

**Have you thought about becoming  
a real teacher?**

**The COVID-19 pandemic and the public  
perception of the value of the  
early years worker.**

**A discourse analysis of the early years  
'professional'.**

**Lauren Mills  
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## **Abstract**

This research analyses public discourse during January 2021, the third national lockdown in England during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through discourse analysis methodology, conclusions have been drawn in relation to the social construct of the early years workers value and status. Being exposed to an increase in media and policy attention, and reframed as keyworkers, the rationale guiding this research was curiosity as to whether the social construction of the early years worker, as of little worth and status, could be open to change. Despite its importance, work across all levels of the education system is hugely undervalued in society. Discourse analysis of media texts, such as newspaper articles and television interviews, exposed the unjust positionality of early years workers in particular as expendable to the needs of higher value workers. Government policy, communicated through the media, exacerbated the dominant discourse of derision, by reinforcing the 'childcare' aspect of early years education. This rejects the early years as part of the education system, thus maintaining the construct of the early years worker as a glorified babysitter and not an educator, at the very bottom of an already hugely undervalued sector.

## **Introduction**

Childcare and education have historically been seen as women's work, from the early pioneers of early education to the present day. Work with young children is seen as biologically determined (Ailwood, 2008; Osgood, 2006) and an extension of women's natural capabilities (Ailwood 2008; Hochschild, 1983; Osgood, 2006; Randall, 2000; Yarrow, 2015). 'Homely' care from motherly figures is still deeply embedded in government policy and ideology leading early years workers to adopt a quasi-maternal role. Such policy reinforces the idea that the work is of little value, unskilled and gendered, implying that early years workers should use their innate qualities and practice these through domestic labour. This dominant discourse devalues the importance of early years education and the skills needed to educate young children. Through discourse analysis of media texts, this research aims to analyse the extent to which these assumptions are still present in dominant government and media discourse.

## **The Government and the Early Years: An Attack on Working-Class Women**

Major focus on early years policy began with New Labour in 1997 who depicted a sector 'in crisis' and in need of radical reform, to improve employability and the country's economic competitiveness and to allow women to re-enter the labour market. Early years workers were seen, not only as the key to this success, but also essential in reducing and tackling poverty, social inequality and disadvantage (Dahlberg & Moss 2007; Moss, 2006; Osgood, 2009). Whilst much of future societal success rested on the shoulders of the early years workforce (Osgood, 2009), they were simultaneously depicted as an inadequate and lacking sector in need of 'professionalising' to increase 'quality' of provision.

New Labour's National Childcare Strategy implicitly stated that women entering the early years workforce can be supported to help them care successfully for their own children, reinforcing the perception that early years work is an extension of mothering, whilst implying that parenting is a skill in which working-class women were lacking. They are expected to adopt a different persona, masking who they are to meet the needs of their middle-class clients, serving and loving their children to middle-class values and adopting a middle-class ethos (Vincent & Braun, 2013). The government, therefore, construct early years work as a default career, undertaken as an alternative to a life on benefits (Osgood, 2005). A discourse of derision, depicting the early years

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workforce as indolent, untrustworthy, unambitious, intuitive, under-qualified, reliant, and opaque (Osgood, 2006b) and in need of professionalising and radical reform, so publicly, dehumanises the early years sector and becomes an act of violence against the workforce which overwhelmingly consists of working-class women. The same gendered and classed narrative continues (Osgood, 2021) ensuring that working-class women are the ones continuing to gain employment in this sector (Ailwood, 2008; Tronto, 2013).

### **The Caring Professional: An Oxymoron?**

Dominant masculine, neo liberal qualities (based on male, white, middle-class values) traditionally associated with professionalism include rational thinking, leadership, assertiveness, and power (Osgood, 2006). This automatically places the early years sector, whose work involves conventionally feminine qualities, behaviours, and attitudes such as care and love, as unprofessional (Lally et al, 1997). This maintains the maternalistic discourse and further devalues work with young children, contributing to the perception of this as a low value 'career'. This also acts to justify the poor working conditions and low pay faced by those in the sector.

Hochschild (1983) addressed the notion that labour is not divided into manual work and mental work and instead the two could be combined. Being able to maintain professional intimacy, contain emotions and painful feelings whilst building strong attachments is highly skilled and should be recognised as such (Hochschild, 1983). Work with young children requires 'emotional work of the highest calibre' (Elfer et al. 2003:27). The notion of what constitutes a 'professional' must be therefore be open to change.

Attempts to professionalise the workforce through the introduction of the Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) marginalised the sector further. The entry requirements were the same as those needed to become a teacher, however, early years workers who gained the EYTS were unable to work in schools and, despite having a title that makes them appear to have status, continued to have poorer pay and working conditions than teachers (Nutbrown, 2012). The disparity of pay, working conditions and status between early years workers and teachers further degrades the profession (Osgood et al. 2017) and widens the divide between early years workers and teachers (Lloyd & Hallet, 2010).

### **The Media**

Literature shows that work in teaching and education are often seen as the lowest value in society (Ingersoll & Mitchell, cited in Chong & Lu, 2019). When work in education is split into subsets, for example, preschool, primary, secondary, higher, and further education, it is preschool teaching that is considered of lowest value (Chan, 2012) and so early years workers have the most work to do in terms of overcoming obstacles to elevate their status (Buchanan, 2015). Societal status as well as interpersonal values and beliefs, contribute to professional identity and a sense of professionalism.

Social learning theory purports that aspects of our identity are impacted by the groups we belong to, including occupational groups, and how we are viewed by other people (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) in society. Long standing popular expressions such as 'hair-or care', an assumption that women who do not possess academic abilities have only two options of career available to them; hairdressing or childcare, persist with the 'outdated equation between caring and female irrationality or anti-intellectualism' (Taggart, 2011:85). Common expressions frequently reinforced through the media, such as 'Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach', also act to degrade the

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whole teaching profession, impacting negatively on the professional identity of early years workers.

Chang-Kredl, Pauls and Foster (2019) argue that the low wages and poor working conditions are directly influenced by the social undervaluing of the sector. This results from the naturalising view of women as mother figures and cultural belittling of the profession through mainstream media texts which then become subtle and unconscious biases. Their analysis of popular media texts found stereotypical representations of the early years worker which reinforce societal assumptions. Female educators were depicted as 'maternal': feminine without being too sexual, white, in their 30's/40's, respectable, softly spoken, caring, quiet and complicit (Duffy, 2005) and to enjoy being with children is the norm (Colley, 2006). This educator takes care of the 'dirty' work and is often looked down upon and exploited by the middle-class customers who see childcare as work that is beneath them.

## **COVID-19**

Much like during the policy reform in the late 1990's when the sector was thrust into the spotlight and where future societal success was rested on the shoulders of the early years workforce (Osgood, 2009), during this pandemic, the sector was hailed as essential frontline workers. However, the reality is that the sector received little public praise or recognition in comparison to other caring professions. As a direct result of government policy, underfunding and a lack of support during this pandemic, many providers were forced to close, or remain at risk of closure, particularly those in disadvantaged areas. This will have devastating consequences for young children's development in terms of a widening attainment gap (Early Years Workforce Commission, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the unjust treatment of the sector to the forefront for both those inside and outside of the sector, leading to many early years workers questioning their worth, professional value, position in society and subsequently their future.

## **Research Question**

The purpose of this study is to explore in depth, the construction of the early years sector through government policy and the media, and how this influences public perception of the early years work. This study looks to explore the treatment and portrayal of the early years sector, specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic, using data such as newspaper articles and interviews published during January 2021, the third national lockdown in England. To achieve this aim, three objectives were defined:

- To explore the language used in the construction of the early years worker through representation in the media
- To explore language used in the construction of the early years sector in relation to public value and perception
- To infer the implications of the portrayal of the dominant discourse for the early years sector, in terms of judgement of their work, their labour conditions and the future of the sector

## **Methodology**

The ontological and epistemological perspective taken in this research is that there is no single reality of truth to be found, and that reality is both socially constructed and in need of interpretation (Levers, 2013). This perspective is often aligned with postmodern thinking and suggests that a

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single phenomenon is open to multiple interpretations rather than a single truth (Pham, 2018). This research therefore uses an interpretivist paradigm. A qualitative study is appropriate as the goal of this research is to analyse this social phenomenon by relying on a range of data, including individuals' experiences of a given situation during a specific time period. Qualitative methods allow for exploration and investigation of meaning (Willig, 2013) to enable interpretations to be drawn. This qualitative study uses a grounded theory methodology.

The study was performed using discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is concerned with the contextual meaning of language (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), how it is manipulated to achieve specific effects and to meet specific agendas and drawing meaning in terms of conversation or culture (Shaw & Bailey, 2009). When applied critically, its purpose is to describe, interpret, and explain the ways in which discourses construct, maintain, and legitimise social inequalities (Mullett, 2018). It can become a form of social action (Edley, 2001). Post-structuralism, feminism and sociological theory will shape the lens through which these discourses are viewed.

A purposive sampling method was applied to the data selection process. Purposive sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling in which researcher judgement is used to select data (Patton, 2002). Researcher judgement may impact the perceived reliability of the sources sampled and credibility of the research findings as it can never be free from bias. To ensure feasibility, a criterion sampling strategy (Patton, 2002) was adopted which included the following criteria: all data must have been published between 1st and 31st January 2021, all sources should be politically 'neutral' and considered credible, based on scores assigned by Ad Fontes Media, a media watchdog organisation, which measures media bias and reliability. A selection of newspaper articles, written and recorded interviews, policy and letters to the government were included in the data selection. *See Appendix 1 for selected data sources.*

The rationale behind the chosen timeframe was that data would be representative of the social and political context in relation to the research question. To understand the construction of the early years worker during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was essential to analyse discourse generated during that moment in time in which to draw conclusions. During the third national lockdown in England, changes to education were put in place, resulting in new policy, government guidance and media attention. Data gathered during this time could therefore provide the most valid data in relation to the research question.

The source of the texts are first verified, including the company or newspaper, the author and editorial staff involved. Notes are made on the style of the journalists, the general political position of the source, its affiliation with the government and the education sector. Following on from the background checks on the source, notes are made on the medium and genre of the discourse which shapes the meaning to the reader.

Interviews and video footage were transcribed. MAXQDA 2020, a software package for qualitative and mixed methods research analysis allowed discourses to be analysed for themes, repeated words or phrases using a colour coding system. Language was analysed for context and interpretation prior to code assignment. Codes were referred back to the data upon completion of each text analysis, and again after all texts had been analysed to ensure that the correct codes had been assigned. 'Smart Coding' allowed related codes and subcodes to be categorised together in a coding frame. The data was analysed for relationships among the codes and categories and themes were identified and developed. Although discourse analysis is interpretive and often intuitive, a coding programme was used to create order and allow for change and adaptations in the research if necessary following engagement in reflexivity, rather than as a means of carrying out analysis.

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Resulting themes and patterns from analysis were reviewed and interpreted. Interpreting the data involves placing the findings in the broader context in relation to the research question, identifying who may benefit from this analysis. Following interpretation, conclusions were drawn in relation to the research question.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Reflexivity, and an awareness that personal feelings, experiences, and beliefs can impact the research process (Haynes, 2012), must be applied throughout the research process, including data selection and interpretation. Consideration has been given to the sources which were selected; however, they may not be as credible, unbiased, or knowledgeable as each other. Some may have undisclosed political agendas affecting the selection and omission of information, show bias through language, headlines and placement, and may give misinformation, misinterpret data, or give false impressions (Fields, 2006). Data that does not support the research question or fit in with identified themes, must not be omitted to serve the purpose of collecting findings that provide a neat answer.

It is unknown whether there were any power imbalances, inadequate trust or time spent on building relationships with the participants interviewed. These factors could contribute to the participants not giving an honest self-representation of themselves (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). It is also unknown whether participants felt that they were fairly represented following the editing process. Using secondary data in the public sphere, eliminates the possibility of seeking consent. Although ownership of the data must be acknowledged, for data that is made freely available on public forums, such as in newspapers, television, and social media, further use and analysis is implied (Tripathy, 2013).

During interpretive research, particularly one in which is heavily contextualised, socially and in terms of both time and place, inferences drawn from data may not lend themselves well to replicability or generalisability (Leavy and Harris, 2019). Due to the nature of the social context, the research may not serve well to make any predictions about the future. Conversely, conclusions drawn from analysis may expose power relations and inequalities, bringing to light various forms in which inequality presents itself. Identifying these may cause uncomfortable feelings. It is impossible to know how someone may interpret findings from research. However, research oriented towards social justice is important for exploring subjective and collective experiences to increase understanding of how societal structures work (Charmaz, 2005). Social justice research can be the start of identifying injustices and bringing around tangible change.

Power relations and binaries such as male/female can be problematic and seen as normalising gender binaries, rather than acknowledging gender as diverse and fluid (Leavy & Harris, 2019). Where inequalities are found based on gender, the intention is neither to privilege nor marginalise individuals. For the purpose of this study, 'woman' and 'women' refers to those who are female and female identifying. When addressing 'gendered assumptions' or 'gender inequalities', gender is referring to biologically defined sex characteristics.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

Through analysis of discourse using a colour coding system, three clear themes emerged. The first theme is that the early years sector were subject to unjust treatment by the government including late and inconsistent guidance, a lack of financial support and being treated as an afterthought. These feelings are important as they are directly from those working in the sector.

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The second theme is that early years workers are expendable, whether to the needs of others, or in terms of their safety. The final theme to emerge is that early years workers hold less value and status than other educational professionals and teachers, who were well financed, supported, acknowledged and praised throughout the pandemic.

### **Theme 1: Unjust treatment by the Government**

The overwhelming theme that emerged in relation to the research question was the poor and unjust treatment of the sector by the government who felt forgotten, overlooked, undervalued, abandoned and 'hung out to dry'. The sector has had "no words of support, reassurance, direction, explanation, encouragement or recognition. Nothing but utter disdain" (David Wright, Day Nurseries, 5th January 2021). Government guidance for the sector was often published late and was 'risky, vague and inconsistent' (Jedidajah Otte, The Guardian, 18th January 2021). "We're just forgotten, we're bottom of the pile – they don't seem to care" (Christine Berry, The Guardian, 28th January 2021).

Despite a full national lockdown due to the dangerous spread of the COVID-19 virus, early years settings were expected to remain open. Financial blackmail by the government meant that settings that closed would be penalised. A DfE spokesperson said, 'As the PM set out, all EY settings should remain open, and we would encourage them to stay open. Settings that choose to close will not receive early entitlements funding as they will not be delivering places' (Catherine Gaunt, for [www.nurseryworld.co.uk](http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk), 5th January). "Add to this the fact that the government is providing minimal financial support to help providers get through this incredibly difficult period and it's hard to think of many other sectors that have been asked to do so much while being been treated with such disdain" (Neil Leitch for the EY Alliance).

Just as New Labour did in 1997, this conservative government has labelled the workforce as key workers essential in supporting the country through a global pandemic, whilst publicly being told how to do their job properly, imposing financial penalties and continuing to offer little funding or support. All this whilst receiving low pay, suffering from poor working conditions and being afforded little status or recognition (Osgood, 2009). This belittling of the profession through mainstream media texts will contribute to subtle and unconscious biases (Chang-Kredl et al, 2019).

The poor treatment, lack of support and financial penalties continues the discourse of derision (Osgood, 2006b). In doing this so publicly, the dehumanising of the early years sector is reinforced and becomes an act of violence against the workforce. The sector continues to be classed, gendered and depicted as unskilled and lacking (Ailwood, 2008; Osgood, 2009; Tronto, 2013). Despite this, and without support, responsibility has been placed on the early years, as it was with New Labour, to reduce and tackle poverty, social inequality and disadvantage (Dahlberg & Moss 2007; Moss, 2006; Osgood, 2009). Financial penalties act to place blame on those in the sector. By doing this, the government are exerting power over the workforce and silencing alternative discourses (Moss 2006; Osgood; 2009).

Interpretation of the theme, in relation to the research question, is that that government action and policy has little regard for the early years worker, consequently constructing the early years worker through policy and media as of little worth. These views have emerged from the voices of professionals in the sector. This theme infers the resentment of the sector for the publicly poor treatment they are suffering as a result of government action and highlights the power imposed on the sector by the government.

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**Theme 2: Early years workers are expendable.**

The second theme to emerge was the early years worker as expendable. The early years were 'asked to remain on the frontline during the most worrying period of a global pandemic with no PPE, no testing and no access to vaccinations'. The sector publicly voiced their fears: 'Most of us are scared, I've definitely had my moments where I've just sat in bed and cried', (Carolyn White, ITV, 21st January 2021). Despite this, the government removed financial support stating that 'clinically vulnerable can still go to work, which means they can't be furloughed' in a move that appears financially driven and shows no regard for people's lives. This is despite evidence suggesting that an estimated 1 in 10 early years workers contracted COVID-19 in December 2020 with some dying (Christine Berry, The Guardian, 28th January 2021).

The working-class women making up the majority of the sector continue to be there for the disposal of higher value workers, (Osgood, 2009) and continue to be exploited by middle-class customers who see childcare as work that is beneath them (Chang-Kredl et al, 2019).

The government's decision to keep the early years sector open is about 'protecting employment rather than protecting children' (Emma Hallett, BBC News, 6th January 2021), treating early years workers as "cannon fodder so 'higher value' work can go on" (Christine Berry, The Guardian, 28th January 2021). The regard for the safety of the early years workforce has been outweighed by the government's desire to ensure that at least some parents are able to continue to work.' (Neil Leitch, 5th January). The perception of the early years worker as of little value is mirrored in the views of parents. When one setting were short staffed because staff members had contracted COVID-19 and they expressed their fears, they were told that they were 'milking the pandemic' (Jan Stillaway, quoted in Jedidajah Otte, The Guardian, 18th January 2021).

Parents accessing childcare when working from home because 'it is hard to concentrate' (Kara Willetts, quoted in Emma Hallett, BBC News, 6th January 2021), highlights the privilege afforded to higher value workers as early years workers suffer on the frontline with no PPE, testing or vaccinations. This dominant discourse infers that the early years is something to be there for the convenience of others and reinforces the gendered and classed stereotype that working-class women are at the disposal of the middle-class whose needs they should be serving (Vincent & Braun, 2013). This too is consistent with findings that consumer needs are emphasised over the rights of the workforce (Chang-Kredl et al, 2019; Duffy, 2005; Moss, 2006; Osgood, 2012).

Interpretation of the theme, in relation to the research question, is that little regard has been given to the safety of those in the sector, they have been made expendable to the needs of others and hold little value in society.

**Theme 3: Early years workers are not 'real' teachers.**

The third theme to emerge is that early years workers are less important and less valued than teachers and not considered a part of the education system. Early years settings were forced to open, with no evidence that it was safe to do so, when all other schools, colleges and educational establishments were able to close to protect children and staff.

When addressing the public, the education secretary, Gavin Williams, each time, failed to mention the early years sector. He does, however, consistently praise the 'magnificent efforts of all the leaders, teachers and staff in all of our schools, colleges', and the 'fantastic teachers' describing how his 'admiration for teachers and all that they do has reached an even higher level' (Gavin Williamson, The Mail on Sunday, 2nd January 2021). He fails to mention, let alone give thanks or recognition to the early years sector, on the frontline and putting their lives at risk who were left

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having to 'fight to be given anywhere near the same level of treatment as schools every step of the way', for parity and for equity (Neil Leitch, EY Alliance, January 2021).

Omitting the early years from education discourse, conveys the message that early years work is 'childcare', not education, and early years workers are not educators. Despite policy reform and recommendations to improve the status of the workforce by focusing on the educational aspect of the sector, the education secretary has failed to follow his governments own agenda. This continues the dominant discourse of the early years as 'childcare', biologically determined women's work (Ailwood 2008; Hochschild, 1983; Osgood, 2006; Randall, 2000; Yarrow, 2015) lacking in any real skill. This makes it implicit that the workforce is both gendered and classed (Osgood, 2006) and perpetuates the idea that work with children is a default career for the unintelligent, working-class woman.

The disparity of status, working conditions and pay between early years workers and teachers degrades the profession (Osgood et al. 2017) and widens the divide between early years workers and teachers (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010). Continued public praise for teachers in schools and colleges with no mention of, nor gratitude expressed for those working in the early years, does little to close this divide. This supports earlier findings that early years teaching is considered of lowest value in comparison to all other teaching professions (Chan, 2012).

Interpretation of the theme, in relation to the research question, is that the dominant discourse in the construction of the early years worker is that of low value, holding extraordinarily little societal or professional status.

### **Reflection on Findings**

Conducting this study using secondary research posed some limitations, such as the opportunity to speak directly to those working in the sector to gain a deeper understanding of how it felt to be a part of the sector during this time. Sensationalism in media journalism is used to present stories in particular ways to provoke emotive feelings and public interest, usually at the expense of accuracy (Goran & Karamarko, 2015). Consideration should be given to the impact of public anger on journalistic bias and the heightened emotions of those working in the sector caused by the pandemic.

Although preconceived ideas of the findings were held, analysis has increased the understanding and focus of inquiry, particularly regarding the highlighting of structural injustices for those working in the sector. These research findings can therefore be beneficial in communicating wider understanding of the injustices and the prejudices imposed on the sector which can bring focus to ways in which to enact change.

Further primary research should be undertaken into the impact these findings have on those working in the sector, including mental health and wellbeing and the impact on their professional identity, with a focus of creating an action plan of support. Further research opportunities should look at intersectionality to uncover further power structures that marginalise groups within the already marginalised workforce.

Early years workers have long understood the place afforded to them within society. However, the obvious poor treatment and disregard appears to have escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic, with many feeling that they have no choice but to leave the workforce. Acknowledging that they are unvalued, and their lives disposable has caused great damage, leaving a sector at breaking point and with little hope. For real change to occur there must be a move away from the 'childcare' terminology towards that of 'early childhood education' placing the sector firmly as part of the

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educational journey. This recognition must be reflected in fair pay, better working conditions and higher levels of funding and support. The government must recognise and acknowledge the power, oppression and structural injustices they impose upon the sector, give early years workers a voice and work alongside them to co-construct a new narrative for positive change.

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**Appendix 1 – Selected Data Sources**

Title/Description	Where the sources can be accessed	Source
Covid-19 has turned back the clock on working women's lives.	<a href="https://amp.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/dec/10/covid-working-women-pandemic-childcare-issues">https://amp.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/dec/10/covid-working-women-pandemic-childcare-issues</a>	The Guardian
Covid stress 'driving hundreds of childcare workers to quit profession'.	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/jan/31/covid-stress-driving-hundreds-of-childcare-workers-to-quit-profession">https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/jan/31/covid-stress-driving-hundreds-of-childcare-workers-to-quit-profession</a>	The Guardian
'Show us it's safe' to be open-say nursery staff.	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/amp/education-55574297">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/amp/education-55574297</a>	BBC
BBC Breakfast speaks to Neil Leitch on government decision to keep early years open during lockdown. Neil Leitch is the chief executive of the Early Years Alliance and a highly regarded Early years sector representative.	<a href="https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=X0813gQNFzs">https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=X0813gQNFzs</a>	BBC
Nursery staff are being treated like cannon fodder so 'higher-value' work can go on.	<a href="https://amp.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jan/28/nursery-staff-work-covid-crisis-early-years-support">https://amp.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jan/28/nursery-staff-work-covid-crisis-early-years-support</a>	The Guardian
'Risky, vague, inconsistent': nursery teachers in England lament Covid strategy.	<a href="https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/18/risky-vague-inconsistent-nursery-teachers-in-england-lament-covid-strategy">https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/18/risky-vague-inconsistent-nursery-teachers-in-england-lament-covid-strategy</a>	The Guardian
Letter from Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Early Years Alliance to Gavin Williams, Education Secretary.	<a href="https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/alliance-writes-gavin-williamson-over-appalling-exclusion-ey-schools-reopening-debate">https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/alliance-writes-gavin-williamson-over-appalling-exclusion-ey-schools-reopening-debate</a>	EY Alliance
Article by Neil Leitch: Alliance responds to government's inability to justify decision to keep nurseries open.	<a href="https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/alliance-responds-governments-inability-justify-decision-keep-nurseries-open">https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/alliance-responds-governments-inability-justify-decision-keep-nurseries-open</a>	EY Alliance
Nursery staff 'torn between duty and fear'.	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/amp/uk-england-somerset-55542831">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/amp/uk-england-somerset-55542831</a>	BBC

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Government Policy. Education Secretary sets out school contingency plans for England.	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/education-secretary-sets-out-school-contingency-plans-for-england">https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/education-secretary-sets-out-school-contingency-plans-for-england</a>	Government website
Gavin Williamson: We must all move heaven and earth to get children back into the classroom.	<a href="https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9107141/amp/GAVIN-WILLIAMSON-heaven-earth-children-classroom.html">https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9107141/amp/GAVIN-WILLIAMSON-heaven-earth-children-classroom.html</a>	Exclusive interview: Daily Mail
A letter from the NEU, representatives for the education and early years sector, to Gavin Williamson, Education Secretary.	<a href="https://neu.org.uk/media/14031/view">https://neu.org.uk/media/14031/view</a>	National Education Union
Covid: Nurseries 'forgotten by government' as cases soar among staff.	<a href="https://www.itv.com/news/2021-01-21/covid-nurseries-forgotten-by-government-as-cases-soar-among-staff">https://www.itv.com/news/2021-01-21/covid-nurseries-forgotten-by-government-as-cases-soar-among-staff</a>	ITV Includes recorded interviews with sector workers
Nurseries get 'no words of support'.	<a href="https://www.daynurseries.co.uk/news/article.cfm/id/1640319/national-lockdown-government-keeps-nurseries-open-closes-schools">https://www.daynurseries.co.uk/news/article.cfm/id/1640319/national-lockdown-government-keeps-nurseries-open-closes-schools</a>	Day Nurseries
A workforce in crisis saving our early years.  A report looking at the sustainability of the sector after COVID-19.	<a href="https://www.cache.org.uk/media/1863/a-workforce-in-crisis-saving-our-early-years.pdf">https://www.cache.org.uk/media/1863/a-workforce-in-crisis-saving-our-early-years.pdf</a>	The Early Years Workforce Commission
Michael Gove says early years providers remain open to "support key workers"  A BBC report covered by the EY Alliance.	<a href="https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/news/2021/01/michael-gove-says-early-years-providers-remain-open-support-key-workers">https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/news/2021/01/michael-gove-says-early-years-providers-remain-open-support-key-workers</a>	EY Alliance
Early years workers express fear and frustration over Government decision to keep nurseries open.	<a href="#">Early years workers express fear and frustration over Government decision to keep nurseries open   Nursery World</a>	Nursery World