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What does it mean to be an early years practitioner: an investigation into the professional identity of graduate early years practitioners.

Mary Alexandria Dyer

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

November 2017

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of government-driven change (DfEE, 198; DfES, 2006, DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2017b), within a sector largely comprising privately owned and managed organisations, on how individual practitioners understand their role and their professional identity. Workforce reform strategies included the introduction of sector-endorsed degrees to promote the use of critical reflection to raise the quality of practice, a skill understood to develop confidence, autonomy and agency in practitioners (Moss, 2006; Osgood, 2010), for which a personal vision of practice (Dyer and Taylor, 2012) is required. This raises a potential tension between the empowering nature of reflection, and expectations of compliance with government-led standards and practice guidance. This study explores how this shapes graduate practitioners' understanding and articulation of professional identity, and their understanding of their professional status and agency. 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted, within which participants shared narratives of their practice experience, discussing what they considered to be strong and weak practice, and how they prioritised the different aspects of their role. These were analysed using the Listening Guide (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008), an approach selected for its effectiveness in drawing attention to the voice and the stories of narrators, to understand how they perceive their world and themselves within it. The data analysis draws on literature exploring the nature of early years practice, power relations within the sector, and the formation of professions. This study shows that these participants understand professionalism and their role in terms of the relationships they form within their own organisations, privileging interpersonal skills over abstract, high level knowledge, and presenting these as personal values rather than professional ethics. By using Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1986), this study identifies that these participants engage with their sector largely within the micro-and meso-systems of early years practice, limiting their agency as a professional workforce. It is isolation, rather than lack of knowledge, that restricts their agency, from other practitioners within the workforce, from the politics that drive change within the sector, and also from the research community that produces the knowledge they use to underpin their practice. This study concludes with curricular and pedagogic implications for professional educators within the sector, and also identifies how the workforce itself might more closely engage with the wider systems that impact on their sector.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been completed without the general encouragement of my family and friends, as well as the support and guidance provided by my supervisory team and colleagues. In particular I would like to thank my original supervisor, Dr Denise Robinson for getting me started with my writing and data collection, and her successor, Professor James Avis for seeing me through to the end, coping with some very long sentences in the process! I would also like to thank my second supervisor, Dr Emma Salter who has been there for the whole study, for her positive encouragement throughout. I must also thank my colleagues for their encouragement, their IT support, and their contribution to my stress management, particularly in the final stages of write up. Any doctoral student will agree that a thesis cannot be written without a great deal of encouragement and understanding on the home front, and in this regard I am no different. To my husband and my daughter in particular, my thanks are for the encouragement and the space you provided, as well as for your faith in my ability to see this to the finish. Finally, this thesis would never even have been started without the willing and generous participation of the graduate practitioners who shared their experiences and their perceptions with me. Thank you for trusting me with your stories and your voices – I hope you consider I have done you justice.

Glossary

BTEC	Business and Technical Education Council
CACHE	Council for Awards in Childcare and Education
CWDC	Children’s Workforce Development Council
CGLI	City and Guilds of the London Institute
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DFES	Department for Education and Skills
DoH	Department of Health
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ECM	Every Child Matters
ECS	Early Childhood Studies
ELG	Early Learning Goal
EYDCP	Early Years Development and Care Partnership
EYE	Early Years Educator
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYFSP	Early Years Foundation Stage Profile
EYPS	Early Years Professional Status
EYTS	Early Years Teacher Status
HEI	Higher Education Institute
PVI	Private, Voluntary and Independent
NCMA	National Child Minders Association
NCTL	National College for Teaching and Leadership
NDNA	National Day Nurseries Association
NNEB	National Nursery Examining Board
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OfSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PACEY	Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years
PLA	Pre-school Learning Alliance
PPA	Pre-School Playgroups Association
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status

SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
TACTYC	Association for the Professional Development of Early Years Educators
TDA	Teachers' Development Agency
UNCRC	United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child

Introduction

This thesis explores what early years practitioners consider their role and professional identity to be, and how they have arrived at this definition. It is concerned particularly with how graduate practitioners articulate their identity, and arises from my own experience working within the early years sector, both as a practice educator and a development worker, over the last 25 years. This introduction explains how this research focus emerged, and the overall aims of the study, concluding with an outline of the structure of this thesis. It begins with an outline of my own involvement with the professional education of practitioners and the impact on this of changes to the early years sector.

A personal perspective

My involvement with the professional development of early years practitioners began in the 1990s, teaching and supporting both college-based students and practitioners undertaking work-based qualifications at NVQ levels 2 and 3. The majority of these were female, and under 21, and most had left school at 16 with 5 or fewer GCSEs at Grade C or higher. All had embraced what Colley (2006) refers to as the 'moral worth' (p.6) of working with young children, and accepted the 'classed and gendered dispositions of a destiny of caring for children' (p.26). When asked, they perceived their role as one of caring for rather than educating young children, a perception that Colley (2006) identifies as leaving them open to exploitation for their emotional labour, and many regarded the Level 3 qualification as an ambitious aspiration given their previous academic achievements. As their role within the workplace developed to include a greater focus on young children's learning outcomes, it was not unusual for them to report feeling overwhelmed by this responsibility and describing themselves as 'just a nursery nurse' and having come into the sector 'to care for children not to teach them'. Yet when challenged to differentiate between caring for young children and supporting their learning about the world, these practitioners often accepted there was no clearly defined boundary between the two, and that their role, in promoting holistic development, integrated both strands of practice.

The structure of the early years sector

This led me to ask what early years practitioners themselves consider their professional identity to be, a question that is further complicated by the complexity and diversity of the sector itself. The early years sector today is a mix of government controlled and funded provision, privately owned and managed businesses, and voluntary, community run provision and social service, with 80% of

early years settings situated within PVI (private, voluntary and independent) provision (DfE, 2017a, p.4). This distribution means there are a range of working environments for the workforce, and a range of different terms and conditions, including remuneration, for their employment. The only common condition of their employment is the regulatory framework for practice and the registration of premises and staff (DfE, 2017b), which sets out key principles they must follow in their practice, and minimum adult: child ratios and qualification requirements that must be met. Most practitioners are working in settings that meet the requirement that 50% of the staff should be qualified to Level 3 (DfE, 2017a), and there is no mandatory requirement for higher levels of qualification within staff teams. Whilst government policy has been to set targets for graduate leadership of early years provision (DfES, 2006, p.31), at present only maintained schools (representing no more than 20% of early years provision) are obliged to employ staff with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) to lead practice. Thus most of the workforce within the early years sector have qualifications that would support their movement across the PVI sector, but not into positions of leadership within the maintained sector.

What this has created is a confusing early years sector where terms such as childcare and nursery have been conflated to refer to “any form of care of a child including (a) education and (b) any other supervised activity” (West and Noden, 2016, p.9), offered as a service to enable parents to work, regardless of how provision was funded or regulated. This can leave parents unsure about the nature or level of training or qualification necessary in order to support their children’s care, learning and development (Nutbrown, 2012), due to the imposition of apparently arbitrary rules regarding the nature of the setting (private, voluntary or local authority maintained), the age and number of the children, and the sources of funding used to pay for places. It has also meant that whilst practitioners understand what Foucault described as the “dividing practices” (Rabinow, 1984, p.8) that regulate where they work (and more significantly, are not allowed to work), they must determine for themselves, at a personal or organisational level, what the core or purpose of their practice should be.

Following the publication of New Labour’s expansion plans for the early years sector (DfEE, 1998), the role of the early years practitioner has changed, and their responsibilities have broadened. New government frameworks have been introduced for their practice (QCA/DfEE, 2000; DfES, 2003a; DfES, 2003b; Abbott, 2002; DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2017b), and practitioners have been recast as qualified specialists, who cross the boundaries between care and education, although to what extent they are seen to possess and demonstrate their own professional expertise is what is in question here. New,

higher level qualifications are now more widely available to them, following government-led workforce reforms (DfES, 2006) and more of the workforce are engaging in a higher education, which with its focus on critical reflection of both abstract, academic knowledge and practice, requires them to be more aware of their role and its purpose. However, whilst the post-graduate accreditation of Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS), previously Early Years Professional Status (EYPS), has introduced a nationally recognised 'rank' for a leader of practice in registered provision, there is no further recognition for graduate practitioners beyond the NVQ Level 3 qualification requirement that designates them as Early Years Educators (EYE) (DFE, 2013).

Questions to be addressed

This raises the question of whether or not practitioners' understanding of their role and professional identity has changed, following degree studies that are intended not only to increase their knowledge and understanding of child development theory and pedagogic approaches, but also their skill in reflecting on their practice. As a lecturer now closely involved with the development of graduate and post-graduate levels of professional education for this workforce, it has been my experience that my students seem to know what they are required to do in the workplace, but have spent only limited amounts of time considering why that is, despite having quite strong opinions about what is appropriate practice with young children and what is not. They understand who they are in terms of their individual job descriptions, but have spent far less time considering the contribution they make to society, considering their role from the perspective of the needs of children and their families, rather than state concerns over children's education or health. Whilst they understand the purpose and value of reflecting on their practice, they have seemed at times to lack the confidence required to articulate their own perception of their role and purpose, and to use this as a context for considering the social and cultural implications of their practice, on the children they work with, and also on their own professional status.

It also raises the question of how workforce reform strategies (DfES, 2006) intended to raise quality and professionalise practitioners have impacted on their status as professionals. Professional education that includes the development of critical reflection might be expected to support the development of confidence, agentic practitioners, able to define their own role and understanding of good practice. However, the development and imposition of regulatory frameworks for practice might suggest greater control and accountability (Saks, 2013) rather than increased autonomy and acknowledgement of professional expertise.

Overall, this study is concerned with investigating the impact of higher-level professional education on how practitioners see themselves and understand their status. Whilst this is of interest to a professional educator whose personal approach to her teaching favours a transformative pedagogy (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009), it also represents valuable feedback to HEIs in their on-going development and delivery of such provision. By exploring what graduate practitioners have to say about how they understand their role and their identity, the aim of this study is to identify how both the curriculum and pedagogy of their degree studies have been used to shape this understanding. To support this, theoretical frameworks concerned with the identification and analysis of power relationships and individuals' engagement and interaction with their environments will be used to frame the data analysis for this study. Previous research has explored practitioner identity focussing on those completing initial vocational training (Colley, James, Dimont and Tedder, 2003; Colley, 2006), and those who have undertaken post-graduate accreditation for EYPS (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010; Chalke, 2013). Practitioners' understanding of practice, and particularly their understanding of care, has also been reported (for example Taggart, 2016; Page, 2011; Luff and Kanyal, 2015; Ang, 2014). However, this study considers how graduate practitioners' understandings of both their practice and their status are brought together in their articulation of a professional identity, to identify where the agency and autonomy for this articulation lies. These practitioners can be seen to occupy a somewhat ambiguous position in term of their status in the workplace, since they are regarded as Early Years Educators (EYEs), with equivalent status to their colleagues qualified to NVQ Level 3, and no higher recognition for their qualifications unless they fulfil a management role. This study considers the impact of the lack of a clear position for these practitioners on their exercise of agency and autonomy in articulating their role and their identity. To ensure that their voices are heard in this articulation, this study adopts the data analysis tool of the Listening Guide (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Doucet & Mauthner, 2008), an approach intended to foreground the voice of participants in narrative research.

Chapter structure

This thesis begins by identifying the research questions to be addressed in this study, and discussing the theoretical framework, based on the work of Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) to be used to understand the findings. The literature review of this study considers three strands of existing research to set the context for the analysis of the primary data. Firstly, the development of the early years sector and its field of relationships is reviewed, considering how the balance of power within the sector has changed and the impact this has had on the demands made on the workforce, and the

shaping of the habitus of the practitioner. Research and literature concerning practitioners' developing understanding of their role and how this is expressed is then considered. The implications of this for their initial vocational education and on-going professional development on their identity is discussed, including consideration of how the pedagogy of such professional education contributes to practitioners' perceptions of their role, agency, and status. Professionalism within the early years workforce, and how it can be construed, is considered to offer a context for understanding the status and agency of the practitioner, with particular reference to the current state-led professionalization agenda. This literature review concludes by raising a series of questions about how practitioners' engagement with the structures of the early years sector, and the professional education they have undertaken, have contributed to their understanding of their role and identity.

The overall methodological approach for this study is then set out, explaining my own stand on the development of identity and how this has shaped the approach taken to the data gathering and analysis for this study. This includes a critical discussion of the use of a narrative approach and how this might be defined, and the selection of a data analysis approach developed to draw out the voices of the participants in this research, i.e. the Listening Guide (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Doucet & Mauthner, 2008). The data analysis that follows is structured using the Readings identified in the Listening Guide (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008), and draws on key findings within the previous review of the literature, including:

- their perception of their roles as carer and/or educators
- the place of care within their practice
- the significance of the relational nature of their role
- their understanding of their own professionalism and status.

The data analysis chapters are followed by reflections on how issues of researcher positionality and reflexivity have been addressed, including an evaluation of the effectiveness of the data analysis tool in foregrounding the voices of participants. The main findings and conclusions from this research are presented in relation to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986), used to contextualise the processes of identity formation and the research questions identified at the start of this study. They are followed by recommendations, aimed principally at the professional educators of the sector located in HEIs, and address the overall aim of this study, i.e. to support those engaged in the professional education of practitioners in the development of transformative study programmes that enable their learners to develop the skills for critical reflection, and raise their awareness of the impact, not only of their working environment, but also

their social, cultural and political environment, on their sense of identity. However, steps are also identified that practitioners as individuals and as a collective workforce can take to claim ownership of their professional identity and their role since without their own active participation, their development of agency and autonomy over their practice remains restricted.

Chapter 1

The theoretical context for this study

This chapter sets out the aims of this study, and the theoretical concepts that have been used as a context for understanding and analysing both primary and secondary data. It identifies the specific research questions to be addressed, and sets out the structure of the report, including the main arguments to be addressed in each chapter. It begins with an overview of the current early years sector and the issues that impact on practitioners' understanding of their role and professional identity.

The professional context of the early years practitioner

The early years sector in England includes 72,100 settings on the OfSTED Early Years Register (EYR) (DfE, 2017a), with 65% of these setting being child-minder provision, and 35% being day nurseries, pre-school groups and children centre provision. The sector also includes 400 maintained nursery schools offering provision to children aged from 2 – 4 years, and 17,500 primary schools with Nursery and/or Reception class provision following the EYFS curriculum framework, all registered with OfSTED as schools rather than early years providers (DfE, 2017a).

Table 1: Early Years provision 31st March 2016 (adapted from DfE, 2017a, p.4)

EYR providers	Childminders	Childcare on non-domestic premises		All provision
	46,600	25,500		72,100
Registered schools	Nursery School	Primary school – nursery and Reception class	Primary school – Reception class only	
	400	9,300	8,200	17,900
				90,000

OfSTED's authority, however, goes beyond the registering, licensing and inspection of early years provision. Although independent of the Department for Education (DfE), it reports directly to government on its inspection findings, which are used to inform education policy and regulation. Its influence in standardising, as well as quality assuring, early years practice has been noted by Baldock, Fitzgerald and Kay (2013), and includes the development of inspection frameworks and regimes (for example, OfSTED 2015a; OFSTED, 2015b) to ensure government standards for practice are upheld; and early years providers and practitioners articulate their accountability to government policy in terms of their performance in OfSTED inspections (Gourd, 2014). Lea (2014) further argues

that OfSTED encourages practitioners' compliance in reconstructing the concept of childhood to fit the current policy discourse for early years so that the early child development is now understood to follow a universal and measurable pattern. It has also been argued that OfSTED's inspection processes have encouraged a culture of performativity within early years practice (Spencer-Woodley, 2014; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016), by privileging a understanding of quality that focuses on measurable outcomes, meeting targets, and the completion of league table which appear to foster competition and comparison across the sector (Gourd and Kingdon, 2014). The power of OfSTED, not only to control access to the sector and licence to practice, but also to influence the nature of early year practice and its pedagogy, is therefore considerable.

Early years practitioners are mainly employed in the PVI settings that comprise 80% of the sector. Whilst up to 50% of the workforce can be employed with no formal, early years qualification, the Early Years Educator (DfE, 2013) holds a qualification equivalent to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3, and many have gone on to acquire further qualifications at NVQ Level 4 (Higher National Diplomas), Level 5 (Foundation degrees (FdA)) and Level 6 (BA Hons degrees) (DfE, 2017a). Some graduates have taken the further step of acquiring either Early Years Professional Status (EYPS), now Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS), to be employed as leaders of practice within early years settings, although qualifications higher than Level 3 are not mandatory requirements for the sector.

The sector within which they work faces a number of issues that impact on their practice and their professional role, which will be explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters. These include a confusing attempt to divide care and education practice (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p.130), increasing State oversight of the sector as a whole including the licensing, quality assurance and regulation of provision, balancing the demands of State and organisation control of practice at practitioner level, a tension between early years provision (particularly its educational component) presented as a universal, or sometimes remedial, benefit for all children, or as a commodity sold to benefit working parents, and the call for a more knowledgeable workforce to ensure better outcomes for children yet with no regulatory framework to support this requirement (Cohen, Moss, Petrie and Wallace, 2004; Baldock et al, 2013). The settings within which they work are small organisations, owned and managed by individuals or small chains, so there are no nationally agreed job titles, descriptions, or personal specifications for their roles, no nationally agreed levels of responsibility an individual practitioner may be expected to take on, and no nationally agreed terms

and conditions for their employment beyond legal requirements set out in law for all employers to meet.

This raises the question of how the professional role or identity of the practitioner might be defined; and how, within the context of graduate level professional education, students might be supported to develop their own sense of identity, and their own criteria for evaluating and judging their practice. Earlier research in Australia (Brownlee et al, 2000; Berthelsen and Brownlee, 2007) identified that early years practitioners described their role in unsophisticated language which emphasised their caring rather than educational role, and which has the potential to undermine the specialist knowledge they apply to their work. The current regulatory framework for the early years sector requires them to plan and support learning taking into account the developmental needs of individual children (DfE, 2017b, p. 9), a task that requires complex interpersonal and pedagogic skills, sensitivity, and an in-depth knowledge of children's learning and development. To do so requires experience and judgement rather than it being a matter of following routine procedures and practices, to be able to evaluate practice in relation to the needs of specific children. This study seeks to understand how practitioners make these judgements and what they consider their role and professional identity to be, and what factors influence these ideas.

Research Aims

The overall aim of this study is to inform the development of professional education for early years practitioners, in support of reflective practice. The research questions I wish to address are:

1. What is the vocational habitus of the early years graduate practitioner?
 - a. What do early years practitioners define as good practice?
 - b. What do early years practitioners define as their professional role or identity?
2. How do they articulate these concepts of identity and good practice?
3. How do these concepts contribute to their understanding of professionalism, and their status as a professional workforce?
4. How can this information be used within professional education to support the development of the reflective, professional early years practitioner?

The freedom of the individual practitioner, working within a regulatory framework to meet the individual needs of a child, is an important factor in their sense of professionalism and expertise, and in the creation of a learning community within their organisation where experience can be shared to

strengthen practice. Therefore, in addressing these questions, the issue of practitioner agency and autonomy over their practice, and how this contributes to their professional identity will also be considered. For early years practitioners to regard themselves as experts (and for others to share this perception), they need to be able to exercise autonomy over their practice, and to feel that their judgement is valued. Whilst this has been recognised in the recent review of the sector and acknowledged in government policy (Nutbrown, 2012; DfE, 2013), the increased measurement and accountability of their practice (Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016) and the increased focus on a school readiness agenda (Allen, 2011, p.46), particularly one which privileges the position of compulsory schooling (Moss, 2012, p.356) could risk undermining this, and impacting on how practitioners see themselves.

Professional identity within this study

The professional identity of the early years practitioner, it could be argued, is a complex, multi-faceted construct, and its development needs to be explored within a theoretical model that enables a range of potentially influential factors to be taken into account. For the purposes of this study, professional identity will be explored through what practitioners consider to be effective and appropriate practice when working with young children, and the values and concepts that underpin these terms. Whilst there has been considerable government involvement with the early years sector in recent years, in determining appropriate content and level of initial vocational training, and developing regulatory frameworks within which practitioners should operate, the voice of practitioners themselves, it could be argued, has been less evident, and heard predominantly in the context of academic-led research studies rather than policy and legislation (Hordern, 2016). The development of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2017b; Early Education/DfE, 2012), incorporating statutory welfare requirements and good practice guidance in promoting young children's learning and development, could be seen as undermining the need for such an individual definition of the role of the practitioner, since this framework now identifies what progress children should be making, what principles should underpin their holistic development and care, and how best practitioners might use resources to achieve this. The role of the practitioner, and to some extent their day-to-day practice, was now more clearly outlined for them, and their practice would be inspected and quality assured based on these principles.

The issue of practitioner agency in determining effective practice, it could be argued, rests on whether or not the regulatory framework is perceived as a document for interpretation, or a document for compliance. This calls into question the right of the individual practitioner to exercise

agency and autonomy in defining their role and identity, through reflecting on their actions and the values that underpin their practice. This then has further implications for the role of graduate level professional education over its content and pedagogy, and questions the necessity of developing such critical awareness.

The role of the EYFS and its relation to the practice within the sector is a key element of the initial vocational education and on-going professional development of practitioners. This raises the question of to what extent should, and do, practitioners regard this document as a guide to their practice and open to interpretation, or as a framework that determines and constrains their practice. This is shaped by the level, content and pedagogy of the education and training to which they have access, and further influences the perception practitioners have of themselves and their practice. Sector Endorsed Early Childhood Studies (ECS) degree programmes, particularly those supporting accreditation for EYPS, were required to place great emphasis on the skills of critical reflection (DfES, 2001, p.16), as an essential tool for practitioners who would become leaders of change within their settings in order to raise quality. Such an approach could be understood to construct the EYFS as a framework for interpretation at the level of individual settings and practitioners. However, the use of the EYFS as a tool solely to ensure compliance with regulation and uniformity of practice could be seen to reduce the need for individual practitioners to evaluate and critically reflect on their practice and take responsibility for its quality in responding to the needs of specific children.

The development of this framework, and how it is perceived by practitioners and regulators, contributes to the structure of the early years sector today, a structure that has evolved initially quite gradually, but more recently (in the last 20 years) with considerable pace and increased State involvement (Gourd, 2014). Whilst it does not offer a nationally agreed job description for the early years practitioner, it does define, through the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) (DfE, 2017b, pp. 10 - 12) and Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning (CETL) (DfE, 2017b, p. 10), what their practice should achieve and how this might be done. This does not, however, define how practitioners should see themselves, or what values and ethical principles they should bring to their practice.

Establishing a theoretical framework for studying identity

To consider how practitioners conceptualise their professional identity – their roles, responsibilities, agency and autonomy – in response to these influencing factors, I need a framework within which I can explore how individuals come to understand and present themselves, and to successfully

mediate changes to these perceptions in order to maintain or move their position within their social world. Bourdieu's work (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) emphasises the importance of power and relationships in influencing how we make sense of our social world and our own place in it. In particular, his focus on how powerful élites impose hegemonic discourses through social institutions, particularly education systems (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), in order to maintain and perpetuate control of power and capital, offers a useful framework for establishing how the identity and role of the early years practitioner is defined, and by whom. At the same time, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986), which recognises a number of different systems that comprise an individual's environment, also offers a context for understanding how a sense of identity can be influenced and developed.

Both theoretical frameworks focus on the individual and their interactions and relationships with others, and both consider where the power to influence and shape lies. However, Bronfenbrenner's model regards human development as an 'evolving interaction' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.3), implying that this is a dynamic process, subject to change driven by interaction between the individual and his/her environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that this interaction is shaped by individuals' perceptions of and responses to their environment, so that if this perception is changed, then their development will also change. Therefore, to understand the development of an individual, it is necessary first to understand how they perceive, understand and respond to their environment. Bourdieu's account of our construction of identity and role is presented as dependant on the power of the individual, based on their capital, to effect change across a field, that leads to change in their social world. Bourdieu's contention, that to "think in terms of field is to think *relationally*" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.96, their italics), rather than in terms of the behaviour of the individual, implies that individual action, including a change in understanding or perception, will have little effect within a social world if not tied to power. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) arguably offers a model of development and identity that, whilst subject to the influence of the environment at a range of levels, offers greater potential for the individual to exercise some agency over how they see themselves and are seen.

Field and habitus in the early years sector – the contribution of Bourdieu

Wacquant (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) argues that Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of field and habitus were not intended to be used as fixed concepts for sociological analysis, but that they offered a framework for the researcher to think with Bourdieu and, where appropriate, to think beyond him in applying them to the case being studied. In presenting field and habitus as

representing “bundles of relations” (Wacquant, in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.16), Wacquant makes the case for these concepts being viewed as interactions determined by those who hold power in a social field, rather than structures. It is these interactions that facilitate the exercise of influence over less powerful individuals, for example, the relationship between OfSTED and providers, and the acceptance by practitioners and the owners of private provision of the licensing and regulatory authority of the state. Thus in considering the development and role of both field and habitus for the early years practitioner, it may be possible to understand how the one has shaped the other and to determine where the power for agency and autonomy in defining practice lies.

Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 97) defines his concept of field as “a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions”, which in turn are defined in terms of their “access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field and their relation to other positions”. Fields are constructed in terms of the power relations of their actors rather than in terms of specific roles. Within the early years sector it is therefore the relationships between practitioners, employers and owners of provision, regulators, funders and users of services, each with their own level of power and influence, that impact on interaction and the development of practice. Habitus is defined as “systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures, predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.72, his italics). For early years practitioners, these systems include their initial vocational education, its content and pedagogy, the values and attitudes considered appropriate for those caring for young children, and the social approval their role attracts. Like field, the development of habitus for early years practitioners is influenced by those with the power to influence their training and professional development, to license them as practitioners and to confer or withhold approval for their practice, most especially by granting them access to this field in the first place.

Bourdieu goes on to argue that fields and habitus change where powerful actors change their role or their sense of who they are, or what the purpose of the field is, so that interactions within the field must change to take account of this. This disruption between field and habitus is referred to as hysteresis (Hardy, 2012), and incorporates a period of adjustment to new roles and identity for individuals and the acceptance of new structures. Where individuals lack the power to resist such change, the powerful will prevail, so that proposed new ways of working or being will gradually be subsumed within habitus, or those resisting them must leave the field. Within the early years sector, greater State involvement in regulation and funding, and the expansion of the PVI element of the sector to meet increased demand (DFEE, 1998) led to workforce reform strategies (DfES, 2006) that

introduced new qualifications for practitioners, and new regulatory frameworks (DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2014; DfE, 2017b), redefining the role of the early years practitioner. It is this increased level of engagement and influence through State regulation and funding, and its impact on the professional identity and agency of the practitioner, that is under examination in this study.

The early years practitioner might reasonably be considered as a key actor within this field. They are positioned to feel the greatest impact of changes to this field imposed through political and social agenda, mediated by the opportunities available to them for employment and professional education and training, requirements for qualifications and registration, and accountability for their practice to employers and funders. Whilst field provides the structure within which the relations of power operate, it is the habitus of practitioners that determines how these relations shape the agency, practice and disposition of the individual. This habitus is developed and sustained by social and cultural perceptions of the role of the practitioner and those who chose to take it on, the pedagogy of their initial training and the further professional development they receive, and the willingness and capacity of the individual to question or challenge this, forming an alternative vision of what they consider their role to be. Colley et al (2003) argue that roles and identity do not exist in a causal relationship, the one governing the other as the embodiments of field and habitus respectively, but rather that they co-exist in a relationship of mutual influence. Field and habitus imply each other, so that the demands from field for a specific role to be fulfilled will impact on the identity of those individuals who take on that role, whilst the identity of those fulfilling that role will influence its development and evolution, subject to the power those individuals hold to wield such influence. In such a way, a vocational habitus is developed, 'a process of orientation to a particular identity, a sense of what makes "the right person for the job"' (Colley et al, 2003, p.488). To understand where this sense has sprung from, it is necessary to identify and understand the influence of the factors that shape it.

An ecological understanding of the early years sector

Dalli, Miller and Urban (2012, cited in Miller, Dalli and Urban, 2012) argue that the role of the early years practitioner is socially, culturally and organisationally defined, rather than determined through fixed criteria within job descriptions, and national negotiation and agreement, and therefore "embedded in local contexts, visible in relational interactions, ethical and political in nature, and involving multiple layers of knowledge, judgement and influences from the broader societal influences" (in Miller et al, 2012, p.6). These local contexts are further situated in a history of national change (physical, legal, political, social, professional), including a growing role in fulfilling

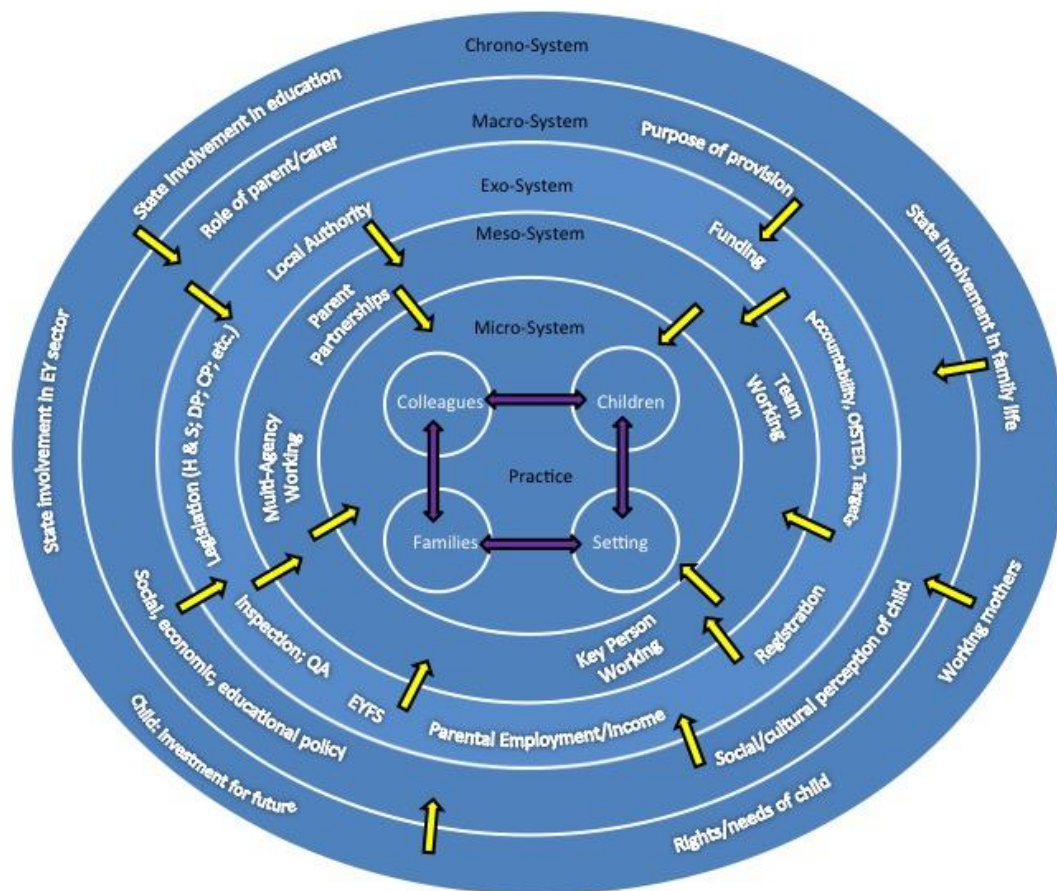
the political agenda of the government of the day, changes to the demands placed on their service from funders and users, changes to regulatory frameworks and entry qualifications, and an increase in the size of the sector to facilitate these new demands. To understand how these impact on the development of the early years sector, Dalli et al (2012) propose the use and adaptation of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), usually applied to the development of the individual child within society, but which offers a useful insight into the position of the early years sector today. This model identifies 5 systems within an individual’s environment, all of which impact on the individual and their development, either through direct interaction between that system and the individual, or by indirect interaction, by means of social, cultural, political or historical influence. These systems are the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chrono-systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) (see Table 2 below), and include the interactions the individual experiences with their environment, wider relationships that influence these interactions, and broader factors that also shape these interactions and the individual’s perceptions of their meaning and significance, such as cultural and social understanding and expectations, social policy and legislation, and changes brought about over time.

Table 2: Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986)

Micro-system	<i>activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.22)</i>
Meso-system	<i>interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.25)</i>
Exo-system	<i>one or more settings ... in which events occur that affect or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.25)</i>
Macro-system	<i>consistencies, in the form of lower order systems ... that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or culture as a whole, along with any belief system or ideology underlying such consistencies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.26)</i>
Chrono-system	<i>changes (and continuities) over time in the environments in which the person is living (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p.724)</i>

A diagrammatic representation, based on Dalli et al’s (2012) interpretation of the development of the practitioner role, identifies the historical, political, social and cultural factors that have shaped the development of early years practice:

Figure 1: An ecological model of the development of early years practice and the role of the practitioner (adapted from Dalli et al, 2012, p.7)

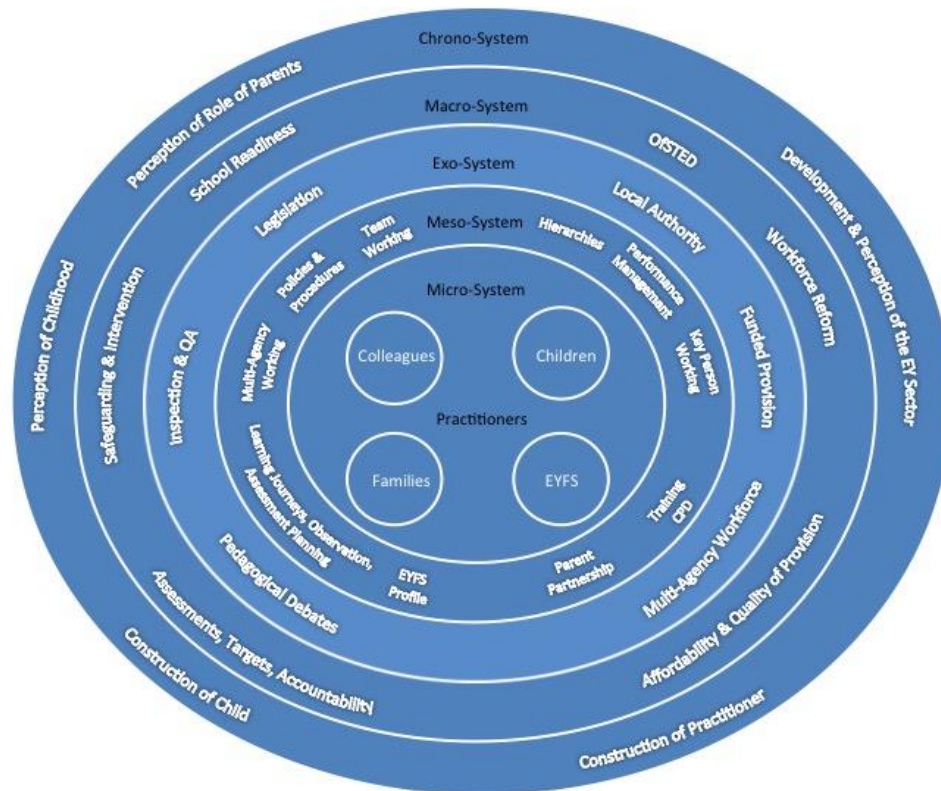


From this it can be seen that the role of the practitioner has developed through their relationships with their colleagues, employers and service users, within a context of organisational and sector-wide expectations of team working, inter-agency cooperation, and a close personal relationship with the individual child. This, then, is situated within a broader context of policy and legislation aimed at ensuring quality of provision and the preparation of children for formal education, sustainability and sufficiency of provision through state funding, in order to support broader social policy, and a reconstruction of the role of parents and the rights and needs of children, particularly in relation to their safety and well-being. Over time, these last two points have changed considerably, as evidenced through changes to legislation and state involvement with the early years sector, all of which have led to changes in expectations of the role of the practitioner.

This model, however, considers the development of the role of the practitioner in abstract terms, rather than considering the development, including their awareness and understanding of their

environment, of the individual practitioner. Just as their practice can be argued to be located in a range of related and overlapping systems of influence, so their personal development as practitioners is similarly situated in a complex environment of influential factors:

Figure 2: An ecological model of the environmental systems of the early years practitioner



Just as early years practice has been subject to influence by historical, social and political factors, so too has the identity of the individuals who make up this workforce. The changes shaping practice have also impacted on the vocational training and professional development of the individual practitioners. Bronfenbrenner’s model would suggest that it is practitioners’ immediate relationships within their social and cultural environment, and particularly their initial vocational education, their employment and their professional development that have shaped their development. At the heart of these immediate relationships, it is practitioners’ own perceptions of that role and purpose (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.4), and how they chose to apply this to their own behaviour, that make a significant contribution to this understanding. Practitioners’ awareness of and engagement with changes in their less immediate environments will also influence their development of an identity and an understanding of their role.

Bronfenbrenner's model (1979, 1986) implies that environment alone is not enough to shape the development of the individual, but that this is also the product of their engagement with their environment, beyond passive or unconscious acceptance and compliance. Such a framework implies a level of personal agency and responsibility for identity, based on the interactions and perceptions of the individual. By exploring these perceptions, and their accounts of practice, with individual practitioners, I hope to establish how they have come to their understanding of their role, and the levels of agency and autonomy they have exercised in defining this.

Conclusion

Bourdieu's concept of field as a relational network has the potential to clarify the different sets of actors who comprise the early years sector, and the influence they have on each other. It offers a framework for identifying where the power in this sector lies, how it has been exercised, and with what effect. His concept of habitus equally well identifies the overall dispositions of these different groups, superficially as those who have power to exert and those who are required to comply, and going further, how such power is enacted. However, in order to understand how these positions have been reached and maintained, Bronfenbrenner's model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986), of layered environments influencing the individual and the sector both directly and indirectly, offers a more structured framework in which to understand the impact of relationships between these different actors and broader social, cultural and historical factors. Bourdieu's 'field' may perhaps be used to describe the chrono-, macro- and ex-systems of Bronfenbrenner's model, whilst the formation of habitus, although influenced significantly by these less immediate systems, may be seen in the relationships engaged in by the individual within the more immediate systems of the meso- and microsystems. Exploring what practitioners draw on to articulate their definitions of professional identity and role offers an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of these frameworks in explaining how identity is developed and the impact this has on the development of personal and professional agency. This theoretical issue is pursued within this study, for its potential as a tool for supporting both professional educators and practitioners in their understanding of how identity is formed. It begins by considering how the field of the early years sector has developed, in response to social, political and cultural influences.

Chapter 2

The Early Years Sector

This chapter considers the broader working and social context of the early years practitioner, and the development of the relationship between providers, practitioners and the State, through the development of discourses. Osgood (2006, p.8) draws on Foucault to define discourse as “systems of statements, which construct objects and subjects within which the self positions, and is positioned through, interaction based on a struggle for power”. This suggests that it is those with the power to define the hegemonic discourse of early years practice, who will have the power to shape the construction of individuals and their practice, and those who lack agency and autonomy who will comply with these structures.

Bourdieu’s metaphor of field (Wacquant, 1992 in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) suggests either contested ground, within which different groups compete for the power to determine the rules and outcomes of their interactions; or an arena within which all who take part agree implicitly to abide by prescribed rules of engagement. This suggests either the exercise of power by the government to determine the role of the practitioner, or practitioners themselves exercising their own agency in defining and determining their role. The current state of relationships between the different sets of actors within the early years sector would appear to be closer to the latter interpretation of field, as providers are heavily reliant on government funding for their sustainability, and totally reliant on government for their licence to practice. It could be argued that this implies a more constraining relationship between field and actor, so that individuals are required to comply with powerful forces within a field.

Bronfenbrenner’s model is based on the interaction between the individual and their environment, and could be interpreted to offer the individual greater scope for shaping their own development, depending on their level of awareness and engagement with their environment. His identification of wider systems of the individual’s environment, the chrono-, macro- and exo-systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), include historical, social, cultural and political factors that have an indirect influence on the development of practitioners’ identity and their practice. Within both models, it is the agency of the individual in response to their environment that determines the level and nature of influence or control that environment exerts. However, whilst Bourdieu’s framework presents this as a question of the level of power and capital an individual possesses, Bronfenbrenner’s model suggests that it is awareness and interaction, both factors that can be supported and developed

through processes of education, that govern the level of agency an individual can exercise over their own development.

This chapter outlines the development of the early years sector, from its beginnings as a privately owned and managed sector at the start of the 20th century, developed by early pioneers of child development, through increasing government involvement in support of social and political agenda, to its current position on the periphery of the education system. In doing so, the development of regulatory bodies and frameworks for practice, and the relationship between these and providers and practitioners will be examined, to identify the distribution of power and autonomy between different sets of actors, and how the changing hegemonic discourse of the sector has impacted on the role and position of the practitioner. The following chapter will then consider how the pedagogy and curriculum of early years professional education has shaped the practitioner's understanding of his/her role.

The development of the early years sector

The early years sector today is a network of power relationships between different stakeholders with an interest in its successful operation, but different agenda to pursue, different levels of power to support their influence, and arguably with different criteria for measuring success. These include:

- politicians and policy makers at government level
- employers and owners who wish to run cost-effective and sustainable businesses (both for profit and not-for profit)
- charitable and voluntary bodies aiming to address issues of inequality, need and deprivation on behalf of children
- parents seeking safe and high quality care and education for their children
- children themselves requiring support for their successful learning and development
- practitioners seeking a rewarding form of employment, and a career structure within which they can progress.

Arguably the most significant relationship, in terms of its balance of power, is the one between Government and providers and practitioners, as the former controls the policy and regulation that governs the sector, with which the latter must comply to retain their licence to practice. The growth of this relationship has been characterised as representing a "living contradiction" (Spencer-Woodley, 2014, p.33) where accountability to government definitions of standards and quality have a detrimental effect on practitioners' abilities to underpin their practice with their own values, experience and judgement, at a time when their role is becoming more complex and multi-faceted.

From the beginning of the 21st century, the state has focused on the early years sector “almost as cure for all social and economic ills” (Cohen et al, 2004, p.57). These can be summarised as including:

- issues of poverty and deprivation and their impact on children’s well-being, health and potential for future employment
- the need for an educated, available workforce, to ensure economic stability and reduce welfare spending
- addressing safeguarding issues
- the recurring issue of young children’s school readiness, and the affordability of provision to support this
- the outcomes of poor parenting on children’s educational outcomes and future employment.

(adapted from Cohen et al, 2004, p.57)

This makes it a diverse and multi-purpose service with responsibility for fulfilling a broad social and governmental agenda, whose discourse of practice has fluctuated in response to state intervention. In the last 20 years, successive governments have introduced a range of policy initiatives and legislation to develop the capacity, sustainability and quality of the early years sector (See Table 3, adapted from Dyer and McMahon, 2018, pp. 4, 5). These initiatives include workforce reform (DfES, 2006), a renewed emphasis on multi-agency working (DfES, 2004), changes to regulatory frameworks for practice (DfES, 2003a, 2003b; DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2012; DfE, 2017b; OfSTED, 2015a), and new ways of measuring and monitoring children’s progress and learning outcomes (Early Education/DfE, 2012). They have been accompanied by structural change within the sector (Cohen et al, 2004; DfEE, 1998), with the expansion of funded nursery education to new providers and younger age groups of children; the introduction of financial support for working parents to be able to take up early years provision; the development of Children’s Centres offering integrated services to families to ensure the best outcomes for children in need or at risk, and to encourage parents into paid employment.

Table 3: Government policy and the early years sector

<p><i>The National Childcare Strategy: meeting the childcare challenge</i> (DfEE, 1998)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of PVI sector through Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative (NNI) funding; funding of Out of School Club (OOSC) provision; introduction of local authority Early Years Childcare and Development Partnerships (EYDCPs) to support local providers; proposals for SSLPs and Extended schools • Workforce development funding to raise number of Level 2 and 3 qualified staff • Introduction of Nursery Expansion Grant (NEG), enabling more PVI settings to offer nursery education, and Nursery Education Funding (NEF) to pay for nursery education for 3 and 4 year olds for 12.5 hours per week
<p>Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLP) initiative (DfES, 2003a) Expansion of SSLP to Sure Start Children's Centres (see Bate and Foster, 2015)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding to tackle the impact of poverty and disadvantage on young children in areas of greatest deprivation; later rolled out as Children's Centres that offered health, education and financial advice for families, with the intention of there being one in every ward within a local authority
<p>Development of <i>Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage</i> (QCA/DfEE, 2000)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum support for providers, and introduction of Stepping Stones for learning outcomes for nursery education
<p><i>Researching Effective Pedagogy in the early years</i> (Siraj-Blatchford, et al, 2002) <i>The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE)</i> (Sylva et al, 2004)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key research projects, one of them on-going, that have identified how young children learn and how this process can best be supported
<p><i>Birth to 3 Matters: a framework to support children in their earliest years.</i> (Abbott, 2002)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good practice guide for the care and development of children up to 3 years old – non-statutory but registered providers of services for very young children encouraged to follow it
<p>Laming Report (Laming, 2003) Every Child Matters (ECM) (DfES, 2004) Children Act 2004 Childcare Act, 2006</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report documenting failure of multi-agency working • Definition of positive outcomes for children • New legislation enacting the principles of ECM, making it the duty of local authorities to ensure effective multi-agency working is in place
<p>Introduction of EYFS (DCSF, 2008)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory Welfare Requirements for all registered providers to follow, including all registered schools (nursery and Reception classes) and all child-minders; curriculum framework and practice guidance on supporting children's learning and development from birth to 5 years old.
<p>2005 Introduction of Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Workforce Reform Strategy published (DfES, 2006)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CWDC introduced to oversee workforce reforms, including meeting the target for all settings to have graduate leadership, and to develop the criteria for this as Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) • Transformation Fund to offer support for employers (and individuals) to meet targets for more highly qualified staff • Introduction of Common Core of Skills and Knowledge (CWDC, 2005) for all practitioners working with children and young people
<p>Review of the EYFS (Tickell, 2011) Review of early years qualifications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisions to EYFS including introduction of Characteristics of Effective Learning and the separation of prime and specific areas of learning

(Nutbrown, 2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of early years qualifications and role of practitioner
<i>More Great Childcare</i> (DfE, 2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government introduces new titles and requirements for GCSE English and Maths for Early Years Educators • Revision of EYPS to EYTS and introduction of NCTL standards
Revised EYFS (DfE, 2014)	
Revised EYFS (DfE, 2017b)	
Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017c)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revision of English and Maths qualifications for Early Years Educators

For the early years sector, what can be seen through the policy developments of the last 60 years, and more particularly the last 30 years, is change driven by government, a body which might be considered to be at the periphery of practice, yet who, through their control of policy and therefore discourse, hold most of the power (Lea, 2014). This is particularly evidenced in the rolling out of a professionalization agenda driven and funded by government, in order to raise the quality of provision (HM Treasury et al, 2004, p.43; DfES, 2005, pp.24 - 25), for a workforce portrayed as a somewhat contradictory combination of “the salvation of society and as shambolic/disordered” (Osgood, 2009, p.735) and “in need of transformation through top-down measures including qualifications” (Osgood, 2009, p.736). McGillivray (2008) concurred with this interpretation of government perception of the early years workforce, commenting that the “language of ‘reform’ suggests a need for change and improvement; that what had gone before was not ‘good enough’” (McGillivray, 2008, p.245). Although the professionalization agenda was presented as an opportunity for personal growth and empowerment for practitioners (DfES, 2006), it can therefore also be seen to define practitioners as in some way deficient or failing up to this point (Osgood, 2006, p.6; Kingdon, 2014, p.138, Miller and Cable, 2008, p.2). It is an indication of the power of government and its funding of provision, that a largely privately owned sector can be defined so overtly as lacking in quality (DfES, 2006, p.9), and made to comply so efficiently with significant workforce reform by a body with quite limited involvement with day to day practice, and who offered no guarantee of any material return for accepting such change. Recognised experts in the field of early years practice had also previously called for highly educated specialists to support young children’s holistic development (Garhart Mooney, 2000), but this had led only to the development of non-transferrable training programmes for staff working within specific institutions (for example, Froebel kindergartens, Montessori schools) rather than an overarching qualification for the early years workforce as a whole.

The role of the practitioner has therefore been increasingly shaped by government policy (Baldock et al, 2013), as they have acquired additional responsibilities for promoting children’s well-being, and supporting their health and educational outcomes. When considered from an ecological perspective,

it is clear that factors within the chrono-, macro- and exo-systems of the practitioners' environment have impacted on their role. This can be summarised as a movement from being the expert in children's development, working in a privately controlled sector, to being a safe carer and supervised educator, with a growing contribution to multi-agency team working, now working in a sector with increased government regulation and funding. What may be less clear is how this has impacted on their professional identity.

The private early years sector: practitioners as specialists in holistic development, and the importance of childhood

The early years sector began from the recognition that formal education provision for older children was not an appropriate care and developmental approach for very young children – those below the age of 5 (Isaacs, 1929). Instead there developed a discourse of play-based practice to support the holistic development of the individual child, and to ensure children experienced a healthy and emotionally secure childhood. Early leaders of practice argued that sensitivity, affection and responsiveness on the part of the knowledgeable practitioner were essential for effective early years practice (Isaacs, 1929; Aslanian, 2015), along with a holistic, less formal approach to supporting the learning of very young children (Owen, 1920).

This discourse reinforced the notion that early childhood was, in itself, a significant period in a child's life, rather than simply a transitional stage from infancy to the school aged child. It introduced the belief that learning is not always a formal process or something that can be switched on and off to suit a timetable, and emphasised that learning is only one aspect of a child's overall development – health and emotional well-being must also be supported for children to learn effectively. Early pioneers, including Froebel, Montessori (Garhart Mooney, 2000), and MacMillan (Kingdon, 2014), all recognised the need for an informed and well-qualified practitioner who understood children's holistic development needs and could support them.

A focus on safe and healthy development: the construction of the vulnerable child

By the 1940s a focus emerged on children's safety and their healthy development, and the need for substitute parenting to enable women to enter the wartime workforce. 1945 saw the formation of National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB) by the Ministry of Health, and a national diploma qualification that took this approach further. Early years discourse now emphasised the importance

of health, the prevention of disease (Meering, 1947), and the provision of a substitute parent, rather than early learning and achievement.

The later introduction of the Children Act (1989) required local authorities to register and inspect early years provision and the legal provisions of the Act reinforced the discourse for care and child protection arising from children's vulnerability in early years settings and the family home. Regulations focussed on children's safety and physical health within registered premises, as well as record keeping, and the fitness (in terms of health, mental health and criminality, and their dispositions towards young children) of individuals to work as practitioners. Early years discourse now privileged the child and his/her welfare rather than the adult, creating a legislative framework for a service primarily designed to be safe and to meet the developmental needs, rather than the educational outcomes, of young children. Practitioners required a clear, legal framework to guide them in safeguarding children, but were still given little by way of a curriculum or framework to work within to support young children's learning. It was not until the introduction of the Birth to Three Matters Framework (Abbott, 2002) that there was any formal recognition from policy makers of the learning potential of the under-3s, and the need for a knowledgeable practitioner to support this. Any requirement for knowledgeable and qualified practitioners within a care setting was unspecified, despite the earlier arguments of Owen, Isaacs, and Montessori.

Underpinning the 1989 Children Act, however, and the registration requirements that followed it, was the concept that children's safety could be ensured by following set processes and procedures. Care was a matter of disposition and could be delivered effectively by even an inexperienced and only basically trained sole worker, or a team within which only half its members have a basic level of knowledge and understanding of children's needs (DfES, 2003a, 2003b; DfE, 2017b). There was little acknowledgement of the relationship between loving care and early learning, as identified by early pioneers such as Montessori, Froebel and Pestalozzi (Aslanian, 2015), or the level of knowledge required to understand and support the integration of emotional and cognitive development. The later expansion of nursery education provision, with its introduction of separate standards for registration, inspection and delivery of funded nursery education (QCA/DfEE, 2000) in the early 21st century, had little impact in encouraging greater professional education aspirations within the early years workforce, or more clearly defining them as educators of young children. Instead, the introduction of different standards could be seen to reinforce the notion that educational practice was separate from care practice, being more a matter of knowledge and training than disposition. It could be argued that the legacy of this interpretation of early years practice – the importance of

keeping children safe and protected, emotionally as well as physically – is what underpins current debates about the benefits and necessity of raising entry qualifications for practitioners, and concerns over whether or not this will still attract the ‘right’ kind of applicant to the workforce.

Early intervention: the construction of the child in need

There was recognition, even as early as the 1908 Education Act, that many young children from poorer families were living in poor quality homes in unhealthy environments, some of which could be alleviated by nursery school provision. Health surveillance and monitoring could be carried out more regularly, and parents would be better educated about the care their children required (Owen, 1920). The introduction of State provision for nursery education was based on a discourse of intervention, aimed at addressing issues of child health and mortality, and social and economic deprivation, whilst supporting “all round development of the mind and body in an atmosphere of happy companionship”, most notably “for all children whose needs could not be met at home” (Owen, 1920, pp.12, 13). More recent reports concerning children’s outcomes and social mobility (Field 2010; Allen 2011) have perpetuated this view and acknowledged the link between deprived home backgrounds and children’s poor health and educational outcomes. The establishment of intervention programmes including Sure Start Local Programmes and Sure Start Children’s Centres in the early 21st century (Sure Start, 2005; Bate and Foster, 2015, p.5) created new roles for early years practitioners, requiring partnership working with parents and other agencies as planned interventions to address children’s needs. Since 2003, government policy has also been to integrate a range of services and departments to meet the requirements for multi-agency working highlighted by the Victoria Climbié Inquiry (Laming, 2003, pp.372, 373) and the *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* (DfES, 2004, p.4) green paper. This integration of services, to address “cross cutting local interests” (Cabinet Office Strategy Unit, 2002, p.35), led to the development of a practitioner role that went beyond a caring disposition, and a concern with the child’s learning and development. The discourse of the sector had now expanded from being one of concern over children’s safety and well-being, to including meeting parents’ employment and educational needs in the interests of the wider national economy, and providing family support. In doing so, this changed the nature of the parent/practitioner relationship, from one of customer/retailer or service user/service provider, to one where the practitioner had some delegated authority to advise parents/carers and even monitor their behaviour.

Early years care provision: support for working parents

Government support for the working mother initially was limited, and over time can be seen to be contradictory. The workplace nurseries of the 1940s, offering substitute maternal care whilst women were needed in the workforce, closed rapidly to ensure employment for returning soldiers (Lea, 2014, p. 19). The Plowden Report (DES, 1967) was explicit that local authority nursery provision was not to be used as childcare provision by working mothers. It was clear from this discourse that government at this time saw little need to support working mothers, and retained the view that nursery education for 3 and 4 year olds served the purpose of preparing children for school. Any other form of early years care was a private matter for those who could afford to pay for it.

The National Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998) re-directed this discourse as the Labour government sought to make it easier for all parents to seek employment or training (Baldock et al, 2013), and thereby support themselves and their families, by ensuring that there was accessible, affordable, high quality childcare for all parents who wanted it. The early years sector was now presented, by government, as a commoditised service to parents, supplemented by tax credits and voucher schemes, in support of broader economic aims. The size of the early years sector was greatly and rapidly increased by means of several funding streams including the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative, Nursery Expansion Grant, New Opportunities Funding, to ensure sufficiency and affordability of provision, particularly for parents in deprived areas, where there was deemed to be a pressing need to support them back into employment or training. Nursery education was offered universally, initially to 4 year olds, then extended to 3 year olds, and was available in the PVI settings so could be used to meet and subsidise the care needs of working parents.

The early years sector had now become a service for working parents rather than a universal, or even remedial, benefit for young children and their development. This continues today with the further extension of nursery education funding, to provide 30 hours of provision, to the children of working parents. That it was the need to enable parents to work and thus reduce welfare spending (Baldock et al, 2013), rather than children's developmental benefit that was a priority can be seen in the urgency with which additional care places were to be made available, and in the relatively low level of qualification required for a largely unqualified workforce. This was still well below that of the informed expert the early pioneers had called for. Only half the staff within a setting were required to be qualified to NVQ Level 3 (or their college-based vocational equivalents) and child-minders only had to undergo limited basic training (DfES, 2003b, p.10). Funded nursery education provision was now inspected to a different set of standards, and PVI settings, whose staff were not required to

hold any higher qualifications, were monitored and quality assured by teams of local authority consultants, rather than being given the autonomy to manage their own practice. Provision for children not in receipt of the Nursery Education Funding was still not required to meet any but the most general of requirements regarding the provision of a child-friendly, play-based approach to learning and care (DfES, 2003b, p.12; DfES, 2003a, pp.12, 13). This meant that for many settings, including the majority of child-minders, the content of their practice in meeting children's developmental needs was largely undirected and unspecified. It would seem that what was required was a practitioner whose interpersonal skills and commitment to their role were to be more highly valued than their knowledge, and who was willing to comply with a national, regulatory framework.

Pre-school provision: the learning child and school readiness

State-funded nursery education was first proposed in the early 20th century, but it was acknowledged (Owen, 1920, p.16) that this would require new government spending, which would only achieve public support if the provision were seen to be effective. This would only come about, she argued, from the employment of expert specialists, rather than the existing compromise provision where pedagogy, resources and teachers intended to support older children's learning were being used ineffectively and inappropriately with a younger age group. Following the 1908 Education Act, state nursery schools were introduced in 1923, adopting a pedagogy and curriculum more appropriate to the learning needs of children aged 3 – 5, which was delivered by trained teachers, reinforcing the recognition that children's early learning required the support of a qualified practitioner with specialist knowledge.

However, by reserving this type of staffing for explicitly school-based provision, this supports the implication that state-funded education, rather than voluntary or private provision, was where specialist knowledge was required. The Plowden Report (DES, 1967) later acknowledged the importance of children aged 3 and 4 receiving a good nursery education. However, in order to meet demand from parents at least possible cost, the government accepted that voluntary, unqualified, play-based provision, supported by the Pre-School Playgroups Association (PPA) (now the Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA)), and paid for by parents who could afford to do so, could effectively make up the shortfall in state provided places. Whilst this appeared to support the notion of the informed adult promoting children's early learning and development, there were no qualification standards set for this private practice, or formal training introduced to ensure these adults were (as school-based teachers were) informed or qualified to any measurable standard (Griffin, 2011). This raises the question of whether the employment of trained specialists for pre-school provision was seen as

an issue of quality, or rather one of demonstrating value for money and accountability of public spending. Government-funded education might require specialists, but this was a rule that could be relaxed for young children in private, play-based pre-compulsory provision.

Government policy with regard to the content of nursery education was also made explicit in the Plowden Report (DES, 1967), and followed up in the Rumbold Report (Rumbold, 1990). Both strongly advocated a play-based approach to young children's learning and the necessity of treating children as individuals, and meeting their unique learning needs. Both identified the need for sensitive and knowledgeable practitioners, regarding interaction with adults as the key to successful learning and development. The Rumbold Report (Rumbold, 1990) also specifically quoted and endorsed a 1988 report that stated unequivocally:

Care and education for the under-fives are complementary and inseparable
(House of Commons Education, Science and Arts Committee, 1988)

However, the government guidance for funded early years provision emphasised the curriculum providers should follow, and the outcomes children should meet (QCA/DfES, 2000), enabling the measurement and assessment of their progress, and school readiness. This approach again demonstrates that government funded nursery provision, wherever it is located, has long been subject to a more formalised quality assurance process, arguably implying that whilst the quality and thus the sustainability of purely private provision may be managed through market forces, including parental satisfaction with what is offered, public provision needs to be seen to be held to a different (perhaps higher, more expert driven) standard. The introduction of the EYFS (DCSF, 2008) marked the first combined framework of welfare regulations and good practice for care and education, for children from birth. Even this has not detracted from the primacy of meeting children's educational outcomes in inspection judgements and national EYFS Profile data. It potentially positions the early years practitioner as having a responsibility to meet targets imposed by policy makers, rather than critically reflecting on how best to support the learning and development of individual children.

The positioning of education and care

The expansion of funded nursery education provision to the PVI settings in 2001 (Cohen et al, 2004), in order to meet demand, added responsibilities to the role of the practitioner but brought no requirement for a higher standard of professional education or qualification. Settings continued to operate with only 50% of their staff qualified to NVQ Level 3, and their professional context was, and remains, limited to provision for children aged up to 5 in the PVI sector. As their role in providing funded nursery education developed, there emerged what seemed to be a double standard being

applied to provision. Where PVI services were paid for solely by parents, and valued by government as meeting their social agenda, there was less oversight and control over practice, in order to satisfy demand for services. Where provision was funded by government within the PVI sector, and took on a more explicitly educational role, more stringent regulatory and practice frameworks were applied, as they would to statutory education services. The explanation for this could lie in the fact that where statutory providers, who are required to employ more highly qualified staff, provide a similar service to the PVI sector, only one regulatory framework is needed, perhaps implying a higher level of professionalism amongst the workforce delivering these services. However, what it also implies is that the caring element of the role of the practitioner is less a matter of training than of the natural disposition of a largely female workforce, so that whilst carers may need to be trained as educators, educators do not require further training to take on caring responsibilities. Such a perception overlooks what makes up the caring role and its importance to young children's learning (Manning-Morton, 2006) and devalues the importance of moral, ethical and values-led practice (Taggart, 2011), whilst privileging the role and expertise of the educator.

The privileging of teaching qualifications can still be seen in the current regulatory framework (DfE, 2017b), where a practitioner with QTS can take responsibility for a larger group of children than a practitioner with a Level 3 qualification can, and maintained schools can open their doors to 2 year olds. Whilst the difference in level of professional education and qualification is clear, what is less explicit in policy is why two differently qualified individuals can be allowed by the Department for Education to do the same job, to the same regulatory framework, in different organisations, working under different terms and conditions. To address this apparent inconsistency, monitoring of funded nursery education was led by advisors from the teaching profession, so that once again, early years practitioners were operating under oversight by qualified teachers. Consequently, although practitioners were allowed to take on an educational role, this was not without a level of supervision and support regarded as unnecessary for their care responsibilities.

Early years practitioners came to accept the discourse that their role was to support learning, and accepted the premise that education for pre-5 learners is a separate concern, requiring a level of regulation and quality assurance that went beyond the requirements for providing care. However, in accepting this separation of care and education, it could be argued that they surrendered a level of agency over their own practice and the purpose of their sector; and at the same time, positioned themselves at the edge of education practice, accepting their subordination as a workforce to qualified teachers. Whatever status early years practitioners might have felt they gained by meeting

two sets of inspection and regulation standards, has served, in fact, to emphasise the amount of control exercised over their practice, compared to either care-only providers, or schools themselves, each regulated under a single framework. Once again, what might have been interpreted as an indication of a higher standard of practice (equity of inspection standards for education with schools) could equally be interpreted as a quasi-professionalism ideology (Evetts, 2013) giving cover to managerial control by state funders.

In accepting the two inspection frameworks and additional monitoring, the sector also contributed to the divide between education and care that perpetuates today, and the privileging of an educational discourse. Current research into practitioners' understanding of their role (for example, Manning-Morton, 2006; Moss, 2006; Chalke, 2013; Cook et al, 2013) shows how care is often simplistically defined, and presented in gendered, superficial terms that diminishes a research base positioning it as a vital underpinning for children's successful learning and development. This research serves to emphasise how far current practice is from the holistic understanding of the importance of emotional engagement and support for young children's learning promoted by early pioneers (Aslanian, 2015), and how powerful the influence of government policy can be.

Recent revisions to the EYFS (DfE 2017b; Tickell, 2011), and the OfSTED inspection framework continue to focus attention on school readiness, as does the attempted introduction of base line assessment rather than the use of the EYFS Profile. In emphasising the importance of formal education and measurable learning outcomes, this has led to uncertainty over the value of play-based informal learning. Further guidance has been issued about the teaching role of the practitioner and how this should be understood, and how play can be used by practitioners to support learning (OfSTED 2015c). In being issued by the government's regulator of practice, this implies that again, the practitioner role is a matter of approved practices, rather than the exercise of professional judgement to meet individual children's needs.

Despite this renewed emphasis on the value of play, Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) report that practitioners still feel under pressure to narrow their practice to a focus on children meeting prescribed learning targets. Moss (2012) continues to argue that in positioning early years provision as a vital tool for ensuring children's school readiness, practitioners are constrained into being technicians following prescribed processes in supporting children's learning rather than their own critical judgement. A more autonomous, critically reflective practitioner would have the specialist knowledge to be able to evaluate how their practice meets the needs of the children they work with,

and is able to exercise greater agency and autonomy over determining what effective practice is, and how this can be shared within the work place to raise quality. However, such a practitioner would require graduate level professional education and qualification, which includes critical analysis and evaluation of child development and pedagogic theory, and a more agentic pedagogic approach than is found in Level 3 qualifications.

The early years sector today

Within the changing discourse of the sector there appear to be two overarching themes. Firstly, there is the power of government funding over provision, with its impact on the role of the practitioner and their agency in determining their professional purpose and identity. This is accompanied by the separation of care and education, with a privileging of educational services within early years provision, and the measurement of children's progress in terms of the Early Learning Goals. Both have led to changes in practice and the regulation of practice, changes in how the role of the practitioner has been perceived by regulators and service users, and potentially changes in how practitioners view themselves.

The changing role for the early years practitioner has required them to extend the breadth and depth of their knowledge base in order to practice effectively to meet inspection and audit standards. The introduction, first of national standards for the licensing and quality assurance of provision (DfES, 2003a, 2003b), followed by curriculum guidance for funded provision (QCA/DfEE, 2000), and then the integration of the two streams into the EYFS (DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2017b), further indicate a view of the workforce as being in need of external guidance and regulation. Workforce reforms that appeared to support the development of a more expert practitioner (DfES, 2006) with a more detailed and broader knowledge base have been presented within the context of frameworks for compliance, and the development of practice through accreditation frameworks. The limited involvement of practitioners in the development of these frameworks confirms their lack of autonomy in determining their specialist knowledge base, and in contributing to the development of understanding of what effective practice is.

The child is now presented, by the introduction of an overarching curriculum framework which culminates in prescribed learning outcomes, as a predictable and measurable learner (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005), whose progress can be mapped to demonstrate the quality and accountability of the setting they attend (Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016), and whose choice over what they learn is now limited. The further packaging of welfare requirements and curriculum guidance into one

regulatory framework presents the child as a vulnerable and incomplete individual, in need of protection and education, in order to be able to benefit from subsequent compulsory schooling. Neither discourse presents the early years as a stage of childhood for children to experience and enjoy as unique and individual learners. Rather, they support the characterisation of the early years as a period of preparation for later, essential learning (Moss, 2012), rather than a stage of life to be experienced for its own sake.

Finally, early years provision itself is now presented as a business opportunity for potential providers, which remains sustainable whilst it delivers affordable and acceptable quality of provision. It is a service subject to market forces for working parents (Baldock et al, 2013), rather than a service to be of benefit for the children who attend it. As such, it is the role of government to ensure that the elements it funds are appropriately quality assured, and to put in place mechanisms for ensuring the quality of the rest. Thus, what is a largely privately owned sector (DfE, 2017a) has come under the control of the Department for Education, and serves a fluctuating political agenda for supporting parental employment, and children's welfare and their learning. This has created a hierarchy where government ministers and civil servants have substantial control over practice within private enterprises, and practitioners themselves have limited agency in determining their role or professional identity.

Theoretical constructions of the development of the practitioner role

It should be noted, however, that change has not been a simple, overall linear progression from one focus on practice to another. Instead it reflects the shifting priorities in social and governmental agenda located in the exo-and macro-systems of the sector (see Chapter 1, Figure 1, p.27), and a growing recognition that the PVI element of the early years sector had an essential role to play in delivering the services families and children require. From an ecological perspective, the development of the practitioner's role arises not only from changes within these systems but also and equally, from how the individual interacts and engages with them, and how they view themselves (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Agency and self-awareness are key factors in this development, positioning the practitioner as an active participant in the structuring of their working environment, so that their response to change and regulation is potentially a matter of conscious choice rather than passive and unconscious acceptance, or may perhaps be the consequence of a lack of education and understanding.

However, to understand the early years sector in Bourdieusian terms, it is the relationships between the different actors that create its structure and hierarchy (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), and determine how power is distributed between different actors. The influence and authority of politicians and funders, and the compliance with this from practitioners and providers, form part of the structure of the early years sector, contributed to and accepted by all those who operate in this field. The powerful within the field have created the role of the practitioner through social policy and political drivers, rather than practitioners uniting to present a common definition of their role, which then underpinned the creation of a field. Some of the key relationships of the practitioner within the field of early years provision could be characterised as subordinate – to external state funding and policy making, to parental pressure arising from expectations of what could and should be provided, and to the exploitation arising from a symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) perpetrated on them by an education and training system where government has determined the content and value of the skills and knowledge required for their roles. Their role is shaped by through political, social and cultural drivers, and licensed by political authorities, suggesting that the professional identity they articulate will reflect the requirements of those more powerful others rather than their own values.

The extent of the power of government regulation and oversight within the early years sector can be seen more clearly within Bourdieu's (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.8) metaphor of an orchestral score and musical composition to demonstrate the power relations and constraints involved in field. Within any ensemble piece it is clear, both to participants and audience, who has the privileged voice of the melody or tune, and who is cast in the supporting, harmonising role of adding depth and support but without being allowed primacy or the opportunity to shine and lead. Equally, the power relations within a field can be seen in the ways identities are construed and established doxa remain unchallenged. To do so would be the equivalent of discord and disharmony, being out of tune and therefore unacceptable to the ears of the other participants, and could ultimately lead to being excluded from the field entirely – or to extend Bourdieu's metaphor, written out of the piece. What this means for the individual is that they are compelled to accept the boundaries and constraints of their field if they wish to remain in it, or need to be able to exert sufficient force and power within their field if they wish to effect change. This can be seen today, in the compliance by the regulated early years sector with the hegemonic discourse of the benefits of early intervention and the importance of measurable school readiness, evidenced through the statutory requirements of the EYFS, and the tracking and assessment of ELGs. Early years settings and practitioners, in their completion of EYFS profiles, monitoring of children's attendance, and the shaping of their practice,

are encouraged to pursue a role that appears to privilege measurable educational outcomes over individual social and emotional development.

Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis, that the field and habitus will adapt to new practices and doxa, has been demonstrated throughout the history of the early years sector as providers have gradually moved to accept the increased government control regulation that accompanies its funding. What was once a private sector of provision, led by practitioners who applied their critical understanding of theory and research to their practice, is now a sector where government discourse and funding determine how practice is regulated and licensed. However, this does not necessarily imply that change to a field can only be driven by those who have the most power. Bourdieu also argues that "the field constitutes the habitus ... Habitus contributes to the constituting the field" (Bourdieu, 1992, in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.127). Just as the sector has changed in response to social and political pressures, the responses of the workforce to this change will also shape the development of the sector. Evidence of this reciprocal relationship is perhaps more clearly perceived in Bronfenbrenner's model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and his argument for a more agentic perception of the individual, whose development is shaped by their engagement with their environment. Within such a context, when practitioners, as the principal actors closest to practice, encounter proposed new roles and habitus, they must either engage with these to shape and/or accept them, or leave the field.

The overall aim of this study, in considering how practitioners construe their professional role, is to determine what level of agency or engagement they exert within their field, in terms of how they judge and define their practice and their role. By exploring their level of awareness of their working environment and its influences on them, this will offer for the professional educator an understanding of how to support them in the development of critical reflection, so that the professional identity they claim is one they own and understand. To support this, the following chapter will consider the role of the early years practitioner, and how this has been shaped by research, the pedagogy of their training and professional education, and discourse.

Chapter 3

Shaping the practitioner role through practice and professional education

This chapter examines the relationship between the different discourses of the early years sector and the practitioner him/herself, and how the former influences the perceptions of the latter. Current discourse privileges educational outcomes, school readiness and the safeguarding of children (Moss, 2012), using the Welfare Requirements (DfE, 2017b) and practice guidance of the EYFS (Early Education/DfE, 2012) to frame and support this. The role of the practitioner then could be construed in terms of compliance and accountability, with practice focused on the meeting of targets and measurable outcomes for children's learning. Alternatively, a more agentic understanding of their role would be that each practitioner interprets and applies these standards uniquely to their own practice. This raises a series of questions about the role of the practitioner:

- do they see themselves primarily as carers or educators, or a combination of the two?
- do they consider their role is to implement regulatory frameworks and government policy, or to decide for themselves how these might be interpreted in order to meet the individual needs of the children in their setting?
- do they see themselves as autonomous practitioners, applying specialist knowledge to make judgements about the effectiveness of their practice?

Underpinning these issues is the nature of practitioners' engagement with their working environment, and whether this could be characterised as the acceptance of social, cultural and political perceptions and pressures, or as challenging and redefining these in ways they themselves consider to be more appropriate.

This chapter reviews findings from recent research literature on how early years practitioners understand and articulate care and education as separate concepts; the relative values they ascribe to each of these; and how this may be used to form and support the vocational habitus of the practitioner. However, in order to understand how practitioners have engaged with their social environment, it is important also to consider the influence of their vocational training and on-going professional education since this has been identified as playing a significant role in developing the confidence and agency of practitioners (Osgood, 2010). Consequently, the pedagogy of their initial vocational training and on-going professional education will be examined, along with the social and cultural expectations that underpin this, to consider their influence on what practitioners consider to be important in their practice, how they describe their roles, and the level of autonomy they assume in both of these.

Reforming the professional education of the early years practitioner

McGillivray (2008, p.249) charted the evolution of the practitioner role in relation to the changing discourse of the early years sector, up to the point where the EYFS, and the concepts of Senior Practitioners and EYPS were first introduced. This evolution stressed the need for a practitioner with an appropriate disposition (maternal, sensible, sensitive to young children's moods and needs), and the importance of an appropriate knowledge base and career prospects. Although this has contributed to raising the profile of the practitioner as a worker with responsibility for supporting young children's learning as well as forming a positive, affective connection with children, this has consistently been interpreted in gendered terms, leaving the early years practitioner with a vocational habitus (Colley et al, 2003) that presents them as a caring, maternal figure, whose main concern is the physical and social well-being of children (Meering, 1947) in preparation for them entering formal education.

Following the introduction of the ECM outcomes as the basis for good practice (DfES, 2004), the government's Workforce Reform Strategy, in reviewing provision for young children, called for 'a sharper focus on outcomes rather than processes' (DfES, 2006, p.23). This would be achieved by the introduction of EYPS, developed through consultation between the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and the Teachers Development Agency (TDA), in order to 'refine details of the core skills, knowledge and practice experience required to lead practice in early years settings' (DfES, 2006, p.30), and the introduction of the EYFS (DCSF, 2008). The equating of EYPS to QTS and the involvement of the TDA in its development began to shift the practitioner role to a more educational focus, with the graduate-qualified, post-graduate accredited Early Years Professional (EYP) taking responsibility for leading the change to practice this would entail (CWDC, 2008). The EYFS framework, specifically the Early Learning Goals, in providing an outcome-based structure for practitioners to follow when planning provision and activities for children and assessing their progress, further emphasised the role of the practitioner in supporting children's educational outcomes as preparation for formal schooling, whilst continuing to stipulate that practice should be underpinned by principles that stress an interpersonal, respectful and enabling relationship with each child (DfE, 2017a, pg. 6). The later re-framing of the EYP role into Early Years Teacher Status (NCTL, 2013a) has reinforced the shift in early years discourse towards measurable educational outcomes and school readiness, but this introduction of a graduate, leadership role has not led to significant change in the initial vocational education of the Level 3 qualified practitioner.

Entry-level vocational education for practitioners (NVQ Level 3, licensing them to practice unsupervised) continues to focus on children's needs, and the policy and legal framework for practice, rather than on pedagogy appropriate to the pre-school learner (Pearson, 2016; CACHE, 2017). Practitioners are taught about children's early development, and made aware of their safeguarding and welfare responsibilities (to children, families and regulators), and the impact of wider legislation (data protection, health and safety) for early years practice. They are instructed as to how to gather and use observation data in order to plan activities to support learning and assess children's progress, and thus by implication, are inducted into the role of being the practitioner, rather than encouraged to consider their own understanding of what it means to be a practitioner. This vocational education remains competence based and service oriented, with an emphasis on following policy and procedure whilst demonstrating an appropriately caring disposition. However, whilst this encourages practitioners to value their caring disposition as the core of their professional identity (Colley, 2006), since the needs and the well-being of the child are at the heart of their initial training, it is the relatively low level of this vocational education, intended to prepare them to support and promote young children's learning, that situates them as being different from and lacking the status of a teacher within the early years sector. The omission from their training of reflection on personal values and ethical practice, self-evaluation and critical engagement with research that can be used to inform practice, which might be regarded as higher order thinking skills requiring a higher level of professional education (Taggart, 2016), also potentially undermines the importance of the care and emotional support they offer to young children.

The place and status of care in early years practice and pedagogy

Research in Australia, where similar early years sector and curriculum reforms have been introduced, revealed that there are practitioners who continue to emphasise their caring relationship with the children they support, to the extent of rejecting the notion that their purpose is to educate them (Cook, Davis, Williamson, Harrison & Sims, 2013). Earlier research indicated that practitioners discuss and describe their caring role using language that undermines the academic credentials and intellectual status of this understanding (Brownlee, Berthelsen, Boulton-Lewis & McCrindle, 2000; Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2007). The tension remains between care, or more precisely, the affective element of the practitioner role, and education, or the capacity to support young children's learning that is not only sensitive to their needs and individuality, but which also results in measurable progress to the satisfaction of funders and regulators. The vocational education and professional development of the practitioner has not yet encouraged them to

reframe a discourse of care in more abstract and pedagogic terms, or to demonstrate its basis in research, and its role in supporting successful learning.

Dahlberg and Moss (2005, p.90, 91) acknowledged that “the meaning of ‘care’ is rarely gone into with any rigour, leaving it loosely defined by association”, also noting that within early years practice there existed an “education/care dualism”, as though the two elements were in some way mutually exclusive. Even before the development of the EYFS, which integrated the practice standards for care and education for the first time, they proposed that pedagogy should be seen as a term that encompassed both elements (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p.130), where care was seen to add an ethical dimension to practice, through a pedagogy of listening (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p.105), and early years practice was embedded in relationships between the practitioner and the individual child, so that difference and choice were respected and valued, and there was a move away from a normative, universalistic, single code approach to early years practice. Moss (2006), in arguing for practitioners to reframe their work in more pedagogical terms to give it the professional recognition it deserves, and to move away from a discourse of care which he described as assuming “little or no education is necessary to undertake the work” (Moss, 2006, p.34), was arguing for practitioners to address the terminology they used to describe their practice, and to see the value of care beyond the framework of attachment theory. However, in presenting this as the need for practitioners to move away from a discourse of care rather than reframing this aspect of their work, he seemed to be suggesting the removal of what many practitioners regarded as the core of their professional values (Luff & Kanyal, 2015).

Ang (2014) has since identified a research base for the importance of children’s social and emotional well-being that went beyond attachment theory and tied these aspects of development to successful learning (Laevers, 2000; Carr, 2001; Claxton & Carr, 2002), combining pedagogy and care rather than seeing them as discrete and even competing aspects of practice. Echoing Dahlberg and Moss’ (2005) pedagogy of listening, she went on to argue that the core of the practitioner’s role was to take account of the individuality of the child in their practice and planning, applying a deep understanding of children’s backgrounds and early experiences and their impact on developmental progress, as well as the interests and learning needs children present in the setting. This concurs with Chalke (2013) who argued that the demands of the practitioner role, which could include physical and manual work as well as emotional engagement with young children (including the management of their transitions within and beyond the setting), required a pedagogic approach based on relationships that valued children as co-constructors of knowledge rather than recipients. She

further argued that in order to fulfil their responsibilities for working sensitively with parents/carers, and other agencies to ensure children's complex needs are met, it is important that they "learn to articulate the processes they engage with" (Chalke, 2013, p. 217).

Australian early years research has also identified that the place of care within the role of the early years practitioner is still to be fully recognised. Davis and Degotardi (2015) cite a range of sources that identify care as being undervalued as a professional skill (Andrew & Newman, 2012; McDowell Clark & Bayliss, 2012), and consigned to being a gendered, dispositional trait (Ailwood, 2007). In considering care as practice and understanding, rather than simply an emotional connection between practitioner and child, they argue that the physical care routines are undervalued within the Australian Early Years Learning Framework as opportunities not only for the development of ethical, caring relationships, but also for learning and development. Basing their research on the concept of care both as disposition and practice, and an ethic of care comprising attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness (Tronto, 2010), they demonstrate that practitioners' understanding of care as central to their practice in supporting the learning and development of very young children goes beyond what has been written into their practice framework. Within the EYFS in use in England today, although the underpinning principles of the framework acknowledge the importance of positive relationships and an enabling emotional environment for children's learning (DfE, 2017b, p.6), the current regulatory framework offers little information on how care underpins education beyond a requirement for key person working to support children's (and parents') transitions and effective information sharing (DfE, 2017b, pp.22, 23).

Care as an ethical stance

Luff and Kanyal (2015) investigated the notion of care as an ethical stance for practitioners. Their findings demonstrated that practitioners were concerned with preserving children's individuality, fostering their personal and social growth and ensuring their social acceptance within groups, including the management of their transitions. This approach to practice combined the child's need for care with the protection of his/her rights, raising care to the status of intellectual and ethical practice informed by critical reflection on personal values. It places the emphasis on practice which considers the individual needs of children rather than practice that follows a universalistic code (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). To do this requires a practitioner who interprets the EYFS framework in relation to individual children, rather than implements it on the assumption that all children will follow the same developmental trajectory to meet predicted outcomes. Such practice requires a

critical and knowledgeable practitioner rather than one compliant with, rather than questioning of, the curriculum framework.

Page (2011), in considering how love and care should be combined to support children's early development within the early years setting, argues for these to be understood as intellectual rather than emotional concepts. Her concept of "professional love" is based on practice rather than feelings, and a practitioner/child relationship which is "deep, sustaining, respectful and reciprocal" (Page, 2011, p.313), where the needs of the child are put first, and which is complementary rather than in competition with the mother/child relationship. This child-centred approach to practice, in moving the practitioner away from an overly simplistic, gendered interpretation as a substitute mother, and presenting her (or him) as requiring a deep understanding of ethics and interpersonal sensitivity to their practice, reflects again the "pedagogy of listening" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). However, although the development of caring relationships with children and their families, and the place of personal values and critical reflection within practice might be implied in the overarching principles of the EYFS (DfE, 2017b, p. 6) they do not garner the same attention within inspection and quality assurance processes as records for observing and assessing children and the provision of a safe environment. It is left to professional educators and practitioners themselves to articulate the importance of the concept of care in their practice, rather than this being written into the current, official discourse offered by the EYFS.

Taggart (2016) described the role of the practitioner as being to "water the seed of human flourishing itself and to foster compassion in future society" (Taggart, 2016, p.178), arguing that effective pedagogy should be based on emotional contact with children, questioning the different value attributed to a discourse of care, which presents children as vulnerable and in need of protection, from that attributed to a discourse of children's rights as capable citizens, constructing their own understanding and knowledge of the world. Early years practitioners required a "compassionate outlook", entering the workforce based on an ethical stance that they care for and about children, and put their needs first, so that their practice is underpinned by "an ethical pedagogy which attends to both the emotional quality of relationships and also to social justice" (Taggart, 2016, p.175). Not only does this elevate care to being a matter of ethics and values, but also redefines the support of learning as less concerned with the meeting of targets and outcomes and preparation for formal education, and more about the reducing of a child's inequality and vulnerability by increasing their knowledge and understanding of the world their live in.

The research discussed in this chapter demonstrates that practitioners have considerable understanding of young children's development needs, and can apply the principles and ELGs of the EYFS to practice shaped to meet the individual needs of children. They value the care they offer to children, and although they may set it apart from the meeting of prescribed educational outcomes (Cook et al, 2013), they see it as fundamental to a child's healthy development and emotional well-being, and intrinsic to the relationship they form with parents/carers. Their articulation of the value of care and its relationship to children's educational progress however, may not always be presented clearly, or in sophisticated, research-led terms (Brownlee et al, 2000; Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2007; Chalke, 2013).

It becomes clear from existing research into how practitioners view their role, that the concept of care is regarded as central to their practice, although they may not always clearly articulate its relationship with pedagogy (Moss, 2006; Chalke, 2013; Davis & Degotardi, 2015). A clearer articulation of care as an essential element of pedagogy would strengthen public perceptions of a knowledgeable and sensitive practitioner, who understands how care as an ethical stance can inform and underpin their practice. To preserve the quality of such practice and ensure children's needs are met effectively, Ang (2014, p.194) argued that practitioners should "critically analyse and consider their own practice in order to generate, evaluate and produce their own understanding of early years education and pedagogy". In other words, the EYFS, both its Welfare Requirements and the ELGs, should not be regarded by practitioners as an instruction manual, but rather as a framework within which they make, evaluate, and critically reflect on, their own decisions, presenting themselves as the "worker as researcher" (Moss, 2006, p.36), who constructs knowledge about early years practice rather than simply receives it, and who engages with the politics and ethics of the sector as well as applying personal values and identity to their practice. This calls into question not only the level of initial vocational qualification that might be considered appropriate for an early years practitioner, but also the pedagogic approach used to deliver this and their further professional education.

Pedagogy and vocational habitus in the early years sector

As the discourses of practice emerging from the Every Child Matters outcomes (DfES, 2004), new requirements for multi-agency working (Laming, 2003; DfES, 2004) and the introduction of the EYFS (DCSF, 2008) began to take hold in the early years sector, it became clear that more highly and differently qualified workers were required. Foundation degrees, with top-ups and accreditation routes to BA Hons and EYPS were introduced with an emphasis on these new workers being leaders

and managers of change, and able to critically reflect on their practice (DfES, 2006; CWDC, 2008). The development of such an agentic, critically reflective, self-aware practitioner would appear to require a transformative pedagogy (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009) for their professional education. Such an approach not only offers a deeper understanding of the role of research and the use of theoretical underpinnings to inform practice, but also encourages practitioners to see their experience as a learning opportunity and themselves as contributors of knowledge about early years practice. Using the work of Belenkey, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), Johns (2004) argued that, by drawing on both their work experience and personal values, along with existing theory and research, reflective practitioners would develop their own constructions of knowledge that have ethical and academic credibility. This voice of Constructed Knowing (Johns, 2004) is what would empower early years practitioners to perceive themselves as creators of knowledge in their field rather than the users of Received Knowledge, becoming what Moss (2006) described as practitioners as researchers rather than technicians. However, this calls for a learner who is prepared to engage critically with the higher levels of research and theory necessary to support their reflections and evaluations, and who is aware of their own values base and the significance of the ethical implications of care within their practice. In other words, a transformative approach requires a learner who is much more aware of their working environment, at a range of levels, and has the confidence to engage with it rather than simply accept it.

What is also required to support the development of critically reflective practitioners is the freedom to make autonomous decisions with regard to practice and to interpret regulatory frameworks and shape practice to meet the needs of children as individuals. Whilst Foundation and full BA Hons ECS degrees can (and do) teach the value and processes of reflection on practice, and the critical analysis of theory and research, the early years setting must still comply with government regulatory frameworks, and demonstrate its effectiveness in meeting targets and outcomes to maintain funding. This can have the effect of focussing critical reflection on the more superficial levels (Goodman, 1984) of evaluating the outcomes of practice, rather than its underpinning values and principles (Moss, 2012; Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016), limiting the voice of the practitioner to the articulation of orthodox received knowledge (Johns, 2004), rather than encouraging them to contribute to the development of new knowledge within their field.

Transformative pedagogy is ultimately empowering, but requires that the learner understands and accepts that such an education does not lead to definitive answers about best practice or factual knowledge, but will rather provide an answer to a situated problem or issue and the tools for

readdressing similar situations as they arise in future. Such an approach is based on dialogue, the questioning of how things might otherwise be or be done (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009), and the challenging of taken-for-granted assumptions and values, i.e. the current habitus and doxa of the early years workforce. It could be argued that this approach appears to be a better fit for practice that has been acknowledged will never be a matter of routine (Nutbrown, 2012), dealing as it does with the complexities of human nature and behaviour. However, it requires a learner who is comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty, and confident enough to believe that their own experience and reflections contribute to the content and definition of the specialist knowledge of their occupational group. It also requires a teacher who understands that their role is to encourage dialogue and questioning, rather than requiring the acceptance of received wisdom, and the development of a learner's voice from silence to assertion (Johns, 2004). Whilst the student-practitioner would come to understand the need for compliance with regulation and legislation, they would seek to achieve this within their own system of values and ethics, personalising rather than standardising their practice, through the process of critical reflection. Such a practitioner would also demonstrate the agency and confidence to question regulatory frameworks and policy decisions, in order to maintain the ethical standards of their practice.

Vocational education that follows the Model of Technical Rationality approach (Schon, 1983) potentially constrains reflection to the evaluation of operational procedures to meet objectives, described by Goodman as Level 1 reflection (1984). This offers learners greater security in how to perform their roles, but less autonomy in defining them, and much less agency in contributing to the knowledge that underpins their practice and professional development. Such an approach encourages the development of set processes and procedures to be followed that are intended to meet the demands of practice typically encountered by the learner, and are based on the assumption that individual needs and circumstances are always going to be sufficiently similar for such set routines to be applicable. This approach, although it includes the consideration of research and theory as a knowledge base, does not necessarily require the learner to engage with this critically and analyse how it applies to their own practice or values, but rather to accept how it has been used to underpin the processes they are required to follow.

The two approaches create a very different vocational habitus (Colley et al, 2003) for their learners, leading to greater or lesser levels of agency in defining their professional identity and claiming professional status. The reification of current early years practice, with its emphasis on the recording of observations and assessment, the documentation of policies, procedures and processes, and

interaction and information sharing with partner agencies and parents, supports the development of a Technical Rationality model for initial vocational education for practitioners. However, my own experience of assessing inexperienced trainee practitioners has shown that this can reduce their practice to a series of steps to follow, rather than a critical consideration of how best to meet the needs of individual children. Schon (1983) acknowledges this as a weakness of the Technical Rationality model. Its focus on problem solving promotes the selection, from a range of existing options, the best process to meet required ends or outcomes, rather than the development of the skills or knowledge required for “problem setting” where the student is equipped with skills to “define the decision to be made” (Schon, 1983, p.40), i.e. empowered to acquire and use knowledge to make their own judgements about effective practice. Hyland (1997) similarly criticises competence-based education for its behaviourist approach to the development of practice skills and knowledge, arguing that it takes a “reductionist view of human agency which assumes that knowledge, skills and values can be codified ... and measured objectively in abstraction from human experience” (Hyland, 1997, p.495). His argument, that this approach not only oversimplifies practice skills but also undermines individual agency, highlights the importance of examining the pedagogy of the training and education practitioners receive, to understand how their engagement with their working, cultural and social environments is supported. A pedagogy that emphasises learning how things are done rather than why, or how else they might be done, is one that would appear to require compliance rather than critical reflection or personal judgement. It is also one that facilitates the enculturation of a set of practice or professional values that reflect hegemonic discourse and definitions rather than personal values or ethics.

Such an approach also facilitates the opening of a qualification route to students who are selected less for their academic prowess and achievement and more for their disposition or commitment towards working with children. The GCSE grades in English and Maths, regarded as core entry criteria to other vocational routes, have only recently, and briefly, been required for entry to Early Years Educator (EYE) Level 3 programmes, their introduction leading to much debate within the sector as to their necessity and the danger they pose in reducing the pool of potential applicants or excluding those with the right disposition but fewer academic credentials (Gaunt, 2017), as though the two were inevitably mutually exclusive. This requirement has now been reframed (DfE 2017c) to include a range of less academic Functional Skills Level 2 qualifications, in response to these concerns raised by employers and awarding bodies about their pool of potential recruits rather than the needs of children or the professional status of practitioners.

The traditionally lower entry requirements for early years qualifications, coupled with a Technical Rationality pedagogy, has the effect of reinforcing a vocational habitus, i.e. “a set of dispositions derived from idealised and realised identities and informed by the notions and guiding ideologies of the vocational culture” (Colley, et al, 2003, p. 493) where early years practice “relies on inherent capacities of women” (Colley, 2006, p.16), rather than academic achievement or intellectual capacity. Where these dispositions include a respect for and compliance with hierarchies in return for social and professional approval, rather than critical evaluation of regulation and awareness of the impact of the social and cultural environment of the practitioner, a personal as well as vocational habitus is created where the individual may remain accepting of their lack of power and agency, rather than engaging with the structures around them to challenge their influence. Colley (2006) identifies this in the early years sector as emotional exploitation, where practitioners are expected to sacrifice the potential for greater agency and capital, in return for the satisfaction of doing socially worthy work, for limited financial reward. Similarly, Katz (1985, p.4) referred to this as them acquiring “folk status” as professionals, i.e. achieving social recognition for the value of their work, but with little acknowledgement of the actual knowledge or skill required, and limited financial reward, justified by the limited expectation of their more academic achievements.

It is the pedagogic action (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) of the vocational education and professional development opportunities available to early years practitioners that would appear to significantly influence their professional identity. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that the key to an individual’s engagement with their environment, and their resulting personal development, lies in their perception of that environment and their own place within it. Opportunities for change to the role and position of the practitioner have included raising their levels of qualification and professional education opportunities (DfES, 2006), the development of new standards and a framework for practice (DfE, 2017b), and changes to the balance between education and care provision, particularly in the PVI element of the sector (DfEE, 1998). Whilst these might offer opportunity for the empowerment and enrichment of the practitioner role, it is how practitioners are educated and supported to engage with these that influence any change to the role and identity of the individual. Osgood (2010) reported that practitioners found professional education that offered opportunities for developing critical reflection to be most useful to them in developing confidence about their role, and an understanding of how they were positioned within the sector. A transformative approach to professional education, coupled with the development of critical reflection, then, could support practitioners in understanding not only what their vocational habitus (Colley et al, 2003) is, but also how it has developed and how it frames their perceptions of their

own professional identity. Such an understanding offers them a base from which to challenge or re-define this (Colley, 2006). However, if the professional education of the practitioner adopts the pedagogic approach described within Schon's model of Technical Rationality (Schon, 1983), then the role of the practitioner is more likely to be one of compliance with regulatory frameworks, where the authors of those frameworks pre-determine appropriate pedagogy and values.

There is a tension, though, between the initial training they must undertake to be licensed as fit and knowledgeable practitioners, and the demands of the role they are then expected to fulfil, with no mandatory requirement for further qualification. They have an initial vocational education that appears to adopt a Technical Rationality model (Schon, 1983) for its pedagogy, and a practice that is bound by the regulatory and curriculum framework of the EYFS with its accompanying targets and expectations. However, the expectation that they would exercise their own judgement in relation to meeting the needs of individual children (Ang, 2014; Luff & Kanyal, 2015; DfE, 2017b) suggests that they require a more transformative approach to their professional education, which encourages self-evaluation and the development of personal judgement based on the study of research, the application to practice of theory, and practical experience. Both Bronfenbrenner's model, and Bourdieu's framework of field and power relations, suggest that practitioners' understanding of their role and professional identity will always be constrained by those who control the curriculum and pedagogy of their professional education. The following chapter considers how government introduction of workforce reforms have contributed to practitioners' understanding of their role and also their development of agency and status within the early years sector.

Chapter 4

Professionalizing the early years sector

The government-led discourse surrounding early years provision identified in Chapter 1 demonstrates the importance of the sector to social and educational policy. Chapter 2 demonstrates that this workforce has a unique approach to applying their skills, knowledge and understanding to meet the complex needs of individual children and their families, drawing on research-based specialist knowledge, and personal values and ethics to underpin their daily work. It might be expected then that the status, and the social and economic capital of this workforce would at least be equivalent to that of teachers, and their vocational habitus would reflect such and understanding of the value of their role.

This chapter is concerned with identifying what professionalism means within the early years workforce, and how this contributes to their professional identity in terms of their vocational habitus and social and economic capital. It establishes what it means to be a profession in terms of the status, capital and autonomy this might imply, questioning if such status is still an essential part of being a professional, and what this implies for the identity of early years practitioners. It goes on to consider the impact of the government's professionalization agenda on this workforce, how this has shaped the engagement of practitioners with their working environment, and what this implies for the agency and status it may confer. It concludes by considering the implications for the early years practitioner of the distinction between being professional and claiming professional status, offering a context for examining what my participants have to say about their understanding of their role in the workplace and their concepts of good practice.

Professionalism and early years practitioners

The government's re-envisioning of the early years sector (DfEE, 1998) and its workforce reform strategy (DfES, 2006) identified the need for critically reflective leaders of practice (CWDC, 2008) who could be the articulate and confident interpreters of research and regulatory frameworks described by Moss (2006) and also Chalke (2013). This would be achieved through the accreditation and awarding of EYPS, now EYTS. Since the introduction of these reforms, researchers have identified what they consider to be the key themes that would define professionalism in early years practice, through observation of practice and interviews with different participants:

Table 4: Models of early years professionalism

Oberhuemer (2005)	Relationships; networking; collegial working; cooperation and collaboration; interpersonal skills; strong communication skills; the ability to make positive, affective connections with a wide range of people
Dalli (2008)	Having and using a professional knowledge base; the child's best interests; taking responsibility for the actions of one's colleagues
Moss (2008)	Critical thinking; researching; listening and openness; uncertainty and provisionalism; subjectivity; border crossing, multiple perspectives, curiosity
Miller and Cable (2008)	Quality; standards; expertise; reflection; identity; social status
Urban and Dalli (2008)	Autonomy; critical thinking and reflection; construction of knowledge within an ethical framework
Lloyd and Hallet (2010)	knowledge of children's development; personal qualities; interpersonal skills; leadership skills
Brock (2012)	Knowledge; qualifications, training and professional development; autonomy; values; ethics; rewards

Critical reflection and the application of a specialist knowledge base to practice are identified as important aspects of professionalism within early years practice. Equally valued are the interpersonal skills required for relationship formation and management, to ensure practitioners are effective and respectful in their dealings with others. Similarly, values and ethics are key principles in professional behaviour for the early years practitioner. Professionalism for the early years practitioner, then, is as much a matter of attitude and disposition (Simpson, 2010), and as much a matter of relationships and connection with others (Manning-Morton, 2006), as it is a matter of specialist academic knowledge and qualification.

However, it is this integration of practical and interpersonal skills, and values and dispositions with the need for specialist knowledge that leads to conflict in how practitioners view their own professionalism. Manning-Morton (2006) was critical of concepts of professionalism that undervalued practitioners' personal connections with the children and families using their services, arguing that they perpetuated the differential values placed on care and education services for young children, and reflected an historical perspective that portrayed practitioners as lacking, and which should be replaced by one that promoted "a professional identity of a critically reflexive, theoretical boundary crosser" (Manning-Morton, 2006, p.50). Sims-Schouten and Strittrich-Lyons (2013) found that practitioners continued to see themselves as having two identities, one concerned with their practice, and one concerned with their academic education. The two identities remain separate and differently valued. Experience and expertise in practice is regarded as a very practical and low-value skill, whilst professionalism is a matter of knowledge and education, demonstrated

through academic and sophisticated language. Their work also identified that practitioners collectively have a low self-esteem with regard to their academic abilities, attributed in part to a discourse of workforce reform that views them as “still in need of transformation” (Sims-Schouten & Strittrich-Lyons, 2013, p.42). They conclude that the concept of professionalism within the early years sector needs to be revised to include “notions, not just in relation to being an ‘educated’ early years practitioner but also as one that is skilled in dealing with children” (Sims-Schouten & Strittrich-Lyons, 2013, p.51).

Professionalism in early years practice then remains a problematic concept, with the academic knowledge of the graduate, which is applied to the leadership of practice, particularly in support of older children’s learning, being privileged over the practical tasks of day-to-day practice. To challenge this would require a general acceptance, from those using early years provision and those educating the workforce, that neither knowledge nor practical skill alone is sufficient for practice to be of a professional standard. However, the workforce reform agenda (DfES, 2006), and the professionalization measures it introduced, were presented as introducing a higher level academic knowledge for practitioners, so that professionalism would be achieved through the medium of graduate level qualifications. This would include an emphasis on the study of a specialist body of knowledge rather than necessarily the development of high-level interpersonal skills, perpetuating the concept that professional status is achieved through control and monopoly of a specialist knowledge base (Eraut, 1994; Lloyd & Hallet, 2010). It also indicates the distance between those who have determined what this knowledge base should be and how it might be applied to practice, and practitioners themselves (Urban, 2008), who have a more real sense of the skills and expertise it takes to do their job well.

The raising of qualifications, and increased government control over quality, however, does not appear to have led to any material change in the terms and conditions of employment for practitioners, or to any closer move to parity with teachers within the compulsory education sector (Lloyd & Hallet, 2010; Sims-Schouten & Strittrich-Lyons, 2013). In other words, although practitioners may demonstrate the professional behaviours within their practice identified by a number of researchers (see Table 4 above), there has been little evidence of any change to the capital or status of the early years practitioner. This raises the question of how a workforce might claim its professional status and to what extent does this differ, particularly for the early years practitioner, from professional behaviour?

Professional recognition and the early years workforce

Functionalist perspectives on what constitutes a profession bring both status and power and also practice together, viewing professions as groups of highly educated experts, applying their knowledge and expertise for the good of wider society (Kinos, 2008), embodying an ethical stance within their practice, coupled with the autonomy to determine what this knowledge (in terms of content and level) is and how it can be perpetuated and developed (Evetts, 2003). Taxonomic definitions of traditional professions and professionalism focus on specific traits assumed to be associated with professions such as ethical practice and altruism, how the boundaries for membership of occupational groups are set and maintained, and where the power lies to determine this (Noordegraaf, 2007; Saks, 2012). Such definitions could be seen as problematic for early years practitioners, as their articulation of ethics and values is presented simplistically in terms of care, with limited articulation on underpinning research or theory (Brownlee et al, 2000; Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2007), and the regulatory framework for their practice has been developed and imposed by policy makers rather than by practitioners themselves. Eraut (1994) argued that professions have their own unique, expert knowledge that can be discussed with confidence and which is not shared by other occupational groups. However, although its application to meet children's holistic needs is unique, the knowledge base for the early years practitioner is multi-disciplinary, drawing from health, education and psychology.

More traditionally recognised, equally independent and originally market-led professions such as lawyers and doctors have claimed professional status for themselves, by forming their own professional bodies and organisations, and applying and enforcing their own regulations. In making their own claim for the jurisdictions of their practice (Abbott, 1988), these groups have exercised autonomy over determining the knowledge-base, practice standards and entry and licensing requirements for their work, affording them control over their status and capital. However, it is government, with its control over early years funding, who have taken it on themselves to determine the regulation, qualification and registration of this workforce, to the point of claiming the power to determine professional status. At the same time, it has drawn back from creating a career progression structure and nationally applicable terms and conditions for practitioners (McGillivray, 2008). In other words, the early years workforce, potentially a profession, has been shaped in response to a range of political and social demands and discourses, rather than by demands for recognition voiced by practitioners themselves.

Professions, then, have traditionally been defined by what they do and know that sets them apart from other occupational groups, the power they exercise in defining their practice and its standards, and their autonomy to self-regulate and manage the boundaries of their group. These are factors that may appear problematic for the early years practitioner. Saks (2012) cites Foucault in arguing that professions draw their power from their usefulness to state institutions and the dominant political agenda, and it is clear that the early years sector has a key role to play in meeting a range of political agenda (DfEE, 1998; Cohen et al, 2004). However, recent research (Oberhuemer, 2005; Manning-Morton, 2006; Noordegraaf, 2007; Kinos, 2008; Saks, 2012, 2013; Colley & Guery, 2014) questions the validity of group autonomy in defining professions in today's knowledge-based societies. The increased external regulation now applied to once self-regulated occupations, particularly by the state to whom these professions are useful, and the introduction of neo-liberal concerns including value for money and market forces, along with performance management, and concerns about added value and financial accountability, have all challenged the autonomy of traditional professions (Saks, 2013).

The introduction of new occupational roles that bring together vocational expertise with the skills of leadership and performance management, or which require workers with established expertise to work in new ways or new contexts, are also blurring the boundaries between what were once separate specialisms (Colley & Guery, 2014). The uniqueness of a profession's knowledge base can no longer be assured. Claims to expertise are more concerned with how practitioners bring different disciplines together, the specific service users they engage with, or work environments they inhabit, a jurisdiction based on the workplace (Abbott, 1988) rather than the boundaries set by those who license them or use their services. On a day to day basis, early years practitioners demonstrate the content of their professionalism in their application of knowledge to practice, the development of knowledge from experience which is then applied to future practice, the codifying of their practice into in-house standardised processes including the observation and assessment of children, and the development of strategies to deal with regularly occurring incidents. However, the question remains as to what status and agency this offers them, and how this is achieved.

Noordegraaf (2007) identifies a hybridised professional, a reflexive practitioner for whom relationships with other organisations and individuals are a key element of their expertise and practice. This definition emphasises the importance of the content of a workforce's knowledge base, and their ability to use this to inform "sense-making or meaning-making behaviour" (Noordegraaf, 2007, p. 774). This, coupled with skill in relationship formation and networking, supports the

development of a flexible expertise drawing from a range of different knowledge sources. The modern professional is a self-managing individual who makes their own determination of how to use their expertise to meet the needs of their service users, ensuring that such strategies can be seen to be cost effective and measurable, thus negotiating their way through knowledge-based, values driven, practice and performance management. Given the complex mix of government regulation and accountability, the need for a financially robust and sustainable business model and the requirement for knowledgeable and skilled practitioners, the hybridised model of professionalism might appear to sit well with early years practice, and previous concepts of early years professionalism. However, whilst it could be argued that such a definition appears to fit the day to day experience of practitioners working collegially and collaboratively, the overarching requirement for children to be rendered school ready and the use of a curriculum framework charting universal developmental patterns and early learning goals to guide practice and assessment, both imply that practitioners' creative and critical expertise has limited value. Whilst this follows current trends to increase the accountability of publicly funded professions (Saks, 2013), it could present a barrier to the development of practitioners' autonomy and creativity in determining practice standards. A competence-based approach to professional education, that teaches practitioners how to work within the EYFS framework, rather than to understand and critique the principles on which it is based, and the introduction to many workplaces of such tools as appraisal and performance management rather than professional mentoring and supervision, facilitate a "from above" (Evetts, 2011, p.407) professionalization agenda, appearing to offer autonomy over decision making within the setting, whilst in fact imposing greater control over practice. To avoid such a circumstance, the higher-level professional education of the practitioner needs to be transformative, critically reflective and dialogic in nature (Taggart, 2016), encouraging them to see themselves as contributors to rather than simply receivers of their specialist knowledge base.

Professions are understood to operate as collectives, with shared aims and interests, existing within an established field, where the principle actors claim the dominant and powerful positions, and where there is a collective struggle for a common goal (Kinos, 2008). Alternatively, they emerge where there is a recognised vacancy for the service they provide (Abbott, 1988). Both circumstances are closely tied to the ownership of a specialist field of knowledge. To claim power within an established field requires secure ownership of a knowledge base arising from higher-level professional education where the skills of critical reflection, and debate and discussion about its relationship to practice are encouraged. To create a profession to fill a vacancy (Abbott, 1988), individuals should already possess the necessary knowledge and qualifications for their new roles,

and existing professions should be prepared to make space for the emerging group, implying the negotiation of power that requires a strong collective voice within the workforce.

However, as a collective, the early years workforce barely exists at all, with no universally agreed terms and conditions or job roles, no clearly identifiable professional association with the power to regulate or inspect service, and no single union to represent their interests with employers. This lack of a unified voice weakens them (Abbott, 1988; Hordern, 2016), giving them little role in determining the specialist knowledge that underpins their practice, and thus a meaningful voice in setting the standards for their work. Arguably, if this remains the case, despite higher level qualifications and titles, it means they remain technicians carrying out relatively complex but prescribed processes as their practice, rather than creatively applying a body of knowledge to the individual and unique circumstances they encounter with individual children on a daily basis.

Where there is no collective occupational voice, where individuals do not explicitly share a common goal or aim, power is claimed by some other elite group with the authority to determine working conditions, occupational roles and identity and mechanisms for entry to the group (Kinos, 2008). Autonomous, self-governing professions set qualification and practice standards themselves. Early years practitioners lack the collective organisation to do so, giving them limited agency over their status and identity and facilitating government intervention to shape and regulate their sector. The fragmented and diverse nature of the early years sector (Miller, 2008), largely comprising small to medium PVI organisations (see Table 1, chapter 1), can also be argued to undermine the power of this workforce to set the structure of the sector. Government assumed the power to set the legal jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988) of their practice (DfES, 2006), without going so far as to develop a full professional infrastructure including nationally recognised job descriptions and terms and conditions for employment. Government intervention (DfEE, 1998) created the need to expand early years care and education provision. However, in identifying this vacancy, the qualified workforce it required did not exist, and measures were required (again, acted on by government) to revise and raise minimum levels of qualification for practitioners, and to introduce and enforce new processes and oversight for registration and inspection of provision. Such moves were not made by the sector itself. This governmental appropriation of the jurisdictions of early years practice has continued to date, with the development and revision of the EYFS (DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2012, 2014, 2017b), reports calling for minimum levels of entry qualification to specific practitioner roles (DfE, 2013) and the development and redevelopment of EYPS and EYTS accreditation frameworks, all emanating from the Department for Education. This approach to the governance and development of the early years sector, and its

acceptance by practitioners, is what has facilitated the imposition of a 'from above' professionalization agenda (Evetts, 2011, p.406), with the lack of autonomy and agency for the practitioners themselves that this implies.

Kinos (2008) argues that occupational groups with reduced agency imitate higher status groups. This represents the path the early years practitioner workforce has followed since the introduction of the Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998) and the transfer of oversight of early years provision from the Department of Health to the Department for Education. This has created a public perception that they are a form of subordinate profession (Abbott, 1988) to teachers, excluded from some of the practices or workplaces of their higher level colleagues, relieved of some of the specialist knowledge these colleagues possess, but also lacking the potential for "a national professional identity through belonging to a distinct professional group" (Lloyd & Hallet, 2010, p.83). It has only ever been government that has had the power to determine levels of qualification for a setting's workforce, and the authority to tie this to their licence to practice, so that in terms of autonomy and power for self-regulation, the early years workforce has lacked authority. Today, with practice standards controlled by the NCTL, closely allied to the DfE, it could be argued that this positions the sector as subordinate to teaching. This is further emphasised by the privileging of an educational discourse within early years practice, and the clear division of where early years practitioners, educators and teachers may and may not work. Current, government-recognised job titles focus on the school readiness role of the practitioner – Early Years Educator (EYE), Early Years Teacher (EYT) – and reflect a discourse of young children lacking knowledge and being prepared to meet the educational outcomes of compulsory education. Practitioners are measured, to some extent, in terms of where they fit within the teaching profession – the EYT being of equivalent status to a primary school teacher - but the fact that this equivalence has to be explicitly stated undermines the potential for such parity to be approved and accepted automatically. When early years practitioners are categorised as a subordinate profession, their status and agency are compromised.

It could be argued then that the definition of the role of the early years practitioner is bound more tightly by the perceptions of those who use their services – parents/carers, funding bodies (including government), the schools young children transition into – which undermines their own "social and cultural authority" (Abbott, 1988, p.60). Public opinion can be a lasting and powerful influence on the professional status of a group (Abbott, 1988) but works best when all practitioners are employed in the same way, in the same kind of organisation, performing the same duties, a state of affairs that does not apply to the early years practitioner workforce. As a result it is easier, particularly for

parents, but also for other interested parties, to define them in terms of what they are not – not health professionals, not teachers, and not social workers – and also in terms of the core functions they fulfil, i.e. looking after, caring for and playing with young children, a superficial and simplistic perception that takes no account of the specialist knowledge the practitioner now requires to ensure children are safe, emotionally as well as physically, and their learning and development is appropriately supported. Challenging such a limited public perception, and equally to address issues of low self-esteem in practitioners themselves (Sims-Schouten & Strittrich-Lyons, 2013), needs to begin with an examination of practitioners' articulation of their identity and their role.

The ownership and value of professional education in the early years sector

Initial vocation education for early years practitioners has consistently been designed and led by employers and policy makers, as well as qualification awarding bodies, with later involvement from groups with closer links to practitioners. The NNEB introduced the first nationally recognised qualification for early years practitioners with a strong emphasis on children's physical well-being, but this was an organisation external to the workforce rather than drawn from within it. Further training and qualifications were developed as pre-school provision was expanded following the Plowden report (DES, 1967), by the PLA, an organisation comprising parents and some qualified teachers. This brought ownership of the knowledge base required for early years provision closer to providers and practitioners, but with no power to enforce standards on provision in general, or even on their own membership (Griffin, 2011). Educational awarding bodies – for example, BTEC, CGLI, CACHE – in consultation with the early years sector, later introduced other qualifications for early years practitioners, and many PLA and NNEB qualifications were subsumed into qualifications awarded by CACHE, shifting control of the workforce knowledge base and standards away from the practitioners again. The Early Years National Training Organisation was formed in 1998 to lead on the development of NVQs for early years practice, then Sector Endorsed Foundation Degrees in ECS, followed by the CWDC, who have since been replaced by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) (Owen & Haynes, 2008). Thus, whilst the sector has had some involvement with the development of its professional knowledge base, this has been largely steered by those who might be regarded as distanced from practice, rather than by practitioners themselves. The revision of the EYPS standards (CWDC, 2008) to the more educationally focused EYTS standards (NCTL, 2013a) to develop practitioners as pedagogic leaders within settings, has confirmed the influence of an educational discourse and school readiness agenda over early years practice.

Control over entry to the workforce lies with external authority. Practitioners are required as individuals to meet regulatory requirements in terms of qualification and fitness to practice, standards now set by OfSTED, an authority that is run by the same Department for Education that funds some (although not all) of their practice. Where practitioners may work, and their levels of responsibility and accountability (as well as the remuneration they may or may not expect) are defined by their regulator. This is far from the autonomous, knowledgeable, holistic expert practitioner envisaged by the first pioneers of early years provision (Garhart Mooney, 2000), and perhaps reflects the power the state can exert over private practice, due to the funding it provides. Clearly, overall control of the practice of this occupational group is not managed by its members, resulting in them presenting, and perpetuating a vocational habitus of subordination and acceptance (Colley, 2006).

This habitus is further perpetuated by the pedagogic ethos of a competence-based initial vocational education, which at NVQ Level 3 represents the highest mandatory level of qualification they are required to achieve, but which does not reflect the level of expert knowledge they require if they are to fulfil their roles appropriately. This may be supplemented by degree-level qualifications that, by themselves, confer no greater sector recognition than their colleagues qualified to Level 3, but which must be followed by further, competence-based accreditation to education standards in order to achieve recognition as the equivalent of a teacher, but with none of the raise in status or capital this accrues in the compulsory education sector. The sector endorsed ECS degrees that represented the specialist knowledge base of the graduate practitioner (Calder, 2008) have now been replaced by degrees which meet criteria for the status of Early Years Educator (NCTL, 2013b), a status also held by practitioners with Level 3 qualification. Thus, although the skills of critical reflection and evaluation continue to form an important part of degree-level education for practitioners, they are no longer required to be a key component of the degree course.

The value of higher-level professional education may also appear questionable to practitioners themselves. Workplace promotion may be achieved as much through the acquisition of experience and specialist skills (First Aid, SEND training, curriculum specialism training, safeguarding training) as by the achievement of degree-level qualifications. Settings within the PVI sector set their own terms and conditions for their employees and many would argue that they lack the capacity to employ a highly trained graduate practitioner or Early Years Teacher, especially in a sector where they are allowed to operate with up to 50% of their staff having no qualification.

Within this context, with limited value placed on higher level study, and the content, regulation and licensing of practice being controlled by government rather than the workforce, it is not surprising that any professionalization agenda would be imposed “from above” rather than emerge “from within” (Evetts, 2011, p.407). There would appear to be little incentive for practitioners as individuals to engage with expensive degree level study when there is no national infrastructure to guarantee any occupational gain from it. However, on closer examination of the workforce reform programme (DfES, 2006), with its supported access to higher levels of education, and opportunities for different post-graduate career opportunities, it can be seen to offer the elements identified in concepts of professionalism (e.g. Cable & Miller, 2008; Moss, 2008; Urban & Dalli, 2008; Brock, 2012) that the work place cannot. Most notably, these include a deeper, broader knowledge base, and opportunities for discussion and reflection on practice. In choosing to engage with a demanding programme of study, which might only bring tangible rewards for those prepared to leave their current role, it could be argued that practitioners are demonstrating a further key element of professionalism, their commitment to professional development and to the improvement of their practice, again indicative of a vocational habitus of where personal disposition is valued more than material gain (Colley, 2006).

How have practitioners come to be in the position of apparently exercising so little autonomy over their working roles and practices? One answer lies in the fragmented nature of the workforce (Miller, 2008), and the tenuous relationship between PVI organisations and state provision. In drawing down increasingly available government funding to ensure their sustainability, these providers have accepted government oversight of their practice and standards as a necessary condition. In turn, the state has relied on the cost effective mechanism of funding the PVI sector as an extension of state provision in order to pursue its own political agenda, retaining control through financial means, and standing back from any further involvement in the management of the sector. Practitioners have been offered the means to raise their qualifications and thus, potentially, their social capital with government funding for Level 3 and degree qualifications, without any career structure in place to value this professional development (McGillivray, 2008). The workforce as a whole has not yet been able to organise a collective voice for their aspirations, with which to exercise autonomy over their practice or values (Hordern, 2016). Without such a collective voice to raise issues of practice, their opportunities for shaping the knowledge base for their practice, and for perceiving themselves as contributors to that knowledge base seem at present to be limited (Hordern, 2016).

Conclusion

The early years practitioner role, then, is situated in a somewhat ambiguous position with regard to its potential professional status. There is evidence of a high-level knowledge base and expertise being required for practitioners to do their jobs. Their role is of great importance to the state, as the development of the sector has been used to offer opportunity to parents to return to the workforce thus reducing the state welfare bill (DfEE, 1998), and also ensuring children's health and educational outcomes are underpinned by high quality provision (DfES, 2004). They are socially necessary, altruistic, expert workers fulfilling a role that is unique in terms of its content and its environment. However, whilst they may have achieved the "folk status" of a professional, in that they are regarded as demonstrating "dedication to morally praiseworthy work" (Katz, 1985, pp.4, 5), this does not bring with it the status and capital accorded to traditional professions. Instead it potentially leaves them open to the possibility of exploitation for the emotional element they bring to their work, their affective commitment to the children they support, and the respectability and social approval offered to young women of limited education, doing caring work (Colley, 2006).

Definitions of profession that place strong emphasis on their unique expert knowledge and autonomy will remain problematic for the early years sector. Their knowledge base is multi-disciplinary (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010) – health, psychology, education, sociology, leadership and management, interpersonal skills, entrepreneurial and business skills – yet as practitioners they do not belong entirely in any one of these fields. It could be argued that they fill a professional vacancy (Abbott, 1988), as their role, in bringing together a responsibility for holistic development and learning in a way other 'specialists' do not, is unique when considered next to teachers, social workers, and health visitors. Their work takes place in environments where, until very recently, other occupational groups within the early years sector would not be found, particularly with regard to private and voluntary service provision. However, their autonomy as individuals is limited, as it is now difficult for practitioners to work in anything other than registered provision, even in their own homes, and as a workforce they have had no control over the level and content of qualification required to do this job. Their status as a profession can also be questioned in terms of their autonomy in controlling the knowledge based required by their occupational group to practice.

The status of a profession still seems to lie in its collective autonomy in setting the entry requirements to its group and defining the standards of its practice, relating these to a hierarchy of job roles and descriptions. Whilst increased performance measurement and accountability to funders, particularly for public services (Saks, 2013) has seemed to reduce the autonomy of

occupational groups in terms of where and how its members might practice and how sustainable their service might be in the long term, their ability to regulate entry and practice appear to be key in maintaining their status. Issues such as value to government, unique knowledge base and the complexity of job roles do not appear to be instrumental in creating the status of a profession, exclusivity does.

It has been argued that it is the fragmented nature of the workforce that undermines the development of a collective autonomy for practitioners (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010), but the influence of the vocational habitus and the role of the pedagogy underpinning the professional education of the practitioner should not be overlooked. It is worth exploring, at individual level, the articulation of professional identity by practitioners, in terms of what they personally consider their standards of practice and their purpose in the workplace to be. Such information then gives professional educators a context for the development of the critical thinking skills required to develop the reflective and creative practitioners current early years practice needs (Moss, 2006) and perhaps pave the way for more highly educated practitioners to begin to consider what the purpose and aspirations of their workforce should be.

Chapter 5

Methodology, methods and analysis

The focus of this study is the development of the vocational habitus of the early years practitioner, what practitioners consider their professional role to be and what they define as good practice, a process of personal development within a social and cultural context, raising the following research questions:

1. What is the vocational habitus of the early years graduate practitioner?
 - a. What do early years practitioners define as good practice?
 - b. What do early years practitioners define as their professional role or identity?
2. How do they articulate these concepts of identity and good practice?
3. How do these concepts contribute to their understanding of professionalism, and their status as a professional workforce?
4. How can this information be used within professional education to support the development of the reflective, professional early years practitioner?

These notions of identity may have been formed through critical engagement with the knowledge taught in their initial vocation training and subsequent professional education and their practical experience in the work place, or equally, may have been influenced by the expectations of those who regulate and fund their practice. In other words, is their engagement with their professional environment characterised by acceptance of the power of policy makers, service users and funders to determine what the parameters of their practice should be; or are they taking a more agentic stance in defining their own professional identity, regardless of the titles assigned to them and the assumptions made about their level of professional expertise and knowledge? This chapter sets out the methodological approach used to design this study and the data gathering and analysis tools adopted.

Research Design

This concern to answer questions about the formation of identity within the context of broader social and cultural influences reflects a nominalist, anti-positivist perspective on human behaviour (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007), which acknowledges that not only are individuals deliberate and creative in their interactions (Blumer, 1969 in Cohen et al, 2007) but also that they actively create their own social world (Garfinkel, 1967, Becker, 1970 both in Cohen et al, 2007). Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field contribute to understanding how these can shape and constrain the

professional identity of individual practitioners, but could be argued to position individuals as subject to influence and constraint based on differential levels of power within existing social relationships. The theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model offers greater scope for personal agency, considering personal development as arising from the individual's perception of and engagement with his or her own environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This model, whilst acknowledging the influence of powerful groups and forces (for example, social and cultural expectations, historical perspectives, legislation and policy developments), presents the individual as an active, and therefore more agentic, participant in their development, shaping the impact and relevance of such forces by their own acknowledgments of and interaction with them. This consideration of the active role of the individual in their self-definition, seems a more appropriate stance to take in relation to an anti-positivist perspective on human behaviour (Cohen et al, 2007) and in understanding how early years practitioners have come to develop a more relational, interpersonal and values-based understanding of their professional identity and the role played in this by their professional education.

Epistemological Stance

This study adopts the epistemological stance that knowledge encompasses not only empirical facts but also personal beliefs and values, and the ontological stance that knowledge is not fixed but develops and changes in relation to its social and historical context, a context which itself is also fluid and dynamic. In taking a subjective view of the nature of the social world – that it is created by individuals within the social world rather than simply inhabited by them - an interpretive ethnographic approach was indicated since this would focus on how the social reality inhabited by these practitioners is created (Silverman, 2010). However, ethnography can place too much emphasis on the process of how understanding of the social world between its participants is negotiated – the process of interaction – rather than the product of that negotiation (Gubrium & Holstein, 1977 in Silverman, 2010) – what it actually means to be an early years practitioner. To address this, my study adopts the social constructionist epistemological stance, accepting that “facts are socially constructed in particular context” (Holstein & Gubrium 2008, in Silverman, 2010, p.108), and using dialogue (between researcher and participant) and narrative (about the context of practice) to explore what it means to individual practitioners to be a good practitioner, and what they consider their professional identity to be.

Social constructionism is based on the need to adopt a “critical stance toward our taken for granted ways of understanding the world, including ourselves” (Burr, 2003, p.2, 3), and could be interpreted

as the engagement and interaction between the individual and his/her environment that Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues drives personal development. This would involve the need to examine and deconstruct practitioners' understanding and acceptance of the doxa of early years practice, a set of "fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted" (Deer, 2012, in Grenfell, 2012, p.115). Social constructionism recognises the situated and changing nature of truth, what Burr identifies as, "our current accepted ways of understanding the world" (Burr, 2003, pp.4, 5), and supports an interpretive epistemological stance by claiming that all knowledge is derived from our interpretation of the world based on our interactions with others, so that knowledge becomes "something that people do together" (Burr, 2003, p.9). Such a stance implies the possibility that as individuals we can create our own identities, professional and personal, through our interactions with others, and that engaging in dialogue and interaction about these identities will shed light on them. Whilst this acknowledges the agency of the individual in developing their own identity, it also recognises the potential of field and habitus to shape an individual's identity through their acceptance of the powerful socialisation forces these concepts represent.

Social constructionism also recognises the somewhat circular nature of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), that whilst the social world is constructed by the individuals who inhabit it, they experience it as if they had entered a pre-formed framework, with pre-determined rules of behaviour and expectations to which they as individuals are required to conform. Identifying issues of agency within the social world and power relations in our interactions with others and with cultural and social forces would then appear to be of key importance in understanding how identity is formed (Burr, 2003). If, as Burr argues in her account of macro social constructionism, "the person can be conceptualised only as the outcome of discursive and societal structures" (Burr, 2003, p.23), then such a perception of limited individual agency implies that practitioners might have no specific professional identity or personal concept of good practice beyond that which is determined by the regulations and policies that govern their professional world. This research is concerned with establishing if that is the case, or if early years practitioners, collectively or as individuals, take a more agentic approach to defining their professional values and behaviour through their engagement at micro and meso levels with their professional world.

Data gathering

Acceptance of the individualistic, situated, and changing nature of knowledge implies it should be explored at the level of the personal, in terms of beliefs, values, experiences, actions. The same workplace may be understood differently by the individuals who work there, and the relational,

affective nature of the role of the early years practitioner as it has developed (Isaacs, 1929; Manning-Morton, 2006) means that practice over even a short time span encompasses many different interpersonal relationships with colleagues, parents/carers and young children. Therefore, it was essential that in the data gathering for this study the voice of the individual practitioner would be heard, and their personal understanding of their role would be discussed. Whilst the limited responses of closed questioning would render data that were easily comparable and quantifiable, the personal experience and beliefs of the practitioner required to answer the research questions were likely to be overlooked, so that a more open-ended approach to data gathering, allowing for personal experience to be shared and explored was required.

Observations of practice within the workplace could have been used to identify, describe and classify practice, but this was rejected as it offered no opportunity to explore how individuals themselves interpret and respond to their own actions and interactions, and make meaning from them – the why is just as important as the how (Fontana and Frey, 2008). It also risked researcher-led interpretation overshadowing the practitioners' voice in analysing the findings. My own involvement within the early years sector as a practice educator for many years means I have some understanding of the development of the sector, and has left me with my own view on the role of the practitioner and definitions of good practice, but this research is about how practitioners themselves construct their identity, and how they understand their position within the early years sector. What matters is their own interpretation of their position within the sector and their response to this as individuals, rather than my own perceptions.

The use of narratives

An approach to data gathering that offers participants opportunity to talk about their world in their own terms was indicated. Spradley (1979) argues that offering participants the opportunity to talk about their world, in their own terms, leads to the uncovering of the meaning underpinning social actions, including professional practice, and that tacit knowledge individuals may not be aware they possess or apply may be made explicit. Gathering data in the form of narratives offered such an opportunity. Chase (2008) recognises the strength of this approach, particularly in re-locating some of the power of a research interview, describing narrative data gathering as offering research participants an opportunity for “retrospective meaning-making” (Chase, 2008, p.64) of their stories and experiences. Such an approach encourages open-ended dialogue rather than a more formal question and answer exchange, and supports a social constructionist understanding of the development of identity. By encouraging participants to recount narratives of their experience and

practice, the sense they make of their actions and interactions with others might be drawn out. My experience and understanding of their experiences, and the stories they tell of this, ensures that their narratives are intelligible (Chase, 2008) and relevant to my research aims. Whilst a knowing researcher is potentially a controlling researcher, a shared understanding of context is helpful in securing data that are valid and reliable, so that my own position in this study can be regarded as advantageous. However, to balance the potential for control, open-ended questions give the participants the right to determine the content and the detail of the narratives they share. This has resulted in co-constructed conversations with a purpose (Kvale, 2007), where although the purpose of the interaction was mine, the content and context of the narratives have been set by my participants. This has offered me as researcher the opportunity to gain greater understanding of how these individuals view and construct themselves socially. Chase's (2008, p.65) description of narratives as "verbal action", undertaken for a purpose, also draws attention to the constructed nature of such data. For example, my participants have informed me of and explained their perceptions, defended their points of view, and challenged the perceptions of others in their narratives. All of this activity has contributed to my understanding of their sense of purpose, identity and agency in their professional roles, and has been supported by a dialogue between a researcher and participant with a common frame of reference. Recognising and exploring these actions through narrative analysis has offered a rich opportunity to focus on the individual meanings these participants construct about their own complex social interactions in the world of work (Etherington, 2004).

Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998, p.7) argue that narratives offer "one of the clearest channels for learning about the inner world ... In other words, narratives provide us with access to people's identity and personality". However, narratives are accounts of events that individuals choose to share and to present in particular ways and at particular times, in other words, they are subjective presentations of an individual's experience, empowering the participant as they decide what narratives are to be shared. Loots, Coppens and Sermijn (2013) argue that the voice of the individual represents a culmination of a number of different voices, which represent the different facets of an individual's self, or what Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg and Bertsch (2003) describe as "a constitutive expression of her/his dynamic and multi-layered inner world" (Gilligan et al, 2003 cited in Loots et al, 2013, p.114). Drawing on work by Sermijn, Devlieger and Loots (2008), they argue that there is no single route to understanding the self of an individual and describe selfhood as "a rhizomatic story with multiple entryways" (p.111). Whilst this makes them valuable data when trying

to identify how an individual perceives their own reality, this raises issues of validity and interpretation that will be addressed in the discussion on data analysis.

Incorporating a narrative approach, and encouraging of the use of examples taken from 'stories' of practice, offered a richer and less self-conscious account of what good practice might be and what professional values an individual might hold. Thus I used semi-structured interviewing, with a focus on overall themes for discussion, accompanied by encouragement to participants to share narratives of examples of their daily practice and previous experiences, in order to gain insight into the personal values and concepts I wished to explore. Since such an approach takes a more inductive stance, I considered this would reduce the risk of data being over interpreted, or overshadowed by my own expectations and assumptions, particularly if the approach used for data analysis were also to acknowledge the multi-layered and subjective nature of the data.

The use of semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviewing as a data gathering tool offered the opportunity for dialogue, with the participant giving their account of what they do and how they understand their role, and the researcher clarifying their understanding of what is being described. This would result in an interpretation of data that is in some measure checked by the participants themselves – a “mutually accomplished story that is reached through collaboration between the researcher and the respondent” (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002, cited in Fontana and Frey, 2008, p.141). It also offered an insight into the language used by participants to construct their definitions of professional identity and good practice, language being the tool we use to conceptualise and categorise ourselves (Rabinow, 1984), and the means by which we structure and understand our social world and our relations within it (Burr, 2003).

Semi-structured interviewing relies heavily on the skill of the researcher to manage the encounter and to generate appropriate conditions for the interviewee to feel sufficiently at ease to be able to discuss personal values and concepts without feeling exposed or vulnerable. The interviewer must acknowledge the personal risk participants are taking in agreeing to talk about and evaluate their practice, and create an atmosphere of trust combined with close but unobtrusive listening and interest, within which the individual feels sufficiently comfortable to reflect on their values and their practice (Douglas, 1985; Enosh and Buchbinder, 2005; Ezzy, 2010). The relationship between researcher and participant will never be an entirely neutral or balanced one (Fontana and Frey, 2008), if only because the researcher controls the topics to be discussed. However, my own

background relationship with these participants (former tutor to some, former Development Worker to some; in possession of some knowledge and understanding of the workings and development of the Early Years sector) enabled me to take an empathetic stance (Fontana and Frey, 2008) in my research, seeking data from my participants in order to better inform future professional education and to support an articulation of their professional identity and values by practitioners themselves. Our shared understanding of the early years sector and its practices meant my participants could assume a shared occupational vocabulary (for example, observations, planning, key working and OfSTED terminology). This led to a more fluent dialogue, resulting in interview data that represented a more authentic joint production between participants and researcher (Chase, 2008), and which could be considered to be a more reliable account of how they understood their role and their identity. By striving to make the relationship between interviewer and interviewee one of equal co-constructors of knowledge (Kvale, 2007; Kvale and Brinkman, 2009), and structuring the data gathering around narratives of practice and experience, there was arguably less opportunity for leading the interviewee, and more opportunity for tailoring the dialogue to explore specific pieces of information further as they were shared to ensure I got data I needed.

However, the appropriate framing of questions also needed to be considered. All questions, including innocuous requests for examples of 'a typical day' within a setting, can be leading and even misleading as interviewees can form their own interpretations as to required answers. My own position as researcher and one-time teacher of many of these participants might have encouraged them to present information or use vocabulary that does not truly reflect their own ideas and values but which conformed to their notion of what I might be there to hear. However voluntary these practitioners' participation is, my role as a current or former professional educator of theirs, or simply as interviewer offers me greater power to control the interaction than them, so that the issue of reflexivity needs to be thoroughly considered and steps taken to address it (Etherington, 2004). My choice of a semi-structured approach to questioning, and of my approach to data analysis was considerably influenced by trying to address this concern. The data gathered, in terms of its vocabulary, style and variety of content, substantial examples of which can be seen in Appendices 2 - 7, indicate that participants were able to choose for themselves what experiences and opinions to share, and did not feel obliged to reproduce the language of the university classroom to meet any perceived expectations of their former tutor.

Finally, just as my participants' narratives represent their own meaning making of their experiences, I have remained conscious throughout this study of my own role as a narrator, in making sense of

their collective narratives (Chase, 2008). My role as sole interpreter of the data was made clear to and accepted by my participants before any data were gathered, according me overall control over the presentation of findings and conclusions. To balance this, and to demonstrate the trustworthiness of my interpretations, where data have been presented, the actual words of the participants have been used wherever possible, and the context for those extracts provided (see Appendices 6, 7). A multi-layered data gathering approach, that unpicks in its first three readings how these narratives have been interpreted, before summarising in its fourth what they mean, was also specifically selected for its foregrounding of the voices of my participants, and the findings from all four readings have been presented.

Data analysis – the Listening Guide

The overall aim of this study is to know and understand the professional identity of the practitioners taking part, through the stories they tell of their workplace experience. However, this raises issues of reflexivity and positionality, as well as validity, in the interpretation of findings, particularly in a study where the intention is to present the voice and understanding of the participants themselves. The Listening Guide approach to data analysis (Gilligan et al, 2006; Mauthner & Doucet, 2008) has been used, as this requires a careful consideration of the researcher's position in relation to their participants, to secure a valid and reliable, respectful and ethical analysis and reporting of findings. Doucet and Mauthner (2008, p.404) caution that, when using narrative data, researchers (or any outside party) cannot claim to completely know another individual and that "all we can know is what is narrated by subjects, as well as our interpretation of their stories within the wider web of social and structural relations from which narrated subjects speak". Whilst my understanding of the early years sector offers some shared context for interpretation of their data, I cannot claim to fully understand the motivation and intentions of their actions. Equally, if their practice is strongly enculturated (from their professional education, their workplace, their culture, or class) they may not, until called upon to explain it, be fully conscious of their own intentions or rationale. Such understanding may only emerge through the co-construction opportunities offered by the dialogue and shared reflection of an interview-based approach to data gathering (Roulston, McClendon, Thomas, Tuff, Williams and Healy, 2008).

Gilligan et al (2006) describe the Listening Guide approach to data analysis as one which "draws on voice, resonance and relationship" and being "designed to open a way to discovery when discovery hinges on coming to know the inner world of another person" (p.253). For a study investigating concepts of professionalism and identity that may be defined within the context of relationships, this

offers an effective means of exploring how early years practitioners frame their understanding of their role, and how their engagement with others contributes to their personal development. The Listening Guide (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Gilligan et al, 2006; Doucet & Mauthner, 2008) requires the researcher to undertake a series of readings of the data, to explore from a range of perspectives the narratives and concepts of the interviewees, offering the researcher the opportunity to demonstrate the strength of their interpretations. It recognises the importance of participants describing their experiences and social interactions in their own words, and, as in social constructionist research, requires the researcher to pay close attention to the vocabulary used as well as the ideas expressed in responses to questions and narrative accounts. It also offers an opportunity to identify a level of agency in participants as they discuss their practice and their role, shedding light on the nature of the individual’s engagement with their environment and how this contributes to their understanding of themselves.

The purpose behind this multi-layered approach to data analysis is “to keep respondents’ voices and perspectives alive” (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, p.119), addressing the issue of words being open to a number of different interpretations by requiring the researcher to acknowledge their own response to the data and reflexivity in their interpretations. The 4 readings have evolved and been adapted through usage to fulfil the functions summarised below:

Table 5: The Listening Guide and its Readings

	Gilligan et al, 2006	Doucet & Mauthner, 2008	
Reading 1	Listening for the plot	Listening for the plot	To identify the plot and the researcher’s own response to the data
Reading 2	I Poems	I Poems	To locate the voice of the narrator – the voice of I
Reading 3	Contrapuntal voices	The narrated self in relation (P.406)	To locate the self in relation to social networks and relationships, to hear different themes and strands of the plot
Reading 4	Composing an analysis	The reading for structured subjects	To achieve an analysis and synthesize different strands of the plot

These two iterations of the Listening Guide demonstrate how, as an approach, it requires the voice of the participant, the narrator, to be closely attended to before any thematic analysis or social contextualisation is attempted. They also demonstrate how Readings 1, 2 and 3 may be regarded as stages within the interpretive process, with Reading 4 representing the overall outcome of this, in presenting a summary of what the data tell the reader. However, each reading should also be

regarded as offering valuable insight into how individual narrators perceive themselves within their social worlds, with their focus on themes and issues of particular personal concern, and in their discussion of the relationships that are important to their practice. Whilst there is difference in the terminology used to identify the 3rd reading, its purpose highlights the importance not just of considering the impact of social networks and relationships on the narrator, but also how tensions between different networks and actors might demonstrate the power of their influence over the individual. Gilligan et al (2006) define contrapuntal voices as the expression of stories, values or beliefs that oppose or contradict those already expressed by the narrator – whether these emanate from the narrator themselves or from others. This suggests that identity is not only shaped by relationships with others and their power and influence over the individual, but also by how individuals position themselves in relation to the values and actions of others.

Gathering the data

The participants

The data for this study were gathered by means of semi-structured, one-to-one interviews with 23 early years practitioners. Their consent was voluntary and their anonymity was assured by the use of pseudonyms in the reporting of findings. The sample of participants was drawn from early years practitioners who had completed at least a level 5 FdA Early Years and whose qualifications and experience were drawn from working full or part-time in a registered early years setting in England. This included private day nursery, pre-school group, Children's Centre or maintained school nursery provision, and also some child-minder settings. Whilst these sole workers do not always have the same opportunities for team working or team influence as those in group care/education settings, recent innovations, including access to funding streams, child-minder networks and groups, mean that these individuals do now come together to discuss their practice and learn from each other. They do participate in multi-agency teams to support children and families, and child-minders with larger 'customer bases' often employ assistants. Thus, all participants had undertaken their undergraduate studies whilst practising within the EYFS framework (DfE, 2012, 2014, 2017b), or Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum, positioning them appropriately to discuss current policy and regulation of early years practice in England, and to consider issues relevant to the development of graduate level professional education in England.

Participants had completed their degree studies on a full or part-time basis as delivery pattern does not significantly alter the content, level or assessment of the sector endorsed FdA provision they had

undertaken. Those on the full-time route had undertaken significant (i.e. 2 days per week, per year of the course, totalling a minimum of 480 hours) placement experience to develop and extend their practice skills and knowledge of the workplace. Some participants had already progressed to Level 6 BA Hons provision but this did not include any further development of reflective skills or placement assessment, so was not considered to significantly alter participants' experience of reflective skills. Factual information about participants' qualifications and experience was gathered in advance of the interview using a short written profile, so that it would be possible to track any significant differences in responses arising from type or amount of professional experience (see Appendix 1 for the Participant Profile Summary).

Participants were drawn from 3 groups:

- Graduates from full-time sector endorsed FdA Early Years taught by the researcher
- Graduates from part-time sector endorsed FdA Years taught by the researcher
- Graduates from sector endorsed FdA Early Years provision not taught by the researcher but identified through contact with tutors offering similar provision in a local FE college

By including a number of participants from outside my own teaching it was anticipated this would balance any potential bias caused by participants trying to meet a tutor's expectations in their responses or by a perceived power relationship. By requiring that all participants had achieved FdA through a sector endorsed or approved route this meant that all participants had been taught about critical reflection, had been required to apply underpinning theory of children's learning, development and well-being to their practice and had a similar level of understanding about policy and legislation that framed their professional role. Individuals were invited to participate rather than simply volunteering in response to a general invitation, to ensure that participants were those practitioners most able to answer the questions being posed and therefore most appropriate to gather data from (Flick, 2007). Selection was therefore restricted to those students who had achieved higher marks (Merit grade and above) for modules where assessment focused on critical reflection on their own practice.

The interview process

Interviews lasted around 45 minutes and were conducted at a time and place of the participants' choosing. All interviews were audio-recorded for later transcription, allowing me to concentrate on what was being said and to direct the 'conversation' to those topics most relevant to my research questions. All participants were offered the opportunity to see their transcription and check it for

accuracy, although none of them took this up, and the participants were also offered a copy of the audio file of the interview if they wished, but none of them did. However, it was made clear to them before they gave consent that I alone would conduct the data analysis and interpretation, and they would have no part in this process.

The interviews all followed the same process, using overarching themes, selected to follow the research questions, to structure the 'conversation' between the participant and myself. Prompt questions were identified to ensure all interviews could reliably meet the overall research aims of the study (see Appendix 9). My intention was to explore the confidence and frequency with which my participants use the underpinning theory they have studied to emphasise the affective dimension of their practice, or justify and explain their role, thus making claim to a professional expertise based on sophisticated, specialist knowledge (Eraut, 1994; Brownlee et al, 2000; Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2007). I also wanted to investigate their perception of the care/education divide in relation to their own role and practice and how they articulated their values in relation to their practice. I asked direct questions about how they evaluated and judged their own practice and if they looked for 'rules' to follow, seeking to establish their level of agency and professional confidence in defining good practice. It was important that their narratives of practice included evidence of their day-to-day interactions with colleagues or parents/carers, and the value they place on the nature and quality of their relationships with the children they work with, as this would offer insight into how they prioritised different aspects of their role and how they conceptualised professionalism. Finally I asked about their use of reflection, in terms of the processes used, but much more in terms of why they used it, and what their expectations of it were – a way of justifying their practice, or correcting incorrect practice (and how is this determined), to provide solutions to problems, to explore areas of uncertainty in practice, or to question personal and/or professional values? Direct, open-ended, over-arching questions were used with all participants (identified in bold type, see Appendix 10) to construct an informal but directed discussion of good practice and professional experience and identity, and participants were encouraged to give as many examples and narratives of their practice as seemed appropriate. The additional prompt questions (see Appendix 10) were used with participants where further encouragement or clarification was required, or to enable me to obtain the level of detailed information I required.

Ethics

This study follows the ethical principles set out in BERA (2011), so that participants were asked to give written informed consent before data gathering began (see Appendix 8); pseudonyms were

used in the reporting of findings; and no mention was made which of the three groups of participants individuals belonged to. All participants understood the aims of the study, the potential contribution it would make to the development of graduate level professional education, the likely publication and dissemination of its findings and their right to correct raw data and/or withdraw from the study at any time.

However, fixed ethical protocols are not always sufficient to address issues that emerge from qualitative research drawing on participants' personal experience, where it is harder to predict what might be shared, and what the consequences of this could be. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) argue that it is more appropriate to consider likely "fields of uncertainty" (p.69) in such research approaches rather than fixing a set of ethical rules to follow, and suggest that these fields, whilst including issues of informed consent and confidentiality, should also include consequences and the role of the researcher. The first two of these have been addressed through the gathering of informed consent and the protocols for the reporting of findings reported above. Whilst there were no immediate and obvious intended consequences for the practitioners participating in this study, it was explained that their contributions would enable the further development of graduate level professional education for practitioners, with the intention of this empowering them to raise their own professional status, an aim all participants considered to be important for their workforce. To address any unforeseen consequences that might arise from them discussing their professional values and experience, their right to withdraw from the study at any point during the interview, and in particular after reading the transcript of their interview was repeated, and they were encouraged to contact me if they had further questions or wanted to discuss (outside of the remit of this study) any of their interview further. The role of the researcher, particularly in interpreting and reporting on the data, was explained when consent was sought, as participants would have no opportunity to revisit their answers beyond factual correction of information if appropriate. All participants understood they had the right to withdraw their data from the study following the interview.

Interpreting and presenting the data – validity and transparency, analysis process explained.

Within qualitative research, validity is argued to be a matter of truth and trustworthiness (Silverman, 2010; Cohen et al, 2007), the demonstration of genuine, critical interrogation of data, which can be seen to sustain the interpretation made by the researcher. Maxwell (1992, cited in Cohen et al, 2007) argues that in considering the validity of qualitative research, what matters is the reader's understanding of the argument offered in the interpretation and analysis. A narrative approach to data collection generates idiosyncratic data that differs from interview to interview, so that it is the

researcher’s responsibility to present an analysis of the data that the reader can trust and follow. Polkinghorne (2007) argues that validity for narrative inquiry is not a question of presenting data interpretation as the privileged and sole interpretation of what has been shared, but of presenting a strong and well-argued understanding that can be seen by the reader to have strength and merit and follows an inductive route to conclusions rather than be the proving of an a priori hypothesis. The multi-layered approach of the Listening Guide requires the researcher to consider their data from a number of different perspectives, all of which consider the position of the narrator – the overall story of the narrative, the voice of the narrator and how they present themselves, their relationships within their social world and how these contribute to the narrator’s presentation of themselves – so that what is presented as a concluding analysis can be seen to be drawn from what the narrator has shared. To ensure the voice of the narrator is heard in this analysis, all 4 readings from the Listening Guide have been used in this study.

From Reading 1, it has been possible to identify not only the storyline of some of the individual practitioners, whose narratives presented clear individual themes about their perception of their role and position in the early years sector, but also a shared storyline about what comprises good practice in working with young children and their families, to which all participants in the interviews had something to contribute. All transcripts were analysed for the key plots or storylines they presented, which were recorded by linking specific words and phrases from their transcripts to my own interpretation of the points they were making, as shown below (Figure 3):

Figure 3: Reading 1 analysis

Reading 1 – Plot	
Participant no: 6 Florence	
Key phrase	Reaction/interpretation
That’s the title I’ve been given from the Nursery Nurse Examination Board That’s what I’ve been called since 1989 when I started working I’ve fallen into that category I don’t class my self as a teacher ...I’ve not got the Qualified Teacher Status [nursery nurse] is a bi no-descriptive for the job I do. It sort of puts you in a carer position where we have to be sort of a carer and an educator [main purpose] to follow government guidelines, school policies, early years curriculum, ...as well	It’s not my choice, it’s what I have to have – it’s what others call me Not happy with it but has to accept it – fallen – unable to get out, trapped? Dividing practices – what I am not allowed by others to be Sells us short in terms of recognition for what we do; lowers our status. Like a list from a job description – how much of this is owned at personal level – is she really there to implement govt. policy? Again, is this what she is told by others to do?

<p>you've to be counsellor to the parents, shoulder for the other staff, support for the children</p> <p>we do have a timetable we have a weekly planning meeting ...we storm ideas ... we put plans together</p> <p>you're just put in different areas of nursery</p> <p>personally?</p> <p>It is supposed to happen but if you've got a child that needs child initiated play and they need to be left alone doing that play and you're pulling them out of that to do a planned task, for me personally that could be detrimental to that play that that child's doing at that particular time. So then I would leave that child</p> <p>That's from a professional view but personally I think</p> <p>It's so they feel safe, so they feel secure, they're settled, they're comfortable</p> <p>Policywise we have to do the phonics and we have to do the literacy and we have to do maths</p>	<p>Very relational account of her job role</p> <p>Very 'we' account – team working, collective activity; little personal ownership here.</p> <p>Lack of agency – do as told, deployed by someone else rather than autonomous</p> <p>Questions that her own ideas are being sought – happens more than once – where is her sense of agency and autonomy?</p> <p>A very oblique way of saying practice should be child-led – justifies/almost excuses her priority of stepping outside team planning and overall routine and timetable. Seems to highlight tension between what she thinks is good practice and how the setting is run.</p> <p>Separation of professional from personal – real lack of autonomy for her in this setting</p> <p>Priority is about meeting emotional and social well-being</p> <p>Stresses 'we have to do' – who is controlling all these demands?</p>
<p>Summary box:</p> <p>Themes: Bowling to authority – title, timetable, structure - powerless Children's emotional well-being Child-led practice Problem based reflections – addressing negatives rather than celebrating positives</p> <p>Plot: What others tell me to do Distinct shift throughout interview from 'official' account of role to personal view of what the practitioner and she herself is there to do. Pleasing everyone else</p> <p>Protagonists: Children</p>	

Where a participant's narrative has presented such a strong, individual storyline in their interview, this has been captured in a vignette taken from their interview transcript, for example:

Figure 4: Sample Vignette

Florence – a narrative of setting structure hampering children's learning

There is a routine set out. We do have a timetable but given the environment, that can waiver depending where you've had accidents or upsets but the rule of thumb is Register half past 8 while about 20 to 9, free play, in between that there are structured group activities, and then we have an organised tidy up time, then back to the planned/free play, then story and then more or less home time and in between that we have music sessions and PE ... For me, it's [my priority] so they

feel safe, so they feel secure, they're settled, they're comfortable and then all of that follows. But policy wise we have to do the phonics and we have to do the literacy and we have to do maths, and honestly some are not ready when they come in to do that even after a term they're not ready. If they come from a stressful environment and you're wanting highly structured activity, you're not going to get it if they've not done their own little bit in play first. It's just finding that balance and sometimes it's really difficult when you've got assessments and targets to meet from the profile...

If we'd not had the timetable, that little boy's telescope that he'd made, his learning could have been built on and we could have gone back to it but because of the timetable and the routine that had to stop because of the other accidents. So maybe more flexibility that way but we do have to have a timetable... Yes we need a routine, but I don't think it has to be structured as such, that play or development is cut short because we have to tidy because we have to do PE, or we have to go down to the hall to sing, or we have to do the structured group work, maybe that could come in between doing other things. You can do your 3D solids, shapes while you've got your junk modelling and do it that way and you've still got to have your tick list but you could still tick them off. You could do it outside, inside but you know, we have to have a timetable.

You see Day Care is structured differently to your school setting and even though we have wrap around care from Day Care into school, I think that, well the Day Care provision that we've got at school, the people work with and put their needs first, the children... It's different because they've got babies right up to 3, 4, and their structure is more flexible. They [the children] take their shoes and their socks off in there, you know, they run round, and then they come into nursery and they take their own shoes and socks off so and it will cause a bit of a discrepancy sometime because our practice as such is you keep your shoes and socks on nursery.

Yes it's from, it's [management of practice] top down and you're actually on the front line and you're dealing with little people and it's totally different to reading it from a book or from a sheet, and you're tuned in to how their behaviour and try and think on their level and you know them and you spending 3 and half hours every day, you do get to know little snippets and I think reading things from a policy or a book just sometimes doesn't work.

(For complete examples of the Readings, see Appendices 2, 3, 4)

What have been removed are the researcher's questions and prompts, and instances of repetition or where the participant moved away from their main narrative, returning to it a moment later. The vignettes, from 14 participants, can be seen in Appendix 6. The findings from Reading 1 will be used to address the research questions:

What do early years practitioners define as good practice?

What do early years practitioners define as their professional role or identity?

How do they articulate these concepts of good practice and identity?

In undertaking Reading 2, what became clear was that the practitioners in this study made only limited use of "I" in discussing their practice, so that their "I Poems", where significant statements made in the first person singular are drawn out of the transcripts to demonstrate how the narrator

locates themselves in relation to their story, were often quite short, or dominated by phatic utterances of 'I think' rather than these being much stronger statements of personal belief, value or knowledge, for example:

Figure 5: Sample I Poem

Florence I Poem extract

I've been given, I passed, I've fallen into
I don't know. I don't class myself, I've not got, I think, I do.
I've been called, I started working.
I would leave
I think
I always think
I always keep, I've made, I've said, I will try, I think, I base it on
I don't really, I suppose thinking about it, I've not thought, I hadn't really thought
when I did, I would have just spouted off, I've just said
I think
I think, I think, I think, I've done it, I think
I was going to do, I'm going to do, I think

What makes Reading 2, whose purpose is to locate the voice of the narrator, significant in understanding the identity of these practitioners, is the frequency of plural pronouns – we, you, they – when discussing practice, and how practitioners have positioned themselves in relation to groups or teams of colleagues, within their own workplaces and within the broader early years sector. Reading 2 revisits the question of how these practitioners define their role and considers it in relation to the voice and the language they use to articulate this definition, addressing the research question:

How do they articulate these concepts of identity and good practice?

Reading 3, in considering how relationships considered important by these practitioners have contributed to their definitions of good practice and professionalism, offers insight into what these practitioners consider to be professional behaviour within the early years sector. Not only is this evidenced by direct statements of the values and behaviour they consider to be important, but it is also evidenced in how they present their relationships with colleagues, families, children and others. Attention was paid not only to the content of the narratives, but also the working environment within which they were situated as well as the tone of these stories. By attending to this construction of "small stories" (Phoenix, 2013, p.73) this strengthens the validity of the interpretations made, since such detail offers "insight into the dilemmas and troubled subject positions speakers negotiate ... their understandings of current consensus about what it is acceptable to say and do in their local and national cultures" (Phoenix, 2013, p.73). The Listening Guide directs the researcher to consider not only the stories told by participants, but also the

relationships they identify and describe within their narratives, evidenced particularly by their use of personal pronouns. This has enabled me to synthesise both the influence of the workplace and its ethos on these participants' articulation of role, ethics, and identity, with their own values and experiences, and their professional education, biographical and contextual factors which Phoenix (2013) argues is essential for a trustworthy and complete interpretation. The analysis in Reading 3 addresses the research questions:

What do early years practitioners define as good practice?

How do these concepts contribute to their understanding of professionalism, and their status as a professional workforce?

Finally, Reading 4 draws together the three separate strands of the analysis from the previous readings, addressing the overall research question:

What is the vocational habitus of the early years graduate practitioner?

This summarising analysis is considered within the context of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development, and in relation to the pedagogical approaches used in the initial vocational training and later professional education of these practitioners.

The following chapters present and discuss the findings from each of the readings, beginning by drawing together Readings 1 and 2, since together these set out "the plot or the storylines... bringing in the first person expressions of the speaker ... and provide a context for the contrapuntal listenings" (Gilligan et al, 2006, p.262). The findings from Reading 3 are organised into a more thematic structure so that significant similarities and differences across participants' narratives are drawn out in relation to early years professionalism and status, and the key themes identified earlier from the review of literature. These include:

- their perception of their roles as carer and/or educators
- the place of care within their practice
- the significance of the relational nature of their role
- their understanding of their own professionalism and status

The findings from Reading 4 will then be presented to summarise key findings. Issues of researcher reflexivity and positionality are addressed in the final chapter as reflections on the effectiveness of the Listening Guide as a data analysis tool within this study.

Chapter 6

Good practice and the role of the practitioner: Readings 1 and 2

Using open-ended questions in the semi-structured interviews meant that the participating practitioners were free to determine what narratives of their practice they would share. This gave them the freedom to decide which aspects of practice they would focus on, increasing the validity of these accounts as personally owned definitions of their professional identity. This chapter presents the findings and analysis from Readings 1 and 2, which Gilligan et al (2006) regard as providing a context for understanding the identity and agency of an individual, and are used to address the research questions of:

- What do early years practitioners define as good practice?
- What do early years practitioners regard as their professional role or identity?
- How do they articulate these concepts of identity and good practice?

From the first reading of the data, two sets of storylines emerge. Firstly, the collective responses from individual practitioners build a plot about the practice of the graduate practitioner, indicating what these participants consider to be key issues in their practice and experience. Secondly, the narratives of individual participants offer insight into what they consider their role and professional identity to be. Both sets of storylines shed light on how they understand their place and their agency within their occupational and social environments, and which environmental systems they engage with.

Within the first reading, three key aspects emerge that can be used to define good practice and professional identity for these participants:

- their own practice values and children's rights, and how these influence the relationships they form with children in order to provide them with emotional stability
- the power relationships within their own settings and how this shapes their practice and identity, including feelings of frustration and also empowerment
- their relationship with OfSTED and current government agenda and their engagement with policy and practice beyond their own setting.

In this chapter, these will be analysed to determine how participants understand their role, and exercise any autonomy over their practice and their identity.

In addition to these three aspects, there is also the question of how these practitioners lay claim to their professional identity and role. The most striking feature of the stories they tell of their practice and their

identities is that these narratives are largely situated in the here and now of their practice and within their own organisations, the micro- and meso-systems of their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), with only limited acknowledgement of wider political concerns and authorities, and colleagues from associated organisations and agencies. The implications of such a narrow and immediate focus will be discussed further with the analysis from Reading 2, which considers the voice used by practitioners, by examining their personal ownership of their words. When what they discuss, and the style and vocabulary they use to do so, is considered, along with an examination of the voice (Johns, 2004) expressed by the individual participants, it becomes possible to see how they understand and respond to power within their occupational sector, and what, if any, impact their higher level professional education has had on their understanding of their role and their status.

Reading 1 – stories of practice and identity

Overall, the first reading of the data presents the shared storyline of a deep sense of obligation to and affection for the children and families who use their services, as well as strong ethical principles underpinning their practice. These include a commitment to the primacy of the needs and interests of the child, the emotional security of the child, and to ensuring that individual children are supported to make as much learning and developmental progress as they can. For example, Meg (setting) explains her personal priority in her role as:

for them to feel settled and to make sure that they are happy ... if a child doesn't feel safe and settled they're not going to explore are they. If they're not confident they're not going to explore (Meg 1, Appendix 7)

The participants present themselves as people who are very close to and want the best for the children they work with, and who cannot envisage doing their job without this level of commitment. Claire, working in a school-based nursery sums this up as:

[a good practitioner] has a passion for those children and their families, to work with them and give them the best start (Claire 1, Appendix 7)

Their individual narratives tell more personal stories of their perception of their role, and how their experiences have shaped this understanding – summarised in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Summary of individual narratives

	Current role	Setting	Highest Early Years qualification	Experience - years	Storyline - a narrative of:
1. HANNAH	Pre-school deputy manager	Pre-school	Foundation degree Early Years		Reflection on child-centred practice
2. JANET	Family support worker	Children's centre	Foundation degree Early Years	10	Child-centred practice
3. ROSE	Behaviour support worker; senior teaching assistant	Primary school	Foundation degree Early Years	2+	Frustration and fear of corruption
4. FLORENCE	Nursery nurse	School nursery	BA Hons Early Years	25	Frustration with setting management and structure
5. NINA	Nursery nurse	Day care	Foundation degree Early Years	5	Frustration with the inflexibility of setting management
6. IRIS	Senior early years practitioner	Day care (school site)	BA Hons Early Years, EYPS	8	Empowerment through professional education
7. LAURA	Nursery nurse	Day care	Foundation degree Early Years	2	Growing empowerment
8. DOROTHY	N/a	School	Foundation degree Early Years	Placement 4	Compliance and the power of the class teacher
9. BETTY	N/a	School year 1	Foundation degree Early Years	Placement 4	The power of the class teacher
10. CLAIRE	Nursery nurse	School nursery	Foundation degree Early Years	10	Conflict and compliance
11. HELEN	Family play and learning worker	Children's centre	Foundation degree Early Years	3 months	Validation through OfSTED
12. ALICE	Childminder	Childminder	Foundation degree Early Years	15	Playing the OfSTED game
13. VALERIE	Childminder	Childminder	Foundation degree Early Years	5	More than a babysitter
14. PENNY	Deputy manager	Pre-school	BA Early Years with EYTS	9.5	Frustration with political undervaluing of early years

(See Appendix 6 for a complete account of each vignette)

These individual narratives identify a number of personal concerns and priorities for individual practitioners as they articulate their professional identity, including:

- Practice values and children's rights
- The impact on their working environments on their practice and their personal values and identity
- Issues of empowerment and power relationships both within their organisations and with regulatory bodies

- Their relationships beyond their own organisations, and their engagement with the political factors that shape their sector

The development of the collective storyline of the group will be identified alongside these individual narratives, and examined for how it supports these concerns.

Practice values and children's rights

Narratives shared by some of the practitioners in this study are striking for the accounts they offer of combining ethical principles and values with knowledge and understanding gained from professional education and work experience. These narratives demonstrate the practitioners' regard for the children they work with, and how much they consider it is the right of these children to be dealt with sensitively and as individuals. In Hannah's narrative, from the pre-school she manages, there is clear evidence of her understanding of the principles of the EYFS and the need to let the children lead their play and learning:

planning used to be where you look at the children's interest and you plan from the children's interests ... but I wanted to focus on the characteristics of the learning so the children are really motivated ... Getting a child completely engrossed in their play and their exploration, whatever, that is more than ticking a box ... from that they truly develop more ... That involvement is what's inspiring them and what makes them come in the next day, and they want to do more of something, or try something different. (Vignette 1, Appendix 6)

This is a strong statement about what Hannah believes are the ethical values that underpin her practice – to support children's positive engagement with their learning and to foster a sense of curiosity and motivation, rather than to tick off the achievement of a specific learning goal – and reflects findings from previous research (Luff and Kanyal, 2015) that practitioners focus on children's individuality in their practice and foster their personal and social growth.

Janet, working in a local authority Children's Centre, presents a more personal view of what she considers to be good practice, with a detailed narrative of how a practitioner has valued a child's interests, extended his learning and in doing so has also met his emotional needs and supported his self-esteem. For her what stood out was the practitioner's respect for the child's interests and what this contributed to the child's development:

that practitioner took the time and could see what that child actually wanted to do and was interested in, and the whole time she was talking and explaining and really extended what he was enjoying doing. And what he'd chosen to do as well ... [closing the door] does keep the child warm but the child was also warm when she wrapped him up and took him outside. And that [closing the door] would just have, to me, would've been 'your interests aren't worth exploring and not valued' (Vignette 2, Appendix 6)

This is a strong example of the “pedagogy of listening” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p.97) in respecting the right of the child to lead their own learning, and is valued by Janet for its ethical stance in valuing the interests of the child. She sees this as more than simply maintaining the child’s interest in an activity, and argues it sends a more powerful message about the perceived worth of an individual. What she has described is practice that makes real the underpinning principles of the EYFS (DfE, 2017b) of respecting the individuality of children and fostering positive relationships, and represents both the “ethical pedagogy” Taggart (2016, p.175) identified as essential for supporting young children’s development and learning and the practice of professional love described by Page (2011).

Both these narratives place the development of children’s self-esteem, and their right to direct their own learning above the demands of a curriculum framework or adult-led planning, arguing that children will only learn effectively if they feel themselves to be safe, secure and valued. This theme is shared by the collective storyline of early years practice from these participants, who all value child-led play as a vehicle for learning. Eleanor, working as a child-minder, sums up the need for taking the time to form a bond with a child, to be able to then support their learning effectively:

I didn’t get involved with the activities straight away ... I sat and observed and let them come to me. Once they started coming to me ... I felt able to work the activities with them, I’d sit down and gradually join in, but without that care and that bond I don’t think it would have been as easy for them to develop because they trust you (Eleanor 1, Appendix 7)

Page (2011, p.313) argues that practitioners can be understood as putting the needs of the child first for ethical and pedagogical reasons, rather than presenting the practitioner as a mother substitute. Eleanor’s recognition of the need for trust indicates her understanding of children’s emotional needs and that these must be met if any measurable learning outcomes are to be achieved. Overall, these narratives present what is in fact a sophisticated argument about the rights of children, their need for social and emotional support and stability, and the ethical responsibilities of the practitioner. However, they are expressed with little reference to any underpinning theory to support or develop these points, supporting Manning-Morton’s (2006) claim that the affective connection between practitioner and child was often undervalued and considered to be a dispositional trait rather than a skill, since it was rarely presented with any academic underpinning.

The impact of the working environment

Frustration

For those working in strongly hierarchical organisations such as schools and day nursery chains, their stories tell of frustration with managerial control, particularly from management colleagues who do not

seem to share their hands-on experience of working with young children. These narratives are examples of the “living contradiction” identified by Spencer-Woodley (2014, p.33) where accountability, this time to organisational management rather than government, undermines the autonomy of the practitioner in exercising their own judgement, based on experience and knowledge, over their practice. For Rose, who works in a primary school with children in Reception Class and Key Stage 1, her narrative tells of frustration with colleagues and managers who do not understand the complexity of children’s development, and that it does not always follow a universal pattern or time frame.

children are expected to do something at a chronological age ... I get so frustrated when they’re told ‘... you have to write something’ and the child hasn’t got the motor skills that come before it (Vignette 3, Appendix 6)

Not only is this frustrating in hampering her own practice, but she also considers it to be unethical, as inappropriate expectations are made of children’s learning and behaviour, and they are treated in ways she clearly considers to be unacceptable:

A child is an individual child instead of a uniform in a group in a room ... they forget they’re [children] little people, they’ve little personalities, and they don’t fit into little boxes (Rose 1, Appendix 7)

There is evidence here of an emphasis on school readiness underpinning practice with young children, identified by Moss (2012), where preparing them for a more formal and outcome-driven pedagogy seems to outweigh individual learning needs and developmental progression. This acceptance by the setting management of a universal developmental framework which all children will follow conflicts with Rose’s own understanding of child development, which seems much closer to the “pedagogy of listening” (Dahlberg & Moss 2005, p.97). However, her frustration is now developing into a fear that her own values and principles will be corrupted if she stays in a mainstream school environment, even if she progresses to a class teacher role, with more autonomy over how children’s learning is supported. In expressing this frustration, Rose is demonstrating her awareness of the power of the field to shape and control the habitus of the individual. Her intention to investigate employment in a different type of educational setting reflects Bourdieu’s argument, from his orchestral metaphor (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.8) that challenging practice within her current setting would be to introduce disharmony and put her out of step with her colleagues. Since she lacks the power to effect change across the organisation, her only other option, if she is to maintain her own values and identity, is to leave.

Florence works in the nursery unit of a local authority primary school, which has a Children’s Centre offering day care provision attached to it. She is also frustrated by the setting’s apparent privileging of school readiness in driving practice (Moss, 2012), demonstrated by the requirement for her to ‘do’ literacy, phonics and numeracy with children she knows are not yet ready for it; she criticises the lack of consistency

between the practice and rules for children in the school nursery and similarly aged children attending the day care provision in the children's centre attached. She is critical of the lack of flexibility from the managers of her setting in their approach to supporting the children's learning and assessing their progress, and to the behaviour management policy. Her narrative, which focuses on a typically fast-paced day, describes how one child's personal breakthrough in his learning, and the sense of achievement that goes with, this has to go unremarked in order to meet the demands of the timetable for the day:

if we'd not had the timetable, that little boy's telescope that he'd made, his learning could have been built on
(Vignette 4, Appendix 6)

She considers this to be the consequence of those who manage practice not understanding the flexibility required of practitioners if they are to meet children's individual learning needs effectively and ethically. Florence is an Early Years graduate practitioner, with a 1st class Honours degree, implying a high level of knowledge and understanding of young children's learning needs, yet she does not draw on this to challenge management structures she considers to be detrimental to the children's progress, despite demonstrating her own understanding of how a more play-based, child-led pedagogy can equally well support the achievement of the ELGs for children:

You can do your 3D solids, shapes while you've got your junk modelling and do it that way and you've still got to have your tick list but you could still tick them off. You could do it outside, inside... (Vignette 4, Appendix 6)

Sims-Schouten and Strittrich-Lyons (2013) have identified a separation in practitioners' perceptions of themselves between their practical self, working with the children on a day-to-day basis, and their more academic or intellectual selves, developing a deeper understanding of theoretical and abstract knowledge related to practice. Florence would appear to have considerable confidence in her practice, and how it can best meet the needs of the children she works with, but lacks the confidence to draw on her considerable understanding of abstract knowledge and research to support this, and challenge structures she considers to be unhelpful. Her narrative shows that she is an interpreter of the EYFS framework, capable of applying her own understanding of pedagogy to her practice (Ang, 2014) rather than being the compliant technician identified by Moss (2006) and Osgood (2006), following set procedures and processes. Her reluctant acceptance of the structuring of her practice instead implies a feeling of powerlessness within her organisation, which the hierarchical organisation of the setting's management structure reinforces, especially as her graduate status currently has no nationally or locally recognised currency. Both McGillivray (2008) and Lloyd and Hallet (2010) argued for national recognition of the graduate Senior Practitioner, so that such practitioners would be recognised for their level of knowledge and qualification in leading practice, giving them the legitimacy of both a legal and public jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988) from which to claim a professional status. Without it, knowledgeable staff such as Florence and other

participants in this study may find their autonomy over their practice limited by management structures imposed to ensure the quality and effectiveness of practice can be judged in terms of measurable outcomes such as progress towards the ELGs and the EYFS Profile and Key Stage 1 SAT scores. Hardy (2012) argues that where individuals and their field do not share the same perception of their role, Bourdieu's account of hysteresis will enable field and habitus to adjust to changed perceptions of individuals' roles and/or new structures governing this, but this implies that individuals can exert sufficient power over their field to achieve this. Where the field holds the balance of power, as in this case, where government pressure and control over funding exerts power over setting management, individual practitioners must adjust to new requirements if they are to remain. Thus, whilst Florence expresses dissatisfaction with how her practice is managed, she accepts that she cannot change this.

Not all the narratives of frustration with the way practice is managed are based in school settings. Nina works in a day nursery that is part of a small chain (4 settings), for which there is an overarching management structure, where decisions about matters of policy and practice are made for all 4 settings. Her story is again one of frustration with a management that will not alter practice to meet children's needs, so that she is left with the conflict of feeling that her practice could be so much better but she would need to be working somewhere else for this to be possible:

there's a limit to what I can do with me being in the specific setting I'd say it's [my practice] good but there's a limit to it. I'd like to be better but because of the setting that I was in I can't (Nina 1, 2, Appendix 7)

Nina, however, does not seem to fear any personal corruption of her own values and, like Florence, has not articulated any intention to leave her current employment. She, too, is prepared to accept the limitations to her autonomy over her practice, implying a vocational habitus of acceptance and compliance with perceived authority.

These concerns and frustrations are echoed by other participants working in school-based settings, suggesting that organisational hierarchies in particular impose a structure to practice that does not take account of the individual needs of children. Both Yvonne and Sally work in school settings delivering the EYFS, and identify instances of poor practice where they feel their autonomy as practitioners and their expertise in knowing and understanding the children they work with is overlooked:

a topic is chosen for us, so maybe a co-ordinator or somebody higher up in the school says we are going to do this topic ... "high in the sky" ... I don't think there was anything wrong with it but I didn't think it was appropriate for this age group ... it wasn't what the children particularly were interested in (Yvonne 1, Appendix 7)

the child comes in, they're told to get their milk and biscuits, they sit on the carpet first thing in the morning. This child comes in ... from breakfast club, does not want milk and biscuit, if they do not get milk and biscuit and do not sit on the carpet they're sent to sit on the bench because they're not following the rules ... we're not listening to the children (Sally 1, Appendix 7)

In these examples, practitioners are making strong ethical statements about the rights of children to have their individual needs and interests taken into account. They are demonstrating the “compassionate practice” (Taggart, 2016, p.176) that puts children’s needs and rights first, but neither practitioner supports this with reference to more abstract or academic sources, they simply express frustration with managerial practices.

Empowerment

Not every practitioner’s story was one of overwhelming frustration with the way their practice is managed or has developed, although it is interesting to note that the most empowered practitioners worked either in management positions or in PVI settings rather than schools. Those who manage provision shared stories of how they have been able to lead practice with their own vision of what matters for children’s holistic learning and development. Two contrasting narratives stand out from practitioners, both working in Children’s Centre provision, that show how one practitioner, in a management position, feels able to share her empowerment with the team she leads, whilst the other, new to her setting, is still learning to assert her own professional confidence despite the lack of a recognised qualification framework or career structure to support this.

Iris, a deputy manager in her setting, presents a narrative of sharing knowledge with her staff, taking charge of specific areas of practice within the setting, and using her learning to improve and develop practice. She takes pride in offering children a positive and emotionally stable environment where they can feel safe, valued and secure, and in having a better understanding of how the setting can possibly offer a respite for many of them from home lives of disadvantage and instability. She is also concerned to share the confidence she has gained in her own practice from her higher-level studies, and to use this to develop the confidence of her staff:

I can see the Nursery has developed immensely throughout my journey, from foundation degree to my BA Honours, EYPS status, I've grown in confidence which has had a rippling effect on the practitioners that I work alongside (Vignette 6, Appendix 6)

Overall, she views her higher level professional education as a significant factor in developing her understanding not only of early years practice but also of her own role as a leader of practice:

it's having that knowledge and ability to make them changes with confidence and understanding what you're doing (Iris 1, Appendix 7)

This reflects Osgood's (2010) finding that practitioners value most highly the professional education that develops their confidence. However, whilst Iris speaks with confidence about what she considers to be the priorities of her practice and how she leads her team, once more she does not draw on specialist language beyond reference to the EYFS, or the theoretical concepts and research that were part of her degree studies. This is particularly evident in her prioritising of children's emotional and social well-being:

children need a happy environment to learn ... I just ensure that all the children that come to the setting are happy. If they weren't happy I'd be wanting to know why (Iris 2, Appendix 7)

Other participants in management roles, in the course of their narratives, also demonstrated autonomy and empowerment over their practice, and their confidence in leading practice in their settings. Hannah, deputy manager of a pre-school setting, demonstrated her sense of empowerment in describing how she now views the role and authority of OfSTED:

before I started my degree.... Ofsted were something that were there and perhaps I had an higher opinion of Ofsted; now I find what I feel important, and I question things of what we are doing and why we are doing it. It has brought a lot more criticality (Hannah 1, Appendix 7)

Her degree studies have encouraged a questioning approach to her practice, moving her from unquestioning compliance with a regulatory framework to the reflective and research-based practice the workforce reform strategy was intended to support (DfES, 2006, CWDC, 2008).

Laura's story of her Children's Centre experience, by contrast, is one of slowly growing empowerment. She is growing in personal confidence in her dealings with colleague and parents, her degree has given her a lot more knowledge about early years practice and she is learning how to 'properly use' the EYFS rather than simply following it;

there are [practitioners] that would use the EYFS as solely towards the EYFS so everything would be directed whereas some others may just use it as a guideline and provide on top of that with other knowledge... about Maslow's needs, zone of proximal development by Vygotsky...when I did [Level 3 qualification] I understood the EYFS but I don't think thoroughly understood it ...I knew of it ... but until I actually used it within practice I would not have said I understood it. (Vignette 7, Appendix 6)

Laura has learnt from her practice that the EYFS is a framework she must apply her own understanding and interpretation to, moving from technician to creative, reflective practitioner (Moss, 2006) and developing her own understanding of pedagogical practice (Ang, 2014). Whilst Laura's narrative is generally positive

and demonstrates a growing awareness of her own development as a practitioner, she still feels there is little recognition for practitioners who have gone beyond Level 3, and that in some way this holds her back from claiming authority for her practice and her ideas:

I feel like the qualifications you've got aren't recognised in any way or ... taken into consideration or giving you any different roles or responsibilities ... I don't want to cause offence by saying I have got this qualification ... I'd just like to know I was recognised for having it (Vignette 7, Appendix 6)

The lack of a nationally recognised career structure for early years practitioners, which both McGillivray (2008) and Lloyd and Hallet (2010) considered essential to underpin their professionalization, is limiting the confidence of graduate practitioners in claiming recognition for themselves for their skills and knowledge. It is also interesting to note that, despite a degree level professional education that was intended to reform the early years workforce as professionals (DfES, 2006), Laura does not regard her knowledge and understanding as sufficient criteria in themselves for her to make this claim to this status, requiring instead a legal jurisdiction to support her.

Power relationships in professional education

Participants have already demonstrated an awareness of where different levels of power lie in their organisations through their narratives of frustration and personal empowerment, and in their discussions of the mechanisms they use to judge the quality of their practice. However, two narratives from practitioners working in schools demonstrated a more personal response to the power dynamic they encountered, in the way they described the role of the teacher and their own practice in relation to this. Both describe placement experience rather than employment, and working with a class teacher as their mentor rather than their manager, and both seem to have experienced a similar pedagogical ethos underpinning their work-based learning.

Dorothy's narrative from her placement describes instances of her own powerlessness over her workplace experience. Her practice is directed and supervised, and the classroom and the children's learning are all managed by the class teacher. Having shown an interest when her class-teacher is observed she finds herself undergoing practice observation, which was useful but unexpected:

He was doing a maths, a numeracy activity, and the head teacher had to observe him and I was asking how that felt and he said 'Well I'll show you if you want' and the next day he observed me ... I didn't enjoy it at the time but I got some feedback from it so it does help in the long run (Vignette 8, Appendix 6)

She looks to colleagues and the class teacher for feedback on her practice:

then I communicated back with the classroom leader, the teacher, about everything that I'd done and he had to approve it (Vignette 8, Appendix 6)

Throughout her narrative there is evidence of her taking a subordinate position to the class teacher, with limited opportunities to exercise autonomy over her own practice.

Betty, working in a Year 1 classroom, presents a narrative (Vignette 9, Appendix 6) in which she avoids making any overt criticism of the class teacher but instead presents her as an expert manager of children's learning and behaviour. However, closer examination of Betty's narrative shows that at times this teacher's expectations of the children's learning are too high, and her pedagogic approach to her teaching is ineffective, leaving Betty to 'take a risk' and suggest alternative and more effective ways of engaging the children's interest and supporting their achievement. Where children's behaviour requires individual management, the teacher is responsible for setting boundaries and enforcing sanctions for unacceptable behaviour, but Betty is the practitioner tasked to provide more positive support for child-led activities and for monitoring progress in class. Throughout her narrative, Betty credits the teacher with the greater understanding of the children and their learning, feeling that her own contribution is insignificant in comparison, despite her successful intervention when the children's progress had stalled.

Both participants have adopted a role within the classroom that is characterised by seeking feedback and following direction – an appropriate stance for a student on placement, but one that emphasises their subordination and lack of autonomy. It implies a technical rationality model of pedagogic approach to their work-based education (Schon, 1983), which may reflect their experience of their Level 3 vocational education. Although they now have a considerable knowledge base relating to young children's developmental and learning needs (which Betty in particular demonstrates in her practice) they do not use this to lay claim to their own expertise, regarding the legal jurisdictions (Abbott, 1988) of the teachers' experience and status as more credible sources of power. In accepting such a subordinate relationship with their classroom mentor they demonstrate a vocational habitus of compliance rather than agency, and of received rather than constructed knowing (Johns, 2004). Rather than reflecting a lack of trust from more experienced colleagues, their narratives imply they have an understanding of classroom power relations that serves to undermine their autonomy and restricts their capacity to see themselves as creators of knowledge, contributing rather than simply participating in a community of practice. In discussing their use of reflection, both participants describe a somewhat superficial approach to this, focussing on whether or not children's learning had progressed and if their practice had met with the class teachers' approval. Such limited use of reflection does not support the development of an agentic practitioner (Johns, 2004) exercising autonomy and personal judgement over their own practice, but rather contributes again to the development of a vocational habitus of compliance with authority.

Relationships and engagement with OfSTED

The relationship between the individual practitioner and OfSTED is discussed in different ways by some of the participants, and not mentioned at all by others. As an authority, OfSTED seems to offer both regulation and control over practice, as well as approval, and is regarded as having the power to steer practice and govern day to day working. For some practitioners, there is a shared sense of OfSTED as a faceless authority, de-personalised and bureaucratic, demanding profile and achievement scores, and setting targets that put pressure on teachers and practitioners alike to prioritise measurable outcomes for children's learning and development rather than consider the support needs of individual children. These are concerns identified in research by Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) and Moss (2012) who have argued that early years practice currently privileges the measurable performance of children and their preparation for formal learning over them developing positive dispositions by leading their own learning through play. Rather than being seen as a promoter of high quality practice, or the authority that ensures only those who are fit and qualified are permitted to work with young children, OfSTED is regarded by many of these participants as an authority that measures learning. Claire, working in a school-based nursery described the morale-lowering outcome of their last inspection:

They have gone in and obviously said our school is good at care, the care side but it's the teaching that they've flagged up because the children's levels aren't consistent and aren't moving rapidly (Claire 2, Appendix 7)

While Emily, working in a First School, commented on how governmental pressure for results impacts on the management of practice within the setting:

the bit on the paper at the end of the day is what the Governing Body and Head Teachers want to see. They want to know, if we haven't made the right amount of points progress for everybody, why not and what are we doing about it? Whereas in ... you know that Fred in Year 1 might not be able to do something there because he might not be ready to learn but Year 3, Year 4 he could well be the highest achiever in your class because he's ready to engage, ... he wasn't ready in year 1. So he might makes 12 points progress in Year 3 and Year 4 but he didn't make them at the right time lower down school. (Emily 1, Appendix 7)

However, Helen's narrative (Vignette 11, Appendix 6), drawn from her experience in a Children's Centre, demonstrates how she values OfSTED approval of her practice, in validating her professional expertise and her knowledge, an expectation which might imply a technical rational understanding of her work-based learning, despite her degree studies encouraging personal evaluation and reflection. Without this recognition, she might interpret her sharing of her knowledge and her use of the technical language of the EYFS as 'showing off', an inappropriate display of her expertise to parents to emphasise her greater understanding, rather than a demonstration of her knowledge that would reassure parents of her professional credentials. This sensitivity to how her ownership of knowledge and expertise might be

interpreted by others suggests either a lack of confidence in claiming it, again demonstrating the lack of confidence in using a knowledge base to claim professionalism demonstrated by other participants. However, it could also be interpreted as an awareness that it might present a barrier for families she is trying to forge a close and collaborative partnership with, implying a very relational understanding of professional behaviour such as described by Oberhuemer (2005).

Two of the child-minders are very open about their use of OfSTED registration and its inspection grading to make the point to parents that they provide more than a baby-sitting service. Both present a legal claim (Abbott, 1988) for their professional status, using their OfSTED registration and the requirements they have to fulfil to maintain this. Alice, in particular, stresses how her provision and the structure of her day, is similar to any other type of provider, and how she engages with OfSTED requirements and inspectors to promote her own practice:

I always call myself a Registered Child Minder ... so people know it's an official capacity and it's a real job... I have got a play room and a dining room that I set up with continuous provisions like a book corner and a home corner and the blocks and the books and things so that it is like a mini nursery really (Vignette 12, Appendix 6)

Valerie offers a similar narrative (Vignette 13, Appendix 6), but challenges some of the validity of the OfSTED inspection regime, criticising it for being too predictable and too infrequent. In sharing her own feeling that she is overdue for her own grading to be improved, she acknowledges the high level of public confidence there is in this measure of practice, and how this can influence parents looking for childcare provision. Overall, the authority of OfSTED to validate and steer practice is recognised by most of the participants in this study, making them a powerful force within the field of early years practice. Although these participants may be critical of OfSTED for their apparent privileging of formal and measurable educational outcomes, its role as regulator and licensor of practice is what has enabled the “from above” approach to professionalization (Evetts, 2011, p.407) the government has undertaken in the early years sector. In representing the legal jurisdiction of early years practice, OfSTED’s requirements are very powerful forces in the field of early years, with the potential to shape not only the content of practice but practitioners’ attitudes and values.

Political awareness and engagement beyond the setting

Whilst some of these participants have discussed their perceptions of, and relationship with, OfSTED, two participants in particular shared narratives that demonstrate how they position themselves within the broader early years sector. Claire’s story (Vignette 10, Appendix 6) is one of contradictions and a conflicted view of her own worth and professionalism. She does not broadcast her higher level of qualification, since

she does not want to appear to be better than less qualified colleagues doing the same job, but then describes her distress when the pedagogic nature of her role – both as an NTA and a nursery nurse – is dismissed by others. Most strikingly, she does not feel she should be paid more for her greater expertise, as it was her choice to pursue further professional education, despite taking advantage of the workforce reforms introduced by a government seeking to raise the quality of early years provision. She does not appear to see any tension between the government wanting a better workforce and yet offering no career structure of improved terms and conditions to secure this. The core of her argument is that she is improving her own practice to demonstrate her own commitment to work she considers to be of vital social importance:

it was my choice to go educate myself further ... for me you enter a job with certain responsibilities and just because I have chosen to do a job that requires level three but I have got a foundation degree I shouldn't be paid any higher, I think it is the job and what the system deems an appropriate level [of] pay that reflects that level (Vignette 10, Appendix 6)

The vocational habitus articulated here is that it is acceptable for government to rely on practitioners taking up such professional education with no expectation of greater reward. Claire's narrative reflects her understanding that she is now qualified beyond the requirements of her post, so that to justify her studies she may only attribute this to personal motivation and commitment. Her acceptance of this situation indicates her "folk status" as a professional, described by Katz (1985) as offering social approval for her attitude to her work and for the role she fulfils, but with limited economic or cultural capital.

By contrast, Penny's narrative (Vignette 14, Appendix 6) is one of feeling undervalued both by the public who use her services and by the government who fund them. She argues at length that government has failed to act on the argument that investing in early years provision avoids much greater costs in addressing children's educational needs later on. She also expresses frustration with the early years sector for not fighting this state of affairs and refusing to accept the government's undervaluing of their services. However, her own narrative ends with the comment that:

we do the best we can. I feel I am trying to keep up with government's agenda ... to try and make things better, ... to keep up with what's going on. (Vignette 14, Appendix 6)

This may be interpreted as an ironic lack of self-awareness of her own compliance with the government's agenda she is so critical of, but may also reflect her awareness of her lack of power in challenging an agenda she does not agree with but which controls her sector. Both practitioners demonstrate an understanding of the power of government in shaping structure and practice within the early years sector, through its control of funding, both for practitioner qualifications and children's attendance. Penny has positioned herself as reluctantly accepting government policy, demonstrating the power of the field to shape habitus, whilst Claire has found a way of justifying the lack of recognition for her skills and

knowledge in terms of her personal motivation, showing how personal habitus contributes to the power of the field by supporting its control over individuals. Government control of the qualification structure of the early years sector, and its funding has led to a habitus of acceptance rather than challenge, supported by the fragmentary nature of early years provision, particularly in the PVI sector.

Whilst other participants discuss OfSTED and its impact on their practice, their comments are restricted to expressing personal opinions about increased levels of administration or funding available for professional development, rather than discussing how these can be challenged. Throughout all the narratives, there is very limited evidence of any engagement with the sector beyond a practitioner's immediate setting, with only two child-minders making reference to local support networks or local authority support, and individual practitioners describing collaborative work with outside agencies for children with SEN. This lack of engagement beyond the micro- and meso-systems of their practice impedes the development of a shared perception of what their role and professional identity is or should be, undermining the development of a collective voice to support their claim for professional status and identity. Most particularly, this lack of participation in early years communities beyond their own setting impacts on the development of the specialist knowledge base that underpins early years practice, restricting their agency in defining what good practice is, and the legitimacy (Murray 2013) of their articulation of their professional identity.

Hordern (2016) argues that early years practitioners are significantly held back by their lack of involvement in the development of the knowledge base for their practice, reducing their ownership and articulation of their own specialist knowledge base. Murray (2006) argued that practitioners were well positioned to undertake action research on issues of practice and children's learning, but that there was limited public reporting of these research findings. This was attributed to assumptions that the dissemination of research knowledge being the responsibility of academic researchers rather than practitioners, an assumption that positioned practitioners again as a subordinate group, and highlights the value of HEIs and academic researchers working with early years settings to build both their research capacity and confidence in publicising their findings beyond their own organisations. More recently, Murray (2017) has argued again that practitioners have the potential to contribute to the generation and refinement of practice knowledge, through participation in small-scale research projects. Such participation would position practitioners as constructors of knowledge (Johns, 2004) rather than receivers, offering them an opportunity to speak out collectively for the practice they consider to be ethical and effective. In contributing to the knowledge base for their practice through sharing and debating practice knowledge with colleagues beyond their own organisations, underpinned by academic theory rather than subjective personal opinion, their articulation of professional identity would take on a stronger claim for professional status, based less on personal

values and the perceptions of others, and more on a claim to a specialist vacancy no other occupational group fulfilled (Abbott, 1988).

Reading 2 – the voice of the practitioner

Johns (2004), drawing on work by Belenkey et al (1986) identifies 5 stages in the emergence of a practitioner’s voice, as they gain empowerment and agency over their practice – see Table 7 below:

Table 7 – The emergence of voice:

Silence	The lack of voice – not knowing what to say or having no power to say it
Received knowing – the voice of others	Receiving and reproducing knowledge from others
Subjective knowing – the inner voice, the question for self	Beginning to value one’s own voice as a source of knowing – may be vulnerable and uncertain
Procedural knowing – connected voice	Using empathy to connect with others and their experiences, a voice “grounded in morality of responsibility and care” (Johns, 2004, p.11)
Procedural knowing – separate voice	The voice of rational critique and reason, challenges knowledge for its validity and appropriateness to a situation
Constructed knowing	The integration of the subjective and procedural voices, to assert oneself as a creator of knowledge

The less agentic voices of Silence and Received Knowing would suggest a field where individuals exhibit a strong habitus of compliance, with neither the knowledge nor the confidence to assert themselves as either possessors of alternative knowledge or creators of their own understanding of knowledge. The remaining voices, as they increase in agency, imply a field where individuals have the power to change their habitus by introducing either new knowledge or new interpretations. To support this requires pedagogies that encourage transformative learning rather than the competent reproduction of set processes. Within the early years sector, the pedagogical approach of Level 3 qualifications (the only mandatory requirement for employment) fosters Received Knowing rather than critical reflection, supporting the development of a vocational habitus of compliance rather than autonomy, and reflecting an understanding of the EYFS as a document for implementing rather than interpreting. Higher-level professional education, including the sector endorsed ECS degree programmes, adopted a pedagogical approach that incorporated critical reflection on policy and research, aimed at encouraging the development of Subjective and Procedural Knowing, so that, with experience, practitioners would achieve Constructed Knowing, and contribute to the development of their own knowledge base. Laura’s narrative of growing empowerment (Vignette 7, Appendix 6) is a good example of this progression from unquestioning use of the EYFS practice guidance (Early Education/DfE, 2012) to a deeper understanding of her responsibility to apply this critically to the individual needs of the children she is working with. Since all these practitioners had undergone such higher-level professional education, it might be expected that the more agentic voices of Procedural and

Constructed Knowing would emerge in these narratives. Table 8 indicates the voices these practitioners used in their narratives:

Table 8: The voice(s) of the participants

The voice of the participants			
	Current role	Setting	Voice (Johns, 2004)
ALICE	CHILDMINDER	CHILDMINDER	Subjective/connected; some evidence of separate knowing
BETTY	N/A	SCHOOL YEAR 1	Received/subjective connected; almost unaware of subjective separate knowledge
CLAIRE	NURSERY NURSE	SCHOOL NURSERY	Received/subjective, connected knowing
DOROTHY	N/A	SCHOOL	Received/subjective, connected knowing
ELEANOR	ASSISTANT CHILDMINDER	CHILDMINDER	Subjective/connected; some evidence of separate knowing (weak/naïve expression)
FLORENCE	NURSERY NURSE	SCHOOL NURSERY	Received/Subjective connected; almost unaware of subjective separate knowledge
GAIL	OUTREACH - FAMILY SUPPORT	CHILDREN'S CENTRE	Subjective/connected; some evidence of separate knowing
HELEN	FAMILY PLAY AND LEARNING WORKER	CHILDREN'S CENTRE	Subjective/connected and separate but with weak expression of theoretical underpinning
IRIS	SENIOR EARLY YEARS PRACTITIONER	DAY CARE (SCHOOL SITE)	Subjective/connected and separate but with weak expression of theoretical underpinning
JANET	FAMILY SUPPORT WORKER	CHILDREN'S CENTRE	Subjective/connected; some evidence of separate knowing (weak/naïve expression)
KATY	LEAD PRACTITIONER	PRE-SCHOOL	Subjective/connected; some evidence of separate knowing
LAURA	NURSERY NURSE	DAY CARE	Subjective/connected; some evidence of separate knowing (weak/naïve expression)
MEG	EARLY YEARS PRACTITIONER	DAY CARE (HOSPITAL TRUST)	Subjective/connected; some evidence of separate knowing (weak/naïve expression)
NINA	NURSERY NURSE	DAY CARE	Received/subjective, connected knowing
PENNY	DEPUTY MANAGER	PRE-SCHOOL	Subjective/connected; some evidence of separate knowing
ROSE	BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT WORKER; SENIOR TEACHING ASSISTANT	PRIMARY SCHOOL	Subjective/connected; some evidence of separate knowing - very strong moral dimension to knowledge and discussion of practice
SALLY	NURSERY NURSE	PRIMARY SCHOOL	Subjective/connected
TINA	ASSISTANT CHILDREN'S CENTRE MANAGER	CHILDREN'S CENTRE	Subjective/connected; some evidence of separate knowing (weak/naïve expression)
VALERIE	CHILDMINDER	CHILDMINDER	Subjective/connected; some evidence of separate knowing
YVONNE	NURSERY NURSE	SCHOOL NURSERY	Subjective/connected; Some evidence of separate knowing (weak/naïve expression)

ZOE	MANAGER	PRE-SCHOOL, OUT OF SCHOOL CLUB	Subjective/connected; some evidence of separate knowing (weak/naïve expression)
EMILY	HIGHER LEVEL TEACHING ASSISTANT	FIRST SCHOOL	Subjective/connected and separate but with weak expression of theoretical underpinning.
HANNAH	PRE-SCHOOL DEPUTY MANAGER	PRE-SCHOOL	Subjective/connected; some separate

What is clear from this analysis is that whilst these participants are developing some agency in their understanding of their role and identity, none of them as yet see themselves as constructors of knowledge, despite their work experience and higher qualifications. In their narratives they use unsophisticated and naïve language (Brownlee et al, 2000; Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2007) which could be interpreted as a lack of confidence in engaging with specialist vocabulary to demonstrate their expertise. This is supported by Johns' (2004) argument that where practitioners only undertake superficial reflection on practice – for example, the achievement of outcomes, the efficient use of resources – their understanding of their role will be voiced in less agentic ways, focussing on compliance with regulation and set procedures. This is particularly evident in those participants working in more hierarchical organisations including schools, where practice must comply with overarching timetables and class teachers' planning. However, not all practitioners in school settings were restricted in this way, suggesting that the ethos of individual organisations is what constrains the development of an agentic voice.

Whilst the Connected Voice of Procedural Knowing (Johns, 2004) can be heard in most of the narratives, there is limited expression of the Separate Voice, where knowledge is critiqued and analysed in the context of research and theory, so that when practice is described, it is done so in less academic, more personal and sometimes emotive ways. These practitioners demonstrate a high degree of empathy with the children and families using their services. They value the relationships they build and regard them as the core of their practice and unique to their role. But in speaking from such a personal stance, they present their ethical values as the need to care for children rather than a recognition of children's rights, the child's need for emotional stability as the provision of a happy environment, the key worker role as a substitute parent, and the use of a play-based pedagogy as opportunities for children to have fun. However, although they demonstrate a sound understanding of the importance of positive and respectful relationship with the child in order to support learning (Chalke, 2014) and the importance of integrating care into pedagogic practice to support learning (Ang, 2014), they describe their practice using a discourse of care rather than pedagogy, which Moss (2006) criticised for undervaluing the expert knowledge their practice required. Furthermore, when asked about the knowledge base required for good early years practice, several participants equivocate about the level of child development knowledge that is needed, privileging instead the dispositions and life experience of the individual. Both Janet and Claire even suggest that disposition and

life experience can compensate for weaker understanding of child development theory, privileging a relational rather than intellectual approach to practice:

some people are practically better ...but perhaps not academically as clever. And I think the practitioners that really enjoy children and working with children sometimes outshine the ones who have got perhaps a very high level qualification but in some ways don't particularly like children. (Janet 1, Appendix 7)

For someone who does not have children and not having knowledge of child development I would say [NVQ] level 3 but someone who's experienced childcare and child development, ... it's life experience, you could go a bit lower in the level. (Claire 3, Appendix 7)

In discussing their practice in such personal and relational terms, these practitioners risk the 'emotional exploitation' that Colley (2006) identified, where it is expected that practitioners invest personal feelings and motivation in their role for little cultural or economic reward, as can be evidenced in Florence's comments about the need for a personal commitment to their work:

you've got to do it from your heart ... I see them as a second family ...we do as much as we can for them while they're here (Florence 1, Appendix 7)

Such commitment may address the dissonance they experience in doing a demanding job for limited financial reward or social status, but it supports the development of a vocational habitus that focuses on traits, personal disposition and subordination to the power and authority of others rather than the autonomy to exercise personal judgement over practice through intellectual understanding and reasoning.

To locate the voice of the practitioner, analysis should include drawing out the narrator's use of "I", indicating a personal ownership of their story, and presented as a collection of "I" statements forming an "I Poem", usually associated with strongly held opinions or deeply felt emotions (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Doucet & Mauthner, 2008). When the "I" analysis was undertaken in this study, what was more striking was the greater use of "we", "you" and "they" (see Appendix 7) in discussing practice and roles (further analysis of how these pronouns are used follows in Chapter 7), suggesting that they construct their professional identity as part of a collegial team and in terms of their relationships rather than as individuals. Even particularly strong statements of practice values such as expressed by Laura may appear to lack a sense of personal agency:

Interviewer: *so part of good practice is about wanting children to do.... Wanting children to progress? Can you do the job without that feeling of wanting them to do it?*

Laura: *No I don't think you can't because what aspiration do you have for a child to develop, to achieve their full potential in life (Laura 2, Appendix 7)*

The expression of this value, as one to be owned by all practitioners for it to be meaningful, could be interpreted as a lack of confidence in expressing a Separate Voice to assert an underpinning ethic of

practice, or it could reflect practitioners' emphasis on the need for shared values in their practice. Studies of early years professionalism identify collegial working and relationships as values that underpin practitioners' views of good practice (Oberhuemer, 2005; Lloyd & Hallet, 2010), which emphasise how practice is conducted more than they do hierarchies of knowledge or power. This more democratic approach to defining their professional behaviour and its implications for their status will be discussed further in the analysis of Reading 3, where the social and relational context of the practitioner role is examined.

Conclusion

Overall, the individual and collective storylines from the narratives show that these practitioners understand good practice and their own roles to be to provide both educational support and care to children to meet their individual needs, underpinned by stable and positive, respectful and affectionate relationships. They do this within a context that some find frustrating and others empowering, depending on the nature of the setting they work in and their place in the organisational hierarchy. Whilst their stories show that some of them have developed a vocational habitus of compliance and acceptance of the structures that constrain them, others have developed the confidence to engage with these structures and challenge them with their own interpretation of good practice.

Reading 2, in examining the personal ownership of these narratives, demonstrates that the voice these practitioners use to articulate their professional identity and definition of good practice is a very personal one, drawing on values, emotions and empathy rather than abstract academic research and study. They validate their professional identity and good practice firstly through the response they get from children and their families, and then also from authority figures such as class teachers, setting managers and OfSTED inspectors, rather than their own critical analysis of research and theory. They privilege experience, particularly parenting experience, as underpinning the development of good practice rather than academic study and qualifications. All this serves to support the development of a vocational habitus that places the development of appropriate dispositions above the acquisition of specialist knowledge, undermining any claim to professional status or expertise.

What their stories and their use of voice have in common is a concern with their immediate working environment. There is evidence, particularly in their use of "I" and "we" in their narratives, of them engaging in the relationships and interactions that comprise the micro- and meso-systems of their environment – relationships with children, families and colleagues, and awareness of legal and regulatory frameworks, government policies and targets, and organisational policies and procedures. What they do

not appear to do is consider the broader systems of their environment, and how changes to social, cultural and political perceptions impact on their role. A similar pattern was noted by Lumsden (2012) in her work investigating the professional identity of practitioners with the newly accredited Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). Many of these participants also articulated their new role and identity in predominantly in the context of the micro-system of their environment, i.e. in terms of their relationships with colleagues, families and children, rather than in terms of status or an understanding of a broader educational or political context. Whilst engagement with these immediate systems can make a significant contribution to the professional identity of these practitioners, it is questionable that they are sufficient by themselves to support a claim for professional status. The following chapter, in examining the social and relational context of these narratives, considers what understanding of professionalism and professional status these participants demonstrate, and how this contributes to their definition of good practice and their perceptions of their own role.

Chapter 7

Practitioners and their relationships – Reading 3

From Reading 2, it is clear that these practitioners do not position themselves, or their understanding of practice, in isolation from others. Reading 3 within the Listening Guide is intended to identify “the narrated self in relation” (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008, p.406), by examining the relationships these participants in this study have included in their narratives of practice (See Appendices 5, 8 for examples of how this analysis was initially tracked). This offers an opportunity to examine the breadth of the social network these participants consider important to their practice and their professional identity, and to determine the nature of their interactions within their working environment. The distribution of power within these relationships, and how this contributes to their vocational habitus and professional identity is of particular interest, as it indicates the level of autonomy and agency these practitioners claim for their practice. This analysis of the relationships discussed by these participants addresses the research questions of:

- What do early years practitioners define as good practice?
- How do these concepts contribute to their understanding of professionalism, and their status as a professional workforce?

It will be presented following a thematic structure so that significant similarities and differences across participants’ narratives are drawn out in relation to the research aims, and considers what the key relationships are for these practitioners, how they contribute to their understanding of good practice and professional identity, and, in particular, how they are used to demonstrate their understanding of care and education within their practice. This chapter will conclude by considering the impact of these relationships on how these participants understand their professionalism.

Relationships and their significance for good practice and professional identity

Lumsden (2012), also taking an ecological perspective on the early years sector, and arguing that the development of professional identity must encompass all systems of the occupational environment, introduced the notion of professional socialisation, i.e. that individuals require support, not only in adopting new practices and roles, but also in developing new relationships in new and unfamiliar field. It is these relationships that support the development of a new or different professional identity. The relationships emphasised by my participants in their narratives will indicate which environmental systems they interact with, and what, if any, professional socialisation they have had or still require. Whilst the individual narratives each describe different specific relationships with individuals and groups in the discussion of practice, reflection and role, all the narratives made reference to similar sets of relationships – with children, with families, with colleagues and managers, with de-personalised authority figures such as

OfSTED, management committees, governing bodies and government. It is these common relationships that will be examined for what they contribute to these participants' understanding of good practice and their status.

The tone of the relationships described by participants ranges from admiration and appreciation, to affection and empathy, to neutrality and acceptance, to frustration and resentment, and can be seen in the way names, nouns and pronouns are applied to different groups of people. Throughout all the narratives, 'we' is used to refer to a collaborative and collegial team (of adults and/or children), a community of shared practice and values, contributing to these participants' relational view of good practice. The participants' use of 'you' and 'your' reflects an expression of early years relational doxa – 'your children' 'your continuous provision', 'your observations' – and may also reflect their acknowledgement of my own understanding of early years practice and regulation. Whilst this can be interpreted as indicating our shared sense of ownership or closeness to practice and the children they work with, it also indicates an assumption that the practice and the values they are discussing are generally shared by other practitioners and regarded as appropriate and typical for all settings.

'They', and sometimes 'he/she', is used to refer to colleagues (past and present) whose practice the narrator disapproved of, or faceless authority figures who constrained practice, sometimes at the expense of children's individual needs or emotional well-being. 'They' and 'he/she' are also used neutrally as third person pronouns, so it is the context in which these pronouns appear, and the tone with which they are used, that gives significance to the nature of the relationship being discussed. By attending to the contextual significance of these pronouns, this contributes to an understanding of how these participants engage with others, particularly those with power, in relation to their practice and their positioning of the importance of care and children's rights. Third-person pronouns, for these practitioners, indicates an othering of individuals or groups who do not share their values, their understanding of practice, or their experience, or who do not inhabit the same occupational space in terms of the role or the power they have; whilst first- and second-person pronouns indicate a similarity of professional experience, and a closeness and collegiality that contributes to the role of the practitioner. However, this somewhat overwhelming focus on more immediate relationships, in the micro and meso-systems of their environment, contributes to their lack of assertion with regard to their status, and reflects Bourdieu's contention that our closest relationships are with those we come most closely in to contact with (Bourdieu, 1998). The implication of this is that it limits the professional socialisation opportunities (Lumsden, 2012) for practitioners, confining their voice to within their organisations rather than across their sector, reducing their awareness and understanding of wider influences on their practice. Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective on personal development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) would therefore suggest that the

relationships and interactions most focused on by practitioners are in part responsible for their lack of agency and status. More active engagement with the groups and individuals encompassed in 'they', particularly those recognised to wield power over their practice, is required if practitioners are to develop a broader understanding on the factors that influence their practice, and the confidence to question them or contribute to their development.

Mapping the various relationships participants discussed in their narratives revealed differences in the relational context of their practice. Some did not discuss relationships with parents and carers, some did not make reference to previous colleagues or workplaces, and some did not mention their relationship with managers or mentors. Whilst a relationship with children was the only shared relationship in all these narratives, discussions of networking and relationships beyond their own workplaces were the most scarce, with only two child-minders making reference to some professional networking, and of the seven making any reference to external agencies or other providers, the tone of these relationships was, at best, neutral, and, in some cases, negative. Again, this indicates an emphasis on immediate, micro-system relationships with children which Lumsden (2012) has argued arises from an occupational approach where the practitioner spends all their time with the children, with so little space provided for professional networking, that practitioners may struggle to identify themselves as members of a professional group.

In discussing their relationships with children, parents and colleagues, these participants clearly demonstrate their understandings of good practice and professional behaviour, and the personal values that underpin their role. They are critical of practice that overlooks children's individuality, or prioritises organisational structures, procedures and requirements over child-led play, as Florence (Children's Centre practitioner) explains:

The ones where you have to get the list and find them [children] because there's this target that has to be met ... is a bad day because it's not free flowing, it's not working like it should, there's no fun and playfulness, it's a case of meeting the target (Florence 2, Appendix 7)

In particular, they are especially critical of practice where children's self-esteem is seen to be put at risk or actually damaged, as Alice, a child-minder, demonstrates:

Poor practice is when the child is fobbed off trying to communicate ... or is being ignored or overlooked ... it doesn't make them feel valued (Alice 1, Appendix 7)

These criticisms demonstrate participants' understanding of both professional love (Page, 2011) and care as an ethical practice (Taggart, 2011; Luff & Kanyal, 2015), and the promotion of the child's right to play (UNICEF, 1989), and their understanding of their responsibility to provide a physically, socially and emotionally enabling environment (DfE, 2017b). By centring their practice on the need to know and understand the needs and interests of the individual children they work with, they articulate a concept of

good practice that follows the child-centred “pedagogy of listening” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p.97), and reflect on their own ability or freedom to provide this. Rose, working in a primary school, explains the difference between what she believes her role to be and how the setting deploys her:

It's very rare you get time just to be free with the children and get involved with the play ... it's usually an activity focus ... I know from what I've learnt at Uni how I should be towards the children but how I see myself towards them is basically realistically getting things done as are in the timetable (Vignette 3, Appendix 6)

This indicates a view of good practice that is process-oriented rather than outcome based, and a professional identity that prioritises understanding children’s development (Lloyd & Hallet, 2010) and working in the best interests of the child (Dalli, 2008).

Their narratives of working relationships with colleagues indicate that shared values and the development of communities for practice are important factors in their understanding of good practice. Narratives of frustration emerged from practitioners working in hierarchical settings, where the organisation’s management structure was considered to offer little scope for autonomy over practice, or the sharing of values. However, for other participants, their colleagues, including managers and mentors, were discussed in more positive and supportive terms, with individual narratives in particular emphasising their positive experience of team working and the sharing of collective values. For example, these three participants, Iris, Zoe and Penny, who have management roles in day care provision all articulate an understanding of their leadership role that emphasises the development of communities of practice:

If staff's not happy for any reason then that's something we'd deal with but we've never had that happen at this setting ... if something's not worked effectively I will speak to the girls about that and we try and think of ways we can implement it (Iris 3, Appendix 7)

So we're all working to the same aims and we may have different ways of doing it but it's just making sure that the staff are all doing the best for the children ... although they're coming to me, they're sharing ideas in the practice as well between themselves (Zoe 1, Appendix 7)

The idea was that everybody contributed to what good practice was and we were going to try and compile a list of everybody's views ... after a discussion we came up with what we hope will be the joint effort (Penny 1, Appendix 7)

As managers and leaders of practice, these participants articulate their commitment to promoting collaborative and democratic team working within their settings (Oberhuemer, 2005), as well as an understanding that there is a collective responsibility across the staff team for the quality of practice that children and their families experience (Dalli, 2008). These are narratives where the emphasis given to first person pronouns in the interviews, ‘we’, ‘our’, ‘my’, do indicate a feeling of closeness and shared connection within teams, rather than an authoritarian perception of the role of the setting leader.

The value of team working and the importance of collegial respect and cooperation are also emphasised through stories of poor practice from their peers, such as this example, identified by Yvonne, working in a school nursery class:

I was doing some imagination play with some children ... we were all working together ... this practitioner interrupted me ... and took three children away to go and do something ... although I was quite annoyed I could not let the children see that ... at the end of the session I ... sort of made a joke of it ... and actually I think she understood ... why I had pulled her up about it ...you should not take it too personally, that is when you can start having problems in your team (Yvonne 2, appendix 7)

Not only does the respect from other colleagues matter to this practitioner, but she also recognises the need for her response to be sensitive to team working dynamics. When these experiences were shared in the interviews, the emphasis given to the 3rd person pronouns used marked a separation from the narrator and her understanding of good practice, and the actions of the practitioner being described.

Poor interpersonal skills and lack of respect are regarded as potentially undermining for the professionalism of the setting, and even practitioners in general, as well as the individual, as they pose a risk to the development of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), and to emotional harmony within the setting. Katy, who manages a pre-school, recognises her responsibility to ensure that team dynamics remain positive and that no-one in the staff team is shirking even their most mundane responsibilities, regardless of rank or qualification:

We all do the domestic side of things ... no one person is asked to do the toilets ... I feel she [member of staff with EYPS] is starting to think that she is EYP now, she does the evaluation sheets ... one of the other practitioners does the toilets ... I have picked it up myself, no-one has brought it to my attention but I can see maybe something will have to be done about it (Katy 1, Appendix 7)

Katy is aware that what may seem to be a trivial aspect of day-to-day practice can have a negative impact on team dynamics, which will undermine the whole ethos of her understanding of good practice:

if you haven't got a happy team you haven't got a happy setting ... and the children will notice when things aren't good. (Katy 2, Appendix 7)

That poor practice is criticised equally for its impact on children's emotional needs as well as its impact on staff morale, emphasises again how much these practitioners privilege the child when evaluating practice.

In describing their relationships with parents/carers, the participants in this study have presented these as positive and supportive, trying to avoid judgement or criticism wherever possible, as Janet, who works in a Children's Centre demonstrates:

We get a lot of children from disadvantaged areas where they don't always see the most appropriate things at home ... that can be quite hard because sometimes people [practitioners] don't understand ... you've got to take every child as the same and treat everybody equally and fairly (Vignette 2, Appendix 6)

Her language reflects a deliberate effort to avoid taking a judgemental stance regarding children's home backgrounds and the actions of parents/carers, reflecting the current early years policy of regarding parents as partners in supporting the learning and development of their children (DfE, 2017b). Even where they acknowledge that their work is deliberately interventionist, aimed at compensating for disadvantaged and detrimental home conditions, they acknowledge, as Laura (who has also worked in Children's Centres) does, the importance of working collaboratively with families:

They are the aims of children's centres, to target families, and the only way to target families is to understand families, which is to build rapport with families (Laura 1, Appendix 7)

In doing so, they are demonstrating through their relationships their understanding of the importance of effective and affective relationships outside their setting (Oberhuemer, 2005, 2008) and the importance of understanding children's lives from a range of perspectives (Moss, 2008).

At the time of interview, all these participants were engaged in university-based professional education, giving them contact with groups of practitioners from a range of settings. However, none of them made reference to relationships with other practitioners beyond their workplace, other than to describe previous employment. Both the child-minders who described contact with local networks considered themselves to contribute more to these than they got back, with Valerie summing up her experience as:

I do go to child-minder groups ... I am the only person doing the degree course ... I get asked a lot of questions but I don't get as much out of it as I used to and I find that more difficult (Valerie 1, Appendix 7)

This lack of engagement with other agencies and networks beyond their own setting suggests a focus on personal or organisational practice that can be limiting. Both Oberhuemer (2005) and Moss (2008) argue that professionalism in early years practice should include a broad range of relationships and perspectives to inform judgements on practice, but these participants do not seem to engage in relationships that would support this. Where individual participants, such as Sally who works in a primary school, do seek out advice or support from colleagues beyond their own immediate work environment, this could be interpreted as the seeking out of a perspective on practice more conducive to their own opinions, rather than a strategic or political engagement with a new perspective:

I actually go to another member of staff ... she is probably in her third year of teaching, or I go the lady in Nursery ... I think they're more on a level where I am ... I feel they're coming at me with a fresher approach ... more recent training they do a few things differently than some members of staff (Sally 2, Appendix 7)

By restricting their relationships to those most closely associated with their own practice, Hordern (2016) would argue that they are limiting their ability as a workforce to contribute to the development of the knowledge base for early years practice. However, whilst this may be the outcome of their actions, it is also important to consider what this implies for professional identity and their professional confidence. These participants, in the relationships they consider to be important to their practice, perceive themselves as acting for the child and their family first and foremost, rather than for their workforce or sector. The frustration or empowerment they experience is expressed in terms of how they are able to meet the needs of individual children, or how they interact with their colleagues. Such a perception constructs an identity as emotionally connected advocates for the child, reflecting a vocational habitus that promotes a caring, respectful disposition towards children and their families, and towards their colleagues. Overall, what their relationships demonstrate, in addition to their understanding of good practice and their role, is their focus on their immediate practice and work environment.

Relationships and the place of care within early years practice - participants' perceptions of their roles as carers and/or educators

From the discussion of relationships within these narratives it becomes clear that these participants integrate care and learning within their practice. They understand the need to provide children with close and affectionate relationships in order to support their learning and the development of positive learning dispositions, as Meg, employed in a day care setting, demonstrates when she says:

My priority is for them to feel settled and to make sure that they are happy and they are exploring everything that they want to explore and they are confident in doing that (Meg 1, Appendix 7)

They use their caring, personal relationships with children to promote learning in informal and play-based ways. Eleanor, a child-minder, shared a narrative of how she used storytelling and the opportunity to play with a toy bear to encourage a previously silent 4 year-old child to begin talking:

When he walked through the door the first thing he did was run to me, give me the bear, and said "picnic". And his mum stood there ... she said "how have you done that," ... [I] explained to her the story ... after a month he was talking away (Eleanor 2, Appendix 7)

However, whilst they regard themselves as educators of young children, their discussion of their relationships indicates that as practitioners, they recognise that they bring a caring and relational approach to their practice that teachers do not. Both Claire and Dorothy, working in primary schools alongside class teachers, have identified that children and parents have a different quality of relationship with them than they do with the class teacher. Dorothy compared her class teacher to a previous mentor in a day care setting:

He was very good, and good at being a teacher but I wouldn't say that he built relationships with the children ... this woman [previous mentor in day care] she knew exactly what each child liked, knew exactly how to be with every single one ... so that they'd engage better with her (Dorothy 1, Appendix 7)

Claire, in comparing her relationships with parents to her class teacher, noticed that:

Some parents came to me first ... they found it easier to talk to me ... I think they found I had more time to talk to them than the teacher ... they could relate to me better (Claire 4, Appendix 7)

Emily, whose job role encompasses both classroom support and occasional teaching cover, summarises her understanding of the difference between the teacher and the learning support staff:

The expectation is that every child will make a required number of points progress through the year ... the teacher's job is very much to make sure that that is achieved ... sometimes they don't have the time to nurture the children (Emily 2, Appendix 7)

Any fluffiness, generally can come much more from the support people who take the smaller groups ... work with children who maybe aren't as socially skilled as some of the others ... they might not have the desire to do the learning and it's our job to inspire them and to motivate them, to encourage them, to make them believe in themselves (Emily 2, Appendix 7)

At times, they even consider their learning support responsibilities to conflict with their priority to provide young children with the caring and affectionate relationships they consider necessary for learning to progress, as Meg's comment shows:

My thing is if a child doesn't feel safe and secure they're not going to explore are they? ... whereas some people may think 'well they shouldn't be having a cuddle for that long' ... you have to build up a rapport (Meg 1, Appendix 7)

For these practitioners care, and affective connections with children and families, are a vital part of their pedagogic role, their unique specialism in early years education, and much of what they say reflects Taggart's (2016, p.178) description of their role as supporting children's psychological development. Their accounts of their relationships with children emphasise their understanding of good practice as the need to offer children emotionally stable, engaging and stimulating play opportunities, from which their learning will emerge. This weaving together of care and education is based on their knowledge of children's development, and their interpretation of the principles of the EYFS into practice to meet the needs of the children in their settings. Their criticisms of practice focus on examples where such knowledge or interpretation is lacking, so that practice is either formulaic or focused on outcomes rather than process, as Hannah shows in her explanation of poor practice:

It's pointless activities sometimes that are put out ... they look good ... but who are they there for? For the children or to look good? (Vignette 1, Appendix 6)

This suggests they do have the understanding of the pedagogical discourse that Moss (2006) argued was lacking, even if the language of their practice emphasises care. However, in basing their understanding of their role on their relationships with the children they work with, their reflections on practice focus on the immediate issues of these children's needs being met, and medium term planning for how this might be progressed. For example, Yvonne's description of how she reflected on an activity demonstrates her unspoken understanding of reflection on action and in action (Schon, 1983), but her evaluation is restricted to resourcing and offering activities for a small group of children over a two-day period:

If I plan an activity, when I chose a topic, maybe dinosaurs, and some things have not gone right, I have thought there and then 'has that really worked, is there any point doing it tomorrow, have the children been interested ... has it worked for the most able children or worked for the lesser able [sic] children?' (Yvonne 3, Appendix 7)

This somewhat technicist approach (Moss, 2006; Osgood, 2006) appears to restrict their evaluation of their role to the goals and outcomes of their current setting and employment, rather than to their role in any broader context, i.e. considering what it means to be a good practitioner here and now, rather than considering what it means to be a good practitioner per se.

Relationships and professionalism

Dalli et al (2012, p.6) argue that:

Early childhood professionalism is something whose meaning appears to be embedded in local contexts, visible in relational activities, ethical and political in nature and involving multiple layers of knowledge, judgement and influences from the broader societal influences

It is clear from this reading that relationships are a key part of the practitioner role for these participants, but that their focus is on those relationships they are active in forming for themselves, with children, families and colleagues. Whilst they demonstrate, in all three readings, some awareness of the political and legal context for their work, these participants do not demonstrate any active engagement with these contexts beyond the expression of personal criticism or approval. They draw their understanding of their professionalism from the way their relationships enable them to engage with children and families and support learning and developmental progress, emotional well-being and children's safety. Such an understanding represents care both as an opportunity for promoting and developing learning (Davis & Degotardi, 2015), and as a perception of the child as the empowered constructor of their own learning (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Taggart, 2016), raising its status to an informed and ethical understanding of practice rather than simply the expression of a maternal disposition (Luff & Kanyal, 2015).

However, these participants' focus on expressing their professional identity and good practice through their interpersonal relationships overlooks the need to engage with a specialist knowledge base to support practice, identified by a number of writers (for example, Oberhuemer, 2005; Urban & Dalli, 2008), and envisioned in the government's workforce reform strategy (DfES, 2006). It could be argued that there is a tension between an understanding of professionalism that privileges relational and interpersonal skills, the needs of the child and collegial working, which might encourage reflection within a more immediate working context, and one which privileges engagement with multiple perspectives, critical reflection and the development of a knowledge base which might be applied to broader working contexts (for example, Moss, 2008; Urban & Dalli, 2008). Whilst the former supports the development of a very ethical professionalism that values the rights of children and their families (Page, 2011; Taggart, 2011; Luff & Kanyal, 2015), it does not encourage the practitioner to engage more actively with the politics of their field, nor does it encourage them to reflect on the theoretical underpinnings of what they consider to be practice based on emotional connection. Instead, it can serve to emphasise the separation between the practical and the academic self-identified by Sims-Schouten & Strittrich-Lyons (2013), so that a vocational habitus forms, based on what they do, rather than what they know. Later models of early years professionalism include critical thinking, engagement with specialist knowledge, autonomy and leadership skills (for example, Lloyd & Hallet, 2010; Brock, 2012), implying the need for a wider and more abstract level of reflection on their practice and its purpose, and greater appreciation of the research as well as the values that underpin their actions. Such development can be supported by high-level professional education, but also requires engagement in relationships across their sector, with agencies and colleagues beyond their immediate setting, in order for them to encounter different perspectives. Some of the participants in this study, such as Rose who went into her school-based role with no early years qualification, but has studied part-time alongside employment, acknowledged the value of their degree studies in facilitating this:

I wouldn't have known [how other settings and practitioners work] other than being at Uni and sharing ideas with other people (Rose 2, Appendix 7)

However, this was not universally acknowledged, and the focus on setting-specific relationships suggests again the separation for many of the participants of their practical (and setting-based) self from academic self (Sims-Schouten & Strittrich-Lyons, 2013). This separation of doing from knowing is what leads to their presentation of their roles and identity in unsophisticated, naïve and care based terms (Moss, 2006; Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2007), and a vocational habitus that offers them social approval for their work, but with limited status and reward.

Overall, what their relationships demonstrate is that whilst they present a strongly ethical approach to practice, they also appear to reduce its potential social, as well as economic, capital, and increase the risk of emotional exploitation (Colley, 2006) for these participants. This will be explored further in the next chapter, where the constructed self of the practitioner is examined, to determine how they understand their status as professional within the early years sector, and how they make any claim to agency or autonomy over their practice.

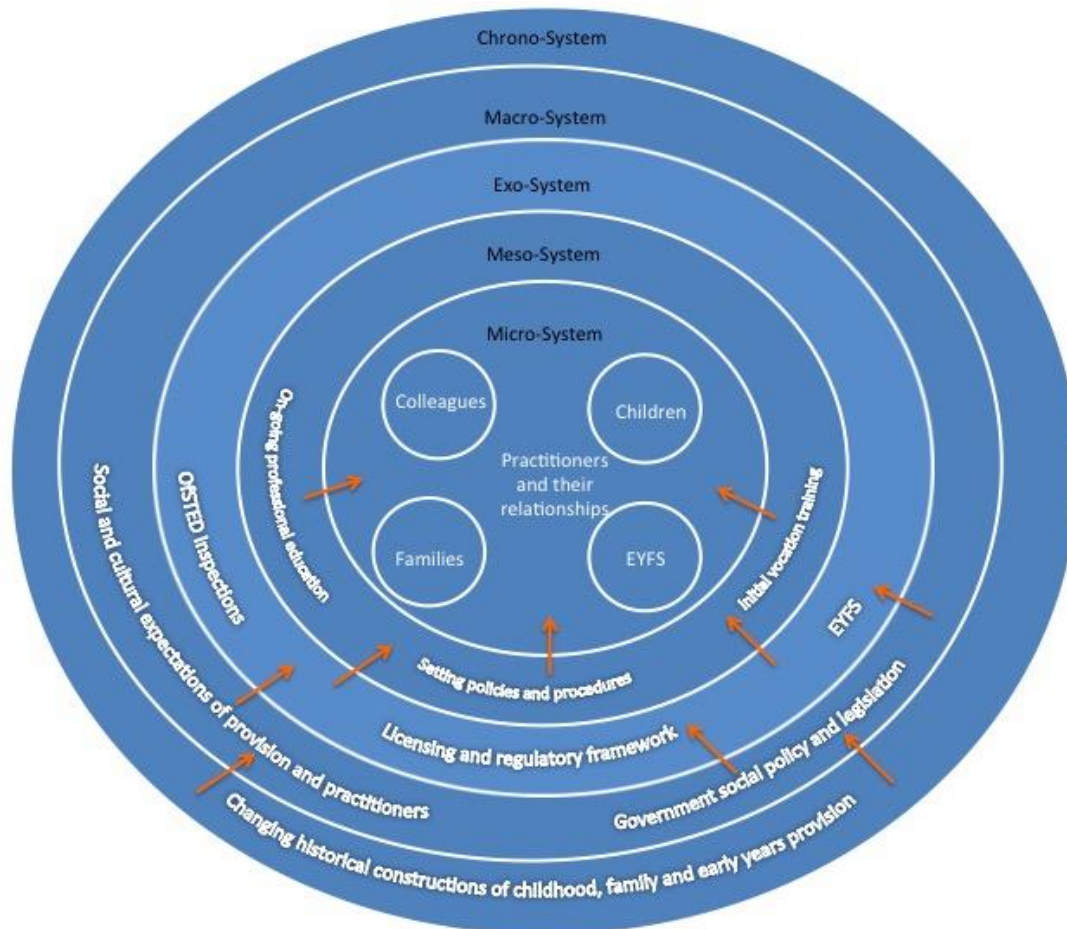
Chapter 8

The structured self of the practitioner: Reading 4

The preceding two chapters have explored how the storylines, voices and relationships of the participants in this study demonstrate how they understand and articulate their role as early years practitioners. This chapter now draws together these first readings into the structured subject that Doucet and Mauthner (2008) describe as an analysis and synthesis of the different voices, relationships and storylines that comprise each participant's narrative. This overall presentation of the narrated selves of these participants addresses the question of what their vocational habitus is, particularly in relation to the level of agency and autonomy they claim in defining their professional identity.

The role of the early years practitioner has been shown to be subject to government-driven discourse concerning children's health and educational outcomes, the value of early intervention to address children's developmental needs, and pressure to expand early years provision and raise the quality of practice. Research into the nature of early years practice and practitioners' perceptions of these suggests that practitioners use the interpersonal and affective dimensions of their work to explain their roles, and that the quality of practice can be improved by developing their use of critical reflection. Examination of what constitutes professional status, and how professionalism is defined in early years practice, suggests that it is practitioners' control of their knowledge base and the boundaries of their occupational group that will give them the agency and autonomy to articulate a personally owned professional identity and status. Overall, this presents the role and professional identity of the early years practitioner as influenced by the interaction of a number of environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) (see Chapter 1, Figures 1, 2). The chrono-, macro- and exo-systems of political, social, and cultural factors combine to shape the policy and regulatory framework for early years practice, based on a current, hegemonic definition of the purpose of the sector. It is within these systems that the drivers for determining the knowledge base underpinning early years practice, and the legislative framework for provision, have been developed, in relation to the historical origins of the sector and the dominant political ideologies of society. This informs the meso- and micro-systems of the regulatory framework and the professional education and training for practitioners (see Figure 6):

Figure 6: Shaping the role of the practitioner through environmental systems



The participants in this study use these more immediate systems to inform their practice, and their understanding of its purpose. However, in order to understand how these participants construct their professional identity, and the level of agency they bring to this definition, it is necessary also to consider their engagement with the systems that go beyond their immediate and direct environment. Lumsden (2012) has previously characterised workforce reform development and the introduction of EYPS accreditation as macro-system factors. This has taken the form of social policy for children and families influencing the micro-system of early years practice and the role of the practitioner, a relationship which could be seen to lead to the imposition of a ‘from above’ (Evetts, 2011, p.407) approach to professionalization. A more equal, reciprocal interaction between the two systems, where practitioners and providers contribute to the shaping of such policy, might more readily lead to a ‘from within’ approach (Evetts, 2011), implying a level of agency and autonomy on the part of practitioners. This chapter, in analysing how these participants structure their identities, and understand their status and roles as professionals, considers:

- how they describe themselves, the titles they accept or claim for themselves, and the priorities they identify in explaining their roles

- their positioning of their practice in relation to the sector-wide issue of the care/education divide
- their use of critical reflection and the contexts within which they evaluate their practice
- their relationships with the broader early years sector, including other practitioners, other agencies and political and regulatory systems.

What's in a name?

When asked about the job titles they answer to, there is evidence of acceptance of the caring implications of the nursery nurse title, as well as the educational implications of the early years practitioner title, with most participants deriving their title from their contract of employment or job description. However there are tensions expressed about the accuracy of the titles they are given, and how their roles are then perceived by employers and the public. Of the 23 participants in this study, eight different titles are used to identify their roles:

Table 9: Participants' job titles

Nursery nurse	Early years practitioner	Manager	Child minder	Teaching assistant/learning support worker	Other
6	6	2	3	3	Early Years Teacher Student practitioner Early years professional

However, although these are the titles acknowledged by these participants, there were mixed feelings as to their accuracy, with Florence describing her nursery nurse title as:

the title that I've been given by the NNEB ... a bit non-descriptive of the job ... puts you in a carer position where we have to be sort of a carer and an educator (Florence 3, Appendix 7)

Whilst Florence recognises that the award of her title from what was the licensing authority of the time for her role offers strength to her status, she also acknowledges that her role has since changed. Her once nationally recognised job title no longer matches the demands of the current regulatory framework for early years provision, or the government driven discourse for the purpose of her role. As a result, this one-time legal jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988) for her status is unhelpful, since its title reflects an out-dated job role, even if, for some practitioners, it sits more comfortably with their understanding of their identity.

Nina also explains how her title does not reflect the job she feels she does:

That's [nursery nurse] what the setting employed me as, ... I know I'm an educator, everybody working with children is an educator (Nina 3, Appendix 7)

Her response to this is to tacitly acknowledge the inaccuracy, and, like Florence, ensure her practice matches current requirements. However, what this means in practice is that public perception, particularly from parents and partner agencies, is unlikely to recognise the new knowledge and skills their role requires.

For some though, their title is an important reflection of the nature of their role, as Gail, unhappy about her current designation as an early years practitioner, explains:

nursery nurse more fits the kind of role I'd like to see ... how I perceive myself ... the more caring side (Gail 1, Appendix 7)

Her job title now reflects the current regulatory framework for practice, and her new, arguably less gendered, more generic job title is open to wider interpretation as to what it might encompass. However, Gail interprets this as overlooking or devaluing an essential element of her professional role and understanding of good practice. Again, since she is unable to challenge her organisation's authority in determining her job title, she must do this through underpinning her practice with her own values and priorities within organisational requirements and constraints.

There are also concerns over how specific titles might imply status. Claire, a Nursery Nurse in a school-based nursery class, acknowledges that 'it's what people know us as, it's a comforting name for parents' but goes on to remark that changing the name might confuse public perception of the status of their role:

if you said early years practitioners they [parents, the public] might think you are better than what you are (Vignette 10, Appendix 6)

Not only is the nursery nurse title familiar and understood by parents in terms of the content of the role, it also marks a perceived status. Public opinion can strengthen a workforce's claim to professional status (Abbott, 1988), but it leaves them dependent on others' understanding of that role for their legitimacy, reducing their autonomy in controlling the definition of their role, and in determining their social status and capital. In this case, Claire feels that public understanding of the nature of the practitioner role is now out of date, with the lack of recognition for their new responsibilities reducing the status they are accorded by public perception. This reduced autonomy is indicated by Claire's concern, discussed in Chapter 6, not to mislead others about her (or her colleagues') status, and her reluctance to make known her degree status.

Of the participants in management roles in their settings, two have identified themselves as practitioners, highlighting their status by using 'lead' or 'senior' in their title, whilst one added the explanation that she saw this as a support role rather than one of measuring the performativity of her team. This demonstrates not only that these individuals apply personal constructions of their leadership and management responsibilities to their professional identities, but also that there are no shared job titles or designations across the sector. The fact that of 23 participants, there are nine job titles in use, indicates that for these practitioners, the most public-facing signifier of their professional role is organisationally rather than personally or legally defined. Furthermore, since it is employing organisations that determine job descriptions, this places greater power to define practice with employers and managers rather than individual practitioners.

Overall, whilst the range of job titles may be explained by historical change across the early years sector, the significance of this change and its drivers is that it is a change acted out on the workforce rather than one that they have mobilised themselves. Their acceptance of titles that they consider to be either inaccurate or inappropriate implies either a lack of care about this issue, or a lack of personal agency. However, since they all chose to discuss their job title and its implications as part of their narratives, it seems unlikely to be a lack of care. Their lack of agency on this issue may be attributable to the diverse composition of the early years sector, which includes a wide and confusing range of practitioner qualifications considered to be unhelpful to public understanding of their role (Nutbrown, 2012), and which encourages isolation of practitioners from each other (Hordern, 2016).

Practitioners as educators or carers

When asked to describe their individual roles, and what they consider to be the priorities of their practice, their answers show the prioritising of both learning and care needs. Participants working in school-based provision place more emphasis on the educational aspect of their role while PVI sector and children’s centre practitioners favour care-based explanations:

Table 10: Prioritising of care and education in the role of the practitioner

	PVI pre-school	PVI day care (inc. child minder)	Children’s Centre	School-based nursery	School	Total
Prioritises care	1	3	2	1	1	8
Prioritises learning	1	2	0	1	4	5
Prioritises both equally	0	1	1	2	0	4

However, the answers indicating these priorities highlight the history of the education/care divide, and reflect that it is only following the expansion of the early years sector (DfEE, 1998) that more PVI providers were able to offer funded nursery education for children, or schools allowed to offer places to children below three (Gov.uk, 2011). Practitioners working in school-based provision, where educators have traditionally been qualified to degree level, understand their responsibilities to be focused on care, as Yvonne’s explanation of her role in a school-based nursery indicates:

I look after children up to the age of 5 (Yvonne 4, Appendix 7)

She is employed in school-based provision but describes her job focusing on her care and supervision responsibilities. This suggests not only a personal construction of her role but also the boundaries on her responsibilities in structured work environment where other, differently and more highly qualified colleagues take responsibility for planning and assessing learning. A similar self-positioning is demonstrated by other practitioners working in schools, such as Betty, who describes her role as

To support the teacher basically and do anything that she asks you to do (Vignette 9, Appendix 6)

This apparent lack of autonomy over her practice is further demonstrated in her explanation that

At the moment, because of the qualification I've got, I can't do anything above like a Higher Level Teaching Assistant ...I couldn't call myself a teacher yet because I'm not a qualified teacher (Betty 1, Appendix 7)

She recognises the power of legal jurisdictions (Abbott, 1988) to determine status and autonomy, and accepts that this means she has little control even over her own practice. As her narrative develops, she demonstrates her own skill and understanding as she intervenes in practice to support children's learning more effectively, but describes this as risky behaviour for someone in her position, implying she is possibly exceeding her status in the classroom. This understanding of her place within the educational hierarchy privileges qualification and status over effective practice, a further indication of the separation of the practical and academic self (Sims Schouten & Strittrich-Lyons, 2013). Although she will take risks and exercise agency, she continues to articulate a vocational habitus where compliance with power is regarded as a professional asset.

In contrast, Penny, who manages a private pre-school, is able to support her understanding of her role as taking an educational direction, with the use of her nationally recognised status:

I am an Early Years Teacher (Penny 2, Appendix 7)

Although this does not guarantee any nationally recognised terms and conditions of employment, it does enable Penny to assume there is an understanding that her role is not only to manage a setting but also to lead pedagogical practice. She further explains her focus on supporting children's learning by saying:

it's not just about playing with children, it's about understanding what play is ... and what children are learning from it (Vignette 14, Appendix 6)

This concern to ensure that her practice is understood as more than safe and supervised play opportunities is shared by other participants in this study, and demonstrates the potential weakness of relying on public perception for establishing professional status. However, although she is moving away from the discourse of care that Moss regarded as undermining for practitioners' professional status (Moss, 2006), within her storyline, and many of the other narratives of practice, there is limited evidence of an overt discourse of pedagogy.

This may reflect a perception on the part of these practitioners that whilst individual children learn, pedagogy is a term restricted to whole class teaching and the delivery of a set curriculum to a series of measurable outcomes. Such an understanding has been reported to arise from "a focus upon a top-down approach to raising educational standards" (Chesworth, 2015, p. 143) where a playful approach is encouraged but where children's learning is measured in terms of outcomes rather than engagement with process. This would appear to be the focus of school-based early years practice, even for children in

Reception classes, still within the EYFS, as the narratives of school-based practitioners such as Rose, Emily, Claire, Dorothy and Sally suggest. In presenting their play based practice as a means for children to develop social and emotional resilience and have fun rather than the application of their specialist knowledge base to children's achievement of the ELGs, they overlook its importance to their professional identity. What they have in their play-based practice is the opportunity to claim for themselves a specialist role in this pedagogic practice. In doing so, they would have identified the vacancy, or unique specialism, that Abbott (1988) argues is necessary in order for an occupational group to claim professional status. However, by centring their use of play on their interactions and relationships with the children, rather than presenting it as drawing from a specialist knowledge base, this devalues the place of play as a pedagogic tool in early years practice, and weakens their claim as expert professionals. Once again, their construction of identity in terms of their relationships emphasises a vocational habitus based on personal disposition rather than the critical application of expert knowledge.

From the explanations of participants who do not overtly prioritise either strand of practice, it is clear that, for them, the practitioner role includes a responsibility for both. Hannah, who manages a private pre-school, manages to avoid separating these two strands of practice out in her explanation that her role is 'to work with the kids', just as Dorothy, working in a classroom support role, describes her job as:

Everything. It's the responsibility for the children, it's where you are in the team. It's hard to describe (Dorothy 2, Appendix 7)

It could be argued that for many of these participants, the separation of education and care is impractical or nonsensical, echoing the argument (Rumbold, 1990; DfEE, 1998) that it represents an arbitrary divide that is unhelpful when supporting young children's holistic development. The lack of articulation of an overt discourse of pedagogy from practitioners may not reflect a lack of understanding or education on their part, but perhaps an assumption that in meeting children's individual care and relational needs their knowledge and their understanding of the world will also grow. This would support the use of a "pedagogy of listening" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p.97), where children's needs and interests are attended to and followed rather than the imposition of an adult-led pedagogy where knowledge is incrementally introduced, assessed and progressed.

In discussing their practice, while this pedagogic approach is described by many of these participants, it is again presented as developing from their relationships with the children rather than their understanding of pedagogic theory. Similarly, their understanding of care is presented in terms of children's needs and opportunities for developing relationships rather than an ethical stance that underpins their practice. There are few examples of these participants regarding physical care routines as opportunities for learning, and few examples of their understanding of attachment theory and key working procedures that go deeper

than an acceptance that for children to play and socialise, they must first feel safe. Care is presented by these participants as a personal disposition rather than a pedagogic practice, reflecting Manning-Morton's (2006) criticism of the binary perception that the ability to make an affective connection with a child requires disposition whilst educating a child requires intellectual ability and abstract knowledge. In centring their understanding of their role on this perception of care, this again supports the development of a vocational habitus where interpersonal skills and disposition are regarded as fundamental to their identity, rather than the understanding and application of abstract knowledge.

Critical reflection and engagement with the knowledge base

When asked to discuss their use of reflection, the participants in this study, all of whom had undertaken foundation degrees that were required to actively teach critical reflection as a means to improve quality of provision, focused very much on evaluating their use of resources and management of activities. For example, Meg describes:

A lot of what you want to reflect about are things you maybe think you could have done better ... or you could have prevented from happening ... you tend to do it when you want to improve something (Meg 2, Appendix 7)

Their discussions demonstrated some awareness of different models to structure reflections but few admitted to using such models in full, and some regarded reflection as an academic exercise rather than one which could be used to support practice in the setting, as Betty's narrative suggests:

Interviewer: *how do you do that [reflect on practice]*

Betty: *the old lazy answer of thinking about it. Writing it down because we had to do that for our placement portfolio [degree assignment] ... I've still been keeping a diary of reflections, only brief, not going into great detail (Betty 2, Appendix 7)*

The focus of their reflections appears to be the efficient use of resources, children's interest and engagement with activities, and a decision about how to further develop an activity. There is little evidence of deeper levels of reflection concerned with the appropriateness of specific activities or of policy and regulation (Goodman, 1984) or of the consideration of how theoretical perspectives might be applied to improve practice (Rolfe, Freshwater & Jaspar, 2001; Brookfield, 2002). Although there is evidence of reflection sometimes being used to develop a setting-wide understanding of practice issues, as Penny's narrative demonstrated, this is done without reference to any underpinning theoretical knowledge base.

This limited use of the knowledge base they have spent up to five years studying demonstrates their lack of engagement with the working environment beyond their setting and their immediate practice. The intention behind the provision of sector endorsed ECS degrees, was to offer professional development to enable practitioners to discuss and evaluate their roles with confidence and with the support of a critical

understanding of research and theory. From this would emerge the professionals who could critique and improve practice and raise quality across the sector. However, what has emerged is a practitioner who evaluates practice within their own setting, within a relatively narrow context, to meet the immediate and individual needs of the children they currently work with. Several practitioners spoke very positively about their university studies and the benefits they felt their higher levels of knowledge had given them, in developing their critical reflection skills and also their knowledge base, as Yvonne and Rose demonstrate:

I feel as though my practice has improved since I did my foundation degree quite a lot because of being ... reflective and understanding what reflective actually is (Yvonne 5, Appendix 7)

It would be fantastic for everyone to have the kind of knowledge you get at foundation degree (Rose 3, Appendix 7)

However, by not applying this knowledge to support their reflections, they restrict themselves to using a very subjective voice (Johns, 2004) to describe their role and their identity. By not applying and critiquing this knowledge when considering practice development and the implementation of policies and legislation, they are restricted to the Received Knowing (Johns, 2004) of the less agentic practitioner. By limiting the development of their knowledge and understanding of practice to their own settings, they are restricting their scope and autonomy as constructors of knowledge. Overall, this lack of engagement with their knowledge base in practice evidences again the separation of the practical from the academic self, holding them back from claiming professional status, and facilitating the imposition of a “from above” professionalization agenda (Evetts, 2011, p.407).

Throughout the narratives, there appears to be a reluctance to require a higher level of qualification or knowledge for the early years workforce in general. These participants value an understanding of child development and team working and leadership as essential knowledge to underpin their practice, and this is particularly evident in the frustrations they describe when working with colleagues and managers whose understanding in these areas was limited. When asked about the level of knowledge or qualification that practitioners should have, there was considerable equivocation about levels of qualification, which was partly in recognition of the lack of higher-level posts and salaries across the sector, as Nina pointed out:

I don't think there's enough jobs out there for everybody to become a graduate ... I think a lot of people are doing their graduate level and there's no post available (Nina 4, Appendix 7)

However, for many participants, there seemed to be a fear that valuable interpersonal skills might be lost from practice, reflecting the history of an occupational sector where disposition was privileged over academic achievement. For example, Katy describes making allowances for one member of her staff who lacked academic skills, as her practice with the children was good:

She did have other attributes she brought to the setting so I did support her key skills ... but I think her other attributes outweighed some of the things that let her down, academic things let her down (Katy 3, Appendix 7)

Similarly, Meg voiced her concern about raising minimum levels of qualifications which might result in losing practitioners from the sector whose academic skills were weak and who lacked a commitment to higher level study:

There are certain members of staff or practitioners that wouldn't do the degree and have openly said that 'if it [were] brought into play so you'd have to do a degree then I'd walk' and I think that would be a shame as they are good practitioners (Meg 3, Appendix 7)

The privileging of personal experience rather than a more abstract, research-based knowledge base to support an understanding of children's needs, again restricts their articulation of professional identity to the less agentic Subjective Knowing (Johns, 2004). This leaves them relying on the agreement of others, expressed by means of public approval and/or license to practice, for their professional status, rather than the exercise of their own expertise.

Engagement with the wider sector

These restrictions on their articulation of a professional identity are added to by the diverse nature of the early years sector and the separation of provision into a very large number of small settings. This gives practitioners limited immediate opportunities to share their perceptions and evaluations, and develop a collective articulation of their role, especially when working as child-minders. Whilst these participants have acknowledged support agencies such as Speech and Language Therapy services and local authority support workers, or relationships with organisations that children transition to such as schools, there is almost no discussion or description of relationships with other practitioners in similar workplaces. Several participants have acknowledged the value of their University studies in bringing them into contact with practitioners in similar roles, giving them opportunity to consider different ways of practising. However, since the sustainability of non-compulsory early years provision depends on funding from government and/or parents, market forces has meant there has been little encouragement for individual providers to work collaboratively rather than regarding neighbouring settings as competitors. Settings develop their own communities of practice based on the leadership of the managers and owners, and although staff move from one to another taking their personal experience and history with them, there is no sharing between these communities at organisational level.

A similar finding was noted by Lumsden (2012) as her participants reflected on their disappointment at the lack of infrastructure – the development of a professional body or association, a government-led awareness-raising campaign for their new role and status, nationally agreed terms and conditions of

employment for their role - in the early years sector to support the recognition of their newly accredited status. This in turn reduces the scope for the professional socialisation (Lumsden, 2012, p.85) required to support a re-construction of identity, and the development of personal agency and autonomy. Hordern (2016) has also identified the limited opportunities for practitioners to develop a collective understanding of their role or to contribute to the development of an appropriate knowledge base for their practice, and the organisations that exist either represent the interests of employers (for example, NDNA, PLA, PACEY) training providers (for example, CACHE) or professional educators and researchers (for example, TACTYC). His argument that this locates practitioners at a distance from the development of their knowledge base, thus undermining their capacity to claim a professional status for themselves, is supported by Simms-Schouten and Strittrich-Lyons' (2013) identification of the separation of practice from academic understanding, demonstrated by many of the practitioners in this study.

Their engagement with the politics and regulation of the sector has also been demonstrated to be limited, despite their understanding of the influence these exert over practice. Government policy and support for the sector is criticised, and OfSTED is positioned as both exercising considerable power over the content and quality of practice, and also as overlooking the individual needs of children. Yet there are few that overtly challenge the authority of the regulatory and curriculum framework in determining practice, and none that question its content. This limited engagement reflects the kind of acceptance of the hegemonic discourse of the sector described by Johnson (1998), where hegemony does not rely on agreement or shared belief, but simply on the lack of any imaginable alternative. Within this understanding of hegemony, practice can vary, and individuals may disagree, but the overall discourse that steers practice is accepted as the only imaginable way to behave in a specific occupational context. This suggests a vocational habitus for these participants where they not only understand and accept that they have a responsibility to work in the best interests of young children (Ang, 2014), but also that this does not extend to shaping curriculum and regulatory frameworks, or defining the quality standards for what they do. Such a habitus makes possible a field where practitioners have little agency to exercise over their professional status and identity, and where their habitus, in accepting this, perpetuates this balance of power. The positioning of these participants as lacking in agency in defining their role and restricted in the autonomy they have over their practice, makes the imposition of a 'from above' professionalization agenda achievable. When coupled with a diverse and fragmented sector, where practitioners appear to lack a collective 'within' from which to mobilise their own professionalization agenda, they are more likely to find themselves subject to the control of more powerful actors. By also not using their knowledge base to articulate a definition of their role or to explain their practice, relying instead on public approval for their personal values, dispositions and interpersonal skills as the foundation for their professional status, their agency and potential for a stronger claim to professional status is further reduced.

Conclusion

Overall, these participants present themselves as moral and ethical workers, with a relational understanding of their role. They understand the importance of children's social and emotional development and its role in underpinning learning. They promote the child's right to construct his/her own understanding of the world through a play-based pedagogy. They value positive team dynamics within the workplace, particularly for the contribution this makes to fostering a welcoming and emotionally safe environment for families and children. These participants all demonstrate in their narratives that, even in the most restrictive of workplaces, they have developed some broader, personal understanding of what the practitioner role should be and what their values are in relation to practice. However, their storylines and relationships indicate that they have limited engagement with issues of policy and practice beyond their immediate settings. Although they regard themselves as educators of young children, they position their role as subservient to teachers and schools, and undervalued by partner agencies and organisations. Whilst as individuals, they value the higher-level knowledge gained from their degree studies, they regard experience and personal disposition as making a more significant contribution to high quality practice, a privileging of the personal and interpersonal over the intellectual or academic which is particularly evident in their discussions of critical reflection.

This presentation of their professional identity locates them within the micro- and meso-systems of their occupational environment, demonstrating a personalised and organisationally located understanding of their current roles. However, such an occupationally driven construction of their professional identity and status renders it weak and temporary (Abbott, 1988), and offers little agency or personal control to the individual. Despite the introduction of workforce reform strategies to raise the professionalism of the early years practitioner, their agency and autonomy in articulating their role and their understanding of good practice remains limited. Whilst this may be attributable in part to the top-down approach of government rather than the workforce driving change to the role of the practitioner, it is also attributable to how practitioners themselves have engaged with their professional education opportunities and applied them in the workplace. Their reliance on their subjective knowledge, and their presentation of a heavily interpersonal, dispositional construction of their role rather than a more objective knowledge base offers them a vocational habitus based on personal qualities rather than critical understanding and application of knowledge to practice. Their lack of engagement with the political and social factors that influence the discourse of their sector both implies and perpetuates a lack of agency on their part to articulate a shared professional identity and role. Structural changes to the early years sector, to introduce nationally recognised terms and conditions for employment, and a career pathway that includes mandatory higher level qualifications for leaders and managers, might address the issue of a shared understanding of roles. This might also resolve the chaotic system (Lumsden, 2012, p.307) that has resulted from a workforce

reform strategy that was presented as a standards issue to be enforced through the centralised, government-led registration and inspection, for a PVI sector which retains the autonomy for providers to determine individual definitions of roles and appropriate remuneration for practitioners. However, this would still represent a 'from above' rather than a more autonomous and individual 'from within' control of professional identity. The foundations for such a change to the vocational habitus of the early years practitioner may be more effectively laid in the content and pedagogy of their professional education, the implications of which are considered in the following chapter.

Chapter 9

What does it mean to be an early years practitioner?

What are the implications of this for professional educators and the sector?

This chapter draws together the answers to the research questions identified at the start of this study, considering them in relation to the theoretical frameworks offered by both Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) and Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) discussed in Chapter 1. It draws out the implications of these findings for those who design and deliver their initial vocational education and their on-going professional education. It further identifies the potential implications for practitioners themselves as individuals, and also more broadly across the early years sector. However, since the overall aim of this research was to draw as directly as possible on the voices of practitioners, this discussion begins with a reflection on how issues of reflexivity have been addressed, and how the voices of the participants have been heard.

Hearing the voices of the participants

The focus of this study was to consider how practitioners' own understanding and articulation of their role contributes to their use of critical reflection and their understanding of good practice. However, its overall aim was to support professional educators in applying this knowledge to the design and delivery of higher-level professional education. Consequently, I chose not to involve my participants in the interpretation and analysis of the data, as I wished to consider their articulation of identity from the perspective of a professional educator rather than from that of a practitioner. Yet for the findings and their implications to be acceptable to the reader, they must be seen to be trustworthy (Silverman, 2010), drawn from the data themselves, rather than significantly shaped by my own reflexivity. The Listening Guide, which requires that the researcher 'listens to, rather than categorizes or quantifies, the text of the interview' (Gilligan et al, 2003, p. 256) has supported me in achieving this level of trustworthiness.

I chose to present my data as storylines, rather than to code individual narratives using a series of themes. In doing this, I have been able to maintain the sense of individual narratives, presenting these as vignettes which capture particularly distinct experiences and articulations, and which direct the reader's attention to the whole of the narrative rather than fragmenting it into codes and themes. My presentation of the data as the participants' storylines, rather than structured through my own coding, locates ownership of the narratives with the participants, offering the reader trust in the authenticity of their accounts and also in my interpretation of their meaning. In presenting my findings in this way, not only was the validity of the

data analysis and interpretation strengthened, but also the ethical issues associated with presenting the voices of the participants (discussed in Chapter 5) were addressed.

Finally, the nature of the findings themselves further support the validity and ethical approach of this study, since some do not match the expectations I had of how graduate practitioners would articulate their professional identity and role. The aim of this study was to understand how practitioners saw themselves, rather than to gather data that validated others' perceptions of their role and identity. The findings presented in this study are a genuine reflection of how these participants construct their identity, and that is what must be taken account of in drawing conclusions and making recommendations for the further development of the sector and its workforce.

Reflexivity and my own responses to the storylines

Chase (2008) argues that in the presentation of narrative research, researchers assume one of three voices – an authoritative voice, a supportive voice or an interactive voice. An authoritative voice has a different purpose to that of a narrator, speaking 'differently but not disrespectfully' (Chase, 2008, p.75), taking responsibility for interpreting the significance of the narratives under analysis. The interactive voice represents the need of the researcher to make explicit their own position in relation to their data and its interpretation. Both require the consideration and acknowledgement of the researcher's position in relation to their participants, so that the truth of their interpretation can be trusted. The Listening Guide, as a structure and a process of data analysis, supports such consideration.

As a professional educator in matters of practice as well as matters of research and theory, I was surprised by my participants' focus on the 'here and now' of their practice, and their lack of engagement with other practitioners beyond their own setting. There was a greater emphasis on care and relationships within their narratives of practice and choice of pedagogy than I had anticipated. The most challenging aspects of their narratives, however, were their limited engagement with an abstract knowledge base, despite their degree studies, and their apparent powerlessness in the management of their practice and governance of their sector. The use of the Listening Guide, however, to structure my analysis has prevented it from becoming simply a matter of noting what is done or not done by these practitioners when articulating their identity. By identifying my own responses to narratives in my initial field notes for Reading 1, this has driven me to explore my surprise, my disappointment, my approval and agreement at what my participants have told me, achieving a deeper analysis than might have been achieved through thematic coding. By presenting findings that have surprised me and challenged some of these expectations, I feel I have avoided the main

dangers posed by my positionality, and upheld the ethical aim of foregrounding the voices of practitioners in my interpretations.

Summary of findings

The research questions set out at the start of this study were:

1. What is the vocational habitus of the early years graduate practitioner?
 - a. What do early years practitioners define as good practice?
 - b. What do early years practitioners define as their professional role or identity?
2. How do they articulate these concepts of identity and good practice?
3. How do these concepts contribute to their understanding of professionalism, and their status as a professional workforce?
4. How can this information be used within professional education to support the development of the reflective, professional early years practitioner?

I will examine my findings in relation to existing literature and also to the two theoretical frameworks applied throughout this study to offer a context for understanding the processes involved in an individual's development of their identity. The final question will be addressed by considering the implication of these findings for a range of 'stakeholder' groups including the professional educators of the workforce, practitioners themselves as individuals, and the workforce as a collective group.

Overall, this study shows that these participants' understanding of their professional status is significantly influenced by their lack of engagement beyond the boundaries of their settings. There is evidence that their degree studies have been a transformative experience for some of the participants in this study. There is also evidence that they have used their knowledge base to inform their leadership of pedagogic practice, and build communities of practice, within their organisations. However, their focus on their immediate practice and relationships has limited their perception of themselves as owners and creators of knowledge, and their lack of a collective voice reduces their power to challenge the regulatory and political frameworks of their practice. It is their isolation rather than a lack of knowledge that has enabled the imposition of a 'from above' professionalization agenda, since there is little evidence from these narratives of a sector wide 'within' from which such an agenda might spring. Workforce reforms that might have appeared to have the potential to empower a workforce have instead facilitated the management and control by government of a privately owned and managed sector. Although these participants are graduate practitioners with degrees, they have not yet acquired the status of graduate professionals. Their studies have furnished them with a broader perspective for evaluating their practice, but they continue to understand the policy context

of the early years sector in terms of their accountability, rather than as an influence or driver of practice to be critiqued itself. Whilst they now have a knowledge base that has the potential to give them greater autonomy over their practice and exercise of judgement, their acceptance without challenge of regulatory framework and other legislation has increased managerial control at a distance. To understand how this has happened, it is useful to consider the theoretical frameworks of Bronfenbrenner and Bourdieu that explain the development of role and identity.

Theoretical frameworks and the development of professional identity - the significance of this study

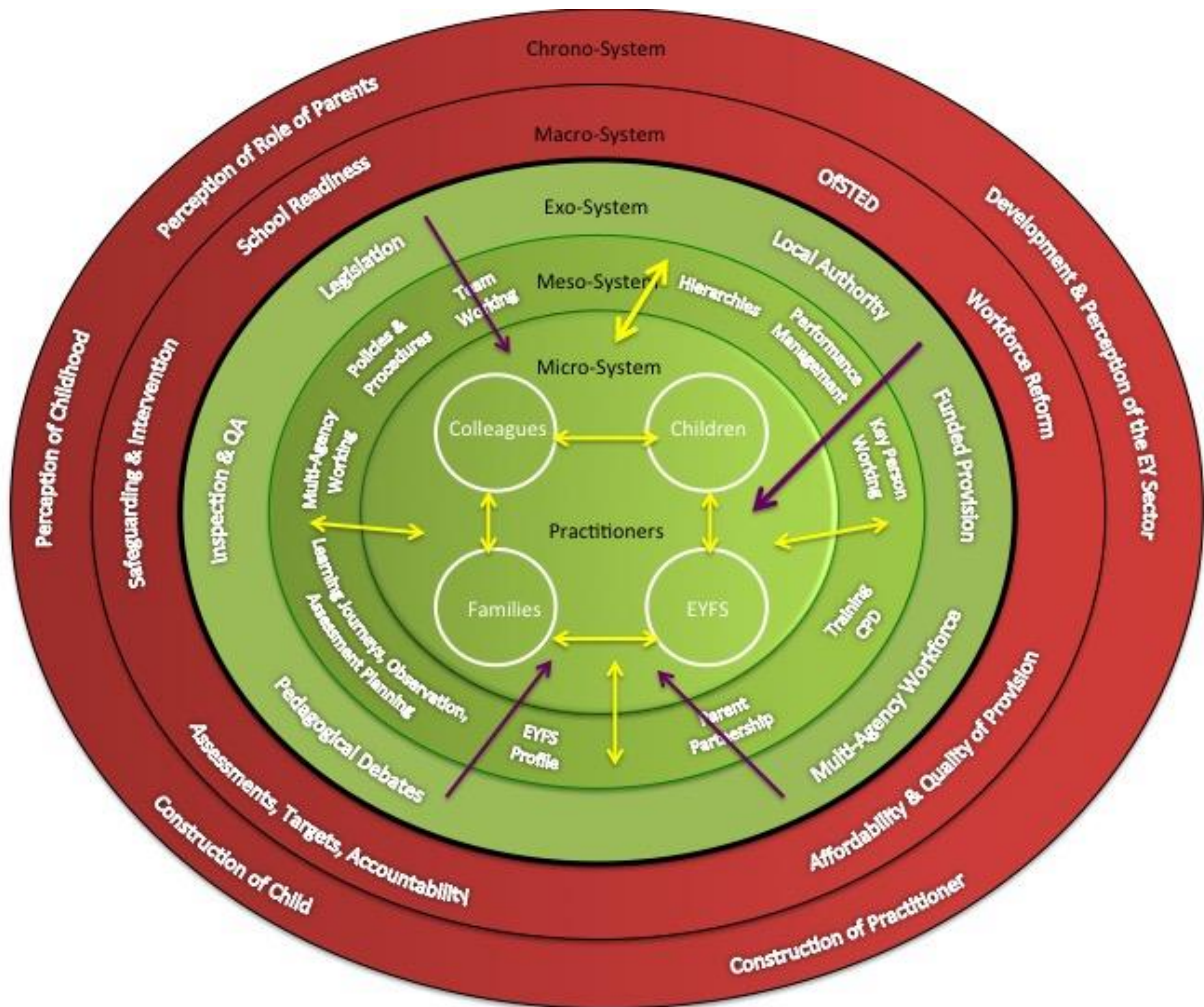
The aim of this study was not only to understand what the professional identity of the early years practitioners was, but also how they constructed this. Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), discussed in Chapter 1, have been useful in identifying how practice is shaped and constrained by regulatory pressures and managerial requirements. Not only do my participants recognise their lack of power over matters of regulation, the definition and measuring of quality, and career progression, but they accept them, despite their frustrations, and the dissonance they experience when required to practice in ways that contradict their personal values or their knowledge. Bourdieu's characterisation of pedagogic processes as a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), promoting a hegemonic understanding of the practitioner role, represents an accurate picture of the influence of the initial vocational training early years practitioners receive (Colley et al, 2003; Colley, 2006). This is what contributes to their development of a vocational habitus based on their interpersonal and relational skills and disposition rather than their ability to understand and critically apply theory and research to their practice. Whilst it might be expected that access to a more empowering, higher-level professional education that encouraged critical reflection and engagement with abstract theory would change practitioners' perception of their role, this has not been the case. Rather than perceiving themselves professionals with specialist knowledge of young children's development, they continue to express their previous vocational habitus, valuing experience over knowledge, and accepting the constraints of management and government. However, beyond confirming that early years practitioners have limited power within their sector, Bourdieu's theoretical framework does not identify why this might be.

This study's contribution to understanding the identity of the practitioner

Existing research has already acknowledged the lack of agency and power of the early years practitioner and the pressure they are under to conform and comply with their existing vocational habitus (for example, Colley, 2003; Osgood, 2006; Lloyd & Hallet, 2010; Hordern, 2016). Bourdieu's theoretical framework shows that the early years sector, like any other social world, is made up of power relations. However, by using

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of personal development (1979, 1986), this study has identified where these power relationships are situated, and how they are perpetuated. The narratives gathered for this study identify how these participants engage and interact with their environment, as shown in Figure 7 below. The yellow arrows indicate two-way interaction between individuals, groups and different systems within the immediate environment of these participants. At the micro- and meso-levels of their environment, these participants demonstrate some agency and autonomy in their relationships with children, families and colleagues, making judgements based on their own experience and knowledge about how best to meet children's needs, and fulfil organisational policies and requirements. The purple arrows indicate that practitioners demonstrate some awareness of national policy and legislation influencing their understanding of their role, but the single direction of the arrow indicates that they exercise little agency in determining how this should shape their own practice. The remaining red levels represent the overall social, political and historical context of their role, where they appear to have little engagement, represented by the solid, black line marking the boundary of the exo-system. This is why they remain practitioners with degrees, rather than empowered professionals with a collective voice that is used to determine their own knowledge base, entry requirements and standards of practice.

Figure 7: Early years practitioners' engagement with their environment



In identifying the nature of practitioners' engagement with their environment, this study has shown how their vocational habitus and restricted agency are perpetuated, not just by government through the power of regulations and funding, but also by practitioners themselves. Their lack of engagement within these systems indicates that these practitioners do not consider the development of policies and procedures at national level to be something they can influence, but rather what they must accept as governing their practice. It is this engagement with their environment that has led to their current understanding of good practice, and the articulation of a strongly values-based professional identity. By limiting their attention to those factors that most immediately impact on their practice, their degree-level professional education appears to be used to support them in the further development of appropriate dispositions towards children, families, and colleagues, keeping them focused on the micro- and meso- levels of their environment.

Their lack of agency in articulating a professional identity, and lack of autonomy over their practice, does not reflect a lack of skill or knowledge, but rather a lack of understanding of how historical, social and political factors have shaped the early years sector and their place within it. They accept social and educational policy as surrounding and structuring their practice, rather than seeing these as issues to be challenged. They have accepted the government's discourse of workforce reform and accountability, understanding that their roles have changed as government priorities have altered, whilst accepting that public perceptions of their practice may not. It is this limited engagement with the factors in the macro- and exo-systems of their environment that leaves them compliant with regulatory and licensing frameworks, as well as facilitating the 'from above' approach to professionalization that currently structures the sector. Their lack of articulation of a specialist knowledge base drawn from theory and research further indicates their lack of engagement with factors beyond their immediate workplace, and perpetuates a vocational habitus that emphasises personal values, and limits their development of an agentic, professional voice. However, if their current vocational habitus arises from the way they engage with their environment at present, this implies that changing their awareness and understanding of the broader systems that influence their practice could support them to develop the agency and confidence to shape this habitus differently in the future. Lumsden (2012) argues that for workforce reform for the early years sector to be effective it must take account of the history of the vocational education and training offered to practitioners, where this was situated and what it offered, to be able to incorporate into new opportunities the professional socialisation required for practitioners to reframe their professional identities. A more detailed discussion of the key findings from the data, in relation to the research questions for this study, and the implications they raise for professional educators and practitioners themselves, is now presented below.

1. The vocational habitus of the early years practitioner

Finding 1: Their vocational habitus, in privileging personal and interpersonal qualities over a specialist knowledge base, particularly personal commitment and motivation, positions them as exercising limited personal agency over their identity and professional status.

These participants understand good practice to comprise a caring and educational role that is led by the individual needs of children, and underpinned by positive team dynamics, and respectful and sensitive relationships with colleagues, children and families, echoing some of the dimensions of professionalism identified in previous research (Dalli, 2008; Oberhuemer, 2005; Moss, 2008; Brock, 2012). They understand their professional identity as being to strive to be as good a practitioner as possible, an identity which is less a matter of status and rank, and more one of having the right values, less a matter of being able to understand and articulate a knowledge base and more one of how their practice is seen to embody their

personal values. They have therefore developed a vocational habitus that privileges personal disposition and values, and interpersonal skills, a finding shared by earlier researchers identifying the professional role of the early years practitioner (for example, Colley, et al, 2003; Manning-Morton, 2006; Moss, 2006; Luff & Kanyal, 2015). This is based on their own commitment to their role, and the quality of the relationships they form with children and their parents, as identified in earlier research (Simpson, 2010). They strive to demonstrate the 'professional love' identified by Page (2011) as the core of ethical and sensitive working with parents, and to put into practice the key principles of the EYFS (DfE, 2017b). In doing so, they use language that is readily accessible to the individuals at the core of their practice, the children and their parents/carers, an ethical choice that potentially positions their practice as emotional rather than intellectual work.

However, this vocational habitus puts them at risk of potential exploitation from their emotional capital (Colley, 2006) invested in their roles. They resolve the dissonance of undertaking demanding work and further study for limited social and economic capital with justifications based on their personal motivation and commitment to their role. However, this focus on personal motivation increases the isolation of the individual practitioner from the wider workforce, undermining the potential for the development of collective agency and voice. Furthermore, by expecting and accepting only limited reward for their commitment they present themselves as, at best, a subordinate profession (Abbott, 1988), perpetuating power relationships that position them as having limited agency within their occupational sector and their organisations (Osgood, 2009). Whilst this finding reflects previous research, the use of Bronfenbrenner's model of ecological development (1986) identifies that this positioning may arise through their lack of engagement with broader political and social influences on their practice, most notably, government policy and funding for early years provision, and parents'/carers' understandings and pre-conception about their roles.

2. Their articulation of professional identity and good practice

Finding 2: In privileging a personal values-base for defining the quality of their practice, they separate their professional identity from its social and political context, reducing the legitimacy of this definition.

Current early years sector discourse promotes an understanding of quality in terms of meeting statutory requirements for registration and inspection (DfE, 2017b), and supporting children to meet the ELGs (Early Education/DfE, 2012). From this discourse, it might be anticipated that an articulation of good practice and professional identity would be framed in terms of government targets, inspection criteria and the overarching principles of the curriculum framework. However, the narratives shared in this study make only limited reference to policy documents and frameworks, focussing instead on the relationships between

practitioners and children, and their understanding of the processes by which children learn. Whilst this indicates a more values-led, personal articulation of identity, it also separates this articulation of identity from some of its professional context.

Murray (2013) argues that professional identity is a negotiation between personal values and the external social, cultural and political norms that give this identity a 'social legitimacy' (Murray, 2013, p.531). Whilst rigidly enforced or binding external constraints may restrict the agency of individuals in articulating their identity in terms of their personal values, too strong an emphasis on how personal values are applied to the immediate sphere of practice can result in a statement of personal ethics, rather than a broader articulation of the role of the practitioner. Manning-Morton (2006) argues strongly that personal values and attributes should underpin practice. However, these values need to be seen to be applied to the wider context of professional practice, including the development of its knowledge base, and the policy and legislation that frame practice in the setting, for them to be accepted as relevant to a professional rather than personal identity. Since these participants demonstrate only limited engagement with the social, political and cultural systems within their environment, their values may underpin their practice, but are unlikely to be used to challenge the discourse that currently frames government funded and regulated early years provision.

Finding 3: They distance themselves from an abstract, specialist knowledge base, reducing the strength of any claim to professional status.

The participants in this study demonstrate in their narratives an understanding of different pedagogical approaches, but they articulate this through a discourse of care, although without overtly presenting themselves as substitute parents to the children they work with. Rather, their emphasis on care and positive relationships emanates from an understanding of young children's emotional needs, and their own desire to recognise and respect the individuality and the needs of children in leading their own play and learning. This use of a discourse of care can be argued to reflect an ethical rather than motherly stance (Luff & Kanyal, 2015), but nonetheless, this articulation of their practice can still be heard as gendered and emotive rather than abstract and academic.

Their narratives indicate that these practitioners have a high level of understanding of child development, of children as constructors of their own learning, and of the importance of effective leadership and positive team dynamics. They should, therefore, be able to articulate their practice in the context of the theory that underpins it, as Chalke (2013) suggests. However, they continue to demonstrate, in the content of their narratives, the separation of academic and practical selves identified by Sims-Schouten and Strittrich-Lyons (2013). To be simply critical of the language used by these participants in their narratives of practice

(Brownlee et al, 2000; Moss, 2005; Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2007) might be to imply that a different vocabulary is all that is required to change their own or public perceptions of their role or their status. Instead, Osgood (2006, p.7) argued that, in order for practitioners to articulate their own professional identity, they need to negotiate and challenge regulatory oversight and the discourse of the sector that drives this, which requires greater engagement with the politics and regulation of the sector. They need to understand why such engagement might result in greater agency over their practice, by changing not only how others (external agencies, policy makers, funders, service users) perceive them, but also how they perceive themselves.

3. Their understanding of their status as professionals

Finding 4: The impact of a relational vocational habitus and their limited engagement with social and political influences within the sector has resulted in the isolation of practitioners, which undermines their claim to professional status.

The participants in this study articulate their professional identity in terms of their relational and interpersonal skills, rather than their knowledge base or their qualifications. In doing so, they could be judged to meet Noordegraaf's (2007) definition of the hybridised professional, which is a "much more relational concept" (p. 774), based on how they practice. This definition of professional status potentially circumvents the issues raised by the diverse nature of the early years sector. However, it implies a context for understanding practice that encompasses the whole of an occupational group, whereas these participants focus on the relationships they form within their own organisations, with little engagement with other practitioners beyond this. The social and economic costs of such networking beyond their own setting significantly impacts on how they develop a sense of their own professional status.

Hordern (2016) highlights the lack of a collective voice from early years practitioners, arguing that this holds them back from playing an active role in developing the knowledge base needed to underpin effective practice. Whilst workforce reform strategies and government policy may regard early years practitioners as a collective workforce, their employment in the PVI sector, and lack of nationally recognised job roles, terms and conditions, foster in them a more individual or organisational perception of their practice and their role. The collective recognised by these practitioners exists at the level of their own settings, rather than across the wider sector, limiting their opportunities for professional socialisation (Lumsden, 2012) and therefore the development of a collective voice as a workforce, with which to engage with government policy or the development of their professional education. Their lack of engagement beyond their setting, with colleagues, partner agencies, or political issues, suggests they see themselves as isolated, limiting their agency in changing the context of their practice and how others see them.

Finding 5: Their reliance on public perception and government licensing to validate their practice also reduces their agency in claiming professional status.

Their narratives have demonstrated that many of them rely on public perceptions and understanding (most particularly parents') of their role to validate their practice, so that the perceptions of others are a powerful factor in their claim to a professional status. However, Abbott (1998) cautions that for public perception to offer powerful support to a claim for professional status, the role should be clearly visible to the public with a high degree of homogeneity. It can be seen from the employment profiles of the participants in this sample that there is considerable diversity of workplace and role for early years practitioners, and the visible element of their role to parents is often relational rather than pedagogic. While the strength of a public endorsement for their professional status lies in its longevity, some of these participants have also found that this can be unhelpful, as they now accept titles and perceptions of their role that do not match their current practice or expertise.

A stronger claim to professional status might be made in terms of practitioners' legal right to practice (Abbott, 1998). However, their acceptance of the government discourse of workforce reform and its strategy, despite the lack of infrastructure to offer them enhanced terms and conditions of employment, indicates individual compliance and acceptance rather than collective agency. Their reasons for this engagement can be characterised as personal ambition, to lead practice or change their role, or as a demonstrable measure of their commitment to improving their own practice, rather than a collective claim for professional or social mobility.

Finding 6: Their creation of knowledge is restricted to their own organisations, and their articulation of a specialist knowledge base is limited and unsophisticated, undermining their status as professionals and constructors of knowledge.

Professional status has also been linked to the ownership and articulation of a unique, specialist knowledge base (Eraut, 1994; Saks, 2012; Hordern, 2016). Many of the participants in this study describe the formation of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) where knowledge about how to practice is created, shared, refined and applied through collaborative teamwork. However, these communities exist only within the confines of their settings, and do not extend to the sector either at local or national level. In articulating their professional identity, these participants make little overt use of the knowledge base they have acquired through their degree studies to explain or reflect on their practice and pedagogy, or to critique government or setting policy. Whilst this may be disappointing to a professional educator, it has greater significance in highlighting how these practitioners understand their role as professionals and engage with those who shape the structure of the sector.

The limited articulation of their knowledge base, evidenced in their narratives, is restricted to describing practice rather than their understanding of the application of developmental and pedagogic theory. This superficial and personal approach to evaluating practice reduces their voice to that of subjective knowing (Johns, 2004), rather than the more agentic constructed knowing (Johns, 2004) that would position them as creators of knowledge in their workplace and in the sector. Murray (2006, 2017) whilst arguing that practitioners are well placed as action researchers to participate in research that informs practice and policy, also acknowledges that they struggle to articulate the findings of such research through channels policy makers consider credible. There are limited opportunities for sharing knowledge across the sector, and the pedagogic approach of their Level 3 qualifications means that they are unlikely to view themselves as potential authors and publishers. Their university studies have further encouraged them instead to draw on the published expertise of those outside practice. Their limited articulation of a specialist knowledge base indicates that these participants have yet to claim ownership or participate in the development of this key element of professional status.

4. What does this mean for the professional education of reflective, professional early years practitioners?

The degree-level professional education these practitioners have all undertaken might have been expected to be a transformative learning experience, with its emphasis on critical reflection of practice. However, whilst it has extended their knowledge of theory and research, it does not appear to have prompted an empowering level of questioning about how theory and policy are applied to practice, nor has it encouraged them to consider practice across their sector. These participants have demonstrated they have developed a vision of practice within which to evaluate their work with children, families and colleagues (Dyer & Taylor, 2012), but one which is so personal that it isolates rather than empowers them, and encourages them to view themselves as ethical rather than intellectual workers, restricting their agency in developing a specialist knowledge base for their workforce. The workforce reform strategies introduced by government (DfES, 2006) were intended to raise quality in early years provision. I would argue that this is most effectively achieved, not by the development of a workforce simply compliant with regulation, but by the development of a workforce which has confidence in critically interpreting and applying a specialist knowledge base to their practice to meet the best interest of children. This study shows that to achieve this, practitioners need not only an understanding of child development and pedagogic theory, but also an understanding of their responsibility in critiquing and developing this knowledge base. This raises implications for the early years sector that are located in the curriculum of their professional education, the pedagogic approaches used, and in the actions of practitioners themselves.

Implications for the professional educators of the sector

Curricular implications

The participants in this study have all acknowledged the usefulness of the current knowledge base used in their Level 3 qualifications and ECS degrees, and there is evidence of this informing their practice in their narratives. However, their continued separation of their academic knowledge from their practice and interpersonal skills has restricted the voice they use to articulate their understanding of good practice. Whilst this is in part a matter of pedagogy, it also reflects their lack of understanding of the relationship between ethical values and practice, social and political factors and the development of provision. Reframing positive, affectionate relationships and care practices as ethics that underpin effective pedagogy rather than reflect the appropriate disposition of a practitioner, would lead to a more intellectual rather than emotive understanding of care. This would elevate it as a practice to the expertise of the critically reflective practitioner rather than the instinctive and gendered behaviour of a competent technician (Moss, 2006).

Murray (2013) also argues that within competence-based frameworks for practice, practitioners particularly need to be encouraged to develop self-awareness if they are to practice effectively. Critical reflection needs to be embedded as a core skill within the teaching of child development and pedagogic theory, curriculum development, and practice skills, as a means of integrating the academic and practical selves of the practitioner. Such an integration of the examination of values and theoretical knowledge will also support student practitioners in articulating a more intellectual, rather than personal, basis for their practice ethics. This requires raising their understanding of the power of social and political factors in shaping their sector and their practice, so that good practice moves from being a matter of compliance to one of informed judgement, and professional identity is no longer located in the sharing of recognised and prescribed practices, but in individuals' contributions to communities of practice. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) argued that personal development grows from an individual's understanding and engagement with their environment. This study, like that of Lumsden (2012), has already demonstrated that the development of the practitioner role has not followed a simple linear trajectory of increasing skill, responsibility and complexity, but has been shaped particularly by the changing social, cultural and political agenda to be found in the exo- and macro-systems. A professional education that overlooks this chaotic aspect (Lumsden, 2012) of changes to their role limits the capacity of practitioners to understand their occupational environment and engage with it fully in order to assert a more Subjective Voice (Johns, 2004) and claim a professional status.

Pedagogic implications

The reason for practitioners' lack of agency within their sector may also lie with the pedagogical approaches of both their initial vocational training and their degree studies. Both Level 3 qualifications and EYPS/EYTS accreditation, which represent the starting point and highest finishing point of qualifications for early years practitioners, take a competence-based approach, described by Murray (2013) as a rational approach to professional education implying an externally defined right way to practice. The ECS degrees designed to meet the Statement of Requirements (DfES, 2001) promoted the development of reflective practice and critical evaluation theory and research, implying the adoption of a more transformative pedagogy (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Sector endorsement for ECS degrees no longer exists, and for degree programmes now to offer their graduates the status of Early Years Educator, they simply need to include an unspecified amount of placement experience. However, this does not mean that the vital skills of critical reflection should be removed from these programmes.

Higher-level professional education should be understood by students to be a challenging process of critical analysis of the theory, legislation and policy that has shaped their sector. The role of the professional educator should, therefore, be re-framed as a facilitator of this critical process, rather than the transmitter of established orthodoxy about the right way to lead and develop practice. If both student and teacher approach degree-level study with this understanding of the value of such a transformative pedagogy, then the role of the graduate Early Years Educator will be separated from their Level 3 colleagues, and practitioners may be supported to develop a more positive view of their status and the role in leading practice. The networking and professional support activities and opportunities sought by practitioners newly accredited with EYPS (Lumsden, 2012) would make a valuable contribution here, and local authorities and HE providers have a significant role to play in facilitating and supporting these. However, there also needs to be active involvement from the early years workforce, and therefore they require an education that empowers them.

Implications for the workforce themselves, their agency and autonomy

Raising practitioners' self-awareness of their identity, and drawing their attention to the influence of social and political factors on their practice, empowers them to make informed choices about how they view themselves and their practice. However, for claims to agency and autonomy over practice and identity to be effective, they need to be made *by* the workforce, rather than on behalf of the workforce. The professionalization agenda introduced by government was only going to afford practitioners a limited autonomy in determining their role, since it was introduced by the same body that regulates and licenses, i.e. controls, practice. It would be easy to dismiss such a reform strategy as a cynical attempt by the State to control private provision. However, regardless of intention, Hordern (2016, pp.509. 510) argues that

external control of professional standards and knowledge has the potential to create “a relationship of dependence on those external bodies that have the power to stipulate a specific model of professionalism”. For the early years workforce, this relationship of dependence is how the power of the field has been exerted over their habitus. For this to change, habitus needs to exert power over field, which calls for the workforce as a collective to challenge how they see themselves and how others see them.

While professional educators, in revisiting the curriculum and pedagogy of their own provision can make a valuable contribution to addressing this relationship, only the practitioners themselves have the power to change it. Wider engagement across their sector and beyond their organisations, and a clearer articulation of the knowledge base they use to inform their practice, supported by the confidence and self-awareness they gain from their degree studies, are what will develop their voices as professionals. A deeper understanding of ethical practice that links personal values to pedagogy will move their vocational habitus and public perception of their role from being individuals who care to individuals who know. Active involvement in the development of knowledge drawn from practice and experience will not only challenge the current value placed on care practice (Davis & Degotardi, 2015) but will also encourage practitioners to claim their status as creators rather than recipients of knowledge. This places great responsibility on early years practitioners to drive change in a sector with a history of having change driven by the needs and requirements of others. By listening to the voice of practitioners, their professional educators can work with them to support their development.

Recommendations

In making recommendations arising from the findings of this study and their implications, I recognise that neither the HE sector nor any other body of professional educators can significantly reorganise the structure of the early years sector. What they can do, however, is address practitioners’ understanding of their own agency in determining their role and professional identity. My recommendations are aimed at addressing the apparent isolation of graduate, early years practitioners found in this study, and supporting them in developing a broader understanding of the factors that shape their identity and their status:

- the adoption of an overtly transformative rather than technical rational pedagogy for their professional education
- the reframing of the teaching of critical reflection
- the reframing of interpersonal skills and a relational approach to practice as an intellectual, ethical stance for pedagogy
- the involvement of practitioners in published research

This first recommendation is intended to encourage in graduate practitioners a sense of their own right to question and challenge the doxa of early years practice, and to recognise their own capacity to contribute to the knowledge base underpinning practice. A transformative pedagogy, although challenging at first, encourages the learner to form their own judgements through critical evaluation of research and practice, rather than accepting the received wisdom of others. Such a pedagogic approach is what will encourage practitioners to develop the more agentic voice of constructed knowing (Johns, 2004), as they integrate personal values and experience with abstract, academic research. This drawing together of the practical and the academic selves is required to support the development of a graduate practitioner who is recognised not only for the relational and interpersonal skills they bring to their work, but also their understanding of how these qualities are essential for young children's learning and development.

Whilst the teaching of critical reflection will necessarily include introducing students to different models and strategies that support the process of reflection, it should also include the exploration of professional identity and professional values. Within a transformative pedagogic approach, this would also include the challenging of taken for granted values and expectations, and discussion on the responsibilities of a workforce in determining its own standards of practice. Such an approach moves critical reflection from being a performance management tool that focuses on the use of resources and the measurable outcomes of practice, to a deeper consideration of what practice is intended to achieve, and for whom, and the ethical as well as the practical implications of this.

Underpinning the first two recommendations is the need for graduate practitioners to recognise that their personal values and their relationships with the children in their care represent an intellectual, ethical stance underpinning their practice rather than an emotional response to young children. They need to move beyond an acknowledgement of attachment theory in underpinning key person working, and understand that their affective connection with children is part of their overall pedagogic approach to their practice. Further, they need to be supported in articulating this, so that interpersonal skills are no longer dismissed as a respectful and affectionate disposition, but are recognised as the professional language and expertise of the practitioner.

Finally, the involvement of practitioners in research will not only reinforce the transformative pedagogy of their degree studies by challenging assumptions about practice and children's development, but it also offers a further opportunity for them to position themselves as contributors to their specialist knowledge base. HEIs are well placed to build research capacity (Murray, 2006) and collaborate with graduate as well as undergraduate practitioners in undertaking the small-scale research activities that are vital to the development of effective practice and which may lead to publication. This not only empowers practitioners

as experts in their field, but encourages them to engage with the wider social environment that surrounds their practice, reducing their isolation and drawing them into a wider community of practice, beyond setting boundaries, where they can engage with colleagues from different organisations as well as different agencies.

The importance of a transformative pedagogical approach to the professional education of the graduate practitioner underpins all these recommendations. However, such an approach requires the learner to question taken for granted assumptions and practices, challenging not only the vocational habitus they have internalised, but also the power of regulatory and licensing authorities and employers. Although such challenge is possible, it is unlikely to be mobilised by practitioners who regard themselves as relatively powerless, lacking confidence in their academic knowledge, and restricted to their own organisations. It is also less likely to be mobilised by a workforce that has come under increasing government scrutiny, as this has the effect of reducing opportunities for them to claim autonomy (Hordern, 2016).

For the participants in this study, being an early years practitioner means meeting the needs and requirements of others. For future practitioners, this vocational habitus can be transformed into a more agentic perception of their role through the medium of professional education. The findings from this study indicate that it is not diversity but isolation that discourages the sharing of practice and knowledge, and that graduate practitioners need to move beyond the micro- and meso-systems of their practice to claim autonomy in determining their role and identity. Professional education that is independent of the immediate environment of practice and regulation, locating itself in the exo-system of the sector, and combining issues of practice knowledge and skill with social and political understanding and critical self-awareness, can address some of this isolation and lack of engagement. However, for this to be addressed only by HEIs or local government agencies bringing practitioners together simply compounds the lack of agency of this workforce, and risks such opportunities being viewed as compliance rather than empowerment. The workforce itself, with the confidence gained from higher level professional education, must also take responsibility for challenging the structure of the sector if it is to develop agency and autonomy over what it means to be an early years practitioner.

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Appendices

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Appendix 1 – Participant Profile Summary

Participant Profile Summary

Number	Pseudonym	Setting	Highest EY Qualification	Level of qualification	Experience - years
1	Alice	Childminder	Foundation degree	5	15
2	Betty	School year 1	Foundation degree	5	Placement 4
3	Claire	School nursery	Foundation degree	5	10
4	Dorothy	School	Foundation degree	5	Placement 4
5	Eleanor	Childminder	Foundation degree	5	20 weeks
6	Florence	School nursery	BA Hons Early Years	6	25
7	Gail	Children's Centre	BA Hons Early Years	6	9
8	Helen	Children's Centre	Foundation degree	5	3 months
9	Iris	Day care (school site)	BA Hons Early Years with EYPS	6	8
10	Janet	Children's Centre	Foundation degree	5	10
11	Katy	Pre-school	Foundation degree	5	20
12	Laura	Day care	Foundation degree	5	2
13	Meg	Day care (hospital trust)	Foundation degree	5	7
14	Nina	Day care	Foundation degree	5	5
15	Penny	Pre-school	BA Early Years with EYTS	6	9.5
16	Rose	Primary school	Foundation degree	5	2+
17	Sally	Primary school	Foundation degree	5	14
18	Tina	Children's Centre	Foundation degree	5	19
19	Valerie	Childminder	Foundation degree	5	5
20	Yvonne	School nursery	Foundation degree	5	7
21	Zoe	Pre-school; out of school club	Foundation degree	5	7
22	Emily	First school	Foundation degree	5	4
23	Hannah	Pre-school	Foundation degree	5	5+

Appendix 2 – Florence: Reading 1

Reading 1 – Plot

Participant: Florence

Key phrase	Reaction/interpretation
<p>That's the title I've been given from the Nursery Nurse Examination Board That's what I've been called since 1989 when I started working</p>	<p>It's not my choice, it's what I have to have – it's what others call me</p>
<p>I've fallen into that category</p>	<p>Not happy with it but has to accept it – fallen – unable to get out, trapped?</p>
<p>I don't class my self as a teacher ...I've not got the Qualified Teacher Status</p>	<p>Dividing practices – what I am not allowed by others to be</p>
<p>[nursery nurse] is a bit no-descriptive for the job I do. It sort of puts you in a carer position where we have to be sort of a carer and an educator</p>	<p>Sells us short in terms of recognition for what we do; lowers our status.</p>
<p>[main purpose] to follow government guidelines, school policies, early years curriculum, ...as well</p>	<p>Like a list from a job description – how much of this is owned at personal level – is she really there to implement govt. policy? Again, is this what she is told by others to do?</p>
<p>you've to be counsellor to the parents, shoulder for the other staff, support for the children</p>	<p>Very relational account of her job role</p>
<p>we do have a timetable we have a weekly planning meeting ...we storm ideas ... we put plans together</p>	
<p>you're just put in different areas of nursery</p>	<p>Very 'we' account – team working, collective activity; little personal ownership here.</p>
<p>personally?</p>	<p>Lack of agency – do as told, deployed by someone else rather than autonomous</p>
<p>It is supposed to happen but if you've got a child that needs child initiated play and they need to be left alone doing that play and you're pulling them out of that to do a planned task, for me personally that could be detrimental to that play that that child's doing at that particular time. So then I would leave that child</p>	<p>Questions that her own ideas are being sought – happens more than once – where is her sense of agency and autonomy? A very oblique way of saying practice should be child-led – justifies/almost excuses her priority of stepping outside team planning and overall routine and timetable. Seems to highlight tension between what she thinks is good practice and how the setting is run.</p>
<p>That's from a professional view but personally I</p>	<p>Separation of professional from personal – real</p>

<p>think</p> <p>It's they feel safe, so they feel secure, they're settled, they're comfortable</p> <p>Policy wise we have to do the phonics and we have to do the literacy and we have to do maths</p> <p>It's just finding that balance and sometimes it's really difficult when you've got assessments and targets to meet from the profile</p> <p>[job performance] we have achievement targets that we have to aim towards</p> <p>we'll get feedback from adequate down to outstanding</p> <p>we just get feedback on a tick sheet and a score from 1 to 4 and a only little observation of how you did</p> <p>I always keep the children in mind</p> <p>If I've made a mistake or I've said the wrong thing or done the wrong thing</p> <p>Stepping up to what you need to do</p> <p>Years and years ago I would have spouted off policy and procedures</p> <p>Not only the theory side but a large part of it is thinking about what you're doing daily</p> <p>you have get the list and find them because there's this target that has to be met and for me that sort of is a bad day because it's not free flowing, it's not working like it should, there's no fun and playfulness, it's a case of meeting the target which then causes pressure. So then you're thinking more or less on ages and stages lines whereas you're not thinking more a scaffolding and working at that kid's level, for me that's a bad day.</p>	<p>lack of autonomy for her in this setting</p> <p>Priority is about meeting emotional and social well-being</p> <p>Stresses 'we have to do' – who is controlling all these demands?</p> <p>Who says so – league tables? Funding requirements? Head teacher? Tension between what children need and what the setting requires. Definite lack of agency in her practice.</p> <p>Why – from where</p> <p>OfSTED grading – very authoritarian</p> <p>Never says who from; does not seem impressed by quantity or quality of feedback but does not question/challenge the process.</p> <p>Self evaluation focuses on children – their response, their behaviour rather than an assessed learning outcome</p> <p>Interesting negative response to a question about knowing if you're doing a good job – why the focus on getting things wrong? Ethos of setting? Management style? Conscious of higher authority?</p> <p>Meeting some else's expectations? Concerned with being seen to do the job well by others?</p> <p>Seems unaware that she did in terms of what her role is!</p> <p>Talks about theoretical knowledge and reflection which heavily underpin the degree she did</p> <p>Again, tension of meeting targets against free flow play; mechanistic rather than holistic view of children's development – target driven rather than naturally developing through play. Reference to scaffolding, ages and stages, playfulness – some awareness of terminology of research and theory of early years Criticizes aspects of practice yet does not challenge setting ethos.</p>
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<p>You've got to do it from your heart You've got to be patient, understanding, empathy ... I think you have to have a love for kids</p>	<p>Personal commitment, motivation – the need to be emotionally connected to the role. Sensitivity and interpersonal skills.</p>
<p>You have to have that spark to keep going</p>	<p>The need to find the role intrinsically motivating – because there are few other rewards to be had for it?</p>
<p>You've got to find something from somewhere to keep that fun and that enjoyment for the kids</p>	<p>Starting to see her priorities – not the children's learning but their well-being.</p>
<p>Appealing and set out so the kids are going to go in and enjoy that</p>	<p>Bench mark of quality – not performance tables or staff team working.</p>
<p>Good practice is sort of being on the side lines and sort of getting down on their level and engaging</p>	<p>A very child-led view of good practice – not getting in the way of the children, not operating from an 'adult knows best' perspective – straight out of Bruce/Moyles but no mention of these.</p>
<p>Good practice narrative – p.19 – largely in 'we' terms, and a lot of detail about the morning and the parent and the children. Describes whole morning and attempts to keep to routine</p>	<p>Needs to be asked to bring this back to what is good practice – it seems to be important to show how chaotic the day can be and how much can happen simultaneously.</p>
<p>He was just full of joy, full of enjoyment, smiling</p>	<p>Child's response is benchmark of good practice.</p>
<p>I see them as a second family ... we do as much as we can for them while they are there</p>	<p>Personal commitment to children and families, affective connection.</p>
<p>If they're happy and they know they can achieve then they'll progress</p>	<p>Very straightforward statement underpinning her view of practice – but has not used this to challenge management and organization offsetting. Why not?</p>
<p>Priority should be I suppose to stay and build the learning that was happening there but it is really difficult to prioritize because there's that many individuals who need that many different things</p>	<p>No links to research, theory, even EYFS.</p>
<p>Priority should be I suppose to stay and build the learning that was happening there but it is really difficult to prioritize because there's that many individuals who need that many different things</p>	<p>Tension in meeting range of different needs – no mention of understaffing, again no challenge to management of setting.</p>
<p>If we'd not had the timetable that little boy's telescope ... his learning could have been built on ...because of the timetable and the routine that had to stop</p>	<p>Overt criticism of organization of the setting – in terms of meeting children's needs.</p>
<p>We do have to have a timetable ... because we're structured like school, so we have to have the register ...personally no, we don't need a timetable</p>	<p>Why is this a personal critique – it seems to be a professional opinion based on experience and knowledge of how children learn best.</p>
<p>We need a routine but I don't think it has to be structured as such that pay or development is cut short ... you can do your 3d solids, shapes while</p>	<p>A very articulate critique of a knowledgeable practitioner but clearly one who feels she has no authority to voice this or effect change.</p>

<p>you've got your junk modeling ...but you know we have to have a timetable</p> <p>The flip side is how do you prepare the for school if you've not got the timetable set for your PE and your music and your group work</p> <p>The day care provision we've got at school, the people work with and put their needs first, the children</p> <p>I don't really agree with taking a 3 or 4 year old into an office to see the Head Teacher either. But sometimes you have to.</p> <p>[conflict with policies] it's from top down and you're actually on the front line and you're dealing with little people and it's totally different to reading it from a book or from a sheet ...reading things from a policy or book just sometimes doesn't work</p> <p>you're just continuously trying to solve problems</p> <p>you're just trying to please everybody all the time, the parents, the kids, the staff, that's what you do you don't really notice yourself because you're just doing for others all of the time</p> <p>as long as they're coming in happy, they're safe, they feel secure, they're content ...if they are then I know I'm doing my job right</p>	<p>Tension between what early years should be providing; some recognition that adult agenda overlooks needs of child</p> <p>Children's needs are a priority</p> <p>Again, the notion that she is doing things because others tell/expect her to – lack of agency in this setting.</p> <p>War metaphor – does she realize this? Feeling that those who write policy are removed from practice and don't understand it – but seems to have no authority or agency to write own policy.</p> <p>But not problems of agency and autonomy that she describes above. Very child-centred problems – behaviour, progress, etc.</p> <p>At the expense of personal autonomy and agency? Even when you have experience and knowledge that tells you what you are trying to do is inappropriate or never going to work? Distinct lack of power in this role.</p> <p>Children come first, emotional well-being rather than learning outcomes.</p>
<p>Summary box:</p> <p>Themes: Bowling to authority – title, timetable, structure - powerless Children's emotional well-being Child-led practice Problem based reflections – addressing negatives rather than celebrating positives</p> <p>Plot: What others tell me to do Distinct shift throughout interview from 'official' account of role to personal view of what the practitioner and she herself is there to do. Pleasing everyone else</p> <p>Protagonists: Children</p>	

Appendix 3 – Florence: Reading 2

Reading 2 - Florence

I: What do you actually call yourself if somebody says what do you do?

F: As a job status?

I: As a job title.

F: It's Nursery Nurse

I: That's what you call yourself?

F: Yes

I: Why?

F: Because that's the title that **I've been given** from the Nursery Nurse Examination Board when **I passed** the certificate and then all the jobs after that were set as Nursery Nurse, so **I've fallen into** that category.

I: Are you happy with that?

F: No.

I: What would you like to call yourself?

F: **I don't know.** **I don't class myself** as a teacher as such because **I've not got** the Qualified Teacher Status but **I think** Nursery Nurse is a bit non descriptive for the job that **I do**. It's sort of puts you in a carer position where we have to be sort of a carer **and** an educator at the same time.

I: You don't use the term Practitioner?

F: No

I: An Early Years Practitioner?

F: No. At the school where everybody's got their job titles put underneath their photographs it is Nursery Nurse.

I: Right so that's what the school calls you?

F: Yes and that's what **I've been called** since 1989 when **I started working**.

I: But you've never thought 'No I'm not going to call myself that'?

F: No

I: Right. Ok. What's the main purpose of your job then?

F: To follow government guidelines, school policies, early years curriculum, adhere to anything, routines, be a Key Worker, do assessments, observations on a professional level and work in parent partnerships as well.

I: What would you define as a 'professional level'?

F: Following the procedures of school and the EYFS and being a positive role model for the children that are in my care.

I: So on a day-to-day basis, what do you do, what does it mean to be Nursery Nurse in your setting?

F: Well from starting at half past 8 onwards while half past 3?

I: Yes just roughly.

F: Setting up quality provision, meet and greet as the children come in, assessments, observations

I: Of the children?

F: Of the children yes. Monitoring, on-going, it's sort of look, think, do. You're watching what they are doing and then you're acting on it. Sometimes you've to be a counsellor to the parents, a shoulder for the other staff, support for the children. It varies on a day-to-day basis. Your actual job description to what you actually do when you're thinking on your feet.

I: So is there a structured timetable, is it a free flow kind of environment?

F: There is a routine set out. We do have a timetable but given the environment, that can waiver depending where you've had accidents or upsets but the rule of thumb is Register half past 8 while about 20 to 9, free play, in between that there are structured group activities, and then we have an organised tidy up time, then back to the planned/free play, then story and then more or less home time and in between that we have music sessions and PE so it's very much

I: And this is across a half day session?

F: This is 2 half days so you've got structure ... So it's the same pattern morning and afternoon but yes you follow that same structure daily, you're just put in different areas of nursery throughout the week.

I: **So across a week you could be carrying out planned activities, planning those activities yourself?**

F: No we have a weekly planning meeting on a Wednesday where we storm ideas and then work on what the kids need and then we put plans together.

I: **But you're part of that planning process?**

F: Yes

I: **What would say is the main focus, what is the priority for you in all of that?**

F: Personally?

I: **Yes**

F: You're acting on each individual child and their needs. Professionally sometimes that It is supposed to happen but if you've got a child that needs child initiated play and they need to be left alone doing that play and you're pulling them out of that to do a planned task, for me personally that could be detrimental to that play that that child's doing at that particular time. So then **I would leave** that child and maybe put them in a group a few days following and not stick to the plan or the timetable.

I: **So your priority is to follow the child within whatever the classroom requires them to do.**

F: Yes

I: **Right. Ok. Cos it's interesting, when I said 'What does it mean to be Nursery Nurse in your setting?' you start with policies and Initiatives.**

F: That's from a professional view but personally **I think** their wellbeing and their self-esteem and keeping them in your mind all the time.

I: **Cos that was the other thing I was going to ask when you said it's about meeting the children's needs, which needs are we talking about? Are we talking about learning and maths and phonics or are we talking about**

F: For me, it's so they feel safe, so they feel secure, they're settled, they're comfortable and then all of that follows. But policy wise we have to do the phonics and we have to do the literacy and we have to do maths, and honestly some are not ready when they come in to do that even after a term they're not ready. If they come from a stressful environment and you're wanting highly structured activity, you're not going to get it if they've not done their own little bit in play first. It's just finding that balance and sometimes it's really difficult when you've got assessments and targets to meet from the profile.

I: but personally your priority would be their social and emotional wellbeing then learning targets?

F: Yes

I: How would you know if you were doing your job well?

F: From a professional point of view we have continuous professional development; we have achievement targets that we have to aim towards. We will get observed and lesson plans every half term, termly then we'll get feedback from adequate right down to outstanding, that's either from your Line Manager or from your Head Teacher but then **I always think** 'Are you as good as the person that is observing you or should there be an External body coming in and observing'. Then we just get feedback on a tick sheet and a score from 1 to 4 and tiny little written observation of how you did.

I: So you get through a very formal system and that's once every half term.

F: Yes

I: How do you know on a day to day basis if you're doing a good job or not?

F: Personally?

I: Yes

F: **I always keep** the children in mind and if **I've made** a mistake or **I've said** the wrong thing or done the wrong thing then **I will try** and correct it immediately but **I think** it's that fast pace in nursery, sometimes you're automatic, you're on automatic pilot you're not actually you've not got the goals and the aims in the back of your mind all the time, you're looking for triggers of what's going to cause little Timmy to have, you know, a big behavioural

problem. You're looking for the ones who are going to burst into tears because they know its story time and mum's coming home soon. **I base it on** looking at them and finding out when their triggers spots are and then trying to stop that in an emotional

I: So it's how the children are?

F: Yes but **I don't really**, ... **I suppose thinking about it** the only way through that, **I've not thought** about this before, would be observation technique. Your looking, your thinking and your acting, but then you have to do that continuously anyway to make sure that you're stepping up to what you need to do. **I hadn't really thought** about that actually.

I: In terms of knowledge and skill what do you need to be able to do your job well? What knowledge, what skills?

F: If you would have asked me that **when I did** the nursery nurse exam years and years ago **I would have just spouted off** policy and procedures. Now after doing the FDA and the BA it's got to be, not only the theory side but a large part of it is thinking about what you're doing daily, even though **I've just said** sometimes it is automatically, you still have that little thing in the back of your mind, where if you have a good day and things went well then you would do it again, if you had a bad day you'd probably not do that or say that or plan that or act like that and you'd correct it that way.

I: Back to the bad day and doing things wrong, how do you know you've done it wrong? If you plan and activity or you set out continuous provision, how do you know it's wrong?

F: You get a sort of a gut feeling to how it's going to run and **I think** that's from experience from years and years. You can set up an activity and you can shout those kids down to come to you on your list but you know the ones that are going to get the most out of it, if you get swamped, you know they come to you and then you can build on that and that for me is a good day. The ones where you have get the list and find them because there's this target that has to be met and for me that sort of is a bad day because it's not free flowing, it's not working like it should, there's no fun and playfulness, it's a case of meeting the target which then causes pressure. So then you're thinking more or less on ages and

stages lines whereas you're not thinking more a scaffolding and working at that kid's level, for me that's a bad day.

I: Right, where targets and policies overtake what children want to do.

F: Yes

I: Right. Ok. So in terms of knowledge, yes degree level is what you're saying?

F: Yes

I: What about the skills? What about how somebody is as a person and what they can do?

F: To do this job?

I: Yes. To do it well.

F: **I think** you've got to do it from your heart. **I think** you've got to be patient, understanding, empathy. It's quite difficult to sort find a phrase or words to capture just exactly what you do because **I think I've done it** for that long, it just comes naturally. But **I think** you have to have a love for kids, it's got to be there you can't just think 'Oh **I was going to do** hairdressing but **I'm going to do** this' you know you have to really want to do it because it's hard work, its physically draining, it's sometimes emotionally draining and **I think** you have to have that spark to keep going even if it gets to 2 o'clock where you could sit down and not move. You've got to find something from somewhere to keep that fun and that enjoyment for the kids because it is difficult.

I: So fun and enjoyment has got to be there. That's a key part of good practice?

F: It is yes.

I: Anything else that you would say is good Practice in early years is?

F: It's got to be good quality provision for me.

I: What would that be?

F: No tatty things, everything's colourful, you know, appealing and set out so the kids are going to go in and enjoy that, but then how do you know what that is and **I think** that is through years of experience as well. Because if you know your kids you know what you can provide so you do have to know.

I: So good practice comes with experience?

F: Yes **I think it does, I think it does.** **I think** when you're new and you start out, when **I look back**, there were things that **I did** that **I wouldn't do** now. **I think I've learned** to listen more, observe more, just sit back sometimes and watch and not think you have to be at the side of that child every time to get a good written observation where you could just stand back and not interrupt their play, and then take it from there. **I think** part of good practice is sort of being on the side lines and sort of getting down on their level and engaging instead of **I have** in the past walked straight into play with the clip board and their play has stopped, whereas now I will say '**Can I play, can I come and play?**' and they will direct you. If it's a 'Yes you can' 'No you can't'. And think that's an element of getting right down there and being on their level.

I: What happens if they say no?

F: If they say no, **I just do** what other kids do, **I'll just go** 'Ok' and **I'll pull** a bit of a sad face and then usually you'll get a 'Oh come on you can' but if it's a definite 'No' it'll be 'No another day' or 'Not just yet, you can come later' or sometimes it's just a stomp and a 'No' and then you know you're not needed, for whatever reason, that child wants to be left or that group want to be left.

I: And if you get involved how much can you direct things?

F: It just depends what type of play it is and where that play's going and the group of children that you've got, the cultures and the backgrounds that they come from. If you've got a couple of children who you know who are very highly stressed when they are coming in to nursery and they don't get a moment, they need to be left to play. But usually at the end of the session they will come to you or you can get something from them through midweek. Sometimes it's really easy dependant on the level of play, the vocabulary, sometimes you can interact and you can get some really good play where then you can pull your strands off for your EYFS. Other times you just sort of get this feeling that you're interrupting and it's got to stop and you will just say 'Right I'm going to go and sit over here' or go and play in the sand and do it that way.

I: But you would take yourself out?

F: Yes

I: Good. So give me an example, tell me about something that you've done recently just as a typical example of what you might do in a day or in a session at work. A single event or something you've set up over a number of weeks or just something that gives me an idea of you as a practitioner.

F: Do you mean as an activity or just the overall day, just anything?

I: Either, yes.

F: Well **I would never**, say, plan an activity as though it is going to go to plan. Last week, let me think of last week, we had quite an eventful oh we had It was my Register and one of the mums in my Key Worker group she wanted to have a word, so the woman who was supposed to have been at the door for me had to come down to swop me, because the other member of staff had got a crisis at home, she was on the mobile phone, so we did a bit of a swop. This mum was quite agitated because her son, we think his interaction and communication is not where it should be for somebody at his age. She wasn't very happy so she said she would video him and bring it in on a DVD to show us but during that, we have Self-Registration and some Feelings Cards, happy sad, frightened, angry. She didn't want her child to pick one of these cards up because she didn't think he understood what feelings were, so we were trying to explain that the only way to understand this is if we talk about it and I mentioned to her about Circle Time and SEAL and Personal and Social but she weren't happy. She went away disgruntled so we swopped again to do Register then her child got up and he picked a card off the table. Mum saw this as she was going out the door and came back, so as **I was in** Register, another member of staff dealt with her about that, then as we were supposed to be dispersing to do our Free Choice Activities we had a nose bleed, somebody had a toilet accident, the planned activity didn't really go plan, just thinking on your feet really. When that was sorted we then had a crier who wanted their mum, so **I'd got** her one shoulder, **I'd got** the child with the nose bleed at this side, then we had another accident, somebody had got a tummy bug, so we had to ring for that parent, so

about an hour had gone by and we'd still not really got down to any activities because we were too busy seeing to this.

I: Yes

F: When we did get down to our activities, because we were doing a Pirate Theme for then of term, a little boy who really does not have much speech or interaction made a telescope using 2 cylinders and put one through the other and then pulled it out, which was absolutely fantastic so we went and got the stickers and the Reward Certificates and put him down for a special mention. In between that, somebody had thrown some water over somebody in the water tray, he was absolutely covered, so then because **I was** in that area **I was changing** him so **I had to** leave that child who **I could have extended** that play, to sort out the one in the water. By this time then it was time to tidy up and then us Group Focused activities, we were doing number, shape, that didn't really go according to plan, because another child who has other issues just kept shouting out all the time, basically for attention. So then he upset somebody sat next to him, and then somebody across who was looking at this other child crying, they thought they would join in and start cry, so we did not really abandon that activity but you just have to basically think on your feet. The ones that you had got listening and were in to it, **I sort of had to lay** the numbers down for those so they could find one more one less that could count more or less beyond 10 – 20 and the other 3 **I had just had to sort that out** because the other members of staff were doing their group activities. In the end it got that loud we had to get them all together and just do singing because it just got horrendous. Outside play then, we had about 4 or 5 accidents, bumps, scrapes and then it was story and then it was home time. And that's a typical day basically.

I: So out of all this what you have picked as being good practice?

F: From that?

I: From something like that

F: The little boy with the telescope because weeks prior to that we'd had a tube activity and been looking at 3D shapes. We'd got cubes, tubes, junk modelling, he was putting one thing into another. Another child across had done the same with a box, they'd shoved a

box through the hole and we were discussing positional language in, over, through, out with this little boy that did this telescope it was spontaneous, but you could jump in and you could build on that. But we had built on it a little bit before the wet accident, but his face just lit up as soon as he knew he'd, **I said** 'Ooo look at that, that one comes through there and that smaller one inside that bigger one' And he was just full of joy, just full of enjoyment, smiling, he doesn't smile a lot but his self-esteem was so high because he'd made this construction which he'd then lifted to his eye.

I: Why is that good for you as a practitioner, why was that I mean I can see why it's a good achievement for him, why is that, recognising that and building on that, why is that good practice for you?

F: Because that's why **I'm there to** scaffold this, to build this, to develop this but also to give them that safe and secure little bubble. **I see them as** a 2nd family so when their mums, dads carers aren't there, they're coming to us and we're like their 2nd family and we do as much as we can for them while they are there.

I: So it's very important for you to encourage and boost confidence?

F: Yes and rewards Yes. Praise verbally, stickers, anything.

I: Why?

F: Self-esteem. Confidence. Wellbeing.

I: What's so important about that?

F: So they're happy when they come. So if they're happy and they know that they can achieve then they'll progress. **That's what I think.**

I: And that's what underpins good practice?

F: **I think so.**

I: For you?

F: Yes

I: Right. Ok. Carrying on with this typical morning. Juggling a lot of very different things.

F: Yes

- I: What's the priority? The parent? Wiping the floor so nobody else falls over or?**
- F: Sometimes it becomes Well your first priority is your accidents, you know, your bumps, your scrapes, your wet children. Priority **I suppose should be** to stay and build the learning that was happening there, but it is really difficult to prioritise because there's that many individuals who need that many different things maybe all at one time. You've to sort be in 2 places at once.
- I: Is there anything in that that you would have said 'We shouldn't have done it' or 'We could have done that better' or that was bad practice?'**
- F: Erm
- I: Cos there were a lot of things that you didn't achieve in terms of your intention and there were a lot of things that happened that you hadn't planned to happen. That doesn't necessarily make them bad so I'm wondering if there was anything that you would have picked out that said 'Erm that we could have done something about and could have done it better'**
- F: If we'd not had the timetable, that little boy's telescope that he'd made, his learning could have been built on and we could have gone back to it but because of the timetable and the routine that had to stop because of the other accidents. So maybe more flexibility that way but we do have to have a timetable.
- I: Why?**
- F: Because we're structured like school. So we have to have the Register
- I: I'm seeing the face**
- F: Yes
- I: but the tape isn't but you're saying 'We have to have' but what do you feel?**
- F: Personally, no we don't need a timetable.
- I: You should have been able to go with what was**
- F: Yes we need a routine, but **I don't think** it has to be structured as such, that play or development is cut short because we have to tidy because we have to do PE or we have to go down to the hall to sing or we have to do the structured group work, maybe that could

come in between doing other things. You can do your 3D solids, shapes while you've got your junk modelling and do it that way and you've still got to have your tick list but you could still tick them off. You could do it outside, inside but you know we have to have a timetable.

I: So are you saying there is a possible weakness overall in setting practice in having a timetable that has to be kept rather than following what the children are doing?

F: Yes and **I think** that's not just as a present thing, **I think I've experienced that** in previous posts as well.

I: And this working with children who are age 3 and 4.

F: Yes. But yet how do you The flip side of that is how do you prepare them for school if you've not got the timetable set for your PE and your music and your group work but when they're coming in at 3 do they need a timetable? Maybe the timetable could come the term before they start school or maybe 2 terms before.

I: So you would still put the child, their interests and a little bit of routine as good practice rather than following a structure in the way that you're doing at the moment?

F: Erm.[agreement]

I: Does Good Practice change from age group to age group, type of setting to type of setting or is it something that kind of runs deeper than where it's happening?

F: See definition of good practice in the EYFS can be different to what you witness other people doing or what you think you're doing yourself. **I think as a whole** Different ... gosh You see Day Care is structured differently to your school setting and even though we have wrap around care from Day Care into school, **I think** that, well the Day Care provision that we've got at school, the people work with and put their needs first, the children

I: In a way that you don't? In a way that you can't?

F: It's different because they've got babies right up to 3, 4 and their structure is more flexible. They take their shoes and their socks off in there, you know, they run round, and then they

come into nursery and they take their own shoes and socks off so and it will cause a bit of a discrepancy sometime because our practice as such is you keep your shoes and socks on nursery.

I: Ok so rules change from setting to setting.

F: Yes

I: That I think everybody expects that because people run their settings differently but the Day Care side where you work also had 3 and 4 year olds, they will deal with them differently but is good practice on the Day Care side the same as good practice on your side in terms of what it should be and what it means to be a good practitioner or is there a different definition within a school than there is within Day Care setting or a Child Minding setting?

F: I think, only way to answer that would be to look at Ofsted Reports because we don't get to work in Day Care and Day Care don't get to work in Nursery so nobody sees into this practice.

I: Ok. If you went to work in Day Care and I asked you what you thought Good Practice was would you say anything different to what you've said?

F: No.

I: So the values or the personal qualities or the commitment, which is what you've talked about, that goes wherever the Practitioner goes?

F: I think so yes.

I: I know the practice has changed

F: Yes

I: But that doesn't necessarily mean what you think good practice is Will change. What about bad practice? I mean, you had that very busy morning; the one thing you were critical of was 'We put the timetable before the child'. Is there anything else you would say, not necessarily only out of that morning, but is there anything else that is your kind of 'ohh I really don't like that sort of thing when it happens, I really think that's poor practice'?

F: For myself or from others?

I: **Either**

F: **I don't like** other practitioners raising their voices to younger children. **I don't think** there's any need to do that. **I think** that can be dealt with but sometimes you have to raise your voice and I put my hand up and **I have raised** my voice. When **I've done it**, **I've thought 'No I shouldn't have done it'.**

I: **Why, what's made you think that?**

F: **I just don't think** they need a verbal rebuke, you know, our policy is a time out or a verbal warning, and you do have to make your verbal warning clear, but **I just don't agree** in using a loud sharp voice, but sometimes you have to, depending on behaviour if it's escalated so much that it's getting out of control and harmful to others, you do have to.

I: **But it wouldn't necessarily be a first response, that's when it would be inappropriate?**

F: No, but then we have a Behaviour System anyway and it's gone over the boundaries of that then it's to the office but then **I don't really agree with** taking a 3 or 4 year old in to an office to see the Head Teacher either. But sometimes you have to.

I: **Why, because it's School Policy or because that's the only thing that's going to work?**

F: Yes, 3 strikes and you're out and sometimes that's the last resort when you've tried your time out and you've tried everything else. **I mean I am usually** a bit flexible with it, shouldn't really be but Sometimes like a quiet time out is enough and sometimes it's not. But **I deemed** as bad practice, you see there's really not that much

I: **I mean I have to say at this there's a level of personal conflicts between you and the policies you work within in terms of what you think is appropriate or a good way for a practitioner to behave, is that fair?**

F: Yes it's from, it's top down and you're actually on the front line and you're dealing with little people and it's totally different to reading it from a book or from a sheet, and you're tuned in to how their behaviour and try and think on their level and you know them and you

spending 3 and half hours every day, you do get to know little snippets and **I think** reading things from a policy or a book just sometimes doesn't work.

I: We keep coming back to knowing the children, having the relationship and putting that first as the basis for supporting them, yes?

F: Yes definitely, definitely.

I: Ok. Reflection then.

F: Yes

I: Do you reflect, how do you reflect?

F: oh, reflection (whispered). **I would say** consciously **now I've been** to University, it just depends if something's happened, yes you think about it and you act on it but prior to knowing it was more of a just being conscious of maybe doing the right or wrong thing.

I: You say 'If something's happened', so are we talking about critical incidents?

F: Yes

I: Right, so the stuff that goes wrong?

F: The stuff that goes wrong, for instance, we were sat There were a group of us sat at the mark-making table where there's scissors. This little girl decided to snip a bit of her hair off and in that split second one of us had just turned away because we'd been called somewhere else. Now looking back on that, should we have directed us vision away from a couple in a group who's got scissors, should we have stayed focused or should we have turned round and the behaviour behind let someone else deal with? So it's thing like that that you think all of a sudden 'Right next time I'm looking that way, I'm not Somebody else can deal with that'.

I: Right that answers me I was going to ask 'What do you mean something wrong' but with the scissors it's fairly obvious what you mean. Ok, so you use reflection, is this written or is this just in your head?

F: In my head, it's just mental.

I: Right. Do you do any written reflections or written in a diary or anything like that?

F: No.

I: right. And your reflections focus on critical incidents.

F: Yes

I: You don't go home and think 'That was a good day' or 'Why was it a good day'

F: No.

I: So the reflections that you do are about moving practice on and solving problems?

F: Yes

I: Do you share them?

F: Yes. Wednesdays we get to share at Staff Meetings or if there's anything that we think is deemed urgent then the morning after the day or sometime in that day, yes.

I: Then again it would be about a problem

F: With a child or a parent.

I: It wouldn't be about 'This has gone really well'

F: No

I: Have you ever thought about that before?

F: No, never, not until now. Because you're trying to solve problems either from parents or the children or you're trying to progress them or develop them. You just get lost in your personal identity, yourself, just gets lost because you're just there doing for others.

I: Because you will have had something like a parent coming along and saying 'He really enjoyed that thing yesterday'.

F: We have and we've

I: And you've never taken that to the Wednesday Meeting?

F: No, never. We should do.

I: I'm not saying you should or you shouldn't.

F: Oh but we should do for reflection and our own self-esteem.

I: I find it curious that reflection is a problem solving exercise and only a problem solving exercise.

F: But **I think** that's part of it, **I think** that's part of your job what you do.

I: What?

F: Problem solve. You're forever thinking 'How **can I improve** that' 'How **can I do that better?** if so and so's got this problem then how can we fix it,' we get the family in, talk to the family, behaviour charts' you're just continuously trying to solve problems.

I: If you weren't would you feel that you were letting yourself down as a practitioner?

F: Yes because it wouldn't feel as if you were doing part of your job **I suppose**.

I: Ok.

F: Because it is mainly, that job is very problematic sometimes, can be quite emotional and I've never really known it without a problem. You have some good days, they run pretty smoothly, you've had no accidents, you've had no behaviour, you know, but **I would say** majority of time there's always something to solve.

I: You've never seen reflection as a process where if there's been a good day 'Let's look at what made it good'?

F: Now **I think** the only answer **I can give** to that is with planning, and if we've had a theme or an activity that's gone ok that the kids have enjoyed then we've reused it. Apart from that

I: But you've never looked at why it went well or what made it enjoyable that you might to the next planning of a different theme?

F: No.

I: Right. Again I'm not being critical I'm just trying to understand how you use your reflection. So you reflect about problems and issues and you do that against the idea of what you should be doing and how children should be feeling and what they should be achieving?

F: Yes.

I: So there's a link between your reflecting and your idea of being a good practitioner?

F: Yes because it's basically you're looking for optimum achievement, you're looking for ... trying to be positive role model. You're trying to please all the time. **I think** to narrow it down you're just trying to please everybody all the time, the parents, the kids, the staff, that's what you do.

I: Do you ever try to please yourself?

F: No. No you don't really put yourself in it.

I: I don't mean in terms of 'I'll do what I want' but your own level of satisfaction, your own level of, I don't know, professional confidence or something.

F: Not while you're there doing that job from sort of 8 while quarter to 4 because it's just constant. You don't really notice yourself because you're just doing for others all the time and there's people pulling little bits here there and everywhere and you know, if you've had a bad day you put a smiley face on, if you've got personal problems you put a smiley face on because you know maybe coming through that door there's going to be somebody who needs to tell you something.

I: Ok. Is there anything else you want to say about what you think Good Practice is?

F: Well reflection is a part of it because you do have to think, like I've said, if this happens I will do it in another way this time but it's not necessarily written, like I say, it's mental you have to be conscious of your thoughts and your actions and what you say to others, especially children. It's just one whole, it's the whole thing. It's quite hard to describe really. But you don't think about ... when you go to do your job you don't think 'right I'm doing best practice today' you're just there and you just try your hardest to do the right thing.

I: And the children are at the front of that?

F: Yes and that for me, as long as they're coming in, they're happy, they're safe, they feel secure, they're content, you know, and you've got them there and they know they can come to you and they're formed... I mean some children form a different attachment with different members of staff but you can just tell that by looking at them that the group that we've got they're happy, so if they are, then I know that I'm doing my job right.

I: Your practice is good.

F: And if they were coming in screaming and wanting to run out of the door, obviously it doesn't mean to say that we're not doing good practice and if it was continual every day then you'd want to think Well you would look at yourself; well I would look at myself and think 'Is it me'?

I: And what would you do about it?

F: **If it were me?**

I: Well Is it going to be you or is it going to be things we need to do collectively.

F: Gosh. Probably so, and the environment and everything or it could be problems at home but you do beat yourself up in this job trying to get it right and then the government will come along and they will change the spec of what they deem as what you should and what you shouldn't do which for me looking back to desirable outcomes and EYFS and then this new one. You don't really change yourself to fit a government document you're there because you want to be there and you're doing it from

I: Right so it's not government policy that defines good practice

F: No. I

I: it's something in you?

F: **I think so**

I: Right. Ok. Thank you very much.

Appendix 4 – Florence: I Poem

I Poem: Florence

I've been given I passed I've fallen into
I don't know. I don't class myself I've not got I think I do.
I've been called I started working.

I would leave
I think
I always think
I always keep I've made I've said I will try I think I base it on
I don't really I suppose thinking about it I've not thought I hadn't really thought
when I did I would have just spouted off I've just said
I think
I think I think I think I've done it I think
I was going to do I'm going to do I think
I think
I think it does, I think it does. I think I look back, I did I wouldn't do
I think I've learned I think I have
I will say 'Can I play, can I come and play?'
I just do I'll just go I'll pull
I would never I was in I'd got I'd got
I was I was changing I had to I could have extended I sort of had to lay
I had just had to sort that out
I said
I'm there to I see them as
That's what I think.

I think so.

I suppose should be
I don't think
I think, I think I've experienced that
I think as a whole I think
I think,
I think so yes.

I don't like I don't think I think I have raised I've done it,
I've thought 'No I shouldn't have done it'.

I just don't think I just don't agree
I don't really agree with
I mean I am usually I deemed
I would say now I've been
I think I think
can I improve can I do that better
I suppose.

I would say
I think I can give
I think
like I've said, I will do it I'm doing
I mean I know that I'm doing
I would look at myself 'Is it me'?

If it were me?

I think so

Appendix 5 – Florence: Reading 3

Reading 3: Florence

I: What do you actually call yourself if somebody says what do you do?

F: As a job status?

I: As a job title.

F: It's Nursery Nurse

I: That's what you call yourself?

F: Yes

I: Why?

F: Because that's the title that I've been given from the Nursery Nurse Examination Board when I passed the certificate and then all the jobs after that were set as Nursery Nurse, so I've fallen into that category.

I: Are you happy with that?

F: No.

I: What would you like to call yourself?

F: I don't know. I don't class myself as a teacher as such because I've not got the Qualified Teacher Status but I think Nursery Nurse is a bit non descriptive for the job that I do. It's sort of puts you in a carer position where we have to be sort of a carer and an educator at the same time.

I: You don't use the term Practitioner?

F: No

I: An Early Years Practitioner?

F: No. At the school where everybody's got their job titles put underneath their photographs it is Nursery Nurse.

I: Right so that's what the school calls you?

F: Yes and that's what I've been called since 1989 when I started working.

I: But you've never thought 'No I'm not going to call myself that'?

F: No

I: Right. Ok. What's the main purpose of your job then?

F: To follow government guidelines, school policies, early years curriculum, adhere to anything, routines, be a Key Worker, do assessments, observations on a professional level and work in parent partnerships as well.

I: What would you define as a 'professional level'?

F: Following the procedures of school and the EYFS and being a positive role model for the children that are in my care.

I: So on a day-to-day basis, what do you do, what does it mean to be Nursery Nurse in your setting?

F: Well from starting at half past 8 onwards while half past 3?

I: **Yes just roughly.**

F: Setting up quality provision, meet and greet as the children come in, assessments, observations

I: **Of the children?**

F: Of the children yes. Monitoring, on-going, it's sort of look, think, do. **You're watching what they are doing and then you're acting on it. Sometimes you've to be a counsellor to the parents, a shoulder for the other staff, support for the children. It varies on a day-to-day basis. Your actual job description to what you actually do when you're thinking on your feet.**

I: **So is there a structured timetable, is it a free flow kind of environment?**

F: There is a routine set out. **We do have a timetable** but given the environment, that can waiver depending **where you've had accidents or upsets** but the rule of thumb is Register half past 8 while about 20 to 9, free play, in between that there are structured group activities, and then **we have an organised tidy up time, then back to the planned/free play, then story and then more or less home time and in between that we have music sessions and PE so it's very much**

I: **And this is across a half day session?**

F: This is 2 half days so you've got structure ... So it's the same pattern morning and afternoon but yes **you follow that same structure daily, you're just put in different areas of nursery throughout the week.**

I: **So across a week you could be carrying out planned activities, planning those activities yourself?**

F: **No we have a weekly planning meeting on a Wednesday where we storm ideas and then work on what the kids need and then we put plans together.**

I: **But you're part of that planning process?**

F: Yes

I: **What would say is the main focus, what is the priority for you in all of that?**

F: Personally?

I: **Yes**

F: **You're acting on each individual child and their needs. Professionally sometimes that It is supposed to happen but if you've got a child that needs child initiated play and they need to be left alone doing that play and you're pulling them out of that to do a planned task, for me personally that could be detrimental to that play that that child's doing at that particular time. So then I would leave that child and maybe put them in a group a few days following and not stick to the plan or the timetable.**

I: **So your priority is to follow the child within whatever the classroom requires them to do.**

F: Yes

I: **Right. Ok. Cos it's interesting, when I said 'What does it mean to be Nursery Nurse in your setting?' you start with policies and Initiatives.**

- F: That's from a professional view but personally I think their wellbeing and their self-esteem and keeping them in your mind all the time.
- I: **Cos that was the other thing I was going to ask when you said it's about meeting the children's needs, which needs are we talking about? Are we talking about learning and maths and phonics or are we talking about**
- F: For me, it's so **they feel safe, so they feel secure, they're settled, they're comfortable** and then all of that follows. But **policy wise** we **have to do the phonics and we have to do the literacy and we have to do maths,** and honestly some **are not ready when they come in to do that even after a term they're not ready.** If they come from a stressful environment and you're wanting highly structured activity, you're not going to get it if **they've not done their own little bit in play** first. It's just finding that balance and sometimes it's really difficult when **you've got assessments** and **targets to meet from the profile.**
- I: **but personally your priority would be their social and emotional wellbeing then learning targets?**
- F: Yes
- I: **How would you know if you were doing your job well?**
- F: From a professional point of view **we have continuous professional development; we have achievement targets that we have to aim towards.** We will get observed and lesson plans every half term, termly then we'll get feedback from adequate right down to outstanding, that's either from **your Line Manager or from your Head Teacher** but then I always think '**Are you as good as the person that is observing you** or should there **be an External body coming in and observing**'. Then **we just get feedback on a tick sheet** and a score from 1 to 4 and tiny little written **observation of how you did.**
- I: **So you get through a very formal system and that's once every half term.**
- F: Yes
- I: **How do you know on a day to day basis if you're doing a good job or not?**
- F: Personally?
- I: **Yes**
- F: I always keep the children in mind and if I've made a mistake or I've said the wrong thing or done the wrong thing then I will try and correct it immediately but I think it's that fast pace in nursery, sometimes **you're automatic, you're on automatic pilot you're not actually** you've not got the **goals and the aims in the back of your mind all the time, you're looking for triggers of what's going to cause little Timmy to have, you know, a big behavioural problem.** You're looking for the ones **who are going to burst into tears** because **they know its story time** and mum's coming home soon. I base it on looking at them and finding out when their triggers spots are and then trying to stop that in an emotional

I: So it's how the children are?

F: Yes but I don't really, ... I suppose thinking about it the only way through that, I've not thought about this before, would be observation technique. **Your looking, your thinking and your acting, but then you have to do that continuously anyway to make sure that you're stepping up to what you need to do.** I hadn't really thought about that actually.

I: In terms of knowledge and skill what do you need to be able to do your job well? What knowledge, what skills?

F: If you would have asked me that when I did the nursery nurse exam years and years ago I would have just spouted off policy and procedures. Now after doing the FDA and the BA it's got to be, not only the theory side but a large part of it is thinking about **what you're doing daily, even though I've just said sometimes it is automatically, you still have that little thing in the back of your mind, where if you have a good day and things went well then you would do it again, if you had a bad day you'd probably not do that or say that or plan that or act like that and you'd correct it that way.**

I: Back to the bad day and doing things wrong, how do you know you've done it wrong? If you plan and activity or you set out continuous provision, how do you know it's wrong?

F: **You get a sort of a gut feeling to how it's going to run and I think that's from experience from years and years. You can set up an activity and you can shout those kids down to come to you on your list but you know the ones that are going to get the most out of it, if you get swamped, you know they come to you and then you can build on that** and that for me is a good day. The ones where **you have get the list and find them** because **there's this target that has to be met** and for me that sort of is a bad day because it's not free flowing, it's not working like it should, there's no fun and playfulness, it's a case of meeting the target which then causes pressure. So then **you're thinking more or less on ages and stages lines whereas you're not thinking more a scaffolding** and working at that kid's level, for me that's a bad day.

I: Right, where targets and policies overtake what children want to do.

F: Yes

I: Right. Ok. So in terms of knowledge, yes degree level is what you're saying?

F: Yes

I: What about the skills? What about how somebody is as a person and what they can do?

F: To do this job?

I: Yes. To do it well.

F: I think **you've got to do it from your heart. I think you've got to be patient, understanding, empathy. It's quite difficult to sort find a phrase or words to capture just exactly what you do because I think I've done it for that long, it just comes naturally. But I think you have to have a love for kids, it's got to be there you can't just think 'Oh I was going to do hairdressing but I'm going to**

do this' you know you have to really want to do it because it's hard work, its physically draining, it's sometimes emotionally draining and I think you have to have that spark to keep going even if it gets to 2 o'clock where you could sit down and not move. You've got to find something from somewhere to keep that fun and that enjoyment for the kids because it is difficult.

I: So fun and enjoyment has got to be there. That's a key part of good practice?

F: It is yes.

I: Anything else that you would say is good Practice in early years is?

F: It's got to be good quality provision for me.

I: What would that be?

F: No tatty things, everything's colourful, you know, appealing and set out so the kids are going to go in and enjoy that, but then how do you know what that is and I think that is through years of experience as well. Because if you know your kids you know what you can provide so you do have to know.

I: So good practice comes with experience?

F: Yes I think it does, I think it does. I think when you're new and you start out, when I look back, there were things that I did that I wouldn't do now. I think I've learned to listen more, observe more, just sit back sometimes and watch and not think you have to be at the side of that child every time to get a good written observation where you could just stand back and not interrupt their play, and then take it from there. I think part of good practice is sort of being on the side lines and sort of getting down on their level and engaging instead of I have in the past walked straight into play with the clip board and their play has stopped, whereas now I will say 'Can I play, can I come and play?' and they will direct you. If it's a 'Yes you can' 'No you can't'. And think that's an element of getting right down there and being on their level.

I: What happens if they say no?

F: If they say no, I just do what other kids do, I'll just go 'Ok' and I'll pull a bit of a sad face and then usually you'll get a 'Oh come on you can' but if it's a definite 'No' it'll be 'No another day' or 'Not just yet, you can come later' or sometimes it's just a stomp and a 'No' and then you know you're not needed, for whatever reason, that child wants to be left or that group want to be left.

I: And if you get involved how much can you direct things?

F: It just depends what type of play it is and where that play's going and the group of children that you've got, the cultures and the backgrounds that they come from. If you've got a couple of children who you know who are very highly stressed when they are coming in to nursery and they don't get a moment, they need to be left to play. But usually at the end of the session they will come to you or you can get something from them through midweek. Sometimes it's really easy dependant on the level of play, the vocabulary, sometimes you can interact and you can get some

really good play where then you can pull your strands off for your EYFS. Other times you just sort of get this feeling that you're interrupting and it's got to stop and you will just say 'Right I'm going to go and sit over here' or go and play in the sand and do it that way.

I: But you would take yourself out?

F: Yes

I: Good. So give me an example, tell me about something that you've done recently just as a typical example of what you might do in a day or in a session at work. A single event or something you've set up over a number of weeks or just something that gives me an idea of you as a practitioner.

F: Do you mean as an activity or just the overall day, just anything?

I: Either, yes.

F: Well I would never, say, plan an activity as though it is going to go to plan. Last week, let me think of last week, we had quite an eventful oh we had It was my Register and one of the mums in my Key Worker group she wanted to have a word, so the woman who was supposed to have been at the door for me had to come down to swop me, because the other member of staff had got a crisis at home, she was on the mobile phone, so we did a bit of a swop. This mum was quite agitated because her son, we think his interaction and communication is not where it should be for somebody at his age. She wasn't very happy so she said she would video him and bring it in on a DVD to show us but during that, we have Self-Registration and some Feelings Cards, happy sad, frightened, angry. She didn't want her child to pick one of these cards up because she didn't think he understood what feelings were, so we were trying to explain that the only way to understand this is if we talk about it and I mentioned to her about Circle Time and SEAL and Personal and Social but she weren't happy. She went away disgruntled so we swopped again to do Register then her child got up and he picked a card off the table. Mum saw this as she was going out the door and came back, so as I was in Register, another member of staff dealt with her about that, then as we were supposed to be dispersing to do our Free Choice Activities we had a nose bleed, somebody had a toilet accident, the planned activity didn't really go plan, just thinking on your feet really. When that was sorted we then had a crier who wanted their mum, so I'd got her one shoulder, I'd got the child with the nose bleed at this side, then we had another accident, somebody had got a tummy bug, so we had to ring for that parent, so about an hour had gone by and we'd still not really got down to any activities because we were too busy seeing to this.

I: Yes

F: When we did get down to our activities, because we were doing a Pirate Theme for then of term, a little boy who really does not have much speech or interaction made a telescope using 2 cylinders and put one through the other and then pulled it out, which was absolutely fantastic so we went

and got the stickers and the Reward Certificates and put him down for a special mention. In between that, somebody had thrown some water over somebody in the water tray, he was absolutely covered, so then because I was in that area I was changing him so I had to leave that child who I could have extended that play, to sort out the one in the water. By this time then it was time to tidy up and then us Group Focused activities, we were doing number, shape, that didn't really go according to plan, because another child who has other issues just kept shouting out all the time, basically for attention. So then he upset somebody sat next to him, and then somebody across who was looking at this other child crying, they thought they would join in and start cry, so we did not really abandon that activity but you just have to basically think on your feet. The ones that you had got listening and were in to it, I sort of had to lay the numbers down for those so they could find one more one less that could count more or less beyond 10 – 20 and the other 3 I had just had to sort that out because the other members of staff were doing their group activities. In the end it got that loud we had to get them all together and just do singing because it just got horrendous. Outside play then, we had about 4 or 5 accidents, bumps, scrapes and then it was story and then it was home time. And that's a typical day basically.

I: So out of all this what you have picked as being good practice?

F: From that?

I: From something like that

F: The little boy with the telescope because weeks prior to that we'd had a tube activity and been looking at 3D shapes. We'd got cubes, tubes, junk modelling, he was putting one thing into another. Another child across had done the same with a box, they'd shoved a box through the hole and we were discussing positional language in, over, through, out with this little boy that did this telescope it was spontaneous, but you could jump in and you could build on that. But we had built on it a little bit before the wet accident, but his face just lit up as soon as he knew he'd, I said 'Ooo look at that, that one comes through there and that smaller one inside that bigger one ...' And he was just full of joy, just full of enjoyment, smiling, he doesn't smile a lot but his self-esteem was so high because he'd made this construction which he'd then lifted to his eye.

I: Why is that good for you as a practitioner, why was that I mean I can see why it's a good achievement for him, why is that, recognising that and building on that, why is that good practice for you?

F: Because that's why I'm there to scaffold this, to build this, to develop this but also to give them that safe and secure little bubble. I see them as a 2nd family so when their mums, dads carers aren't there, they're coming to us and we're like their 2nd family and we do as much as we can for them while they are there.

I: So it's very important for you to encourage and boost confidence?

F: Yes and rewards Yes. Praise verbally, stickers, anything.

I: **Why?**

F: Self-esteem. Confidence. Wellbeing.

I: **What's so important about that?**

F: **So they're happy when they come. So if they're happy and they know that they can achieve then they'll progress.** That's what I think.

I: **And that's what underpins good practice?**

F: I think so.

I: **For you?**

F: Yes

I: **Right. Ok. Carrying on with this typical morning. Juggling a lot of very different things.**

F: Yes

I: **What's the priority? The parent? Wiping the floor so nobody else falls over or?**

F: Sometimes it becomes Well **your first priority is your accidents, you know, your bumps, your scrapes, your wet children.** Priority I suppose should be to stay and build the learning that was happening there, but it is really difficult to prioritise because there's that many individuals who need that many different things maybe all at one time. **You've to sort be in 2 places at once.**

I: **Is there anything in that that you would have said 'We shouldn't have done it' or 'We could have done that better' or that was bad practice?'**

F: Erm

I: **Cos there were a lot of things that you didn't achieve in terms of your intention and there were a lot of things that happened that you hadn't planned to happen. That doesn't necessarily make them bad so I'm wondering if there was anything that you would have picked out that said 'Erm that we could have done something about and could have done it better'**

F: If **we'd not had the timetable, that little boy's telescope that he'd made, his learning could have been built on and we could have gone back to it but because of the timetable and the routine that had to stop because of the other accidents. So maybe more flexibility that way but we do have to have a timetable.**

I: **Why?**

F: Because **we're structured like school. So we have to have the Register**

I: **I'm seeing the face**

F: Yes

I: **but the tape isn't but you're saying 'We have to have' but what do you feel?**

F: Personally, no **we don't need a timetable.**

I: **You should have been able to go with what was**

F: Yes we need a routine, but I don't think it has to be structured as such, that play or development is cut short because we have to tidy because we have to do PE or we have to go down to the hall to sing or we have to do the structured group work, maybe that could come in between doing other things. You can do your 3D solids, shapes while you've got your junk modelling and do it that way and you've still got to have your tick list but you could still tick them off. You could do it outside, inside but you know we have to have a timetable.

I: So are you saying there is a possible weakness overall in setting practice in having a timetable that has to be kept rather than following what the children are doing?

F: Yes and I think that's not just as a present thing, I think I've experienced that in previous posts as well.

I: And this working with children who are age 3 and 4.

F: Yes. But yet how do you The flip side of that is how do you prepare them for school if you've not got the timetable set for your PE and your music and your group work but when they're coming in at 3 do they need a timetable? Maybe the timetable could come the term before they start school or maybe 2 terms before.

I: So you would still put the child, their interests and a little bit of routine as good practice rather than following a structure in the way that you're doing at the moment?

F: Erm.[agreement]

I: Does Good Practice change from age group to age group, type of setting to type of setting or is it something that kind of runs deeper than where it's happening?

F: See definition of good practice in the EYFS can be different to what you witness other people doing or what you think you're doing yourself. I think as a whole Different ... gosh You see Day Care is structured differently to your school setting and even though we have wrap around care from Day Care into school, I think that, well the Day Care provision that we've got at school, the people work with and put their needs first, the children

I: In a way that you don't? In a way that you can't?

F: It's different because they've got babies right up to 3, 4 and their structure is more flexible. They take their shoes and their socks off in there, you know, they run round, and then they come into nursery and they take their own shoes and socks off so and it will cause a bit of a discrepancy sometime because our practice as such is you keep your shoes and socks on nursery.

I: Ok so rules change from setting to setting.

F: Yes

I: That I think everybody expects that because people run their settings differently but the Day Care side where you work also had 3 and 4 year olds, they will deal with them differently but is good practice on the Day Care side the same as good practice on your side in terms of what it

should be and what it means to be a good practitioner or is there a different definition within a school than there is within Day Care setting or a Child Minding setting?

F: I think, only way to answer that would be to look at **Ofsted Reports** because we don't get to work in Day Care and Day Care don't get to work in Nursery so nobody sees into this practice.

I: **Ok. If you went to work in Day Care and I asked you what you thought Good Practice was would you say anything different to what you've said?**

F: No.

I: **So the values or the personal qualities or the commitment, which is what you've talked about, that goes wherever the Practitioner goes?**

F: I think so yes.

I: **I know the practice has changed**

F: Yes

I: **But that doesn't necessarily mean what you think good practice is** Will change. **What about bad practice? I mean, you had that very busy morning; the one thing you were critical of was 'We put the timetable before the child'. Is there anything else you would say, not necessarily only out of that morning, but is there anything else that is your kind of 'ohh I really don't like that sort of thing when it happens, I really think that's poor practice'?**

F: For myself or from others?

I: **Either**

F: I don't like other practitioners raising their voices to younger children. I don't think there's any need to do that. I think that can be dealt with but **sometimes you have to raise your voice** and I put my hand up and I have raised my voice. When I've done it, I've thought 'No I shouldn't have done it'.

I: **Why, what's made you think that?**

F: I just don't think **they need a verbal rebuke**, you know, our **policy is a time out** or a verbal warning, and **you do have to make your verbal warning clear, but I just don't agree in using a loud sharp voice, but sometimes you have to, depending on behaviour if it's escalated so much that it's getting out of control and harmful to others, you do have to.**

I: **But it wouldn't necessarily be a first response, that's when it would be inappropriate?**

F: No, but then we have a Behaviour System anyway and it's gone over the boundaries of that then it's to the office but then I don't really agree with taking a 3 or 4 year old in to an office to see the Head Teacher either. But **sometimes you have to.**

I: **Why, because it's School Policy or because that's the only thing that's going to work?**

F: Yes, 3 strikes and you're out and sometimes that's the last resort **when you've tried your time out and you've tried everything else.** I mean I am usually a bit flexible with it, shouldn't really be but

..... Sometimes like a quiet time out is enough and sometimes it's not. But I deemed as bad practice, you see there's really not that much

I: I mean I have to say at this there's a level of personal conflicts between you and the policies you work within in terms of what you think is appropriate or a good way for a practitioner to behave, is that fair?

F: Yes it's from, it's top down and you're actually on the front line and you're dealing with little people and it's totally different to reading it from a book or from a sheet, and you're tuned in to how their behaviour and try and think on their level and you know them and you spending 3 and half hours every day, you do get to know little snippets and I think reading things from a policy or a book just sometimes doesn't work.

I: We keep coming back to knowing the children, having the relationship and putting that first as the basis for supporting them, yes?

F: Yes definitely, definitely.

I: Ok. Reflection then.

F: Yes

I: Do you reflect, how do you reflect?

F: oh, reflection (whispered). I would say consciously now I've been to University, it just depends if something's happened, yes you think about it and you act on it but prior to knowing it was more of a just being conscious of maybe doing the right or wrong thing.

I: You say 'If something's happened', so are we talking about critical incidents?

F: Yes

I: Right, so the stuff that goes wrong?

F: The stuff that goes wrong, for instance, we were sat There were a group of us sat at the mark-making table where there's scissors. This little girl decided to snip a bit of her hair off and in that split second one of us had just turned away because we'd been called somewhere else. Now looking back on that, should we have directed us vision away from a couple in a group who's got scissors, should we have stayed focused or should we have turned round and the behaviour behind let someone else deal with? So it's thing like that that you think all of a sudden 'Right next time I'm looking that way, I'm not Somebody else can deal with that'.

I: Right that answers me I was going to ask 'What do you mean something wrong' but with the scissors it's fairly obvious what you mean. Ok, so you use reflection, is this written or is this just in your head?

F: In my head, it's just mental.

I: Right. Do you do any written reflections or written in a diary or anything like that?

F: No.

I: **right. And your reflections focus on critical incidents.**

F: Yes

I: **You don't go home and think 'That was a good day' or 'Why was it a good day'**

F: No.

I: **So the reflections that you do are about moving practice on and solving problems?**

F: Yes

I: **Do you share them?**

F: Yes. Wednesdays we **get to share at Staff Meetings or if there's anything that we think is deemed urgent then the morning after the day or sometime in that day, yes.**

I: **Then again it would be about a problem**

F: With a child or a parent.

I: **It wouldn't be about 'This has gone really well'**

F: No

I: **Have you ever thought about that before?**

F: No, never, not until now. **Because you're trying to solve problems either from parents or the children or you're trying to progress them or develop them. You just get lost in your personal identity, yourself, just gets lost because you're just there doing for others.**

I: **Because you will have had something like a parent coming along and saying 'He really enjoyed that thing yesterday'.**

F: **We have and we've**

I: **And you've never taken that to the Wednesday Meeting?**

F: No, never. **We should do.**

I: **I'm not saying you should or you shouldn't.**

F: Oh but **we should do for reflection and our own self-esteem.**

I: **I find it curious that reflection is a problem solving exercise and only a problem solving exercise.**

F: But I think that's part of it, I think **that's part of your job what you do.**

I: **What?**

F: Problem solve. **You're forever thinking** 'How can I improve that' 'How can I do that better? if so and so's got this problem then how can we fix it,', **we get the family in,** talk to the family, behaviour charts' **you're just continuously trying to solve problems.**

I: **If you weren't would you feel that you were letting yourself down as a practitioner?**

F: Yes because it **wouldn't feel as if you were doing part of your job I suppose.**

I: **Ok.**

F: Because it is mainly, that job is very problematic sometimes, can be quite emotional and I've never really known it without a problem. **You have some good days, they run pretty smoothly, you've**

had no accidents, you've had no behaviour, you know, but I would say majority of time there's always something to solve.

I: You've never seen reflection as a process where if there's been a good day 'Let's look at what made it good'?

F: Now I think the only answer I can give to that is with planning, and if we've had a theme or an activity that's gone ok that the kids have enjoyed then we've reused it. Apart from that ...

I: But you've never looked at why it went well or what made it enjoyable that you might to the next planning of a different theme?

F: No.

I: Right. Again I'm not being critical I'm just trying to understand how you use your reflection. So you reflect about problems and issues and you do that against the idea of what you should be doing and how children should be feeling and what they should be achieving?

F: Yes.

I: So there's a link between your reflecting and your idea of being a good practitioner?

F: Yes because it's basically you're looking for optimum achievement, you're looking for ... trying to be positive role model. You're trying to please all the time. I think to narrow it down you're just trying to please everybody all the time, the parents, the kids, the staff, that's what you do.

I: Do you ever try to please yourself?

F: No. No you don't really put yourself in it.

I: I don't mean in terms of 'I'll do what I want' but your own level of satisfaction, your own level of, I don't know, professional confidence or something.

F: Not while you're there doing that job from sort of 8 while quarter to 4 because it's just constant. You don't really notice yourself because you're just doing for others all the time and there's people pulling little bits here there and everywhere and you know, if you've had a bad day you put a smiley face on, if you've got personal problems you put a smiley face on because you know maybe coming through that door there's going to be somebody who needs to tell you something.

I: Ok. Is there anything else you want to say about what you think Good Practice is?

F: Well reflection is a part of it because you do have to think, like I've said, if this happens I will do it in another way this time but it's not necessarily written, like I say, it's mental you have to be conscious of your thoughts and your actions and what you say to others, especially children. Its just one whole, it's the whole thing. It's quite hard to describe really. But you don't think about ... when you go to do your job you don't think 'right I'm doing best practice today' you're just there and you just try your hardest to do the right thing.

I: And the children are at the front of that?

F: Yes and that for me, as long as they're coming in, they're happy, they're safe, they feel secure, they're content, you know, and you've got them there and they know they can come to you and they're formed... I mean some children form a different attachment with different members of staff but you can just tell that by looking at them that the group that we've got they're happy, so if they are, then I know that I'm doing my job right.

I: **Your practice is good.**

F: And if they were coming in screaming and wanting to run out of the door, obviously it doesn't mean to say that we're not doing good practice and if it was continual every day then you'd want to think Well you would look at yourself; well I would look at myself and think 'Is it me'?

I: **And what would you do about it?**

F: If it were me?

I: **Well Is it going to be you or is it going to be things we need to do collectively.**

F: Gosh. Probably so, and the environment and everything or it could be problems at home but you do beat yourself up in this job trying to get it right and then the government will come along and they will change the spec of what they deem as what you should and what you shouldn't do which for me looking back to desirable outcomes and EYFS and then this new one. You don't really change yourself to fit a government document you're there because you want to be there and you're doing it from

I: **Right so it's not government policy that defines good practice**

F: No. I

I: **it's something in you?**

F: I think so.

Appendix 6 - Vignettes

1. Hannah – a reflection on child-centred practice

Ensuring that they [children] are getting the most from their play and helping them in what they are doing.... I spend a lot of time playing. Playing with the children and having fun and we have quite a fun atmosphere, and we have short 2 ½ hour sessions and in those 2 ½ hours there is a lot of fun to have ... The most important thing is ensuring the children are developing and enjoying coming, and enjoying learning and achieving, and getting everything they can in, ... very social children that learn lots with their role play, so its interacting with them and ensuring they have lots of things to take their play further ... The happy children that even when they are happy, but they have a melt down and start crying because something is not quite right, and you help them work it out and they are beaming again and running around

we are constantly changing the planning.... I keep complaining that actually, is the planning doing what it is supposed to be doing, so now we have changed it to ensure, well.... because planning used to be where you look at the children's interest and you plan from the children's interests and which is great, and we still look at the children interests, but I wanted to focus on the characteristics of the learning so the children are really motivated ... rather than it just be an activity that is put there because the children have [been] seen to be doing it. It's more focussed on them as individuals ... Getting a child completely engrossed in their play and their exploration, whatever, that is more than ticking a box ... You just see a different level with their ideas, and from that they truly develop more ... That involvement is what's inspiring them and what makes them come in the next day, and they want to do more of something, or try something different, that brings out different ideas.

it's [poor practice] pointless activities sometimes that are put out, ...they are not pointless but there is no.... they look good... but who are they there for. For the children, or there to look good? Things we don't do very often, now and again, then why have you got that out and the children may struggle, its quite a difficult thing. It's really hard ... like sewing is great ... 2 and half or three, four, you can't expect it, you show them how to do it, they are never going to be able to achieve threading that needle on their own, you know, it's setting up the impossible ... I like to see the kids getting the most out of what they can do.

I have always liked to see happy content, even sad and content children. If that makes any sense ... secure because they can be happy, they can be sad or miserable, they are secure in where they are and what they want

we have a display board put up and the manager thought we should have this display board, and why is it up so high, and why do we have to put these statements on there ... linked to the Development Matters,

but who is going to read them? Just have the children's work. He said 'well Ofsted will look at that'. I don't mind Ofsted if they don't see statements on the wall, but children's work takes priority

2. Janet – child-centred practice

[good practice is] making sure that the children are happy and that they're learning appropriate things when they're in your care and just feeling safe to learn and feeling appreciated and valued and so that growing up in a nice environment ... we get a lot of children from disadvantaged areas where they don't always see the most appropriate things at home and they're not in routines that sometimes make children feel more comfortable and settled, so I think it's even more important that, for the children that I've particularly worked with, that routines and stability is key when trying to teach them things.

[monitoring the child's emotional well-being] I think that's, as well as being tracked on observations because, for example, at transition times particularly when you find that children's emotional well-being is sometimes, does sometimes need a little bit of extra support, that is tracked on a transition, not assessment, but it'd be monitored over the first three or four weeks of a child starting. So it may be perhaps that we did something in group-time around emotions, about feelings, the empathy dolls may be used to really make sure that the children's emotional well-being is supported as well.

I think you need to be able to listen to children and I think you need to be able to watch them and know them, after a length of time obviously, but know them well enough to know their facial expressions, know that child as much as you possibly can for the time that they're in day care ... you need to be patient. And I think you need to look at the whole child, the whole family to get a proper picture of that child's experiences. And to be caring and make everything as fun as you can and appropriate for that individual child.

for children I like seeing spontaneous teaching and I think, for example, there was a practitioner, when it was snowing and there was obviously lots of ice on the floor and a 2½ year old toddled outside and started playing in the ice and the snow. I've seen practice in which the door would've been shut at that point because it's cold, at which point the practitioner straightaway put the child in an all-in-one suit, wellingtons, took them outside, collected some snow and ice, came back in and continued that by getting ice out of the freezer that had got animals in it and extending that child's interest. And to me that was child-led yet better than closing the door and saying it was too cold. That was good practice ... not just because it was child-led. I think there's got to be a mixture of both really. But because that practitioner took the time and could see what that child actually wanted to do and was interested in and the whole time she was talking and explaining and really extended what he was enjoying doing. And what he'd chosen to do as well ... [closing the door] does keep the child warm but the child was also warm when she wrapped him up and took him outside. And that would just have, to me, would've been 'your interests aren't worth

exploring and not valued' ... There might be something equally as exciting inside but the child on that occasion wanted to go outside. So I think that just showed that she was really interested in that child, and soon enough, you know, there was a full group of children around the experience that she'd created ... I think to follow the child's interests, to engage them is quite important, to make sure you try and get the best out of them ... 'Cos when they're engaged and interested they are perhaps learning more than if they're not ... they get the attention of the practitioner and the input from the practitioner so when the practitioner's extending their learning by, I don't know, more vocab, 'what would happen if', more questions to them, to try and extend their thoughts, but yeah they're engaged and interested, I would say that you were more likely to get more out of them.

3. Rose - frustration and the fear of corruption

It's very rare you get time to just be free to be with the children and get involved in the play and things like that. It's usually an activity focus or you're outside supporting play outside. So it's difficult because I know from what I've learnt at Uni how I should be towards the children but how I see myself towards them is basically realistically getting the things done as are in the timetable ... you'll lead the activity at the table and they can choose to come to you or a new role play is set out you'll be timetabled to play with the role play with the children and to encourage them to use it properly ... rather than run round playing drums with the cauldron which they might like to do, we have to kind of try and direct the play to the focus as it's intended ... They're only allowed to wear their dressing up shoes for inside, they're not allowed to then go outside ... I would love to let them do that ...it's part of how they learn, how they develop and they could be engaged sometimes it's so sad to make them take things off before they go outside because they might have dressed up in something inside and they're building their own role play in their home corner and then they want to take it outside and continue it and then you've got to stop them and say 'No take that off, that stays inside'

.... Sometimes people forget they're little people and self-esteem and things like that and they don't realise how you speak to them, your body language, if you're approachable, but I'm very much that way inclined so that's why I get so frustrated when people don't have that ... What I hate to see is in a numeracy lesson with a clear objective and it keeps getting banged on and banged on regardless of what the children are doing, they've lost interest, they've had enough, they're rolling about on the carpet and they're getting screamed at because they have to finish this lesson, they have to understand. ... And I look at them and they're struggling to sit on the carpet. Or some of them especially with some boys we've got, 'I can't write'.... 'Why can't you' and they just can't write, they're just not ready to write ... children are expected to do something at a chronological age because the EYFS says 'they should be able to do this within this month bracket' and I get so frustrated when they're told, 'Right you have to do this and you have to write something' and the child hasn't got the motor skills that come before it and although an intervention might be put in place ... there's still no let up and then how Practitioners might deal with that child who can't do their writing and how much it's hammered home. But I think if you had a knowledge [of child development]....But then even if you have a knowledge, you've got to be free to use it, I suppose, which is a challenge but some people just don't I don't think they've got a holistic view of the child and it frustrates me.

after I've done my 'Top Up' I want to do Teacher Training but I don't know if I could work within the mainstream school because I'm scared of getting that taken out of me and getting in the mundane targets,

Ofsted, assessments and I'm questioning whether I can do that. I really don't know where I want to go, I'm confused at the moment because I'm so worried about losing how I feel.

4. Florence – frustration with setting management and structure

There is a routine set out. We do have a timetable but given the environment, that can waiver depending where you've had accidents or upsets but the rule of thumb is Register half past 8 while about 20 to 9, free play, in between that there are structured group activities, and then we have an organised tidy up time, then back to the planned/free play, then story and then more or less home time and in between that we have music sessions and PE ... For me, it's [my priority] so they feel safe, so they feel secure, they're settled, they're comfortable and then all of that follows. But policy wise we have to do the phonics and we have to do the literacy and we have to do maths, and honestly some are not ready when they come in to do that even after a term they're not ready. If they come from a stressful environment and you're wanting highly structured activity, you're not going to get it if they've not done their own little bit in play first. It's just finding that balance and sometimes it's really difficult when you've got assessments and targets to meet from the profile...

If we'd not had the timetable, that little boy's telescope that he'd made, his learning could have been built on and we could have gone back to it but because of the timetable and the routine that had to stop because of the other accidents. So maybe more flexibility that way but we do have to have a timetable... Yes we need a routine, but I don't think it has to be structured as such, that play or development is cut short because we have to tidy because we have to do PE, or we have to go down to the hall to sing, or we have to do the structured group work, maybe that could come in between doing other things. You can do your 3D solids, shapes while you've got your junk modelling and do it that way and you've still got to have your tick list but you could still tick them off. You could do it outside, inside but you know, we have to have a timetable.

You see Day Care is structured differently to your school setting and even though we have wrap around care from Day Care into school, I think that, well the Day Care provision that we've got at school, the people work with and put their needs first, the children... It's different because they've got babies right up to 3, 4, and their structure is more flexible. They [the children] take their shoes and their socks off in there, you know, they run round, and then they come into nursery and they take their own shoes and socks off so and it will cause a bit of a discrepancy sometime because our practice as such is you keep your shoes and socks on nursery.

Yes it's from, it's [management of practice] top down and you're actually on the front line and you're dealing with little people and it's totally different to reading it from a book or from a sheet, and you're tuned in to how their behaviour and try and think on their level and you know them and you spending 3

and half hours every day, you do get to know little snippets and I think reading things from a policy or a book just sometimes doesn't work.

5. Nina – the inflexibility of setting management

When a child first started the setting, ...she really wasn't settling, it took a while ...we don't do Home Visits at this setting but the parents said 'Are you able to come to our home see what she likes, 'Can we take some photos of you and put them up? Now that's a personal preference if they wanted to but that member of staff actually went to the child's house with the parents, did a Home Visit, read stories to them and they took photos together ... that photo was up at home and at the Nursery on the Board and I just thought that was really nice that she'd gone out of her way to do a Home Visit to help that one child.... It's putting the child first. The standard is that some children just come in for visits, 1 2 3 4 however many visits they need and if they settle they settle, if they don't they maybe come for a few more but she's actually gone out of her way to go to that child's house, see the home life and then to settle them a bit more to get to know them before they join, it was really nice ...nobody has done Home Visits. We have tried to mention it to the Manager but with it being a big chain of Nurseries it's not

There's a limit to the activities that you can do... I'm basically limited to water, sand and the toys that we've got whereas I'd like to explore with ice, but there's choking and hazards. They [management] say there's choking with ice so they can't play with ice cubes, I'd like to get beans out, jelly and let them explore different textures. Food play is banned, dried pasta is banned ... they [management] say there's Third World countries that are suffering without food and we're playing with it and wasting it. It's a fair point but children They get things out of experiences so different senses, playing with sensory jelly, pasta, beans, spaghetti; they can get all sorts from it.

6. Iris – empowerment through professional education

I'm in charge of all the education side of things in the Day Care ... I think you've got to have a very good knowledge of children's development and understanding what their next steps need to be, it's a very big part of the EYFS and something that we always try to ensure we incorporate in children's observations. That it's not just observing them and comparing them to the EYFS and meeting where they are but also where they need to be so also ensure that's there's next step to put on... If you're aware of what a child should be achieving then ... you can always plan for their next steps then. I think it's important, especially as a senior to have understanding of ... team work and being able to have good relationships with your staff so they understand where you want, what your expectations are, not just for the children but on a professional level ... we would expect that a senior practitioner show the same professionalism as what I do ... there is good language between the practitioner and the child, good language between the practitioner and the parent, paper work is done to a higher level, there's a good understanding of the Nursery Policies, EYFS. If a parent asks a question then that practitioner is able to give them a professional answer that is jargon free and the parents can understand it

you need to be a strong character especially if you're wanting to be a senior ... I've got a very good team around me but you do need to be strong because if there's something that you would want to put in action or something that you need to change, you need to be able to address that and do it in a professional way which staff will respond to and take immediate action. But I think you need to be happy ... Because children need a happy environment to learn.

We have free play opportunities for children so they access indoors and outdoors on a daily basis so children are learning through their own play but the practitioners that we've got are very highly qualified and are working toward being highly qualified, so they can provide things ... when I was learning at University I implemented things such as the sustained shared thinking with staff, making sure that all staff were aware of what it meant and how we could actually put it into play practice.

Not trying not to be a bit big headed but I can see the Nursery has developed immensely especially since I achieved my EYPS, but throughout my journey, from foundation degree to my BA Honours, EYPS status, I've grown in confidence which has had a rippling effect on the practitioners that I work alongside. They ask much more questions than what they did initially, they're wanting to learn more; there's actually a member of staff now who is going to University and starting her BA Honours in Early Years in September because she's wanting to be a Deputy Manager, so I'd like to think that I've inspired her to further her professional development as well. But I definitely think it's made a big difference and impact on the

setting, ... the area of this school is highly deprived and I do think I've made a big impact because I'm aware of children's needs now a bit more than what I was when I started. I can kind of think of things to put into practice as opposed to what I used to be like when I first started and I think that's happened through confidence and my own experience ... but I do definitely think the degree has made a huge impact on that.

I've recently changed all the planning documents and the way the children are observed. It was one of my ideas to bring in the incidental observations so staff could look back and cross reference that to the characteristics of effective learning, so we're covering another aspect of the EYFS ... to ensure that we worked alongside the school and the Reception Class and also cover children's individual needs regardless of what they are. The room that I currently work in is a 2 – 4 so there's quite a big difference in children's development so the planning document that I produced covers every child's age but also allows me to plan for their individual learning as well through good communication with staff and activities that are easily differentiated for each child's needs. Again the degree has influenced and increased my knowledge of the EYFS so I'm now able to know the ins and outs of the EYFS and what is expected not just 'right this is what communication means, this is what maths means', but actually I understand the guidelines and framework of the EYFS and why it's there and what we're doing things for as opposed to 'We've got to do it for EYFS'. ... and I think that's helped in producing things like the planning document and just on a general daily basis

I've been appointed Behaviour Manager in the early years foundation stage, which includes Day Care Nursery and Reception. And basically I put guidelines in; I'm saying guidelines because everyone is different, and some children need different targets and strategies ... we've not got a non-shouting policy because some children may need a voice raising to them but we do differ from it ... if we can, if at all possible, because it's pointless shouting at a child and him screaming in your face, that's not going to help anybody. So we do have the Thinking Chair, we do sit with that child while they think about what they may have done until their time's ... until they're ready to move on, whether it be playing with a new game or actually apologising for something that they may have done and that's the strategy that I've implemented and it's currently working. But we've had some children that have come through and those strategies don't work for them, so I had to research different strategies that may have worked for them in a different way and then put them in practice.

I think one of the main things for me in particular was confidence and the degree gave me a lot of confidence and ... one apprentice, she's absolutely amazing but she doesn't see how good she is because she's got low confidence. So my job is seeing her, I don't need to tell her anything because she knows, ... she just needs to start believing in herself now. So my job as senior currently is just increasing her confidence.

7. Laura – a narrative of growing empowerment

I would call myself early years professional because that is the term a lot of people tend to use now and from my qualifications that is what we have been taught that we are. However working in a day nursery they put your title as a nursery nurse which never takes on qualification status or anything like that ... I feel like the qualifications you've got aren't recognised in any way or they're not, like taken into consideration or giving you any different roles or responsibilities you are just within a certain right of a band of people ... I think that although the levels shouldn't be what you are perceived as in a centre because they could take offence to you being highly qualified and you saying that. But I think with roles and responsibilities they should be able to look up to you to provide like support and guidance. ...I don't want to cause offence by saying I have got this qualification or this qualification I'd just like to know I was recognised for having it ... It's the recognition of having qualifications that are different I think the need for a title for someone who has got qualifications should be different to those who has level 2 or level 3.

I think without the knowledge of the EYFS it underpins a lot of the practitioner roles and responsibility within early years care. Without understanding that how do you then go to be able to observe plan and evaluate, and understand children, understand their development, what you should promote through working with the children and providing for children ... People are going to have different extents of knowledge on the EYFS. So there are those that would use the EYFS as solely towards the EYFS so everything would be directed whereas some others may just use it as a guideline and provide on top of that with other knowledge ... like knowing about Maslow's needs, zone of proximal development by Vygotsky ... I know when I did it I understood the EYFS but I don't think thoroughly understood it... I knew of it and I knew it was used but until I actually used it within practice I would not have said I understood it.

I had a SENCO to come in to assess one of my key children for Special Education Needs ... She came in and was asking for a bigger picture of her [the child's] development so I had provided long observations, sticky note observations, and a summary of her development within the prime areas of the EYFS, plus established forms of observing her because the observations they [other staff in the setting] used which were sticky notes did not apply to her development because her development would not show any progression through the use of sticky notes. So providing a long observation allowed me to write a summary over the month of how she was doing...that allowed [the SENCO] to have a clear outset and image of what to expect when she observed her ... within studying, I've kind of come to understand the EYFS and looking at the new EYFS and noticing how focused in it is now... Her [the child's] development doesn't fit into the development pointers. You can't highlight anything for her because it doesn't fit and the sticky note observations would

just say the same thing over and over again whereas changing it into establishing a full summary and therefore an overall picture of her development [will] support further investigation.

I had a meeting with a child's parents. I went back into the room, and ... a member of staff who is level 4 qualified came up to me and said 'I really think you should have either me or the room leader in the room, in this meeting with you for experience' ... I wasn't really sure what to say so I went up to my manager and said "what's all this about" ... and she said 'I wouldn't have left you to take the meeting yourself if I didn't think you was experienced or qualified enough to take it'. So I think being able to ... brush off comments that are not really supporting anybody, is being able to have the confidence to say 'well no actually I am qualified and experienced enough to have a meeting with the child's parents'.

8. Dorothy – compliance and the power of the teacher

There's usually throughout the day set in a couple of hours where we had to do activities either with a small group of children or 1 on 1 and sometimes I'd be told earlier in the lesson or the day before, 'You're going to have to do this for the children, engage them in this', but even though they were there, they weren't as big a part of the day as free flow in the school hours.

Interviewer: How do you know if you're doing it well?

D: Feedback from other people in the classroom, maybe they'd say 'Oh that went really well today' or 'Maybe you could have included this next time' because obviously they're experienced in the school. Does it meet the outcomes that are set out by the EYFS, does it meet what I wanted it to meet?

Interviewer: How would you know it had?

D: Through observations; through other people commenting and watching; a lot of observations really, yes of the children. I think I had one adult seeing me but mainly it was the observations of the children.

Interviewer: Who did the observation of you?

D: The teacher in the classroom ... I was talking to him about He was doing a maths, a numeracy activity, and the head teacher had to observe him and I was asking how that felt and he said 'Well I'll show you if you want' and the next day he observed me. I didn't enjoy it at the time but once it's gone I suppose it's something that I got some feedback from it so it does help in the long run yes.

there was a couple of boys in the classroom who weren't progressing as well in maths and English and it started out where I'd go out with Teaching Assistant to do some focus activities with just them, aimed at them, because we were find when they were getting in the classroom they were just sitting back and they were getting more and more overwhelmed by it all and they weren't taking it on board, until eventually it became my responsibility every day for this half hour that I had to think of a maths activity, plan it up and then write about it and actually deliver it to these children. Actually seeing them progress was quite a big thing ...I thought it was good ... because obviously the children starting heading in the right direction so it was helping them ... and then I communicated back with the classroom leader, the teacher, about everything that I'd done and he had to approve it and say 'We also need you to focus on this and this and this',

it [good practice] depends on the setting because if what's expected of them in one setting is higher than in another then obviously the staff are going to work to a better standard.

9. Betty – the power of the classroom teacher

To support the Teacher basically and do anything that she asks you to do. My role has been very much to support. I work with the lower ability table, I'm placed on that table a lot on there and when the teachers obviously she's got 30 children to see and sometimes they fall a bit further behind so if they've got somebody with them it means that she doesn't have to repeat herself constantly and waste sometime, you know, I can be there to support them and I support a child with behavioural difficulties and I do his 'nurture time' with him so it's a mixture between I'm there to support some of the lower abilities, I'm there to support a child with behavioural difficulties and I'm also there to support the Teacher in anything she needs doing.

I suggest things to my Supervisor - 'or perhaps I could do this with this group because I think this child might be falling a bit further behind when I've been working with them, they're just not understanding it so would it be alright if I took them out for 15 minutes during the afternoon and did an activity with them just to try and pull them up a bit?'. Because some of the children, they do get left behind so I think it needs somebody there to identify and sometimes it's a Teaching Assistant because a Teacher's very busy, she's got the whole class.

I take that [suggesting additional activities] on myself, she [class teacher] doesn't really ask me to do it. She asks me to work with the children but she doesn't ask me to take them out and do activities but if I feel like there's a problem or there's an issue I feel confident enough to say 'Can I do this?'

They [teachers] introduced quite late, division to the whole class, it was a couple of months ago but they've been making it increasingly harder, and the lower ability group I've been working with, to be fair all the class ... have found division the most difficult. It's quite hard to get your head round, you know, they've been doing times instead and very getting very confused, so I told my supervisor, we both discussed this, I said 'You know they're finding this very difficult, obviously the lower abilities are finding it difficult, would it be alright when I come in on a Tuesday afternoon, is there a time like even 20 minutes that I could take them like into the hall and we could do more of a practical activity?' And so we got ... the PE equipment and got like big basket balls and like divided it that way and so stuff was very big and visual so instead of it being them sat a desk I think they got bored as well, bored and frustrated and they were sat in the same place looking at a piece of paper and that's not good ... because if they're not understanding it that way it's not good and they're not going to. If they've been sat there for an hour and they're in tears looking at a piece of paper sat in the same place and they're 6, it needs to be approached in a different way, you need to say 'right this way's not working they're not going to understand it, let's try a completely different

approach' which is why I took them into the hall and we used like big basket balls and hula hoops and like we had hula hoops and bean bags and I give them [problems] like, 'so and so has so many sweets' I'm trying to think of an example. 'I have 4 sweets, my sister wants to share them equally' so we had bean bags and those big hoops and like practically I was telling them even to throw them in, you know, so It was learning disguised as fun. Which, learning it can be fun obviously and then they understood it then to be fair. I mean I did it for a few weeks, a few different things, you know, most of them practical and they seemed to have a lot better understanding afterwards ... I think it was good practice ... I suppose I took a bit of a risk by saying 'Can I have 20 minutes' because 20 minutes is like gold, every little minute they're trying squeeze something in

10. Claire – a narrative of conflict and compliance

I'd probably say [I am] a nursery nurse ... because it is what people know us as, it's a comforting name for parents I think ... You start saying early year's practitioners and they think you don't work in a setting, it is just a name that has gone through generations and has not changed ... parents at the setting, if you start saying early years practitioners they might think you are better than what you are because they do not accept the concept of what we do in the early years, some parents ... we've never altered it at school ... we are known as nursery nurses ... I was a teaching assistant and all staff referred to us as non- teaching, teaching assistants. It got altered because we are in the teaching profession, but it just never changed with members of staff, we were always known as NTA's; it was upsetting to know I had gone through the qualifications I had gone through

I have got a foundation degree. At school not many people know I have got that, and as far as work's concerned it does not come with any more responsibilities, I do the job that I do, whether I have got the foundation degree or not ... parents don't know that I have the foundation degree and ... they [the other nursery nurses] have level 3 which is the requirement of being a nursery nurse, so parents know that's the level, they don't know the difference between us, we are all across the board the same. Which to be fair, I agree with ... Because there was an issue with work once where they said you should get paid for the qualification that you had, but to me, [if] you go and do a job that requires a set of skills and if you *choose* to go and educate yourself further, then yes, it should be acknowledged but not in the payroll sense, ... it was my choice to be a nursery nurse, ... if that is the level that society sees it requires, then that is what I should be paid as, and if they want more... from me with an early years degree, then that is the education [authority's] job to decide whether they want that from me. Or I could go on and get a different job myself ... we are doing the same job and we're all there for the children it was my choice to go educate myself further. Yes the knowledge I have got from this degree has been immense and staff at work know I have that knowledge and they can see it but for me a lot of early years is practice ... I have been in this school setting for 10 years before I came back to study, I wouldn't have engaged in this course as much and as well I think if I hadn't had that 10 years experience. Childcare is a lot about experience.

the word educator is much nicer than practitioners and nursery nurse ... Because you are there to educate the children and I just think it is a word that is understood by everybody, it is not made out to be something it is not, it hasn't got several meanings, you are there to educate the children. You're there to teach the children and engage with them ... I think your title doesn't really matter it's who you are and how you respond to children and parents that makes a difference ... When I look at the teacher that I work with, she has obviously got the degree, her practical role of what she does in that session is no different to me that's

got a foundation degree, to a nursery nurse that's got a level 3. Her role is different because she has to attend staff meetings and puts it down on the planning, she analyses the data, so I think there comes a different level again but on a practical level of working with children ... you do need a qualification of teacher status [to lead practice] ... degree level to analyse all the data because it is about putting it down on paper, and knowing how to articulate it and talk about what is written down. But I think on a practical level ... having the ideas is one thing, but actually sitting down with a child and getting them to engage and understand what they're learning about ...

11. Helen - validation through OfSTED

Last week I made some Play Doh and it was linking in with the Royal Family, I left a learning objective out for the children to see if they could make some scones obviously using malleable media skills and developing them, rolling and cutting them and things like that and after observing them I'm thinking right we could extend this and make some buns to link in with the family so I introduced some baking trays and I got some baking bun cases and we made buns and we stuck things in, like made some little cherries and things to put on the top and they really liked that. And even the parents commented and said just simple things like 'that you don't realise you can get things out at home that you could get out for the children to do to try and extend it'. ... it was making it a little bit more interesting because they had something extra to link in with what they were doing and also to me it was extending their knowledge of why maybe they are doing it and where it's going to go afterwards.

[without degree knowledge] I wouldn't have that expertise to put across and be able to be a competent Practitioner basically ... We've just had Ofsted in ... I feel quite proud of doing this ... and I just put a small Learning Objective on the tables just as a prompt for parents so it could be something like 'Can you use your Fine Motor Skills and write a letter to the Queen' ... because sometimes as a Practitioner you can be in several places at one and then parents come in ... and if you're not around they could just walk away and think 'Well we don't know what we're doing on here, let's go to another one'. So I feel quite proud, Ofsted picked that up in their Report ... and they thought it was a really good idea as in having these Learning Objectives on the table ... I've been putting it into a Learning Journal that I've created for the whole session and each week ... and I've been putting snippets from the EYFS and linking it in to the photograph of what the child is doing ... and again Ofsted picked up on this and they thought it was a really good idea.

They [OfSTED] said it was really good. I personally think I'm selling my expertise and my knowledge of why, what, how children are learning, Well basically I'm not showing off but I'm showing parents that I'm quite knowledgeable and that I know what I'm doing, and why children are learning, and basically the terminology of what they're doing ... if I went into a Children's Centre before I knew obviously the knowledge and understanding that I've got now, I wouldn't understand what fine motor skills was and I'd be thinking 'What's fine motor skills?' ... Why not show off your expertise, to be honest, you know... I suppose not showing off but ... sort of selling yourself that you know your stuff ... You're showing what you know ...that you've got understanding, knowledge of your background in the area that you're working.

I said to her 'I understand that I've only just come but this is an example of what I did in the other Centre, would you be happy to combine it down to one, just basically to save time and for instance Ofsted come in,

they're not going to be wanting to flick through 3 pages of planning when you've just got it all one piece and to be honest they have put it in place, they have taken some of my ideas on board and we have sort of re-jigged the Planning Sheet similar to how I did it in the other Centre.

I just think I know I'm doing a good job if the children, again, are happy, they're engaging well within something, you're getting feedback from parents ... and obviously when you're getting comments from Ofsted, and then your Line Manager thinking 'you've only been here 2 minutes but you've made a vast difference, and you've put your good ideas across' and things like that and to me that must mean that I'm doing a good job.

12. Alice – playing the OfSTED game

I always call myself a Registered Child Minder ...Because I feel sometimes Child Minders used quite loosely in the Press ... so I always try put Registered Child Minder so people know it's an official capacity and it's a real job ... A lot of people think, incorrectly, that if you stop at home looking after other peoples children you're just doing it as a side line or incidental because you're at home perhaps with your children. I think the professionalism of Child Minding in last 15 years that I've been registered has come on leaps and bounds. Now that people know perhaps that you've got to be OFSTED Registered. When I first Started Child Minding if people came to look round my setting to perhaps leave their child with me I thought they were quite surprised about the amount of paper work and the amount of policies and procedures and that kind of thing... nowadays when people look around they know what to expect and they know about OFSTED and they look at your OFSTED Report and the parents are perhaps a little bit more informed now ... they've looked at an OFSTED website and recognised that I'm one of the outstanding child minders in the area and they want to come to me.

Its fairly structured is the day, really in the fact that we have got different routines to stick to, for example, we have got to go to the school run to make sure all the children are there on time. We may have a nursery run to do at lunchtime if we are collecting people. Dropping them off in a morning then teatime school run and then in-between time its fairly free flow really. I might decide that we might be doing a bit of a creative session and a specific thing but I have got a play room and a dining room that I set up with continuous provisions like a book corner and a home corner and the blocks and the books and things so that it is like a mini nursery really in there and children can self select

I am absolutely horrified that child-minders are don't get the level 3 funding. ... It [Welfare Requirements] says that other practitioners might need level 2 and level 3 ... But they [Welfare Requirements. Government] are saying child-minders don't need level 3 ...I think it is a funding issue and don't think the government won't offer funding.

I do the Ofsted self-evaluation form and I try and evaluate my planning ... I use the Ofsted evaluation only when I'm doing my SEF [Self Evaluation Form], ... I try and use the Ofsted SCHEDULE cos it tells you what needs to be satisfactory and the outcomes which are outstanding ... Obviously it gets you into Ofsted language and the lingo ... a lot of Ofsted look at your procedures they will want to look at your planning but if you are confident and articulate what you are doing, not particularly quoting but using the EYFS lingo I think they do think then 'well you are talking about it and I don't have to pressure you on that now'

Ofsted just come in for that 2 or 3 hours every three of four years they don't see that holistic picture I don't think... I do think that Ofsted should take local authority's judgements

13. Valerie – more than just a baby sitter

The easiest way to describe it is as a child-minder but I do tend to elaborate then from then on to just about that fact it is more than just babysitting and that I follow the EYFS legislation and that I work from home and that it is a very hard job and long hours ... I feel that a lot of people think my job is just to be a babysitter, they do not see the more detailed role that I have. I'm..... let me see now I am a book keeper and child care practitioner, obviously I do all the planning for my setting, I have to keep to tight schedules. I have children from ...erm... currently from the youngest is 2 but the youngest I have had was 6 months old but the oldest I have had is 13; you could have the full age range together in the setting at the one time. There are a lot of things that I ... want people to know what it is that I do. I work very hard and I am wanting to say I... I want to feel appreciated for it I suppose.

Basically my job is to support children when they are learning the new skill form babies upwards helping them to crawl and giving them the support and encouragement to try new things ... Planning activities that will challenge them and also ensuring that they are all really happy and safe, feel good with me and they get plenty of rest because that is very important as far as I am concerned. They eat a healthy diet and obviously I am working alongside their parents as well to make sure that if there is anything that is not quite right then we can discuss with them and put things in place for them. It's to give them a wider range of opportunities to learn and develop obviously so that they will feel better, they will develop very well ... I do a lot of observing and assess the children in many ways

14. Penny – frustration with the political undervaluing of early years

since I have done further training ... my personal views have changed slightly as well in that my role is not more important but certainly people are more aware perhaps ...I have been sort of in this industry since 1990, so going back then, there wasn't that professionalism, I don't think it came with working with young children ... I think status we are not it's not an important job so all we do is play with children ... it's not just about playing with children it's about understanding what play is and where its going and what children are learning from it. I think probably the last sort of 5 or 6 years since I started my training, and being in an environment where my manager has also gone through the training ... our perception of what we do and how we do things has changed.

we are educators of young children, I mean we have children from 2 to 5 in my age group, and we are not just babysitting, we are educating as well as caring ... There is the caring nurturing side and there is the education side. I have worked sort of in a bit of both ... but also more recently the last 10 years in the pre-school environment where there is more of an emphasis on the teaching and learning and the education side but that nurturing and caring is still there, it seems to be almost second place to the education side in the pre-school ... I think there is as much importance with both, both are as important as each other and personally I ensure that the caring side of things is done almost automatically. It's not therefore registered and measured like the teaching and learning, reaching their next steps, and [inspection of practice] seems to be more based around the teaching and learning rather than the caring and nurturing side. Personal and social development comes into that side as well I suppose.

I just think the whole profile of early years has changed and become more accountable. The funding ... all 3 and 4 years olds are entitled to 15 hours, the disadvantaged 2 year olds are into the 15 hours, so what we do now, almost all our children that attend the setting, 95% of the children are funded, and maybe 5% pay the extra if they are coming for additional sessions, but the majority of our children just come for the 15 hours a week. So in that respect, because money is coming from government, we have to be accountable for that funding, and probably more so when the premium for early years comes in in April ... it's pushing you more like into schools and being more accountable for what you do for your money I suppose.

They are trying to make us look and be on a par with teachers but I don't think we ever will be ... Because part of the reason, government won't fund newly qualified teachers in early years and that is the reason we have not awarded it QTS, if they suddenly gave early years teachers QTS pay scale, most pay scales would make them all redundant or get rid of them, as they would not afford to pay a QTS wage, so that is the government's underlying motive... They don't need QTS because it's equivalent; but it's not. Until

Government realise ... when they realise the Early Years is the most important time in a child's life, if they get [that] right then the rest of the schooling should follow, instead of putting all the money into key stage one or key stage two. The pupil premium is £1300 per child and going up, so we will be getting the early year's premium, which is £300 so to me it shouts volumes as to how much they value what we do in the early years. It works out at 53p an hour they will be giving us. They are also taking away the weighting money that they have given us for the under privileged children, as the £300 is less than what we have been given anyway. So the £300 which is less than £10 per week, which the government say we have to be creative with to be accountable for this money, and the child in year one will get £1300. So the difference there to me speaks volumes on the government's priority. The early years are reliant on those people who feel passion about those early years to have the best start possible. They shoot themselves in the foot because the more they go for it, the low pay, low status, low everything, the more it will carry on. If everyone took a stand and said 'you know what, we are going to take children at the Kirklees rate 'cos we know you are the cheapest in the country' and if all settings say they are not going to have anyone, then they will have to lower the money.

I feel I am trying to keep up with government's agenda in the qualification side of things, to try and make things better, not to try and improve my practice but to keep up with what's going on.

Appendix 7 - Data Extracts

Alice 1

I see a lot poor practice at places where children are trying to make contact and communicate with that adult, because there is no response back because they are having a chat or coffee or they say, "that's nice", and they've no idea what they are talking about. Or they stick the dummy in and they are trying to talk around that. I've heard lots of time, "that's lovely sweetie, you go play". They have no idea what the child has said practically, so I think poor practice is when the child fobbed off trying to communicate or trying to find what they are wanting and are interested in, or is being ignored. Or overlooked.

Betty 1

At the moment, because of the qualification I've got I can't do anything above like a Higher Level Teaching Assistant because I want to be working in a school, that's what I'd be either a Teaching Assistant or a Higher Level Teaching Assistant, I wouldn't be able to be I couldn't call myself a teacher yet because I'm not a qualified teacher yet, so that's what I'd call myself depending on the job ... That's what I see myself at the moment, yes. I mean I'm going in voluntary on my placement that I have been in and I'm doing a Teaching Assistant's role there basically. I work one to one with a child, but yes I'd see myself at the moment as a Teaching Assistant.

Betty 2

Interviewer: Do you reflect on your Practice?

Betty: Yes

Interviewer: How do you do that?

Betty: The old lazy answer of thinking about it. Writing it down because we had to do for our Placement Portfolio but also since I've been going in voluntary I've still been keeping a diary of reflections, only brief, not going in to great detail. My supervisor's still been signing it every week like I was still there because we discussed it and we said that if I went for a job or something I could show that 'Yes I had gone in voluntary but I hadn't just gone in and sat there and, you know, here's what I've done'. It's evidence basically, so I've still been keeping a reflective diary even though I've gone in voluntary.

Claire 1

Interviewer: So what is a good practitioner?

Claire: Somebody that just loves the job, has that knowledge, has a passion for those children and the families to work with them, and give them the best start.

Interviewer: Is that something they have in their life then?

Claire: Yes I don't know anybody that works in school that works with children or anybody in the learning community that doesn't go beyond what the job description states.

Claire 2

Interviewer: Are there examples of what you would consider weak practice or poor practice within your setting?

Claire: What's been shown is that children levels haven't improved rapidly, so in particular they might not have made 2 levels progress. But knowing that child and where they came in from in nursery, yes they might have been a level one on the paper, and still only level 2, but unless you know that child, and the confidence and the improvements in other areas that might not flag up in the literacy and numeracy, because they can't do certain things, that hasn't moved them on to the next level, just the confidence in themselves and commitment in that child and having the confidence to do it. And I think OfSTED don't see that level and performance. They have gone in and obviously said our school is good at care, the care side but it's the teaching that they've flagged up because the children's levels aren't consistent and aren't moving rapidly

Claire 3

Claire: I came in as a level 3 so I am not sure.

Interviewer: Is that higher than you need or is that where you should be starting?

Claire: For me personally it was where I needed to start. But I'd not had children and I had not had experience of child development, and have seen teaching assistants with level 2 that have joined the school after they have had their family life, and I think that was enough experience in itself. They had that underpinning knowledge on where their children moved through and the experience of them going to school. I can't put a level, if that makes sense, on that? For someone who does not have children and not having knowledge of child development I would say [NVQ] level 3 but someone who's experienced childcare and child development, whether it's on a personal .. it's life experience, you could go a bit lower in the level.

Claire 4

Claire: it's who you are and how you respond to children and parents that makes a difference in a school setting especially in my school setting. From experience, especially as a teaching assistant in Reception, parents knew there was a difference in levels, and if it was a personal matter I found that they came to me more rather than the teacher. If it was regarding a reading matter for the child, they went to the teacher. Some parents came to me first, then I went on to the teacher because they found it easier to talk to me.

Interviewer: What sort of things do parents bring to you?

Claire: Personal matters like divorce, if a child was upset, or if other children weren't getting along together. I think they found I had more time to talk to them than the teacher, because it got to ten to nine, the children had to come in and the lesson began, whereas if I was available to chat to them for that little more and I gave them that little bit extra time; at parents evenings again, although it was done with a teacher, they got ten minute time slots. I think it is all very restricted, and I think this is where a lot of parents, I'm talking obviously from a personal setting, they could relate to me

Dorothy 1

the teacher in the last place, he was very good and good at being a teacher but I wouldn't say that he built like relationships with the children. You know, he had a relationship with the children but this woman in the first one she knew exactly what each child liked, knew how to be with every single one, you know, to make it so that they'd engage better with her whereas he was a teacher and he said this and the children did it and he had a good relationship with them but I wouldn't say he was as flexible.

Dorothy 2

Interviewer: If somebody said, 'What do you do?' what does that mean to you.

Dorothy: Everything. It's the responsibility for the children, it's where you are in the team, it's hard to describe, it's hard to put it into words.

Interviewer: Take me through a sort of a day then. What sorts of things would you be doing through an average day?

Dorothy: To start off with, obviously checking the safety of the classroom, checking everything, all the risk assessments are done, everything's alright for the children and then once they arrive making sure there's things out for the areas that we're trying to develop. It's hard to describe to meet the requirements about what we're doing with the EYFS at the moment, just really thinking on your feet.

Eleanor 1

Eleanor: if you've not got that bond, and you walk straight in and start doing activities with them, they're going to shy away from you because you're a stranger.

Interviewer: Right

Eleanor: Whereas in child minding I don't, when I first started I didn't get involved with the activities straight away, I bonded with the children, and I sat and observed and let them come to me. Once they started coming to me and I walked in and they were '[her name]' and they were ... and I felt able to work the activities with them, I'd sit down and gradually join in. But without that care and that bond, I don't think they would've ... it would have been as easy for them to develop because they trust you.

Eleanor 2

One little boy, when I first got to working with my child minder, because I'd done my placement with her and I got offered a job through that. There was one little boy who she'd got, I think he was just nearly 4, and he didn't speak, didn't speak anything, wouldn't speak to the other child minder, barely spoke to his mum and dad, but did to his mum and dad because he did trust them but not much... and I could see him interested in this one book that I'd got with these puppets; and he kept looking and smiling and I said 'Come on then, come and have a look if you want' and I could see him edging towards me and then, he shied away because one of the other little girls sat on my knee ... So every morning for that next week I sat down with the puppet book, the same book, because I could see him interested, ... from what I'd seen of him it was the puppets and the voices that were making him interact, because he seemed to shuffle more when the puppets were being used in the books... I said 'Do you want to have the bear?', and he kind of nodded, ... After reading the book for about 5 minutes he edged on to my knee and I could see the other child minder watching me, and he didn't say anything else he only said Henry, ... I said, 'If you want you can look after that bear for the rest of the day. You can take him home over the weekend and fetch him back on Monday and I want you to tell me everything that your bear did'. And by Monday, when he walked through the door, the first thing he did was run to me, give me the bear and said, 'Picnic'. And his mum stood there and she went, 'Wow'. She said, 'How have you done that?' I went, 'I just took me time with him, found something he was interested in', and explained everything to her, the story, and she said, 'Well I think you've got a fan there', and after a month, he was talking away.

Emily 1

For me it's more about what they're [the children] doing but I wouldn't say it was the same throughout school. I think from a teacher's point of view, yes they want to see that, but the bit on the paper at the end of the day is what the Governing Body and Head Teachers want to see. They want to know if we haven't made the right amount of point's progress for everybody, why not and what are we doing about it? Whereas in reality, if you're in a classroom and you understand children, you know that Fred in Year 1 might not be able to do something there because he might not be ready to learn but Year 3, Year 4 he could well be the highest achiever in your class because he's ready to engage, he wants to do things then, he wasn't ready in year 1. So he might makes 12 points progress in Year 3 and Year 4 but he didn't make them at the right time lower down school. That's fortunate, as a support person I suppose in the school, that side of things doesn't fall at the side of me, I can concentrate on what I feel I need to do and what I think the children need.

Emily 2

Emily: the teacher has the overall balance and the overall, 'This is what they're going to do', but any fluffiness, generally, can come much more from the support people who take the smaller groups away, perhaps work with less children, and perhaps work with the children who maybe aren't as socially skilled as some of the others who find things more challenging, take a little bit longer, need that bit more nurturing; we tend to work with those kind of children, so the social side of it is incredibly important because they might not have the desire to do the learning, and it's our job then to inspire them and to motivate them, to encourage them, to make them believe in themselves.

Interviewer: So why isn't that a teachers job?

Emily: Ideally I think it would be a teacher's job and I suspect many years ago it was, but I think now because the aim or the expectation is that every child will make a required number of points progress through each year group and by the end of school, but the teacher's job is very much to make sure that that is achieved ... You can do that by that method but sometimes I think there's a pressure, there's an hidden agenda and a pressure from a teacher's point of view that they don't feel that they have the time. They have a broad curriculum that they have to get through and there may be more challenges in the classroom then they can cope with on their own, as in children's behaviour, that sometimes they don't have time to nurture the children, they just haven't got the time to do that and on a one to one basis, whereas the support people are an additional resource who can be sent off to do that.

Florence 1

I think you've got to do it from your heart. I think you've got to be patient, understanding, empathy. It's quite difficult to sort find a phrase or words to capture just exactly what you do because I think I've done it for that long, it just comes naturally. But I think you have to have a love for kids, it's got to be there you can't just think 'Oh I was going to do hairdressing but I'm going to do this' you know you have to really want to do it because it's hard work, its physically draining, it's sometimes emotionally draining and I think you have to have that spark to keep going even if it gets to 2 o'clock where you could sit down and not move. You've got to find something from somewhere to keep that fun and that enjoyment for the kids because it is difficult ... Because that's why I'm there to scaffold this, to build this, to develop this but also to give them that safe and secure little bubble. I see them as a second family so when their mums, dads carers aren't there, they're coming to us and we're like their second family and we do as much as we can for them while they are there.

Florence 2

You can set up an activity and you can shout those kids down to come to you on your list but you know the ones that are going to get the most out of it, if you get swamped, you know they come to you and then you can build on that and that for me is a good day. The ones where you have get the list and find them because there's this target that has to be met and for me that sort of is a bad day because it's not free flowing, it's not working like it should, there's no fun and playfulness, it's a case of meeting the target which then causes pressure. So then you're thinking more or less on ages and stages lines whereas you're not thinking more a scaffolding and working at that kid's level, for me that's a bad day.

Florence 3

Florence: Because that's the title that I've been given from the NNEB when I passed the certificate and then all the jobs after that were set as nursery nurse, so I've fallen into that category.

Interviewer: Are you happy with that?

Florence: No.

Interviewer: What would you like to call yourself?

Florence: I don't know. I don't class myself as a teacher as such because I've not got the Qualified Teacher Status but I think nursery nurse is a bit non descriptive for the job that I do. It's sort of puts you in a carer position where we have to be sort of a carer and an educator at the same time.

Interviewer: You don't use the term practitioner?

Florence: No

Interviewer: An Early Years Practitioner?

Florence: No. At the school where everybody's got their job titles put underneath their photographs it is Nursery Nurse.

Gail 1

I think nursery nurse and there are not many nursery nurses titles now but I think nursery nurses more fits the kind of role what I'd like to see anyway, how I perceive myself. It brings out the more, because you're working with younger children and I think it brings out the more caring side of the nursery nurse. I have heard some of the other new and up and coming titles, Early Years Educator, things like that.

Hannah 1

I think actually working and doing the degree has been brilliant for me; if I had done it full time without working I am not sure whether I would have got the same from it or the same use of it daily. Whereas the amounts of times in the day that things popped in my head with something I had seen and the reasoning ... Because it makes me question ... before I started my degree I never.... Ofsted were something that were there and perhaps I had a higher opinion of Ofsted; now I find what I feel important and I question things of what we are doing and why we are doing it. It has brought a lot more criticality into my work I suppose, when somebody mentions something and asks why, I say why? If they are doing this, why are you doing it? It gives everything more purpose.

Iris 1

I think it's [reflection] about change as well with all the different guidelines and things like that that are coming into practice with new EYFS, the new 2 Year Old Assessments, and things like that. Again following back onto the degree, it's having that knowledge and ability to make them changes with confidence and understanding what you're doing ... because staff look at me for support ... I think 'The 2 Year Old Assessment, what do I have to do there, how would I do this?' ... I did a model one, I did one with an actual child, staff saw it and thought 'Oh it's not that bad now' and went and did it and now they're quite happy to do that themselves.

Iris 2

Because children need a happy environment to learn. They're coming to this setting and they need to come to this setting happy, I'll smile back and that might be the only smile they'll see all day, so they need to come to this setting and feel happy when they come here ... I just ensure that all the children that come to the setting are happy. If they weren't happy then I'd be wanting to know why, as a senior ... If a child wasn't happy in a setting, in our setting in particular, well in any setting, but obviously I can only speak for my own, I'd want to know why that's child's not happy. Obviously, you know, there's the bonding process leaving their parents, but once they're settled at the setting and they didn't seem happy I'd be speaking to my manager but also that parent immediately because I would be wanting to know why they weren't happy. Yes that would be my main priority regardless the planning, regardless the EYFS, that would be my main priority as senior.

Iris 3

Maybe if staff's not happy for whatever reasons then that's something that we'd deal with but we've never had that happen at this setting, thankfully. All staff enjoy their work and then you can identify it in the children's behaviour, it's very good relationships with the children ... I do try and think if something's not worked effectively I will speak to the girls about that and we try and think of ways we can implement it. I do tend to reflect my own practice, looked at areas, especially when I was learning

Janet 1

I think some people are practically better and I think, but perhaps not academically as clever. And I think the practitioners that really enjoy children and working with children sometimes outshine the ones who have got perhaps a very high level qualification but in some ways don't particularly like children.

Katy 1

we share the jobs, we all do domestic side of things we all... it depends on who is working that day and what we have to do at the end of the session.. No one person is asked to do the toilets. We have a cleaner at the end of the week but on a daily basis, the domestics have to be done and I feel that she is starting to think that because she is EYP now, she does the evaluation sheets and it seems to be one of the other practitioners that seems to be regularly doing the toilets. It's just something I have picked up myself but it's not been brought it to my attention by any of those practitioners but I think I can see there may be something said about it. To be honest I have just devised a staff deployment sheet, a daily staff deployment sheet, which I have never felt I have needed to do before, I've felt everybody knows their roles.

Katy 2

So I think that's my ultimate aim I think on a daily basis to address anything that is causing something... if you haven't got a happy team you haven't got a happy setting and it will affect ... and children will notice when things aren't good.

Katy 3

there might be the odd error and I don't really like to see that error but sometimes I think it's important to pick them up. I will sometimes pick up on it but as we have mature staff, we have professional staff from different background, I don't have that trouble. I did in the past with one member of staff but yet she did have other attributes she brought to the setting so I did support her key skills, you know, allow her to do some training but I think her other attributes outweighed some of the things that let her down if you like, academic things that let her down.

Laura 1

I have a little brother and I have helped look after him like since he was born and we have gone through looking for nurseries stage, we have gone through everything; me being at University and having him at home I have taken things back and gone, 'well what if we did this?' Strategies do work. And I think from having him at home and understanding strategies do work. I think I implement it a lot into practice, and I think working at the children's centre and having to establish my confidence, establish my rapport with parents, and multi agency working has had to be a must, because they are the aims of children centres to target families; and the only thing way to target families is to understand families which is to build rapports with families. Therefore from working there, a lot of my views within home as well, have brought this out.

Laura 2

Interviewer: so part of good practice is about wanting children to do.... Wanting children to progress? Can you do the job without that feeling of wanting them to do it?

Laura: No I don't think you can't because what aspiration do you have for a child to develop, to achieve their full potential in life... to develop enough in a certain area to achieve further

Meg 1

Meg: Ok, my priority is for them to feel settled and to make sure that they are happy, and they are sort of exploring everything that they want to explore, and they are confident in doing that. To make sure that they are stimulated, but they are still having fun at the same time, sort of thing. I think the setting's would be sort of less of, ...the care giving routines obviously, but I think on paper, priority would be to ensure that every child is moving in the right direction.

Interviewer: Right, so possibly slightly more towards the stimulating and moving on in the learning? Within the context of being settled,

Meg: Yeah. My thing is, if a child doesn't feel safe and settled they're not going to explore are they? If they're not confident, they're not going to explore, whereas some people may think well they shouldn't be having a cuddle for that long, they should be doing that, like everybody else would.

Interviewer: Come with me and do the jigsaw?

Meg: Exactly, whereas if they are never given that, they will never want to do that. You have to build up a rapport before. Not with every child some children come in and just fly with it don't they?

Meg 2

I think a lot of what you want to reflect about are things you maybe think you could have done better with, or you could have sort of prevented from happening. So I think they are the ones that you do. But in saying that, you do sometimes, like I was saying with the planning, that it doesn't always have to be positive. I think quite a lot in terms of planning is positive because you are documenting and justifying why you have done a certain thing, so you have got a positive outlook, because otherwise you would not have done it in the first place if you didn't think it was going to be positive, sort of thing. And I do in terms of ... when I was a room leader I did a lot more, because there were certain members of staff that maybe lacked a bit of confidence. I would encourage them, if they handled something particularly well, I'd say 'you handled that really well, blah, blah, blah,' and they'd say 'you know what, actually in thinking about it ...' so you're sort of encouraging them.

Interviewer: So a reflection on strengths?

Meg: Yeah. But I do think as well you do tend to do it maybe when you want to improve something.

Meg 3

Interviewer: You are heading for a degree? In a profession where you could stay at level 3

Meg: Yeah,,,, yeah.... Erm..... But I did that for myself if that makes sense. I did that because I wanted to be the best that I could be if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yes it does

Meg: And I don't think everybody has got that attitude and I think there are certain members of staff or practitioners that wouldn't do the degree and have openly said 'if it brought into play so you had to do a degree then I'd walk'... that would be a shame as they are good practitioners.

Interviewer: But they don't have that commitment?

Meg: I think that.... The girl I am thinking of in particular works part time she is older and has a family. When she is at work she is completely committed and she is a really good member of staff and I really enjoy working with her and she is really good with the children and they really like her being in the room to the point where some of the children ask for her even when it's not her day in. They have built a rapport and parents get on with her and things. Then away from nursery I think she has got commitments elsewhere. Maybe she doesn't feel like she is academic enough to do it.

Nina 1

I am but there's like a limit to what I can do with me being in the specific setting. There's a limit to the activities that you can do ... I'm basically limited to water, sand and the toys that we've got whereas I'd like to explore with ice, but there's choking and hazards. They say there's choking with ice so they can't play with ice cubes; I'd like to get beans out, jelly and let them explore different textures. Food play is banned, dried pasta is banned.

Nina 2

Interviewer: So your Practice is good? Would you admit to that, would you say 'I'm a good practitioner'?

Nina: I'd say it's good but there's a limit to it. I'd like to be better but because of the setting that I was in I can't

Nina 3

Interviewer: What's your job title?

Nina: A Nursery Nurse

Interviewer: Why that particular title? There's lots of things you can call yourself within Early Years, why a Nursery Nurse?

Nina: That's what the setting employed me as but we'll get referred to as We've got Senior Nursery Nurses, Assistants, Students, Room Leaders and that's just what I'm classed as, Nursery Nurse.

Nina 4

Interviewer: How about everybody becoming a graduate? Is that necessary?

Nina: No I don't think it is. I don't think there's enough jobs out there for everybody to become a graduate. There's not enough people who've got to want to do it for the jobs to be there, whereas at the moment I think a lot of people are doing their graduate level and there's not posts available.

Penny 1

within our setting at the moment we are introducing peer observations for all our staff now we had a staff meeting about what everybody feels good practice looks like and how we can measure that in peer observation so the idea was that everybody contributed to what good practice was and we were going to try and compile a list of everybody's views so that everybody knows what the good practice should look like and what it is and doing our peer observations cos A you know what you are looking for and B the ones who are being observed knows what they are showing in good practice.

Penny 2

now I say I am an early year's teacher. But probably previous to that I would say I work in a pre-school but I am actually the deputy manager there but it almost, I think previously, it's almost seen to be less valued as a manager as a deputy manager. I don't really see myself as a manager in a management role.

Rose 1

I suppose in me and in other people I look for good practice in terms of seeing that a child is an individual child instead of a uniform in a group in a room.

Rose 2

I wouldn't have known other than being at Uni and sharing ideas with other people. You know when you said about, on Monday's class about two practitioners talking and the planning and how it works, that was me and somebody else ... It was me, because they were all saying, 'Well we plan for the children' and I was 'you don't; we do it every 2 years and it comes out like this', and oh my goodness me. So considering all that, it's a shame that it has to change so much in school.

Rose 3

To do the job at the moment it's [the Foundation degree] more than you need, in my opinion, it would be fantastic for everybody to have the kind of knowledge that you get at Foundation Degree; having said that everyone is different how they respond to it, and different people deliver it different ways, because I know people who have got Foundation Degree through college but don't go into things like I do because they weren't encouraged to use the same skills

Sally 1

As I say, we have a practice that, and it's something very, very basic. The child comes in, they're told to get their milk and biscuits, they sit on the carpet first thing in the morning. This child comes in who's just come from Breakfast Club, does not want milk and biscuit; if they do not get milk and biscuit and do not sit on the carpet they're sent to sit on the bench because they're not following the rules. That to me is bad practice. That child is not hungry, they've been to Breakfast Club within the school, so it's not as if they don't And we know that they'll come in and they'll say, 'Oh I've had beans on toast, I've had cereal, I've had a glass of milk'. So this is at 10 to 9 they come into the classroom from Breakfast Club, 10 to 9 they're expected to sit down and have milk and biscuit. They don't want it, they're not hungry. So then they're sent straight to the 'off the carpet', not by me, because I just say 'ok right have a bit later', which is going partly against the school rules but I do think if they haven't got that need for it at that point they will have at some point and as long as they're not saying in the middle of a numeracy session 'Can I have a milk and biscuit' If they say when they're on their 'choose' or when they're on their work, 'Can I have another biscuit because I'm choosing now?' I'll say, 'yes you may'. If they ask during the session I'll say, 'Can you wait until we've just finished this bit then you may go and have it'. But the other staff don't see it like that. To that it's a hindrance having to do milk and biscuit in the middle of a session, to me it doesn't matter, if they've done their work and they need it at 20 to 12

Interviewer: So what's the 'Poor' element of this? What was the thing you consider to be inappropriate about it?

Sally: Because again we're not listening to the children; if someone isn't hungry they're not hungry and just because it doesn't fit into a set programme of time that is adult led, you know a timetable says 'At this point you do this'. If somebody said to me I had to have my breakfast every morning at 8 o'clock I wouldn't be able to do it. I know what it's like for me personally, I get up, I do jobs around the house, I leave for work about quarter past 7, I get to work and at 10 o'clock I'm ready for a drink and if anybody said I'd to have anything before that I would struggle and I would probably have a paddy like the children. So I just think it's not listening to the children and dealing with their needs at that point.

Sally 2

I actually go to another member of staff who is quite Well when I say newly qualified, she's probably in her 3rd year of teaching, or I go to the lady in the Nursery, who is again 4\5 years into that role, because I think they're more on a level where I am so I feel that I can have a more

Interviewer: Why does that matter?

Sally: When I say a level, that's not the right word really, but it matters to me because I feel that they're coming at me with a fresher approach because they haven't been in the post that long, so they have come in with new ideas, they have come in with more recent training so I think they do a few things differently

than some members of staff that haven't. So to me it's important. It's no good going to the lady I'm working with me because she just sees it as 'Sitting them down, do a, b, c, and d' and if they can do it they can do it, if not just pull them out of 'children time' and get them to do it again.

Valerie 1

I love Uni because I can talk of what I do in a comfortable position as there are no children around. I do go to child minder groups with children we arrange different visits. We went to a Sikh temple recently. Because I am the only person doing the degree course within one of the groups, I get asked a lot of questions but I don't get as much out of it as I used to and I find that more difficult. I am a member of the Children Come First network, which is a group of child minders that can provide the free funded classes. So we get extra training and [we're] doing extra training tomorrow. It's on media and material that is something that is not really that good.

Yvonne 1

Interviewer: What have you seen that has struck you as being poor practice?

Yvonne: When, I think when a topic is chosen for us so maybe a co-ordinator or somebody higher up in the school maybe says we are going to do this topic.

Interviewer: An example?

Yvonne: Of the topic or...

Interviewer: Yeah...

Yvonne: Erm... high in the sky...

Interviewer: Right

Yvonne: For nursery, so we said, 'well we need you to be more specific than that', and actually I have mentioned about doing organic planning, which has been up and running for about 3 weeks now. For our medium term planning we put our ideas on, so now we say to management, 'this is what we want to do, this is what the children are telling us that they want to do', to add our input on that, rather than to be told, 'this is what topic you are doing'.

Interviewer: What was wrong with high in the sky?

Yvonne: I don't think there was anything wrong with it, I just don't really feel it was appropriate for this age group

Interviewer: What made it problematic for you?

Yvonne: I think you can get a lot out of it with imagination, but I just think it wasn't what the children particularly were interested in. It's not come from their interests and us as practitioners, it's not been something that we have discussed, it was just sort of, 'this is the topic'.

Yvonne 2

Interviewer: Could you give an example on how you have used your reflection or your evaluation recently?

Yvonne: I was doing some imagination play with some children, building, so I just took a builder ... I weren't Miss N I were this builder, Suzie the builder. And then another practitioner interrupted me, and I had 4 or 5 children with me and we were building this wall, and we were all working together to build it, and this other practitioner interrupted me, not sort of saw what I was doing, and took 3 children away to go and do something, so I was left holding this wall on my own... [laughs]... but although I was quite annoyed, I could not let the children see that and I just thought that is bad practice, you know in my head I was thinking that was bad practice

Interviewer: Yes

Yvonne: And I was reflecting on that, I thought that practitioner shouldn't have really done that, and she had not realised the importance of what I was doing really.

Interviewer: So what did you do about it?

Yvonne: I carried on building my wall with the child that I had left, and then we sort of finished that activity, and at the end of the session I just sort of said to the other practitioner, on her own, sort of made a joke of it, 'didn't you realise I was building this wall'. But then it became a little bit more, 'actually I didn't want you interrupt what I was doing', and I told her what my aim was and actually ... I think she understood why I had told her really, why I had pulled her up about it. And I think that is good practice, as well, you should be able to approach your colleagues. And actually I might do things sometimes that I might need for someone to tell me, 'well actually I didn't appreciate that' or 'you have not understood the importance on what I was doing'; so I think that was quite good practice where 3 or 4 year ago I would not have dared say that to anybody, so that is where my confidence has come in

Interviewer: But good practice involves team communication and that shared understanding

Yvonne: And I don't think ... you should not take it too personally, that is when you can start having problems in your team ... if she had taken that the wrong way, rather to say, 'I'm sorry I didn't realise, I just needed my key children' and again I sort of said 'I understand that', and I think it is good to be professional about things

Yvonne 3

Interviewer: tell me about the reflection that you do. How you do or when you do it?

Yvonne: I think I just do it very informally on a sort of day to day basis, so if I plan an activity linked to the topic maybe dinosaurs and some things have not gone right I have thought there and then has that really worked is there any point doing it tomorrow have the children been interested has it been... has it worked for the most able children or worked for the lesser able children, has it just worked; sometimes activities don't work and that's when you need to think not just carry on with that cos its not planning you have got to adjust it.

Yvonne 4

Interviewer: How do you explain your role to people then, what do you do, what is a nursery nurse?

Yvonne: I say that I look after children up to the age of 5. In my current role with young children I plan activities and meet the care needs of them, I work with parents and I provide good provision for young children.

Yvonne 5

Interviewer: What about knowledge, what do you need to know?

Yvonne: You have to have a good understanding of early years and what children need, and their age and stages of development. I think you need to learn yourself how to interact, and how to reflect, and how to understand practice in the early years.

Interviewer: To what level? At the moment your profile says you have a level 3, a level 5 qualification, you are moving onto do your level 6 qualification, so what is the necessary level?

Yvonne: I don't know, I can't say that, but I feel as though my practice has improved since I did my foundation degree quite a lot just because of just being, well, reflective, and understanding actually what reflection is. I have learnt that from my foundation degree, I feel I can share that with other practitioners as well. I think you can go on to learn more, and be more knowledgeable.

Zoe 1

again with all the changes with the Ofsted and EYFS it's keeping up to that, again letting everybody have their own say and just all of us working together to work out what's best for our practice and how we can implement it. So we're all working to the same aims and we may have different ways of doing it but it's just making sure that the staff are all doing the best for the children and working for them, but they're sharing their ideas between them, although they're coming to me, they're sharing ideas in the practice as well between themselves.

Appendix 8 – Reading 3: Frequency of pronouns

Reading 3: Frequency of pronouns

	Pseudonym	Yellow - we, team	Turquoise - you, doxa, practitioner in general	Green - he, she they, other practitioners	Purple - they, specified others	Blue - faceless authority, management	Red - children	Total	
1	ALICE	6	15	12	5	13	13	64	'We' includes children, and parents
2	BETTY	4	13	13	0	7	22	59	
3	CLAIRE	23	26	11	12	9	7	88	
4	DOROTHY	4	19	17	1	1	9	51	
5	ELEANOR	25	26	19	7	1	28	106	
6	FLORENCE	38	49	4	3	7	27	128	
7	GAIL	12	26	5	10	5	14	72	
8	HELEN	19	23	7	5	9	14	77	
9	IRIS	39	11	19	5	4	14	92	
10	JANET	7	23	4	6	0	10	50	
11	KATY	58	26	17	9	9	15	134	
12	LAURA	7	22	12	3	1	9	54	
13	MEG	20	21	12	1	4	12	70	
14	NINA	7	15	12	4	11	10	59	
15	PENNY	21	15	14	1	3	7	61	
16	ROSE	6	18	18	1	8	19	70	
17	SALLY	12	12	9	1	3	19	56	
18	TINA	15	23	23	2	1	14	78	
19	VALERIE	15	15	4	3	5	12	54	'We' includes children, and parents
20	YVONNE	13	22	9	0	5	10	59	
21	ZOE	32	15	26	3	3	17	96	
22	EMILY	14	24	8	0	4	16	66	
23	HANNAH	13	16	5	4	3	10	51	

Appendix 9 – Participant Information and Consent Forms

University of Huddersfield

School of Education and Professional Development

Participant Information Sheet (E3)

Research Project Title: How do early years practitioners conceptualise good practice for the purposes of self-evaluation and professional identity?

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. May I take this opportunity to thank you for taking time to read this?

What is the purpose of the project?

The purpose of this investigation is to explore the ways in which early years practitioners conceptualise good practice and the factors that influence the process of conceptualisation and the resulting definitions. In particular, by adopting the Listening Guide approach to data analysis I will also attempt to identify how these concepts are influenced by professional relationships within the workplace and by the judgements and guidance of senior colleagues. The study will seek to identify any differences between the concepts developed by novice and experienced practitioners, and the basis of these differences.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been asked to participate as you have recently completed an FdA/BA Hons in Early Years, which has included the teaching of reflective practice, and you also have professional/placement experience in an early years setting.

Do I have to take part?

Participation on this study is entirely voluntary, so please do not feel obliged to take part. Refusal will involve no penalty whatsoever and you may withdraw from the study at any stage without giving an explanation to the researcher.

What do I have to do?

You will be invited to take part in a semi-structured interview about how you define good early years practice. This should take no more than **45 minutes** of your time. It would also be helpful if you were prepared to make yourself available for further contact if there are any questions I feel I would like to follow up. This contact can be face-to-face, by phone or by e-mail, as you prefer.

Are there any disadvantages to taking part?

There should be no foreseeable disadvantages to your participation. If you are unhappy or have further questions at any stage in the process, please address your concerns initially to the researcher if this is appropriate. Alternatively, please contact the research supervisor **Dr Denise Robinson**, at the School of Education & Professional Development, University of Huddersfield.

Will all my details be kept confidential?

All information which is collected will be strictly confidential and anonymised before the data is presented in the Dissertation, in compliance with the Data Protection Act and ethical research guidelines and principles.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of this research will be written up in a thesis and presented for assessment in **2016**. If you would like a copy please contact the researcher.

Who has reviewed and approved the study, and who can be contacted for further information?

The research supervisor is **Dr Denise Robinson**. She can be contacted at the University of Huddersfield, 01484 478116, or d.robinson3@hud.ac.uk .

Name & Contact Details of Researcher:

Mary A Dyer
University of Huddersfield
School of Education and Professional Development
Lockside Building
Queensgate
Huddersfield
HD1 3DH

01484 478246

m.a.dyer@hud.ac.uk

University of Huddersfield

School of Education and Professional Development

Participant Consent Form (E4)

Title of Research Study:

How do early years practitioners conceptualise good practice for the purposes of self-evaluation and professional identity?

Name of Researcher: Mary A Dyer

Participant Identifier Number:

- I confirm that I have read and understood the participant Information sheet related to this research, and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

- I understand that all my responses will be anonymised.

- I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.

- I agree to take part in the above study

Name of Participant:

Signature of Participant:

Date:

Follow-up contact details (optional):

Name of Researcher: Mary A Dyer

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

Appendix 10 – Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Semi-structured Interview Question Schedule

Explain your title – why do you call yourself that? What do you think the main purpose of your role is?

How would you know if you were doing it well/effectively?

What would you call yourself if you were still at your placement provider?

What does it mean, in your eyes, to be an ey practitioner (or title used)

Describe the things you do in a typical day

What knowledge/skills do you think someone needs to be able to do your job?

Share with me something you have done recently – tell me about your practice.

Would you say this was good/average/practice that needs to be improved or practice that could be improved? Why – how are you making this judgement?

Now tell me about (opposite) type of practice – again how are you making this judgement, based on what?

Other examples of good practice – generally, or yourself? Poor practice?

Does good practice change, develop, adapt to different types of setting – could something be good practice in one setting and not in another? Or with some children and not others?

Talk to me about reflection:

How/when do you evaluate your practice? Reflect on your practice or your role?

Why – for what purpose?

Shared reflections?

Reflect only to solve problems?

Find reflection helpful? What do you get from it? What connection is there between your reflections and your ideas of good practice?

Example of how you have used reflection or evaluation recently.