differs from “baby-classes of the old type,” was not addressed.<sup>19</sup>

Precise and workable definitions in the field were still required. This was the reason that the Consultative Committee felt that it could not fulfil its remit without addressing the issues of what nursery classes and nursery schools were and what they were for.

### **5:3 The reverberation of the 1918 Education Act: a “stop-go” policy**

The 1918 Education Act permitted Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to financially support nursery schools but it did not require them to do so. The Board of Education’s commitment to providing resources for the new clause was weak. This left nursery education vulnerable to neglect at times of financial difficulty. The result was a pattern of development during the 1920s which historian, Nanette Whitbread, has identified as a “stop-go” approach.<sup>20</sup> Small steps forward were followed by roadblocks. The frustrations of this period had a profound impact on the psyche of nursery education advocates. Therefore, financial considerations and the likelihood of any recommendations actually becoming reality became key issues for the policy network as a whole and the Consultative Committee in particular. These roadblocks also had an impact on the form of provision which LEAs were able to establish and

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>20</sup> Whitbread, *Evolution of the nursery-infant school*, 67.

successful or unsuccessful developments also helped shaped the policy network's ideas about what was realistic and what was not.

The task of tracing the actual development of both institutions is complicated by the ambiguity in the terms nursery class and nursery school, as has been discussed in the preceding section. It is frequently difficult to determine whether civil servants, politicians and other interested parties are using the term "nursery school" to refer only to a detached institution, or in the broader sense of the 1918 Act. In some cases, they themselves may not have been fully aware of the niceties of the terminology. However, there was a crucial difference between the detached nursery school and the attached class which is very useful here. It was necessary to apply formally for the Board of Education to recognise a "school" in order to secure financial support, whereas the places for children in "nursery classes" were funded in the same way as those of all children under five in the public elementary schools. Many "nursery classes" were established by making a number of improvements, the nature of which varied considerably, to existing "baby classes." Therefore the statistics to which the Board had access concerning "nursery schools" did not in fact include "nursery classes." The number of detached schools can thus be determined with some certainty. National figures about the spread of nursery classes are not available, but alternative sources, such as Board of Education internal discussions and information from local authorities which had a particular interest in the area, give some indication of the extent of their development.

The Board of Education Circular 1190, issued in 1921, was a clear request to Local Education Authorities not to embark on new projects and much development in

nursery education consequently drew to a halt.<sup>21</sup> The Board became very reluctant to sanction new (detached) nursery school accommodation, and would only do so “in special circumstances and on an experimental basis” in existing buildings.<sup>22</sup>

G.G.Williams, a Board inspector, wrote in December 1921 that worsening “political conditions” had led to the rejection of several plans for nursery schools, even when this meant refusing sites offered as gifts. This meant that “nursery classes” were a more realistic option for Local Education Authorities to pursue at this time. Williams stated that the classes “have made considerable headway in London, but they are seen at their best in Manchester where 16 PESs have developed an efficient well organised system of classes.”<sup>23</sup> Many local authorities, however, did not choose to develop any provision at all during the financial pressures of the early 1920s.

The Labour Party was elected to power in 1924 and this signalled a change in policy in respect of nursery education. On 20<sup>th</sup> February 1924, A.H.Wood, the Secretary to the Board, wrote to a colleague that “an advance now is quite practicable as far as finance is concerned.”<sup>24</sup> In the House of Commons on 22<sup>nd</sup> July, Morgan Jones, the Parliamentary Secretary, referred to the government’s intention to remove restrictions and stated that “proposals that are made to us that are reasonable in character will receive our sympathetic consideration.”<sup>25</sup> However, this government was to prove short-lived and the Conservatives were returned to power by the end of the year.

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<sup>21</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

<sup>22</sup> Board of Education, *Circular 1190*, January 11, 1921, Section 10 page 5.

<sup>23</sup> G.G.Williams, *Scope of the Nursery Class and School*, December 20, 1921, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 1. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>24</sup> A.H.Wood to Howarth, February 20, 1924, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 2. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>25</sup> HC Deb 22 July 1924 vol 176 c1266.

The new President of the Board, Eustace Percy, did nothing to encourage expansion and the number of nursery schools remained largely static throughout his tenure. In July 1927, the Duchess of Atholl, the Parliamentary Secretary, stated in the Commons that, “We have had very few proposals for opening nursery schools since we came into office. We have sanctioned one being opened in an important industrial area. Three have been closed for various reasons incidental to the locality.”<sup>26</sup> In April 1928, the number of nursery schools was 26.<sup>27</sup> In January 1929, it was 27.<sup>28</sup> When viewed against the number of public elementary schools, given as 20 734 by Percy in March 1926, it is clear that very little investment was being made in this area.<sup>29</sup>

The Conservative government was also interested in cutting spending by reducing the amount of grant paid for other children under five in elementary schools, which would have had an impact on those in nursery classes. Circular 1371, introduced in late 1925, set out these plans. According to *The Times*, the circular created “immense hubbub” with “teachers, parents and officials,” united in opposition and it was abandoned before the end of the year.<sup>30</sup> Percy nonetheless continued to express a desire to curtail nursery classes. In June 1926, he wrote to the Secretary of the Board that in his view elementary schools were “primarily” for children between 5 and 14. Although children under 5 might be admitted in cases of need, there was no justification for making special adjustments for them.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> HC Deb 26 July 1927 vol 209 c1096.

<sup>27</sup> HC Deb 23 January 1929 vol 224 c160.

<sup>28</sup> HC Deb 23 January 1929 vol 224 c160.

<sup>29</sup> HC Deb 11 March 1926 vol 192 c2631W.

<sup>30</sup> “Second Thoughts,” *The Times*, December 21, 1925, 13.

<sup>31</sup> Percy to Secretary, June 14, 1926, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1467. National Archives, Kew.

However, he did not find a mechanism with which to achieve this and local authorities remained free to establish nursery classes if they wished. Leicester Education Committee's *Annual Report* from 1928, for example, reported the recent establishment of two of them.<sup>32</sup>

In the 1929 general election, Labour won the greatest number of seats. Charles Trevelyan, who had been President of the Board in 1924, returned to this position and continued to show support for nursery education. However, this interest did have to compete with a large number of other ambitious plans for progressive reform in the service, including a potentially expensive determination to increase access to secondary education.<sup>33</sup> Board officials were concerned that there was a danger in overloading the LEAs and that there was a risk that they would ignore the push for nursery education if it was made while they were grappling with the implications of raising the school leaving age.<sup>34</sup> Trevelyan agreed to delay pressurising LEAs on the issue for a few months while they put in place "their general reorganisation."<sup>35</sup>

Board officials also argued that there were further difficulties with an immediate and comprehensive expansion of nursery schools. In a Board meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1929, it was "pointed out," although it is not clear by whom, that the cost of new nursery schools and the lack of available sites in crowded inner-city areas were potential difficulties which might hamper development. On the other hand, a

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<sup>32</sup> Borough of Leicester, Education Committee Minutes 1928-1929, insert Allan Warner, Annual Report 1928, 19.D.59/VII/413. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Trevelyan to Philip Snowden, October 29, 1929, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1466. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>34</sup> Pelham to Secretary, July 19, 1929, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 3. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>35</sup> C.Eaton to Lowndes, October 1, 1929, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 3. National Archives, Kew.



bulge in the school population was about to pass out of infant schools, leaving empty classrooms which could be used for the under fives. George Newman, the Medical Officer, argued that the Board should attempt to tackle the lack of provision by encouraging both nursery schools and nursery classes, in addition to day nursery facilities. Trevelyan agreed that a circular should be drafted setting out these possible options.<sup>36</sup> On 5<sup>th</sup> December 1929, a joint circular was duly issued by the Board of Education (1405) and Ministry of Health (1054). This made it clear that nursery provision was very much encouraged by the government. The document gave a prominence to the provision of unattached nursery schools but made it very clear that these were not the “only method of attacking the problem.” The provision of nursery classes was also encouraged, as was “otherwise” accommodating the under fives in mainstream infant classes.<sup>37</sup>

Thus even at a time when the Board was expressing enthusiasm and encouragement for an expansion of nursery education, financial considerations were constraining and constricting it. There was, however, a pressure on the Board, and later on the Consultative Committee, to do something rather than nothing and to find some sort of a solution even if, because of limited resources, the ideal was not perceived as achievable. The result was that the Consultative Committee believed it was important to take the issue of affordability into account when making its recommendations.

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<sup>36</sup> WRR, Note of a Discussion on Nursery Schools, June 28, 1929, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1466. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>37</sup> Board of Education, *Circular 1405: Children under school age* (also Ministry of Health, *Circular 1054*), December 5, 1929.

#### 5:4 The significance of the advocacy coalition in the 1920s

An important feature of nursery education policy during the 1920s is that fact that the frustrations and, to use Whitbread's term, the "stops," were nonetheless followed by the "goes." This was not a policy which was allowed to drop off the public agenda altogether. The nascent advocacy coalition which was establishing itself during the formation of the 1918 Education Act continued to develop. A major feature of this coalition was the formation of The Nursery School Association (NSA) in 1923 by Grace Owen, H.J.Eveleigh and Margaret McMillan, with the express purpose of securing "the effective work of the Education Act of 1918."<sup>38</sup> The main focus of the organisation was the vigorous lobbying of decision-makers in order to secure the establishment and spread of nursery institutions. This was achieved through correspondence with election candidates and with politicians in post and through deputations to the Board.<sup>39</sup> McMillan was associated with the Independent Labour Party, and had campaigned for socialist causes<sup>40</sup> and so her personal connections with Labour politicians were well-established. Advocates were also eventually successful in encouraging the Conservative Party to adopt a similar positive policy towards nursery education. Viscountess Nancy Astor was a Conservative MP and a very prominent nursery school supporter.<sup>41</sup> She put forward a resolution at the Council of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations on June 26<sup>th</sup> 1928 calling for the establishment of open-air nursery

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<sup>38</sup> V. Celia Lascarides and Blythe F. Hinitz, *History of Early Childhood Education* (New York: Garland, 2000), 122.

<sup>39</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

<sup>40</sup> Carolyn Steedman, "Bodies, Figures and Physiology: Margaret McMillan and the Late Nineteenth Century Remaking of Working-class Childhood," in *In the Name of the Child: Health and Welfare 1880-1940*, ed. Roger Cooter (London:Routledge, 1992), 19-44.

<sup>41</sup> Kevin J. Brehony, "Lady Astor's campaign for nursery schools in Britain, 1930-1939: attempting to valorize cultural capital in a male-dominated political field," *History of Education Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2009): 196-210.

schools in deprived urban areas.<sup>42</sup> This was accepted.<sup>43</sup> Eustace Percy, who had tried to put a halt to all development, nevertheless found this to be a “good thing” because, in his view, the Labour Party certainly believed that it would gain electoral advantage from its support for nursery schools and the Conservatives should attempt to do so as well.<sup>44</sup>

Politicians clearly felt that the public was broadly supportive of a policy promoting nursery education. The fact that this was the case says a great deal about how the issue had been framed, by all policy participants, as a purely educational and child welfare issue. An alternative framing would have perhaps made links between education and childcare services, thus linking the provision of early years education to the facilitation of maternal employment. This was not a period when such a framing would have been welcomed by the public. There were in fact 5.6 million working women in Britain in 1931 but only 16% of these were married.<sup>45</sup> Unemployment in the interwar period, averaging at 10% in the 1920s and 1930s<sup>46</sup> led to societal pressure militating against women’s work and ill-feeling against women who took “men’s” jobs.<sup>47</sup> This combined with a feeling that mothers should, in ideal circumstances, be at home with their children, a view apparent in the oft-

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<sup>42</sup> Pembroke Wicks to Wood, June 18, 1928, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1466. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>43</sup> The National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, Resolution passed at a meeting of the central council held at the Hotel Cecil on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> June 1928, July 12, 1928, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1466. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>44</sup> Eustace Percy to Wicks, June 19, 1928, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1466. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>45</sup> Gerry Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain since 1840* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> Jane Humphries, “Women and Paid Work,” in *Women’s History: Britain 1850-1945- An Introduction*, ed. June Purvis (London: UCL Press, 1995), 72-90.

<sup>47</sup> Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain since 1840*.

stated view that the “ideal scheme for young children is to leave them in a good home.”<sup>48</sup>

Nursery education supporters did not generally use the argument that schools/classes were needed in order to provide childcare. Instead, they concentrated on arguing that although a good home was indeed ideal, there were significant numbers of homes that were not in fact “good” and therefore nursery education could be of significant benefit to the child in such difficult circumstances. The terms used by the Labour MP for Middlesbrough East, Ellen Wilkinson, are indicative of the line usually taken: “This experiment of nursery schools was to take these children out of all the grime and horror and ugliness of our big industrial areas, and give them bright nursery conditions, teach them clean personal habits, teach them love of duty and self-control, and just lay the foundations of those decent social habits which go to make good citizens.”<sup>49</sup> Even the Nursery School Association, which later in the 1930s would be at the forefront of arguing that nursery schools could benefit all children,<sup>50</sup> took its lead in the 1920s from its president, Margaret McMillan, who argued, “I am concerned entirely with children and above all the children of the poorest class.”<sup>51</sup>

This framing of the issue had the advantage of appealing to a wide range of potential supporters and of limiting controversy. It was difficult to argue against taking children out of horror in order to teach them a love of duty. However, it set

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<sup>48</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee upon the School Attendance of Children below the age of Five* (London: HMSO, 1908), 17.

<sup>49</sup> HC Deb 17 December 1925 vol 189 c1760.

<sup>50</sup> Nursery School Association, Memorandum of the Nursery School Association of Great Britain on the Educational Needs of Children Under Seven Years of Age, Undated (post 1936), Early Documents File 13/1. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>51</sup> McMillan to de Lissa, May 8, 1929, Early Documents File, 13/8. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

definite limits to the potential expansion of nursery education as it was not promoted as a universal good. The persistence of these underlying attitudes to women and work perhaps contributed to the government's reluctance to prioritize the financing of this policy area. As would be demonstrated by events in World War II, when women's labour did become a priority, radical change became possible.

### **5:5 The referral to the Consultative Committee**

It is rather intriguing that a referral was made to the Consultative Committee at a point when the prospects for development seemed brighter than they had been at any point since the passing of the 1918 Act. One might have anticipated, perhaps, that the nursery school advocates would concentrate on capitalizing on the opportunities presented by Trevelyan's encouraging 1929 circular. Instead, they were instrumental in demanding a full enquiry into the nature of nursery education and the best way forward, despite the risk of delay that this would entail.

On 18<sup>th</sup> December 1929, Trevelyan and members of the Board received a deputation from a number of prominent nursery education enthusiasts.<sup>52</sup> These included Viscountess Astor, Margaret McMillan, Grace Owen and Freda Hawtrey of the Nursery School Association, Shena Simon from Manchester Education Committee, representatives from the NUT and the academic, Winifred Cullis. The deputees pressed very forcefully for an enquiry into "the training and nurture of children from 2 to 7." Trevelyan expressed the concern that setting up an enquiry would lead LEAs to the conclusion that the Board was not sure of its policy and so

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<sup>52</sup> S.H.Wood, Memorandum, December 19, 1929, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 3. National Archives, Kew.

cause them to delay taking action. Freda Hawtrey argued, however, that an enquiry would provide much needed publicity for nursery education and so would raise its status. Furthermore, the collection of evidence would stop the development of “casual and thoughtless provision.” This would seem to be a veiled criticism of Circular 1405 and its encouragement of any form of services. Cullis suggested a referral to the Consultative Committee, and Trevelyan promised to consider the matter.

In fact, according to a Board of Education internal memorandum, Freda Hawtrey and R.H.Tawney, one of the authors of *The Case for Nursery Schools*, had suggested that this would be a suitable investigation for the Consultative Committee as long ago as 1926.<sup>53</sup> Hadow himself was attracted to the idea because the resulting report would form a natural trilogy with his previous works on the primary school and on education for adolescents.<sup>54</sup> According to Aubrey Symonds, Permanent Secretary to the Board, Trevelyan was “willing to acquiesce” with the proposal. Nevertheless, he remained concerned about possible checks to progress.<sup>55</sup>

It was therefore necessary for the committee’s remit to be carefully framed. In order to minimise the risk of delay, Symonds suggested that the committee should refrain from looking into which type of institutions might be most suitable for nursery education but should look instead at how existing provision might best be conducted. His suggested task, or “reference,” for the committee, was “To consider and report on the training and teaching of children attending nursery schools and

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<sup>53</sup> WRR to Sir E Phipps, December 16, 1929, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1226. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>54</sup> Hadow to Symonds, January 20, 1930, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1226. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>55</sup> Author unknown to Secretary, December 20, 1929, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1226. National Archives, Kew.

infants' departments of public elementary schools."<sup>56</sup> The committee itself, however, felt that the phrasing should leave them "full discretion to explore the whole field of educational provision for children up to the age of 7+."<sup>57</sup> This would suggest that they were indeed keen to pronounce on the respective merits of existing forms of provision. The final wording of the reference was that the committee would "consider and report on the training and teaching of children attending nursery schools and infants' departments of public elementary schools, and the further development of such educational provision for children up to the age of 7+."<sup>58</sup> This gave the committee the free range which they wanted.

### **5:6 Formation and working of the Committee**

The Consultative Committee was a permanent body of people with educational interest and expertise, which did not necessarily change from report to report. New members were selected by the Board of Education from the personal connections of the President or the Permanent Secretary, or on the basis of recommendations made to them.<sup>59</sup> The character of appointments was determined by the need for the committee to represent a "microcosm" of the educational world and to represent a broad spectrum of experience.<sup>60</sup> However, from 1924 the

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<sup>56</sup> Aubrey Symonds to Hadow, January 17, 1930, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1266. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>57</sup> Consultative Committee, Unconfirmed minutes (79<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Meeting held on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> January and Friday 24<sup>th</sup> January), Undated, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1266. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>58</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools*, iv.

<sup>59</sup> Sylvia Harrop, "Committee Women: Women on the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education 1900-1944," in *Women, Educational Policy Making and Administration in England: Authoritative Women since 1800*, ed. Joyce Goodman and Sylvia Harrop (London: Routledge, 2000), 156-174.

<sup>60</sup> RFJ, Statement regarding the eight vacancies on the Consultative Committee (as from 1 December 1930), September 27, 1930, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1224. National Archives, Kew.

expertise of potential members with regard to upcoming issues was also taken into account.<sup>61</sup>

In 1930, there were eight vacancies.<sup>62</sup> Albert Mansbridge was reappointed because “of his position in the educational world” (this may have referred to the fact he had founded the Worker’s Educational Association<sup>63</sup>) and also because he had connections with Margaret McMillan and was one of the authors of *The Case for Nursery Schools*. J.A.White was also re-appointed because of his involvement with this report.<sup>64</sup> A significant new member was Shena Simon, who was appointed because she was “deeply interested in social and educational questions” and had served on departmental committees.<sup>65</sup> As a member of Manchester Education Committee, she had experience of overseeing the development of a large number of nursery classes.

Part of the committee’s investigations involved conducting visits to nursery institutions. For example, some (unspecified) members visited “6 Nursery Classes under one Authority” in March 1930.<sup>66</sup> Evidence of practice abroad, such as reports on provision for the under fives in other European countries and in the United States,

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<sup>61</sup> Harrop, “Committee Women.”

<sup>62</sup> RFJ, Statement regarding the eight vacancies on the Consultative Committee (as from 1 December 1930), September 27, 1930, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1224. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>63</sup> Bernard Jennings, *Albert Mansbridge: The Life and Work of the Founder of the WEA*, (Leeds: Leeds University of Leeds with the WEA, 2002).

<sup>64</sup> RFJ, Statement regarding the eight vacancies on the Consultative Committee (as from 1 December 1930), September 27, 1930, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1224. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>65</sup> RFJ, Statement regarding the eight vacancies on the Consultative Committee (as from 1 December 1930), September 27, 1930, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1224. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>66</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T – 3 Board of Education Consultative Committee, Visits to 6 Nursery Classes under one Authority in March 1930, March 1930, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.



was also collected.<sup>67</sup> However, the bulk of the evidence came from the statements of “witnesses,” made either in written form or at a meeting with the committee. Some of this evidence was volunteered without a specific request, usually by teachers or head teachers. The committee, however, asked directly for evidence from other individuals and organisations, overwhelmingly from within the world of education. The list, as presented in the final report, was headed by government officials, largely from the Board of Education inspectorate.<sup>68</sup> Then followed the representatives from Local Education Authority organisations, both municipal and county council, and then organisations representing teachers. Other educationally orientated organisations on the list included the Froebel Society, the Montessori Society, the New Educational Fellowship and the Nursery School Association. In addition, a large number of individuals, chiefly Directors of Education, professors and teachers, gave evidence. Thus the two main sources of solicited information were collective voices, expected to give a feel for the opinions of a particular constituency, and the voices of experts and specialists deemed by the committee to possess some particular knowledge.

There were a very small number of witnesses who could potentially have brought in perspectives beyond the purely educational and might have been in a position to make links with wider social issues and thus threaten the exclusively educational frame. These were representatives of the Industrial Women’s Organisation and the Trades Union Congress General Council. However, neither

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<sup>67</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T 7 Board of Education – Consultative Committee Report by Two of the Board’s Women Inspectors on the Provision made for the care and training of children under school age in certain cities of Austria, Germany and Holland, September 1930, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>68</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery School*, 198-200.

these organisations themselves nor the Consultative Committee seemed to see this as their role and these contributions are no different from the other submissions in terms of range and content.

### **5:7 Teachers and the nursery school/class question: muddy waters**

The teacher and headteacher organisations consulted were generally convinced of the need of more early years provision, and they saw this as the main priority. With regard to the question of a preference for nursery schools or nursery classes, the profession did not speak with a unified voice. Where a preference was expressed, this tended to be for nursery classes, with the importance of “continuity” between nursery and later school experiences given prominence. Other organisations, however, preferred not to address the issue at all and seemed to be more concerned with the policy core belief and not the question of policy alternatives. The waters are muddied further by the witness statements from a number of teachers associations not directly concerned with younger children and not necessarily familiar with the contemporary use of the terms “nursery school” and “nursery class.” These associations were likely to be influenced by the official use of the term “nursery school” to mean all types of provision.<sup>69</sup>

Two examples of groups which did argue in favour of nursery classes were the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) and the National Union of

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<sup>69</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper T. 40 Consultative Committee Board of Education Memorandum by the Association of Assistant Mistresses in Secondary Schools, Undated, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 150. National Archives, Kew; Consultative Committee, Paper No. T 50 Memorandum on The Education of Children under Five, submitted by the Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters in Secondary Schools, Undated, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 150. National Archives, Kew.

Women Teachers (NUWT). The NAHT stated that unattached schools were justified in the “experimental stage,” (referring possibly to the calls for experiment after the passing of the 1918 Act), but had several major disadvantages: they restricted the opportunities of nursery teachers, keeping them apart from colleagues; infant schools were not able to capitalise on the strong links which they made with parents and the break at five led to a damaging lack of “continuity of treatment.”<sup>70</sup> The NUWT evaluated three types of provision: babies’ rooms in infants schools, which they saw as not adequate and acceptable only as a “temporary expedient;” the free-standing school and the “nursery wing.” As this was specified as being of the type found in Manchester, this may be considered to be the nursery class. This was seen as the “nearest approach to a combination of the ideal and the practical,” and its particular advantages were the way in which the nursery spirit would infuse the rest of the school and links with parents could be maintained. There is a list of the disadvantages of nursery schools, including the isolation of teachers and the need to see education up to age seven as a “continuous phase.”<sup>71</sup>

Two examples of organisations which did not engage with the question at all in their evidence to the Consultative Committee are the National Federation of Class Teachers (NFCT) and the National Union of Teachers (NUT). The NFCT clearly indicated that either nursery schools or classes would “benefit enormously” children in deprived circumstances.<sup>72</sup> The NUT did not mention the issue at all,<sup>73</sup> but their

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<sup>70</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No. T. 11(13) Memorandum of Evidence by the National Association of Head Teachers, June 26, 1931, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>71</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T.11 (12) Précis of Evidence to be submitted by representatives of the National Union of Women Teachers, June 26, 1931, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>72</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No. T 11 (14) Memorandum of Evidence to the Consultative Committee given on behalf of the National Federation of Class Teachers, June 25, 1931, Education

position may be inferred from a statement made later, in 1936, by Miss J.A.Callard, who was one of witnesses representing the union at the meeting with the Consultative Committee: “Given our choice, we have always preferred the Nursery School, but as practical people we have realised that our “wants” are always conditioned by circumstances.” The most important thing, she continued, was to ensure standards in nursery classes were the same as in schools.<sup>74</sup> This may be an inaccurate description of the union’s long-standing position (as discussed in the previous chapter concerning the 1918 Education Act). The salient point, however, is that the form of institution did not seem to be a particularly high priority.

### **5:8 The Board’s inspectors and medical officers and the nursery school/class question: a continuum of opinion**

The evidence the inspectors gave to the Consultative Committee suggests that most of them were convinced of the merits of both nursery schools and nursery classes. Generally, this group saw nursery schools as an absolute ideal but believed that nursery classes were capable of doing sterling work and were probably a more practical solution. There is a continuum of opinion from those who felt regretful about this to those who were content that it should be so. At the regretful end of the spectrum, for example, was HMI Miss Hill, who believed that nursery schools “undoubtedly formed the better type of provision,” but that nursery classes should be

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Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>73</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T. 11(11) Memorandum of Evidence submitted by the Executive of the Union to the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education on the Education of Children up to the age of seven plus, June 1931, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>74</sup> Nursery School Association, Report of Conference on the Education of Children Under Seven, 1936, NSA Pamphlets 1930-1964, 24/2. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

established if that was all that was economically viable.<sup>75</sup> The National Association of Inspectors of Schools and Educational Organisers, whose representatives were all connected to London County Council, were somewhat more accepting of the situation. Its evidence praised the role of the nursery school as a “model and exemplar” in terms of hygiene and physical amenities, and felt that it should operate as such for the present. However, the facts that nursery schools were expensive and required a lot of ground space meant that the “reformed infant school” with a properly equipped nursery class was seen as a more realistic way of achieving expansion.<sup>76</sup> Divisional Inspector, H.J. Dean, sat at the far end of the continuum: the past and current achievements of nursery schools were to be appreciated, but, ultimately, they were not the way forward. He suggested that it would be “fatal” to suggest that the aims of nursery schools could only be achieved in “special conditions.” He went so far as to call them “excrescences on a developing educational system.”<sup>77</sup>

The view of Henry Richards, the Senior Chief Inspector, was also that the nursery school was the ideal form of institution but that the nursery class was an “acceptable alternative” in straightened times. However, his analysis of the consequences of this differed somewhat from that of the other inspectors and the language he used is rather striking. He suggested that classes were the best

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<sup>75</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper T.12 (16) Summary of evidence given by Miss Hill H.M.I., July 23, year unknown, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>76</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T 11 (9) Memorandum submitted by the National Association of Inspectors of Schools and Educational Organisers regarding the education of young children up to the age of 7+ , May 29, year unknown, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives. Kew.

<sup>77</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No. T. 11 Consultative Committee Board of Education, Memorandum of Evidence to be given by Mr H. J. Dean, H.M. Divisional Inspector for the N.W. Division, March 27, 1931, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

“solution” for “normal children,” but that nursery schools should be provided for “the very poor or abnormal children.”<sup>78</sup> In other words, different groups of children required different institutions. Both institutions had a distinctive place in the system and both were needed.

The Medical Officers to the Board, Lilian Wilson and George Newman, also gave evidence to the committee. Wilson gave extensive details of the advantages and disadvantages of both types of provision. Her position was that the nursery schools should be “more of a home than a school,” and her instinct was to be suspicious of the “attached” schools, saying that they should be “watched carefully.” She was thus more hostile towards the nursery class than any of the inspectors had been. Nevertheless, she made a point of saying that nursery classes could perform a valuable service if economic conditions made the expansion of separate schools impractical.<sup>79</sup> This is a very clear case of a witness being concerned to protect and promote the policy core belief (the need for expansion), even if the secondary beliefs (concerning the policy alternatives of schools/classes) needed to be sacrificed. Newman’s comments are, intriguingly, very closely aligned to that of Henry Richards. He described schools and classes as “treatment,” with the class being a watered down version of the school. He also saw “advantage in diversity,” and explained how different institutions were needed for different groups of children.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T. 12 (1) Memorandum of the evidence of Miss A G Philip, Chief Woman Inspector of the Board of Education. Accompanied by Sir Henry Richards, the Senior Chief Inspector, February 26, year unknown, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>79</sup> Consultative Committee Board of Education, Summary of evidence by Dr Lilian E. Wilson, Medical Officer of the Board of Education, March 26, 1931, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>80</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No. T.11 (44) Memorandum on some medical considerations by Sir George Newman, Chief Medical Officer of the Board, May 26, 1932, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

Perhaps there had been a conversation between these two senior figures. Perhaps their shared beliefs represented a developing understanding at the Board which was held more widely.

### **5:9 Local Education Authorities and the nursery school/class question: circumspection**

Another group of witness statements to the Consultative Committee came from Local Education Authorities. A small number of LEAs gave individual evidence; others spoke as part of umbrella associations. Most witnesses described and offered evaluations of their own provision. This was in most cases at an early stage, and so witnesses spoke cautiously about their own schools and/or classes as a promising experiment. The Director of Education for Bradford described the city's schools for the two to seven age range in these terms.<sup>81</sup> Paul Innes, Birmingham's Chief Education Officer, stated that his authority had not concerned itself with the under fives to a great extent until very recently, but that it was currently experimenting with both forms of provision and believed both would prove satisfactory.<sup>82</sup>

In general, opinions submitted are circumspect and far from strident. The Association of Education Committees was broadly in favour of "the type which provides for the closest co-operation of nursery and infants' departments," which

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<sup>81</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T 11(23) Memorandum of Evidence submitted by Mr Thomas Boyce, Director of Education for Bradford, October 22, 1931, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>82</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper T 11 (33) Memorandum of Evidence to be submitted by Dr P. D. Innes, Chief Education Officer, City of Birmingham, January 29, 1932, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED10 149. National Archives, Kew.

was to say nursery classes.<sup>83</sup> It emphasised, however, that each LEA had a different set of circumstances which needed to be taken into account and that “each type of establishment contributes in some degree towards the amelioration of unfortunate circumstances.” The Association of Municipal Corporations admitted that there were “divided opinions” among their representatives but felt that, on balance, nursery classes would be better because of the ease of transition from the nursery to the infant or elementary school.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, it admitted that “separate nursery schools have certain advantages of their own.” F. P. Armitage, the Director of Education in Leicester, saw nursery schools as the ideal form of provision but was nonetheless investing heavily in nursery classes. He and his Education Committee believed that they had a duty to spread the benefit of nursery education widely and the nursery class was the most efficient way to do this. Armitage believed it was better for a child to be in a well-equipped nursery class than a poorly-equipped “baby room,” and, indeed, a “crowded baby room” was better than “a cold doorstep.”<sup>85</sup> It would not be easy for the Consultative Committee to take a lead from the constituency of LEAs on this question.

### **5:10 Other educational organisations and the nursery school/class question: an alternative model**

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<sup>83</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T.11 (32) Memorandum of Evidence on the Education of Young Children up to the age of Seven plus submitted on behalf of the Association of Education Committee, January 20, year unknown, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>84</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T. 12 (36) Memorandum of Evidence Submitted to the Consultative Committee on behalf of the Association of Municipal Corporations, January 14, 1932, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>85</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No. T 11 (39), Memorandum of Evidence to be submitted by Mr F. P. Armitage, Director of Education for Leicester C.B., Undated, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.



A number of educationally-orientated voluntary organisations were also asked to provide evidence to the Consultative Committee. The most forceful and least conciliatory witness statements were among these submissions. The New Education Fellowship declared itself “apprehensive” and “fearful” about nursery classes, although it was also careful not to rule them out completely, aware that nursery classes may have been the only provision the Board of Education was prepared to offer.<sup>86</sup> The Bradford Independent Labour Party, of which Margaret McMillan had been a member, was the most strident voice raised against nursery classes, calling them “at best makeshift and on the whole a delusion and a snare.”<sup>87</sup> The Bradford Independent Labour Party,<sup>88</sup> the Froebel Society<sup>89</sup> and the Nursery School Association (NSA)<sup>90</sup> were in fact in favour of the nursery school which admitted children from the ages of two to seven.

Within the NSA, advocacy for the 2-7 school was a unifying principle. Its statement to the Consultative Committee made the point that the nursery class is not “an economical proposal,” in that if it were resourced properly, which is to say to nursery school standards, it would not be any cheaper and would in fact lose out on

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<sup>86</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T11(26) Memorandum of evidence submitted by the Committee of the English Section of the New Education Fellowship, October 23, 1931, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>87</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T. 26 Memorandum on Training and Teaching of Children up to the age of 7+ from the Bradford Independent Labour Party Education Commission, Undated, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 150. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>88</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T. 26 Memorandum on Training and Teaching of Children up to the age of 7+ from the Bradford Independent Labour Party Education Commission, Undated, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 150. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>89</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T. 12 (7) Memorandum of Evidence given by the Froebel Society, May 29, 1931, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew; Consultative Committee, Paper no T12 (8) Evidence of Nursery School Association, May 29, 1931, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>90</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T.12 (8) Evidence of the Nursery School Association, May 29, 1931, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

the economies of scale. Nevertheless, the statement fought shy of condemning nursery classes outright and concentrated instead on stating the importance of maintaining parity of standards between the two institutions.<sup>91</sup> This amounted to a papering over of the internal debates about the nursery school/class question, which had been bitter and divisive. For Margaret McMillan, the association's first president, the open-air school which she had pioneered was the only acceptable form of institution. She refused to accept the argument that financially difficult times meant that only classes could be provided.<sup>92</sup> There were, however, sharply differing views within the association on this matter, as Grace Owen had candidly admitted to Shena Simon in a letter in February 1929.<sup>93</sup> In an undated historical account of the NSA written at some point after 1944, Grace Owen and Margaret Eggar claimed that the address by Manchester's Director of Education, Spurley Hey, at the association's meeting in 1925 had "served to bring to the surface the strong feeling which this subject aroused."<sup>94</sup> Hey's picture of the achievements of his city's nursery classes had made a favourable impression on some members. In 1927, Lillian de Lissa wrote to Grace Owen about a recent visit she had made to Hey. He had, she said, "faith and vision as well as a practical mind."<sup>95</sup> Support for nursery classes among NSA members deeply irritated Margaret McMillan, who resigned as President on

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<sup>91</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T.12 (8) Evidence of the Nursery School Association, May 29, 1931, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>92</sup> Nursery School Association, Report of Open Meeting, January 3, 1925, Early Documents File, 13/4. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>93</sup> Owen to Simon, February 12, 1929, Early Documents File, 13/6. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>94</sup> Grace Owen and Margaret Eggar, Historical Record of the Nursery School Association of Great Britain, 1923-1944 (Pamphlet no. 60), Undated, Early Documents File, 13/2. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>95</sup> De Lissa to Owen, September 19, 1937, Early Documents File, 13/9. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

account of this in 1929. She wrote to de Lissa, saying that her aims of nurturing the poorest children would not be achieved through “the school [meaning nursery class] that is advocated by the NSA.”<sup>96</sup>

The 2-7 school, combining nurture and the open-air principles with the opportunity to avoid the break at five and thus provide an easier path into formal education, seemed to be an option which healed the rift. The association’s publication, *A Ten Year Plan for Children*, published in 1935, indicated that it was understood by members in this way: the plan recommended that all infant schools should be transformed into “open-air nursery infant schools suitable for children from 2 to 7,” thus providing nursery school conditions for all children.<sup>97</sup> All members of the association could support such an aim.

For the Consultative Committee, then, these organisations presented stronger and more definite views, which could thus be examined and agreed or disagreed with. However, the addition of the 2-7 school into the mix added a new dimension which risked confusing the issue still further.

### **5:11 Non-educational organisations: Maintaining the frame**

Evidence was also offered by two organisations which might have been expected to put the interests of service users and potential service users, particularly working mothers, centre stage: the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women’s Organisations (SJC). These organisations

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<sup>96</sup> McMillan to de Lissa, May 8, 1929, Early Documents File, 13/8. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>97</sup> Astor, Hawtrey, Spencer, Wintringham and Strachey, *A Ten Year Plan for Children*, December 1935, Early Documents File, 13/1. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

had the potential to challenge the way that the issue was framed as one of exclusively educational interest and to make links with a wider range of social issues. They did not in fact do this to any significant degree. They did express clear preferences as to the form that early years education should take but the arguments used are very similar to those used by the educationalists.

The representatives of the TUC described the quantity of current provision as “lamentably small” and called for extension, particularly in deprived areas. However, no explicit link is made between this call and the needs of industry, present or future. The organisation’s preference was towards the 2-7 school because of the perceived need to avoid a break at five. Again, no reason was given that made any particular link to the industrial concerns of the Congress.<sup>98</sup> The submission is indistinguishable in tone to that of the educational societies.

The SJC was an umbrella association for eighteen organisations, including unions of poorly paid women workers, such as shop assistants, and also political movements such as the Labour Party. Its memorandum claimed that it had a particular right to be heard, as it represented a large number of “working-class mothers who have a special interest in all questions affecting the education and welfare of young children.” Like the TUC, it pressed for expansion of provision primarily because of its “educational value.” However, the difficulties facing overburdened parents and subsequent risks to children were also referred to. The SJC argued that nursery schools were the best sort of provision, although nursery classes should be used to address present urgent requirements. The reasons for this choice

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<sup>98</sup> Consultative Committee, Trades Union Congress General Council, Memorandum of Evidence, October 13, 1932, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149, National Archives. Kew.

were not quite spelled out, but it was clear that nursery schools were seen as the best method of meeting the needs of children who were “badly housed and under-nourished.” Perhaps the fact that nursery classes did not generally provide meals was important here. The SJC made a particular point of arguing against a system of crèches, on the grounds that they would not be staffed by those trained in “nursery school methods.” The perceived needs of the children for quality institutions were thus more important to the members than a quick solution to working mothers’ need for childcare.<sup>99</sup>

### **5:12 The committee’s position**

The decision-making of the Consultative Committee was guided by a smaller group of key members, the Drafting Sub-committee, chaired by W.A.Brockington, Director of Education in Leicestershire.<sup>100</sup> It was this sub-committee who produced a “rough list of points of discussion” in February 1932, which shaped the questions for the committee, and in so doing began to point to the answers. Prominent on this list were the questions of whether more children under five should receive pre-school education, and, if so, what kind of provision should be recommended, “having regard to the present financial position.”<sup>101</sup> Solutions proposed would have to be adapted to the current economic environment.

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<sup>99</sup> Consultative Committee, T.11.46 Memorandum Submitted by The Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women’s Organisations, October 26, 1932, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>100</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools*, xi.

<sup>101</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T. 58 Educational Provision for Children under the age of 7+: Rough list of points intended to serve as a basis for oral discussion at the meeting of the Consultative Committee on Friday, February 26<sup>th</sup> from 10:30 to 12:00 noon, Undated, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 150. National Archives, Kew.

By May 1932, the drafting sub-committee had proposed “conclusions and recommendations” for the whole committee to consider.<sup>102</sup> This document recommended that there should be “a well-developed system of Nursery Classes and Nursery Schools capable of providing for the majority of children between the ages of 3 and 5, at any rate in urban areas.” This stopped short of universal provision, but represented a call for a significant expansion. The sub-committee believed that the main purpose of nursery education, in whatever institution it took place, was to safeguard the health of young children. The “scientific evidence” demonstrated that it was important at this age to concentrate on a child’s “physical and mental development.” The use of the term “mental development” did not suggest that children should learn specific skills and knowledge relevant for later schooling, but instead was used in a more general sense of the appropriate development of cognitive faculties and capacity for learning.

The extent to which children needed to attend an institution which protected and nurtured their health varied according to the economic circumstances of their home environments. It was not “desirable” that it should be compulsory, because some children were adequately provided for at home. Some children, who lived in extreme poverty, needed very intensive nurture. Some children, from somewhat less deprived but still less than ideal areas, needed less intensive nurture. Nursery schools were needed to provide the more comprehensive form; nursery classes, which could be established at “comparatively small cost,” could provide the watered

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<sup>102</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T. 74 Certain Draft Conclusions and Recommendations prepared by the Drafting Sub-Committee as a basis for discussion on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1932 (Agenda 5), Undated, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 150. National Archives, Kew.

down version. The pressure to find a solution which would be perceived as economically viable clearly influenced this position.

When the full committee was given the opportunity to comment on the recommendations, the question of nursery schools and classes did not seem to cause much debate. One concern is recorded in the extant papers: Alfred Mansbridge was dismayed that it was not made clear that nursery schools were “the best possible provision” and should be provided wherever possible, and that institutions run as part of infant departments were a necessity in current circumstances, but a rather regrettable one.<sup>103</sup> No further discussion of the issue is recorded, however.

The final report was completed and signed on the 27<sup>th</sup> July 1933.<sup>104</sup> As part of this comprehensive survey of nursery and infant education, the committee provided definitions of the different institutions in which it took place. This marked the end of the confusion which arose from the peculiar clause in the 1918 Act, which suggested that “nursery classes” were a subset of “nursery schools.”<sup>105</sup> The report meticulously described the ways in which the nursery school differed from the nursery class. The nursery school was “usually” separate from other institutions (a little bit of leeway was allowed here for nursery schools which shared a site with another building) whereas the class was “an integral part” of another school. Other differences mentioned were that schools could admit two year olds, whereas classes admitted children only once they had reached three; nursery schools provided meals

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<sup>103</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No 75(e) Comments by Members of the Committee on Paper No T. 74, Undated, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 150. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>104</sup> W.H.Hadow and R.F.Young, Report of the Consultative Committee to the Board of Education on the Work done during the year ended 31 July 1933, 26 October, 1933, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1225. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>105</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1918, clause 19.

whereas classes did not; the schools opened for longer hours than classes and schools provided medical inspections more often than classes. Two points which were perhaps not as helpful for the definition itself but useful in building the arguments in the rest of the report were that nursery classes avoided children experiencing disruption in their education at five, as they would remain within the same institution, and that the schools were more expensive than classes.<sup>106</sup>

The report also attempted to define the difference between the nursery class and the babies' class. There was still some confusion in current usage as babies' classes were slowly upgraded in different ways. The report therefore recommended that "the term nursery class should be restricted to classes like those at Manchester and Leicester," which is to say where numbers were around 30 per class, where an additional "helper" was employed and the premises were specially adapted.<sup>107</sup>

In terms of the understanding of the role of nursery education and the sort of institutions which would be most suitable, there was continuity between the initial suggestions of the Drafting Sub-committee and the final report. The position taken was that nursery education, in either schools or classes, should be orientated towards health and physical development: "physical health comes first."<sup>108</sup> The best place for this to be developed was "a good nursery in a well-managed home."<sup>109</sup> The report did not, therefore, call for universal provision. Nursery education was seen as a special service to prevent physical and social defects in those children whose home environments were not adequate.<sup>110</sup> The ideal institution to achieve this was the

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<sup>106</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools*, 110.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.



nursery school. Therefore these were definitely needed in “deprived areas.”<sup>111</sup> They also had a value in acting as a model of good practice for others.<sup>112</sup> However, there were many children whose home environments were not ideal and yet not poor enough to warrant the great expense which nursery schools entailed. For children in these areas, a cheaper, leaner form of provision, the nursery class, could meet their needs. The babies’ class, with no special provision, did “little to provide the right environment for the young child,” and needed to be replaced by proper nursery classes as soon as was practicable.<sup>113</sup>

The idea of the school for children aged 2 to 7 received fairly short shrift: “These arrangements are at present experimental, and it is too early yet to draw conclusions from them.”<sup>114</sup> For one member of the committee, Freda Hawtrey, this was a cause of dismay, and she felt it necessary to add a personal postscript in support of these institutions.<sup>115</sup>

The conclusions of the final report had something which would recommend it to most of the witnesses. The witnesses had overwhelmingly emphasised the value of nursery education and the committee recommended investment in the service. It called for both nursery schools and nursery classes so that supporters of either could find encouragement. Those who saw nursery classes as the pattern of the future could celebrate the fact that classes were very likely to be the dominant mode of provision in difficult economic times. Nursery school supporters, who had generally

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>113</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No. T.11 (44) Board of Education Consultative Committee, Memorandum on some medical considerations by Sir George Newman, Chief Medical Officer of the Board, May 26, 1932, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>114</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools*, 107.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 196.

accepted the fact that nursery classes were an acceptable alternative if nothing else was possible, could be glad that nursery schools were still the preferred institution in the sort of area where they currently existed and, moreover, through the use of “model” schools, their core values were to be promoted for others to copy. The report could be presented by all as a step in the right direction and was thus inclusive and unlikely to provoke controversy among policy participants.

It was also highly unlikely to prove disruptive to the Board of Education. The Consultative Committee had cut its plans according to the rather threadbare cloth currently at the disposal of the Board. The financial viability of its suggestions had been a guiding principle throughout. In this way, the committee functioned very much as an arm of government. If it brought a diversity of voices to the table, it brought them conveniently packaged into a palatable form.

### **5:13 Nursery education after Hadow**

As the government’s perception of what was financially realistic had been so instrumental in the formation of the report’s recommendations, it is not surprising that it did not lead to a radical change of policy. Nonetheless, its support for expansion strengthened the hand of those who wanted investment in the area. Its clarification of what nursery schools and nursery classes were and what and who they were for gave shape and direction to the Board’s approach to this issue.

When the Report into nursery education was initially contemplated, Trevelyan had already committed to expansion in the area, as he had made clear in

the joint circular with the Ministry of Health issued in 1929.<sup>116</sup> However, the early 1930s were marked by financial crisis and the establishment of a National (Coalition) Government with the priority of restoring stability.<sup>117</sup> A specific ban on the building of new nursery schools was introduced in 1932.<sup>118</sup> However, as the crisis lifted, the Board began to encourage development in what it deemed suitable areas.<sup>119</sup> Those nursery school advocates who had believed that a Consultative Committee report would provide necessary support for expansion were perhaps proved right: the Hadow Report appeared to prevent backsliding. The fact that nursery education was a part of the national system proposed by Hadow in the trilogy of reports with which his name was “inseparably associated throughout the empire” surely offered nursery education some protection.<sup>120</sup>

Funds hardly flowed freely, however. There was still a perception that government needed to run a very tight ship and funds available for education and social policy were still limited. The expansion of nursery education needed to compete with a huge range of other calls on the Board’s purse-strings. Speaking in the House of Commons in May 1934, Herwald Ramsbotham, the Parliamentary Secretary, argued that the Board was being pressed “to restore teachers’ salaries; to raise the school-leaving age; to give maintenance allowances...to press on with reorganisation; to build more nursery schools; to reduce the size of classes; to

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<sup>116</sup> Board of Education, *Circular 1405: Children under school age* (also Ministry of Health, *Circular 1054*), December 5, 1929.

<sup>117</sup> Philip Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government: British Politics, the Economy and Empire 1926-1932* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>118</sup> Author unknown, Board of Education, Nursery Schools, April 24, 1934, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1466. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>119</sup> Author unknown, Board of Education, Nursery Schools, April 24, 1934, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1466. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>120</sup> Consultative Committee, Unconfirmed minutes of 109<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Meeting 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> January 1934, Undated, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1224. National Archives, Kew.

increase the number of teachers; to provide free milk for all school children and to give free dinners to all children of poor parents.” All of these projects could not be put into place without “a surplus very much larger” than that available.<sup>121</sup> However, Ramsbotham believed that expansion in nursery education would be an area which was likely to be particularly popular, and would give the impression that the Board’s policy was “alive, vigorous and original” and thus accrue credit for the government as the next general election approached.<sup>122</sup>

The number of nursery schools accordingly grew by a modest amount: there were 58 in March 1934 and 78 by May 1936.<sup>123</sup> There was a more marked increase in the number of nursery classes. Falling birth-rates led to empty classrooms and a surplus of teachers, meaning that the adaption of existing facilities to nursery class purposes was relatively easy.<sup>124</sup> A useful set of comparative data is given by Kenneth Lindsay, Parliamentary Secretary 1937-1940, who stated in the House of Commons that 19 schools and 228 classes had been approved in the period from January 1936 until February 1938.<sup>125</sup> Lindsay made it clear that there was no requirement to report the number of classes to the Board, so the figure for classes was probably an underestimate.

The deputation of nursery school advocates who had argued for the referral to the Consultative Committee had aims beyond expanding the number of nursery places. They also believed that an authoritative statement by the committee could avoid “casual and thoughtless provision,” and would encourage in its place a well-

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<sup>121</sup> HC Deb 30 May 1934 vol 290 c188.

<sup>122</sup> HR to Secretary, 18 December 1934, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1395. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>123</sup> HC Deb 13 March 1934 vol 287 c189; HC Deb 19 May 1936 vol 312 c1019W.

<sup>124</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*

<sup>125</sup> HC Deb 03 February 1938 vol 331 cc377-8.

thought out system in which facilities were established on the basis of what was genuinely required and not what happened to seem most convenient at the time.<sup>126</sup> In short, they had wanted an end to muddling through. The committee's response was that both nursery schools and nursery classes were needed, with the choice of institution to be made according to the extent of poverty within the surrounding area. Thus it built on Trevelyan's policy that both forms of institution were acceptable and attempted to impose a logical rationale on how a mixed system might develop.

Statements from the Board in the late 1930s show that it adopted this approach. The fact that nursery schools were a special service for the most deprived, for example, was suggested by the Board's 1936 pamphlet, *Nursery Schools and Nursery Classes*, (which was largely concerned with encouraging nursery class teachers to find ways of making improvements on a low budget): "Nursery schools have as their primary object the physical and medial nurture of the debilitated child."<sup>127</sup> Lindsay's written answer to a parliamentary question in February 1938 made the Board's position on the distinct purposes of the different institutions very clear and also seem very inflexible: He referred to children under five being divided into "three classes" - those who should be at home, those who needed nursery schools and those who could make do with nursery classes.<sup>128</sup> There seems to be a parallel here with the attitudes which underlay the post-war tripartite secondary

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<sup>126</sup> S.H.Wood, Memorandum, December 19, 1929, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 3. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>127</sup> Board of Education, *Nursery Schools and Nursery Classes*, *Educational Pamphlet 106* (London: HMSO, 1936), 6.

<sup>128</sup> HC Deb 10 February 1938 vol 331 cc1273-4W.

system, with its division of children, at age 11, into different categories which required different forms of schooling.<sup>129</sup>

In fact, this policy towards nursery classes and nursery schools tended to promote precisely the sort of ad hoc development and discrepancies between policy approaches in different areas that the deputation had hoped to avoid. With both forms of expansion possible, local politicians were able to make decisions about what was needed and what was not in their local area. Their interpretations of need, coloured by their own understandings of the purposes of nursery education, would determine the course of action. The Board, particularly in the person of Cecil Maudslay, a Principal Assistant Secretary, tried to keep a unity of vision, but found this very challenging. As Maudslay complained to a colleague, it was a frustrating task as the distinctive role of each institution was not even understood well by many of the Board's own inspectorate.<sup>130</sup> Key local authorities were developing very different patterns of provision at this time, as will be discussed in detail in chapter eight of this thesis.

The Board's policy regarding nursery schools and classes in this period was criticised by some nursery education advocates, notably the Nursery School Association, whose thinking about what nursery schools and classes might achieve was moving in a very different direction. McMillan's belief that "the root of the work is to be in the slum" had been left behind.<sup>131</sup> In an undated memorandum which refers to the Board's "new pamphlet" on nursery schools and nursery classes,

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<sup>129</sup> Ken Browne, *An Introduction of Sociology*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Policy Press, 2011).

<sup>130</sup> Maudslay to Ainsworth, November 16, 1938, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 5. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>131</sup> McMillan to NUT, July 1928, Early Documents File, 13/9. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

the association argued strenuously against the notions that nursery schools were “only suitable for debilitated or neglected children” and that a good home was better than a nursery school. Nursery education should be, it argued, “the first step and the foundation of the national system of education.” This was a clear rejection of the idea that there were different types of children with different needs and a call for universal provision, where every child was entitled to same standard of institution. The memorandum restated the belief that the ideal was the 2-7 school as seen in Bradford.<sup>132</sup> Maudslay commented that the “policy of the Nursery School Association is so remote from that of the Board that the two points of view are clearly irreconcilable.”<sup>133</sup> The Hadow Report certainly had not laid the matter of the ideal form of provision to rest.

## **5:14 Conclusion**

This thesis has argued that the 1933 Hadow Report should be regarded as a key decision-making point in the history of nursery education policy and the particular story of the choice between nursery classes and nursery schools. This is because the writing of the report offered an opportunity for participants in the policy network to give their views on the issue, and for the Consultative Committee to weigh evidence in order to make an authoritative statement on the matter. The Board of Education, while not obliged to follow the committee’s lead, was nonetheless under political pressure to consider and respond to it.

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<sup>132</sup> Nursery School Association, Memorandum of the Nursery School Association of Great Britain on the Educational Needs of Children Under Seven Years of Age, Undated (1936?), Early Documents File, 13/1. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>133</sup> Maudslay, Note on the Memorandum of the Nursery School Association, October 9, 1936, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 4. National Archives, Kew.

The chapter answers the question of what influenced both the committee in making its recommendations and the Board in formulating a response (research question 1a). This was a combination of beliefs about the purpose of nursery education and about what was financially possible. The committee believed that nursery education was a special service that not all children needed. If a child was in a good home with his/her mother, then he/she was in the ideal situation. However, the committee recognised that not all homes were “good” and saw nursery education as a way of alleviating social problems by promoting the health and wellbeing of deprived children. The best way of doing this was through nursery schools, with comprehensive medical services and a midday meal. However, some children were in less dire need than others and for the somewhat less deprived, a watered-down nursery class was seen as sufficient. This was largely in line with the Board’s existing views, which already allowed both schools and classes, and so the recommendations were absorbed easily into the Board’s policy in this area.

The chapter also address the research question concerning which individuals or groups were able to make their voices heard and influence the decisions of the choice between nursery classes and nursery schools (research question 1b). It is important to emphasise this was seen as being a question for the educational community. The educational “frame” for the debate was not broken, and arguments from other sections of society did not percolate through. Links with issues such as the impact on labour were not explicitly discussed. Neither the witnesses who were consulted nor the Consultative Committee seemed to believe that this was an aspect of the matter at hand. The welfare of the child was considered in a way that was detached from the needs of his/her family for economic sustenance.



The committee had been established in order to provide a mechanism whereby the voices of the educational community could be heard.<sup>134</sup> The process of collecting witness statements, and the considerable time and effort involved in that process, demonstrated a commitment to giving those voices a platform. It is difficult, however, to determine exactly whose voices influenced the committee's recommendation and were therefore heard by the ultimate decision-makers, the Board of Education and the government. This is due to the equivocation and extreme reasonableness of most of the witness statements. Despite the heat which the matter had previously generated in some quarters, most of this evidence was mildly stated. It appeared that the frustrations of the previous decade and the stop-go policy in the area had led most policy participants, as evidenced in their witness statements, to focus on the "policy core belief" of expansion and "secondary beliefs," such as the form the expansion might take, had been somewhat downgraded.<sup>135</sup>

Witnesses had expressed preferences for both nursery schools and nursery classes. As neopluralist, Andrew McFarland, suggests, in a case such as this, the decision-maker can choose between the proffered alternatives with relative freedom and a pluralist model of policy making loses validity.<sup>136</sup> With the policy network divided, the Consultative Committee could fall back on its own instincts. However, the most profound influence on the committee was the Board and wider government's perspectives of what was financially possible and what was not. The committee was very conscious of the lack of commitment which had been shown to

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<sup>134</sup> Brehony, "School masters parliament."

<sup>135</sup> Sabatier and Weible, "The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Innovations and Clarifications," 189-220.

<sup>136</sup> Andrew S. Mcfarland, *Neopluralism: The Evolution of Political Process Theory* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

investment in nursery provision in times of financial hardship, and formulated its position accordingly. The committee, then, operated as a policy elite during the writing of the report, and ultimately enabled the Board of Education to act as a policy elite rather than as part of a pluralist system.

This was an occasion when policy could potentially have changed direction. In fact it did not to any significant degree. The development of the Board of Education's policy regarding nursery schools and nursery classes was thus incremental and not marked by any abrupt changes of direction from 1918 until the outbreak of World War II. This, as policy theorists, True, Jones and Baumgartner argue, is what one expects in most policy areas.<sup>137</sup> However, the very small quantity of actual nursery provision meant that the committee and Board still had options for shifts in policy direction. It would be inaccurate to argue that national policy at this point was determined by path dependency, or an inability to escape from the route already followed.<sup>138</sup> Should seismic events occur, opportunities for sudden changes could still open up. The next chapter explores this in the context of policy developments during World War II.

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<sup>137</sup> True, Jones and Baumgartner, "Punctuated-Equilibrium Theory."

<sup>138</sup> Kirsten Scheiwe and Harry Willekens, eds. *Child Care and Preschool Development in Europe: Institutional Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

## Chapter Six: Nursery Schools for all: The 1944 Education Act

### 6:1 Introduction

This chapter examines the decisions leading to a series of dramatic changes in nursery education policy which found expression in the 1944 Education Act. Firstly, there was an increase in status for the service, which had previously been seen merely as an optional extra, something for which Local Education Authorities (LEAs) had “power to make arrangements” if, and only if, they wished to do so.<sup>1</sup> The 1944 Act changed this power to a duty to “have regard (b) to the need for securing that provision is made for pupils who have not attained the age of five years.”<sup>2</sup> The Board of Education’s aim was that “ultimately Nursery School provision should be made wherever it is desired by the parents”<sup>3</sup> although the formulation used in the act strongly suggested that the Board was prepared to accept that this might not be a high priority in the immediate aftermath of war. Secondly, there was an attempt to grapple with the issue that services for young children were split between childcare and education and a decision was taken that children over two should only be in educational institutions. Thirdly, and of particular interest in this thesis, a significant change of direction occurred in the Board’s understanding of the roles of the nursery class and the nursery school. Prior to the outbreak of World War II, it believed there was a need for both nursery classes and nursery schools, with each institution best serving the requirements of different areas. However, by the end of the war, nursery schools for all was its preferred option. The formulation

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<sup>1</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1918, clause 19 (1).

<sup>2</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1944, clause 8.

<sup>3</sup> Cecil Maudslay, Post-War Nursery Policy, January 12, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

in the 1944 Education Act was somewhat mealy-mouthed: LEAs were asked to meet the need for pre-school education “by the provision of nursery schools or, where the authority considers the provision of such schools to be inexpedient, by the provision of nursery classes in other schools.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, a much more outspoken and determined preference was initially contemplated and expressed in the preceding White Paper, but the position was softened just before publication of the Act itself. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Education (as it became after the 1944 Education Act) stated the preference clearly and forcefully to LEAs as they drew up their post-war plans. For example, on the 1st November 1945, E. N. Strong, a civil servant at the Ministry, wrote to London County Council: “As the Authority will be aware, it is the Department’s view that the needs of children under five can in general best be met in the small self-contained Nursery Schools.”<sup>5</sup> What had previously been seen as extraordinary provision for the poorest was to become the birthright of the nation, absorbed into the mainstream system.

The 1944 Education Act brought in a raft of policies which affected all areas of schooling. Historian, Paul Addison, has suggested that the very destructiveness of the war was in itself a factor in people’s determination that some positive change should result, and that reconstruction proposals were seen as important for public morale by many (but not all) in government.<sup>6</sup> According to historians, Flora and Heidenheimer, the link between “social welfare legislation” and “the rhetoric of a

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<sup>4</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1944, clause 8.

<sup>5</sup> E.N. Strong to London County Council, November 1, 1945, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 192. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945 – British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975).

period of wartime crisis” was particularly marked in England.<sup>7</sup> The calls for education reform were linked strongly with left-leaning ideals to improve the life chances of poorer children. In his memoirs, R.A. Butler, the war-time President of the Board, wrote that “the revelations of evacuation administered a severe shock to the national conscience” by bringing to light the deprivations of the evacuees.<sup>8</sup> This was a strong motivation for action for him and for many others.

However, the radicalism of the reforms in the 1944 Education Act has been questioned by left-wing educational historians, such as Ken Jones, who argues that it “worked to support existing patterns of privilege and class advantage.”<sup>9</sup> The plans for nursery education, on the other hand, do stand out as something fresh and radical. Marxist historian, Brian Simon, highlights the area as one of the “important gains for the reform movement” in what he sees as a generally conservative Act.<sup>10</sup> It was an area where rupture rather than continuity was dominant, where ideas took the lead over practicalities. Unfortunately, it was also the area where implementation of the Act failed most spectacularly. In his 1971 biography, Butler congratulated himself on the general success of his Act but acknowledged that nursery provision “remained patently inadequate.”<sup>11</sup>

The early years historians, Whitbread and Blackstone, both offer perspectives on the nursery clause of the 1944 Act and acknowledge the shift from a view of

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Flora and Arnold J. Heidenheimer, “The Historical Core and Changing Boundaries of the Welfare State” in *The Development of Welfare States in Europe and America*, ed. Peter Flora and Arnold J. Heidenheimer (London: Transaction Books, 1981), 17-32, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Lord Butler, *The Art of the Possible: The Memoirs of Lord Butler* (London: Purnell, 1971), 92.

<sup>9</sup> Ken Jones, *Education in Britain 1944 to the Present* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 15.

<sup>10</sup> Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order: British Education since 1944* (London: Laurence and Wishart, 1999), 75.

<sup>11</sup> Butler, *Art of the Possible*, 124.

nursery education as a special service to a universal one.<sup>12</sup> With regard to the question of the form of provision, both authors present something less than the whole picture, disadvantaged by the fact that relevant Board of Education discussion documents were not available at the time they were writing. Whitbread does note a shift towards a preference for nursery schools over nursery classes: a change which she sees as due entirely to pressure exerted by the “the nursery school lobby.”<sup>13</sup> Blackstone, conversely, does not seem to attach much significance to the shift towards nursery schools in the new Act. In fact, in her investigations into developments in Hertfordshire in the 1950s, she suggests that the fact that the Ministry of Education was interpreting the Act as implying a preference for nursery schools as “extraordinary” and “entirely new.”<sup>14</sup> Both Whitbread and Blackstone note the lack of implementation of the nursery education clause but suggest different reasons for this failure. Blackstone follows the Ministry of Education’s explanation that the teacher shortages, increased birth-rate and financial hardships made investment in the service impossible.<sup>15</sup> Whitbread blames a lack of public interest, allowing the post-war focus to settle on secondary education.<sup>16</sup>

This chapter aims to add to research in this area and address some of these contradictions, offering support for Whitbread’s assertion that nursery schools were preferred. This was not an incremental development of policy, but rather, using the terminology of political theorists, Jones and Baumgartner, an example of punctuated

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<sup>12</sup> Nanette Whitbread, *The Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School: A History of Infant and Nursery Education in Britain, 1800-1970* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972); Tessa Blackstone, *A Fair Start: The Provision of Pre-School Education* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1971).

<sup>13</sup> Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*, 104.

<sup>14</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*, 131.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*.

equilibrium.<sup>17</sup> The chapter offers an analysis which differs from Whitbread's in that it argues that the impetus for this change came from within the Board of Education and its inspectorate and therefore suggests an elite model of decision-making rather than Whitbread's rather pluralist one. However, there is some evidence of influence from parties outside the Board in the subsequent modification of the policy. With regard to the lack of implementation, it supports to some degree Whitbread's belief in a lack of interest in the post-war period, arguing that a strong contributory factor was the determination of the Board/Ministry of Education that the purpose of nursery schools and/or classes was to provide education and not childcare services.

The structure of the chapter broadly follows that taken in the previous chapters. It summarises the "appreciative system," or manner of understanding the current situation, of the Board and the other policy participants before the decision.<sup>18</sup> However, chapter five has covered many of these points in detail, taking the story right up until the outbreak of World War II, and so this is reviewed only briefly here. The chapter describes how the context of war had a radical impact on nursery services in the short-term and considers the extent to which this affected the development of policy. The decision-making process within the Board of Education itself is analysed so as to identify the motivation behind the policy changes. The views of other policy participants and the extent to which they were able to impact on the Board's decision are analysed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the post-war situation and the reasons why the policy was not fully implemented.

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<sup>17</sup> James L. True, Bryan D. Jones and Frank R. Baumgartner, "Punctuated-Equilibrium Theory: Explaining Stability and Change in Public Policy" in *Theories of the Policy Process*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Paul A. Sabatier (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2007) 155-187, 155.

<sup>18</sup> Geoffrey Vickers, *The Art of Judgment: A Study in Policy Making*, Centenary ed. (London: Sage, 1995), 82.

## 6:2 Nursery education prior to World War II

Prior to World War II, members of the Board of Education tended to construct nursery education as a form of social work, an intervention which would improve the welfare and life-chances and educational prospects of the most deprived children in society. A key purpose of the introduction of the nursery school clause in the 1918 Education Act was to reduce “the large numbers of preventable defects now observed in entrants to the Public Elementary School, and the associated educational handicap and resulting incapacity.”<sup>19</sup> When the Consultative Committee was asked to investigate education for young children in the early 1930s, it affirmed the belief that promoting the health and welfare of young children was the primary business of nursery education and that nursery schools should be provided in districts where “housing and general economic conditions are seriously below average.” In slightly less deprived areas, a nursery class, a cheaper, watered down version of the nursery school, could fulfil the same function.<sup>20</sup> This remained the official government position throughout the thirties. It was restated and clarified in Circular 1444 in 1936.<sup>21</sup>

This position was not, however, universally accepted. LEAs had a great deal of autonomy with regard to whether or not nursery education was provided in their area and, if it was, what form it took. They did not necessarily accept the government’s view that both schools and classes were important in different ways.

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<sup>19</sup> L. Selby-Bigge, Draft for Regulations for Nursery Schools 1919, date-stamped December 31, 1918, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 2. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>20</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools* (London: HMSO, 1933), 114-5.

<sup>21</sup> Board of Education, *Circular 1444: Administrative Programme of Educational Development*, January 6, 1936.



Statistics, so far as they can be ascertained, with regard to the actual numbers of nursery schools and nursery classes suggest that LEAs were giving preference to the latter in all sorts of areas. The Board had approved proposals of just 19 schools but 228 classes from January 1936 to February 1938.<sup>22</sup> Blackstone has suggested that there was at this time many unused classrooms in elementary schools, owing to a drop in pupil numbers, and LEAs were taking advantage of this. It was quicker and cheaper to adapt these existing spaces than to build new schools.<sup>23</sup>

Other members of the policy network that traditionally concerned itself with nursery education had not accepted the Board's position and were arguing vociferously that a new conception of the purposes of nursery education was needed. The Nursery School Association was particularly prominent in this capacity. In her 1938 overview of provision, Phoebe Cusden, who styled herself "sometime organising secretary, Nursery School Association of Great Britain" on the title page, complained that the Board still saw nursery schools "as a special service for the amelioration of unsatisfactory social and domestic conditions"<sup>24</sup> and claimed that in fact they had much to offer children from affluent homes and had accordingly "become increasingly appreciated by parents in comfortable circumstances."<sup>25</sup>

### **6:3 The decision between education and childcare**

Early Years academics, Tizard, Moss and Perry, bemoan the "distinction between a child's health and physical requirements and his educational and social

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<sup>22</sup> HC Deb 03 February 1938 vol 331 cc377-8.

<sup>23</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start: The Provision of Pre-school Education*, 55.

<sup>24</sup> Phoebe Cusden, *The English Nursery School* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Truber and Co Ltd, 1938), 23.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

needs” which had been made in 1918, when the Education Act enabled Local Education Authorities to establish educational provision for pre-school children, while a Maternity and Child Welfare Act allowed welfare authorities, under the Ministry of Health, to set up day nurseries, or childcare facilities, which were seen as being chiefly for the purpose of allowing mothers to work.<sup>26</sup> From that time until the outbreak of World War II, the distinction was preserved, with different bodies responsible for the management of each institution and different groups of people taking an interest in each service. The preservation of an educational frame around nursery schools and nursery classes can be seen very clearly in the collection of evidence for the 1933 Hadow Report, where the educational policy network was extensively consulted and issues of childcare and women’s work hardly penetrated at all (see chapter five).

However, the war caused great disruption to the normal patterns of provision. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only one in seven married women worked and male unemployment during the interwar years had reduced that number further.<sup>27</sup> The outbreak of war, however, led to a need for women’s labour and the government requested, although did not demand, that mothers of young children offered their services for the nation’s good.<sup>28</sup> Therefore childcare provision was urgently needed and traditional distinctions between educational institutions and day-care institutions broke down.<sup>29</sup> “War-time” nurseries were established. These were staffed jointly by

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<sup>26</sup> Jack Tizard, Peter Moss and Jane Perry, *All our children: Pre-school services in a changing society* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1976), 69.

<sup>27</sup> Viola Klein, “Married women in employment,” *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 1, no. 2 (1960): 254-261.

<sup>28</sup> Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women’s Wartime Lives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

<sup>29</sup> Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*.

medical staff, doctors and nurses, and by educationalists, either existing teachers or people who had been given some educational training.<sup>30</sup> Thus a medical “matron” and an educational “warden” could manage the institution between them, with many opportunities for differences of opinion and conflict. Nursery classes at this time became “War-time Nursery Classes.” They opened for extended hours, provided extra meals and, in theory, fulfilled much the same role as other war nurseries. This is illustrated by the complaints of one local teacher’s association, which, in a plea for more payment for headteachers, claimed “the school was open 7am – 7pm on Mondays to Fridays and 7am – 12:30 on Saturday” and that the headteacher served breakfast, dinner and tea, in addition to “milk, cod liver oil and juices.”<sup>31</sup>

The Board of Education remained responsible for the inspection of all these institutions. This was an unfamiliar context for the early years inspectorate and they were not generally very impressed with what these hurriedly formed institutions, operating in such straightened and stressful conditions, managed to achieve. Two inspectors, Dr Llewellyn and her colleague Miss Greaves, wrote in one report, dated 11th November 1941, for a nursery home in the West Country, “education arrangements not adequately catered for. No one on the staff who understands this side of the work.”<sup>32</sup> In a report on another nursery visited shortly afterwards, they commented, “We saw little evidence of training or play of educational value

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<sup>30</sup> Board of Education and Ministry of Health, *Not Yet Five* (London: HMSO, 1942), 3.

<sup>31</sup> E.E.Duckworth to Ministry of Education, June 21, 1945, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 52. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>32</sup> Llewellyn and Greaves, Inspection Report, November 11, 1941, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 14. National Archives, Kew.

.....The Matron is pompous in her attitude, obstructive on the question of overcrowding and ventilation and uncooperative on the question of education.”<sup>33</sup>

These two inspectors were convinced, as one might anticipate from their educational backgrounds, that daycare institutions conducted outside the protection of the Board of Education were a bad thing. They recommended to Cecil Maudslay, a Principal Assistant Secretary with responsibility for the Board’s provision for children below statutory school age, that all children under two should be kept at home and mothers of children in this age group should not be encouraged to work.<sup>34</sup> Maudslay was very happy to adopt this view, perhaps because it chimed with his existing beliefs. He believed that in the post-war world there would be no need for day nurseries. Children under two should be at home, and those over two who were not at home should be in educational provision.<sup>35</sup>

Generally, the Ministry of Health, responsible for the day nursery provision, seemed quite favourably disposed to the idea of relinquishing its role in this area, although some worries were expressed about whether the post-war system as envisioned by Maudslay would really be able to fulfil the demands made on it. On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1943, Ernest Brown, the Minister of Health, wrote to Butler, “I am quite prepared to accept the general principle that in normal times the proper provision for children over the age of two is by way of nursery schools rather than by way of day nurseries. The practical question is whether nursery schools can meet the case of

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<sup>33</sup> Llewllin and Greaves, Inspection Report, April 21, 1942, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 12. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>34</sup> Maudslay to Secretary of the Board, January 12, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>35</sup> Maudslay to Secretary of the Board, Draft of Post-War Policy, January 12, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

areas in which there is a strong local demand for some arrangements which will enable mothers of young children to undertake work outside the home.”<sup>36</sup>

It was recognised, by both departments, that there were going to be some cases where nursery schools, with their shorter hours and longer holidays, would not be able to fulfil all the childcare requirements of working mothers. It seems, however, that members were able to convince themselves that these cases were going to be exceptional in nature, and could easily be accommodated with tweaks and stretches in some localities. Maudslay wrote to Zoe Puxley, a Ministry of Health official, on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1943, addressing some of these concerns. He stated that Butler believed that there would not be “any serious difficulty” in extended hours for nursery schools “in certain cases” and also that he thought that a few children under two could sometimes be admitted where there was a real need. Maudslay optimistically stated that “the agreement on these two points should help to meet the needs of mothers who have to go on working after the war.”<sup>37</sup>

This seems a rather hurried agreement, and it is unlikely that there was a careful consideration and calculation of the numbers of children and families who would continue to need care facilities for periods longer than the standard nursery school hours after the war. Nonetheless, the decision was taken that it was the Board of Education that was to be the body chiefly responsible for institutions for pre-school children in the long-term.

#### **6:4 Early plans for education after the war**

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<sup>36</sup> Brown to Butler, March 3, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>37</sup> Maudslay to Puxley, October 8, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

The President of the Board in 1940 was Herwald Ramsbotham, a man who historian, Paul Addison, describes as giving “the impression of being firmly guided by his officials.”<sup>38</sup> It was Ramsbotham’s administration which began devising the post-war reconstruction plans for education. The motivation for this was a feeling that there was an appetite for reform, and, in the words of Permanent Secretary, Maurice Holmes, “the Board should lead rather than follow.”<sup>39</sup> A committee of senior officials from the Board of Education was appointed in early November 1940 in order to prepare an initial discussion document about post-war educational developments.<sup>40</sup> Historian, R.G. Wallace, argues that the officials did this in physical and intellectual isolation with little political input.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, these plans embodied what were by then becoming “widely popular demands.”<sup>42</sup> A “Green Book,” a standard form for a discussion document, was completed in June 1941 and entitled “Education After the War.” It was circulated to LEAs, teachers’ organisations, churches and other educational associations.<sup>43</sup> The National Froebel Foundation was given a copy and the Nursery School Association was sent a copy of the paragraphs relevant to the education of children below school age.<sup>44</sup> In other words, the usual policy networks were invited to participate in the debate. Wallace argues that Holmes was particularly determined that “the public at large” should not be admitted to the discussion until the Board had settled on its policies and he tried

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), 171.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>40</sup> P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Education in the Second World War: A Study in Policy and Administration* (London: Methuen and Co, 1976).

<sup>41</sup> R.G.Wallace, “The origins and authorship of the 1944 Education Act,” *History of Education* 10, no. 4. (1981): 285.

<sup>42</sup> Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990*, 58.

<sup>43</sup> Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*.

<sup>44</sup> Unsigned, Education after the War – Distribution of Copies, Undated, Board of Education and Successors: Private Office: Files and Papers (Series II) ED 136 293. National Archives, Kew.

to resist wider publication.<sup>45</sup> This was not altogether successful, and the “blaze of secrecy” caught the attention of many people.<sup>46</sup>

The official who seemed to be taking most interest in the area of nursery education was R.S.Wood, Deputy Secretary of the Board, who included thoughts about nursery schools and classes in his policy and planning notes in January 1941. Wood argued strenuously in this note that post-war planning would need to be radical and left-leaning: “the order will still be “Forward March,” not “As you were.”<sup>47</sup> In accordance with this position, Wood argued in favour of developing nursery education. He saw the primary purpose as the alleviation of the ill effects of poverty and deprivation and even argued that if the re-housing programme was successful in improving living conditions, then nurseries may not be needed at all. However, he also stated that the “positive educational value in the nurture and training” could justify expansion.<sup>48</sup>

In the final document, the two major areas for post-war development were the raising of the school leaving age to 15 and ensuring “some measure of education supervision” for those under 18.<sup>49</sup> Plans for education for the under fives received some attention but were placed in a not particularly prominent position in chapter six. The language and thinking of Wood’s notes were the basis of the position taken and there is clear movement away from the Board’s pre-war policy. Nonetheless,

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<sup>45</sup>Wallace, “The origins and authorship of the 1944 Education Act,” 285.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>47</sup> R.S.Wood, Policy and Planning for Post-War Education, January 17, 1941, Board of Education and Successors: Private Office: Files and Papers (Series II) ED 136 217. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>48</sup> R.S.Wood, Policy and Planning for Post-War Education, January 17, 1941, Board of Education and Successors: Private Office: Files and Papers (Series II) ED 136 217. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>49</sup> Board of Education, Education After the War, June 1941, Board of Education and Successors: Private Office: Files and Papers (Series II) ED 136 214. National Archives, Kew.

despite Wood's avowed intention to think boldly, these steps conform to the usual incremental pattern of policy development.<sup>50</sup>

The most significant point is that the enhanced status for nursery education, embedded in the 1944 Act, stemmed originally from this document. The Green Book suggested that Local Education Authorities should be "charged with the duty of making such additional provision as may be necessary for attending to the physical and mental development of children over 2 and under 5."<sup>51</sup> The use of the word "duty" here is significant and strongly suggested that LEAs would be obliged to make provision, which was a development in policy. However, as the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) very convincingly argued in its response, the phrase "as may be necessary" rendered this obligation somewhat meaningless. The WEA pointed out that "many lukewarm LEAs may accept a very low estimate of what is necessary."<sup>52</sup>

With regard to the question of which form(s) of nursery education would be acceptable, the document suggested that expansion could be "in nursery schools or classes or such other forms of nursery as may be approved by the Board."<sup>53</sup> It was made clear that nursery schools were too expensive for mass development: "If provision for more than a small fraction of the children who would benefit from it is to be made in any reasonable time, it must be by some other means."<sup>54</sup> Although the

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<sup>50</sup> True, Jones and Baumgartner, "Punctuated-Equilibrium Theory."

<sup>51</sup> Board of Education, Education After the War, June 1941, Board of Education and Successors: Private Office: Files and Papers (Series II), ED 136 214. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>52</sup> Workers' Education Association, Education After the War, Memorandum submitted to the President of the Board of Education, November 1941, Board of Education and Successors: Private Office: Files and Papers (Series II), ED 136 218. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>53</sup> Board of Education, Education After the War, June 1941, Board of Education and Successors: Private Office: Files and Papers (Series II), ED 136 214. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>54</sup> Board of Education, Education After the War, June 1941, Board of Education and Successors: Private Office: Files and Papers (Series II), ED 136 214. National Archives, Kew.



possibility of the existing war-nurseries continuing was raised, “some other means” referred above all to nursery classes. This represented a change from the Board’s pre-war position, although a somewhat subtle one. The emphasis on different institutions in different areas (nursery schools for the most deprived, nursery classes for the somewhat less deprived) had disappeared. Cecil Maudslay’s strenuous pre-war efforts to convince LEAs, and indeed the Board’s own inspectors, of the distinctive place of both schools and classes and to promote one or the other depending on the economic circumstances would be no longer required.<sup>55</sup> In effect, although nursery schools would still be permitted, nursery classes were being promoted as the way of the future.

### **6:5 A sudden change of perspective**

R.A.Butler became President of the Board on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1941. He claimed, in his 1971 autobiography, to have been enthusiastic about the chance to contribute to solving educational problems, which needed addressing urgently. He believed that “through sheer lack of opportunity, much human potential was wasted” in the current system and his ideas about the direction in which education should move were thus socially progressive.<sup>56</sup> The extent of his personal contribution to the eventual Education Act has, however, been a moot point among educational historians. Jeffries believes that Butler’s input was “considerable.”<sup>57</sup> Wallace, however, argues strenuously that the Green Book, produced before Butler’s appointment, really

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<sup>55</sup> Maudslay to Ainsworth, November 16, 1938, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 5. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>56</sup> Butler, *Art of the Possible*, 91.

<sup>57</sup> Kevin Jeffries, “R.A.Butler, the Board of Education and the 1944 Education Act,” *History: The Journal of the Historical Association* 69, no. 227 (1984): 429.

determined the content of the 1944 Education Act.<sup>58</sup> The area of nursery education is one in which a major change in thinking did occur under Butler's watch, between the distribution of the Green Book and the production of the White Paper (a more formal statement of the government's plans, which was made more fully available).<sup>59</sup> This shift related specifically to the question of whether nursery schools or nursery classes should be preferred. The change which took place can be seen as part of a trend whereby educational plans became progressively more adventurous and ambitious in the course of the war, as officials became convinced, as R.A. Wood had argued from the beginning, that bold reform would be more likely to suit the post-war world and those who were most likely to be in control of it.<sup>60</sup> It was a "punctuation" in the policy equilibrium, caused by the national crisis.<sup>61</sup>

It was the war nursery inspection reports of Miss Greaves and Dr Llewellyn which seem to have provided momentum for a change of thinking about the nursery school/nursery class question. It was not just matrons, without education backgrounds, who came in for the inspectors' criticism: those, typically from a background in teaching older children, who focused on encouraging children's formal academic skills rather than on their social and physical needs were also criticised. One war-time nursery in Bethnal Green, visited in October 1942, was reported on thus: "The teacher, a retired C.T [Class teacher] has little understanding of needs of nursery children. Inadequate play material."<sup>62</sup> Greaves and Llewellyn

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<sup>58</sup> Wallace, "Origins and authorship of the 1944 Education Act," 285.

<sup>59</sup> Gosden, *Education in the Second World War*.

<sup>60</sup> Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990*.

<sup>61</sup> True, Jones and Baumgartner, "Punctuated-Equilibrium Theory."

<sup>62</sup> Llewellyn and Greaves, Inspection Report, copies sent out October 26, 1942, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 82. National Archives, Kew.

came to the conclusion, or at least found evidence to support their pre-existing convictions, that nursery education was best carried out away from this formal pressure and in separate schools. A note from Maudslay to Greaves confirms that he discussed with her the “question whether the type of Nursery which you envisaged could be provided by means of small Nursery Classes forming part of the Infants’ Department of the Public Elementary Schools, but you were definitely of opinion that this would not be so satisfactory as the provision of small independent Nursery Schools.”<sup>63</sup> Greaves and Llewellyn subsequently set out the reasons for their convictions in a comprehensive fashion. Their main points were: two-year-olds needed provision, and this could not easily be supplied by nursery classes; the nursery school should be an extension of the home and “association with a large community” should be avoided; specialist teaching was required, and could not be “picked up” by infant teachers; headteachers in infant schools tended to insist on “infant school activities at too early an age”; the “break at 5” did not seem to cause any harm; nursery school teachers were better at building relationships with parents and nursery schools carried less “risk of infection” because of the smaller group size and the increased opportunities for an outdoor life.”<sup>64</sup> Although there was nothing here which contradicted the Board’s pre-war insistence that nursery schools were for safeguarding physical health and welfare, there was perhaps a slight shift towards more educational and psychological concerns visible, for example, in the point about appropriate teaching methods.

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<sup>63</sup> Maudslay to Greaves, January 26, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>64</sup> Greaves and Llewellyn to Maudslay, February 4, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

Maudslay, who had previously worked assiduously to promote the Board's policy of different schools for different types of children,<sup>65</sup> became a convert to the cause of nursery schools for all. On 12th January 1943, he drafted a note to the Secretary of the Board in which he presented this policy suggestion.<sup>66</sup> On the same day he acknowledged to Greaves that "My note on post-war policy was written after full discussion with you."<sup>67</sup> In the years between his conversion to the nursery school cause and the passing of the 1944 Education Act, Maudslay promoted the policy through letters and memoranda to colleagues, in internal Board meetings and in discussions with external interested bodies and there is no doubt that his personal advocacy and persistence was a major cause of the policy's eventual acceptance. His enthusiasm for the project was acknowledged by Butler: writing to the Secretary of the Board in October 1943, he refers to "the small Nursery School, of which Mr Maudslay is so warm a champion."<sup>68</sup>

Initially, at least, Maudslay was able to carry Butler along with him. When presented with the memorandum written by Greaves and Llewellyn which presented the reasons for their preference for nursery schools, Butler added the comment, "Certainly an excellently presented point of view. I am ready for discussion."<sup>69</sup>

When Maudslay wrote to the Secretary of the Board on 20th April 1943 with the

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<sup>65</sup> Maudslay to Ainsworth, November 16, 1938, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 5. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>66</sup> Maudslay to Secretary of the Board, Draft of Post-War Policy, January 12, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>67</sup> Maudslay to Greaves, January 26, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>68</sup> Butler to Secretary of the Board, October 21, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>69</sup> Butler, addendum to memorandum, February 9, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

proposal that they “depart from the pre-war policy of providing Nursery Schools only in areas where housing conditions are unsatisfactory” and added that “our ultimate aim is the provision of Nursery Schools wherever there is a demand or need for them,” Butler added a “Good.”<sup>70</sup> In a letter to the Nursery School Association, Butler acknowledged that the original source of the new policy was war-time experience, which would seem to have been that gathered by Greaves and Llewelin: “We at the Board have, as a result of our experience during the war, evolved fairly definite views about the type of Nursery School which we should like to see established.”<sup>71</sup>

That a civil servant should have such a crucial role in formulating and pushing forward government policy is not really surprising. Hennessey has documented the service’s “formidable, continuous influence in the highest decision-making bodies in the land” throughout its history.<sup>72</sup> Kellner and Crowther-Hunt have suggested that this is “inevitable” given cabinet ministers’ “killing and intolerable burden of work.”<sup>73</sup> As Butler worked to revise the entire education system in the pressure of war-time, it seems highly likely that this burden was heavier than ever.<sup>74</sup> In his autobiography, Butler generously acknowledged that he was “fortunate to be served by a quite outstanding group of civil servants.”<sup>75</sup> It

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<sup>70</sup> Maudslay to the Secretary of the Board, with addendum by Butler, April 20, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>71</sup> Butler to Allen, March 12, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 8. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Hennessey, *Whitehall* (London: Fontana Press, 1990), xvii.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Kellner and Lord Crowther Hunt, *The Civil Servants: An Inquiry into Britain’s Ruling Class* (London: Macdonald, 1980), 204.

<sup>74</sup> Wallace, “Origins and authorship of the 1944 Education Act,” 283.

<sup>75</sup> Butler, *Art of the Possible*, 93.

seems that when his civil servants devised plans compatible with the particular needs of his war-time reconstruction, Butler trusted them with the details.

### **6:6 The position in the White Paper**

The White Paper was published in July 1943, and began with an optimistic fanfare: “The Government’s purpose in putting forward the reforms described in this Paper is to secure for children a happier childhood and a better start in life.”<sup>76</sup> It set out plans for the reconfiguration of the whole educational system, and nursery education was placed in an extremely prominent position. It was, for example, the first item listed on the summary of principal reforms.<sup>77</sup> The suggestion from the Green Book that the “power” of the LEAs to supply nursery education was to be transformed into a “duty” remained. The Green Book’s proposal that this duty should apply “as may be necessary” was revised to “as in the opinion of the Board may be necessary” in order to give the Board power to apply pressure to reluctant LEAs. This was a further shift in the direction of universalising nursery education. Nonetheless, there was still a strong suggestion here that the Board might give a sympathetic hearing to the idea that it was not necessary in certain places, at least in the short term.<sup>78</sup>

The commitment to nursery schools as the preferred mode of provision was also very clear – and yet, in this case too, a touch of flexibility was allowed. There were unambiguous statements such as: “It is now considered that the self-contained nursery school, which forms a transition from home to school, is the most suitable

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<sup>76</sup> Board of Education, *Educational Reconstruction* (London: HMSO, 1943), 1.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

type of provision for children under 5.”<sup>79</sup> The pre-war model of different types of children needing different institutions was absolutely rejected: “Such schools are needed in all districts, as even when children come from good homes, they can derive much benefit, both educational and physical, from attendance at a nursery school.”<sup>80</sup> The reasons for this change of policy were given: nursery schools were “nearer to the homes than large infant schools” (this meant in psychological terms, rather than physical distance), and there was less chance of infectious disease.<sup>81</sup> This clearly owed a great deal to Miss Greaves and Dr Llewelin’s reasoning, as set out to Maudslay earlier in the year. Nonetheless, although the hope that new provision will be “mainly” in nursery schools was very clear, it was also stated that there was no intention to remove from LEAs the power to set up nursery classes.<sup>82</sup> A hint of a lack of commitment was creeping in here.

There was a very brief mention of the role that nursery schools might play in facilitating the employment of women: it was pointed out that nursery schools were “of great value to mothers who go out to work.”<sup>83</sup> Interestingly, though, when the “financial implications” of the proposals were considered, very briefly and in an appendix, this was not discussed. The difficulties of taking fourteen and fifteen year olds out of the labour market were mentioned and it was admitted that “industrial considerations” might cause delays to the raising of the school leaving age.<sup>84</sup> The fact that nursery provision could enable women to stay in or take up employment, perhaps alleviating pressure caused by the removal of the adolescents, is not

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 34.

considered. Despite the experience of the war nurseries, there was no intention to use arguments of this sort to encourage the policy change. A potential source of support for the new policy was consequently not to be exploited.

### **6:7 The Nursery School Association: Useful for propaganda**

Members of the policy network which had been established in the area did have plenty of opportunities to present their views to Board members. Teachers, LEAs and other educational organisations were given access to the Green Book when it was first produced. In the forward to this document, Maurice Holmes, the Permanent Secretary, was at great pains to point out that it did not represent the Board's "considered conclusions," which could only be formulated after consultation.<sup>85</sup> Butler, on his appointment, was particularly keen to broaden out the discussion as soon as practicable, so as to "be sure that the whole English character is represented" and to "be able to hold the confidence of the country."<sup>86</sup> Certainly after the production of the White Paper, free and open discussion was possible and encouraged. Board members spent large amounts of time gathering views, reading and responding to correspondence about the proposed policies and meeting deputations. In the area of the policy concerning the respective merits of nursery schools and classes, however, evidence suggests that most members of the established policy network had little influence on the formation of the new approach or on the Board's thinking once it had been presented.

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<sup>85</sup> Board of Education, *Education After the War*, June 1941, Board of Education and Successors: Private Office: Files and Papers (Series II), ED 136 214. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>86</sup> Butler to Deputy Secretary and Secretary, September 2, 1941, Board of Education and Successors: Private Office: Files and Papers (Series II), ED 136 215. National Archives, Kew.



The Nursery School Association (NSA) was one organisation which had the necessary prestige and channels of communication in place to participate in the debate and ensure that its views were known. Whitbread has claimed that they were indeed “influential,” and particularly in the decision to adopt the policy of a preference for nursery schools.<sup>87</sup> Regular meetings took place between the association and the Board in this period, and the Board made efforts to assure the association that it was important and its opinions mattered. According to the government records of a meeting on 4th June 1943, Butler said, “The Board were glad to have this opportunity of hearing the views of the Association on the education of young children generally” and he “emphasised the importance of bodies such as the NSA in helping to shape educational policy.”<sup>88</sup>

As the process of revising the education system got under way during the war years, the NSA was concentrating its energies on the promotion of schools for two to seven year olds. During the 1930s, the NSA had moved away from the arguments about nursery schools and nursery classes which had proved very destructive, resulting in the loss of its prestigious president, Margaret McMillan.<sup>89</sup> Phoebe Cusden, the Organizing Secretary, stated in a letter to the Board in 1936 that in the view of the NSA, a “combined Nursery and Infants school .....in which the principles and practice of the Nursery School are continuous throughout – constitutes the sound solution of the problem.”<sup>90</sup> This was an option which seemed to combine

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<sup>87</sup> Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*, 104.

<sup>88</sup> Board of Education, Nursery School Association: deputation to the president 4<sup>th</sup> June 1943, June 4, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>89</sup> McMillan to de Lissa, May 8, 1929, Early Documents File, 13/8. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>90</sup> Cusden to Stanley, September 21, 1936, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 4. National Archives, Kew.

the advantages of both the nursery school (extensive nurture) and the nursery class (avoiding disruption at five, when the child transfers to a more formal school) and seemed to be an idea behind which the NSA could unite.

In August 1941, the association sent the Board a memorandum setting out its views in a comprehensive fashion. This was after the completion and distribution of the Green Book, but no explicit mention is made of the relevant paragraphs in this document. It called for a wide extension of nursery education, with a great deal of emphasis on maintaining high standards of buildings, resources and staffing (which meant favourable ratios and qualified teachers). The association was happy that this should be in either detached schools or attached “wings,” but placed great importance on the fact that “nursery education” should be provided for children until they were seven.<sup>91</sup>

The recommendations of the White Paper were of a character that had much to recommend them to the NSA. Certainly the commitment to expansion accorded with its position. The shift towards nursery schools rather than nursery classes addressed its concerns about the discrepancies in standards between the two, and the makeshift nature of much provision in classes. These had been expressed to the Board on many occasions, particularly forcefully in a meeting in 1936.<sup>92</sup>

Encouragement of the 2-7 school was not, however, to be part of the government’s policy. The association was persuaded that nonetheless they should publically back the government’s position. It was worth sacrificing its “secondary beliefs” in order to

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<sup>91</sup> Nursery School Association to Butler, August 27, 1941, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 5. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>92</sup> Author unknown, Note to Secretary of the Board, November 27, 1936, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 4. National Archives, Kew.

maximise the chances of implementation of its “policy core beliefs” (the need for nursery education).<sup>93</sup>

Butler, in a rather flippant mood, wrote to Maudslay on 8th April 1943, about a meeting between himself and “an informal group of elderly persons interested in the very young this morning in my room at the house.”<sup>94</sup> This group included Viscountess Astor, a very prominent supporter of the movement,<sup>95</sup> Dr Mansbridge, who was Margaret McMillan’s biographer and Mrs Wintringham, a Liberal MP who was associated with the NSA campaigns, having contributed to the drawing up of “A Ten Year Plan for Children” in December 1935.<sup>96</sup> In his discussion with them, Butler made reference to “expert advice” which was against the idea of a school for two to seven year olds and mentioned an “experiment in Bradford” which did not seem to have worked. According to Butler, the deputation was “quite sensible in agreeing that the important thing was to make a start with the nursery school .... and they were quite ready to accept that it was better to have nursery schools from 2 to 5, if the choice were between that and having none at all.”<sup>97</sup>

The formal leadership of the NSA came to the same conclusion. The matter was debated at the meeting of the NSA General Committee in May 1943. Lady Allen, the Chairman, argued that members should “bear in mind the point of view of

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<sup>93</sup> Paul A. Sabatier and Christopher M. Weible, “The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Innovations and Clarifications,” in *Theories of the Policy Process* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Paul Sabatier (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2007), 189-220, 194-196.

<sup>94</sup> Butler to Maudslay, April 8, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>95</sup> Kevin J. Brehony, “Lady Astor’s campaign for nursery schools in Britain, 1930-39: attempting to valorize cultural capital in a male-dominated political field,” *History of Education Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2009), 196-210.

<sup>96</sup> Astor, Hawtrey, Spencer, Wintringham and Strachey, A Ten Year Plan for Children, December 1935, Early Documents File, 13/1. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>97</sup> Butler to Maudslay, April 8, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

the Board but reminded them at the same time of the necessity for the NSA to preserve independence of policy.<sup>98</sup> The decision was taken to support the Board's plans whilst continuing to make the case for the 2-7 school.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, one very prominent member, Freda Hawtrey, who had added a note to the 1933 Hadow Report in support of these schools,<sup>100</sup> decided to resign from the Executive Committee because of what she saw as the association's supine attitude on the subject.<sup>101</sup> According to the Executive Committee minutes, members were regretful but remained convinced that they should "not to take any action which might jeopardize the chance of the Nursery School becoming part of the national system of education."<sup>102</sup>

The Board did not seem to be actively listening to the association, but aimed to use it to help promote to the public the policy which had already been formulated. When Butler was invited to the association's birthday celebrations in 1944, one official, E.N.Strong, wrote in a minute to a colleague: "the Association is generally speaking a sound body and well disposed toward us. They can certainly help us a good deal with propaganda."<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Nursery School Association, Minutes of Meeting of General Committee, May 15, 1943, Nursery School Association Executive Committee minutes, 30 October 1940 - 3 July 1943 (unbound) 1940-1943, 14/1. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>99</sup> Nursery School Association, Suggested Draft Statement, November 2, 1943, Executive Committee Minute Book September 1943-May 1945) 14/2. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>100</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools* (London: HMSO, 1933), 196.

<sup>101</sup> Nursery School Association, Minutes of Executive Committee, December 4, 1943, Executive Committee Minute Book September 1943-May 1945) 14/2. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>102</sup> Nursery School Association, Minutes of Executive Committee, December 4, 1943, Executive Committee Minute Book September 1943-May 1945) 14/2. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>103</sup> Strong to Goodfellow, October 5, 1944, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 8. National Archives, Kew.

## **6:8 National Union of Teachers: Selfish concerns**

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) was, like the NSA, sufficiently ensconced in the policy network to be able to meet with Board officials in order to give their views on developing policies. The union was a recipient of the Green Book, and its representatives met with James Chuter Ede, the Parliamentary Secretary, to discuss the proposals in April 1942. According to Chuter Ede, they “went through the memorandum word by word. No objection was taken to any paragraph.”<sup>104</sup> In recommending an expansion through nursery schools and nursery classes, but arguing that nursery classes was a more realistic alternative for achieving expansion, the Green Book accorded very well with the NUT’s pre-war position. In its evidence to the Hadow Committee in 1933, the union had argued for an expansion of nursery education, but had not attached particular importance to the form which this should take, not mentioning the issue at all.<sup>105</sup> In a 1936 statement, Miss J.A.Callard, one of union representatives at the Hadow meeting, claimed that nursery schools were to be preferred but “as practical people, we have realised that our “wants” are always conditioned by circumstances.”<sup>106</sup> In other words, nursery classes were seen as an acceptable alternative and a suitable means for achieving expansion.

The White Paper, with its strong advocacy for nursery schools, however, did not find favour with the union. The NUT position had shifted considerably from that

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<sup>104</sup> JCE, Note of Interview, April 23, 1942, Board of Education and Successors: Private Office: Files and Papers (Series II), ED 136 214. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>105</sup> Consultative Committee, Paper No T. 11(11) Memorandum of Evidence submitted by the Executive of the Union to the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education on the Education of Children up to the age of seven plus, June 1931, Education Department and Board of Education: General Education, General Files, ED 10 149. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>106</sup> Nursery School Association, Report of Conference on the Education of Children Under Seven, 1936, NSA Pamphlets 1930-1964, 24/2. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

set out by Callard towards a marked preference for nursery classes. One representative, Mrs. Manning, said “she felt she was speaking on behalf of a great many teachers in expressing alarm at the Board’s suggestions.” She claimed that the NUT had always favoured the nursery-infant school, not, as she made clear, the 2-7 school, but infant departments with nursery classes attached. The Board’s new policy would “perpetuate the break at 5” and lead to staffing issues, isolating nursery teachers and limiting their opportunities for promotion. One NUT representative asked if the new policy was final and Maudslay answered that the Board saw no reason for changing it. Another representative, Mrs. Parker, felt certain that it would meet “serious opposition” from teachers and the Board would have a great deal of work to do to convince them.<sup>107</sup>

Maudslay seemed to be somewhat angered by the encounter and was convinced that the motives of the NUT in opposing his policy were essentially cynical and selfish. In an internal memorandum written the following day, he said: “I think there is little doubt that their opposition is inspired mainly by Infant Head Teachers who wish to take more children under 5 into their school so as to increase their salaries under the Burnham Scale .....Whether we can convert the NUT depends on the extent to which their opposition is based on the material interests of the Infants’ teachers rather than the needs of the children.”<sup>108</sup>

Such a conversion did not take place. The NUT continued to express, both to the Board and to others in the policy network that it “disagreed with the small

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<sup>107</sup> Board of Education, Record of meeting with NUT, July 26, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>108</sup> Maudslay to Cleary, July 27, 1943. Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

Nursery School.”<sup>109</sup> There is, however, no evidence that the Board was convinced by its arguments or felt that it should adjust its position because of NUT opposition.

### **6:9 Local Education Authorities: Demands for flexibility**

The local education authorities were the bodies through which government policy was enacted and therefore had more obvious power than many other members of the policy network. Since the passing of the 1918 Education Act, nursery education was an optional aspect of provision: LEAs had been enabled but not compelled to provide it. Therefore, their role in this area of policy had been particularly crucial: only the active enthusiasm of some urban authorities had given nursery education any corporeal reality. It was the LEAs, as described in Chapter 4:8, who had been influential in the withdrawal of the first version of the 1918 Act and its revision.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, they were a powerful constituency whose opinion could prove crucial.

Several local authority associations presented their views to the Board about the Green Book. Where nursery education was concerned, they were supportive of the suggested measures. The Association of Directors and Secretaries agreed that it was necessary to extend the reach of the school medical service and “a great extension of nursery class facilities” would be useful in this respect.<sup>111</sup> A report from a sub-committee of the Association of Education Committees set up to consider

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<sup>109</sup> Nursery School Association, Minutes of meeting of NSA executive committee, including report of meeting with representatives of NUT, November 6, 1943, Executive Committee Minute Book September 1943-May 1945) 14/2. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>110</sup> Andrews, *Education Act, 1918*.

<sup>111</sup> Board of Education (unsigned), Green Book Discussions – Association of Directors and Secretaries, December 17, 1941, Board of Education and Successors: Private Office: Files and Papers (Series II), ED 136 214. National Archives, Kew.

the Green Book argued that “the provision of nursery schools and classes has in the past been altogether insufficient” and welcomed the idea of a statutory obligation to provide them.<sup>112</sup>

The decision to change from the policy set out in the Green Book to a position where nursery schools were the preferred form of provision was one in which the LEAs were not actively involved. As the policy was mulled over before the publication of the White Paper, officials were uncertain of the extent to which they should communicate the change to the LEAs at all at this stage. Maudslay was nonetheless keen to avoid them planning to establish nursery classes after the war.<sup>113</sup> He suggested that a memorandum should be sent informing them of the “probable” change in policy and advising them that it would “as a rule, be unnecessary in planning new Primary Schools to make provision for the admission of children under five.”<sup>114</sup> Another official, J.H. Burrows, commented that this would cause “consternation” and “uproar,” and argued that “LEAs will have their own views” and “any attempt to stop provision by Nursery Classes would certainly fail.”<sup>115</sup> This, and a further note by Hammond B. Jenkins, who also argued that it was “a matter for the LEA to decide”<sup>116</sup> give an indication that not all officials were convinced of the

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<sup>112</sup> Association of Education Committees, Special Sub-committee, Report of the Special Sub-Committee, Undated, Board of Education and Successors: Private Office: Files and Papers (Series II), ED 136 214. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>113</sup> Maudslay to Clearly, February 20, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>114</sup> Maudslay to Cleary, February 23, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>115</sup> J.H.Burrows to Maudslay (circulating memorandum), March 1, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>116</sup> Jenkins to Maudslay (circulating memorandum), March 4, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.



change in direction, and the possible reaction of the LEAs was a factor in their trepidation.

The trepidation was well-founded. LEA organisations did indeed protest about the new policy and convinced Butler of the justice of their case. In October 1943, Butler proposed a change to the wording of the nursery school clause as it stood in the White Paper, as he had come to the “realisation that the small Nursery School...is not the best means of providing for children under 5 in all and every circumstance” and now believed that the current wording tied “the hands of the Board, as well as of the LEAs unduly.”<sup>117</sup> In a letter to the Secretary of the Board, Butler wrote: “I have been impressed, as has anybody else who has read their submissions, by the views of the great Local Authorities on the subject of Nursery Schools and Nursery Classes.”<sup>118</sup> He cited in particular the practical challenges of providing separate nursery schools in rural areas.

Butler’s change of heart prompted Maudslay to write an extremely heated minute to the Secretary of the Board. He claimed that the LEAs had not enough experience of nursery schools to make an informed decision: they were “blind to the defects of Nursery Classes because they have never seen anything better.” He claimed attacks on the policy were made by LEAs “partly because of ignorance and partly for ulterior motives.” Failing to give LEAs “the lead which some of them desire and all need” would be disastrous.<sup>119</sup> Butler annotated this minute with

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<sup>117</sup> Butler to Secretary of the Board, October 21, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>118</sup> Butler to Secretary of the Board, October 21, 1943. Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>119</sup> Maudslay to Secretary of the Board with addendum by Butler, October 20, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

reassuring comments: “There is no change of policy” and “I think it quite right that views should be thus set out, even though I can show many of these fears to be unfounded.”<sup>120</sup> Butler was adamant that the Board would have the power to insist on nursery school provision where this was in fact the desirable option, and wrote that “the proposed change will not prejudice the powers of the Board in securing that their policy is made effective.”<sup>121</sup> Nonetheless, claiming that there was no change in policy seems disingenuous. Although a complete ban on nursery classes had never been contemplated and the general preference for nursery schools would remain, this decision to make the clause more flexible to accommodate the demands of the LEAs was a significant one.

From this point on, the Board’s public statements on nursery classes and nursery schools typically gave an impression of being positive about both. An article in *Education*, dated 12<sup>th</sup> November 1943, quoted a speech by Butler in which he declared: “In the future I contemplate that the nursery schools for children from two to five will be extended to cater for a greatly increased number of children, but not that they will necessarily supplant all other existing provision for young children. We must recognise that there are various methods of providing for young children and the precise form must depend on the circumstances of a particular area.”<sup>122</sup>

The final wording of the Act placed a duty on LEAs to meet the needs of under fives “by the provision of nursery schools or, where the authority considers the

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<sup>120</sup> Maudslay to Secretary of the Board with addendum by Butler, October 20, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>121</sup> Butler to Secretary of the Board, October 21, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>122</sup> Author not visible, “Mr Butler and Nursery Education,” Clipping, *Education*, November 12, 1943, page not visible, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 8. National Archives, Kew.

provision of such schools to be inexpedient, by the provision of nursery classes in other schools.”<sup>123</sup> The crucial word here was “inexpedient.” Whatever the Board of Education might have meant by this, LEAs would surely interpret this in a wide variety of ways according to their pre-existing wishes. Maudslay was quite determined that this wording should in no way compromise his original vision. He quickly drafted a circular which argued that the word “inexpedient” should not “give LEAs complete freedom” to establish nursery classes because they themselves preferred them, or because they were cheaper. He offered to take on some part-time work after his imminent retirement to continue to ensure that LEAs understood this was the case.<sup>124</sup> It is unclear whether such an offer was ever taken up.

### **6:10 Working mothers: Obfuscation and disempowerment**

The parents of the children who attended or might potentially attend nursery schools and nursery classes were not part of the well-established group of educational experts and workers who felt they had a right to participate in the policy process. It is therefore not surprising that their views are hard to hear, from a historian’s perspective, and did not seem to penetrate discussions about these issues during the writing of the Education Act. There were two further reasons which may have subdued their voices during the crucial stages of policy formation. Firstly, the implications of the new nursery school policy for day nurseries were not really made clear outside government circles until quite late in the process. As Maudslay wrote in an internal memorandum on 10th August 1943, even Major Nathan, a

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<sup>123</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1944, clause 8.

<sup>124</sup> Maudslay to Cleary, July 15, 1944, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 37. National Archives, Kew.

representative of the National Society of Children's Nurseries, did not seem to realise that the proposal involved "the eventual abolition of Day Nurseries for children from 2-5" because this "had never been publically announced."<sup>125</sup>

Secondly, members of the public, including parents, did not necessarily understand the terminology for the different types of institution and may not have grasped the differences between "nursery school" and "day nursery" and all that that entailed.

This observation was made by the Marchioness of Reading, at the Ministry of Health, in a memorandum on war-time nurseries: "In general, the mothers speak of "the Nursery" ...They cannot be expected to differentiate between one government department or another."<sup>126</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that the obfuscation may have served to disempower parents from contributing to the arguments.

### **6:11 The fate of the policy in the post-war period**

In 1941, the left-wing academic and former Consultative Committee member, R.H.Tawney, informed Butler that attempts to re-construct education policy in wartime were doomed to failure: "Once the war ends, there will be a new situation....educational reform will be regarded as a luxury which can wait."<sup>127</sup> The experience at the end of World War I had certainly suggested that this would be the case. In general terms, the implementation of the progressive reforms in the 1944 Education Act was mixed and patchy. In his 1971 autobiography, Butler took the

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<sup>125</sup> Maudslay to Goodfellow, August 10, 1943, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>126</sup> Marchioness of Reading, Memorandum on war-time nurseries, May 15, 1945, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 33. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>127</sup> Gary McCulloch, *Educational Reconstruction: The 1944 Education Act and the Twenty-first Century* (Ilford: Woburn Press, 1994), 32.

view that it would be “generally conceded that many of the opportunities for progress offered by the Act of 1944 have been profitably seized.”<sup>128</sup> It took some time, however. Historian, Brian Simon, argues that by 1948, enthusiasm and forward motion had been lost and blames a succession of financial issues, such as a crisis in the coal industry, and the perceived need to re-arm in the face of potential conflict with Communist states.<sup>129</sup> In the case of the network of nursery schools, Tawney was absolutely proved right: it was never established and therefore the policy must ultimately be counted a failure.

The plan was that at the end of the war, the war-time nurseries would start to close, with staff and facilities transferring to nursery school purposes where practical, so as to get implementation of the new policy off to a good start. On 18th May 1945, a request was made by an education official for a memorandum to be circulated which stated: “In general, the taking over of existing wartime nurseries or wartime nursery classes by Local Education Authorities as part of the Development Plan should be encouraged.”<sup>130</sup> However, the need for womanpower in industry and the need of working mothers for childcare were still extensive and threats of closure were greeted with howls of protest.

On 8th September 1945, Cleary, an official at the Ministry of Education (as it was now known), wrote to Wilkinson from Health about the need to discuss the “urgent problem” and complained about being “under fire” from all directions: “such bodies as the Standing Joint Committee of Working Women’s Organisations, the National Association of Children’s Nurseries, the London Women’s Parliament and

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<sup>128</sup> Butler, *Art of the Possible*, 124.

<sup>129</sup> Simon, *Education and the Social Order 1940-1990*.

<sup>130</sup> FCSB to Mackenzie, May 18, 1945, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 37. National Archives, Kew.

the Northern Counties Campaign Committee, have been using all the usual methods of attack.” He enclosed a memorandum suggesting a way forward, which the Minister (now Labour’s Ellen Wilkinson) had agreed to: it was acknowledged that there was “a need to maintain day nurseries for now,” but 100% grants would cease on 31st March 1946. After that, local education and welfare authorities would have to make a decision about whether to continue the establishment as a nursery school or day nursery, in either case partly at their own expense.<sup>131</sup> As Cleary acknowledged in a memorandum sent to the Secretary on 17th September, this was hardly the “flying start” to the nursery school programme which the Ministry of Education had hoped to achieve.<sup>132</sup>

Protests continued. There is a collection of letters from parents in the Ministry’s files complaining about the policy and, significantly, it can be seen that some of the hostility is directed towards the idea of nursery schools themselves. One letter from a mother from Salford was particularly heartfelt: “do you realize that this will not only cause great hardships to many people but is the greatest setback to child welfare.....School nurseries are hopeless closing at 4:00pm daily, closed on Saturdays. What use is this to the mothers who are compelled to work?”<sup>133</sup> The issue of women’s work, disregarded in the making of the education policy, was certainly being brought to the fore. Whitbread claims that “the public imagination was not fired by the idea of nursery education for all.”<sup>134</sup> It seems reasonable to

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<sup>131</sup> Cleary to Wilkinson, September 8, 1945, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 37. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>132</sup> Cleary to Secretary, September 17, 1945, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 37. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>133</sup> Hudley/Hadley (unclear) to Wilkinson, February 15, 1946, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 32. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>134</sup> Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*, 105.

suggest that the reason was that nursery schools were being judged for their ability to meet a purpose they were never intended to meet.

When national economic difficulties began to bite in the late 1940s and early 1950s, education spending was squeezed and spending on nursery schools was squeezed particularly hard. According to Blackstone, Circular 210, issued in 1949, in which local authorities were asked to “exercise the strictest economy in the administration of education” effectively made “the possibilities of expansion negligible.”<sup>135</sup> Other projects were seen as more important and given priority. The Nursery School Association was well aware of this. Its chairman commented at a meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1948: “The Association could not accept the plea that provision for children of 14-15 and the need for county colleges must have precedence over the provision of nursery schools. The needs of the youngest children had too often been sacrificed to those of the older.”<sup>136</sup>

The policies of the 1944 Education Act initially had the effect on the ratio of nursery classes to nursery schools that the Ministry wished: the balance tipped in favour of nursery schools. An internal Ministry memorandum, dated 15th February 1952, shows that the number of schools did continue to rise year on year from 1947 (353) to 1951 (434), whereas nursery classes, after an initial increase, began to fall (there were 2364 in 1947 and 2116 in 1951.)<sup>137</sup> The adaption of some war nurseries was one factor which worked in favour of school rather than class provision.

However, the very small numbers involved meant that these changes were not really

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<sup>135</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*, 66.

<sup>136</sup> C.C. Bell, Deputation from Nursery School Association, October 27, 1948, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 44. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>137</sup> TS to Marrington, February 15, 1952, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 39. National Archives, Kew.

significant: when the cuts were introduced and provision was frozen, nursery classes remained the dominant mode. This would be significant for the form which developments in nursery education would take in succeeding decades.

## **6:12 Conclusion**

This chapter investigates the factors which influenced the Board of Education's choices about the form of nursery education during World War II (research question 1a). The pre-war insistence that there were different sorts of children fell away and the Board's policy, as indicated in the 1944 Education Act, was that nursery schools were needed for all children. This preference was based on the arguments of Board inspectors who had been looking at a variety of wartime institutions and had presented a barrage of arguments in favour of the nursery school. Key points were that nursery schools presented less risk of infection for young children than being part of a larger school and that specialist teaching was required for children of this age: putting children in infant schools risked introducing them to formal instruction too soon. There seems to be a slight shift here away from a purely health and welfare focus to one where children's educational needs figure more strongly. However, the most significant change is that financial considerations were not allowed to dominate the decision. The Board's vision for the post-war world was based first and foremost on what it felt was best for children.

The chapter also answers the research question of who and who was not involved in making decisions about the form of nursery education in this period (research question 1b). Looking at education policy formation more generally, historian, C.H. Batteson, argues that "civil servants successfully constrained and



coloured education policy in the 1940s” and that the common belief that “wide-spread consultation” following the publication of the White Paper was influential is mistaken.<sup>138</sup> In other words, the policy process was an elitist one. This chapter argues that in relation to the nursery school clause this was largely so. The switch away from encouraging diversity of provision towards indicating a marked preference for the nursery school rather than the nursery class originated within the Board with the inspectorate and civil servants in the period between the production of the Green Book and the publication of the White Paper. The views of the established policy network, including educational organisations and teachers, made very little impact on the policy. The NSA was persuaded to support the policy even though it was not actually its preferred approach and was welcomed as a partner in propaganda. Teachers’ organisations, who were hostile to the policy, did not receive a sympathetic hearing. After the publication of the White Paper, however, LEAs were indeed able to bring about a compromise in the wording of the relevant clause. Butler may have insisted that this alteration did not constitute a change in policy, but his words rang somewhat hollow. The revised wording gave LEAs enough flexibility to deviate from the Board’s vision of nursery schools for all should they desire to do so.

This vision of nursery schools for all is a significant deviation from incremental policy development: in True, Jones and Baumgartner’s terms, this is a punctuation in equilibrium.<sup>139</sup> It occurred because of the “exogenous shocks to the system”<sup>140</sup> caused by war, and the consequent push towards creating a fairer society.

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<sup>138</sup> C.H.Batteson, “The 1944 Education Act reconsidered,” *Educational Review* 51, no. 1 (1999): 14,8.

<sup>139</sup> True, Jones and Baumgartner, “Punctuated-Equilibrium Theory.”

<sup>140</sup> Andrew S. McFarland, *Neopluralism: The Evolution of the Political Process Theory* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 56.

Its occurrence was facilitated by the fact that, in numerical terms, the creation of a nursery education system was still at an early stage: there was little pull from “path dependency”<sup>141</sup> because very little path had actually been travelled.

True, Jones and Baumgartner state that a very common cause of punctuations is that “new participants have become interested in the debate.”<sup>142</sup> In fact, the punctuation discussed here was indeed preceded by a significant change in the nursery system which brought many new users to the service in the form of women war workers. However, this chapter has argued that the voices of these women were not raised effectively during the policy process and did not occasion the change of direction. The Board of Education was determined that nursery provision should be exclusively the concern of educationalists and education authorities. The possible benefits for working women and the economy were considered to be a mere side-effect.

True, Jones and Baumgartner’s observation nonetheless has some relevance to the reasons why the new direction was not sustained and for the ultimate failure of the change in policy. The Board’s lack of responsiveness to the wartime change in nursery users and disregard of the role that nurseries could potentially play in meeting their post-war needs was a crucial factor in the new policy’s seeming lack of relevance after the war. Its attitude limited the arguments which could be deployed in favour of nursery provision. It also reduced the number of potential policy advocates. It is worth noting that the number of married women in work rose from

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<sup>141</sup> Kirsten Scheiwe and Harry Willekens, eds. *Child Care and Preschool Development in Europe: Institutional Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Karen Hagemann, Konrad H. Jarausch and Cristina Allemann-Ghionda, eds. *Children, Families and States: Time Policies of Childcare, Preschool and Primary Education in Europe* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011).

<sup>142</sup> True, Jones and Baumgartner, “Punctuated-Equilibrium Theory,” 159.

2¼ to 3¼ million during the ten years from 1946 to 1955, and many of these would have been potential users of childcare services.<sup>143</sup> Without this dimension, nursery education became one more socially progressive educational spending commitment that the government would struggle to afford. When nursery provision is viewed in this way, a lack of prioritization seems almost inevitable: children of “compulsory” school age will logically be seen as a more urgent cause as those for whom attendance is not compulsory.

The following chapter will analyse the fate of the policy in the financially straightened 1950s and consider how nursery enthusiasts struggled to keep the flame alive. It analyses how these difficulties led to changes in priorities for many with regard to the choice between nursery classes and nursery schools and how this had a profound influence on the Plowden Report of the late 1960s.

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<sup>143</sup> Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother* (London: Virago, 1983).

## Chapter Seven: “An ad hoc amalgam”<sup>1</sup>: The Plowden Report

### 7:1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the recommendations concerning nursery education made in the Plowden Report, *Children and their Primary Schools*,<sup>2</sup> which was published in 1967, and the subsequent decisions made by the relevant government department, which was known from 1964 as the Department of Education and Science (DES). This report was the fruit of the final investigation undertaken by the Central Advisory Council (CAC), the successor to the Consultative Committee, whose modus operandi had been established by the 1944 Education Act.<sup>3</sup> The government was under political pressure to take the CAC’s recommendations into consideration when formulating policy but had no obligation to implement them.

Historians of primary education regard the publication of the Plowden Report as a highly significant moment. Writing in 1999, historian Colin Richards claimed the document “remained the most quoted text in the canon of primary education.”<sup>4</sup> Much of the interest has centred on the report’s advocacy of child-centred teaching methods and the extent to which this approach has been beneficial or harmful to children’s learning.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, its recommendations about nursery education have also received some scholarly attention. The reasons behind the Plowden Committee’s decisions have been considered by the key early years

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<sup>1</sup> Lesley Webb, *Purposes and Practice in Nursery Education* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 50.

<sup>2</sup> Central Advisory Council for Education (England), *Children and their Primary Schools* (London: HMSO, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Kogan and Tim Packwood, *Advisory Councils and Committees in Education* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1974).

<sup>4</sup> Colin Richards, *Primary Education: At a Hinge of History?* (London: Falmer Press, 1999), 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

historians in this field, Blackstone and Whitbread. Both focus on the factors which may have led to more public demand for nursery education in the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> The committee's decision to encourage a wide variety of nursery institutions, downgrading the importance of what form it should take, is commented on briefly by Whitbread who finds the approach "confused."<sup>7</sup> Early years educationalist, Lesley Webb, writing in 1974, also offers an interesting perspective on the committee's decisions, condemning what she sees as a move away from education to childcare, and specifically, to the encouragement of "an ad hoc amalgam of the least thoughtful, least expensive and least expert practices of custodial care."<sup>8</sup> All these accounts are, however, exceedingly brief and a re-examination of the matter is overdue.

The 1944 Education Act had established the Board of Education's preference for nursery schools.<sup>9</sup> No statement from the Ministry or DES in the 1950s and 1960s overturned this position. However, this chapter argues that the policy dwindled away incrementally. When no new nursery facilities at all were being created and existing institutions were also threatened by financial cuts, both government and nursery advocates paid less and less attention to the question of which form of nursery education was preferable. Nonetheless, the Plowden committee was asked to address this long-standing issue in its deliberations. The committee came to the conclusion that the case for expanding nursery education was a strong one but the form it should take was not of prime importance, and a variety

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<sup>6</sup> Tessa Blackstone, *A Fair Start: The Provision of Pre-School Education* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1971); Nanette Whitbread, *The Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School: A History of Infant and Nursery Education in Britain, 1800-1970* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

<sup>7</sup> Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*, 131.

<sup>8</sup> Webb, *Purposes and Practice in Nursery Education*, 50.

<sup>9</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1944, clause 8.

of different approaches should be encouraged. Its lack of commitment to either nursery classes or nursery schools was the final signal that the policy path established in 1944 had worn away to nothing. The Conservative Secretary of State for Education in the early 1970s, Margaret Thatcher, chose to go in a completely new direction, expressing a clear preference for nursery classes. This was a punctuation in policy equilibrium. It was occasioned by the exhaustion of the previous direction, but also by the involvement of new policy participants who pushed the issue of nursery provision up the political agenda. True, Jones and Baumgartner have identified fresh policy participants as a common cause of such punctuations.<sup>10</sup>

The Plowden Committee listened to its witnesses in relation to this downgrading of the nursery school/nursery class question. The policy network therefore had an influence on this governmental body and in this we have a glimmer of pluralism. However, the fact that the committee did not make a strong statement about what sort of provision might be best suited to meet the need for more nursery places meant that ultimately, successive administrations at the DES could make this decision free from significant political pressure. The control of the elite over this particular policy issue was therefore not threatened.

This chapter first examines the development of nursery policy during the 1950s and early 1960s in order to analyse the “appreciative systems” of both the Ministry of Education and other policy participants.<sup>11</sup> The reasons for the referral to

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<sup>10</sup> James L. True, Bryan D. Jones and Frank R. Baumgartner, “Punctuated-Equilibrium Theory: Explaining Stability and Change in Public Policy,” in *Theories of the Policy Process*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Paul A. Sabatier (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2007), 155-187.

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Vickers, *The Art of Judgment: A Study in Policy Making*, Centenary ed. (London: Sage, 1995), 82.

the committee are examined in this context. The decisions of the Plowden Committee itself are then analysed. Finally, the fate of the report's recommendations under administrations in the later 1960s and early 1970s is considered.

## **7:2 The 1950s: The descent of great freeze**

It was argued in the previous chapter that although “war nurseries” were established during World War II in order to meet the needs of working women, the Board of Education did not see meeting the childcare needs of families as a key purpose of nursery provision in the post-war world. It believed that “the proper place for a child under two is at home” and that children between two and five should be in educationally-orientated nursery schools.<sup>12</sup> The belief was that childcare institutions would not be needed, despite the fact that nursery schools did not open for sufficient hours to meet the needs of many working women, and the plan was therefore to close them down or transfer them to educational use. However, this did not happen smoothly, as the need for women's labour continued after the war and the adaption of large numbers of war nurseries to nursery schools was delayed and disrupted. The newly named Ministry of Education admitted that some war nurseries would need to operate as day nurseries after all.<sup>13</sup>

There were indications that, under the new Labour administration, these pressures were leading to a reappraisal of the role of nursery provision. A circular issued jointly in December 1945 by the Ministries of Health and Education claimed that a nursery service was needed due to “a number of considerations – production,

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<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, *Circular 221/45 (Ministry of Health) and Circular 75 (Ministry of Education) Nursery Provision for children under 5*, December 14, 1945.

<sup>13</sup> Cleary to Wilkinson, September 8, 1945, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 37. National Archives, Kew.

educational, health, social and population.” Nurseries of different sorts would be needed to meet these diverse needs, and therefore the form of provision would vary “from area to area according to local custom, and the character of the area.”<sup>14</sup> The crucial point here is that the document did not suggest that the purpose of *nursery education*, or nursery schools and classes, had changed in any way. It was made clear that schools and classes could “never wholly meet the need.”<sup>15</sup> The Ministry of Education was reasserting its traditional sphere of influence and disentangling itself from responsibility for childcare provision. One education official, John Maud, made the lack of interest in labour issues clear to a colleague in Health: “I note that you say that Nursery Classes are not much help to married women who have to do factory work and that additional provision of Day Nurseries is necessary for this purpose. These are, of course, the direct concern of the Ministry of Health.”<sup>16</sup> In 1948, the Minister, George Tomlinson, made it clear in a written answer to a question in the House of Commons that the rapid increase in industrial and private nurseries to meet the needs of industry were no concern of his and “he had no power to require them to submit to registration.”<sup>17</sup> The Ministry was concerned only with nursery classes and nursery schools and they were concerned exclusively with the educational needs of the child. The Nursery School Association (NSA) strove to ensure that the Ministry did not waver from this position. In 1949, the association’s director, Joyce Cornish-Bowden, wrote to Tomlinson with “deepest concern” about

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<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, *Circular 221/45 (Ministry of Health) and Circular 75 (Ministry of Education) Nursery Provision for children under 5*, December 14, 1945.

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, *Circular 221/45 (Ministry of Health) and Circular 75 (Ministry of Education) Nursery Provision for children under 5*, December 14, 1945.

<sup>16</sup> Maud to Jameson, April 25, 1947, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 38. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>17</sup> HC Deb 29 January 1948 vol 446 c198W.



evidence that the children of working mothers were being given preferential treatment on nursery school waiting lists. Even this limited measure was seen as a threat to the idea that nursery school education was not “an end in itself” but being prostituted to the needs of the labour market.<sup>18</sup>

As part of the education system, with no wider remit, nursery schools and classes did not benefit from new policy participants who might successfully have forced the issue of expansion into prominence by linking it with other political concerns. Thus supporters of nursery education had to fight their battles for expansion within the context of the budget of the Ministry of Education and argue that their cause should be an *educational* priority. This was always going to be an uphill struggle: education defined as “non-compulsory” was very likely to seem less important than that defined as “compulsory.” This was already in evidence in a 1948 meeting between an NSA deputation and the Ministry. Lady Allen, now the association’s President, expressed disappointment that the Minister himself had not received them and this may indeed have been an indication of flagging interest.<sup>19</sup> The new Chairman, Evan Davies, made the point that the development of new nursery schools promised in the 1944 Education Act was too slow. The Ministry representatives argued that with limited labour and building materials at their disposal, “priority had to be given to the additional accommodation required in connection with the raising of the school age and the increased birth rate.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cornish-Bowden to Tomlinson, December 1, 1949, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 38. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>19</sup> Nursery School Association, Minutes of meeting of NSA Executive Committee, November 6, 1948, Executive Committee Minutes 5 June 1948-14 November 1953, 14/1. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>20</sup> Nursery School Association, Minutes of meeting of NSA Executive Committee, November 6, 1948, Executive Committee Minutes 5 June 1948-14 November 1953, 1948-1953, 14/1. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

Expansion in nursery education was severely restricted at the end of the 1940s by the 1948 White Paper on capital investment.<sup>21</sup> Despite the Ministry's assertions that it was not interested in the requirements of labour, some limited development was nonetheless approved after this time where it could be shown that "nursery schools would facilitate the entry of women into essential industry."<sup>22</sup> This is further demonstration that mobilizing this source of support for nursery education was the most powerful weapon available for those who wished to promote expansion. However, the Ministry of Education continued to argue that it was inevitable that spending cuts should be made most severely to "extra-statutory" services<sup>23</sup> and issued a succession of circulars to effect this. Circular 210, issued in 1949, asked local authorities to exercise restraint in spending because of another financial crisis.<sup>24</sup> The possibilities for development became increasingly remote with the issue of Circular 242 in 1951, aimed at reducing LEA spending, and Circular 245 in February 1952, which targeted the school building programme.<sup>25</sup> The result was that some Local Education Authorities began to close existing nursery facilities. The number of nursery schools did in fact increase very slightly between 1949 and 1951, from 412 to 434. However, the number of nursery classes, which were not the Ministry's approved form of institution, but which nevertheless catered

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<sup>21</sup> Marrington to Dann, February 6, 1951, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 38. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>22</sup> Marrington to Dann, February 6, 1951, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 38. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>23</sup> Barker to Cornish-Bowden, December 20, 1951, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 45. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>24</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

<sup>25</sup> Roy Lowe, *Education in the Post-war Years: A Social History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

for considerably more children, began to fall. There were 2261 in 1949 and 2116 in 1951.<sup>26</sup>

In 1952, the new Conservative Minister of Education, Florence Horsbrugh, declared to the Nursery School Association that although there was no possibility of expansion, “the important thing was to try and preserve what we had got.”<sup>27</sup>

Horsbrugh did indeed state in the House of Commons that she was opposed to closures on financial grounds.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, when an LEA argued that the teachers were needed for children of compulsory school age, she agreed that such a closure was reasonable.<sup>29</sup> For her, it was absolutely self-evident that the needs of older children should be prioritised. Thus the nursery provision in many LEAs was indeed imperilled. Intensive campaigns were waged in many local areas to prevent this. Campaigns orchestrated in Leicester and Manchester in the 1950s are described in chapter 8:6. In a Directors’ report from 1952, the NSA claimed it had also been active in Somerset, Warwickshire, Dorset, Shropshire, Kent, Leicestershire, Hertfordshire, the West Riding of Yorkshire, Wigan, Nottinghamshire and Brighton and that it has worked closely with parents’ organisations, the National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Head Teachers.<sup>30</sup> Many of these

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<sup>26</sup> T?S (unclear) to Marrington, February 15, 1952, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 39. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Education, Interview memorandum of deputation from NSA to Ministry of Education, January 27, 1952 (date of meeting), Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 45. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>28</sup> HC Deb 28 February 1952 vol 496 c1452.

<sup>29</sup> “Nursery Class Closures – Proposed Economy at Manchester,” *The Times*, March 19, 1953, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Nursery School Association, Executive committee, Directors report circulated with agenda for meeting, March 8, 1952, Nursery School Association Executive Committee minutes, 5 June 1948 - 14 November 1953, 14/4. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

campaigns, including those in Leicester and Manchester, had some measure of success.

In October 1954, David Eccles was appointed Minister of Education. The Conservatives were keen to lose their reputation for miserliness in the area<sup>31</sup> and although he too was under some pressure from the treasury to restrict educational spending, he proved to be far more effective than Horsbrugh in resisting this, and there was a “significant upturn” from this point on.<sup>32</sup> According to historian, Peter Gosden, this period has become known as the “golden years” of educational spending.<sup>33</sup> However, Eccles’ priorities were secondary, further and higher education.<sup>34</sup> He had no particular interest in nursery schools and classes. He claimed, in a letter to Boyd-Carpenter, MP for Kingston, that he did indeed “greatly value.... the fine work that has been done in this country to build up high standards in the education of children under five” but he had to concentrate on other priorities, could not contemplate expansion at this time and would do nothing which might encourage false hopes that this was likely to change.<sup>35</sup> He declined an invitation to open the NSA’s Annual Conference in May 1956 because he would have had to adopt a “negative attitude.”<sup>36</sup> For the same reason, he wrote to the NSA in November 1956, refusing to meet a deputation that it proposed to send him to discuss the recently issued Circular 313, which made it clear that LEAs should

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<sup>31</sup> D.W. Dean, “Consensus or conflict? The Churchill government and educational policy 1951-55,” *History of Education* 21, no. 1 (1992): 15-35.

<sup>32</sup> Lowe, *Education in the Post-war Years*, 46.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Gosden, *The Education System since 1944* (Oxford: Martin Robinson, 1983), 16,19.

<sup>34</sup> John Vaizey and John Sheehan, *Resources for Education: An Economic Study of Education in the United Kingdom, 1920-1965* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968).

<sup>35</sup> Eccles to Boyd-Carpenter, July 4, 1955, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 39. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>36</sup> Jameson to Jeffries, April 7, 1956, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 54. National Archives, Kew.

ensure that they did not increase the numbers of under fives in primary schools so that there would be enough teachers available for older children.<sup>37</sup> In a letter to *The Times* later that year, Evan Davies, the NSA chairman, bemoaned the “increasing tendency in this country when in any educational difficulty to seek a solution at the expense of the young child.”<sup>38</sup> Eccles remained intransigent and no significant progress in the area was made in either of his periods as Minister (1955-1957 and 1959-1962) or in the brief interval between them. In 1960, he issued Circular 8/60, which stamped out the final flickers of hope for expansion in the foreseeable future: “No resources can at present be spared for the expansion of nursery education and in particular no teachers can be spared who might otherwise work with children of compulsory school age.”<sup>39</sup> The numbers of children in nursery education in January 1961 were in fact remarkably similar to those for 1951. There were 453 nursery schools (the 1951 figure was 434) and 60 000 pupils in nursery classes (compared to 59 527).<sup>40</sup>

### **7:3 The impact of the great freeze on the Ministry’s preference for nursery schools**

The wording of the 1944 Act, in which LEAs were asked to meet the need for pre-school education “by the provision of nursery schools or, where the authority considers the provision of such schools to be inexpedient, by the provision

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<sup>37</sup> Eccles to Miles, November 13, 1956, Nursery School Association Executive Committee minutes, 14 November 1953 - 26 April 1958, 14/5. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>38</sup> Evan Davies, Letter to the Editor, *The Times*, December 6, 1956, 11.

<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Education, Circular 8/60, *Nursery Education*, May 31, 1960.

<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Labour, Women’s Consultative Committee, Nursery Education – Note by the Minister of Education, February 1962, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 55. National Archives, Kew.

of nursery classes in other schools”<sup>41</sup> was somewhat vague and seemed to allow LEAs some freedom in determining what sort of provision might be most suitable in their areas. However, as policy sociologists, Gerwitz and Ozga, have shown, officials at the Ministry applied considerable pressure to LEAs to try to ensure that post-war development plans were in line with approved thinking, which was that nursery schools were a superior choice.<sup>42</sup> Comments by Ministry officials about these development plans amply demonstrate the continued commitment to nursery school rather than nursery class provision, despite some wavering doubts on this subject by the wartime President, R.A.Butler. One Ministry official, E.N.Strong, for example, expressed this view clearly to London County Council as the plans were being drawn up in 1945: “As the Authority will be aware, it is the Department’s view that the needs of children under five can in general best be met in the small self-contained Nursery Schools.”<sup>43</sup> Strong later criticized the Manchester Plan on the grounds that “There is little doubt our experts would want to press for more nursery schools.”<sup>44</sup>

Evidence that the Ministry was holding to this position in the early 1950s can be seen in its statements to requests for information about the policy. A letter to an official in Nairobi who enquired about English nursery education in 1950 stated that the Ministry preferred “separate Nursery Schools containing, if possible, not more

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<sup>41</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1944, clause 8.

<sup>42</sup> Sharon Gewirtz and Jenny Ozga, “Partnership, pluralism and education policy: a reassessment,” *Journal of Education Policy* 5, no. 1 (1990): 37-48.

<sup>43</sup> E.N. Strong to London County Council, November 1, 1945, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 192. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>44</sup> G.Auty, Notes for Discussion, January 1, 1948, Ministry of Education and Department of Education and Science: 1944 Education Act, Primary and Secondary Schools Development Plans, ED 152 328. National Archives, Kew.

than 40 children.”<sup>45</sup> A slight change of tone can perhaps be detected in notes prepared for the High Commissioner of Ceylon in 1951, in which it was stated that “Expert preference is for the nursery school” but where the nursery class is posited as a reasonable alternative.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, this does not represent a change in policy and there is no evidence that official policy did alter during this decade.

The freeze on education spending nonetheless had an impact on the prominence of the question of which sort of provision should be preferred. It seemed to gradually fall from view. The Ministry was either engaged, as it was during Horsbrugh’s administration, in defending all existing provision or in discouraging expansion in all forms. In such circumstances, the discussions about whether nursery schools or nursery classes would be more suitable for development in an ideal world where financing was assured rarely arose. The passionate debates which took place in the visionary wartime period no longer seemed relevant and this policy priority dissipated.

One other aspect of nursery school policy was developing at this time: experimentation with part-time nursery provision. This issue rose in prominence as the question of the choice between schools and classes fell. In 1949, a Royal Commission on Population report suggested that it might be valuable to establish some part-time nursery places but Ministry officials were initially sceptical, believing such an arrangement to be “educationally undesirable.”<sup>47</sup> It would lead,

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<sup>45</sup> Harte to Senior Sanitary Inspector in Nairobi, March 25, 1950, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 38. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>46</sup> Marrington to Murton, October 27, 1951, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 38. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>47</sup> Barker to Murton, June 26, 1951, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 39. National Archives, Kew.

they believed, to difficulties with providing the midday meal and sufficient rest periods. However, in 1951, HMI Miss Murton reported that in meetings with her, educationalists and experts were expressing the view that a full day was unnecessary, and actually not ideal, for some children.<sup>48</sup> As a result, experimentation with part-time provision began in a number of areas. It was an arrangement which definitely appealed to Eccles, as it involved a minimal amount of extra expenditure, and he identified it as the “one direction in which development seems practicable.”<sup>49</sup> By January 1959, there were approximately 1420 pupils attending for half a day in nursery schools. Figures for nursery classes were not collected, but Ministry officials were aware that there were also some part-time places here.<sup>50</sup> It is hard not to see something of a “make do and mend” attitude to nursery education here which was reminiscent of the inter-war period, particularly the Board’s 1936 pamphlet, *Nursery Schools and Nursery Classes*.<sup>51</sup> Such a spirit would also come to influence the developments in succeeding decades.

#### **7:4 The impact of the great freeze on nursery education advocates**

The fact that the numbers of nursery schools and classes remained stable over the 1950s and did not decrease despite the steadfastly discouraging attitude of the Ministry was due in no small measure to the intensive turf war waged by local activists in opposing cuts, particularly in the very dangerous years of the

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<sup>48</sup> Barker to Marrington, August 2, 1951, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 39. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>49</sup> Eccles to Davies, February 22, 1955, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 39. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>50</sup> Fletcher to Hudson, May 14, 1959, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 54. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>51</sup> Board of Education, *Nursery Schools and Nursery Classes, Educational Pamphlet 106* (London: HMSO, 1936), 6.



early 1950s. Waging such campaigns had an effect on the priorities of the nursery education advocates. The Nursery School Association was particularly affected because it had, immediately prior to and during World War II, held strong views on the form nursery education should take and had publically supported the Board of Education's stance that nursery schools were preferable to nursery classes (although the association would in fact have preferred a school for ages two to seven). However, the experience of having to defend its "policy core belief,"<sup>52</sup> the need for nursery expansion, meant that the "secondary beliefs"<sup>53</sup> regarding the form of such institutions dropped out of focus among association members.

With remarkable speed, the association's passion for arguing that only the best was good enough, as evinced in its struggle for the 2-7 school during World War II, disappeared. Despite misgivings on the part of prominent member, Lillian de Lissa, the idea of a "short-day" (part-time) nursery school, which would have seemed such a shoddy compromise to Margaret McMillan and her supporters, was promoted in the 1953 Winter Exhibition, on the grounds that it was necessary for the NSA to be "experimental" and "realistic."<sup>54</sup> By 1957, the association supported expansion in "any of the following forms" – the full-day nursery school, the short-day nursery school, and nursery classes.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Paul A. Sabatier and Christopher M. Weible, "The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Innovations and Clarifications," in *Theories of the Policy Process* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Paul Sabatier (Boulder, Co: Westview, 2007), 189-220, 194-196.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 194-196.

<sup>54</sup> Nursery School Association, Minutes of meeting of NSA Executive Committee, September 19, 1953, Nursery School Association Executive Committee minutes, 5 June 1948 - 14 November 1953, 14/4. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>55</sup> Nursery School Association, Statement of Policy 1958, November 30, 1958, Nursery School Association Executive Committee minutes, 14 November 1953 - 26 April 1958, 14/5. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

## 7:5 An increase of pressure in the 1960s

Circular 8/60 put a stop to all possibilities for nursery expansion,<sup>56</sup> but demands for it continued, and came also from fresh sources, with previously neglected voices attempting to make themselves heard. Joyce Butler MP wrote to Eccles in 1961, citing evidence from a survey of parents' views which claimed "that parents in Greater London want twice as many nursery schools as they have."<sup>57</sup> Calls for childcare services also grew apace. Nadine Peppard, from the London Council of Social Services, wrote on behalf of the Immigrants Advisory Committee to demand nursery services on behalf of immigrant mothers who wished to work.<sup>58</sup> The Trades Union Congress passed a resolution in 1962 that "the community should accept some responsibility for helping married women at work with the problems their employment creates."<sup>59</sup> This was an effect of the increasing numbers of married women in work, which continued to grow throughout the 1960s, so that almost 50% were economically active by the end of the decade.<sup>60</sup> The view at the Ministry of Education in the early 1960s, however, was still that it was "very necessary not to lose sight of the distinctive purpose of nursery education,"<sup>61</sup> meaning that the distinction between meeting the needs of the child and meeting the needs of the parents should be preserved.

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<sup>56</sup> Ministry of Education, Circular 8/60, *Nursery Education*, May 31, 1960.

<sup>57</sup> Butler to Eccles, March 30, 1961, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 54. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>58</sup> Peppard to Ministry of Education, July 20, 1961, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 54. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>59</sup> Ministry of Labour, Women's Consultative Committee, Provision for care of children of working mothers, February 1962, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 55. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>60</sup> Jane Pilcher, *Women in Contemporary Britain: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999); Diane Sainsbury, *Gender, Equality and Welfare States* (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1996).

<sup>61</sup> Stevens to Grainger, January 30, 1962, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 55. National Archives, Kew.

Further evidence of growing displeasure about the lack of any sort of nursery provision among potential service users comes from the founding of the playgroup movement in 1961. Parents, led by Belle Tutaev, began to take the initiative to organise and manage play facilities and social groups for under fives.<sup>62</sup> These voluntary groups were used by parents as a substitute for state nursery education, but the movement was nonetheless forceful in demanding improvements to what the state provided.<sup>63</sup> According to the association's national advisor in the 1970s, Brenda Crowe, the movement was very successful in disseminating its approach and this was because "the time was right, not only for the limelight to focus on the under fives, but also on the needs of their parents."<sup>64</sup>

An indication that the Ministry was aware of this continued demand and prepared to contemplate some small concessions came in 1964, when an addendum to Circular 8/60 allowed nursery provision to be established if this would enable mothers who were trained teachers to return to work in schools.<sup>65</sup> This was a rather difficult calculation to make and some LEAs, notably London County Council, were able to manipulate the situation to increase nursery classes beyond the total which the Ministry found reasonable. As one official, P. T. Sloman, complained, "they were concerned less with increasing their supply of teachers than with increasing their nursery provision."<sup>66</sup> The great freeze had started to thaw and pressure would continue to build.

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<sup>62</sup> Peter Baldock, *Developing Early Childhood Services: Past, Present and Future* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, McGraw-Hill Education, 2011).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Brenda Crowe, *The Playgroup Movement*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1977), 107.

<sup>65</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

<sup>66</sup> Sloman to Leadbetter, November 19, 1964, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 55. National Archives, Kew.

## 7:6 Referral to the Plowden Committee

Both the societal impact of the labour market, as Blackstone argues,<sup>67</sup> and the continuing campaigning of new and old groups, as Whitbread argues,<sup>68</sup> contributed to an environment in which an examination of nursery education seemed a suitable subject for investigation for the Central Advisory Council (CAC). There was a clear gap between public opinion and current policy. However, the immediate cause for the referral to the council was that nursery education fell within the broad scope of primary education, which was mooted as a suitable subject in 1962. The reasons for this were that the primary phase had not been examined for more than thirty years, (since the Hadow Report of 1931), and the fact that Ministry of Education members believed that state primary schools were not well regarded by the public and that large classes had led to low morale among primary staff.<sup>69</sup> In the initial stages of discussion, potential questions about nursery education were considered by Ministry officials, including, “Can anything be done to satisfy the undoubted demand for nursery education?” and “Can we justify the present distinction between nursery schools and nursery classes?”<sup>70</sup>

The Minister of Education, Sir Edward Boyle, announced the reconstitution of the CAC, under the chairmanship of Bridget Plowden, in the House of Commons on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1963.<sup>71</sup> There were twenty-three members, most of whom had “direct experience of the educational system as teachers, administrators, inspectors or

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<sup>67</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

<sup>68</sup> Whitbread, *Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School*.

<sup>69</sup> JEHB and LRF, *Primary Education*, May 18, 1962, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 64. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>70</sup> JEHB and LRF, *Primary Education*, May 18, 1962, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 64. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>71</sup> HC Deb 11 July 1963 vol 680 c1397.

university and teacher training teachers.”<sup>72</sup> According to Maurice Kogan, who acted as the committee’s secretary, the CAC’s brief, “to consider primary education in all its aspects, and the transition to secondary education,” was “drafted at a flick of the wrist by a gifted under-secretary, Ralph Fletcher.”<sup>73</sup> As was usual, this brief was very broad and the CAC were theoretically free to interpret it in whatever way it thought most suitable. In a letter to John Newsom, her Deputy Chairman, Plowden wrote, “I think we must tackle the problems that face the primary schools here and now.....We must state the educational aims as we see them at present and in the long term. We must be certain, however, that there is some chance of achieving them.”<sup>74</sup> This implies that affordability, or keeping broadly within the current allocations for education spending, would be a key consideration for her committee.

The questions which the Plowden Committee initially asked about nursery education were along the lines that had been suggested previously by Ministry officials. In October 1964, the CAC set up a study group to examine “what evidence exists concerning the demand and need for nursery education” and “how successfully and with what different emphases children of 2-6 are being catered for in various types of nursery institution and infant schools.”<sup>75</sup> Whether one form of institution was in some way better than another, either generally or in meeting the needs of specific groups, was considered a crucial matter. This was demonstrated by the questionnaire which was sent out to nearly two hundred individuals and

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<sup>72</sup> HC Deb 11 July 1963 vol 680 c1397.

<sup>73</sup> Maurice Kogan, “The Plowden Report twenty years on,” *Oxford Review of Education* 13, no. 1 (1987):13.

<sup>74</sup> Plowden to Newsom, CAC Paper No 51, August 29, 1965, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 67. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>75</sup> Central Advisory Council, *The Scope and Organization of the Council’s Work*, CAC Paper 2, October 1963, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports ED 146 64. National Archives, Kew.

organisations as a way of investigating the issue.<sup>76</sup> Question 1g was “What is the balance of gain and loss in (i) separate nursery and infant schools as compared with infant schools with nursery classes or nursery/infant schools?”

### **7:7 The views of the policy network**

The questionnaire was distributed to the established policy network. It was sent to organisations representing LEAs, teachers, other professional or voluntary organisations such as the Nursery School Association, the Montessori Society and the National Froebel Foundation and to individual primary teachers, academics, education officers and education publishers.<sup>77</sup> This meant that organisations outside the world of education, who may have challenged the idea of considering nursery provision as a matter purely for the education authorities, were not included at this stage. Organised labour and women’s groups had therefore a minimal impact on the consultation process (although there was a later meeting, on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1965, with the TUC).<sup>78</sup> Notices were, however, placed in the daily and the educational press to the effect that the committee was willing to listen to anyone else who would come forward.<sup>79</sup> Judging by submissions preserved in the archives (and not all are), there does not seem to have been very many of these, and of those few, some were rather eccentric and hardly to the point. One Nickolas Loverdo sent an essay about a new

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<sup>76</sup> Central Advisory Council, CAC Paper 3 Appendix A, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 66. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>77</sup> Central Advisory Council, CAC Paper 3 Appendix C, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 66. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>78</sup> Central Advisory Council, Record of meeting between CAC and TUC, January 21, 1965, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 65. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>79</sup> Central Advisory Council, CAC Paper 3 Appendix C and Appendix D, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 66. National Archives, Kew.

alphabet he had invented.<sup>80</sup> Rather intriguingly, one woman who, in her own words “was not vocal, never sat on committees or wrote to newspapers” claimed she had been asked to give evidence by Edward Boyle, the Minister of Education. (Her submission was one of very few hostile to nursery education, calling nursery schools a “profound psychological mistake both from the child’s and the mother’s point of view,” but it cannot be assumed that this was Boyle’s own position).<sup>81</sup>

In the case of the fundamental question of whether nursery education should be provided at all, the vast majority of respondents were in favour. Reasons given for this did, however, vary. These are summarised in a report prepared by the working party who were concentrating on early years: the need to offer an “enriched and stimulating environment” to children from deprived homes; the need to provide “space and opportunity for vigorous physical activity” to children who lived in high flats; the need for “children from good homes” to “develop interests and abilities” to stop them becoming bored; the fact that “Nursery education would provide a gradual entry to school life” and the need to provide a service for working mothers because otherwise they would use unsuitable child-minders.<sup>82</sup> In other words, some respondents saw nursery education as primarily a service for the deprived child which could contribute to creating more social equality, others saw it as a useful part of any child’s education and others emphasised its childcare function. There is no obvious pattern to which groups or individuals took which line.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Loverdo, Universal Alphavitarion, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 75. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>81</sup> M.Bannister, The Question of Nursery Schools, CAC Paper 86, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 67. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>82</sup> Central Advisory Council, CAC Working Party (3), Paper 19, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 85. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>83</sup> Central Advisory Council, CAC Working Party (3), Paper 19, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 85. National Archives, Kew.

The committee did not get a clear answer from its witnesses as to whether nursery classes or nursery schools should be preferred. According to its summary of the findings of the questionnaire, opinion was “fairly evenly divided” on the issue.<sup>84</sup> Fifteen witnesses preferred combined nursery/infant schools, twenty-eight preferred nursery schools, although eleven of these wanted the schools to share sites with infant schools and five favoured nursery classes.<sup>85</sup> Patterns in the responses are hard to detect. Teachers, for example, had mixed views, and their preferences were usually linked to the sort of institution they were currently working in. The NUT merely stated that it endorsed the view of the NSA.<sup>86</sup> The NSA, however, confessed itself divided on the question: 70% of members were in favour of separation between the nursery and the infants (although this would not necessarily imply completely separate schools), whereas 30% wanted nursery classes.<sup>87</sup> Therefore it did not wish “to advocate rigidly that one form of provision is, in every case, the most desirable, since there are varied conditions in different areas.” Significantly, many witnesses simply ignored the question or claimed that they did not have the experience to take a position or stated that they did not have a preference. Some listed advantages and disadvantages of schools and classes without coming to a conclusion. This is indicative of how the question had not been at the forefront of many minds because

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<sup>84</sup> Central Advisory Council, CAC Working Party (3), Paper 19, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 85. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>85</sup> Central Advisory Council, CAC Working Party (3), Paper 19, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 85. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>86</sup> National Union of Teachers, First things first: A memorandum of evidence submitted to the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) under the Chairmanship of Lady Plowden, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, August 1964, ED 146 71. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>87</sup> Nursery School Association, Evidence 103, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 70. National Archives, Kew.



of the nature of the struggles during the big freeze on spending, when all forms of nursery education needed to be fought for.

The committee were also presented with a multiplicity of reasons why either nursery schools or nursery classes might be the more suitable option. Reasons for preferring nursery schools were that they were less formal than nursery classes,<sup>88</sup> they provided more space<sup>89</sup> and children could make more noise,<sup>90</sup> there was more contact with parents<sup>91</sup> and they were able to cater for younger children.<sup>92</sup> The main reason for preferring the nursery class was a continuity of approach with and ease of transition to the infant school.<sup>93</sup> The reasons given in favour of nursery classes imply an approach orientated towards educational benefits and were applicable to all children. The reasons given in favour of nursery schools imply more emphasis on health and social benefits, traditionally strongly associated with alleviating conditions in the poorest areas. The witness statements provided evidence that nursery education was strongly desired by the educational network, but there remained differences about what it should achieve and what form it should take. A

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<sup>88</sup> Central Advisory Council, Evidence from Miss A. Bullen, Beech Green Nursery School, March 8, 1964, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 69. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>89</sup> Central Advisory Council, Evidence 114 from Miss J E Bailey, Chelwood Nursery School, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 70. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>90</sup> Central Advisory Council, Evidence 106 from B.N. Furneaux, Kintore Way Nursery School, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports ED 146 70. National Archives, Kew

<sup>91</sup> Central Advisory Council, Evidence from Nora H. Kemp, Nursery Schools Organiser, Berkshire LEA, March 1964, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 68. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>92</sup> Central Advisory Council, Evidence 110 from Miss H. Boydell, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 70. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>93</sup> Association of Head Mistresses, Memorandum on Primary Education and the transition to secondary education, April 1964, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 69. National Archives, Kew.

clear picture did not emerge which could guide the committee in its decision-making.

### **7:8 The Plowden Committee and the question of working mothers**

Despite the fact that the committee had used only witness evidence from the traditional educational policy network, it nonetheless also considered whether or not nursery provision could have implications for wider social issues, including the questions of whether it could and should facilitate the employment of women. That these issues were raised is evidence for Blackstone's argument that changing patterns of women's employment was a key factor in stimulating the debate about nurseries during the early 1960s.<sup>94</sup>

However, the committee's pronouncements in this area are confusing, as can be seen by the widely different interpretations they have been given. According to Kogan, it was essentially positive about working parents and supportive of their rights. He claimed, in a reflective article written twenty years after publication of the Plowden Report, that the committee believed that: "Nursery education should be provided not only for the good of the children but also as part of the rights of parents who might wish to go to work and thus have a greater choice of life style."<sup>95</sup> Early years educationalist, Lesley Webb, however, writing in 1974, described the committee's attitude to working women as "high-handed and patronizing" and its comments as an "impertinence."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

<sup>95</sup> Kogan, "Plowden Report twenty years on," 15.

<sup>96</sup> Webb, *Purposes and Practice in Nursery Education*, 157.

Both positions have some justification. The report accepted that “many mothers will work,” and “their children will, as a result, need places in nurseries.”<sup>97</sup> It stated that the research evidence that the committee had seen did not prove that “children with mothers at work are necessarily worse off” and indicated that “a short absence during the day” (as opposed to long-term residential care) was not harmful.<sup>98</sup> However, it made it clear that the educational service had “no business” actively encouraging maternal employment<sup>99</sup> and unless a mother had “exceptionally good reasons” for working, her children should not be given priority for full-time nursery places.<sup>100</sup> In short, the implication was that working mothers needed to be accepted as an unfortunate but unavoidable problem. The assertion that women often work with “their husband’s approval because running a home now offers insufficient employment for them”<sup>101</sup> reveal an underlying view of women and their place in the world consistent with Webb’s criticism.

### **7:9 The final recommendations**

The Plowden Report recommended an expansion of provision as the committee was persuaded this was advisable and beneficial by the enthusiasm of the witnesses. A small number of recent research studies were cited which suggested that nursery education benefited disadvantaged groups (including work by Hindley, Bernstein and Deutsch, and Hunt) and reference was also made to a rather inconclusive piece of research about long-term academic benefits (Douglas and

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<sup>97</sup> CAC, *Children and their Primary Schools*, 120.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

Ross).<sup>102</sup> In the view of the committee, however, research evidence was “too sparse and too heavily weighted by studies of special groups of children.”<sup>103</sup> Therefore, in terms of the broad question of whether or not nursery education should be provided, it relied on “the overwhelming evidence of experienced educators.”<sup>104</sup> The vast majority of respondents had been in favour of expansion, and the finished report stated that “the case...is a strong one.”<sup>105</sup> It seems that the sheer weight of numbers convinced them.

A huge number of reasons for expanded provision are stated, seemingly with equal approval. Nursery education was needed “not only on educational grounds but also for social, health and welfare considerations.”<sup>106</sup> It would be of intellectual benefit to all children to be educated in “the right conditions” by skilled staff.<sup>107</sup> It would, as the Nursery Schools Association had suggested, enrich all children’s lives by providing “opportunities for play both indoors and out” and the “companionship of other children.”<sup>108</sup> It would also be a remedial treatment to meet “the special needs of children from deprived or inadequate home backgrounds.”<sup>109</sup> It was needed to cope with the fact that “increasing numbers of married women were going out to work.”<sup>110</sup> Meeting all these varied aims would be a considerable challenge.

Witnesses failed to give a lead on the form of provision which should be preferred and the committee needed to draw on different sorts of evidence. In this case, research was seen as more useful. In particular, the committee drew on the

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 120.

work of John Bowlby, whose work was prominent at this time.<sup>111</sup> His research convinced it that there were dangers in removing children at “too early an age or for too long a period each day.”<sup>112</sup> However, its interpretation of Bowlby’s work was arbitrary and idiosyncratic. It decided, for no clear reason, that “too long” meant for a whole school day and “too early” meant before three.<sup>113</sup> Most nursery places should therefore be part-time and would not be available for the two year olds who had been traditionally catered for in nursery schools. Kogan has commented that in the committee’s analysis, “the correspondence between evidence and conclusions was intermittent” and ultimately it followed “‘Ordinary Knowledge’ and its own intuitions.”<sup>114</sup> This would seem to be what happened here.

The question of whether nursery schools or nursery classes should be preferred, a key issue at the start of the enquiry, simply fell by the wayside. The committee dealt with the contradictory views of the witnesses, and the frank indifference of some, by making this a non-issue. Its recommendations used the neutral term “nursery groups.”<sup>115</sup> Groups were to be clustered together forming a “unit” or “centre,” which were also neutral terms. These would have to be sited “at first where they will fit most easily and that will often be in existing primary schools”<sup>116</sup> but this was by no means an important principle. They could be in factories, clinics or within new flat developments.<sup>117</sup> It really did not seem to be important.

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<sup>111</sup> William Crain, *Theories of Development: Concepts and Applications*, 3rd ed. (London: Prentice Hall International Editions, 1992).

<sup>112</sup> CAC, *Children and their Primary Schools*, 121.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>114</sup> Kogan, “Plowden Report twenty years on,” 19.

<sup>115</sup> CAC, *Children and their Primary Schools*, 121.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

Nursery education was recommended because a large number of witnesses were enthusiastic about it and it could potentially fulfil a wide variety of aims. However, the service would be largely limited to older children attending part-time. In stark contrast to the authors of the 1944 Education Act, the Plowden Committee was largely uninterested in which form of institution might be most appropriate. Its recommendation in this respect was pretty much a blithe acceptance of anything which might be managed. There was little thought given as to whether or not the potential new nurseries would be in a position to meet the many and varied aims the committee had for it. Particular question marks hung over whether or not such a partial service could really meet the needs of working women for childcare. This hardly added up to a coherent vision.

### **7:10 The impact of the Plowden Report: Labour's interpretation**

The period following the publication of the Plowden Report was marked by discontinuity within the DES. From 1967 to 1972, there were four different Secretaries of State, representing both major parties.<sup>118</sup> Each was under political pressure to address the report's call for an expansion of nursery education. However, the political affiliation and traditional sources of influence of each administration had an impact on how the report was interpreted and the weighting which was given to different aspects. Although politicians from both right and left took Plowden's lead in downgrading the issue of preference for nursery schools or

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<sup>118</sup> Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order: British Education since 1944* (London: Laurence and Wishart, 1999).

nursery classes, their varying interpretations caused different patterns of provision to emerge.

By the time the report was published, Labour was the party of government and Anthony Crosland was the Secretary for State.<sup>119</sup> Kogan and Packwood have suggested that the Plowden Committee members began to feel “a coldness” towards the report prior to its completion which was caused by changes of both the minister and of senior civil servants since the start of the enquiry.<sup>120</sup> Crosland was a “powerful minister who had his own sources of advice and his own policy priorities.”<sup>121</sup> It does not seem that nursery education was one of these priorities. In a meeting between the DES and TUC in December 1966, Crosland insisted that “no money would be found during the next five years for building nursery schools unless existing priorities were changed,” and claimed that the difficulties with teacher recruitment did not allow for any further relaxation of the restrictive Circular 8/60, which made it difficult to employ nursery teachers.<sup>122</sup> His assurance that he “entirely accepted the strength of the case for the expansion of nursery education as soon as circumstances allowed” was thus rather hollow, particularly in an era where educational spending was flowing comparatively freely.<sup>123</sup>

However, in a department meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1967, Crosland said “he now felt that he ought at once to adopt a rather more positive attitude to the Plowden Report.” This was partly because “its tenor naturally commended itself to

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Kogan and Packwood, *Advisory Councils and Committees in Education*.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>122</sup> Department of Education and Science, Note of meeting between DES and TUC, December 14, 1966, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 55. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>123</sup> Gosden, *Education System since 1944*.

the Labour Party” and “partly because a number of the recommendations could be implemented without incurring expenditure.”<sup>124</sup> In the House of Commons on 19<sup>th</sup> January, Crosland duly declared himself “in very broad sympathy with the tenor and philosophy of the Plowden Report.”<sup>125</sup> In a written answer to Alfred Morris MP, he welcomed particularly the fact that the committee had “called attention to the special needs of children in socially deprived areas.”<sup>126</sup> This clarifies what Crosland meant in suggesting an affinity between the report and Labour principles. It was Plowden’s concern for alleviating the effects of disadvantage and the call for priority to be given to providing resources for the poorest communities which was the source of its appeal.

Crosland’s statement continued: “Our study of these recommendations has started but is bound to take some time. We must have regard to the resources likely to be available over the period covered by the Report and to the views of the associations of local authorities and teachers and of other bodies concerned.”<sup>127</sup> The DES subsequently embarked on a major policy consultation exercise, asking many of the organisations which had given evidence to the Plowden Committee for their opinions. One official suggested that these should be analysed in “what may turn out to be a rather large chart or grid in which there are horizontal lines for the recommendations on which comments are made and vertical comments for each Association.”<sup>128</sup> In the light of the huge consultation process which the committee had undertaken in the

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<sup>124</sup> Department of Education and Science, Notes of meeting to discuss the Plowden Report, January 13, 1967, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Statistics, Research and Intelligence and Planning Branches, ED 181 29. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>125</sup> HC Deb 19 January 1967 vol 739 642.

<sup>126</sup> HC Deb 19 January 1967 vol 739 105.

<sup>127</sup> HC Deb 19 January 1967 vol 739 105.

<sup>128</sup> Morgan to Ratcliffe, April 3, 1967, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 2. National Archives, Kew.



preparation of the report, the results of which were clearly presented in the final document, this seems an extraordinary undertaking. It is tempting to see it as primarily a delaying tactic. Internal letters from the DES confirm that officials believed that there was an advantage to “postponing general decisions about the major Plowden recommendations for a fairly substantial period” which would give them an opportunity of investigating issues such as “the adaptability of the existing stock of buildings” before making major spending commitments.<sup>129</sup> However, the groups which were consulted, which included the unions and other teacher organisations, local government associations and the Nursery School Association – the traditional educational establishment – seemed to take the exercise as no more than their due and produced detailed and lengthy responses. The NSA, for example, sent an “interim report” in April 1967, saying “The report is now being discussed in our 50 branches and will be put into final form in June.”<sup>130</sup> The National Union of Teachers published its response as a booklet.<sup>131</sup> This consultation exercise is evidence of how it was necessary for the DES to be seen to be working with its establishment partners. This does not imply, of course, that the organisations consulted had real influence over the department’s policy decisions in any area.

Before the responses from this consultation started coming in, the DES began formulating its plans for nursery education. As might be anticipated from Crosland’s emphasis on deprivation in his parliamentary statements, the focus was on providing

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<sup>129</sup> Toomey to Fletcher, January 23, 1967, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Statistics, Research and Intelligence and Planning Branches, ED 181 29. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>130</sup> Warren to Leadbetter, April 21, 1967, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 2. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>131</sup> National Union of Teachers, *Plowden: the Union’s comments on some of the major issues of the Plowden Report* (London: NUT, 1969).

social rescue for the most needy. However, action was to be on a distinctly modest scale. One official, Leadbetter, insisted in a departmental minute that the provision of nursery education even in Plowden's designated Educational Priority Areas was "impracticable on the grounds of cost alone" but claimed it might be possible to establish a small number of nursery classes in areas of extreme poverty "where this could be done in available accommodation or within existing minor works allocations."<sup>132</sup>

When the solicited views began to arrive, it was clear that the Plowden Report had generally received a positive welcome. An HMI report summarising responses concluded "The Report is certainly not a damp squib. .... Much good will accrue if teachers and authorities come to appreciate .... that the Department does intend to act in accordance with the spirit, even if not always the letter."<sup>133</sup> Departmental notes also presented evidence that suggested that concentrating on the most deprived areas first met with approval. The NUT, for example, wrote to Crosland: "we believe that both the needs of our children and the needs of the country as a whole demand no less than the implementation of the Report. .... We accept the proposal that the extension of nursery education should begin in the priority areas, but hope that it will be possible to carry out some parallel expansion elsewhere."<sup>134</sup> This view became transmuted in a discussion document into a statement that the NUT "accept that the extension of

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<sup>132</sup> Leadbetter to Fletcher, Gelding, Hudson, Burrows, Litton and McDougal, February 6, 1967, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>133</sup> Burrows, Reactions to the Plowden Report, May 24, 1967, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 5. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>134</sup> General Secretary NUT to Crosland, March 10, 1967, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 2. National Archives, Kew.

nursery education should begin in EPAs,”<sup>135</sup> thus emphasising the point of agreement with this policy.

The fact that the Labour government believed that the idea of EPAs matched its own concerns so closely meant that purse strings began to loosen. In July 1967, Morgan, a DES official, wrote, “Hitherto, it has seemed unlikely that additional funds would be made available, and that anything spectacular could be proposed. In the last week, the position has somewhat unexpectedly changed. It is now possible to do something about (i) Nursery education (In EPAs at any rate) and (ii) Educational priority areas generally.”<sup>136</sup> Sixteen million pounds had been secured for the EPAs and a slice of the cake was earmarked for nursery education.<sup>137</sup> Nursery expansion within the EPAs became a real possibility.

There followed an unsettled period in the Department. Crosland was replaced as Secretary of State by Patrick Gordon Walker on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1967.<sup>138</sup> As many Ministers and Secretaries of State before him, Walker professed himself a supporter of nursery education, but seemed unwilling to press for any developments beyond what had been enabled with the EPA funding. Lady Plowden wrote to him to express her displeasure at the slow progress.<sup>139</sup> Walker replied that the provision of the extra sixteen million pounds was “a major step” and implied that expecting anything further

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<sup>135</sup> Grinham, *Plowden Report: Draft Note on Nursery Education*, March 30, 1967, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>136</sup> Morgan to Leadbetter, July 24, 1967, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successor, ED 207 5. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>137</sup> Hardyman to Rossetti, August 7, 1967, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 3. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>138</sup> Simon, *Education and the Social Order*.

<sup>139</sup> Plowden to Walker, November 20, 1967, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 67. National Archives, Kew.

was not reasonable at present.<sup>140</sup> Walker was himself replaced by Edward Short, a former headteacher and NUT branch secretary,<sup>141</sup> on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1968.<sup>142</sup> Short applied himself with vigour to getting the EPA programme moving. The Steering Committee on Economic Policy agreed that the expenditure should go ahead under the auspices of the urban programme.<sup>143</sup> However, Short's further progress towards expansion was as limited as Walker's had been. Despite his claims that "nursery education was a first educational priority" and "the possibility of further extension of provision was being examined urgently and intensively,"<sup>144</sup> things ground to a halt once again. In 1970, a draft paper commissioned by the Secretary of State claimed: "The only progress that stands to our credit is the approval of about 10,000 additional nursery places...in socially deprived areas as part of the urban programme. Elsewhere there has been almost a standstill."<sup>145</sup>

The question of whether nursery classes or nursery schools should be preferred did not arise for the Labour administration. Following the lead from the Plowden Committee, who had in turn been influenced by the lack of consensus and enthusiasm among the policy network, the question of the form of provision was entirely downgraded and subsumed into the question of how any provision at all could be

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<sup>140</sup> Walker to Plowden, December 21, 1967, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 67. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>141</sup> *The Telegraph*, "Lord Glenamara," May 11, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/politics-obituaries/9260852/Lord-Glenamara.html>

<sup>142</sup> Simon, *Education and the Social Order*.

<sup>143</sup> Jameson to Hudson, July 17, 1968, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 7. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>144</sup> Tanner, Note of the meeting of the Secretary of State with a deputation from the Oxford City Labour Party, October 9, 1968, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 7. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>145</sup> Hudson, Draft Paper on Nursery Education, January 2, 1970, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 122. National Archives, Kew.

arranged. Nevertheless, Labour's emphasis on the EPAs and on addressing social inequality did have an impact on the kind of provision which emerged.

In the interests of saving money, Labour administrations were keen to make use of empty classrooms to set up nursery classes. In the meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1968, when Short declared his intention of making "a start," he claimed that "by good fortune, spare classrooms were often available" in the EPAs.<sup>146</sup> However, the idea that the whole of the programme could be carried out by this means proved over-optimistic and simplistic. It had already been noted by officials in the department that although some accommodation of this sort was available in areas of deprivation, this was not always the case: "Elsewhere (eg where any spare accommodation has been taken up by an influx of immigrants) nursery groups could be provided for only by new building."<sup>147</sup> It was not the Department's intention to allow the placing of nursery groups to be determined purely by where empty rooms were available and therefore some new buildings would be required.

The Urban Aid program, when it was introduced, covered "the provision, enlargement or improvement of nursery schools and classes, day nurseries and children's homes."<sup>148</sup> Many of these deprived areas were the areas which had nursery school provision as well as nursery class provision, and it made as much sense to expand a nursery school as to build a brand new classroom at a primary school. In fact, it appeared that expanding nursery schools was in fact marginally cheaper. One

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<sup>146</sup> Hardyman, Note of DES meeting, June 21, 1968, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 7. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>147</sup> Grinham, Plowden Report: Draft Note on Nursery Education, March 30, 1967, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 6. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>148</sup> Author unknown, Brief for the Secretary of State's meeting with the National campaign for Nursery Education, November 27, 1968, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 7. National Archives, Kew.

official, Cockerill, commented, “Three out of four proposals received are for new buildings, costing an average of £9000 per class at nursery schools and slightly more at primary schools.”<sup>149</sup> Therefore, the result of Labour’s policy was to encourage, on rather a small scale, both nursery school and nursery class development, building on rather than disrupting existing patterns of provision within urban areas. This was an incremental form of development rather than a radical shift of policy.<sup>150</sup>

### **7:11 The impact of the Plowden Report: the Conservative interpretation**

On 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1970, Margaret Thatcher became Secretary of State for the new Conservative administration.<sup>151</sup> Edward Heath’s Conservative government started life with a cost cutting agenda and Thatcher accepted that education must share the burden. Her period as Education Secretary remains to this day associated in the public mind with a number of economy measures, most notoriously, a reduction in the number of children receiving free school milk.<sup>152</sup> However, according to Gosden, Heath soon began to advocate a “dash for growth” and “increasing public expenditure .....played a prominent part in achieving an annual growth rate of 5 per cent in the gross national product.”<sup>153</sup> Thatcher, as a politician eager to make her mark, lobbied the Treasury for her share of the bounty.<sup>154</sup> At the Conservative Party conference in October 1970, she had already declared that “improving primary schools” and then the

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<sup>149</sup> Cockerill, Note on 2000 nursery classes, November 28, 1968, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 7. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>150</sup> True, Jones and Baumgartner, “Punctuated-Equilibrium Theory.”

<sup>151</sup> Simon *Education and the Social Order*.

<sup>152</sup> BBC, “In Depth: UK Confidential,” [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in\\_depth/uk/2000/uk\\_confidential/1095121.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/uk/2000/uk_confidential/1095121.stm).

<sup>153</sup> Gosden, *Education System since 1944*.

<sup>154</sup> Ian Lawrence, *Power and Politics at the Department of Education and Science* (London: Cassell, 1992), 57.

“needs of nursery education” would be her priorities.”<sup>155</sup> Her vision of what this would involve was set out comprehensively in the White Paper, *Education: A Framework for Expansion*, published in December 1972.<sup>156</sup>

This document makes clear that her reasons for interest in nursery education and the sort of constituency which influenced her were unlike those of her Labour predecessors. The expansion was seen as “the first systematic step since 1870...to offer an earlier start in education.”<sup>157</sup> Nursery education was valuable primarily because there was evidence that “children may make great educational progress before the age of five. They are capable of developing further in the use of language, in thought and in practical skills than was previously supposed. Progress of this kind gives any child a sound basis for his subsequent education.”<sup>158</sup> It was acknowledged that “it is particularly valuable for children whose home and life are restricted”<sup>159</sup> and that it was sensible to build first in the disadvantaged areas, but the shift in tone is unmistakable. Nursery education should be for all – which meant, in effect, the benefits on offer to the most deprived should be extended to the middle-classes. Thatcher’s awareness of the views of middle-class parents is also evident in the praise and support for the playgroup movement: “Local education authorities will also wish to adapt and apply to nursery education lessons which can be learnt from the experience of playgroups” in harnessing parental support and expertise.<sup>160</sup> “The contribution of playgroups” should be taken into account in local plans.<sup>161</sup> This was

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<sup>155</sup> Gosden, *Education System since 1944*, 48.

<sup>156</sup> Department of Education and Science, *Education: A Framework for Expansion* (London: HMSO, 1972).

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

consistent with a stream of Conservative thought which became prominent during the 1960s in which parental choice was seen as an increasingly important driver of positive change in education.<sup>162</sup>

The White Paper gave some guidance as to the sort of provision which was anticipated. It expressed the hope that “local plans will reflect local needs and resources” and stated that the “Government are not laying down a uniform detailed pattern.”<sup>163</sup> However, in a somewhat contradictory turn, it continued: “The Government believe it would be right for most of the extra nursery provision to take the form of classes for the under fives forming part of primary schools.”<sup>164</sup> The reason given was that “Educationally, this has the advantage of avoiding a change of school at five.”<sup>165</sup> Again, the emphasis on the intellectual/educational advantages of nursery was clear. The fact that nursery classes were considered to be a cheaper option was, however, also important: “No allowance has been made to cover the higher capital and current costs of nursery schools. Any significant expansion of nursery schools would slow down the rate at which the Government’s objectives will be reached.”<sup>166</sup> Plowden’s lack of commitment to either nursery schools or nursery classes had led to the conclusion that one might as well go for the cheaper option.

The recommendations of the White Paper were translated into official policy through Circular 2/73, issued in January 1973.<sup>167</sup> This document formally withdrew the restrictive Circular 8/60 and declared that it was the government’s intention to

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<sup>162</sup> Denis Lawton, *The Tory Mind on Education 1979-1994* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>163</sup> Department of Education and Science, *Education: A Framework for Expansion*, 6.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>167</sup> Department of Education and Science, *Circular 2/73* and Welsh Office, *Circular 39/73*, January 31, 1973.



provide nursery education for “all children whose parents want it” by 1982. As the Plowden Committee had calculated, this meant 250 000 extra full-time places (which might be used as two part-time places as required) would be needed. The preference for nursery classes, on the grounds that they were “more economical to provide and maintain,” was also made clear, although nursery schools which had already been planned would be permitted.

Unsurprisingly, the firm commitment to expansion was generally welcomed by educationalists. In 1973, Maurice Chazan from the University of Swansea edited a collection of papers from renowned commentators in the field in which the general tone was one of relief and jubilation. “We have lift-off” wrote the early years educationalist, Willem Van der Eyken.<sup>168</sup> “We are at a watershed in the history of nursery education” wrote Tessa Blackstone.<sup>169</sup> Finally, the pattern of stop-go development which had plagued nursery education throughout its history seemed to be over.

Yet again, however, the celebration proved to be premature. The oil crisis of 1973/4 damaged the economy and severely limited the implementation of the programme.<sup>170</sup> Increases in provision throughout the succeeding years were small. Owen and Moss have suggested that the percentage of children under five “receiving education in maintained schools” was around 35% in 1971 (most of these being in fact in Reception classes) and 41% in 1986: “Moreover, some of this increase in

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<sup>168</sup> Willem Van Der Eyken, “The Social and Educational Aims of Pre-School Provision” in *Education in the early years*, ed., Maurice Chazan (Swansea: Faculty of Education, University College Swansea, 1973), 18-25.

<sup>169</sup> Tessa Blackstone, “The Structure of Nursery Education: Some Reflections on Its Development in the Past and the Future,” in *Education in the early years*, ed., Maurice Chazan (Swansea: Faculty of Education, University College Swansea, 1973), 26-36.

<sup>170</sup> Norman Thomas, *Primary Education from Plowden to the 1990s* (London: Falmer Press, 1987).

participation rate is accounted for by a fall in the child population; if the population of 3 and 4 year olds in 1986 had been the same as in 1971, only 35% of children would have been in school.”<sup>171</sup>

### **7:12 The subsequent position of the nursery school/nursery class question**

The framing of the 1972 White Paper was the last occasion that explicit debate about the relative merits of nursery schools and nursery classes rose to prominence within national government. As education policy theorist, Stephen Ball, suggests, after the 1970s, reform became “not just about changing the way things are organized or done:”<sup>172</sup> the government was looking for a more profound influence on the everyday life of the classroom and this sort of question no longer captured the limelight. The policy that planned nursery schools should continue but that nursery classes were a more realistic form of expansion remained in place from the 1970s until the present day. The number of children in the different institutions today demonstrates this. In 2009, 59% of 3 and 4 year olds were attending state schools, a considerable increase on figures from the early 1970s quoted above.<sup>173</sup> However, very little of this new investment has been made in nursery schools. A report by the pressure group, Early Education, claims that there were 437 English nursery schools in existence in 2009.<sup>174</sup> According to the relevant Working Party for the Plowden

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<sup>171</sup> Charlie Owen and Peter Moss, “Patterns of preschool provision in English local authorities,” *Journal of Education Policy* 4, no. 4, (1989): 309-328.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>173</sup> Department of Education, “DCSF: Provision for children under five years of age in England January 2009,” <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000848/sfr11-2009.pdf>

<sup>174</sup> Early Education, “Nursery Schools Now: Maintained Nursery Schools in England and their role in supporting the evolution of early childhood services,” <http://www.early-education.org.uk/pdf/NSN%20download%20version.pdf>

Committee, the number was 458 in 1963.<sup>175</sup> Although there have been fluctuations in the intervening years, the similarity is striking.

A further reason for the lack of focus on the nursery school/nursery class question was that nursery education in general faded from the political stage during the 1970s and 1980s, according to policy theorists, Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay.<sup>176</sup> When it re-emerged in the 1990s, it was part of an agenda which included a strong commitment to childcare and parental (particularly maternal) employment.<sup>177</sup> The old binary choice between school/class was superseded as new forms of provision, the children's centre (often built around traditional nursery schools) and Surestart facilities, which combined health and educational services, were established. Yet again, it appeared that demonstrating that nursery education could meet the wider social need for increased childcare was the most effective way of encouraging development in this policy area.

### **7:13 Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the question of the reasons behind the preferences (or lack of preferences) for specific forms of nursery education on the part of the Plowden Committee and of successive administrations at the Department of Education and Science (research question 1a). Whereas during World War II, the question of preference was determined by an idealism unfettered, in the first instance, by financial considerations, in this period the cost of provision was very

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<sup>175</sup> Central Advisory Council, Working Party 3, Paper 13, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 85. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>176</sup> Peter Baldock, Damien Fitzgerald and Janet Kay, *Understanding Early Years Policy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Sage, 2009).

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

dominant. The frustrations caused by the lack of implementation of the 1944 Education Act were significant here. The Plowden Report considered that many different sorts of institution should be accepted in the interests of getting the implementation process moving. The Conservative government of the early 1970s recommended that expansion should take place in nursery classes because they were cheaper. Nonetheless, the decision also demonstrates something of the DES's understanding of the purposes of nursery education. The Plowden Report had said that nursery education was needed for a huge variety of different reasons, some which concerned health and well-being and some which concerned educational advantage. The Conservative administration's 1972 White Paper placed a heavy emphasis on educational advantages and argued that a reason for preferring nursery classes was to ease the transition to formal schooling.

The chapter has also answered the question of who and who was not influential in the policy process in this period (research question 1b). The Plowden Committee strongly recommended that nursery education should be expanded, due in large part to the representations of witnesses from the educational policy network. Successive governments were encouraged by the Plowden Committee to begin to implement this expansion. With regard to the question, therefore, of whether nursery education should exist at all, a pluralist approach to policy making is in evidence. However, the subsequent slow progress and return of the stop-go approach in the light of fresh economic crises demonstrates the limitation of pluralist power. Nursery education advocates were not strong enough to ensure sustained investment and focus on the issue. Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay have argued that ultimately the demands of the policy network are only ceded to when they in any case "coincide

with political agendas.”<sup>178</sup> One reason for nursery education slipping out of focus in the 1970s and 1980s may be the fact that although the Plowden Report had made a half-hearted attempt to meet the demand for childcare for working mothers, its part-time provision for over threes only was patently inadequate for the task. Therefore, an opportunity to engage a wider constituency in support of nursery education was missed, as it had been, indeed, after World War II.

The key question for this thesis, however, is who was able to influence decisions about the form nursery education took, and specifically the choice between nursery schools and nursery classes. Many policy participants seemingly lost interest in the issue at this time. The reason for this lay in the deep frustrations caused by the failure of the implementation of the 1944 Education Act with regard to nursery provision and a freeze in development throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Members of the policy network became increasingly desperate and more and more willing to sacrifice their “secondary beliefs” (such as the form which nursery education should take) for “policy core beliefs” (the need to expand nursery education).<sup>179</sup> The Plowden Committee followed this lead in making the form of institution into an issue of minimal importance. This meant that successive governments could make their own choices about this with very little political pressure being applied. The question was therefore decided ultimately by the elite.

The Labour administration did not, in fact, address the question directly. This meant that the result of its policy was a continuation of existing patterns, with numbers of both nursery schools and nursery classes increasing in the areas where

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Sabatier and Weible, “The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Innovations and Clarifications,” 194-196.

they were already sited. This may be seen as a form of path dependent policy.<sup>180</sup>

However, the quantity of nursery education was still small enough for a radical change of direction to be economically and politically possible, as it had been in 1944. Margaret Thatcher's choice of the nursery class over the nursery school marked a decisive shift in approach, or a punctuation in the policy equilibrium.<sup>181</sup> Nursery education policy over the following decades was marked by her decision.

However, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, investment in nursery education did not meet the promised level. This meant that state education services remained insufficient for the country's need at this time. With private enterprises filling the gap, today's nursery service is "a bewildering hotchpotch of day nurseries, nursery schools and classes, childminders and playgroups."<sup>182</sup> The stifling of the debate in the policy network about what might really be best for children and their families which occurred during the writing of the Plowden Report was a significant contributory factor in the development of this chaotic system.

Chapters four, five, six and seven have provided an analysis of national policy over the period 1918 to 1972. The following chapter will re-examine this period with the focus on Local Education Authorities, who were responsible for policy implementation. This will illuminate the impact of the choices made between nursery schools and classes on what was provided for young children and their families.

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<sup>180</sup> Kirsten Scheiwe and Harry Willekens, eds. *Child Care and Preschool Development in Europe: Institutional Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>181</sup> True, Jones and Baumgartner, "Punctuated-Equilibrium Theory."

<sup>182</sup> Martin Hughes, Berry Mayall, Peter Moss, Jane Perry, Pat Petrie, and Gill Pinkerton, *Nurseries Now: A Fair Deal for Parents and Children* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), 10.

## **Chapter Eight: A “correctional coda”<sup>1</sup> : Explaining diversity in four urban education authorities**

### **8:1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to supplement the analysis of national policy regarding nursery schools and classes with an analysis of local policy in four urban Local Education Authorities (LEAs). There were marked differences in the ratio of nursery schools to nursery classes in different LEAs in the period under investigation (1918-1972) and indeed, these differences persist today. The 1967 Plowden Report described a “broad crescent” of nursery schools, reaching from London, through Oxford, Birmingham, East Lancashire and Bradford to Durham. Only a few “minor concentrations” existed outside this arc. The report further noted that “surprising variations exist between towns of similar sizes in similar regions.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore local voices or local conditions must have impacted in some way on what was actually provided for local children. A study of nursery education at this level is therefore a vital part of the story of this policy area. As historian Norman Morris has pointed out, what happened within LEAs can provide a “correctional coda” to our understanding of policy development within central government.<sup>3</sup>

As has been discussed in chapter three, this analysis of local policy uses a qualitative case study approach. In this, it builds on work by early years historian, Tessa Blackstone. Blackstone attempted to investigate the causes of variation in the quantity of nursery provision and found that a quantitative approach was not

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<sup>1</sup> Norman Morris, “The Contribution of Local Investigations to Historical Knowledge,” in *Local Studies and the History of Education*, ed. T.G.Cook (London: Methuen, 1972), 153-167, 153.

<sup>2</sup> Central Advisory Council for Education (England), *Children and their Primary Schools* (London: HMSO, 1967), 117.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, “Contribution of Local Investigations to Historical Knowledge,” 153.

successful. She found that “unique historical factors” within each LEA and “the attitudes and interests of local officials and politicians” were highly significant and a qualitative investigation was more suitable for analysing the variation.<sup>4</sup>

As the focus of this thesis is on the form of provision rather than quantity, it concentrates on areas where expansion was facilitated by the fact that the area was seen by central government as a priority because of challenging socio-economic conditions. Therefore all four areas chosen are major cities with significant pockets of deprivation: London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leicester. The fact that the four areas actively pursued and were willing to fund the socially progressive policy of nursery education (for a significant amount of the period covered, at least) is another factor which they have in common with each other.

However, it should be made clear that there is no easy association between such a policy and exclusively left-wing party politics. The Conservatives were the dominant party in Manchester politics in the inter-war period, although Labour took over this role in the early 1950s.<sup>5</sup> Politics in Birmingham were dominated by the Unionist (Conservative) Party in the 1930s<sup>6</sup> and for the rest of the period under investigation, 1945 -1972, the city shifted allegiance between Labour and the Conservatives, with national swings “replicated with almost unerring precision in the city.”<sup>7</sup> Leicester politics were dominated by a Conservative/Liberal alliance in the inter-war period and swung between Labour and the Conservatives after World War

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<sup>4</sup> Tessa Blackstone, *A Fair Start: The Provision of Pre-School Education* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1971), 122.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Kidd, *Manchester: A History*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Parker, *Faith on the Home Front: Aspects of Church Life and Popular Religion in Birmingham 1939-1945* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Newton, *Second City Politics: Democratic Processes and Decision-Making in Birmingham* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 14.



II.<sup>8</sup> London, however, did have a prolonged period of Labour government, from 1934 until the dismantling of London County Council in 1965, with continued Labour electoral success in the General London Council then established.<sup>9</sup>

Blackstone's study found that the influence of party politics on the quantity of nursery education in different local authorities was in fact small.<sup>10</sup> In an interesting parallel, Randall and Fisher's study into childcare facilities demonstrates that high levels of provision were found in areas with both strong Labour and Conservative majorities, with no difference evident between the two until the 1970s.<sup>11</sup> The investigation for this thesis has found no evidence that party allegiance impacted on the question of whether nursery classes or nursery schools were to be preferred.

A distinction can be drawn between the LEAs who, in the period 1918-1972, showed particular enthusiasm for and commitment to maximizing provision through nursery classes and those who demonstrated a commitment to developing a significant network of nursery schools alongside nursery class provision. The selection of cases has been made with reference to these two categories. Leicester, which did not establish any mainstream nursery schools at all, and Manchester, with its extensive nursery class provision and its determined advocacy for the benefits of large numbers of classes, represent the first category. Birmingham, which was identified by Plowden as having more nursery schools than any other area,<sup>12</sup> and

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<sup>8</sup> David Nash and David Reeder, *Leicester in the Twentieth Century* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Saint, introduction to *Politics and the People of London: The London County Council 1889-1965*, ed. Andrew Saint (London: Hambledon Press, 1989), ix-xiv.

<sup>10</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

<sup>11</sup> Vicky Randall and Kimberly Fisher, "Child day care provision: explaining local variation," *Children and Society* 15 (2001): 175.

<sup>12</sup> CAC, *Children and their Primary Schools*, 117.

London (as represented by London County Council, in existence until 1965)

represent the second.

One aim of the analysis is to account for differences in the distribution of nursery classes and nursery schools in these four cities (which is research question 2a). The chapter considers the reasons why each city adopted the approach it did during the period 1918-1972, and attempts to identify factors which may have caused it to fall into one or other of the above categories. Although generalization beyond the case studies should only be attempted with caution, many of these factors apply to other urban LEAs too, and therefore the theory which the chapter presents will prove a useful starting point for understanding the cause of variation on a wider scale.

A further aim of this chapter is to analyse the nature of the balance of power between central and local government as regards this area of policy in this period (research question 2b). The preceding four chapters, which concern national policy at points between 1918 and 1972, suggest the dominance of an elitist model of decision-making, where the Board/Ministry/Department of Education (and Science) was very much in control of the policy direction. However, the thesis argues that LEAs were able to bring some influence to bear, most notably in persuading Butler to modify the position in the 1944 Act so that nursery classes would be permitted in certain circumstances.<sup>13</sup> This chapter looks at the question of the exercise of power and the applicability of elitist/pluralist models from a different angle, considering the policy implementation process, over which LEAs had control.

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<sup>13</sup> Butler to Secretary of the Board, October 21, 1943. Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew

The method used for this examination of power was inspired by educational historian Gary McCulloch's 2002 study of patterns of secondary education.<sup>14</sup> The analysis is organised by dividing the 1918-1972 period into smaller chunks of time, differentiated from each other by changes in the Board/Ministry/DES policy. The approach of each LEA within each time period is compared to the others and also to the directives and/or advice issuing from central government. In this way, the relationship can be examined in order to determine exactly where the opportunities for individual variation occurred and if and when there was resistance from the LEAs to the policy of the national elite.

The limitations of what has been possible in this investigation need to be acknowledged. It would have been highly interesting and highly relevant to investigate decisions at the local level using much the same method as was used with decisions at the national level, looking in detail at internal discussions and considering which interest or professional groups were able to wield most influence on Education Committee members. Alas, the extant data in local authority archives is too patchy to sustain such an approach. However, there is generally enough evidence to determine the reasons why members took the decisions they did and the sorts of arguments which were put forward. Some gaps in local records can be filled by using data from the national archives, which contain records of discussions between local and national governments.

This chapter presents the thesis that the differences between the two categories of LEAs emerged and were securely established between 1918 and 1939.

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<sup>14</sup> Gary McCulloch, "Local Education Authorities and the organisation of secondary education, 1943-1950," *Oxford Review of Education* 28, no. 2 (2002) 235-246.

In this period, particularly during the 1920s, the position of the Board of Education was that both schools and classes were acceptable alternatives and that LEAs should be given a fairly free hand in deciding what was needed. The views and opinions of local politicians were therefore crucial. The marked determination on the part of Leicester and Manchester that specialised nursery education should be provided for as many children as possible, even in institutions that fell somewhat short of the ideal, was the key cause of the difference between them and the other two cities.

After World War II, the newly formed Ministry of Education took a much firmer position on the sort of institution which it preferred. However, because of “path dependency,” the idea that policy decisions progressively close off future alternatives and radical shifts in direction therefore become difficult,<sup>15</sup> pre-war patterns largely remained. Therefore the control of the central government elite over this policy issue was not absolute, and a more pluralistic model, where local politicians were also able to exercise power, provides a better explanation for the policy in action.

## **8:2 Response to the 1918 Education Act**

Section 19 of the 1918 Education Act, which allowed LEAs to support nursery education, permitted them to invest in, “nursery schools, which expression shall include nursery classes.”<sup>16</sup> This somewhat confusing formulation implied there was a distinction between nursery schools and classes which was generally acknowledged, but that the Board of Education regarded them as essentially

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<sup>15</sup> Adrian Kay, *The Dynamics of Public Policy: Theory and Evidence* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2006), 29.

<sup>16</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act, 1918*, Section 19.

equivalent, or, at least, was not inclined to dictate to local authorities which should be preferred. In the *Regulations for Nursery Schools*, published in 1919, Selby-Bigge, Permanent Secretary to the Board, described nursery schools as being at the “experimental stage” and said that the fact that it was generally “impracticable” to build large numbers of separate buildings for nursery schools was not “altogether to be regretted.”<sup>17</sup> The Board suggested in this document that small scale experimentation with a variety of approaches was what was needed and recommended that LEAs consider providing a small number of both institutions in order to assess their relative merits.

Neither Leicester nor Birmingham LEAs at this time showed a marked interest in nursery education. In Leicester, the Education Committee was focused on the provision of secondary education, passing a motion in May 1919 that “no child desirous and capable of profiting by it” should be denied secondary education and maintenance allowances should be made available to facilitate this.<sup>18</sup> Such a major spending commitment left little opportunity for developments in other areas. Birmingham Education Committee also showed little interest in the policy area, despite the fact that one of the earliest free, voluntary-run, kindergartens had been established in the city.<sup>19</sup> Birmingham had a particularly acute problem with a lack of accommodation and over-large classes and was struggling to cope. This fact was regularly referred to in inspectors’ reports. For example, one such report produced

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<sup>17</sup> L.A.Selby-Bigge, *Regulations for Nursery Schools*, 1919, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 2. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>18</sup> Borough of Leicester, *Minutes of Elementary Schools Sub-Committee 1918-1919*, May 29, 1919, 19.D.59/VII/403. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

<sup>19</sup> Kristen Dombkowski Nawrotzki, “The Anglo-American Kindergarten Movements and Early Education in England and the USA 1850-1965” (PhD diss, University of Michigan, 2005).

in 1921 commented on the fact that “one teacher is regularly in charge of a class of 74 children on roll.”<sup>20</sup> A report by the Chief Education Officer, P. Innes, in 1923 confirmed that “Birmingham has a considerably higher proportion of large classes than most of the authorities” with 14.8% of classes with over 60 children on roll.<sup>21</sup> Relieving this problem was the financial priority for the LEA in this period.

London and Manchester, however, were able to respond a little more positively. In Manchester, with the Elementary Education Sub-committee as the body immediately responsible, four nursery schools were established in the three years after the war, one of which was, however, “unsuccessful.”<sup>22</sup> In the very beginning, then, Manchester saw nursery schools as the normal form of provision. Local historian, Arthur Redford, claims that when the Board of Education started to insist on economies, “Manchester compromised by starting special nursery classes.”<sup>23</sup> According to Redford, the justification for these classes was that they were cheaper and the on-going clearance of slum areas meant that the building of substantial new schools was a poor investment because of the mobile population. Shena Simon, for many years a council member and sometime chairman of the Education Committee, saw things differently, however. In her 1938 account, she paints a picture of an early and enthusiastic embrace of nursery classes, partly for practical reasons but also because the Education Committee believed they were the

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<sup>20</sup> City of Birmingham, Education Committee: Minutes of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, July 14, 1921, BCC /BH/2/1/1/13. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>21</sup> City of Birmingham, Education Committee: Minutes of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, insert P. Innes, Statistics of Public Education 1919-1920, February 15, 1923, BCC/BH/2/1/1/15. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Redford, *The History of Local Government in Manchester: Volume III, the Last Half Century* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1940), 347.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.

best provision to meet the needs of children.<sup>24</sup> She claims that when plans to implement the 1918 Act were made, a small number of nursery schools were proposed but it was anticipated from the beginning that “for the mass of the children,” nursery classes should be provided.<sup>25</sup> Nursery classes could, for the same amount of money, provide a service for many more children than nursery schools and, crucially, it would be “a cardinal mistake” to uncouple nursery provision from the elementary schools which children would later attend.<sup>26</sup>

The initial reaction of London County Council to the 1918 Education Act as a whole was one of “strong approval.”<sup>27</sup> The fact that the Act allowed the provision of nursery schools was included in the council’s summary of the “main proposals.”<sup>28</sup> Responsibility for policy formation in this area was given to the Central Care Sub-committee, who proposed “an experiment,” consisting of “12 nursery schools, six to be attached to elementary schools and six not to be so attached.”<sup>29</sup> The use of terminology here is a little confusing, but it seems reasonable to assume that this meant six schools, as the term would later be understood, and six classes. In the end, the Education Committee as a whole decided that the “experiment” should involve three nursery schools and one nursery class.<sup>30</sup> London, then, was experimenting in

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<sup>24</sup> Shena D. Simon, *A Century of City Government – Manchester 1838-1938* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>27</sup> London County Council, Education Committee: Minutes of Proceedings, insert Report of the General Purposes Sub-Committee, January 23, 1918, London County Council Education Committee: Minutes of Proceedings Jan-Dec 1918. London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>28</sup> London County Council, Education Committee: Minutes of Proceedings, insert Report of the General Purposes Sub-Committee, January 23, 1918, London County Council Education Committee: Minutes of Proceedings Jan-Dec 1918. London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>29</sup> London County Council, Education Committee, Children’s Care (Central) Sub-Committee, Agenda papers, May 23, 1919, LCC/MIN/3167. London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>30</sup> London County Council, Education Committee, Minutes of Proceedings, Central Care Sub-Committee Report, Nursery Schools, 25 February, 1920, London County Council Education Committee: Minutes of Proceedings Jan-Jun 1920. London Metropolitan Archives.

precisely the spirit which Selby-Bigge had intended, aiming to establish small numbers of nursery schools and nursery classes with a view to seeing which worked best.<sup>31</sup>

Both of the LEAs which had an active commitment to nursery education at this stage conformed to the Board's recommended approach, and opened a small number of both schools and classes. However, one potentially significant difference between London and Manchester was the committee/sub-committee which was responsible for these institutions. London assigned the task of implementing the experiment to the Central Care Sub-Committee: in Manchester, it was the Elementary Education Committee which made the decisions. This may be an indication of a different interpretation of the purposes of nursery schools/classes. A care committee might be more likely to emphasize the health benefits of nursery education, an elementary education committee might tend to have more of an eye on continuity between nursery and school and easing the transition process, as suggested by Shena Simon's comments. Perhaps already at this early stage the seeds of the subsequent diversity were present.

### **8:3 The “stop-go policy” of the 1920s**

The 1920s and early 1930s were characterized by what Whitbread has described as a “stop-go policy” in the development of nursery education.<sup>32</sup> In 1921, the Board of Education announced in Circular 1190 that because of a financial crisis,

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<sup>31</sup> London County Council, Education Committee Minutes of Proceedings, insert Report of the Central Care Sub-Committee, June 4, 1919, London County Council Education Committee: Minutes of Proceedings Jan-Jun 1919. London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>32</sup> Nanette Whitbread, *The Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 67.



it was not in a position to sanction expenditure for new nursery schools.<sup>33</sup> This circular was withdrawn in 1924, when the financial situation had eased somewhat.<sup>34</sup> In 1929, a circular was issued by the Board of Education and the Ministry of Health, strongly encouraging Local Authorities to establish services for pre-school children, with nursery schools and nursery classes, together with day nurseries, all receiving approval. However, in 1932, a ban on the building of new nursery schools was put in place by the National (Coalition) government.<sup>35</sup> By 1934, the Board felt that it was again able to encourage development in some areas.<sup>36</sup>

An LEA keen to develop nursery provision in the 1920s and early 1930s was likely to have had a frustrating time, with projects being developed and then needing to be put on ice to wait for a more favourable climate. The Board of Education gave very little lead as to what sort of provision might be needed, and so the development of either form or a combination of both was possible. However, because a nursery class was easier, quicker and cheaper to establish than a nursery school, one might anticipate that more nursery classes than nursery schools would actually become a reality. Developments in Leicester and Manchester broadly conform to this pattern. Developments in London and Birmingham do not, as there was no particular enthusiasm for nursery classes in those areas.

In 1927, the medical officer in Leicester, Allan Warner, noted, "There are no Nursery Schools under the Leicester Education Committee, but the matter has

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<sup>33</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

<sup>34</sup> Freda Hawtrey, History of the Nursery School Movement, (unpublished notes prepared for Lady Astor), January 16, 1935, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 4. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>35</sup> Philip Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government: British Politics, the Economy and Empire 1926-1932* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>36</sup> Author unknown, Nursery schools, Board of Education memorandum, April 24, 1934, Board of Education and predecessors: Private Office: Papers (series 1), ED 24 1466. National Archives, Kew.

received a great deal of consideration during the year.”<sup>37</sup> One impetus for this consideration came from the Elementary Schools Committee member, Emily Fortey. At a meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1927, she spoke of “the great importance” of providing nursery schools and persuaded members to establish a nursery schools committee to investigate the matter.<sup>38</sup>

The newly formed Nursery Schools Sub-committee reported to the Elementary Committee on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1927.<sup>39</sup> The sub-committee were convinced that nursery schools had “passed beyond the experimental stage,” a phrase redolent of Selby-Bigge’s 1919 regulations. The case for their utility was made and “Nursery School accommodation should be provided for all who will avail themselves of it.” The aim of this provision should be “(a) Educational (b) Hygienic (c) Social.” It was necessary to inculcate “good habits of behaviour in its widest sense.” This required an understanding of the needs of the child’s mind, which many mothers did not have and many others “though competent, cannot exercise owing to absence from home.” Presumably this was because of paid employment. The childcare needs of women employed in local industry were therefore seen as an argument for the provision of nursery schools. However, there is no evidence that the needs of industry to employ such women were seen as important: the sub-committee was interested in counterbalancing the perceived ill effects of mothers working and not in promoting the practice.

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<sup>37</sup> Borough of Leicester, Minutes of Education Committee 1927-1928, insert Annual Report of the Medical Officer 1927, 19.D.59/VII/412. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

<sup>38</sup> Borough of Leicester, Minutes of Elementary Schools Sub-Committee 1925-1928, April 4, 1927, 19.D.59/VII/42. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

<sup>39</sup> Borough of Leicester, Minutes of Elementary Schools Sub-Committee 1925-1928, December 5, 1927, 19.D.59/VII/42. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

Members of the sub-committee had been assiduous in exploring what sort of institution might best achieve their aims, visiting nursery schools in Bradford, Deptford and schools and classes in Manchester. There is no systematic discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of schools and classes in the report, but the Rachel McMillan School in Deptford is the focus of particular praise: “the spirit of Miss Margaret McMillan pervaded it: the results were very striking.” The hagiographic tone of the reference to Margaret McMillan, the nursery school pioneer, is in itself an indication that the nursery school was the preferred option. The sub-committee’s initial suggestion was that shelters “like those at the Deptford school” should be provided for 3 and 4 year olds in an area of the city where there was a particular issue with finding sufficient accommodation in elementary schools for under fives.

It is not clear what happened to this project, but it seems to have failed to get off the ground. Continued attempts were made to find other suitable sites, but further issues arose. One site, for example, was considered unsuitable by many sub-committee members because it was near the dye works.<sup>40</sup> Eventually, one project was ready for implementation, but at the last minute, the Board of Education decided that it could not be approved “in present financial circumstances.”<sup>41</sup> However, the Education Committee found that nursery classes could be established far more quickly and easily. Allan Warner’s 1928 report states that, “There are no buildings specially constructed for Nursery Schools in Leicester, but during the year, two

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<sup>40</sup> Borough of Leicester, Minutes of Elementary Schools Sub-Committee 1929-1933, January 20, 1930, insert Site for Nursery School, 19.D.59/VII/43. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

<sup>41</sup> Turnbull to Borough of Leicester Education Committee, May 22, 1932, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 304. National Archives, Kew.

classes have been started which are, as far as possible, run upon Nursery School lines.”<sup>42</sup> There is very much a suggestion that this was not seen as ideal in the phrase “as far as possible,” but the classes were nevertheless perceived to be a success and others were opened.<sup>43</sup> By 1932, 23 such classes had been established in Infants’ schools.<sup>44</sup> Despite the sub-committee’s clear preference for schools, the combination of difficulties in identifying suitable sites and financial cutbacks at the most inopportune moments had conspired against their establishment and a system of nursery classes began to emerge.

Some similarities can be seen in the development of nursery education in Manchester, although that city was less inclined to the view that nursery schools were the ideal which should be aspired to in all areas. Manchester was not, as the Director of Education, Spurley Hey, pointed out at a meeting of the Nursery School Association (NSA) in 1925, “as some supposed, antagonistic to nursery schools.” A small number had in fact been established.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, Hey was markedly enthusiastic about nursery classes and a strong advocate for their development. At the NSA meeting, he spelt out the advantages of a system of nursery classes, clearly emphasizing the fact that because of their relative cheapness, they could provide for a greater number of children.<sup>46</sup> As was the case in Leicester, the LEA had found that it was relatively easy to establish nursery classes and the Manchester network was

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<sup>42</sup> Borough of Leicester, Minutes of Education Committee 1928-1929, insert Annual Report of the School Medical Officer, 1928, 19.D.59/VII/413. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

<sup>43</sup> Borough of Leicester, Minutes of Elementary Schools Sub-Committee 1929-1933, February 18, 1929, 19.D.59/VII/43. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

<sup>44</sup> Borough of Leicester, Minutes of Elementary Schools Sub-Committee 1929-1933, May 2, 1932, 19.D.59/VII/43. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

<sup>45</sup> Nursery School Association, Report on Open Meeting, January 3, 1925, Early Documents File, 13/4. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>46</sup> Nursery School Association, Report on Open Meeting, January 3, 1925, Early Documents File, 13/4. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

developing apace, quickly becoming firmly established. Hey said that there were currently twenty classes, “by July there would be thirty and later fifty.”<sup>47</sup>

London, in contrast, did not pursue options to develop nursery classes. After the cuts in 1921, the LCC curtailed its experimentation with different forms of nursery education. In 1928, the issue was re-examined and it was “decided not to establish nursery classes in infants’ departments but to provide two detached nursery schools as an experiment.”<sup>48</sup> Despite the re-emergence of the term “experiment,” this was not an even-handed attempt to see which form of education worked best, and it seems clear that the Education Committee had taken the decision that nursery schools were to be preferred. One potentially influential voice was that of LCC inspector, P.G.Ballard, who according to an article in *The Times*, advocated nursery schools because “At that age [children’s] bodily needs were more imperative than their mental needs.” The infant school did not reach “a sufficiently high hygienic standard” and opportunities to inculcate good habits were limited.<sup>49</sup>

In January 1930, there were nine recognised nursery schools in London, providing places for 600 children. Two new schools to be opened in the summer would provide for about 300 more. There were no nursery classes.<sup>50</sup> However, it is important to realise that the LEA continued to allow under fives into elementary schools in the ad hoc way it always had. 123 689 children were in babies’ classes in

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<sup>47</sup> Nursery School Association, Report on Open Meeting, January 3, 1925, Early Documents File, 13/4. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>48</sup> G.H.Gater, Information Sheet – Enclosure C, April 7, 1930, Education Officer’s Department: Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education: Subject and Policy files – General: Children under school age, LCC/EO/PS/1/16. London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>49</sup> “Educationists in Conference: Nursery Schools and Classes: Spelling Old and New,” *The Times*, January 5, 1925, 7.

<sup>50</sup> G.H.Gater, Information Sheet – Enclosure C, April 7, 1930, Education Officer’s Department: Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education: Subject and Policy files – General: Children under school age, 1905-28, LCC/EO/PS/1/16. London Metropolitan Archives.

1930.<sup>51</sup> In London's view, then, nursery education was a special service for the most deprived and this was best delivered in nursery schools. Most children under five could, however, manage satisfactorily in an elementary school without any particular attention being given to their needs.

In Birmingham, after the withdrawal of the restrictive Circular 1190 in 1924, the Nursery School Sub-sub-committee, attached to the Hygiene Sub-committee, was established.<sup>52</sup> In March 1924, it considered "the proposal made by the Chief Education Officer for the establishment of a Nursery Class" and agreed to support this course of action.<sup>53</sup> According to an unpublished history of Birmingham LEA by an Assistant Education Officer, M. G. R. Adams, the Education Committee also decided in this period to establish "a Nursery School for 80 children in rented premises at the Women's Settlement in Summer Lane" and "to pay a grant to the old established school for 40 children at Selly Oak,"<sup>54</sup> which was the free kindergarten established in 1904.<sup>55</sup> It seems, therefore, that there was no clear position taken on what sort of provision might be most appropriate at this stage. These institutions were established and funded "by way of experiment."<sup>56</sup>

Adams describes how the encouragement local authorities received in 1929 to develop their nursery education systems led the LEA to "embark upon a scheme

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<sup>51</sup> G.H.Gater, Information Sheet – Enclosure C, April 7, 1930, Education Officer's Department: Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education: Subject and Policy files – General: Children under school age, 1905-28, LCC/EO/PS/1/16. London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>52</sup> City of Birmingham, Education Committee, Minutes of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, March 20, 1924, BCC /BH/2/1/1/16. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>53</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, March 20, 1924, BCC /BH/2/1/1/16. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>54</sup> M.G.R.Adams, History of Birmingham Education Committee, Undated, BCL: Miscellaneous Education Files. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>55</sup> Phoebe Cusden, *The English Nursery School* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1938)

<sup>56</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, March 20, 1924, BCC /BH/2/1/1/16. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

for the provision of 1500 new places in Nursery Schools and Classes at a rate of 500 places in each of the three succeeding years.”<sup>57</sup> The Chief Education Officer and the sub-sub-committee, however, seemed convinced that nursery schools were preferable to nursery classes. Writing in 1934, the Chief Education Officer referred to a visit by the Nursery Sub-sub-committee members to Manchester which had been made at around the time the 1929 scheme was formulated. As a result of the visit, they decided that schools were superior to classes: “by reason of the aggregation of children in larger numbers, they could be more effectively grouped according to their age and ability,” and therefore more appropriate activities could be provided.<sup>58</sup> However, finding appropriate land for nursery schools was difficult either “because the price was prohibitive, the site too large or irregular in shape or level, or because the character of the surrounding property made it doubtful whether the establishment of a nursery school was justified.”<sup>59</sup> This is why plans for nursery classes were also made. In any case, the financial crisis of 1931 meant that no element of the scheme was implemented, although the land for one school had been secured.<sup>60</sup>

It is thus during this period that the distinction between Manchester and Leicester on the one hand and London and Birmingham on the other began to emerge. Manchester was convinced that nursery classes were the best solution for the overwhelming majority of children. Leicester was not convinced of this, but still regarded them as successful enough to invest in them heavily when opportunities for

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<sup>57</sup> M.G.R.Adams, History of Birmingham Education Committee, Undated, BCL: Miscellaneous Education Files. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>58</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, October 18, 1934, BCC /BH/2/1/1/26. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>59</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, October 18, 1934, BCC /BH/2/1/1/26. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>60</sup> M.G.R.Adams, History of Birmingham Education Committee, Undated, BCL: Miscellaneous Education Files. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

establishing nursery schools were sparse. London and Birmingham were more firmly convinced that nursery schools should be the normal form of provision, and therefore did not invest time and resources in establishing nursery classes. Although Birmingham began to explore the option of nursery classes when plans for nursery schools seemed doomed, this was not pursued with vigour. The principal causes of difference between the two pairings, then, was the enthusiasm and determination of Manchester and Leicester for taking opportunities to develop nursery education wherever these might present themselves. The fact that London and Birmingham gave responsibility for nursery education to the health/care sub-committees may have been a factor in inhibiting the development of nurseries as part of elementary schools.

#### **8:4 From the Hadow Report to World War II**

In 1933, a report into nursery and infant education was produced by the Board of Education's Consultative Committee. This committee had clear views on the respective benefits of nursery schools and classes.<sup>61</sup> In the most deprived areas, nursery schools were considered the most suitable form of provision, but in slightly less deprived areas, nursery classes would "satisfy existing need."<sup>62</sup> This view was adopted by the Board of Education throughout the 1930s. This was stated in Circular 1444 in 1936<sup>63</sup> and restated in a written answer to a parliamentary question in 1938 by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board, Kenneth Lindsay.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools* (London: HMSO, 1933).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-5.

<sup>63</sup> Board of Education, *Circular 144: Administrative Programme of Educational Development*, January 6, 1936.

<sup>64</sup> HC Deb 10 February 1938 vol 331 cc1273-4W.



Large cities contain areas across the socio-economic spectrum: some parts are very wealthy, some predominately middle-class, some disadvantaged and some extremely deprived. Therefore, in the long term, each city, if it were following the policy of the Board of Education during the 1930s, would be looking to develop a mixed system of schools and classes. However, in the short-term, there was a choice to be made between prioritizing cheaper and more easily established nursery classes for a large number of children or more expensive, less easily established nursery schools for a smaller number living in the most disadvantaged areas. It was also possible for LEAs to disagree with central government about the nature of specific areas and what was required there. There was flexibility built in here for local authorities to find their own path and the diversity established in the 1920s continued.

London was the local authority whose development matched the provision desired by the Board most closely, as there was harmony at this point between the national policy and that of the LEA. Shortly after the publication of the 1933 Hadow Report, the LCC commissioned its own investigation into the best form of provision. The team chosen called for further experimentation and data collection, and therefore for the establishment of “two or three independent nursery schools,” “one or possibly, two attached nursery schools” (nursery wings) and six nursery classes, “on the lines of the Leicester experiment.”<sup>65</sup> Plans to implement this “experiment” were approved for the 1935-6 budget.<sup>66</sup> In 1938, a joint report of the Elementary

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<sup>65</sup> Stevenson, Samson and McVail, Nursery Schools, Nursery Classes, Nursery Wings, July 3, 1934, Education Officer’s Department: Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education: Subject and Policy files – General: Children under school age, 1905-28, LCC/EO/PS/1/17. London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>66</sup> E.M.Rich to Organising Secretary of NSA, August 4, 1934, Early Documents File, 13/10. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

Education and Special Services Sub-committees stated that the nursery school “is much the more valuable in promoting the healthy development of young children needing special nurture,” but “on financial grounds alone” most of the children who needed special care would need to be provided for in nursery classes.<sup>67</sup> Five new nursery schools and 24 new nursery classes were planned for the period 1938-1941.

Birmingham attempted to conform to the national policy directives in establishing both schools and classes, but the implementation of most of its plans continued to be thwarted by circumstances largely beyond its control. By the 1930s, considerable investment by the LEA had to a great extent alleviated the problem of extra-large class sizes in elementary schools: a report by Chief Education Officer Innes in 1935 indicated that, “Birmingham now occupies a position which appears to be about normal for such an Authority.”<sup>68</sup> In October 1934, Innes reminded the Hygiene Sub-Committee of their previous plans for nursery education<sup>69</sup> and it resolved to continue with the plans for a school on the land already secured at Heneage Street but also proposed new classes at Elkington Street and Dartmouth Street schools.<sup>70</sup> However, the Elkington Street project ran into difficulties because the Board of Education did not feel that this area was sufficiently deprived to warrant

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<sup>67</sup> London County Council, Minutes of LCC Education Committee (extract), insert, Joint Report of the Elementary Education and Special Services Sub-Committee, May 9 and 10, 1938, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 22. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>68</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, insert P. Innes, Report, March 21, 1935, BCC/BH/2/1/1/27. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>69</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, October 18, 1934, BCC/BH/2/1/1/26. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>70</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, insert Chief Education Officer, Nursery Schools and Classes (Hygiene Sub-Committee), October 11, 1934, BCC/BH/2/1/1/26. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service; City of Birmingham Education Committee: Minutes of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, October 18, 1934, BCC/BH/2/1/1/26. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

such provision and other areas should be more of a priority.<sup>71</sup> The Board was informed that the LEA had already considered eight other schools but found that there were no suitable classrooms or not enough playground space or that the schools were not “in need of nursery classes.”<sup>72</sup> The Heneage Street project also did not go as planned. According to M. G. R. Adams, the public works committee required the land and although a new site was found, the delay meant the school was still not open when war broke out in 1939.<sup>73</sup> Plans for other classes and schools were considered and rejected for a variety of reasons which were not always clearly expressed in council minutes: “information recently received from the City Surveyor” is one explanation given.<sup>74</sup> Finally some measure of success was achieved in 1937 when the slum clearance programme resulted in empty classrooms which could be converted into nursery classes and three were planned.<sup>75</sup> Generally, though, Birmingham’s early years provision remained sparse.

Leicester, too, attempted to conform to the expected policy but did not find it easy to comply. The position of the 1933 Hadow Report, that nursery schools were to be preferred “where the housing and general economic conditions are seriously below average,”<sup>76</sup> was wholly compatible with the city’s approach in the late 1920s and did not cause a change in policy direction. A letter from the Nursery School Association, pressing LEAs to reserve sites for schools when slums were cleared,

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<sup>71</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, March 21, 1935, BCC/BH/2/1/1/27. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>72</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, March 21, 1935, BCC/BH/2/1/1/27. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>73</sup> M.G.R.Adams, History of Birmingham Education Committee, Undated, BCL: Miscellaneous Education Files. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>74</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, June 17, 1937, BCC/BH/2/1/1/29. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>75</sup> M.G.R.Adams, History of Birmingham Education Committee, Undated, BCL: Miscellaneous Education Files. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>76</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools*, 114-115.

met with the comment that “The Committee signify their concurrence with the general policy advocated by the Nursery School Association in connection with this matter.”<sup>77</sup>

However, it had been found before the publication of the Hadow Report that establishing nursery schools was a slow process, whereas providing nursery classes was quicker, easier and cheaper. This did not change. Plans for schools brewed slowly: arrangements were made for a school to be built in Catherine Street, but this did not come to fruition before the war.<sup>78</sup> The expansion of the nursery class network carried on apace. As there were already many under fives within elementary schools, it was often simply a matter of adapting and upgrading existing facilities. A series of developments set in motion in 1934 would seem to be of this type.<sup>79</sup> It is hard to be sure exactly what motivated the dedication to the cause which the LEA showed, but certainly the needs of working mothers provided part of the justification. In a letter from the Director of Education to the Board, asking them “to sanction” alterations to classrooms, statistics about working mothers in the areas around the schools are included.<sup>80</sup>

The city’s nursery classes began to gain a reputation both for their quality and quantity. They were commented on at a Nursery School Association conference for local authorities in 1936, and this was one way in which others became aware of them: the Birmingham delegate, for example, reported back to his council that

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<sup>77</sup> Borough of Leicester, Minutes of Elementary Schools Sub-Committee 1933-1936, February 5, 1934, 19.D.59/VII/44. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

<sup>78</sup> Borough of Leicester, Minutes of Elementary Schools Sub-Committee 1936-1938, January 6, 1936, 19.D.59/VII/45. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

<sup>79</sup> Borough of Leicester, Minutes of Elementary Schools Sub-Committee 1933-1936, May 7, 1934, 19.D.59/VII/44. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

<sup>80</sup> F.P.Armitage to Board of Education, May 30, 1936, Board of Education and predecessor: Elementary Education, Local Education Authority Supply Files, ED 16 789. National Archives, Kew.

Leicester had “Nursery Class places for all who want to come, and Nursery School standards of hygiene throughout Nursery Classes and Infant School Classes alike.”<sup>81</sup>

In her 1938 book, *The English Nursery School*, Phoebe Cusden, who had been organising secretary of the Nursery School Association, praised Leicester provision very highly: “In newly built infant schools a beautifully planned nursery wing is included which makes it possible to achieve almost all that a well-organised nursery school could achieve.”<sup>82</sup> Provision was of sufficiently high quality to alarm the Board of Education: it pressed the council to ensure the classes were not “over-elaborate” as “other Authorities who might be visiting Leicester might be somewhat frightened by the expenditure involved and would decide not to make any developments of a similar kind in their areas.”<sup>83</sup>

As war broke out in 1939, Leicester had a system of nursery classes which was regarded as one of the best and most extensive in the country. It still had no fully operational nursery schools, with the exception of a unit within a residential children’s home which was sited outside the city.<sup>84</sup> The furious pace of the provision of classes, and the extremely slow development and implementation of plans for schools, particularly in the late 1930s, strongly suggest a growing conviction in the Education Committee that the nursery classes were indeed meeting children’s needs satisfactorily. The attention and praise from interested parties surely bolstered that satisfaction.

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<sup>81</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee, July 16, 1936, BCC/BH/2/1/1/28. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>82</sup> Cusden, *The English Nursery School*, 174.

<sup>83</sup> A.F.Sharam, Board of Education Interview Memorandum, June 19, 1936, Board of Education and predecessor: Elementary Education, Local Education Authority Supply Files, ED 16 789. National Archives, Kew

<sup>84</sup> Borough of Leicester, Minutes of the Education Committee 1946-1947, insert Annual Report of the School Medical Officer, 1946, 19.D.59/VII/630. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

In Manchester, policy continued in much the same way as before. The small number of nursery schools was retained, and so the letter of the Hadow recommendations was adhered to. However, all new expansion was in nursery classes. By 1938, there were 60 nursery classes in the authority, providing for 1600 children and all new elementary schools included provision for nursery classes.<sup>85</sup> As was the case in Leicester, Manchester's nursery classes continued to garner interest and praise from outside. *The Guardian* carried an article in 1935 which reported a talk by the organising secretary of the Kensington Housing Trust to a branch meeting of Manchester and Salford Nursery School Association, in which she claimed "Manchester may set a standard of living and particularly a standard of dealing with her children and pre-school children, which will help London to avoid the mistakes into which, at present, the South is falling."<sup>86</sup> In her 1938 work, Shena Simon was distinctly triumphal about the success of Manchester's provision. The whole nursery school/class question "once so bitter," was now "practically dead."<sup>87</sup> There were, she claimed, "enthusiasts who still maintain the extreme position" of advocating nursery schools alone, but Hadow had confirmed that Hey's views were the right ones.<sup>88</sup> The sense of pride is unmistakable.

During this period, London's development of nursery education was in line with Board of Education preferences and Birmingham's was somewhat minimal. Both Manchester and Leicester developed patterns of nursery provision which were different to the expected mixture of schools and classes. In Manchester, the beliefs of the Education Committee led directly to the form which provision took. In

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<sup>85</sup> Simon, *Century of City Government*, 268.

<sup>86</sup> "Manchester setting a standard," *Manchester Guardian*, November 13, 1935, 15.

<sup>87</sup> Simon, *Century of City Government*, 269.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

Leicester, the commitment to expansion through classes only was less clear, but nonetheless the enthusiasm for nursery classes which had emerged in the 1920s continued to develop. The development of these extensive nursery class networks is indicative of a relatively high degree of local autonomy in this period.

### **8:5 Response to the 1944 Education Act**

The policy of the Board of Education, which became the Ministry of Education after the passing of the 1944 Education Act, changed significantly in the course of World War II. The Board/Ministry had decided during the war that nursery schools were to be preferred for all children. However, LEAs had been able to influence the final wording of the Act<sup>89</sup> so that there was a small possibility of flexibility: nursery classes were to be allowed where schools were “inexpedient.”<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, the Ministry was active in applying pressure to local authorities to conform to its new policy, as has been demonstrated by educational policy theorists, Gerwitz and Ozga.<sup>91</sup> After the war, each LEA was asked to produce a development plan, in which Ministry officials expected nursery school provision to be dominant. They also looked for the early development of nursery schools through the taking over of war-time nursery accommodation.<sup>92</sup>

Clearly, then, an LEA complying with government wishes would develop nursery schools rather than classes in the immediate post-war period. London and

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<sup>89</sup> Butler to Secretary of the Board, October 21, 1943. Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 6. National Archives, Kew

<sup>90</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1918; United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1944.

<sup>91</sup> Sharon Gewirtz and Jenny Ozga, “Partnership, pluralism and education policy: a reassessment,” *Journal of Education Policy* 5, no. 1 (1990): 44.

<sup>92</sup> FCSB to Mackenzie, May 18, 1945, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 37. National Archives, Kew.

Birmingham took advantage of opportunities to develop new nursery schools, but also developed nursery classes, lacking the Ministry's conviction that schools were to be preferred. The result was the preservation (in London's case) or creation (in Birmingham's case) of a mixed pattern of nursery schools and classes. Manchester and Leicester did not take advantage of the move towards nursery schools. This was for both practical reasons and because of the beliefs and values of the LEA members.

Birmingham's nursery facilities had been far from adequate for meeting the needs which arose during World War II, and this, according to Adams, "necessitated the quick erection of simple and inexpensive buildings."<sup>93</sup> In 1945, the LEA controlled 43 wartime nursery classes and 77 other nurseries.<sup>94</sup> At the end of the war, then, Birmingham had a ready supply of war-time nurseries which could potentially form the base of a post-war system. The Primary Education Sub-committee, who had full responsibility for nursery education by this time, according to Adams,<sup>95</sup> confidently made the case for a large expansion of both schools and classes. Its report for an Education Committee meeting to be held on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1945 set out the arguments: it was noted that the new act meant that the authority was "now not merely permitted" but was now "compelled, to have regard to the need for securing that provision is made for Nursery Schools and Classes."<sup>96</sup> It argued that although the need for women's labour was decreasing, parents had "come to value

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<sup>93</sup> M.G.R.Adams, History of Birmingham Education Committee, Undated, BCL: Miscellaneous Education Files. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>94</sup> City of Birmingham, Education Committee, Notice of meeting and agenda, June 25, 1945, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 254. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>95</sup> M.G.R.Adams, History of Birmingham Education Committee, Undated, BCL: Miscellaneous Education Files. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>96</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Notice of meeting and agenda, June 25, 1945, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 254. National Archives, Kew.



the Nursery Schools and Classes” and would continue to use them.<sup>97</sup> Points were also made about the increasing birth-rate and the fact that the housing shortage would mean that more families were in poor accommodation. The recommendation was that all available methods of establishing peace-time provision should be utilised: sites for new schools were to be reserved, nursery classes were to be attached to infant schools and war-time nurseries were to be taken over. One Ministry official noted with regard to this report that the LEA had “not definitely declared themselves on the question of N. Schools v. N. Classes. Other things being equal they would, I think, admit that a School was the better, but they do not regard the N. Class as being much less desirable than the school ie Their mind is more open on the question than the Ministry’s mind is!”<sup>98</sup>

Being open-minded put Birmingham in a good position to capitalize on the opportunities for expansion that existed after the war. Plans to take over the war-time nursery schools did run into some difficulties because the need for women’s labour, and consequently day nursery provision, continued. In a joint report in March 1946, Chief Education Officer Innes and his opposite number in Health, H. P. Newsholme, suggested that up to two-thirds of the war nurseries would need to continue as welfare establishments for the time-being. The proposed number of nursery schools was 22. All the war-time nursery classes were to be retained although the possibility that these would be needed for children of compulsory

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<sup>97</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Notice of meeting and agenda, June 25, 1945, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 254. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>98</sup> Arnold to Strong, July 30, 1945, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 254. National Archives, Kew.

school age in the future was raised.<sup>99</sup> In 1948, the Education Committee had 23 nursery schools and 56 nursery classes: a huge advance on the pre-war position.<sup>100</sup>

In 1949, the shortage of accommodation in primary education began to have an impact on the nursery classes. In a letter to the Ministry of Education, the new Chief Education Officer, Russell, expressed his regret that 7 classes had already had to close and that 8 more would be closing in September. He tried to use this fact to pressurize the Ministry into a prompt approval of additional nursery schools, citing the continued need for women in industry in the area.<sup>101</sup> This letter seems to have had some success: in a letter dated 15<sup>th</sup> July 1949, Russell makes reference to the approval of land purchases for this purpose.<sup>102</sup> The purchase of discontinued wartime nursery buildings also continued.<sup>103</sup> A mixed system, which had a substantial number of nursery schools at its heart, was emerging.

At the end of the war, London was in a similar position to Birmingham in that much war-time provision was made in huts, “a good many” of which were suitable for adaption for nursery school use after the war.<sup>104</sup> According to E. N. Strong at the Ministry of Education, the LCC were happy to do this and willingly

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<sup>99</sup> City of Birmingham, Education Committee, Minutes of the Primary Education Sub-Committee, insert P. Innes and H.P. Newsholme, Children under five: Provision of Nurseries, Nursery Schools and Nursery Classes, March 21, 1946, BCC /BH/2/1/1/38. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>100</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Primary Education Sub-Committee, insert E.L.Russell, Report, March 21, 1946, BCC /BH/2/1/1/40. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>101</sup> Russell to Secretary of Ministry of Education, February 21, 1949, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 256. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>102</sup> Russell to Secretary of Ministry of Education, July 15, 1949, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 256. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>103</sup> T.C.Burns to Secretary, Ministry of Education, July 28, 1949, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 256. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>104</sup> E.N.Strong to Cleary, December 18, 1944, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 192. National Archives, Kew.

looked for opportunities to develop a network of nursery schools.<sup>105</sup> However, in the interests of creating some sort of provision for the greatest number possible, it was also willing to consider options other than nursery schools. What the LCC really wanted, in the short term, was to get “some 50,000 children under five back into Baby Classes.”<sup>106</sup> This sort of provision was actively discouraged under the Board’s new policy, but the LCC was convinced that it was better than refusing to accommodate the children at all. As L. H. Oliver, Deputy Clerk of Council, wrote to the Ministry of Education on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1946, “The Council considers that these young children are better at school in such conditions, even if the accommodation does not reach the Ministry’s proposed standard, then incurring the danger of the streets, or playing in the overcrowded and cramped housing conditions which so many families have to endure today.”<sup>107</sup>

The pattern of the immediate post-war years, then, was that the LCC battled to take advantage of every possible option to get under fives into some form of school. In addition to the creation of nursery schools from the wartime huts, the LEA tried to pursue the option of upgrading babies’ classes into nursery classes (as had been done in Manchester and Leicester before the war). The Ministry and the LCC needed to negotiate about what standard of provision was necessary for the term “nursery class” to be used. At a meeting in October 1945, Ministry officials made it very clear to the LCC that the pre-war standards were “too low” and former

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<sup>105</sup> E.N.Strong to Cleary, December 18, 1944, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 192. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>106</sup> Author unknown to Dakin, September 1, 1945, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 192. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>107</sup> L.H.Oliver to Ministry of Education, January 3, 1946, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 192. National Archives, Kew.

babies' classes should not simply be renamed and reopened.<sup>108</sup> However, the Ministry also knew that if it set the standard for recognition of nursery classes too high, children under five might simply be admitted to mixed classes of infants in any case. According to a report by Graham Savage, Education Officer for the LCC, 20 nursery classes had been approved by November 1945 but these covered "only a fraction of the number of under fives already in attendance."<sup>109</sup>

The London School Plan, setting out the LCC's vision of post-war education in the capital, was published in 1947.<sup>110</sup> A firm commitment to investment in nursery education was evident. It was estimated that 54 000 children would need to be accommodated mostly in "new nursery schools."<sup>111</sup> However, because of a lack of suitable sites, it was argued that the council had to "depend for many years upon nursery classes in infant schools" and, in fact, those classes would not be up to the standard required by the Ministry in some respects, for example in numbers of children per class.<sup>112</sup> London would not miss out on opportunities for nursery schools which the 1944 Education Act provided. Moreover, it had the wartime accommodation to be able to make a quick start on nursery school development. However, the idea that these schools could be available for all children in the short, medium and perhaps even the long term was not seen as realistic. The mixed system

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<sup>108</sup> Board of Education, Provision for Under-Fives in Nursery Classes in the London Area, October 12, 1945, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 192. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>109</sup> E.G.Savage, Report, November 19, 1945, Education Officer's Department: Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education: Subject and Policy files – General: Nursery Classes – General Papers 1945-1952, LCC/EO/PS/1/123. London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>110</sup> London County Council, *London School Plan: development plan for primary and secondary education, adopted by the London County Council* (London: LCC, 1947).

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

of nursery schools and classes which had developed before the war was set to continue.

In Leicester, the substantial pre-war development meant that most wartime provision was based within elementary schools, making use of existing classes. Any extra provision was also provided on this model: Leicester's Elementary Schools Committee minutes record planning for extra war nursery classes in 1942.<sup>113</sup> Therefore opportunities for converting wartime hatted accommodation into post-war nursery schools were limited. This was a significant barrier to Leicester in complying with the Ministry's post-war nursery policy.

There were, however, also emotional as well as practical reasons why Leicester failed to make the most of the advantage the new policy offered. A February 1944 inspection by Miss Greaves and Dr Llewelin, two Board inspectors who had been instrumental in persuading the Board to adopt the new preference for nursery schools, made substantial criticisms of Leicester's nursery classes. The inspectors recommended that nursery schools should be established in the LEA, and that staff should visit other areas and attend "refresher courses" so as to encounter "the most up-to-date ideas on nursery education generally."<sup>114</sup> For an LEA which had invested so heavily in its nursery provision and which was used to receiving high praise for it, this was difficult to accept. Ruffled feathers were on show in the city's development plan which was drawn up in 1945.<sup>115</sup> This document confirmed

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<sup>113</sup> Borough of Leicester, Minutes of Elementary Schools Sub-Committee 1941-1945, February 16, 1942, 19.D.59/VII/541. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

<sup>114</sup> Ministry of Education, Report on Nursery classes in Leicester CB, June 1945, Board of Education and Ministry of Education: Drafts and Papers of Official History of Education, Second World War and General Historical Survey, ED 138 12. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>115</sup> Borough of Leicester, Minutes of the Education Committee 1945-1946, insert Development Plan, 1945, 19.D.59/VII/629. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

that the nursery classes were a source of pride: the “valuable work” which took place there was praised and it was stated that “a tradition has been established in these classes which has been widely recognised, not only within the City itself but in a far wider sphere.” The “representations” of the Ministry of Education “as to the desirability of experimentation in this educational field by the establishment, as opportunity occurs, of independent nursery schools” were mentioned and a rather grudging indication of compliance was given, although the LEA was not itself convinced that “one form of provision is superior to another.” Plans were made for some schools “within the cartilage of new infant schools, and of existing schools where the site permits” and also for some other separate nursery schools but no decision was yet taken as to whether or not these small schools should be allowed to be independent or should be controlled by the head teachers of the adjoining infant schools. The irritation and internal conflict on the subject is palpable.

According to Ministry official, E.N.Strong, the Leicester Plan was not “quite so satisfactory as we had hoped,” particularly regarding the question of head teacher control.<sup>116</sup> However, the Board’s inspectorate felt that Leicester had travelled quite a long way in the direction that the Board wanted, “as the idea of a separate Nursery S. was anathema to them until our enquiry was held and the new Director took over.”<sup>117</sup> The inspectors believed that this new director was “alone agst [against] the city in his fight for the separate NS and this lack of decision is probably his way of avoiding a direct clash.” As the new Director, Elfred Thomas, was not appointed until 1946,

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<sup>116</sup> Strong to Thomas, December 17, 1946, Ministry of Education and Department of Education and Science: 1944 Education Act, Primary and Secondary Schools Development Plans, ED 152 319. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>117</sup> Thomas to Strong, response to note of December 17, 1946, Undated, Ministry of Education and Department of Education and Science: 1944 Education Act, Primary and Secondary Schools Development Plans, ED 152 319. National Archives, Kew.

after the writing of the development plan, this cannot have been quite true.<sup>118</sup>

However, an internal Ministry of Education memorandum, dated the following year stated that, on the question of nursery education, his “opinions tend, on the whole, to agree with the Ministry” but that he was fighting “a lone battle against certain vested interests” who had influence on the Education Committee.<sup>119</sup> Frustratingly, the education records in Leicester do not provide clues about this “battle” or what those “vested interests” might have been. However, it is clear that the sureness, confidence and enthusiasm of the late 1930s had dissipated. There is no evidence in the Education Committee minutes that any nursery development took place in Leicester in the immediate post-war period.

The situation in Manchester bears many similarities to that in Leicester. During the war, Manchester’s large number of nursery classes conferred an advantage in meeting the childcare needs of women employed in war work. Full use was made of these facilities. Where more provision was needed, still more war-time nursery classes were opened. In 1945, there were 81 special nursery classes, in addition to 52 ordinary ones.<sup>120</sup> As in Leicester, there were not many new hatted wartime nurseries which were ready for adaption into nursery schools and this was one reason why it was difficult for the city to comply with the Ministry’s suggestion for a quick start to be made to nursery school development by these means.

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<sup>118</sup> Borough of Leicester, Minutes of Education Committee 1945-1946, January 28, 1946, 19.D.59/VII/629. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

<sup>119</sup> DW (unclear), Minute sheet, July 15, 1947, Ministry of Education and Department of Education and Science: 1944 Education Act, Primary and Secondary Schools Development Plans. ED 152 319. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>120</sup> Manchester County Council, Education Committee Minutes, Volume 12 1945-1946, insert Report from the General Purposes Sub-Committee, December 17, 1945. Greater Manchester County Record Office.

When the Education Committee discussed how to move to peace-time provision, its chief concern was the number of children still in babies' classes or ordinary infants classes. There were parallels, then, with the situation in London, despite Manchester's substantial pre-war commitment to upgrading these classes to nursery standard. In 1946, there were 6410 children under five in school in Manchester, only 2354 of which were in the nursery classes.<sup>121</sup> The first priority of the LEA was the reversion/conversion of war-time nursery classes into ordinary nursery classes and the further adaption of babies' classes. The aim was to establish "128 nursery classes compared with 60 such classes in existence before the war years."<sup>122</sup> It was planned that the three existing nursery schools would continue.<sup>123</sup> In what seems like an attempt to comply with Ministry policy, "tentative recommendations, subject to further discussions" were made with regard to the taking over of three day nurseries for nursery school purposes.<sup>124</sup>

The Ministry was concerned about the way the situation was developing, and attempts were made to influence the LEA and to "arouse more enthusiasm for the N.School."<sup>125</sup> It does not appear that they had much success. In March 1947, the LEA produced a development plan in which provision in nursery classes was very

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<sup>121</sup> Manchester County Council, Education Committee Minutes, Volume 12 1945-1946, April 15, 1946, Greater Manchester County Record Office.

<sup>122</sup> Manchester County Council, Education Committee Minutes, Volume 12 1945-1946, insert Report from General Purposes Sub-Committee – Nursery Classes and School Care Clubs, February 18, 1946, Greater Manchester County Record Office.

<sup>123</sup> Manchester County Council, Education Committee Minutes, Volume 12 1945-1946, insert Report from General Purposes Sub-Committee – Nursery Classes and School Care Clubs, February 18, 1946, Greater Manchester County Record Office.

<sup>124</sup> Manchester Education Committee (signature unclear) to Secretary, Ministry of Education, February 25, 1946, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 308. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>125</sup> Strong to Godfrey, October 14, 1946, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 308. National Archives, Kew.



much dominant.<sup>126</sup> It announced the intention to continue “the traditional policy ..... whereby in the long past the schools have provided places for children below the compulsory school age of five years in nursery classes and babies’ classes.” Nursery schools, it was claimed, “may confer certain advantages over the nursery class associated with the infant school,” but building them was “not a practicable procedure during the next five years at any rate.” The plan listed the three current nursery schools and stated that further schools “should not be ruled out but should, on the contrary, be contemplated where particular districts require further nursery accommodation to supplement the nursery class provision in the district.” It was, however, regretfully acknowledged that the LEA was likely to disagree with the Ministry on when and where this was the case. The plan reads very much like a half-hearted attempt at mollification and very unlike the plan of an authority ready to try a new approach. As was the case in Leicester, it is difficult not to see traces of hurt pride in an LEA which had regarded itself, and had been regarded by others, as such a good role-model in this policy area.

As in Leicester, the tension surrounding the issue caused internal conflicts, setting the Director of Education at odds with his Education Committee. The Director of Education, Lester Smith, told the Ministry that he personally favoured nursery schools, whilst nonetheless believing that “there is much to be said for nursery wings.”<sup>127</sup> Policy theorists, Ozga and Gerwitz, have demonstrated that he

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<sup>126</sup> Manchester County Council, Manchester Education Committee, The Development Plan, March 1947, Ministry of Education and Department of Education and Science: 1944 Education Act, Primary and Secondary Schools Development Plans, ED 152 328. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>127</sup> Ministry of Education, Interview Memorandum, July 28, 1948, Ministry of Education and Department of Education and Science: 1944 Education Act, Primary and Secondary Schools Development Plans, ED 152 328. National Archives, Kew.

actively sought the help of the Ministry in 1949 in dealing with “nursery hotheads led by Lady [Shena] Simon, who would like to precipitate a quarrel.”<sup>128</sup>

The internal divisions and the lack of Ministry support are the likely causes of the very limited progress in the establishment of new provision of any sort in the crucial years after the war. Reports from the Primary Education Sub-Committee in the years 1947 to 1949 show very little change in the number of nursery classes: 136 in November 1947, 132 in 1948 and 133 in 1949.<sup>129</sup> The “Three Year Programme of Capital Expenditure” for the years 1949-1952 deals with the “necessity for providing additional school accommodation to meet the requirements of the increased birth rate” but makes no mention of nursery education.<sup>130</sup> Manchester’s resistance to the Ministry meant that it successfully retained its traditional nursery class system but sacrificed the opportunity for further development.

Despite the change of policy which pressed for national uniformity and concerted pressure from the Ministry of Education, the pre-war variation between the two pairs of LEAs remained. Manchester and Leicester retained their distinctive pattern of a heavy commitment to nursery classes. London and Birmingham developed a mixed pattern of schools and classes. The two LEAs that had invested heavily in nursery classes did not take advantage of the brief period where investment in nursery schools was possible. They were not able to do so because of the lack of availability of wartime nursery huts, and were also affected by emotional

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<sup>128</sup> Gewirtz and Ozga, “Partnership, pluralism and education policy: a reassessment,” 45.

<sup>129</sup> Manchester County Council, Education Committee Minutes, Volume 14B August 1948-April 1949, insert, Report from the Primary Education Sub-Committee, December 20, 1948. Greater Manchester County Record Office; Manchester County Council, Education Committee Minutes, Volume 14B November 1947-July 1948, insert Report from the Primary Education Sub-Committee, April 25, 1949. Greater Manchester County Record Office.

<sup>130</sup> Manchester County Council, Education Committee Minutes, Volume 14B November 1947-July 1948, insert Three Year Programme of Capital Expenditure, December 20, 1948. Greater Manchester County Record Office.

commitment to the pre-existing system. This is an example of policy being determined by “path-dependency,”<sup>131</sup> where emotional, financial and practical considerations make changes in direction difficult.

### **8:6 Coping with the 1950s freeze**

Ministry of Education Circular 210, issued in 1949, asked local authorities to exercise restraint in spending because of another financial crisis and this effectively ended the expansion of new nursery provision in most areas.<sup>132</sup> Circular 242, issued in December 1951, which also called for economies, resulted in some local authorities closing nurseries, despite the Minister’s insistence that it was not the intention that any part of the education system should be simply removed in this way.<sup>133</sup> The establishment of new facilities remained difficult throughout the 1950s, when nursery education remained a very low priority for the national government. The official position of the Ministry was nonetheless that existing services should be preserved.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, if a local education authority was complying fully with national policy, the numbers of nursery schools and nursery classes in each area should not have altered. This was in fact what happened in all four areas, although provision was threatened by the climate of financial restrictions and campaigners needed to work hard to achieve stability.

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<sup>131</sup> Kay, *Dynamics of Public Policy*, 29.

<sup>132</sup> Blackstone, *Fair Start*.

<sup>133</sup> Howard Glennerster, *British Social Policy:1945 to the Present* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007 ); HC Deb 28 February 1952 vol 496 cc1451-2.

<sup>134</sup> Ministry of Education, Interview memorandum of deputation from NSA to Ministry of Education, January 27, 1952 (date of meeting), Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Nursery Education General Files, ED 102 45. National Archives, Kew.

In Leicester, the Education Committee took the decision at a meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1956 to close six infant schools, which meant the loss of twelve nursery classes.<sup>135</sup> The classes were more collateral damage than the target of attack. Nevertheless, a very active campaign, backed by the Nursery School Association, was launched, which involved “telegrams of protest,” letters to newspapers, approaches to local MPs and a public meeting.<sup>136</sup> Although the decision to close the schools was indeed approved by the full council, the campaign was successful in ensuring that the children were found places elsewhere.<sup>137</sup>

In Manchester, the Education Committee was under intense pressure to make financial savings in 1953 and decided to close all of the city’s nursery classes, but not the three nursery schools.<sup>138</sup> The cuts needed to be approved at the City Council meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> March before implementation.<sup>139</sup> Again, the Nursery School Association took a leading role in organizing protests. M. L. Jackson, the association’s Vice-president, spoke out about the consequences, with a particular emphasis on possible road deaths caused by young children having nowhere to play except on the street.<sup>140</sup> This campaign was also successful. The council allowed the Education Committee to make less severe reductions (£204 300 worth of savings as

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<sup>135</sup> Borough of Leicester, Minutes of Primary Schools Sub-Committee for the Borough of Leicester 1955-1959, November 20, 1956, 19.D.59/VII/544. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

<sup>136</sup> Nursery School Association, Minutes of Executive Committee, January 26, 1957, Executive Committee Minutes File 14/5. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>137</sup> Nursery School Association, Minutes of Executive Committee, January 26, 1957, Executive Committee Minutes File 14/5. British Association of Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of Economics.

<sup>138</sup> “Nursery Classes to Close,” Clipping, *Manchester Guardian*, March 16, 1953, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 309. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>139</sup> G.Auty, Closing of Nursery Classes Manchester CB, March 21, 1953, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 309. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>140</sup> “Endangering lives of 5000?” *Manchester Guardian*, March 27, 1953, 24.

opposed to £396 000) and it was able to do this by making economies of items such as “painting, repairs, furniture and text books.”<sup>141</sup>

In London, supporters of nursery education were frustrated by the lack of opportunities to develop new provision caused by the economic difficulties and national restrictions, but the policy thrust in the area remained positive and forward-looking, with the LEA making continued attempts to expand rather than contract. One example of this is an unsuccessful attempt in 1956 to increase the number of nursery classes from 175 to 200 because of the “considerable demand for such classes” and the “strong recommendation from the teachers to do something in this direction.”<sup>142</sup>

By 1952, the shortage of accommodation for children of compulsory school age was having an impact on nursery classes in Birmingham. In a meeting in February 1952, the Chief Education Officer said that, “until fairly recently it had been thought that it would only be necessary to close such classes in a very small number of cases,” which suggests that his view now was that it would be necessary to close a somewhat larger number. However, he stated that there was no proposal that “a general closure” of the classes should occur.<sup>143</sup> The LEA continued to pursue options for opening new nursery schools and asked the Ministry of Education for approval for the adaption of five day nurseries.<sup>144</sup> Ministry officials agonised over

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<sup>141</sup> Wedell to Rackham, July 14, 1953, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 309. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>142</sup> Turner to Morrell, January 24, 1956, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 362. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>143</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Primary Education Sub-Committee, February 21, 1952, BCC/BH/2/1/1/44. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>144</sup> Simpson to unknown recipient, March 9, 1953, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 259. National Archives, Kew.

this suggestion, because it had many points of merit, in their opinion. One wrote in an internal memorandum that “There is no doubt that in the three cases where nursery classes can be transferred into the buildings, the release of primary places will be valuable and moreover it will discontinue a form of organisation of which we do not approve.”<sup>145</sup> Essentially, the Ministry believed that Birmingham had seen the light on the nursery school/nursery class issue, and was keen to encourage this orthodoxy: a letter from HM Inspector, P. Maurice, made reference to a “complete change of heart” and continued “it would be a great pity to force them back to classes.”<sup>146</sup> Ultimately, however, the fact that the Ministry had made it clear that new spending on nursery education could not be permitted in any but “the most exceptional circumstances” weighed more heavily and approval was not given.<sup>147</sup>

For the next few years, Birmingham continued to close nursery classes, albeit in ones and twos rather than through any full-scale destruction, and to plan new nursery “units” and schools.<sup>148</sup> It is not clear, however, whether this was the result of any genuine conversion, as the Ministry believed, or a matter of expediency. On balance the latter seems more likely, as the LEA remained keen to approve plans for nursery classes if these seemed likely to have a chance of success. For example, an opportunity was taken to reopen a nursery class in Princethorpe Road in 1956, on the

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<sup>145</sup> Author unknown to Simpson, March 11, 1953, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 259. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>146</sup> Maurice to Murton, March 28, 1953, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 259. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>147</sup> Simpson to Marsh, April 17, 1953, Board of Education and successors: Medical Branch and Special Services Branch: Local Education Authority Nursery Education: Registered Files (N Series), ED 66 259. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>148</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Primary Education Sub-Committee, October 21, 1954, BCC/BH/2/1/1/46. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service; City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Primary Education Sub-Committee, January 19, 1956, BCC/BH/2/1/1/48. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

grounds that no structural alterations or new staff were needed.<sup>149</sup> By 1959, in any case, the LEA was definitely trying to establish nursery classes. At a meeting of the Primary Education Sub-Committee, the Chief Education Officer raised the possibility of new classes in at least three and potentially five schools, stating that “as the staffing position in primary schools had been appreciably better over the last two or three years, some modest development in Nursery Classes might not be held to be unreasonable.”<sup>150</sup> He suggested that the HMIs, who “spoke very highly of the Authority’s Nursery Classes,” might be enlisted to convince the Ministry. In fact, the Ministry did not allow this development, as they believed it would set a regrettable precedent for their dealings with other LEAs.<sup>151</sup> An actual shift in the balance of nursery school and nursery class places occurred this year when the Heathway Nursery School, an adaptation of a wartime nursery, was closed, as the owner of the site was demanding the return of his land. The children were transferred to new nursery classes, despite a letter of protest about this “retrograde step” from the Birmingham branch of the National Union of Teachers.<sup>152</sup>

The decade in Birmingham can be characterised as one of frustrated plans and incomplete projects. The local authority closed nursery classes as a response to the need for accommodation for children of compulsory age, and initially hoped to compensate for this through nursery school provision, but this was not permitted.

Towards the end of the decade, perhaps due to a lack of success in developing the

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<sup>149</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Primary Education Sub-Committee, November 15, 1956, BCC/BH/2/1/1/48. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>150</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Primary Education Sub-Committee, March 19, 1959, BCC/BH/2/1/1/51. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>151</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Primary Education Sub-Committee, November 19, 1959, BCC/BH/2/1/1/51. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>152</sup> City of Birmingham Education Committee, Minutes of the Primary Education Sub-Committee, July 16, 1959, BCC/BH/2/1/1/51. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

nursery school system caused by the centrally imposed financial restrictions, attempts were made to establish new nursery classes, but these were also largely unsuccessful. The position at the end of the 1950s thus remained very similar to that at the beginning.

This period of the great freeze was therefore not ultimately of great importance in explaining the differences between the two groups of LEAs, as very little change occurred. In all areas, the potentially destructive impact of financial restrictions was resisted successfully. This demonstrates the resilience of nursery classes and schools once they have been established. Educational historians, Tyack and Cuban, have observed a similar phenomenon in the American school system, where kindergartens were very unlikely to close down once they had been established, thanks to the “influential constituencies” which supported them.<sup>153</sup>

### **8:7 The impact of the Plowden Report**

In the mid-1960s, central government’s policy of preferring nursery schools to nursery classes was questioned within the context of the wide ranging investigation into primary and pre-school education by the new advisory body, the Central Advisory Council. The CAC asked its witnesses from the educational world what they believed were the relative advantages and disadvantages of schools and classes.<sup>154</sup> However, the importance of the question became downgraded as they worked, and it was not a focus in the finished report, published in 1967.<sup>155</sup> Its

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<sup>153</sup> David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia – A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 57.

<sup>154</sup> Central Advisory Council, CAC Paper 3 Appendix A, Undated, Central Advisory Council for Education (England): Minutes, Papers and Reports, ED 146 66. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>155</sup> Central Advisory Council, *Children and their Primary Schools*.



recommendation was that nursery education should be expanded through making use of all sorts of accommodation: nursery schools, nursery classes, and groups in factories, clinics or in new flat developments.<sup>156</sup> The Labour government, in power when the report was published, sanctioned the development of a variety of provision within deprived areas.<sup>157</sup> The succeeding Conservative administration decided that nursery classes should be the main priority, and increasing the number of nursery schools “would slow down the rate at which the Government’s objectives will be reached.”<sup>158</sup> One would therefore anticipate that future expansion from this point on would be in the form of nursery classes in all LEAs. The impact of the Plowden Report in all four cities was, indeed, an initial increase in the established form of provision followed by further expansion in nursery classes.

For Leicester, this experience of a shift in national policy was very different to that which it had suffered in 1944. A report by the Primary Education Sub-Committee in Leicester in 1967 expressed the view that the use of part-time nurseries which the city had been developing “foreshadowed the recommendations of the Plowden Report.”<sup>159</sup> Although the focus was on the part-time element not the school/class question, there was satisfaction about the fact that, this time, the city found itself on the right side of the debate. Its system of nursery classes, many of them part-time, was deemed acceptable by Plowden, and was in line with the preferences of the Conservative government in the early 1970s. Subsequent

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>157</sup> Author unknown, Brief for the Secretary of State’s meeting the National campaign for Nursery Education, November 27, 1968, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 7. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>158</sup> Department of Education and Science, *Education: A Framework for Expansion* (London: HMSO, 1972), 6.

<sup>159</sup> Borough of Leicester, Minutes of Primary Education Sub-Committee 1966-1971, June 15, 1967, insert Nursery Education, 19.D.59/VII/685. The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

expansion in Leicester therefore conformed to this pattern. There are currently no maintained nursery schools in the City of Leicester listed in the schools directory.<sup>160</sup>

In Manchester, the Plowden Report was taken as a call for action to increase provision. Summaries produced by the LEA emphasized that “There should be a large expansion of nursery education and a start should be made as soon as possible.”<sup>161</sup> The Report of the Chief Education Officer in 1970 listed proposals for “nursery classes at 9 new schools.”<sup>162</sup> Manchester’s commitment to nursery classes was confirmed and expansion continued in this form of institution. The Conservative commitment to nursery classes provided further validation for this approach. Today, Manchester has only two nursery schools: Collyhurst and Martenscroft.<sup>163</sup> Collyhurst was one of the original schools established after the 1918 Education Act. Of the primary schools listed today on the council’s website, all have nursery classes with the exception of a number of schools for children with special needs and two recently established “free schools,” opened under the Coalition (2010 to date) government’s initiative to allow voluntary groups to run schools.<sup>164</sup> Therefore, the vast majority of Manchester’s provision is in nursery

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<sup>160</sup> Leicester City Council, “Education and Learning,” <http://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council-services/education-lifelong-learning/about-schools/schools-directory/schools-directory/>

<sup>161</sup> Manchester County Council, Education Committee Minutes, Volume 32D January and February 1967, insert Summary of Plowden Committee Report, January 23, 1967. Greater Manchester County Record Office; Manchester County Council, Education Committee Minutes, Volume 32D January and February 1967, insert Report of the Education Officer to the Primary Education Sub-Committee, February 20, 1967, Greater Manchester County Record Office.

<sup>162</sup> Manchester County Council, Education Committee Minutes, Volume 36A June to July 1970, insert Report of the Chief Education Officer to the Management Sub-Committee, July 13, 1970. Greater Manchester County Record Office.

<sup>163</sup> Manchester City Council, “School Finder,”

[http://www.manchester.gov.uk/schools/school/2/collyhurst\\_nursery\\_school](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/schools/school/2/collyhurst_nursery_school); Manchester City Council, “School Finder,”

[http://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200016/nurseries\\_and\\_childcare/3531/martenscroft\\_sure\\_start\\_childrens\\_centre\\_and\\_nursery\\_school/1](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200016/nurseries_and_childcare/3531/martenscroft_sure_start_childrens_centre_and_nursery_school/1)

<sup>164</sup> Manchester City Council, “School Finder”

<http://www.manchester.gov.uk/schools/search/page/1/records/10/>

classes, but a very small, almost tokenistic, quantity of nursery schools is also retained. This has changed very little from Spurley Hey's original conception of what nursery education in the city should be.

In Birmingham, the urban programme which the Labour Party established encouraged expansion in both schools and classes and the city was able to take advantage of this. A letter from the Town Clerk to the Chief Education Officer, K. Brooksbank, in 1969 referred to approval for expenditure on "3 Nursery Schools, Nursery classes in 7 schools" and to plans for further applications for "6 schools, 1 annexe, 1 unit [and] extending nursery provision at 22 schools."<sup>165</sup> A "mood of hopefulness and determination" was established and continued into the 1970s, according to T. D. M. Rees, an Assistant Education Officer at the time.<sup>166</sup> In this period, a fall in the numbers of children of compulsory school age meant that suitable accommodation for nursery classes was readily available in primary schools and thus it was easy for the city to expand in the manner sanctioned by the Thatcher administration.<sup>167</sup> Today, the LEA maintains 20 institutions described as "nursery schools" and 13 described as primary or infant schools "with a nursery," suggesting a separate nursery annexe.<sup>168</sup> Approximately 90% of the 210 other primary schools listed on the council website have nursery classes. This strongly suggests that

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<sup>165</sup> City of Birmingham, Education Committee, Minutes of the Primary Education Sub-Committee, insert Town Clerk to Brooksbank, February 20, 1969, BCC/BH/2/1/1/58. Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service.

<sup>166</sup> T.D.M. Rees, "Slowly but surely in Birmingham," *The Under Fives*, supplement to *Education*, January 19, 1973, iv. School Design, Cuttings and Articles on Nursery School Design, ME/L/2. Institute of Education Archives.

<sup>167</sup> T.D.M. Rees, "Slowly but surely in Birmingham," *The Under Fives*, supplement to *Education*, January 19, 1973, iv. School Design, Cuttings and Articles on Nursery School Design, ME/L/2. Institute of Education Archives.

<sup>168</sup> Birmingham City Council, "Schools and Centres Directory," <http://services.bgfl.org/cfpages/schools/searchpage.cfm>

Birmingham retained its core nursery school provision in the post-Plowden era, but that subsequent expansion took place through nursery classes.

By the time the Plowden Report was published, London County Council was no more. Local government reorganisation had led to the establishment of an Inner London Education Authority (ILEA).<sup>169</sup> This body welcomed the “importance attached by the Plowden Council to a major expansion of nursery education.”<sup>170</sup> In a 1967 report for the Secretary of State concerning ILEA’s views on the nature of future development, Lena Townsend, chairman of the Schools Sub-committee, made no mention at all of a choice between nursery schools and nursery classes but instead focused on the balance of part-time and full-time places.<sup>171</sup> Such an attitude was wholly consistent with Plowden’s downgrading of the issue. London intended to expand nursery education in whatever institutions it could. In 1973, according to an *Education* article by Patricia Burgess, deputy head of the Primary and Secondary Branch, an “exciting programme” would lead to an extra 37 000 places by 1980. Burgess implied that these places might be in either nursery classes or nursery schools.<sup>172</sup> However, the “rapidly falling numbers” in primary schools from 1974 on<sup>173</sup> made expansion through using empty classrooms for nursery classes much the

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<sup>169</sup> Stuart Maclure, *A History of Education in London 1870-1990* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1990).

<sup>170</sup> A. Pearce to Secretary of State, insert, Lena Townsend, Report of the Schools Sub-Committee, June 29, 1967, July 19, 1967, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 3. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>171</sup> A. Pearce to Secretary of State, insert, Lena Townsend, Report of the Schools Sub-Committee, June 29, 1967, July 19, 1967, Department of Education and Science and of related bodies: Records of the Schools Branch and successors, ED 207 3. National Archives, Kew.

<sup>172</sup> Patricia Burgess, “Long-term expansion planned for London,” *The Under Fives*, supplement to *Education*, January 19, 1973, x. School Design, Cuttings and Articles on Nursery School Design, ME/L/2. Institute of Education Archives.

<sup>173</sup> Maclure, *History of Education in London 1870-1990*, 205.

easier option and so in London, too, development took place in accordance with the government's preferences.

ILEA was in its turn abolished in 1990, and its functions passed to individual boroughs.<sup>174</sup> Today the boroughs in the former ILEA area generally retain a mixed pattern of nursery schools and nursery classes. There is a core of old established nursery schools and a large number of nursery classes. For example, Tower Hamlets has four traditional nursery schools and nursery classes attached to just under 90% of its 69 primary schools (as in Manchester, a number of recently established free schools without nursery classes have lowered the percentage slightly).<sup>175</sup> The pattern is similar in Hammersmith and Fulham, which has five nursery schools and nursery classes attached to approximately 80% of the 36 primary schools.<sup>176</sup>

The Thatcher administration's preference for nursery classes did have an impact on the pattern of nursery classes and nursery schools in Local Education Authorities, in that nursery school developments ground to a halt and the number of nursery classes gradually expanded. However, Tyack and Cuban's assertion regarding the resilience of early years institutions still holds true.<sup>177</sup> Nursery schools that were established in previous periods persist, meaning that it is still valid to make a distinction between those areas, such as London and Birmingham, which have a mixed system of schools and classes, and those such as Manchester and Leicester, where nursery schools barely have a presence.

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Tower Hamlets Council, "Starting School in Tower Hamlets: Guide for Parents - The right choice for your child, 2013," [http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgs/1-50/schools/nursery\\_schools.aspx](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgs/1-50/schools/nursery_schools.aspx)

<sup>176</sup> Hammersmith and Fulham Council, "Schools in H and F – contact and location details," [http://www.lbhf.gov.uk/Directory/Education\\_and\\_Learning/Schools\\_and\\_Colleges/Locations\\_and\\_contact\\_details/46195\\_School\\_contacts\\_and\\_locations.asp#primary](http://www.lbhf.gov.uk/Directory/Education_and_Learning/Schools_and_Colleges/Locations_and_contact_details/46195_School_contacts_and_locations.asp#primary)

<sup>177</sup> Tyack and Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia*.

## **8:8 Conclusion**

A key aim of this chapter was to establish why these four LEAs developed their particular patterns of nursery education and to explain why differences occurred in the distribution of nursery classes and nursery schools (research question 2a). A distinction was drawn between the cities which developed a combination of nursery schools and nursery classes on the one hand (London and Birmingham) and those which made provision entirely, or almost entirely, through a network of nursery classes (Leicester and Manchester). Some themes have emerged which can be identified as pushing these LEAs in one direction or the other. As other LEAs were operating under the same national conditions, it seems likely that many of the points made apply more widely. The factors identified thus form the basis of a theory which is potentially generalisable to other urban LEAs and could be tested by further empirical research.

The initial response of the LEAs to the 1918 Education Act may have been a significant factor in the difference, particularly the assigning of the task of considering investment in nursery education to either a care/hygiene committee, with a particular focus on physical well-being, or to an elementary education committee, with an interest in transition between nursery and formal education. As nursery schools had a greater emphasis on physical care, with increased meals and medical inspections, and as nursery classes were clearly better placed to fulfil the aim of continuity, it would seem logical that care/hygiene committees would prefer schools, whereas elementary committees would prefer classes. These four case studies provide evidence for this: it is indeed the case that the LEAs which invested heavily in the development of classes were those where the elementary education

committees were the responsible bodies. However, as Leicester elementary education committee did remain interested in the possibility of developing nursery schools until the outbreak of World War II, and as Birmingham's nursery schools were mainly developed in the post-war period by the primary education committee, perhaps this point should not be pushed too far.

The second factor in explaining the difference is the importance of developments in the late 1920s and in the 1930s. This was the period during which the differences became marked. The opportunity for LEAs to develop their own approach to provision existed because the Board of Education first welcomed experimentation and then, in the later 1930s, believed that both nursery classes and nursery schools had their place. Manchester's strong belief that an extensive nursery class network was the way forward and Leicester's determination that some form of specialized provision was better than nothing (contrasting sharply with London's view that ordinary babies' classes were good enough for most children) were crucial factors in the creation of a pattern of development that differed from the Board's expectations.

The third factor is the effects of path dependency in each LEA, which becomes apparent following the radical shift in Board of Education policy during World War II. When LEAs had committed, financially and emotionally, to a policy direction different from that freshly adopted by central government, adaptation to the new circumstances was difficult and was resisted.<sup>178</sup> From a practical point of view, those authorities with a large number of pre-war nursery classes did not build many hatted wartime nursery schools and were not therefore in a position to adapt these to

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<sup>178</sup> Kay, *Dynamics of Public Policy*.

nursery school use after the war. In addition, authorities that had invested heavily in nursery classes were unwilling to alter a system which had seemed to them successful and which had earned them wide-spread recognition.

A final factor which explains the patterns existing today is the resilience of the nursery classes and schools once they have been established. As Tyack and Cuban found in their study of the American school system, “influential constituencies” were prepared to fight hard to preserve those gains which had been made.<sup>179</sup> This is particularly clear in the defence of nursery classes in Manchester and Leicester in the 1950s. Thus the current provision in each authority represents an accretion of all previous policy decisions. This also explains the continuation of significant numbers of nursery schools in London and Birmingham despite clear government preferences for nursery classes from the early 1970s on.

A further aim of this chapter was to analyse the balance of power between central and local government regarding the choices made between nursery schools and classes in these four cities (research question 2b). The findings offer something of a “correctional coda”<sup>180</sup> to the picture, as developed in the previous four chapters, of a strong policy elite at the Board/Ministry of Education exercising a high degree of control over the policy area with very few opportunities for others to influence the decision-making process. The fact that marked differences between LEAs existed throughout the 1918-1972 period and beyond is in itself evidence that local decision-makers had a significant impact on the way that Board/Ministry policy was implemented and thus on the actual experiences of children and their families.

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<sup>179</sup> Tyack and Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia*, 57.

<sup>180</sup> Morris, “The Contribution of Local Investigations to Historical Knowledge,” 153.



In the period before World War II, opportunities for LEAs to forge their own paths were considerable, as the Board believed that both nursery schools and nursery classes were acceptable. During the war, the Board changed its policy and began to promote nursery schools as the preferred option for all children. The 1944 Act allowed nursery classes where nursery schools were “inexpedient”<sup>181</sup> and LEAs were responsible for drawing up their own development plans so that a degree of flexibility remained. However, the newly formed Ministry made considerable efforts to influence LEAs towards its way of thinking. This is consistent with the tendency identified by historian, Peter Gosden, whereby after World War II, the Ministry became less tolerant of local variation across a range of policies.<sup>182</sup> Nonetheless, the LEAs who had established respected networks of nursery classes were unwilling to shift direction and delayed taking action until the opportunities for any new development dried up once again. It is at this point that tensions between central and local government appear most clearly and effective resistance on the part of these LEAs can be identified. The 1950s and 1960s offered few opportunities for expansion in any form and so the pre-war patterns were largely preserved. Despite a convergence in the form of new developments in the 1970s and succeeding decades, with all the LEAs complying with the government’s preference for nursery classes, the ghosts of these local pre-war decisions can be seen today. In the words of historian, Roy Lowe, LEAs continue to offer alternative “visions of what education

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<sup>181</sup> United Kingdom Parliament, *Education Act*, 1944.

<sup>182</sup> Peter Gosden, “From Board to Ministry: The impact of the war on the education department,” *History of Education* 18, no. 3 (1989): 183-193.

might be”<sup>183</sup> and challenge the notion that power resides only in the hands of the central elite.

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<sup>183</sup> Roy Lowe, “A century of Local Education Authorities: what has been lost?” *Oxford Review of Education* 28, no. 2 (2002): 158.

## **Chapter Nine: Conclusion**

### **9:1 Overview of the thesis**

The aim of this thesis is to offer an analysis of policy in a specific area of education policy in England, namely the choices made between nursery schools and nursery classes, the two key institutions for the provision of specialist education for the under fives. It covers the period from 1918, when legislation was passed to enable Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to support nursery schools for the first time (support for nursery classes was already possible) to 1972, which marked the end of the subject as a focus of interest at the national level. The key decision-makers with regard to national politics were the Board/Ministry/Department of Education (and Science). However, LEAs determined their own policies in the area within the national framework and had a relatively large degree of flexibility to make their own choices about what kind of institution should be preferred. Therefore the thesis examines both the national and the local context.

Chapters 4 to 7 analyse the history of national policy by examining four decision-making points when the choice between nursery schools and nursery classes rose to prominence on the national agenda. These four points are the 1918 Education Act (chapter 4), the 1933 Hadow Report (chapter 5), the 1944 Education Act (chapter 6) and the 1967 Plowden Report (chapter 7). The Hadow Report and the Plowden Report were produced by the government's advisory bodies, and the decisions of the committees themselves are examined, together with the subsequent effect on national policy. The aim of these four chapters is to answer the questions of which factors influenced the Board of Education and its successor bodies in its preference (or lack of preference) for either nursery schools or classes (research

questions 1a) and which groups/individuals were able, and which were not able, to make their voices heard in the process (research question 1b). Chapter 8 focuses on policy choices within four urban LEAs, and aims to answer the questions of why differences in the distribution of nursery classes and nursery schools arose in these cities (research question 2a) and what the balance of power was between central and local government in the choices made regarding forms of provision (research question 2b).

## **9:2 Key findings of the thesis**

This thesis has demonstrated that the choice between nursery schools and nursery classes was seen by members of the Board/Ministry/DES as a key constituent of nursery education policy through most of the period 1918-1972. The 1918 Education Act allowed LEAs to fund either type of institution, and the Board called for experimentation in the area. However, by the mid-1930s, it had developed a firm position that schools were needed in very deprived areas and classes in somewhat less deprived but still needy areas, whereas home was the best place for other children. A radical shift in policy occurred during World War II, and the Ministry's post-war policy was that nursery schools were needed for all children. This policy was never implemented and very few extra nursery schools were in fact established. In the late 1960s, the Plowden Report suggested maximising provision by using all possible approaches. The Conservative administration of the early 1970s stated that the best way to achieve this was through investing in nursery classes.

The decisions about which form of institution should be preferred were determined in part by decision-makers' views about what nursery education should achieve. The nursery school was generally seen, by the Board/Ministry/DES and by the policy network, as being the best way of promoting health, whereas the nursery class was seen as being better for easing transition to infant school. However, financial considerations also played a part in the decision-making process and the fact that nursery classes were cheaper than schools also influenced decisions by government and its advisors. This is evident in both the Hadow and the Plowden committees' very cautious recommendations, as the authors of both reports assiduously considered what a parsimonious state would allow as well as what might be best for children (5:3 and 7:6). The only point in this story where idealism seems largely unencumbered by financial considerations is during World War II, when the Board made the choice for nursery schools for all (6:5).

The Board/Ministry/DES assiduously gathered the views of the educational network, including teachers and their unions, academics and interest groups, at points where nursery education rose on the national agenda and decisions about how best to provide it arose. Nonetheless, the impact of the policy network on this issue was slight. The thesis demonstrates therefore that decision-making in this area was largely elitist, dominated by a small group of politicians and civil servants, rather than pluralistic. The elite was able to take control in this way because members of the policy network were divided on the issue and also, at various points, were prepared to put the whole question aside in favour of maximising the chances of expansion of any sort. However, examples of pluralist influence in the policy area do exist and can be seen, for example, in the efforts that the Board made in the 1918

Act to ensure that the institutions favoured by all members of the nascent policy network were eligible for financial support (4:8) and in the modification that LEAs were able to bring about in the 1944 Education Act (6:9).

In tracing the development of policy over such an extended period, the thesis has identified when changes occurred and drawn on policy theory to explain the nature of these changes. It has demonstrated the applicability of punctuated equilibrium theory<sup>1</sup> for this policy area. Although most change was incremental, there were points in the policy process where punctuations, or sudden shifts in direction, occurred. These were in the switch to a policy of nursery schools for all during World War II (6:5) and in the change to a preference for nursery classes by the Conservative administration in 1972 (7:11). The very low levels of investment in nursery education was a contributory factor in allowing these punctuations to occur, as decision-makers had made very little financial or emotional commitment to existing policy.

A final point of investigation in the thesis is the implementation of the policy in those LEAs who took advantage of opportunities to develop nursery provision. The thesis examines two cities which invested heavily in nursery class provision and two which developed a mixed system of schools and classes. The very fact that these difference existed necessitates a further modification of the elite model of policy making presented above, as it is clear that local voices were significant in this policy area. The findings here demonstrate that local politicians had a great deal of leeway to build institutions of their choice in the period prior to World War II (8:2 to

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<sup>1</sup> James L. True, Bryan D. Jones and Frank R. Baumgartner, "Punctuated-Equilibrium Theory: Explaining Stability and Change in Public Policy," in *Theories of the Policy Process*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Paul A. Sabatier (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2007) 155-187.

8:4). The newly formed Ministry of Education tried to pull power away from local decision-makers and towards the centre after the war, and attempted to impose its policy of nursery schools for all. However, the LEAs which had previously established a network of nursery classes found it difficult, for both practical and emotional reasons, to respond to this policy directive and did very little to shift in the new direction (8:5). This demonstrates the validity of the theory of path dependency, where past decisions constrain future ones,<sup>2</sup> in this policy area within the local context.

**9:3 Research question 1a: Which factors influenced the Board of Education and its successor bodies in indicating or failing to indicate a preference for either nursery classes or nursery schools in its pre-school education policies in England from 1918 to 1972?**

This thesis argues that the decisions concerning preferences for nursery schools and nursery classes were based both on understandings of the purpose of nursery education and on the cost of making provision. The impact of the various understandings was that as a general rule, supporters of nursery schools tended to put more emphasis on health and supporters of nursery classes tended to put more on educational benefits, as schools offered more services such as meals and medical inspections and classes were seen as more suitable for facilitating transition into mainstream schooling. Considerations of cost had an impact because nursery classes were generally the cheaper option available. It was more expensive to establish

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<sup>2</sup> Adrian Kay, *The Dynamics of Public Policy: Theory and Evidence* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2006).

schools in the first place, as classes could often be created by relatively easy adaptations to rooms in existing schools. It was also cheaper to run a class than a school because schools offered extra services and were open for longer hours.<sup>3</sup>

Both the potential health and social benefits and the educational benefits of nursery education were important to various members of the Board/Ministry/DES at various points. For most of the period 1918 to 1972, however, it was the health and social benefits which were dominant. In 1918, the Board viewed nurture as the primary aim of nursery education and the relevant clause within the Education Act was designed to create more nurture orientated institutions (4:8). The Hadow Committee also understood the primary aim of nursery education to be the promotion of health (5:12) and its findings were very much in line with current Board policy (5:13). Health considerations still seemed dominant as the 1941 Green Book was developed: R.S.Wood, a key author, certainly saw the mitigation of deprivation as nursery education's primary purpose (6:4). However, the 1943 White Paper claimed that nursery education was valuable for both health and educational reasons (6:6). The discussion among Board members as this document was written indicated that educational concerns, such as the need to avoid inappropriately formal teaching by infant teachers, did have an influence.

After World War II, there was an increasing tendency for the Ministry/DES to consider the educational benefits. The Plowden Report stated that nursery education was needed to promote the health and welfare of deprived children and the intellectual growth of all children (7:9). In the 1972 White Paper, nursery education

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<sup>3</sup> Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Schools* (London: HMSO, 1933).



was seen as valuable because it promoted children's educational progress and this had become the dominant reason for provision (7:11).

One would anticipate, therefore, that the Board and its successor bodies would move in the 1918-1972 period from a preference for nursery schools to nursery classes, and, indeed, this is the underlying pattern. However, the question of cost also impacted on decision-making. There was throughout most of this period a perception on the part of the Board/Ministry/DES that funds for nursery education were limited and the best use had to be made of a finite pot of money. It frequently implied in its communications with advocates for nursery education that it would ideally like to increase nursery provision but, alas, it was not able to do so because of the financial difficulties of the country (for example, 5:3 and 7:2). There were times when education in general was resourced very meagrely and all aspects of educational spending suffered, such as under the "Geddes Axe" of the 1920s (4:9). The Board/Ministry/DES, however, was still responsible for deciding where its allocation of resources would be spent and it seems that nursery education was a particularly low priority. This was made very explicit, for example, in the 1950s, when it was frequently stated by ministers that the needs of children in compulsory education should always come first (7:2).

The result of this perception was that the Board/Ministry/DES and its advisory committees frequently felt that there was a choice to be made between quality, an ideal form of provision for the most needy children, and quantity, making some sort of provision for a greater number. The lower cost of nursery classes was the reason why the Hadow Committee recommended that they should be the preferred institution in areas where needs were not at the most severe level (5:12).

The Plowden Committee kept affordability firmly in mind throughout their deliberations and this was a reason for moving away from nursery schools for all towards an acceptance of many different sorts of institutions (7:6 and 7:9). The Conservative preference for nursery classes in the early 1970s was also heavily influenced by the fact that the lower costs meant that more provision could be made (7:11). It was only during World War II and the deliberations around the 1944 Education Act that the question of what sort of institution might be best for children was considered relatively unencumbered by the underlying question of whether the government was prepared to pay for it (6:6).

The thesis has demonstrated the applicability of punctuated equilibrium theory in the trajectory of this policy area of nursery schools and nursery classes. True, Jones and Baumgartner argue that “political processes are generally characterized by stability and incrementalism, but occasionally they produce large-scale departures from the past,” perhaps at times of crisis or wider social and political changes.<sup>4</sup> The 1944 Education Act represents one major punctuation, when there is a sudden shift towards nursery schools for all, and another is heralded by the Plowden Report and given a final form in Margaret Thatcher’s nursery class policy. These punctuations could occur with relative ease within the policy area because so little actual provision existed within the period. Therefore, each time a decision-point arose, policy-makers had very nearly a blank page before them. Decisions that future investment should be in one form or another could be made without a feeling that past financial and emotional commitment would be wasted.

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<sup>4</sup> True, Jones and Baumgartner, “Punctuated-Equilibrium Theory,” 155.

**9:4 Research question 1b: Which groups/individuals were able to make their voices heard and which groups/individuals were not able to make their voices heard in the decision-making process?**

In the area of nursery education, a fairly stable group of individuals and organisations developed into a policy network (active policy participants, seen by the decision-makers as having a right to be consulted). Overwhelmingly, members came from within the world of education: they were academics, members of pressure groups such as the Nursery School Association, members of local education committees and teachers and their union representatives. This network was overwhelmingly in favour of the expansion of nursery education. Therefore, many of them co-operated to act as an advocacy coalition,<sup>5</sup> campaigning for increased provision. Examples of co-ordination between some or all of these educationalists can be seen in joint deputations to the Board, for example in 1917 to Fisher (4:5) and in 1929 to Trevelyan (5:5), and also in co-ordinated campaigns to save nurseries from closure in the 1950s (7:2).

Throughout the period, the Board/Ministry/DES was aware of a demand for nursery education and cited it as a stimulus to action (of a limited sort), for example through referral to the Hadow and Plowden Committees (5:5 and 7:5). Therefore, there were many voices from outside the Board/Ministry/DES which contributed to securing nursery education a place on the national agenda and, in Kingdon's terms, opening up the "policy window" which allowed alternative methods of meeting the demand to be discussed.<sup>6</sup> However, the fact that the policies to encourage nurseries

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<sup>5</sup> Paul A. Sabatier, "The Need for Better Theories," in *Theories of the Policy Process* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Paul Sabatier (Boulder, Co: Westview, 2007), 3-17.

<sup>6</sup> John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Longman, 2003), 165.

were never fully implemented and provision remained sparse is an indication that nursery education's place on that agenda was insecure.

The reason for the fragility of that agenda position is bound up with the perception that, from the beginning, nursery schools and classes were a "special" part of the education service (4:8). They were positioned by the Board as an addition to its main business, which was teaching children of the designated compulsory school age. It was therefore difficult for the nursery advocates to make the case that nurseries should be prioritised within the education budget. However, the policy network jealously guarded the educational "frame"<sup>7</sup> around nursery schools and classes and did not choose to capitalise on the support of those parties whose concern was the role nurseries could play in providing childcare. The NSA's correspondence with the Ministry after World War II is one example of this (7:2). Therefore, one group of voices was largely excluded from contributing to the policy debate, namely the parents, mainly mothers, who needed nurseries to enable them to work. The prevailing attitude among powerful classes at the time was that working mothers were a rather unfortunate fact of life, as was expressed very clearly in the Plowden Report (7:8). Nevertheless, an increased awareness of demands for childcare was one of the factors which could force nursery education up the policy agenda. This can be seen most strikingly during World War II when the need for women's work caused an explosion in emergency provision (6:3). It is possible that if working women's voices had been more integrated into the policy network, the fight for agenda position may have been more successful.

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Cairney, *Understanding Public Policy: Theories and Issues* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 175.

The central concern of this thesis is, however, what happened once nursery education was on the agenda of the Board/Ministry/DES and the choices it made between the policy alternatives of nursery schools and classes. It argues that the educational policy network had very little impact on these choices and the central decision makers usually operated as a policy elite, although there are some limited examples of pluralistic decision-making.

The 1918 Education Act permitted LEAs to finance all forms of nursery education (4:8). In one sense, then, all members of the policy network could be said to have achieved their aims in gaining recognition for their preferred form, but it is also true that no particular groups or individuals were able to stamp their vision of what nursery education should be on the new Act. Similarly, the conclusions of the Hadow Report had something to offer all participants, in that both nursery schools and nursery classes were permitted, but the key idea that the different institutions were needed in different areas was very much the committee's own (5:12). The committee was also heavily influenced by the need to make what it saw as financially viable recommendations which would accord with the Board's current understanding of what resources could be allocated to nurseries, and was therefore more influenced by current Board policy than any of the witnesses (5:12). The change of policy embedded in the 1944 Education Act was initiated very largely by one civil servant on the advice of the inspectorate (6:5). The views of policy network members such as the Nursery School Association and teachers were ignored (6:7 and 6:8). Local Education Authorities were, however, able to wring a small concession out of the Board, so that the final Act permitted the nursery classes that many of them wanted in some circumstances (6:9). The Plowden Committee

downgraded the issue of nursery classes and nursery schools, which was broadly in accordance with the wishes of many witnesses (7:7). The result of its wooliness, however, was that the DES was able to pick its own path through the options. The fact that the Labour and Conservative administrations responded so differently to the report is further evidence of elitist policy making (7:10 and 7:11).

The reason that policy-making in this area was largely elitist was firstly that policy network members disagreed among themselves about this issue, and therefore did not act as strong advocates for one approach or the other. It has been conceded by neopluralists that an elite model has validity in situations such as this, because the administrative body must choose between advocates for different positions and thus, effectively, develop policy independently.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, policy participants frequently did not want to jeopardise the possibility of nursery expansion by being inflexible about how it could be achieved. This can be seen in the mild-mannered submissions to the Hadow Committee (5:7 to 5:10) and the Plowden Committee (7:7). It is also evident in the Nursery School Association's decision to support the Board's approach in the 1944 Act, despite its own strong desire for schools for 2 to 7 year olds (6:7).

Policy theorists, Sabatier and Weible, discuss the differences between "deep core beliefs," for example being left-wing or right-wing, "policy core beliefs," which are fundamental positions which affect how one views a whole policy area and "secondary beliefs" of much narrower scope.<sup>9</sup> Policy actors are extremely unlikely

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew S. Mcfarland, *Neopluralism: The Evolution of Political Process Theory* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Paul A. Sabatier and Christopher M. Weible, "The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Innovations and Clarifications," in *Theories of the Policy Process*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed Paul A. Sabatier (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2007), 189-220, 194.

to shift their position in respect of deep core or policy core beliefs, but may be open to arguments about secondary beliefs. For many people interested in nursery education, the belief that it was a good thing and should be available to a greater number of children than currently benefitted from it was a policy core belief. A commitment to the particular policy alternatives of nursery schools or nursery classes was a secondary belief on which they were open to arguments and prepared to compromise in the interest of the core belief. Kingdon argues that, “When the issue isn’t really hot, advocates hold firmly to their extreme positions. But when the issue has a serious chance of legislature or other action, then advocates become more flexible.”<sup>10</sup> This does not seem to be quite right, as network members’ positions on the school/class issue became extremely flexible in the deep spending freeze in the 1950s and early 1960s because they were so intent on placing the issue of expansion back on the agenda (7:4). However, the underlying point that flexibility may be adopted in the interests of easing the passage of legislature addressing the policy core beliefs does hold true.

Those interested in childcare and the voices of working parents were largely excluded from the debate about policy alternatives. This meant that the choice between nursery classes and nursery schools was not made with their needs in mind. This was noticeably the case in the 1944 Education Act, when the contemplated nursery schools were not suitable for the working mothers currently using the emergency war-nurseries (6:10). Similarly, the Plowden Committee grudgingly admitted that nurseries could help solve the problem of what working mothers might do with the children (7:8), but nonetheless recommended excluding under-threes and

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<sup>10</sup> Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, 167.

limiting full-time places so that the proposed new provision was not actually able to make much contribution here (7:9). The fact that the contemplated new forms of provision were unable to meet the needs of this potential constituency and the reaffirmation of the educational frame was a contributory factor to the lack of implementation of the nursery school policy after World War II (6:11) and may also account for the slow progress in the 1970s and 1980s (7:11).

**9:5 Research question 2a: How does one account for differences in the distribution of nursery classes and nursery schools in major English cities?**

There were striking differences between the pattern of nursery school and nursery class provision in English cities in the 1918-1972 period and these differences persist today. Some LEAs, represented by London and Birmingham in this thesis, demonstrated commitment to both nursery schools and classes; others, represented by Manchester and Leicester, put the vast bulk of their resources into developing a more comprehensive network of nursery classes. The differences between the two pairings were caused by the values and beliefs of local politicians in the period prior to World War II. The differences were not eradicated in subsequent decades because past decisions made changing direction difficult. This is consistent with the theory of path dependency, in which each policy decision has the potential to restrict future options.<sup>11</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a determination on the part of the Education Committees in Leicester and Manchester that nursery education should be provided for as many children in the city as possible. This entailed making provision

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<sup>11</sup> Kay, *Dynamics of Public Policy*.



exclusively, or nearly exclusively, through nursery classes, as it was easier and cheaper to do so. Extensive nursery class networks were established (8:3 and 8:4). This was not the case in London and Birmingham. In the 1920s, Education Committees in London and Birmingham believed that nursery schools should be the normal form of provision and therefore concentrated their energies on developing these, with varying degrees of success. They therefore did not invest time and resources to establishing nursery classes (8:3). In the 1930s, London did slowly begin to invest in nursery classes in addition to schools and Birmingham attempted to do so, but was thwarted by practical difficulties (8:4).

The difference between the two pairs of LEAs was not wiped out by the 1944 Education Act, despite its prescription that nursery schools for all should be the norm. The distinction between Leicester and Manchester as LEAs favouring nursery classes and London and Birmingham as LEAs with a mixed system of schools and classes in fact became more distinct. At the end of the war, a window of opportunity arose, albeit extremely briefly, for nursery school development (7:2). However, the radical shift in policy which this represented came as something of a shock to Manchester and Leicester and they were unable to take advantage of this (8:5). There were practical reasons why they found it very difficult to respond: The Ministry of Education had suggested that a good start could be made to implementing the new policy by taking advantage of emergency war-time hatted accommodation. However, the extent of pre-war development in both cities had meant that there had not been much need to throw up such structures, and the majority of wartime provision had been accommodated in pre-war nursery classes. There were also emotional reasons for the lukewarm response. In discussions

between central government and both LEAs about the post-war change of direction, one can sense hurt pride and ruffled feathers on the part of those local politicians who had thought themselves at the forefront of development in the area and had been used to receiving praise for it (8:5). London and Birmingham, however, had many suitable huts for adaptation and the LEAs were very willing to increase nursery provision by these means (8:5).

In the 1950s and 1960s, opportunities for LEAs to establish new provision were severely restricted by the Ministry of Education and therefore the pattern of schools and classes could not be affected by any increases in one form or another (8:6). However, this pattern could potentially be altered through the closure of institutions. In Leicester and Manchester, the possibility of closing nursery classes was debated, but pressure groups successfully mobilized in order to protect what had been established. London remained in any case committed to fighting for opportunities to develop rather than cut nursery schools and classes. Birmingham's newly established provision does not seem to have been seriously threatened. The patterns established in the pre-war period proved resistant.

The Conservative 1972 White Paper recommended that future expansion should be through nursery classes and this was in fact what happened in all four cities (8:7). For Leicester and Manchester, the new direction was a vindication of the approach they had been taking. London (now the Inner London Education Authority rather than London County Council) and Birmingham were more than happy to take advantage of the prevailing wind to maximise provision. Eventually, (in the period outside the scope of this thesis), this led to more similarity between the LEAs and nursery classes became dominant in all areas. Nevertheless, because

nursery education is hard to dismantle once it has been established,<sup>12</sup> nursery schools did persist and remained part of the provision in those areas where they existed prior to 1972. Current provision in each area therefore represents an accretion of all previous policy decisions.

There is thus a marked contrast between how policy changed over time in these LEAs and policy changes at national level. In the LEAs where actual financial and emotional investment was made in nursery provision, rapid changes in direction, or punctuations in the policy equilibrium, proved to be difficult. The lack of harmonisation between the freely swinging pendulum of unimplemented national policy and the necessarily incremental nature of actual development at the local level was an underlying tension which bubbled throughout this period.

**9:6 Research question 2b: What was the balance of power between central and local government in the choices made between nursery schools and nursery classes in English cities?**

The thesis has established that it was a small circle of civil servants and politicians at the Board/Ministry/Department of Education (and Science) who determined the choices made between nursery schools and nursery classes in the formation of national policy. However, nursery school legislation was largely designed to permit LEAs to make provision rather than to force them to do so. Although the 1944 Education Act did impose a duty to provide nursery schools, the Ministry of Education did not compel LEAs to fulfil this duty during the succeeding

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<sup>12</sup> Larry Cuban, "Why some reforms last: the case of the kindergarten," *American Journal of Education* 100, no. 2 (1992): 166-194.

decades and in fact actively discouraged new investment (7:2). Therefore, LEAs had a substantial influence on the ways in which nursery policy generally was implemented and on the choices made on the ground between nursery schools and classes. The difference between LEAs in terms of the distribution of nursery classes and nursery schools is in itself evidence of this. Therefore, the elitist model of policy making in this area needs tempering with a recognition of the power and influence of local politicians.

This freedom and power was at its zenith before World War II. The 1918 Education Act was designed to be flexible to encourage maximum support for the new policy and government regulations from the early 1920s called for experimentation (4:8). This gave LEAs the power to choose nursery schools or classes as they saw fit, which resulted in markedly different approaches in different areas (8:2). The position of the Board of Education became more rigid in the 1930s as the approach suggested by the Hadow Report, that schools and classes were each suitable for a different sort of socio-economic area, was adopted (5:13). The Board made attempts to impose its approach on LEAs, but the fact that the policy allowed for both schools and classes made it difficult to enforce, as did the fact that the socio-economic classification of specific districts could be subject to dispute. Differences between the LEAs thus continued and increased in this period.

The passing of the 1944 Education Act marks a major change in national policy towards nursery schools for all. The Ministry of Education attempted to impose the new policy on LEAs as they worked on their post-war development plans (8:5). However, the case studies in this thesis have indicated that it encountered a degree of resistance from those authorities who had invested heavily in nursery

classes before the war and nursery schools were not established in these areas (8:6). Central government did not therefore implement the change in policy which it had wished.

By the late 1960s, interest in the choice between nursery schools and nursery classes had generally dissipated under the pressure of the years when very little investment had been made in either institution (7:4 and 7:7). When the Conservative administration in the early 1970s decided that all new investment should be in nursery classes, LEAs complied with this change in direction (8:7). The new uniformity between LEAs is strongly suggestive of an increasingly tight hand on the reins of power by the Department of Education and Science (DES). Nevertheless, the maintenance of existing nursery schools, which was sanctioned by the 1972 White Paper (7:11), meant that the shadows of old patterns persisted and the choices of the local decision-makers from the decades before World War II continue to impact on children's educational experiences today.

### **9:7 Contribution to knowledge**

This thesis contributes to knowledge in the field of the history of early years education policy, a largely neglected area of academic study in which the key texts remain works by Whitbread and Blackstone from the early 1970s.<sup>13</sup> The choice between the policy alternatives of nursery classes and nursery schools has not been researched in detail previously, either at the national or the local level. The account here clarifies the narrative of the development of this policy area in the national

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<sup>13</sup> Nanette Whitbread, *The Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School: A History of Infant and Nursery Education in Britain, 1800-1970* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972); Tessa Blackstone, *A Fair Start: The Provision of Pre-School Education* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1971).

arena, particularly in respect of the Board's preference for nursery schools during and after World War II. Although Whitbread indicated that such a preference existed, Blackstone denied this (2:5). Much more detail has been added to the accounts offered by these historians because of the increased access to archive material which was still unavailable in the 1970s. This has illuminated in particular the reasons why decisions were made, as these are often stated within internal memoranda or notes of discussion meetings. The reasons behind the shift in policy during World War II, the determined advocacy of Cecil Maudslay for the new approach and the details of his discussions with Butler are particularly striking examples (6:5 and 6:6). The account of local decision-making in the area is largely new, although some debt is owed to policy theorists Ozga and Gerwitz's work on the post-war development plans.<sup>14</sup>

The thesis has also contributed to the field in demonstrating the applicability of a variety of policy theories to understanding the empirical findings regarding the development of nursery class and nursery school policy. John Kingdon's theory of agendas and alternatives has provided a mechanism for understanding how and when the choice between nursery schools and classes became a live issue for the Board of Education and its successor bodies.<sup>15</sup> The concept of models of power, as set out by Michael Hill, among others,<sup>16</sup> has underpinned the description of decision-making in this area as largely elitist. Explanations for this elitism have drawn on Andrew McFarland's insight that if different members of the policy network are ranged on differing sides of the argument then the decision-maker has a high degree of

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<sup>14</sup> Sharon Gewirtz and Jenny Ozga, "Partnership, pluralism and education policy: a reassessment," *Journal of Education Policy* 5, no. 1 (1990): 37-48.

<sup>15</sup> Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Hill, *The Public Policy Process*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Harlow: Pearson Educational, 2009).

autonomy and on Sabatier and Weible's theory into the occasional need for individuals and groups to sacrifice secondary beliefs in the interest of achieving more fundamental aims.<sup>17</sup> The thesis has also tested theories of policy change within this specific area and has demonstrated the validity of both punctuated equilibrium theory and path dependency.<sup>18</sup> These theories combine to explain why the Board/Ministry/DES was able to alter national policy with comparative ease whereas this was more challenging for local politicians.

The theories presented in this thesis could be taken as starting points for generating theories into other aspects of early years policy. In particular, it would be worthwhile to research the connection between these findings and the other side of the "entwined history"<sup>19</sup> of childcare and education. The relationship between childcare professionals, interest groups and the Ministry of Health which made decisions in this area may (or may not) have taken a similar form, which could be demonstrated by documentary research conducted with the method used here. It would also be worth investigating the relationship between the Ministry of Health and local welfare authorities to see if the situation parallels the central/local relationship analysed here.

Those working in early childhood services in England today will find that much in the account of nursery education policy given here resonates with their experiences. The shadow of a parsimonious state looms still over the debate about how we can best meet the needs of young children for care and education, as has

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<sup>17</sup> McFarland, *Neopluralism*; Sabatier and Weible, "Advocacy Coalition Framework: Innovations and Clarifications."

<sup>18</sup> True, Jones and Baumgartner, "Punctuated-Equilibrium Theory"; Kay, *Dynamics of Public Policy*.

<sup>19</sup> Helen Penn, "Round and Round the Mulberry Bush: The Balance of Public and Private in Early Education and Childcare in the Twentieth Century," in *Public or Private Education? Lessons from History*, ed. Richard Aldrich (London: Woburn Press, 2004), 75-97, 94.

most recently been seen in the proposal by the Coalition government (2010 to date) to generate “more great childcare” by reducing costs through lowering the ratio of staff to children.<sup>20</sup> The policy trajectory this thesis has described has resulted in a mishmash of services which still fails to meet the needs of many parents and children.<sup>21</sup> However, the nursery school, seen by so many decision-makers throughout this history as an unwarranted expense, still exists and continues to operate as a beacon of good practice, as the EPPE project has demonstrated.<sup>22</sup> This thesis can stand as evidence that there is continuing value in thinking about what we, as a society, really want for young children and how it can best be achieved.

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<sup>20</sup> Department of Education, *More great childcare: Raising quality and giving parents more choice*, 2013, <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-00002-2013>

<sup>21</sup> Peter Baldock, *Developing Early Childhood Services; Past, Present and Future* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2011)

<sup>22</sup> Kathy Sylva, Edward Melhuish, Pam Sammons, Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Brenda Taggart, *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE Project): Final Report – A longitudinal study funded by the DfES 1997-2004* (Nottingham: DfES, 2004).



## **Archives and Record Offices**

Birmingham Archives and Heritage, Central Library, Chamberlain Square,  
Birmingham, B3 3HQ

British Association for Early Childhood Education Archive, London School of  
Economics and Political Science, 10 Portugal Street, London, WC2A 2HD

Froebel Archive for Childhood Studies, University of Roehampton, Roehampton  
Lane, London, SW15 5PJ

Greater Manchester County Record Office, 56 Marshall Street, New Cross,  
Manchester, M4 5FU

London Metropolitan Archives, 40 Northampton Road, London, EC1R OHB

Modern Records Centre, University Library, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4  
7AL

The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU

The Newsom Library and Archives, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way,  
London, WC1H OAL

Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, Long Street, Wigston  
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