

University of Stirling

School of Education

**Working with Birth to Three: Exploring the Personal Theories of
Scottish Early Years Practitioners**

A thesis submitted for the fulfilment of
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Dorothy A. Barcroft

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Abstract

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Practitioners working with children under three are often marginalised; both in terms of group settings and in terms of being a focus of research (see Manning-Morton, 2006; McDowell-Clark and Baylis, 2012). This research prioritizes the practitioner's voice by exploring the subject area of personal theory. In this thesis, personal theory is conceptualised as a composite of understandings and experiences including policy, organisational procedures, Early Years literature, training and Continuing Professional Development as well as personal and professional experiences, beliefs, and values. As Stephen and Brown (2004) indicate, particular constructions of care, learning, and children shape what is considered desirable educational practice. Drawing on Aristotle's intellectual virtue of phronesis, this research's aim is to understand how practitioners' personal and professional experiences and understandings contribute to practitioners' construction of personal theory. Research questions focus on: 1) understanding which relationships are particularly influential, 2) understanding which experiences are particularly influential and 3) identifying key features of practitioners' personal theories. Case study methodology frames the research design.

The research demonstrates that although personal theory is tacit, linking to specific instances of practice enables practitioners to articulate personal constructions of care, learning and children. Findings relate to six key characteristics of practitioners' personal theories: practice as an 'Ethic of Care', practice as pedagogy, practice as 'substitute mothering', practice as distinctive for children aged birth to three years, practice as rooted in experience and practice as emotional activity. Joan Tronto's (1993, 2013) 'Ethic of Care' affords further consideration of personal theory; particularly the contradiction between personal theory that shapes engagements with young children as an 'Ethic of Care' and that which shapes engagements as 'substitute mothering'. The thesis' discussion highlights how the articulation and discussion of personal theory enables a richer construction of Early Years professionalism and professional identity within Birth to Three settings.

*“it would cause her to make a clear link between Education and dignity,
between hard obvious things that are printed in books and the soft subtle
things that lodge themselves in the soul”*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009: 216)

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A central premise of this thesis is that Education is a culmination of experiences, relationships and knowledge. It is so much more than the 'hard obvious things printed in books' (Adichie, 2009: 216). As an individual, who has had the good fortune to study and teach most of my life, I have been blessed by experiences and relationships. I now have the opportunity to thank the people who have contributed to and have enriched my own learning process. So without further ado, I acknowledge the following:

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Chapter 1: Considering Personal Theory as a Research Subject

Introduction

Young children's lives matter. The conditions and experiences of childhood are important to the individual child, to their parents and extended family, and to society. Subsequently, relationships between children and those who care for them in their early years are of importance for as Noddings (2006:95) suggests, 'we start life in relationship, not as individuals'. It follows therefore that when young children experience group care, the people in that group care setting are key in terms of young children's well-being, development and learning. Indeed, Bowman et al. (2000) suggest that Early Years practitioners may be more important in terms of children's development and learning than the specific curriculum. How adults make decisions about ordinary daily tasks influences how children see themselves, what they expect and what learning opportunities are offered (Brooker, 2002).

Evidence suggests that women have returned to paid employment sooner after having children and in greater numbers than in previous decades (Social Trends, 2002). According to Dahlberg and Moss (2005), this market demand has fuelled expansion in child care provision for British children under the age of five. Urban (2008), writing from a wider European perspective, also links growth in Early Years provision to maternal employment patterns but additionally notes that this is consistent with economic policy on competitive global labour markets and economic growth. Whether on a micro or a macro level, provision for children under the age of three is often associated with adult employment patterns and economic policy rather than educational opportunities.

Growing up in Scotland (GUS) (Mabelis & Marryat, 2011) data suggests that 26% of families who include a child under one year of age use some form of child care outside of the home. However, by the time the child has reached the age of two years, 82% of parents use some form of child care. *GUS* data suggests that parents are more likely

to use both formal and informal child care provision with regular child care being sought for children from the age of six to twelve months. This pattern is consistent with United Kingdom statutory arrangements for parental leave. The most frequently cited reason for seeking child care for children under the age of three years is parental employment; specifically, paid employment by the mother (Anderson et al., 2007). The number of hours and different child care arrangements also varies between families; with some parents utilizing several different care providers. Informal provision such as care provided by grandparents is the most common form of child care for babies. *GUS* (Anderson et al., 2007) data indicates that the type and pattern of child care arrangements relates to income level with higher earners more likely to secure formal arrangements for provision. Number of children within the family unit also correlates to child care arrangements but this time the relationship is an inverse one. Analysis of *GUS Sweep 1* cohort data indicates that private nurseries are not only the most common form of formal child care arrangements chosen by parents, they are the most preferred. The data therefore indicates that large numbers of Scottish children under the age of three experience group care settings, either on a full time or a part time basis.

This thesis is based on the central premise that those who work with children aged birth to three years are important to children's learning and development. It focuses on a particular aspect of Early Years Care and Education; practitioners who provide care and learning opportunities in group care settings for children under the age of three. Increasing numbers of young children in Scotland experience group care settings prior to their third birthday (Mabelis & Marryat, 2011) yet little is understood about the educational and care practices within group care settings which young children experience (Powell & Goouch, 2012) or the complex interrelationship which practitioners make theory and professional practice (Ceglowski, 2001). The thesis reports on an empirical research study of the personal theories of Scottish practitioners who work with children aged birth to three years in group care settings. This initial chapter begins by stating the thesis' central argument and then outlines the research subject's rationale from both an academic and a personal perspective. It then

identifies the need for this research study before identifying the specific research aim and questions. The final section of the chapter provides an overview of the subsequent chapters of the thesis.

The Central Argument of the Thesis

The central argument of this thesis is that Early Years practitioners' personal theories influence practitioners' practice with children aged birth to three years. A composite of understandings and experiences including policy, organisational procedures, Early Years literature, initial training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as well as professional and personal experiences, beliefs, and values, personal theory shapes a practitioner's construction of desirable practice.

The thesis contends that practitioners do not exist in a 'tabula rasa' state into which government, organisations and higher education establishments simply channel particular constructions of care, education and desirable practice. Instead, this thesis argues that practitioners actively construct personal theory in terms of what it means to be an Early Years practitioner and to work with children under the age of three. Personal theory therefore contributes to an individual practitioner's construct of Early Years professionalism.

Conceptualising Personal Theory in Early Years Practice and Professionalism

Personal theory links with what Polanyi (1967, cited in Kinsella, 2007) identifies as tacit knowledge. It is this 'professional craft knowledge' (Tom, 1984, cited in Cooper & McIntyre, 1996) rooted in experience which contributes to the implicit personal theory used in everyday teaching (Cooper & McIntyre, 1996). In the observation of educational practice, it may appear that action is instinctive rather than intermeshed with knowledge and understandings. As McIntyre (1995) argues, the experienced practitioner may indeed view their work as intuitive yet deeper examination indicates that personal theory is present. Goldstein and Lake (2000) extend this argument to novice practitioners suggesting that even those at the beginning stages of the Early Years profession hold personal theories of care and learning which link to practice.

Central to this argument is the role that experience plays in learning. Rather than being a static entity, knowledge is shaped and reshaped through daily engagements with the world. Individuals are active in constructing meaning through their interactions with others and through a variety of different experiences. As Dewey (1902/ 1972) theorises, learning sits in relationship with experience. Early Years practitioners come to educational practice having been a child, a family member and a learner. They work in group care settings with other colleagues. These settings are subject to government policy and regulation. All of these experiences contribute to the construction of personal theory and to practitioners' sense of professionalism. Additionally, as practitioners participate in the experience of initial training and CPD, they encounter situations and knowledge which contribute to their personal theory.

This thesis' conceptualisation of personal theory draws on Aristotle's (Kristjánsson, 2005) intellectual virtue of phronesis. With its focus on experience and wise practice, phronesis acknowledges the sensitive decision making processes which practitioners engage in during interactions with children under the age of three.

A key consideration of personal theory is its potential to impact on children's learning. As rationale for practice, personal theory is a consolidation of different strands of knowledge regarding policy, procedures, literature regarding child development and childhood as well as understandings constructed from personal and professional experience. Constructions of care, learning and development, the child and childhood contribute to what practitioners consider desirable practice when working with young children. These constructions also contribute to the individual's conceptualisation of professional identity and professionalism.

Yet, presently professionalism in Early Years often focuses on the embodiment of prescribed sets of criteria (Urban, 2010). Miller (2008) contends that this is a result of the presumed relationship between the quality of Early Years provision and the Early Years workforce. Although quality is itself a contested concept (Moss and Pence, 1994; Dahlberg et al., 1999), a focus on quality provision can manifest itself in a parallel focus on staffing. As many policy makers and academics note, Early Years work is

often constructed as low paid, low status and low skilled employment (Ingram, 2009; Payler & Georgeson, 2013). It is also gendered employment; a feminisation of labour based on the assumption that women are naturally skilled at care and relationships (Burman, 2009). The undervaluing of babies and children under three also contributes to the low status of Early Years work. Within a culture which focuses attention on school preparation and 'real learning', work with young children is often cast as task orientated with a focus on physical care rather than education and care (McDowell Clark & Baylis, 2012). This deficit model of Early Years belies the complexity of the work and skill present in educating and caring for young children (Moss, 2006). It constructs a particular form of Early Years practitioner professionalism; one which implies the need for regulation and prescription by bodies external to Early Years settings in order to ensure quality provision for young children.

It is these regulatory frameworks which prioritize a rational and technical approach to care and education (Moss, 2003). Osgood (2006a) identifies how this rational technical approach, prevalent in neo-liberal managerialism, also serves to deskill practitioners thus furthering the deficit construction of Early Years practice. A regulatory framework brings a top-down approach to professional practice by imposing particular constructions of rational knowledge; one where theory and practice are conceptualised as distinct from each other (Urban, 2008; 2010). This discourse of Early Years professionalism interfaces a discourse regarding quality provision in which effectiveness and outcomes are defined out with context (Urban, 2008). Within regulatory frameworks even the emotional tone of practice is prescribed (Vincent & Braun, 2011). 'Good practice' is cast in light of 'feely rules' which regulate control of self and of children. Emotion and care are replaced by a focus on rationale and reasoning (Vincent & Braun, 2013). As Moss and Brannen (2003) note, policy documents spend little time documenting what is meant by education and care or what it might mean for young children or the practitioners who work with them.

The current discourse of quality suggests that government, regulators, parents and practitioners share a single and shared understanding (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Yet,

many Early Years academics argue that quality is a constructed and contested concept (Singer, 1993; Woodhead, 1998; Mac Naughton, 2005). Stephen and Brown's (2004) research, focusing on Scottish Early Years practitioners working with children aged three to five years old, suggests an 'insider perspective' of Early Years practice which is distinctive from that of policymakers and regulators. Similarly, Cottle's (2011) study of English practitioners working in Sure Start centres identifies that practitioners' constructions of quality and successful practice is a composite of political and organisational context, personal life history, as well as individual values and beliefs. Practitioners' construction of quality and desirable practice may therefore differ from other stakeholders such as policy makers, regulatory bodies and parents. A focus on personal theory as a research subject area invites consideration of an 'insider perspective' of theory/practice of working with children under the age of three years in group care settings. Rather than focus exclusively on policy and regulatory frameworks, a focus on personal theory provides a richer construction of theory and knowledge within the particular educational practice of Early Years.

Early Years as a Site of Educational Theory and Practice

Early Years Care and Education is an area often associated with a mixed education and social policy agenda. As Bertram and Pascal (2002) identify, it can be cast as a means to reduce child poverty, tackle educational underachievement and equality of opportunity, improve children's health and development, prepare children for school and also support parents seeking child care arrangements to enable them to work or study. It is this later objective that is often central in the specific area of Early Years practice with children aged birth to three years.

This thesis however firmly places Early Years work with children aged birth to three years as an educational practice; one which provides opportunities for promoting children's learning and development. It is a stance consistent with Scottish Government policy focus of the importance of Early Years in terms of children's learning and development. The publication of *Birth to Three* series in 2005 (LTScotland, 2005a, 2005b) and the subsequent publication of *PreBirth to Three* (LTScotland, 2010)

highlight key strategies in relation to professional practice to support learning and development in children's early years. These guidelines reflect dominant discourses and theory with regards to the education and care of young children in group care settings but they do so from the perspective of stakeholders out with Early Years settings. This thesis' focus is on practitioners' perspectives. Practitioners' personal theories provide rationale for practice and therefore provide a pedagogical approach for working with children aged birth to three years.

The identification of an educational focus in Early Years is not however straightforward for there is also debate with regards to the primary purpose of provision; education, care and child care to enable parents to gain employment or access training can be considered to be primary purposes. Moss (2010:15) argues that Early Years provision needs to be considered primarily as an educational practice as education in its 'broadest sense is connected with human and societal flourishing'. Powell and Gooch (2012), however, state that provision for children aged birth to three years is often viewed as different from other aspects of Early Years. So even within the wider Early Years frame, there are divisions in terms of positioning provision for children aged birth to three years as educational practice. Presently, many policy makers distinguish between provision in Early Years which is considered care and that which is considered education (McDowell- Clark & Baylis, 2012). This construction of service provision has historical connections (Davis, 2010). The focus on care provision also relates to attachment theory and to discourses on mothering (Elfer, 2007). A focus on the physical care of children though can be at the expense of a focus on learning for as McDowell- Clark and Baylis (2012) note, provision for children aged birth to three years is often not recognised as 'real learning' or 'education'. Yet, many Early Years academics (see Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) note that the distinction between care and education is a false dichotomy as the routines and relationships involved in care are central to young children's learning and development.

This thesis is consistent with the work of McDowell- Clark and Baylis (2012) and Powell and Gooch (2012) in recognising that these initial years of a child's life are rich in

learning experiences. Young children are social beings and their initial years of life present significant opportunities for learning. If pedagogy is, as Moss (2006:32) suggests, 'a relational and holistic approach to working with people' then group care provision for children aged birth to three years is a site of educational theory and practice.

Moss's (2006) construction of education positions education as concerned with transformation and change; an ethical practice in which relationships and responsibility to the 'Other' matter (Freire, 1970/1993; Readings, 1996; Moss, 2003). It is a positioning of education which moves away from the 'transfer model of knowledge' by focusing on learning as a shared activity (Lubeck & Post, 2005). Readings (1996) argues that the individual can never be separate from others and therefore education is always a relationship where the teacher speaks in dialogue with the student. The focus is on the process of learning and context of the situation. This particular construction of education acknowledges knowledge that the learner brings to the learning process (Soler & Miller, 2003). This particular stance on educational practice directly contrasts with the technical-instrumental approach to education in which learning is positioned as an activity measured against predetermined outcomes (Calderhead & Gates, 1995; Cribb & Ball, 2005). Educational theory and practice constructed in this manner is consistent with this thesis' construct of personal theory as it embraces experience, knowledge, relationships, and context.

Placing the thesis within Education rather than Social Policy, for example, maintains a focus on learning; both in terms of practitioners but also in terms of children's learning. As large numbers of Scottish children aged birth to three years attend Early Years centres, it is important that research contributes to the understandings of that space as these understandings can ultimately support enhancement of children's learning.

It is therefore crucial to examine Early Years practitioners' personal theories through an educational lens; a lens which may draw on other fields and disciplines but one which maintains a clear focus on education as a social practice. This thesis

acknowledges that for some people there is a distinction between care tasks and educational practice. However, this thesis argues that care and education always sit in relationship with each other. By drawing on the work of Tronto (1993, 2013) and Noddings (1984, 2001, 2003, 2010, 2012) in relation to the Feminist 'Ethic of Care', care can be conceptualised as mindfulness to the 'Other'. In this sense, care is central in education as the focus is on the relationship. It is this focus on relationships which situates 'teaching as a social practice' (Hansen, 1995:9). Noddings (1984) argues that caring is not a role or a performance but instead a practical way of being. It is a moral endeavour which transcends in responsibility and respect to others. Often this means that care is most easily identified by its absence (Roach, 2002). Readings (1996: 154) speaks of teaching and learning as 'sites of obligation as loci of ethical practices'. The place that care may hold in practitioners' personal theories may then be of consequence to practitioners' educational practice and children's learning.

This focus on educational theory and practice and the 'Ethic of Care' are congruent with the case study approach taken in this qualitative research inquiry. Hoffman- Kipp et al. (2003) acknowledge that a key focus of research on teacher reflection is often on technical issues rather than theory, context or social justice. They advocate focusing on the experience of individual practitioners and individual craft knowledge. This research is in that spirit. It takes, as Stephen and Brown (2004) suggest, a context laden 'insider' approach to understanding the educational process. Dalli (2008), writing about Early Years in New Zealand, identifies that much of the thinking regarding Early Years practice tends to be top-down so that expectations are projected 'onto' practitioners. A focus on personal theories of Early Years practitioners provides an alternative understanding of Early Years professional knowing within education.

Conceptualising Personal Theory from a Personal Perspective

As Cresswell (2007: 179) states, 'all writing is 'positioned' and within a stance'. Clarifying this stance is essential in interpretive research as it clarifies how the researcher is situated within the study and the lens through which interpretation is focused. This discussion first outlines the importance of reflexivity to the interpretive

research process. It then discusses the experience and understandings which contribute to decision making regarding the shaping of this research process so as to highlight the choice of topic, the research questions and the choice of philosophical framing. In this section, particular attention is paid to the issue of researcher identity alongside the professional identity of a teacher.

Urban (2008) suggests that the research process is not solely about evidence gathering but also involves critical engagement in order to consider implications and applications. It is this analysis which promotes a 'critical ecology' of the Early Years professional (Urban, 2008: 146; Dalli, 2010). He stipulates that research is a process of enquiry requiring the researcher to engage in dialogue with participants but in order to do so the researcher must consider their own understandings, traditions, and prejudices. This stance sits well within the Interpretive paradigm of enquiry in which this research is situated. It is distinct from a positivist view of the social world as predictable and reliable; or in other words, realist. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004) argue that this fundamental division between positivist and interpretive frames influences the choice of study topic, the research questions and the desired outcomes. As Cohen et al. (2000) outline, the researcher working within the interpretive frame is a central part of the process; a 'human instrument' (Cohen et al., 2000: 140) important in the decision making process shaping research design and analysis. The experiences and understandings of the researcher impact on the research process (Peshkin, 1988) and therefore lead to the importance of reflexivity or positioning of oneself within a particular research process (Punch, 2005). It is not a process though in which the researcher comes to know themselves (Usher, 1996) nor is it a process which is autobiographical. Rather it is a consideration of the 'me' in the research process so as to make transparent the nature of the enquiry and establish the contributions of this understanding in terms of systematic enquiry and representation of the research (Crotty, 2004). It is, as Usher (1996: 36) states, part of the process of establishing an 'identity for the research'; the justification of why this research project, why this particular framing and ultimately what the 'me', the researcher, brings to the process to enrich collection of data, interpretation of data and the writing process.

Thinking about the Research Subject

How a researcher sees knowledge and the social world shapes the choice of subject area, the questions the researcher asks and the design of the research process (Crotty, 2004). As I outline here, it is an interpretive understanding of research methodology that I have come to see as linking to my own 'world view'. My university studies at Canadian universities in the late 1970s and early 1980s did consider qualitative methods but generally quantitative methods, situated within positivism, were privileged. I completed my *Master of Science (Family Studies)* degree generally dissatisfied and uninspired by the research processes that I had been involved with. Subsequent employment in Education and Community Development projects indicated that knowledge about social situations is always partial, multifaceted and open to interpretation. My first full time teaching post was in a Nigerian College of Education so I daily encountered situations where different cultural values and understandings other than my own were at play. I needed to be able to appreciate where students and colleagues were 'coming from' in order to be able to work and live within the setting. This experience encouraged me to examine my own understandings and practices as I encountered challenging situations. I subsequently moved to England and worked in community development related projects in the non-government sector. This experience shaped and reinforced my view that individuals are knowledgeable about their own situation. They are not subjects for investigation or for interventions but are active participants knowledgeable about their own individual experiences. This employment also provided rich opportunities for developing listening skills with regards to what people say about their own situation and for working in partnership with people. As a cultural outsider, I became increasingly aware of my own able bodied, white, female, Canadian and middle class experience and how these impacted on my relationships with others and interpretation of situations. It was, though, my undertaking of the *Master of Research (Educational Research)* that enabled me to read, discuss, reflect and write about interpretive research methodology. This experience was instrumental in shaping my

decision to begin this PhD research process. It also enabled engagement with literature and issues relevant to qualitative research.

My choice of research topic stems from my experience as a Further Education Lecturer within an Early Years Department. Within this employment, I often visited students in placement. Whilst Scottish government policy emphasis at that time was placed on 'preschool experiences' for young children, I was increasingly interested in conditions and interactions that took place in the baby and toddler rooms of group settings. At one point, an aspect of my employment related to the delivery and monitoring of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) in *Children's Care, Learning and Development*. Although there has been criticism of criteria based qualifications (Canning, 2000), the process of compiling evidence and reflective accounts did encourage candidates to consider particular decisions in their professional practice. For many candidates, the SVQ process was a formal acknowledgment of the work which they did and the experience and understandings which contributed to their practice. Although there were frustrations, many candidates became increasingly assertive and articulate about their work and confident about their own abilities. These personal observations regarding initial Early Years training programmes though do not constitute academic research but they do inform and contribute to my experience as a researcher of a subject area such as personal theory. They also contribute to the 'subject frame', or understanding of the specific research context, which Thomas (2011) identifies as an aspect of the case study methodology this research project mobilizes.

The fine tuning of the research aim and questions stems from my interaction with relevant literature and the pilot study. Although I originally considered a research study which focused on issues regarding 'quality in Early Years provision', observations and interviews of the pilot study indicated that practitioners drew on understandings of Early Years work relating to particular experiences. Very rarely in these interviews did participants speak about policy frameworks or particular academic literature. Instead they spoke with conviction about their experiences and their knowledge of individual children and their families. The pilot study provided an opportunity to

consider this area as a point of enquiry so that experiences, policy, values and beliefs could be explored further in the main study. This specific area of personal theory interested me and appeared neglected in Early Years literature. There was literature on personal theory from other aspects of education (see Calderhead & Gates, 1995; Stephen & Brown, 2004) but little in the area of Early Years; especially in terms of practitioners working with children aged birth to three years.

My own professional journey as a teacher specifically contributes to my interest and understanding of personal theory and acknowledgement of the value of experience in professional practice, for I have not taken a traditional path within the education profession. As a graduate student in the 1980s, I worked part time as a Graduate Teaching Assistant facilitating seminars, supporting and assessing students' learning. Although as an undergraduate I had studied modules in Developmental Psychology and Sociology, I had no formal instruction as a 'teacher'. I had however been a student and drew on those experiences in order to shape my own practice. Also significant in shaping my practice was feedback I received from students. Dialogue with students has always been central to my work as a teacher. Another key influence was my extended family as many were involved professionally with formal educational provision and often discussed related topics. Certainly during my initial years of teaching, I drew predominantly on immediate experiences and personal understandings of education. It was only at a later date that I undertook a *Certificate in Education (post 16)* and became more acquainted with literature relating to pedagogy and specific educational policy. This is not to suggest that it is my contention that personal theory is static or solely linked with personal values, beliefs and experience. It is an evolving process. As I became more involved in the processes of espoused knowledge and policy regarding education and engaged with a variety of experiences, my personal theory of what it meant to be a 'teacher' became richer.

Certain approaches in educational literature resonate with my own personal experience and perspective of teaching and the questions I ask. Framing the research within education and an 'Ethic of Care' meshes a particular academic approach to

pedagogy congruent with my experiences, values and thinking. For like Freire (1994: 68), my perspective is that 'teaching is a creative act, a critical act and not a mechanical one'. It is not about the transfer of knowledge but instead about the facilitation of critical thinking. It is a respectful dialogue that one has with another.

Creating a Researcher Identity

Roach (2002) argues that a research focus on care requires the researcher to engage in reflection regarding human consciousness and values. This process acknowledges the tension between the personal and intimate nature of care and the objectiveness of academia. A key aspect of her argument is that the professional must be clear about their own understanding of what it means to be human and to care. Her writing centres predominantly on the Nursing profession but my contention is that the argument is also valid in terms of professions relating to education and educational research. To paraphrase Proust, learning is a journey which enables the individual to construct a point of view through which to engage with the world. It is the reflection and articulation of personal theory that contributes to the process of constructing that world view. A key aspect of this reflection and articulation process for me has been engagement with the research degree process. Thinking through the research questions, engaging with relevant literature and data analysis has prompted me to actively consider what education and care means to me and has assisted in providing language to articulate my own 'world view'.

A research degree is a process of exploration and an opportunity to engage in sustained critical thinking about particular subject areas. It is an opportunity to construct an identity as an academic researcher and writer. During the feedback session of my 15-month review, much was made of this concept of a researcher identity. As I engage with academic literature and the research process, it is a 'problem' that I return to time and time again. My current thinking is that it is about being clear about the framing of the research and the theoretical and philosophical perspectives employed in terms of the interpretation. In terms of an identity as a researcher, the emphasis is on the systematic nature and transparency of the enquiry

process rather than an emphasis on the production of a specific product. It is also links to the ability to defend decisions made in the research process. A key consideration in researcher identity is the awareness of my own personal theory and how this may impact on data analysis and the 'voice' of the research. Throughout the data collection process, it is also important to be aware and to act on the power differential between researcher and participant. Ultimately though, it is about being curious about the social world.

Identity though is multifaceted. I argue that the constructs of teaching and educational research that I discuss in this thesis do not exist as a binary but rather in an interwoven relationship. Teaching is a professional practice that I have been involved with for over twenty-five years. My actions as a teacher are interlaced with experience, values, policy, literature and educational theory. In this section of the thesis I have articulated aspects of my own personal theory regarding education, teaching and learning which informs and enriches my actions as both a teacher and an educational researcher. Just as experience as a teacher informs my actions as a researcher, my experience and knowledge as a researcher informs my actions as a teacher. As Freire (1994: 170) contends, 'all instruction involves research and all research involves instruction'.

The Need for this Research Study

As practitioners are central in the delivery of Early Years services (Ingram, 2009), it is imperative that more is understood regarding practitioners' perspectives of working with children under the age of three. Although Stephen and Brown (2004) and Stephen (2012) do consider the 'insider' perspective of Scottish Early Years practitioners, their focus is on practitioners working with children aged three to five years old. This thesis is based on a unique consideration of Scottish Early Years practitioners working with children aged birth to three years. Practitioners working with babies and young children are often marginalised; both in group care settings and in terms of being a focus of research (see Manning- Morton, 2006; McDowell- Clark &

Baylis, 2012). A research study focusing on the subject area of personal theory places Early Years practitioners at the centre.

Articulation of personal theory though challenges many practitioners; especially as these individuals may have little experience of expressing subjective thoughts (Brooker, 2003). Whilst teaching Early Years qualifications, I often visited students in placement to discuss practice. One frequent observation was that practitioners often struggled to explain why their practice was conducted in a particular fashion. Often though, once they did begin to speak about their own ideas and organisational policies, they were eloquent. This observation is consistent with Gooch and Powell's (2013) work in *The Baby Room* project.

Brownlee et al. (2004) and Stephen (2006) note the scarcity of research aiming to understand personal theory of Early Years practitioners. They argue that research focusing on provision for children under the age of three tends to consider care/nurturing rather than children's learning or professional understanding of practice. As Elfer (2007) identifies, much of this research follows a developmental psychology paradigm; specifically, that of attachment theory. The focus tends to be on attachment rather than relationships. This observation is consistent with Page (2005) who notes the lack of research focusing on relationships between practitioners and children from the practitioner's point of view.

It may be that there is more academic research on action because it is observable whereas personal theory and reflective processes are not (Fang, 1996). Yet, to be able to articulate personal theory is empowering (Manning- Morton, 2006) and may facilitate reflection (McIntyre, 1995) and ultimately confidence and resistance (Mc Dowell- Clark & Baylis, 2012; Stephen, 2012). Gooch and Powell (2013) indicate that Early Years is often isolating work with limited opportunity for structured reflection or professional dialogue. This situation may lead to passive resistance to policy text or academic theory allowing many ideas in Early Years to go uncontested (Yelland & Kilderry, 2005). Articulation of personal theory and subsequent reflection may support

critical thinking enabling practitioners to confirm particular practice or develop new ways of thinking and working (Woodrow & Brennan, 2001; Fleer, 2006).

Research Aim and Research Questions

Aim: To understand how practitioners' personal and professional experiences and understandings contribute to construction of personal theory

Research Question 1: What relationships are identified by Early Years practitioners as particularly influential for their personal theories?

Research Question 2: What experiences are identified by Early Years practitioners as particularly influential for their personal theories?

Research Question 3: What are the key features of Early Years practitioners' personal theories when they work with children aged birth to three years in group care settings?

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis reports on an empirical research study utilising case study methodology to understand Early Years practitioners' personal theories with regards to work with children aged birth to three years in group care settings. The research study also has a specific context, Scotland. Educational policy is devolved to the Scottish Government and therefore guidance, registration and inspection of provision for young children is unique within the United Kingdom.

The thesis therefore follows this introduction with an outline of this context and the historical development of Early Years provision in the United Kingdom (Chapter 2: Context). A review of relevant academic literature then follows (Chapter 3: Review of Academic Literature). The 'Ethic of Care' based on the writings of Joan Tronto (1993, 2013) and Nell Noddings (1984, 2003, 2006, 2012) then is discussed in chapter 4 (Philosophical Influences on the Research). The focus of the thesis then turns to case study research methodology and methods employed in data collection. Discussion regarding research ethics is also included in this chapter (chapter 5: Research Methodology, Methods and Ethics). Chapter 6 is devoted to the study's findings.

Discussion of these findings is presented in chapter 7 before implications and concluding remarks are made in chapter 8.

Chapter 2: Historical and Current Context of Scottish Early Years Provision

Introduction

Early Years provision is a situated practice; it exists within a particular context and is influenced by specific political, social/historical and cultural factors. This context contributes to stakeholders' understandings of quality provision and desirable practice. According to Jepson (2005), a central tenet of interpretive research is that it must acknowledge the context in which research participants are located. Outlining the specific context of the research study enables the researcher to gain insight into the social world in which participants live thus developing the subject frame of the case study (Thomas, 2011). In this research study, this context leads to an appreciation of the historical and current Scottish educational policy on Early Years which may potentially impact on participants' personal theories. In addition to informing the research process, a focus on policy context in a research report also allows the reader to situate the research study (Jepson, 2001). The following discussion therefore initially outlines Scottish policy regarding Early Years provision. The section on Scottish policy begins with a brief documentation of Early Years provision for children age three to five. This outline leads to consideration of the policy documents and guidance for working with children aged birth to three years. The discussion then provides an explanation of the various training routes and registration procedures for qualified Early Years practitioner status. Finally, key points arising from this discussion and implications for this research study are identified.

The Scottish Context

One of four nations within the United Kingdom, Scotland has a unique national identity and history. Complications surrounding the 1872 *Education Act (Scotland)* prompted the creation of the post of Secretary for Scotland and accompanying civil service department, the Scottish Office. Education, a matter then devolved to the Scottish Office, was and remains therefore distinctive (Murdoch et al., 2007).

Early Years Policy and Provision

Devolution in 1998 (*Scotland Act 1998*) and the subsequent creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, heightened the focus on education provision appropriate for Scotland. The creation of Childcare Partnerships and Childcare Information Services based in Scottish local authorities followed the 1998 publication of *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland* (Scottish Office, 1998). This strategy recognised the central issues of child care as: affordability, access and variable quality. Subsequently, the *National Standards for Childcare* (Scottish Government, 2005) and the *Scottish Commission for Regulation of Care* were established as key assurances of ensuring quality provision. Criterion based standards covered a range of indicators of quality provision and identified desirable features of Early Years settings, including staffing. Age categories were also established so that provision was categorised as: 1) birth to three years, 2) preschool (three-five years) and 3) school age children (five to fourteen years). Another strand of the strategy was co-ordination and support of childcare delivery partners by Childcare Partnerships. Scottish Government policy was, and is, that childcare provision operates within a mixed market of providers: local authority, voluntary sector and private sector (Bertram & Pascal, 2002). It is the task of Childcare Partnerships to assess, plan and target specific areas where the market has not responded (Scottish Office, 1998).

Early Years provision takes place within a complex frame of societal expectations (Penn, 2000). There is the expectation that Early Years supports families in their role as primary carers of children, especially in the case of families who experience additional challenges such as poverty, illness or addiction issues. Early Years provision also provides childcare to enable adults to seek employment or training. Additionally, there is the expectation that Early Years is an aspect of education providing opportunities to promote children's learning and development and to prepare children for more formalised and structured education at school (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Stephen, 2006). This focus on education was central in the Scottish Education and Employment Department (SEED) decision in 1996 to offer all four-year-old children a funded

sessional nursery place. In 1998, this aim expanded to include a sessional place to all three-year-old children by 2002 (Bertram & Pascal, 2002).

As Stephen (2008) outlines, this government policy marked a shift with regards to Early Years provision and regulation as issues regarding curriculum and uniformity of access gained prominence. In 1999, the *Curriculum Framework for Children 3 to 5* (Dunlop, 2008) positioned young children as skilled learners who began preschool with the benefit of prior learning experiences and who continued to learn in all settings. The focus of the curriculum was play-based (Bertram & Pascal, 2002). Funding of sessional places also fuelled expansion of provision; especially that of the private and voluntary sector (Bertram & Pascal, 2002). Increased funding and partnership arrangements resulted in almost all four-year-old children and most three-year-old children in Scotland participating in some form of state funded education (Stephen, 2006). Current educational policy, *Curriculum for Excellence* (LTScotland, 2006), provides a unified and coherent curriculum for children and young people aged three to eighteen. It replaces previous curriculum frameworks for children aged three to five years. The current curriculum focuses on young children's play and experiential learning.

The increase in availability of sessional places for preschool children coincided with increased monitoring of Early Years provision. As accessibility was identified as a key issue in the 1998 Childcare Strategy, a yearly audit of childcare places has been conducted by local authority Childcare Partnerships (Bertram & Pascal, 2002). Additionally, Audit Scotland (2001) reviewed the commissioning of preschool education for children to assess costs and benefits of provision. In terms of evaluation of quality of provision, initial work centred on self-evaluation alongside regular inspections by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) and the Scottish Care Commission. *The Child at the Centre: Self-evaluation in the Early Years* (Scottish Executive, 2000) was initially aimed at day care centres and preschools providing sessions for children aged three to five years. There was, however, general acknowledgement that staff working with children under three and those working in

the early stages of primary education would also find the document of value. Self-evaluation was across seven key areas: curriculum, children's development and progress, development and learning through play, support for children and families, ethos, resources and management, leadership and quality assurance. Within each area, key themes and specific performance indicators were identified so that staff could measure service in terms of four levels. This document was revised by HMIE in 2007 (Dunlop, 2008). It is the intention of the Scottish Government that the documentation of *The Child at the Centre* is to be consulted alongside the documents *Curriculum for Excellence* and *How Good is Our School: the Journey to Excellence* in order to provide continuity with inspections from HMIE and the Scottish Care Commission (HMIE, 2007).¹

Early Years Policy and Provision Specific to Birth to Three

In addition to provision for children aged three to five years, the 1998 Childcare Strategy also identified the role of childcare services for children aged birth to three years. Bertram and Pascal's (2002) review for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) of the United Kingdom's Early Childhood Education and Care services identified home based childminders as the largest provider group for children under three years. Numbers of childminders grew from 1985 until 1991 and then declined as the private sector expanded day nursery provision. The OECD review indicated a need to focus on provision for children aged birth to three years.

Just prior to publication of the OECD 2002 Review, the Scottish Executive Education Department commissioned Trevarthen, Dunlop and Stephen to review literature and research with regards to the development of children aged birth to three years.

Supporting a Young Child's Needs for Care and Affection, Shared Meaning and A Social Place (Trevarthen et al., 2003) predominantly highlighted research from a developmental psychology perspective. A key feature of the review was the focus on

¹ Since the transition from HMIE to Education Scotland, inspections after 2013 have been conducted in Early Years centres by a team comprised from both the Care Commission and Education Scotland.

evidence pertinent to the support of children's learning and development in care arrangements outside of the home in order to inform the identification of characteristics desirable in provision and staffing. This review then informed the consultation document *Care and Learning for Children Birth to Three: Supporting Our Youngest Children* (LTScotland, 2003) distributed to policy makers, academics and providers. It, therefore, was the initial statement of policy surrounding *Birth to Three* guidelines.

Commissioning and production of the *Birth to Three* guidelines arose predominantly out of a desire to support children's learning and development (Stephen, 2006, personal communication). The guidelines therefore were education focussed within a specific Scottish context and less prescriptive than the English and Welsh documentation (Cohen et al., 2003). The ethos of the guidelines was on individual's care and learning experiences (Stephen, 2006, personal communication) rather than on specific desired learning outcomes. Commissioned by the Scottish Executive and produced by Learning and Teaching Scotland (2005a), *Birth to Three: Supporting Our Youngest Children* provided guidance for those caring and promoting the well-being of children aged birth to three years in settings outside of the home. Other documentation in the series included *Birth to Three: A Guide for Parents* and *Birth to Three: Supporting Relationships, Responsive Care and Respect* (LTScotland, 2005b), a guide for practitioners. For the first time in Scotland, children aged birth to three years became the specific focus of policy text.

Val Cox, of the Scottish Executive (2005: slide 2), referred to the guidance as 'not a blueprint or handbook; not prescriptive- flexible and sophisticated aid to reflective practice' which intended to 'help workers examine and explore practice- developing an individualised practice appropriate to the needs of each individual child'. The guidance, she suggested, was congruent with other Scottish educational and social policy documentation and flexible to enable application to a variety of settings. It is important, however, to note that provision for children aged birth to three years is regulated by the Scottish Care Commission in accordance with criterion based National

Care Standards (Scottish Government, 2005). Although *Birth to Three* guidelines suggest principles of desirable practice with children aged birth to three years, settings and practitioners work within a context of regulation and inspection.

In December 2010, the revised edition of the *Birth to Three* guidelines, *Pre-Birth to Three: Positive Outcomes for Scotland's Children and Families* (LTScotland, 2010), was published. In line with the *Early Years Framework* (Scottish Government, 2008), the far-reaching and complex overall aims of the guidelines are to: address inequalities so that every child is able to meet their potential, support families in caring for children under three, promote learning and positive relationships, and prevent ill health in later years. The guidelines targeted supporting practice by utilizing current research evidence, in particular research evidence from the academic field of neuroscience. The guidelines encourage practitioners to position themselves as critical thinkers both in terms of everyday practice and in terms of continuing professional development (CPD). Four key interrelated principles are identified: rights of the child, relationships, responsive care and respect. Appreciation of the child as a unique individual entitled to full human rights is central in each of these four key principles. The guidelines suggest that care can only be identified as responsive if the practitioner closely observes the child and then uses this knowledge of the child to interpret behaviour. It is these attentive interactions which enable the practitioner to build and maintain a relationship with the child and the child's family. If relationships are to be respectful, the practitioner must appreciate and value the child as an individual person. The child subsequently experiences a sense of belonging within the setting and being listened to. Time, attention and consistency enhance this feeling of belonging and mattering to others. The child as an individual is also entitled to expression of an opinion and participation in decision making. Choice, therefore, is also a central theme within the guidelines. It is suggested that not only do these principles apply to practice with children but that they also apply to adults within the setting; practitioners should be role models. In addition to the four key principles, the guidelines also identify nine features of practice: role of staff, attachments, transitions, observation assessment and planning, partnership working, health and well-being, literacy and numeracy,

environments and play. These guidelines sit alongside *A Curriculum for Excellence*, the national framework outlining the direction for educational provision for children aged three to eighteen, and the National Care Standards/inspection regime for Early Years settings².

The Scottish Early Years Workforce

There is recognition that the Early Years workforce is central to the delivery of Scottish government policy and quality provision within settings (Scottish Executive, 2006a; Ingram, 2009). Yet, the Scottish Early Years workforce is a myriad of different work roles, job titles and training routes (Adams, 2008a). The *National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce* (Scottish Executive, 2006a) identified this myriad as an obstacle to the development of a cohesive workforce. However, the review also acknowledged diversity as a desirable feature of a mixed market approach and differing Early Year settings. Although the 2006 review omitted consideration of pay and conditions, five key areas were included. These were: roles and responsibilities, qualifications and training, career pathways, recruitment and retention and workforce planning. The review highlighted the link between training, qualifications and quality of provision.

Additionally, qualifications and CPD were acknowledged as important recognition of the status and professionalism of the workforce. Official response to the review, *Investing in Children's Futures* (Scottish Executive, 2006b) identified the desirability of a degree led profession so that managers and leaders within Early Year settings would be qualified at level 9 (ordinary degree/work based equivalent) of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications framework (SCQF). Academic and work -based professional training pathways for practitioners were also identified; the time scale given as 2007-2009 with a qualifications pathway identified by September 2009. The official response to the review emphasised a partnership approach between local authority and providers with

² Recent policy *Bridging the Ambition* (Scottish Government, 2014) focuses on high quality Early Years provision for babies, toddlers and preschool age children. Consideration is given to ways to support the child's well-being, communication, and enquiry as well as the Early Years environment.

the onus on providers to ensure training of staff, registration of staff and provision of CPD opportunities. The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) was identified as the lead body responsible for the development of the qualifications and registration framework for Early Years. The Scottish Executive response to the review indicated that the government expected pay and conditions to improve in line with increased qualifications. Overall, government's response identified Early Years as an emerging profession encapsulating particular knowledge, practice and values.

The Scottish Executive's response to the workforce review was informed by a consultation process involving childminders, Early Years practitioners, managers and employers (Scottish Government, 2007). Workshops and questionnaire responses indicated support for a single qualifications framework but also recognised that diversity of work roles required some flexibility. Experience and prior learning needed recognition with the framework. There was also acknowledgement that external verification of workplace based assessments ensured robustness. The consultation process identified that collaboration between Further Education and Higher Education sectors was essential. Time, financial support and access were all noted by the consultation process as issues related to qualifications. Although the workforce review excluded pay and conditions, those involved in the consultation process highlighted the need for these to be examined alongside career progression routes. These were identified as key factors in the status and retention of the Early Years workforce.

Early Years Qualification Routes

In Scotland, there are two main routes to qualification as an Early Years practitioner: the academic route of the Higher National Certificate (HNC) in *Early Education and Childcare* or the work- based Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) *Children's Care, Learning and Development (CCLD)* level 3 (SSSC, 2007)³. Both are administered and regulated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

³ These qualifications are currently lapsing and are replaced with the HNC *Childhood practice* and the SVQ *Social Services (Children and Young People)*

The HNC is a level 7 SCOF (SQA, 2012) college based qualification delivered predominantly in Further Education colleges. Students entering this qualification usually have a mixture of Scottish Standard and Higher grades and may also have completed the National Certificate (NC) in *Early Education and Childcare*. Placements are used to enable students to link formal learning with practice. Since 2006, students are required to study at least two of the following age groups: birth to three, three to five, five to eight and eight to twelve (Adams, 2008a). There is however no specific requirement for the placements to cover different age ranges or different types of settings. The assessment strategy of the HNC comprises of four mandatory units (children's rights, theoretical approaches to learning and development, curriculum and assessment, working in an Early Years setting), one optional unit and a graded unit. Students can choose working with children aged birth to three as the optional unit. The graded unit is practice related and involves either primary or secondary research. Progression from the HNC is possible through the Higher National Diploma (HND), SVQ level 4, the Professional Development Award in *Early Education and Childcare* (PDA) or the degree in *Childhood Practice*.

The SVQ CCLD is a work based criterion referenced qualification related to the candidate's performance of a specific work role. The criteria identified in the qualification are regulated by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC, 2007). *Children's Care, Learning and Development* (CCLD) at Level 3 is recognised as practitioner level so that the individual practitioner is supporting children's care and learning as well as developing and monitoring learning and the curriculum (SQA, 2012). The level 3 qualification equates to SCQF level 7. Although there is no specific entry requirement for this qualification, candidates must be in a related work role and over sixteen years of age. Progression to the level 3 qualification is often from the SVQ level 2 (CCLD) or the NC *Early Education and Childcare*. To complete the SVQ at level 3, a candidate builds a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate coverage of identified performance criteria associated with five mandatory units and four optional units. This evidence must relate specifically to the candidate's performance in the work role. Direct observation, personal accounts, witness statements and professional dialogues

with an assessor are the main sources of evidence. In addition to performance, a candidate must provide evidence of associated underpinning knowledge related to each unit. It is possible to base evidence on a specific age group and within the option choices are two units which relate specifically to the environment and the physical care of children aged birth to three years. Progression from SVQ CCLD level 3 is to SVQ level 4 or the PDA.

Examination of workforce qualifications (Fee, 2009) suggests that the most common qualification for Early Years practitioners is SVQ 3 CCLD. Fee notes that a third of settings had degree educated staff, although not necessarily a degree related to Childhood Practice or Education. There is however discrepancy between qualification routes with *Interchange 65* (Scottish Executive, 2002) indicating local authority settings' preference for the HNC route. In addition, the *Scottish Executive Response to the Workforce Review* (Scottish Executive, 2007) concludes that qualification levels of staff within local authority settings tend to be higher than those of private settings.

Commitment to CPD is also an important aspect of the Early Years workforce (Ingram, 2009; EducationScotland, 2012). There is increasing expectation that Early Years practitioners keep abreast of current research and guidance in order to inform practice yet the Scottish Government (Ingram, 2009) also acknowledges that CPD cannot be prescriptive or uniform in delivery. Fee (2009) identifies cost, location and time as key barriers to practitioners' participation in CPD activities. Staffing ratio regulations provided a challenge for some settings to release staff during working hours for CPD activities and therefore the majority of centres indicated a preference for CPD activities which were either short term or during twilight hours. Some centres mentioned visits, mentoring and work shadowing as opportunities for CPD. Very few centres identified Further Education colleges or universities as a source of CPD activities. Recommendations of the research report include examination of opportunities for distance learning and the creation of communities of practice.

All Early Years practitioners were required to register with the SSSC by September 30 2011 (SSSC, 2012). It is the statutory duty of the centre manager to ensure that all

employees register with the SSSC. Registration is for a five-year period and requires a minimum of ten days or sixty hours of CPD. This CPD can comprise of work shadowing, training courses, action research and independent reading as well as qualification based courses. If the practitioner does not currently hold a recognised qualification, then registration may be subject to the condition that training be completed within three years. In addition to relevant qualifications, work records and enhanced criminal disclosure checks are completed before the SSSC register an individual as an Early Years practitioner. If during the registration period a complaint is made regarding an individual practitioner, the SSSC can intervene by recommending training, sanctioning a warning or removing the individual from the register.

Conclusion

Divisions have evolved in British Early Years provision. Conceptions of practice have been based on the distinctions between children of different chronological ages and between care and education. Yet, the context of Early Years practice has altered considerably in Scotland since 1998. The establishment of Childcare Partnerships based in local authorities enabled the coordination and support of service provision within a mixed market economy. Since 2005, increasing focus has been placed on service delivery and practice which supports the care and learning of children aged birth to three years. The publication of guidelines in this area provides a catalyst for practitioners' reflective practice and personal theories. There is increasing emphasis on qualifications and registration of practitioners working in the Early Years as well as expectations that practitioners commit to continuing their professional development.

Implications for this Research Study

- Scottish policy distinction between children under three and those over three needs to be considered when reviewing the literature. Literature related to practitioners' understandings of working with children aged birth to three years is central to this study.
- Scottish policy *Birth to Three* suggests a practice focus on relationships and responsive care. The focus on relationships and

responsive care suggest the 'Ethic of Care' requires further consideration as a philosophical frame for the research.

- Scottish professional registration processes indicate that training and CPD are presumed by policy makers to contribute to practitioners' understandings of working with children aged birth to three years. This presumption needs further exploration in the data collection and analysis.
- Registration requirements indicate that the research study should focus on Early Years staff working at practitioner level.

Chapter 3: Review of Literature

Introduction

Although research focusing on Early Years practitioners working with children under the age of three is limited (Manning- Morton, 2006; Powell & Gooch, 2012), a body of literature exists regarding both personal theory and Early Years. This literature informs the research process of this research project by contextualising the research questions, developing the argument regarding originality of the research study and contributing knowledge and understanding of the research subject frame. It also informs data collection and analysis. Finally, an awareness of relevant academic literature permits a placing of findings within a wider academic community. For these reasons, Punch (2005) encourages a novice researcher to see reviewing the literature as an opportunity to critique literature throughout the research process. It is by examining others' research and arguments that a novice researcher's judgement on sufficiency, relevance and decisions crystallise.

Wisker (2001) suggests that the search for relevant academic literature is multi-faceted; databases, manual searches and suggestions from colleagues all inform the search of relevant literature. Additionally, the purpose of the review must be clear so that parameters identify both the search and selection of literature. The review cannot be merely a summary of everything written in the wider subject area. Indeed, many academics (see Punch, 2005; Taylor & Proctor, 2012) warn against the review becoming an annotated bibliography where piece after piece of literature is summarised. Rather, the researcher must select and read for a purpose (Kilbourn, 2006).

This review focuses on literature relating to particular strands of the research subject area, aim and questions. It presents an interrogation of four key strands of literature: 1) personal theory within education, 2) issues relating to the professionalism of Early Years practitioners, 3) discourse of substitute mothering and 4) key pedagogical discourses in Early Years provision. As Biesta (2008) suggests though, much of the

literature within the field of education focuses on the delivery of practice and less on theorizing. This focus on the delivery of practice can lead to wealth of didactic approaches to educational practice rather than critical analysis (Scott, 2000). This review does not consider instruction manuals on how to care for and educate young children nor does it consider particular aspects of child development. Instead, the focus is on a critical analysis of subject areas relating to practitioners working with children aged birth to three years. The review begins by considering the literature relating to personal theory; both in terms of the wider educational context and then the specifics of practitioners working with young children. Reviewing the literature also facilitates conceptualisation of the key construct of personal theory. Gaining an appreciation of how academics conduct research in this area provides ideas regarding research methodology and methods. Secondly, the review outlines issues relating to the professionalism of Early Years practitioners. This section focuses on general aspects of professionalism before considering staffing issues and challenges present in Early Years. An appreciation of the literature in this area supports an understanding of the specific professional context in which Early Years is located. The issues regarding low status and gendered employment link to practitioners' image of themselves and their work. Historically, the discourse of substitute mothering features in provision for babies and young children (Moss, 2006). The third section of the review discusses this discourse as it indicates an area which may contribute to practitioners' personal theories. The final strand of the review looks at particular pedagogical discourses of attachment, development and play. In this section, consideration is given to literature relating to various constructions of the child. As with the discourse of mothering, these key areas may contribute to practitioners' personal theories. The review concludes with identification of key messages from the literature.

Personal Theory

This section of the review considers literature contributing to understanding the subject area of personal theory. It begins by reviewing literature relating to how others have conceptualised professional understandings of practice. This literature

supports decisions taken to conceptualise personal theory within this research study. The review then considers how others have researched personal theory within educational research and then specifically within Early Years research. This literature provides insight into the research process.

The Construct of Personal Theory

One of the initial tasks of any research project regards conceptualisation of the key construct for clarifying the construct then shapes the research's path (Crotty, 2004). This section of the literature review outlines four key approaches to conceptualising practitioners' understandings relating to practice: 1) Habitus 2) Kelly's Personal Construct Theory 3) Personal/Professional Practice Theory and 4) Phronesis.

Habitus

The literature indicates that one key way to conceptualise professional theory and practice is Bourdieu's (1990) concept of Habitus; an internalisation of dispositions, discourses and values so that action is channelled through the habitus. It is unconscious problem solving which leads to particular practice by a practitioner in a particular situation. The internalised nature of habitus means that the individual is socialised into a particular way of practice. Individuals then act in a particular way because of implicit logic and bodily dispositions. In this manner, habitus is an embodied response; a 'cultural unconsciousness' (Eagleton, 1991) in response to a particular cultural context or field.

As a conceptualisation of practitioners' understandings, habitus has been mobilised in Early Years research. Brooker (2002) draws on Bourdieu's writing on habitus in her ethnographic study of an English reception classroom. Acknowledging that implicit understandings interlace a teacher's practice, she utilizes habitus as a conceptual tool in considering the teacher's decision making process within the classroom. Similarly, Colley's (2006) research study of CACHE Further Education students' educational and vocational experience relates habitus to being both a predisposition and a disposition; a channel through which practice is shaped. Both research studies allude to the 'habits' of the practitioner in day to day practice. This focus on 'habits' of practice is

also apparent in Vincent and Braun's (2013) consideration of the process by which tutors and Early Years Further Education student create a particular professional identity by co-constructing a vocational habitus. Students discipline both themselves and other students in order to align with desirable aspects of this identity. Particular dispositions and rules encourage consideration of 'good' practice so that control of the self and children manage emotional components of practice. Vincent and Braun's (2013) analysis is consistent with Colley et al.'s (2003) research consideration of the links between professional identity and learning. In Vincent and Braun's study, the concept of vocational habitus frames discussion of a particular and contextualised professional identity. The focus of vocational habitus is on 'becoming' an Early Years practitioner; students who do not make progress in acquiring this set of dispositions and habits of practice tend to be excluded by other students and tutors.

One consideration is that an emphasis on 'habitus' leads to a consideration of practice as unconsciousness response rather than reasoned and purposeful action (Brier and Ralph, 2009). Linked to this notion of conscious decision-making, Fenech et al. (2010) reject the utilization of habitus as a conceptual frame for understanding rationale for Early Years practice due to its essentialist and universalistic premises which limit practitioner's agency.

Kelly's Personal Construct Theory

In researching teachers' understandings of theory and practice, several researchers draw on Kelly's Personal Construct Theory (PCT) (1955 cited in Christie and Menmuir, 1997; Gould et al., 2004; Nicholls, 2005). A constructivist, Kelly (1955 cited in Christie and Menmuir, 1997: 206) theorised that an individual's engagement with the world develops understandings or a 'set of constructs' from which to live. These constructs are not static as new experiences prompt reflection and perhaps reconstruction. The individual therefore understands and responds to situations through these various constructs. In terms of teaching, PCT suggests that particular constructs lead to particular types of practice (Nicholls, 2005).

PCT is associated with the data collection technique of rep grid in which highly structured interviews are conducted with individuals. The focus is to work through a series of elements in order to discriminate between bipolar constructs (Hillier, 1998). Individuals then rank and score the constructs. Hillier (1998) sees the focus on statistical analysis as an opportunity to remove the researcher's interpretation whilst Gould et al. (2004) maintain that, despite statistical analysis, rep grid remains predominantly focused on the affective. Nicholls (2005) acknowledges that rep grid can appear context free and thus care is required to situate the constructs. She, however, acknowledges that rep grid tends to be reductionist and hypothesis related; a tension with interpretivist research.

A key problem exists with this particular conceptualisation of professional theorising. Although the focus on individual construction is consistent with the research subject area of personal theory, the bipolar aspect of constructs suggests a binary rather than a multifaceted web of understanding and experience.

Personal Professional Theory

Drawing on constructivist epistemology, personal professional or practical theory (PPT) focuses on the individual's understandings and actions in a particular work setting. Fickel (2000) conceptualises personal theories as schemata; a complex web of context, policy and personal understandings within socio-cultural systems of policy, personal and organisation. A combination of theories and influences such as personal biography, experiences and education theorists, PPT is usually implicit and internalised (Fickel, 2000; Schapp et al., 2011). It permits a move away from practical theories and instead provides a focus on both the personal and the practical (Chant, 2002).

This holistic approach to professional theorising though is challenged by those who present personal theory as separate from formal or public theory. In considering the argument for evidence based practice in Early Years, Mischo et al. (2012) distinguish between subjective and objective theories. A distinction is made between intuitive practice theory based on common sense and practical wisdom and systematic and rational scientific theories based on empirical evidence. Mischo et al. (2012) justify this

distinction between the subjective and objective as a presentation of different dimensions of knowledge necessary for professional practice. They argue that such a distinction should not be cast as a binary but as a particular orientation in terms of rationalising professional practice. It is not that one or other is preferable but that both are necessary for informed professional practice. Also distinguishing between explicit 'official' theory and implicit 'personal' theory, Maksić and Pavlović (2011) note differences between experts and lay people. It is the personal theories of experts which shape research enquiries and the development of explicit theory. These experts, they argue, shape and influence personal implicit theory through personal 'explicit' theories. Congruent with Mischo et al.'s (2012) stance, the theories are dimensions of an overall orientation to practice.

Constructivist epistemology inherent in the subject area of personal theory challenges traditional divides between objective and subjective theory. Gupta (2006) suggests that rather than focus on a binary of explicit and implicit theories it is more constructive to consider the interaction between the two. Her research centring on Immigrant and Minority preservice teachers challenges the premise that preservice teachers simply absorb explicit 'official' theory. She refers to a body of literature demonstrating that teachers actively construct understandings of the curriculum and children in light of implicit beliefs and experiences. Contextualisation of these implicit understandings therefore also incorporates 'official' theory.

With regards to this particular research project, Stephen's (2008) contention that pedagogy is conscious and purposeful activity by the individual to promote another's learning is pertinent to the conceptualisation of personal theory. The internalisation and dispositional aspects of habitus are therefore problematic. Similarly, the bipolar and hypothetical focus of rep grid suggest issues with PCT. Although personal theory may be implicit in terms of its expression, it is autonomous, contextual and reasoned. Aspects of PPT therefore appeared consistent with the initial focus of the research subject area. Mindful of Gupta's (2006) contention that the implicit and the explicit intermesh, the review of literature suggests a construct of personal theory as a multi-

faceted web of understandings which incorporate policy and literature as well as personal experience. For simplicity, the construct is referred to as personal theory.

Phronesis

Literature relating to personal theory within education (see Cooper & McIntyre, 1996; Stephen & Brown, 2004; Hofer, 2004) acknowledges the importance of experience. In terms of thinking about the contribution of experience to an individual's knowledge and understanding as rationale for practice and therefore professional theorising, Aristotle's (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Kristjánsson, 2005) intellectual virtue of phronesis is useful.

Aristotle's intellectual virtue of phronesis relates to practical wisdom gained through experience and reflection. Of Aristotle's three intellectual virtues (episteme, techne and phronesis), only phronesis is linked to decisions related to the human good in particular situations. It is, as Flyvbjerg (2006: 370) suggests, 'activity by which instrumental rationality is balanced by value-rationality'. Phronesis is active and critical decision making in a particular situation by one individual in response to another. As an intellectual virtue, it links to embodied and deliberate practice situated in particular spaces in order to make sensitive judgements (Gibbs, 2007).

In this sense, phronesis is congruent with the thesis' positioning of educational practice as purposeful decision making in a particular context. It is also consistent with the research's premise that it is possible for practitioners to articulate particular constructions of care, learning and children by reflecting on implicit decision-making processes.

Often referred to as practical wisdom, practical common sense or prudence (Flyvbjerg, 2001, 2006; William, 2008), phronesis develops through experience. Hansen (1995) notes Aristotle's observation that people learn to respect or to relate to others by seeing it first in action and then having the opportunity to practise. He argues that the embodiment of action is always more powerful than the expression of intent. Yet, as Russell (1995) suggests, Western society tends to favour a construction of knowledge that is related to episteme (scientific knowledge) rather than knowledge from

experience and observation. This is consistent with Urban's (2008) observation that rational knowledge dominates current constructions of Early Years professionalism. A focus on practical wisdom is relative to personal theory for it acknowledges prior learning, experience, specific situations as well as commitment to others. McPherson (2005:715) highlights the attractions of phronesis saying that:

'reflection on forms of human interdependence, and on longer-term reflexive learning, suggests the salience of phronesis, interpreted as an emergent sharable quality, both gift and task, needed for learning, knowing and understanding how to live well with one another, in fair and reasonable relationships, with our common human powers and vulnerabilities, and in similar as well as different situations, both shaping us and shaped by us'.

Phronesis permits a departure from a technical- instrumental construction of education and focuses instead on education as human action and relationship bound (Formoshina and Oliveria- Formoshino, 2012), replacing a construction of 'best' practice with 'wise' practice (Goodman, 2001 cited in Pascal and Bertram, 2012). In considering practitioners' work in educational settings, McIntyre (2005) outlines a connection between practice and experience so that the teacher draws on a repertoire of understandings and experiences in order to make sense of the particular situation. These understandings and experiences may be constructed through personal and professional experience. One aspect of which is initial training. The experiences within a 'classroom' setting as well as in placements contribute to an understanding of professional practice. In addition, CPD provides opportunities to discuss with others as well as potentially experience other settings.

It is this anti- foundationalist, anti-realist and emancipatory link which makes phronesis a particularly attractive concept in considering educational theorising and practice (Kristjánsson, 2005). However, Kristjánsson (2005) also warns against misrepresentation of Aristotle's views on teaching by noting that Aristotle's construction of educational subject matter also features aspects of the intellectual virtues of techne and episteme. Kristjánsson's stance regarding phronesis is similar to Hoveid's (2012) account of teaching as both content and relationship based. Clark

(2005) reiterates this point arguing that there are always some aspects of teaching which relate to aspects of *techne*. This research's focus however is not on the specific content of activities or on particular aspects of children's learning. The central focus is on practitioners' personal theories; a focus consistent with *phronesis*.

A particular strength of *phronesis* is its focus on the interconnection between the cognitive and the affective; the social and the motivational (Carr, 2007). Although Aristotle acknowledged the link between virtuous character and *phronesis*, this is not to imply that teachers require particular personalities or dispositions in order to demonstrate *phronetic* judgments. Virtuous character is distinctive from personality or dispositions in that it is linked to morality rather than individual attributes. Carr (2007) identifies the moral character of a teacher as those aspects relating to care, justice, and passion displayed in communication, respect, trust and motivation. Rather than the process skills associated with *techne*, these attributes are intrinsically valuable to the individual and to those whom they teach. A prime example of this focus on morality and character, Bessant's (2009) research on youth work acknowledges diversity within youth workers' personalities and dispositions but also the commonality of commitment and dedication. She notes that virtue ethics embraces ideas around personal transformation and character development so that the focus is on human agency rather than social determinism. Given the diversity of the personal aspects of youth workers there are social goods such as play, work, meaningful and healthy lives, moral and spiritual life and critical reflection which are collectively noted as desirable. Bessant (2009) argues that exploring youth work as *phronesis* is useful in terms of practitioners' judgements regarding intervention and leadership; to be both an insider and an outsider. Research (see Vogt, 2002; Powell, 2010; Taggart, 2011) and my own experience of teaching Early Years practitioners, suggest that these social goods are also evident regarding work with young children.

One research study is of particular relevance to consideration of *phronesis* as a conceptual construct for this research study. Egan's (2004) study of Early Year preservice teachers' reflective logs draws on ethics to examine construction of

professional identity. She argues that there may be an overarching ethic in teaching practice but specific values of individuals may be diverse and relative to specific contexts. The challenge, she identifies for the novice professional, is the need to identify and establish values based on policy, personal and communities of practice. She claims that explicit expression of tacit understandings permits preservice teachers to link to personal and professional knowledge which is action based. Drawing on Moriarty's (2000) concept of professionalism, Egan outlines how novice teachers need to connect children's care and well-being with children's learning and development. Central to her data analysis is a focus on theoretical knowledge (episteme), skills (techne) and professional knowledge (praxis) and phronetic judgement. It is the links to the commitment to children, the value of play, judgements regarding intervention, care and respect that Egan associates with phronesis. The subsequent review of literature suggests that these ideas are also relevant to this particular research study. To recap, phronesis is practical wisdom gained through experience. It permits a focus on the moral character of the individual practitioner to work towards the collective good. In this respect, it is case sensitive so that decisions relate to particular actions in specific contexts. Application of phronesis to education moves the focus away from techne and towards individual judgments and actions. This focus is consistent with the construct of personal theory as a form of knowledge which develops through experience and rationalises educational practice.

Flyvbjerg's (2001) central argument in *Making Social Science Matter* is that the application of positivist epistemology to social research leads to a focus on techne (technical) and episteme (scientific) knowledge and a replication of natural science research methods. This argument is pertinent to this research study. Personal theory is not necessarily technical knowledge or scientific knowledge; instead it is an accumulation and reconstruction of various sources of knowledge gained through experience. It is therefore consistent with phronesis. As Flyvbjerg (2006) suggests, the experienced practitioner draws on a range of cases and the lessons learnt in order to appear intuitive in their performance. It is tacit knowledge developed and applied to

varying contexts. McIntyre (2005:359) clarifies this with respect to educational practice and personal theory when he suggests that:

'Teachers depend on their own, often very individual, 'schemata' for recognising classes or pupils or situations as being similar to others they have dealt with before, each schema incorporating a range of more-or-less remembered individual cases, and on corresponding repertoires of actions that have seemed to have worked in the past. But what they do have to depend on their judgements about what is appropriate in the unique circumstances of the particular case that faces them'.

This relationship between theory and practice avoids the context-free knowledge of predictive theory (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Instead, phronesis permits a purposeful and contextualised perspective which highlights the relationship between the general and the particular (Brier and Ralphs, 2009). As Brier and Ralphs (2009: 481) state, 'it is precisely not habitual (in the ordinary sense of the word) but a flexible and thoughtful adaption to the circumstances of the moment'.

[Educational Research on Personal Theory](#)

Knowledge is often considered as something obtained a solely from external sources rather than a composition of external sources, personal and professional experience and observation. For this reason, the process of learning through experience is poorly understood (Russell, 1995). Additionally, as McIntyre (2005) identifies, educational research often exists distinct from educational practice therefore creating and reinforcing distance between researchers and teachers. To bridge the gap between teachers and researchers, dialogue and respect for each other's knowledge and skill base needs to exist. Within research regarding personal theory, the researcher's task is to acknowledge and allow explicit articulation regarding complex decision making within the classroom. Researchers, McIntyre (2005) argues, should therefore strive to link research questions and suggestions to current practice and knowledge. The focus of research should be the dynamics of classroom settings rather than decontextualised interviews, questionnaires or laboratory experiments. It is also important for researchers to exam the wider societal context in order to consider the discourses and

policies which interface educational practice (Goodson, 1995; Hursh, 1995) as these also may contribute to teachers' personal theories.

A key contribution of the literature regarding personal theory is the identification of the role of prior experience. One consideration for this research study is the distinction between what presents as intuitive practice of the experienced teacher and the more consciousness decision making process of the novice. Accounts of experienced teachers' personal theories indicate that experiences in the classroom provide a rich source of strategies and rationale in addition to formal pedagogical theorising (see Brown & McIntyre, 1993; Cooper & McIntyre, 1996). The rapid processing of strategies and knowledge may then lead to an appearance of practice as intuitive. Novice teachers have fewer teaching experiences to draw or reflect on. Another consideration is that there is often tension between what is taught in colleges and universities with regards to teacher education and what is observed in the practice of experienced and novice teachers (Fang, 1996). Drawing on research focusing on teachers' personal theories (Brown & McIntyre, 1993), McIntyre (1995) notes that both experienced and novice teachers come to teaching with knowledge, experiences, values, and attitudes which comprise tacit understandings of desirable practice. It is these tacit understandings, he argues, which shape practice.

To examine knowledge which teachers use in everyday teaching, Brown and McIntyre's (1993) research project *Making Sense of Teaching* first observed teachers' delivery of specific units of the curriculum. They then interviewed these teachers at the end of every lesson and at the end of the unit. A focus in the interview on particular instances of practice scaffolded discussion on what and when things worked well. Key findings from the research suggest that being able to articulate tacit knowledge may assist teachers in sharing insights with others, may reduce the loneliness of teaching and may also alert individuals to where their actions have negative consequences.

A subsequent text reflecting on personal theory and the research process however identifies several issues regarding Brown and McIntyre's (1993) research design

(Cooper & McIntyre, 1996). The observation of practice and then subsequent semi-structured interviews encouraged teachers to talk about their teaching and the relating rationale but it also presented a challenge in terms of answering the study's research questions. The content of a semi-structured interview may mean that some aspects of the research questions are not discussed or identified as relevant by the research participants. Cooper and McIntyre (1996) also acknowledge concerns regarding generalization of the research findings; especially in terms of different classrooms and settings. A focus on teachers presents a very different understanding of teaching than if the focus was on students. They do, however, suggest that a focus on listening to teachers' responses regarding specific observed episodes may provide insight into theorising practice rather than descriptive accounts of practice. This data collection approach, they argue, supports a more nuanced understanding of the teaching process.

Driven by the ideal that if initial teacher education is to improve then more needs to be understood about the process of learning to teach, Calderhead and Shorrock's (1997) study of primary school student teachers considers discussions with 10 licensed teachers and 10 *Post Graduate Certificate in Education* (PGCE) students. They identify the valuable role mentors play in this process given the difficulty that trainee teachers have in articulating knowledge used in practice. Key to successful mentoring is an appreciation of context, specific and shared language, and a non-judgemental relationship between mentor and novice. Tann's (1995) research on student teachers' personal theories also acknowledges the importance of a supportive, non-judgemental environment in terms of data collection. If student teachers consider that the interviewer is genuinely interested in their responses rather than conducting a critical assessment then the student teacher is more forthcoming. One particular observation by Tann is that teachers' articulation of planning and action enables analysis and connection with other ways of thinking and subsequent identification of personal theories.

Early Years Research on Personal Theory

Focus on personal theory as a means to understand Early Years practitioners' rationale for practice originates with Spodek's (1988) research on the implicit theories of American Early Years teachers (preschool, kindergarten, and grade 1). A distinctive feature of Spodek's (1988) study is the synthesis of theory across research participants. His particular interest considers commonality with regards to personal theoretical frames and the impact of working with different age groups on implicit theory. Analysis of interview transcripts identifies that teachers distinguish between how to teach and the desirability of particular decisions. The small group of teachers participating in the study indicate that personal values and management of activities dominate decision making processes. Although child development theory prevailed in teacher training programmes, teachers relied more on personal knowledge of individual children rather than particular developmental theory.

This finding is congruent with Stephen and Brown's (2004) study of Scottish Early Years practitioners working in nursery classrooms. In their study, practitioners tended to construct theories around nurturing and management of the learning environment rather than particular theories of child development and learning. Stephen (2012) notes how the range of child development theories, especially those in relation to learning, adds to the complexity of practitioners' rationalisations of practice. Policymakers and managers' focus on curriculum and learning outcomes may mean that practitioners struggle to apply and articulate theoretical frames from developmental psychology or the sociology of childhood. In addition, Stephen (2012) identifies two key aspects of implicit pedagogy which dominate Early Years within the United Kingdom: 1) child centred practice which develops from the child's interests and 2) the belief that children learn through play.

Drawing on life story narratives, Court et al. (2009) shift the focus of their study regarding Israeli preschool teachers away from pedagogy and towards experiences and construction of practice. Acknowledging that novice teachers face different stresses and strains, Court et al.'s (2009) research focuses on 10 women teachers,

each with several years of classroom experience. The initial interview focused on the life story of the teacher. The teacher's practice was then observed and the second interview considered this observation. A key finding was the role which others played in the construction of practice and the development of educational theory. With regards to career choice, teachers reported family members as influential as well as a personal desire to contribute to the creation of a more just and equitable society. Observation of colleagues and management contributed to the construction of educational theory regarding practice.

Whereas Court et al.'s (2009) research focuses on experienced teachers, Goldstein and Lake's (2000) research focuses on preservice teachers working in the initial years of American primary schools. Data collection methods centre on e-journals as a record of students' reflections on caring. Analysis focused across the cohort and within individual journal entries. All the students note the interface between care and teaching. Goldstein and Lake's (2000) analysis of the data indicate three constructions of care present in the personal theories of these training teachers. In the first construction, students construct care from an essentialist stance so that teaching is instinctive and relative to natural dispositions. Goldstein and Lake identify that the issue with this construction of care is that it does not acknowledge the complexity of teaching; the inconsistencies and the tensions. Constructing care as a natural disposition may lead to gendered roles within the classroom and may imply that difficulty within the work role is due to personal failure or deficiencies. The second construction of care involves an oversimplification of care as love. Rather than focusing on pedagogy, this construction of care focuses on immediate behaviours. The third construction of care within teaching is idealism; a romantic notion of childhood and innocence which centres on affective practice. Over a period of time and through placement experience, e-journal data did indicate that students' understandings of care within teaching becoming more nuanced and related to pedagogy.

These studies tend to separate education and care however Brownlee et al.'s (2004) research specifically addresses the link between education and care. Six Australian

practitioners working with children age eighteen months to three years were videoed and then interviewed using recall semi-structured interviews regarding specific interactions with children. The analysis of data linked to Perry's writing on epistemological beliefs. Of the six practitioners, Brownlee et al. (2004) conclude that four practitioners operationalized multiple or mixed belief systems to draw on a range of information sources and experiences. Two practitioners mobilized relativistic views so that they drew on a range of sources but also evaluated knowledge (Berthelsen et al., 2002). Berthelsen and Brownlee's (2007) paper extends the discussion to twenty-one practitioners participating in the three-year research project. Findings suggest that practitioners clearly identify with the affective role in care and marginalise the educational role in working with children under three.

Implications for this Research Study

- Literature suggests various constructs of professional knowing or conceptualisations of practice. For the purpose of this research study, personal theory is conceptualised as relating to the individual's constructions of children, relationships, care, learning and development. Following from Gupta's (2006) contention regarding the interface of explicit and implicit theories, this thesis is constructing personal theory as a web of understandings. These understandings may include 'official' or 'explicit' theory such as policy, procedures or academic literature as well as personal understandings shaped by experience, life history, culture. Key to the research's conceptualisation of personal theory is Aristotle's intellectual virtue of phronesis.
- Literature indicates a distinction between experienced practitioners and those at the initial stages of practice or training. This point is important in terms of shaping parameters for seeking and including practitioners as research participants.
- The link between observed practice and interview is well established in the research on personal theory. Research methods for data collection need to acknowledge and replicate this process

- Literature indicates that constructions of care and learning are important themes to investigate in terms of personal theory.

Professionalism, Professional Identity and Personal Theory

Professionalism and professional identities are socially constructed. It is important to understand how individual practitioner's agency and understandings construct notions of desirable practice and understandings of what it means to work with young children. This stance resonates with a research focus on personal theory. By constructing personal theory as a web of understandings incorporating official and organisational policy, literature and personal and professional experience, personal theory influences how the practitioner constructs professional identity and how the practitioner sees themselves within the Early Years profession. However, it may also be that current constructs of Early Years professional identity and professionalism are aspects of societal expectations and therefore contribute to how practitioners see their work with young children and to the web of understandings which comprise their personal theory. This section of the literature review therefore outlines Early Years professionalism and how it interfaces with personal theory but is also distinct from it. The review begins by considering the constructs of professionalism and professional identity before turning to a specific focus on Early Years. It is within this Early Years section that literature relating to status is reviewed. Status refers to the social standing which a profession holds and therefore it may influence how an individual constructs professional identity. The review of literature relating to status opens with an outline of the status of the Early Years profession and then discusses key explanations for this status. The review then explores several themes prevalent in the literature: 1) gender, 2) context and 3) initial training routes.

Professionalism and Professional Identity

The construct of professional has shifted considerably over the last couple of decades (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003). There has been a departure from structural explanations of professional such as taxonomy of traits or functionalist focus on roles (Frost, 2001). Instead, socio-cultural constructions and reconstructions of power relationships or a

post-modern focus on the effects of power and knowledge shape current understandings of professionalism. This reconstruction of professionalism with regards to power has led to a focus on individuals as the object of the focus on professional development rather than as an engaged subject (Nicholls, 2005). Hursh (2005) suggests that neo-liberal ideology shapes the individual in terms of compliance and consensus rather than challenging particular constructions of education. In the context of Early Years, this has led to a focus on criteria and policy guidelines rather than individual practitioners (Brock, 2006).

However, it is also important to acknowledge that professionalism is not one construct but a set of related ones (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003). Brock (2006) identifies seven key dimensions of professionalism: knowledge, education and training, skills, autonomy, values, ethics and reward. Dimensions relating to knowledge, values, ethics, as well as experience of education and training indicate the contribution that personal theory may make to discussions regarding Early Years professionalism. To enable Early Years professionalism, practitioners must be able to relate theory to practice (McMillan, 2009). For it is 'the ability to reflect on and evaluate one's professional role, its practical application and one's thoughts about it that must be the key to professionalism in the Early Years' (Brock, 2006:3).

Professional identity regarding how a profession is situated within a particular societal context is also an important consideration of research focusing on personal theory. Identity incorporates notions of not only how professionals see themselves but also how others see them. Construction of professional identity therefore relates to status, practitioner's self-esteem and agency as well as to notions of desirable practice. Continually constructed and reconstructed, professional identity is a social process which incorporates notions of the individual's agency whilst also drawing on beliefs, values, behaviour, and experience (Lightfoot & Frost, 2015).

Although the literature suggests no single unifying definition of professional identity (Lightfoot & Frost, 2015), one way to conceptualise professional identity is Moriarty's (2000) construct of Professionality. A particular construct of professional knowing,

professionalism's focus is on values, knowledge, skills and practicalities related to a particular area of professional practice. The concept is particularly apt to this thesis for as Vincent and Braun (2011: 778) state, 'the specialized or professional knowledge of childcare workers is rooted and expressed in practice'. Professionalism embraces practitioners' tacit knowledge as knowledge is constructed as multi-faceted and socially constructed (Moriarty, 2000). Most importantly, professionalism maintains a focus on individuals' judgements relating to practice. Professionalism is a sense of professional identity which is authentic to the individual and permits a sense of integrity (Roach, 2002). It is also a construction of professional identity which is grounded in ethics (Egan, 2009). Drawing on Aristotle, Egan (2009) conceptualises professional identity as encompassing *techne*, *praxis* and *phronesis* in order to acknowledge practitioners' expertise and demonstration of this expertise through practice.

Early Years Professionalism and Professional Identity

Historically, a separation between care and education exists within Early Years (McGillivray, 2008). This separation contributes to the shaping of the construction of Early Years professional identity. As Lightfoot and Frost (2015) suggest, the wide variety of work roles and contexts reflect the disparity between sectors. The UNESCO policy brief 27/10 (Moss, 2004) outlines that the focus on relief of poverty and care of early nurseries positioned practitioners as care workers where the focus on education amongst preschools and kindergartens positioned practitioners as teachers. Moss (2006) also identifies division in the organisation of Early Years provision based on age of the child. In the United Kingdom, education tends to be associated with provision for children over the age of three whereas care and support for working parents is the focus associated with children under three. These distinctions matter as they interface social understandings regarding status and pay thus privileging particular aspects of Early Years professional identity.

Osgood (2006a,2006b) however highlights the case for an individual sense of professional identity for as Egan (2009:46) notes 'the social process of teaching and

learning the requirements, techniques and potentialities of professional activity is too complex to lend itself to a single set of established and/or values'. In this sense, professional identity can be aligned with the conceptualisation of personal theory as a web of understandings regarding children, learning, development and care. However, consideration of the literature indicates that although professional identity, and especially professionalism, are closely related to personal theory, there are differences. One key difference is in the consideration of context. In personal theory, knowledge is multifaceted but it is also situated. Professional identity is reflective of context but the primary focus is on the individual's sense of self (Lightfoot and Frost, 2015). Where personal theory considers understandings as rationale for practice and hence is concerned with projection to 'Others'. Professional identity is introspective.

Early Years Practitioners' Status

The literature indicates that the status of the Early Years profession is low. Several research studies indicate that Early Years is a default profession for some practitioners. Colley's (2006) research study involving young people studying towards the *CACHE Diploma of Nursery Nursing* in an English Further Education college indicates that for many young people work in Early Years is a default option. Many participants indicate a preference to enter teaching or nursing professions but simply do not possess entry requirements. A college-based Early Years programme is the second, or even third, option. This preference may align with perceptions of Early Years work. A survey of Year 10 students in England concludes that the perceptions of Early Years are that of low pay and limited career advancement (Cook, 2005). Osgood's (2005) discourse analysis of Sure Start's recruitment web pages identifies rhetoric of Early Years' work as a means to other professions rather than a primary desire. It is the individual's responsibility to maximize opportunities presented through employment and training in order to move onto something else. Early Years is positioned, she suggests, as a means into employment; especially for mothers returning to the workforce. This biologically essentialist positioning suggests that mothers use their 'natural' skills within the Early Years workplace to fit paid employment around family

responsibilities. The focus, in terms of career fulfilment, is on the emotive rewards rather than pay or conditions. This finding is consistent with Osgood's (2004) study of Early Years professionalism involving focus group discussion and interviews with childminders and nursery staff. Practitioners acknowledge that although they understand Early Years work is low paid and low status, the opportunity to combine paid employment with personal responsibilities is a motivating feature.

In addition to the personal decision to work in Early Years, how practitioners' colleagues, parents and children construct the role of the practitioner matter for they compete or collude with how the practitioner constructs their own professional identity and practice. If the perception of the Early Years practitioner is that of a 'task based occupation' (Cameron, 2002) with 'low level specialist training' (Penn, 1997: 133) then a specific construction of professionalization pervades. Osgood (2005) suggests that government rhetoric about quality provision and professionalism sits uneasily with pay and status currently afforded to Early Years practitioners.

Feminist critique offers a particular perspective on the low pay and status of Early Years practitioners. Ackerman (2006), critical of the focus on public space rather than private space, employs Feminist critical policy analysis in her research on the low wages and status of American Early Years professionals. Her argument suggests that an economic model of care in itself does not explain low wages. Instead, social constructions of gender and social class contribute to the perception and value of work with young children. She suggests that scant recognition of the skills involved in caring for young children contributes to the low status of the Early Years profession.

Many of these skills relate to what Hochschild (1983/2003) refers to as emotional labour; the management of the affective aspects of employment. Emotional labour is a key aspect of Early Years work (see Manning-Morton, 2006; Powell & Goouch, 2012). It is the costs of emotional labour, the burnout, stress, exhaustion and alienation, which may contribute to the high turnover in Early Years. Hochschild (1983/2003) argues that emotive labour is embedded in the structures of society so that structures of gender and class reproduce low status and pay.

This management of emotion, Osgood (2006a) notes, is apparent in Early Years policy so that regulatory frameworks reduce professional autonomy. She identifies the 1998 *National Childcare Strategy* (England and Wales) as the beginning of state intervention in Early Years. This strategy, with its employment and anti-poverty agenda, marked the beginning of a series of Early Years policies and frameworks. Osgood (2006a) claims that although policy is cast as professional guidance, regulatory frames serve to restrict and control individuals and so result in deskilling and alienation of Early Years practitioners. Policy guidance purports to aid the development of practitioners' practice but it also can be restrictive and promote accountability. Additionally, it may be incongruent with aspects of practitioners' personal theories of desirable practice.

The literature also considers Early Years professionalism and status in theoretical frames other than that of Feminism. Foucault (1977, cited in Paechter, 2001) argues that the relationship between power and knowledge is such that the two are never separate. Understanding the educational world through a Foucauldian 'lens' permits an understanding of how educational 'regimes of truth' exist through the dominant discourse of an institution or political state and how these discourses shape constructions of desirable practice. Policy documents and standards then are indicative of dominant discourse and serve to regulate practice.

Much is written with regards to the influence of neo-liberal discourse which has been dominant in British political institutions and Early Years for the past thirty years (see Ball & Vincent, 2005; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). This is a discourse which maintains a key focus on the individual so that each individual becomes a 'project' in their own right (Reay, 2001, cited in Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). This rhetoric is apparent in Early Years recruitment pages (see Osgood, 2005). It is the individual's responsibility to maximize opportunities and create for themselves desired pay and conditions relating to their own professional identity. Neo-liberalism also privileges a managerial and technical-instrumental approach to educational practices (Moss, 2006). Urban (2010) suggests that this presents Early Years professionalism as a prescription from particular policy documents and rational knowledge so that practitioners choose the

appropriate and correct response. Manning-Morton (2006) acknowledges that a personal distancing from care may be cast as a key strategy in professionalism when dominant discourse centres procedures and outcomes rather than relationships. A focus on developing close relationships with young children may align with the discourse of substitute mothering and thus incompatible with a discourse of professionalism. Guidelines on professional practice serve to regulate the individual by positioning the state to 'govern at a distance' (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005:46). As Osgood (2006b:5) states, 'the preoccupation with satisfying dominant and externally imposed constructions of professionalism leaves little time to engage in meaningful critiques of the status quo and as a consequence of social engineering those working in Early Years.

The Scottish Early Years workforce is predominantly female; 98% of practitioners are women (Scottish Executive, 2006b). Cook's (2005) research indicates four key explanations for this gender imbalance: 1) employment related, 2) gender stereotyping, 3) fear of allegations of child abuse and 4) gender discrimination. Her research acknowledges that it can be a challenge to enter Early Years if the perception is that it is also a woman's space. Researchers such as Colley et al. (2003) and Colker (2008) also suggest that constructions of gender may also influence a focus on desirable and 'natural' dispositions to support work with young children. Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Colley et al. (2003) note that a focus on Early Years practice as common sense and emotion based may encourage a particular construction of desirable practice. Their study of college students indicates a development of a vocational habitus to enable self-management of emotional labour. Similarly, Vincent and Braun's (2011) research focusing on the experience and understandings of Further Education Early Years students indicates implicit regulation regarding the emotional tone of the work with students' personal dispositions as indications of suitability and ability.

Literature suggests that experience of care, natural dispositions, as well as policy, academic literature and contextualised knowledge, all contribute to the construction

of practice. 'Good practice' incorporates liking all children equally and a focus on the positive attributes of the child (Vincent & Braun, 2013). Vincent and Braun (2013) acknowledge that gender and emotional capital are not usually linked to economic and social capital. The presumption that women's caring is natural and undemanding of the individual may equate therefore to the low pay and status associated with Early Years. It also can be the basis of the assumption that Early Years practice is indeed common –sense rather than pedagogically based (Vincent & Braun, 2011) or skilled (Manning-Morton, 2006). Albanese's (2007) research focusing on Canadian childminders challenges this assumption by noting the complexity of the work role. She acknowledges though that although childminders could articulate the important contribution their work made to children's lives, parents often undervalued childcare. Indeed, some parents saw being with young children all day not as work but as a pleasurable activity. A construction of Early Years practice which Vincent and Braun (2013: 751) also note, acknowledging a need for practitioners to be 'fun at work'.

Context of Early Years Professionalism and Professional Identity

The professional identity of the Early Years practitioner is related to context (Adams, 2008a). Early Years work takes place in a mixed market of care; private sector for-profit, non-government not-for-profit sector and local authority sector all contribute to Early Years provision. Different pay and conditions exist even though the same guidelines and inspectorate bodies regulate provision (Cameron et al., 2002). Generally, pay and conditions are better in the local authority sector. The *National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce* (Scottish Executive, 2006b) identifies that difference in pay and conditions is a key barrier to a coherent Scottish Early Years workforce. The review indicates that private sector employees do not feel as well supported in terms of training opportunities, especially in terms of Continuous Professional Development (CPD). The economics of the Early Years private sector mean that profit can be low as centres meet staff/child ratios and other regulatory criteria (Ackerman, 2006). Although Ackerman's (2006) work centres on American models of Early Year provision, the same mixed market of care exists in the United

Kingdom and the same conditions prevail (Ball & Vincent, 2005). Low profit margins may suggest low pay in an effort to minimize costs and enhance profit.

If Early Years work is constructed as demanding and complex as well as emotionally demanding, then it requires training and support (Cameron et al., 2002). In Osgood's (2004) research, many practitioners acknowledge the requirement to fund their own training. Ackerman (2006) recognises this is a challenge when wages in the sector are low and time restricted by employment and home caring responsibilities. For those practitioners who do undertake CPD and especially for those who study at degree level, research indicates that practitioners' expectations may not match the reality of Early Years employment. High turnover of staff is a key issue within the private for-profit sector (Ackerman, 2006; Moss, 2006; Rockel, 2014). This turnover subsequently affects relationships which young children have with practitioners (Oberheumer, 2005). Additionally, the assumption can be that graduate level Early Years professionals should work with children aged three to five years (McDowell- Clark & Baylis, 2012) rather than with children aged birth to three years. Miller's (2008) research regarding Early Years practitioners' daily lives suggests that those practitioners who complete a foundation degree often move sectors to secure better pay and higher status employment. She identifies tension between the discourse of professionalism espoused by college and universities and the reality of Early Years work, pay and conditions. One particular tension appears to be that Early Years practitioners are often supervised by qualified primary teachers who themselves have limited academic focus on children aged three to five years and usually no academic focus at all on children aged birth to three years (Adams, 2008a). Rockel's (2014) document analysis of New Zealand teacher training programmes suggests a limited curriculum focus on care and education for children under the age of two years. Where programmes did include modules specifically focusing on babies and infants' development then more attention is paid to educational practice with babies and infants. The more holistic the syllabus is though then the more likely older children's development and learning is prioritised in initial training programme.

The Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) is the most prevalent qualification named in the Scottish Early Years workforce (Fee, 2009). This qualification is not intended to be a training route but rather an accreditation process of work functions and roles. Based on competence based frameworks, work is reduced into specific criteria and associated knowledge statements to be evidenced and tracked (Hyland, 1994). Many Further Education colleges and training organisations deliver such awards, often despite the reluctance of staff (Hyland, 1994). Rather than an accreditation of prior academic learning and work place experience, the SVQ, or its English equivalent the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ), is cast as education and training for Early Years work. Tanner et al.'s (2006) research consisting of interviews and focus groups with managers, practitioners, childminders and parents indicates criticism of the NVQ qualification by those working in Early Years however parents did not appear to voice the distinction between the NVQ qualification and more academic forms of training. The warmth, experience and problem solving abilities of individual practitioners and the ethos of the nursery and relationships apparent in the workplace are the important factors to parents rather than qualification routes. These echo the 'professional dispositions' of 'sensitivity, empathy, awareness, respect for others, commitment to the field of Early Years, and confidence'. Miller (2008: 262) identifies in her study Early Years practitioners' daily lives in six different countries. Miller describes these dispositions as a professional habitus; a way of being rather than a set of specific actions.

Challenges to Particular Constructions of Early Years Professional Identity

Reviewing the literature indicates that many academics note the tension between the complexity of Early Years work as a situated practice and the reductionist and technical instrumental discourse of neo-liberalism. Using Foucauldian theoretical approaches, they claim that it is possible to challenge and disrupt some of neo-liberal discourse (see Cannella, 1997, 2001, 2005; Mac Naughton, 2005; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Post- structuralist Feminists, in particular, are highly critical of the privileging of masculine managerialism policy within Early Years at the expense of the Feminist

'Ethic of Care'. Where the managerial focus is on the individual, the 'Ethic of Care' focus is on the collegiate (Osgood, 2006a). A focus on Early Years professionalism as an embodiment of the Feminist 'Ethic of Care' further distances the Early Years practitioner from the masculine attributes of neo-liberalism and can reframe professional identity within a counter discourse of cooperation, collaboration and passion (Osgood, 2006b).

The fragmented nature of the Early Years workforce (Adams, 2008a; McGillivray, 2008) challenges construction of a single and shared professional identity (Osgood, 2006a). Research indicates a multitude of different job titles and names for Early Years practitioners (Adams, 2008a; McGillivray, 2008). Different educational and training routes and then diversity in group care settings, salaries, and conditions present obstacles to a collective professional identity. McGillivray (2008) argues that this lack of consensus diffuses professional identity and links with uncertainty. It obstructs reflection in communities of practice and restricts confidence and articulation of shared values (Osgood, 2006a). Manning-Morton (2006) encourages movement away from a deficit model of Early Years practitioners towards an examination of what practice comprises. Recognising that work with children aged birth to three years is emotionally demanding work, she promotes self- understanding in order to develop 'emotionally intelligent practice' (Manning-Morton, 2006:48). If professionalism and professional identities are social constructs, then it is important to understand how practitioners' agency and understandings construct notions of desirable practice and understandings of what it means to work with young children. This stance resonates with a research focus on personal theory.

Implications for the Research Study on Personal Theory

- As a multi-faceted construct, professionalism and professional identity is aligned but also distinct from personal theory. Whereas professionalism and professional identity incorporate notions of societal expectations regarding a particular work role. It is a broader and more collective construction than personal theory. With its focus on understandings and experiences of individual practitioners,

personal theory can reflect knowledge, ethic and value dimensions of professionalism. However, personal theory is contextual, individual and rationale for practice.

- Professional identity impacts on how the practitioner sees themselves, their work role and the value of their work with young children. These notions subsequently may be aspects of personal theory.
- Literature indicates that status and training may impact on practitioners' professional identity. They may also feature in personal theory.
- Constructions of gender, care, education, mothering and class contribute to professional identity and may subsequently relate to personal theory
- Literature in this area suggest these construction of gender, care, education and mothering are ones to explore further with practitioners during data collection

Constructions of Mothering

Initial reading regarding Early Years suggests that constructions of mothering may influence rationale regarding desirable practice and therefore cast Early Years practice as substitute mothering. Centrality of the mother in attachment theory reinforces this construction of Early Years practice. The nursery then replicates or compensates for the home with the practitioner fulfilling the role of the mother or an idealised notion of the mother. This literature regarding constructions of mothering provides perspectives on the meaning of mothering and indicates the expectations of others in terms of the practitioner's role in caring for young children. Most importantly, the literature highlights the influence that constructions of mothering may have on practitioners' personal theories regarding desirable practice. This section of the review opens with a discussion regarding the discourse of mothering in Western societies and then narrows the focus to the discourse of mothering with Early Years. It then considers how Early Years can be cast as a distinct practice from mothering. Finally, this section of the review outlines how the discourse of mothering may contribute to personal theory.

Discourse of Mothering within Western Societies

Although there is a recent shift in society towards seeing children as individual agents (James et al., 1998), dominant discourse suggests that the child exists within a family space as a responsibility of their parents (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005); in particular, the mother caring for the young child. The family home then becomes central to the 'child' by 'insulating' and 'privatising' their existence so that in many ways children's lives are 'invisible' to those outside of the home (James et al., 1998: 54). Cannella (1997) situates 'mothering' within capitalist patriarchy so that this private space of the home enables and supports the public space of work. Women's work within the private space is marginalised as it is invisible. What matters is paid employment. Whilst acknowledging that increasing numbers of women are in paid employment, Cannella (1997) contends that women continue to perform and to take responsibility for children's care.

Women who seek employment outside of the home therefore are in a perpetual state of juggling the demands of mothering and those of work. In order to 'go out to work', decisions regarding care of the child must be made. Vincent et al. (2004) suggest that families tend to have gendered arrangements for care with mothers being the ones to arrange, manage and pay for child care. Their research identifies that mothers with higher financial means tend to choose more formal care arrangements, opting for a childminder or day nursery rather than enlisting the informal support of extended family and friends. The decision regarding care of a child is particularly complex for women whose employment is in the Early Years sector for others perceive them as being knowledgeable with regards to 'quality' care and education (Page, 2013). Even for mothers who do not work in Early Years or a related profession, decisions regarding childcare are emotive and stressful but necessary (Vincent & Ball, 2001; Vincent, 2008). Mothers, Dalli (1999) contends, are always simultaneously a mother and an employee.

Singer (1993: 444) states 'up to now, for young children 'belonging' was primarily defined within the family and in particular by the mother-child relationship'. The

placing of the child within the private space of the family, and particularly in terms of the dyad of mother and child, subsequently impacts on ideas regarding the child's care. Woodhead (1987) suggests that this core argument regarding the needs of the child subsequently prioritizes the nuclear family and maternal care and constructs a particular type of 'mothering'.

This construction of mothering, Singer (1993) identifies is one where the mother is self-sacrificing, powerless and central in the child's life. It is a construction of mothering consistent with Bowden's (1997:24) claim that 'mothering is central to understanding women's empowerment and subordination'. For many women, 'mothering' is central to their identity as they are separate but also not separate from the child (Bowden, 1997). Mothering is an unfinished project for both mother and child. This 'first human relationship' (Bowden, 1997:21) relates to judgements, trust, reciprocity and attentive love that Bowden suggests is unique within Western constructs of the mother/child relationship. This discourse of 'mothering' is demanding of the individual. It sets mothers in a position to be responsible for their children and their subsequent actions. It demands of mothers to be self-knowing and confident in themselves. It speaks of a 'mothering experience' which is deeply pleasurable and rewarding; the ultimate self-fulfilment project. There is little acknowledgement of routine tasks, isolation and challenges that mothers experience or the little social value accorded to mothering.

Discourse of Mothering and Early Years

Literature suggests that the discourse of mothering contributes to notions of desirable Early Years provision. Moss et al. (2000: 245) contend that the positioning of the child securely within the family and as the responsibility of the mother 'defines public intervention in the family, especially before children start school as intrinsically undesirable, unnatural and exceptional'. It is, Singer (1993) notes, a juxtapose between the 'good' mother who reproduces socially desirable values and norms of behaviours in children and the 'bad' mother whose mothering skills are cast as wanting. Often this binary of good/bad mothering is positioned in terms of social class

with middle-class mothers cast as 'good' mothers. Hey and Bradford's (2006) evaluation of a Sure Start project identifies slight shifts in the discourse of 'mothering' in neo-liberal Britain. Mothers are now positioned as managing being a 'mother' with employment outside of the home. Still responsible for their children and still caring, 'aspiring and competent mothers with careers and 'successful' children are set as the norm for how middle class femininity defines itself and have become the yardstick against which all mothers are to be measured' (Hey & Bradford, 2006: 55). They claim that it is not surprising that mothers who do not measure up to this construction are deemed as a 'worrysome lot' and a key focus in social and educational policy.

Ailwood (2008), therefore, argues that a distinction should be made between the relationship based role of motherhood and the social construct of maternalism. It is through the discourse of maternalism that Ailwood situates the discourse of 'substitute mothering' which according to Penn (1997) is prevalent in Anglo- American child care. Maternalism refers to how a particular society's expectations and understandings shape motherhood. As a construct in Western societies, maternalism leads to the prioritizing of mothering so that the mother role takes precedence over all others. Maternalism enables a discussion of Early Years practice constructed as gendered and based on substitute mothering. From an essentialist view, women can be considered as being naturals in Early Years practice purely on the basis on their gender (Ailwood, 2008; Kim & Reifel, 2010). If it is not acknowledged that gender in itself is a social construct then it is logical to follow an essentialist argument that women are naturally warm, nurturing and loving as socio-biological theories claim (Klages & Vogt, 1996 cited in Vogt, 2002) and therefore ideally suited to working with young children.

However, the literature indicates that it is also important to acknowledge that constructs of class may also interface with gender. Compensatory parenting was a key focus for Early Years educationalists such as Owen, MacMillan and Pestalozzi (Davis, 2010). Froebel, for example, was explicit in his desire for the nursery as a site of reform and encouraged practice and policy to be transmitted from the nursery to the

home (Davis, 2010). Prochner (2001), charting historical paths of Early Years practice, suggests that child care in a group setting developed from a social policy critique of those families in poverty. Given the tension between the 'mothering role' and the financial need to seek employment outside the home, the nursery was developed. This nursery was modelled on the 'ideal' home and seen as a means providing care for children whose mothers were not in the position to do so. Hey and Bradford (2006) argue that this focus on certain types of 'good' parenting is still maintained. There is, the literature suggests, a tendency to see 'mothering' and 'substitute mothering' as a binary of good or bad rather than a diverse set of practices.

Early Years as Something Other than Mothering

The work of Susan Isaacs (1932/1968), Maria Montessori and John Dewey (Wood & Attfield, 2005) shifted the construction of the child towards that of an individual with agency. The role of the adult is then to observe and provide the child with experiences developing from the child's individual interests. These educationalists firmly focus on the child's learning. Manning- Morton (2006) argues knowledge around education and learning is more highly valued than that of care. A focus on learning also shifts practice away from 'substitute mothering' (Moss, 2006). This is the difference that McGillivray (2008) speaks of when outlining the differences between positioning Early Years practitioners in terms of a mother substitute and positioning Early Years practitioners as professional educators. It is important to note for this research study that this focus in the literature on education and learning links predominantly to Early Years practice regarding children over the age of three years.

Kim and Reifel (2010:241) suggest an alternative way to view the binary between mothering and education arguing that it is an opportunity to focus on the 'in-between' space; an opportunity to think about how teaching and caring for young children may involve some aspects of 'mothering' but also how it may be different from 'mothering'. Their account of interviews with two child care practitioners shows that acknowledgement of the child's need for love, warmth and affection as an important aspect of practice and one which practitioners distinguish from 'mothering'. This focus

on the 'in-between space' links to a discourse of 'shared care'; one where the child is not constructed as an extension or possession of the mother but as an individual with agency to form and manage multiple relationships.

'Shared child care' can be identified as the dominant historical and cultural practice in varied situations such as the Israeli kibbutz (Colloby et al., 2012) or the extended family. Maternal care as an exclusive concept most likely originates in Britain in the 1950s within Conservative ideology and continues as a dominant discourse (Scarr, 1998). Shared care renegotiates this space and emphasizes the importance of relationships and negotiation between caregivers. Brooker (2010) identifies a 'triangle of care' where parents, practitioners and children are in relationship with each other. This emphasis of shared care is one Elfer (2008) identifies when discussing key person schemes in nurseries rather than key worker schemes. Key person schemes explicitly privilege emotional closeness and relationships within organisational structure. The focus is on interaction and relationships rather than the administrative processes. This 'shared care' requires not only a focus on practitioners but also on mothers. Page (2011), for instance, differentiates between the mother who 'shares' the care and the mother who is the prime decision maker. Mutual respect, negotiation, relationships are central in sharing care whereas a focus on the mother's instructions mark control of the child as her possession and responsibility.

A focus on 'shared care' places Early Years as a site of democratic and ethical practice (Singer, 1993; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) or relational pedagogy (Brownlee et.al, 2004). In this sense, care is conceptualised as a commitment to others and therefore inclusive (Vogt, 2002). It centres relationships and care as key in Early Years provision but moves away from ideas of attachment and substitute mothering. It opens, as Taggart (2011) suggests, new possibilities in considering the space of care and education of children. These ideas enable a multifaceted consideration of components of personal theories.

Mothering, Care and Early Years Practitioners' Personal Theories

How practitioners construct mothering, care and learning impacts on rationale for practice and thus are key aspects of personal theories regarding working with children aged birth to three years. Research does indicate that many practitioners align with the constructs of mothering rather than a focus on political notions of care and learning. MacDonald's (1999) research involving American teacher trainees who are also mothers indicates a stance that the role of mothering prepares them for teaching and enhances their work. Similarly, James's (2010) study of American primary teachers also indicates that practitioners draw on their own experience of mothering to inform practice. She particularly notes how care within the classroom is modelled on an interaction between teacher and child rather than the 'triangle of care' that Brooker (2010) outlines. Her narrative inquiry involving six colleagues suggests that constructs of care and mothering are shaped by the individual teacher's personal experience. Data analysis indicates a marginalisation of cultural practices of children's families. In some situations, families seem excluded from decisions regarding the child as the teachers take on a 'mother' role.

Albanese (2007) and Brooker (2014) note that some practitioners identify that the experience of mothering is appropriate training for Early Years practice. Brooker's (2014) research involving childminders suggests that experience of mothering is considered as more preferable and valuable than formal qualifications. A slightly different focus is evident in Elfer's (2007) case study of practitioners' consideration of the primary task of group care settings. In this research, practitioners report that the experience of being cared for or caring for others influences practice. Practitioners, who are also parents, indicate that the primary task of the nursery setting is to replicate the home and family relationships and care. One practitioner notes that challenges present themselves when combining motherhood and caring for children other than her own; especially when her children also attend the same setting. Practitioners who are not mothers tend to see the primary task of the nursery in terms of support for children's learning.

Focusing professional practice on care rather than substitute mothering, the literature suggests, is something to address during the initial professional training period. Writing with regards to nursing, Apesora- Varano (2007) notes an assumption that care is something that people bring with them in terms of dispositions and experience. Her contention is that lecturers' assumptions that students are not interested in academic discussions of care leads to student nurses drawing on natural and gendered constructs of care and substitute mothering. She argues that discussions regarding care and substitute mothering must feature in initial nurse training. Similarly, Goldstein and Lake's (2000) research also demonstrates the manner in which nuanced understandings of care can develop throughout the initial training period. Within British Early Years literature, Page (2011) argues for care and notions of 'professional love' to be incorporated in Early Years practitioner training.

Implications for this Research Study

- The focus on political notions of care in the literature suggests the relationship with discourses of mothering and care is important to pursue further in the research; specifically, in the consideration of the 'Ethic of Care' as an analytical frame for the research.
- Literature relating to the experience of mothering suggests that this is a particular experience worth pursuing further with practitioners
- The construct of the nursery as a home and the practitioner as a substitute mother is an area to explore further during interviews

Early Years Pedagogy

Neuroscience research suggests that babies are born 'ready to learn' (Page, 2005: 92) and therefore the experiences of young children attending Early Years settings support children's learning. Rather than a haphazard approach to supporting learning, the literature indicates that there should be a clear strategy for engaging with young children. Pedagogy provides a theoretical and philosophical frame for educational practice (Rockel, 2009) and leads to purposeful interactions by one person to support another's learning (Stephen, 2007, personal communication).

As education reflects society's ideals of children and childhood (Fleer, 2006), particular discourses shape pedagogy and hence what is considered as desirable quality practice in terms of working with young children. Fleer (2006) suggests that the following are central tenets of European Early Years practice: 1) established knowledge of child development, 2) play based, 3) child centred, 4) following the child's interests and 5) learning experience should develop from observations of the child. As Yelland and Kilderry (2005) note, many of these central tenets often go unquestioned. So powerful though are these central tenets that they suggest certain ideals for Early Years practice. Brooker (2005) suggests that these discourses construct an ideal practitioner as open, enthusiastic, energetic, warm, caring, articulate, and reflective. The ideal Early Years child is one who is interested in being with others but also prepared to work and play independently. Concentration is a desirable characteristic of the ideal child as is enthusiasm for new experiences. The ideal Early Years environment is one which is centred on play with plenty of space for activities and play equipment. Self-discovery and play rather than directed teaching promotes the child's learning.

Although academics such as Brooker and Fleer note key central tenets apparent in Early Years policy, others such as Powell (2010) outline the lack of explicit statements on values in these policy documents. Analysis of English policy documents such as *Early Years Foundation Stage* and the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* indicate limited discussion of pedagogical discourse or desirable character. Notions of 'reflective practice and sustained shared thinking' (Powell, 2010: 219) are mentioned but values are omitted from policy documents.

This section of the literature review considers pedagogical discourses currently apparent in Early Years provision for children under the age of three. These 'official' discourses are representative the 'outsider' perspective that Stephen (2012) indicates is present in Early Years policy and provision. Practitioners' personal theories may draw on or may discount some of these 'official' pedagogical frames and so therefore it is important to consider dominant pedagogical discourses prevalent in Early Years.

Three aspects of pedagogy are discussed: 1) attachment 2) child development and 3) play based learning.

Attachment Pedagogy

Closely aligned to the discourse of mothering, attachment pedagogy refers to the desirability for the young child to form a secure attachment to the carer so that non maternal care is modelled on the relationship between the biological mother and the child (Brannen & Moss, 2003). Referred to at times as 'substitute mothering', attachment pedagogy is linked to key worker schemes in group care settings (Penn, 1997). Working with specific children, the practitioner replicates the mothering role and the practice is channelled towards the child's formation of an attachment to the practitioner.

In Early Years literature, the concept of attachment is well established as the desired outcome of early relationships. Attachment can be defined as the close and selective bond achieved through long term, responsive relationships which provide security and comfort to the child as well as a role model for subsequent relationships (Schaffer, 2004). Bowlby's (1969/1997) seminal research established monotropy as a key feature of successful attachment. To ensure the child's later emotional stability, a close and predictive relationship needed to be established with a single person; the mother figure (Bowlby, 1969/1997). This attachment is innate but separate from the biological function for survival as Bowlby places emphasis on the psychological function of emotional security. Quite simply, the child needs pleasurable, warm and affectionate mothering. When the attachment is secure the child displays distress at separation from the mother figure. Bowlby identifies that this firm and secure attachment usually is established at seven to eight months. He also concludes that if the child has not secured an attachment by the age of thirty months then permanent damage to emotional development occurs and the child will be an 'affectionless character' (cited in Schaffer, 2004: 104) resulting in anxious, insecure and unwanted behaviour.

Bowlby's attachment theory therefore positions the mother figure as central. Children need their mothers and they need their mothers' undivided attention and care in order for attachments to form. Placed within the prevalent 'Conservative' ideology of the 1950 and 1960s, Bowlby's research and theory supported the political and social argument for mothers to be in the home (Page, 2005).

The idea of children's attachment needs is one aspect of a larger debate which Woodhead (1987) outlines around the concept of need. Whilst Woodhead (1987) acknowledges that children have needs, he contests whether these needs are universal or fixed. He suggests that a focus on needs is a reflection of the implicit assumptions and requirements of childhood consistent with a positivist stance on empiricism and universalism. Attachment theory suggests that one variable interacts with another to produce a particular outcome and a particular set of consequences in terms of future mental health. It predicts what will develop or not develop and excludes acknowledgment of socio-cultural factors or alternative understandings of key relationships. As Singer (1993) notes, this could be interpreted as a binary of dependence/independence or secure/insecure.

Recent research in the area of attachment does recognise multiplicity and complexity of attachments (Page, 2005). Rather than the single 'mother figure', there is growing recognition that babies are social beings who can manage multiple key attachments provided there is some consistency and predictability of care (Trevvarthen et al., 2003; Schaffer, 2004). Schaffer (2004) also acknowledges that attachments can alter over time and circumstance and be different with different people. As Trevvarthen et al. (2003) identify in the review of literature for the Scottish *Birth to Three* documents, it is the regularity and the strength of attachment which is key. So although research may indicate the importance of attachments to young children, research studies do so in particular contexts, usually that of the home. One specific context which is less understood is that of day care or group care settings.

It may be that parents choosing group care settings do not espouse an 'attachment pedagogy' (Singer, 1993) as perhaps the rejection of the 'stay-at-home' model of mothering also inscribes different values and behaviours with regards to the child's care and learning. Hickman's (2006) analysis of Early Childhood Longitudinal Study data in the United States indicates that parental levels of education and income are higher for children experiencing centre based care than for those in home based care. These parents therefore may view desirable childcare differently than those parents who choose a home based care model. Woodhead (1987) also suggests that attachment pedagogy does not sit well with increasing employment participation rates for mothers of young children. Nor does attachment pedagogy account for the multiple established attachments possible in group care situations; relationships between child, parents, practitioners and peers. As Singer (1993) notes, the daily experience of a child in group care is so fundamentally different to a child in home care that it requires different exploration and interpretation. She questions the naming of 'group care' as it implies that to care for similarly aged children in the same setting is somehow unusual or harmful. Yet, there will also be implicit assumptions of the 'home based mother'. Singer (1993) suggests that the challenge is for developmental psychology to acknowledge these particular assumptions within research regarding children's attachments. Within the positivist frame, there is also a need for developmental psychologists to recognise that validity of some measurements may be questionable in this different context. Specific experiments such as Ainsworth and Bell's (1978 cited in Colloby et al., 2012) Strange Situation Test used to measure the strength of attachments may be problematic when applied to children in group care (Schaffer, 2004). These children experience separation from mothers on a regular basis and often at a young age and therefore may exhibit different behaviour from children cared for in the home.

Although separation of mothers and children attending Early Years settings happens on a regular basis, this does not imply that such separation is straight forward. The literature suggests that some mothers do voice concerns that children attending care

settings will form an attachment with another person. Page's (2005) research indicates that group care settings may be chosen rather than home based care settings because the mother does not want the child forming a close relationship with the practitioner. She (Page, 2011) acknowledges that although mothers should recognise that a firm bond between practitioner and child is desirable, it can be a challenge to accept that at an individual level. One possibility that Trevarthen et al. (2003: 51) suggest is that 'some parents believe that if the child has a stable home life, whatever happens during the day with children may not be very important'. Elfer (2005, cited in Page, 2005, panel discussion) acknowledges that practitioners may also temper attachments/relationships with children because they do not wish to upset the parent. He also suggests that parents may feel unable to ask for details regarding care of the child because they do not wish to upset or challenge the practitioner. These concerns reflect Singer's (1993) observation that much of the research assumes a dyad relationship between carer and child rather than a relationship within a web of others. It is as if the practitioner and mother are in competition for the affection of the child rather than being conceptualised as a network of support and care.

Brooker (2010), therefore, suggests a focus on the triangle of care which exists in settings. This triangle of care acknowledges that parents, practitioners and children work in relationship to each other. This focus shifts the emphasis away from attachment and instead places it on relationships. It is a focus on relationships that Goldstein (1994) claims embraces mutual caring and reciprocity. Elfer's (2006) observation of two infants in group care settings indicates that a focus on attachment pedagogy can relate to how the infants respond to others. In the nursery where care was organised through a key worker scheme, the child displayed a preference and reliance on care from his key worker. The child attending the nursery less focused on attachment pedagogy seemed abler to form relationships with his peers and other practitioners. Subsequent writing regarding the primary task of nursery reflects a specific focus shared by some practitioners on replication of 'family' care. Elfer's (2007) case study research of a private nursery indicates that staff found fostering and

maintaining close relationships and attachments a careful balancing act. When children were unsettled then comfort was provided to the point where the child was calm. Staff purposively shared the care of children between themselves.

Acknowledging that Early Years work is of necessity emotive work is a prompt to a fuller discussion within the Early Years community with regards to attachment pedagogy and professional care. Research (Page & Elfer, 2013) indicates, for example, the logistical and emotional arrangements which impact on the closeness of relationships between children and practitioners. Page and Elfer (2013) acknowledge that relationships within the nursery are different from the family and as such this difference needs to be managed rather than relying on intuition or personal dispositions. In a similar fashion, Quan- McGimpsey et al. (2011), writing in a Canadian context, note the difficulties which practitioners may experience in managing this closeness. They argue that the issue of managing three interrelated domains of attachment, personal and professional is underreported in the literature. Without explicit discussion of the complex nature of teacher- child relationships, little can be done to manage and avoid stress and burn-out or to prepare for the emotional demands of working in Early Years.

Child Development Pedagogy

Notions of universality and sequential processes of development are prevalent in Early Years (Cannella, 1997). Developmentality of the child is a significant discourse influencing Early Years pedagogy (James et al., 1998; Moss et al., 2000; Mac Naughton, 2005; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). This discourse assumes that as natural beings, children experience a predictable sequence of development in order to mature into adulthood (James et al., 1998). As such this discourse can encourage a construction of the child as 'incomplete' or 'work in progress' as well as define normality and abnormality in relation to the child's chronological age (James et al., 1998). This, in turn, impacts on how an 'ideal' child and childhood is understood (Penn, 2002) resulting in desirable ways to interact and think about individual children (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Mac Naughton, 2005). Understanding and supporting these developmental processes then

is central to developmentally appropriate practices which promote the child's learning. By considering the evidence base of developmental psychology, practices which support the child's growth and learning can be identified. Early Years practice is then shaped with regards to this knowledge base. In addition, academics such as Dahlberg and Moss (2005) suggest that increasing emphasis on development as a pedagogical frame is linked to the production of learning outcomes in relation to the technical-instrumental discourse in British education and the preparation of children for the flexible labour market inherent in neo-liberal ideology.

A focus on child development as a pedagogical frame shapes educational practice in particular ways. Lubeck (1996) notes that a focus on developmentally appropriate practice in education encourages thinking of Early Years practice as universal application and theorising rather than a focus on diversity and context. Likewise, Cannella (2001) argues that developmentally appropriate practice privileges the 'norm' rather than a focus on the individual child therefore positioning the child as in a binary with the adult. Child development then becomes the foundation on which other decisions regarding the child are based. Referring to developmental psychology as 'cultural imperialism', the child is regulated and controlled in an effort to move the child towards maturity in a smooth and predetermined manner (Cannella, 1997).

Socio-cultural theories of child development though acknowledge that development is not a linear process but multi directional (Gallacher & Kehily, 2013). Learning is a social process through which both child and adult engage with each other; potentially altering both in the process. Carroll-Lind and Angus' (2011) review of literature for the New Zealand Office of the Children's Commissioner suggests that socio-cultural theories of child development move the focus away from the universal detached and individual approach associated with traditional child developmental psychology and instead place the child within a network of relationships. The child as a social being engages as a social actor, leading and responding to interactions.

Seeing talk as social interaction links with the premise that children are born as social beings. Trevarthen et al.'s (2003) review of literature for the Scottish Executive *Birth to*

Three documentation indicates that far from being blank states or passive recipients of care, babies and young children actively engage with those around them and the experiences on offer. Young children learn through the relationships that they have with the adults and children in their world. This learning is enhanced in the first year of life if the care from adults is consistent and responsive. As the child enters the second and third years of life, learning is increasingly a social activity with the child learning a sense of self and confidence from both adults and children around them.

Neuroscience research suggests that by the age of three a child's brain is 85% developed. These early learning experiences are therefore important, and contribute both positively and negatively to future learning (Lally, 2009). Research considering babies and young children's learning suggests that exploration, responsive care, relationships (David et al., 2003) and language rich environments all contribute to resilient and confidence (Lally, 2009). A review of empirical research with regards to cognitive development (Goswami & Bryant, 2007) also indicates that language rich environments are particularly important to young children's language acquisition and subsequent learning in school.

Goouch and Powell's (2012) focus on language rich environments and talk in baby rooms of group care settings shows that some practitioners experience difficulty in engaging in dialogue with babies. The various explanations for this difficulty include embarrassment, lack of experience regarding talking with babies and lack of appreciation that babies could engage with talk or the necessity for this interaction. This reluctance to dialogue with babies is also clear in Degotardi's (2010) observations of practitioners working with children age nine to twenty months. In her study, interactions during play lead to richer dialogues between practitioners and infants than those during routine care tasks. When videos of practice were reviewed, practitioners' narratives of routine tasks such as nappy changing linked to simplistic and descriptive accounts of practice and theory rather than interpretive discussions regarding the child at play. Practitioners' accounts of the videos of play interactions though indicated intent associated with particular actions. Degotardi and Davis (2008)

link this to the use of practitioners' naive beliefs regarding children and pedagogy rather than theoretically informed practice. Naive beliefs relate closely to the concept of personal theory for Degotardi and Davis define naive beliefs as the implicit understandings which practitioners acquire through experience. These implicit understandings are less likely, they note, to be discussed or contested. Practitioners associated learning with play activities rather than routine care tasks. Some of this distinction between play and routine care tasks as learning opportunities could be attributed to the attention paid to play during the practitioners' initial training periods and CPD.

Play Pedagogy

Davis (2010) identifies that Rousseau's Romantic notion of childhood as carefree and innocent assists in establishing play as the prerogative of children. Play is the means through which children come to understand their world, develop, practise new skills and solve problems. Through play, children build confidence in their abilities and self-help skills (Isaacs, 1932/ 1968). Wood and Attfield (2005) acknowledge that many educationalists such as Dewey, Montessori, Froebel, MacMillan, Steiner and Isaacs embrace this central ideal that children's learning is facilitated through self-discovery and play. Socio-cultural theorists such as Bruner and Vygotsky extend this discussion to acknowledge the manner in which learning is enhanced when adults or other knowledgeable others engage in activities with young children. Identifying that play pedagogy is inherent in the English *Birth to Three Matters* and the *Foundation Stage*, Wood and Attfield (2005: 9) therefore claim that 'play has an idealised status in early childhood'.

There is a developmental and theoretical orientation to play pedagogy; a focus on child 'readiness', child centred decision making, adult facilitation, and environments rich in resources (Wood & Attfield, 2005). Although the Early Childhood Care and Education literature is clear about the desirability of play, more could be achieved in terms of the association between play and learning (Wood, 2008). In particular,

clarification of what constitutes play and what the role of play is within the setting need further consideration (Kessler & Hauser, 2005).

However, how practitioners define play is often linked to their own experiences and personal notions of playfulness (Wood, 2008). Degotardi's (2010) observations of practitioners' interactions with young children suggest that practitioners are more engaged and interactive with children when play is the focus of the activity. Play activities for these practitioners are something that they are familiar with and a feature of childhood whose educational worth is valued. Similarly, Goouch and Powell (2012) *Baby Room Project* encouraged that practitioners experienced the nursery from the child's physical level and this experience promoted enhanced interaction and engagement. Practitioners spoke about the value of appreciating the child's perspective and how it was important to promote the child's experimentation in order to scaffold learning. They argue that it is only by gaining a deep appreciation of how children learn and develop through play and mapping their world (Goouch & Powell, 2012: 75) that Rogoff's concept of learning through 'guided participation' can be achieved.

Implications for this Research Study

- Practitioners' constructions of pedagogy impact on their interaction with young children. Literature suggests that this pedagogy is shaped by formal instruction during initial training and CPD and also by informal means such as experiences and cultural expectations. This literature contributes to the framing of the research questions and data collection.
- Literature indicates that constructions of the child and development may be an aspect of practitioners' personal theories.
- The distinction between routine tasks and play activities is important to consider during the observations and interviews. It is important that aspects of engagement with young children are included during data collection.

Conclusion

Quality care and education in the early years is central to young children and their families. The literature suggests that this quality provision is marked by responsive interactions between adults and children. Dialogue is an important part of this process as it is through dialogue that adults engage with children and support their learning. As social beings, children seek to build close relationships with those around them. The relationships which children form and develop enhance children's understanding of themselves and the world which they inhabit.

Dominant discourses in pedagogy shape the interactions which practitioners have in group care settings as discourse contributes to what is considered both desirable and undesirable in terms of practice. Within the Early Years literature, much attention is played to three key pedagogies as formal frames for promoting learning: attachment, developmentally appropriate practice and play. However, literature also suggests that Early Years can be cast as common –sense and 'baby -sitting children' rather than an educational theory and practice. This focus suggests that therefore professional identity within the Early Years is problematic.

The status of Early Years practice with children under the age of three is low. A construction of the professional as a substitute mother links to Feminist literature related to a binary of the public/private space so that Early Years group settings are cast as neither fully public spaces or a completely private space. Instead, the literature indicates that practitioners can be cast in the difficult situation of replicating the family home but also being professional. This positioning implies that practitioners should both love and care for young children but simultaneously maintain a distance. Literature also identifies the need for a conversation with regards to 'professional love' and what this may entail and look like. However, in the meantime practitioners are caught between expectations regarding their work with young children and the emotional demands that this role brings. The focus on substitute mothering and the nursery also links to the low status and pay of the profession.

How professional identity is constructed impacts on how practitioners see themselves and subsequently their practice with young children. It also impacts on the confidence that practitioners may have in articulating what they consider important in terms of their work with young children. The literature indicates that personal theory is closely related to however distinct from professional identity and professionalism. With its focus on individual constructions and situated decision making, this research on personal theory mobilises phronesis in conceptualising the key construct. Phronesis enables a focus on knowledge gained through personal and professional experiences to facilitate sensitive decision making in a particular circumstance.

Although personal theory is usually implicit, the review of literature indicates that practitioners can, and do, rationalise practice. Research on personal theory suggests that when considering a specific episode of practice, practitioners can articulate pedagogical decision making to identify key components of personal theory.

Chapter 4: Philosophical Influences on the Research

Introduction

Moyles (2001:82) identifies 'passion, paradox and professionalism' as key words in Early Years practitioners' articulation of educational practice and theory. In doing so, she acknowledges a link with Feminist theory regarding subjectivity as well as challenges presented by the paradox of public and private space. Rather than a focus on public space, Early Years care and education has often been associated with the private space of the home or domestic space (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Within post-Enlightenment Western tradition, Feminists such as Francis (2001) suggest that this private space has tended to be associated with women, children and emotion and cast as secondary to public space. Passion, as Moyles (2001) identifies, then becomes problematic in terms of particular constructions of Early Years professionalism as well as theory and practice.

Currently, dominant constructions of pedagogy focus on interventions or applications of educational strategies to support development of the individual child (Moss, 2007; Farquhar & White, 2014). The prominence of evidence-based practice further narrows consideration of pedagogy and philosophy by prioritizing constructivist approaches to learning centring on the individual child and predetermined outcomes. As Moss (2007) contends, this focus aligns with particular premises regarding the linear and universal nature of development. Dominant educational paradigms thus position educational practice as problem solving where the appropriate strategy provides an idealised solution (Biesta, 2008). Alternatively, Farquhar and White (2014) encourage exploration of philosophical and pedagogical orientations which embrace relationships and emotions. Early Years is a subject area within Education that is rich in opportunities for sensory exploration and consideration of how adult and child learn from each other. Such a pedagogical and philosophical approach, they argue, requires practitioners to engage in reflection and consideration of their experience as a learner as well as that of a practitioner.

This exploration of experience can be, as Moyles (2001) suggests, problematic. Central to this problem is the devaluing of emotion and subjectivity within Western society. Manning- Morton (2006) contends that although education and care are inseparable, educational knowledge and practice continues to be privileged over caring. This privileging, she argues, relates to notions of Cartesian rationality which separate mind from matter. It suggests a dualism between the spiritual or emotional operating in the mind and the physical or objective reality of matter. More importantly, it also links to the dominant view in Western tradition regarding how humans understand and interact with the world. In Western thought, the world is an object seen as reliable and orderly and of which it is possible to understand and establish facts. It is separate from the subject. A successful subject is one who manages therefore to curtail the emotional aspects of the subject to 'private life' (Law & Lin, 2009: 2); the nature of subjectivities is thus codified as personal.

Feminist thinking challenges this unmarked identity of intellect within the public space as rational, cognitive, objective and acting in particular ways (Law & Lin, 2009). They argue that the emotive nature of relationships and decisions with respect to the 'Other' lead to particular and valuable ways of knowing and acting. It is this stance which is congruent with this research's subject area of personal theory in Early Years.

For these reasons and from the review of literature, the Feminist 'Ethic of Care' is a key consideration in terms of the analytical framing of the thesis. Osgood (2006b) suggests in her critique of Early Years and neo-liberalism, that practitioners may align themselves with the Feminist 'Ethic of Care' rather than the focus on outcomes and managerialism prominent in neo- liberalism. Although literature (see Goldstein, 1998; Manning-Morton, 2006; Osgood, 2006a, 2006b) suggests a link between the 'Ethic of Care' and Early Years practice, there is little empirical evidence to suggest that practitioners embrace an 'Ethic of Care'. Mobilizing the Feminist 'Ethic of Care' as an analytical framing for this research study regarding Early Years practitioners' personal theories begins to address this gap in the literature.

This chapter begins by identifying relationships as a key philosophical issue within the thesis. It then moves to Ethics and Feminist Ethics as particular aspects of philosophical influence. The discussion then presents a consideration of the 'Ethic of Care'; first the 'Ethic of Care' as discussed by Noddings and then secondly Tronto's writing on the 'Ethic of Care'. The final section of the chapter outlines educational research which utilizes the 'Ethic of Care' as an analytical frame.

Relationships as a Key Philosophical Issue

This thesis is grounded in relational ontology; the premise that individuals are interdependent so that relationships are central to human life. Relationships are important as people interact in social and emotional ways. To be aware of the 'Other' and to reflect on experience though requires consciousness. Trevarthen and Reddy (2006) indicate that the nature of consciousness is one consideration which is problematic to philosophers. As developmental psychologists, they argue that although consciousness is a developing process in the individual, it is relationship focused. Human beings are 'hardwired' as social beings in the pre-birth phase. The infant's biological formation of consciousness enables them to engage in experiences and with others, especially the care giver. Infants show interest in their world, communicate, seek interaction and comfort; all of which are displays of 'cultural intersubjectivity' (Trevarthen & Reddy, 2006:2). Primary skills that the infant employs such as looking, touch, smell and response prompt 'attunement' or a 'co-consciousness' with the care giver (Trevarthen & Reddy, 2006:9). As the child develops, their intention to learning increases as does their interest in others; a process Trevarthen and Reddy (2006:9) refer to as 'self-other' conscious. Although language acquisition enhances a child's consciousness, the beginnings are through non-verbal experiences shared with others. It is this interaction which leads to the child's engagement with particular cultural meanings and practices.

It is the premise of inter-subjectivity which is helpful in terms of this research for it permits critical and reflexive thought about relationships and action. This focus on inter-subjectivity is not particularly new within philosophy for it can be argued that the

early Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as Smith, Hume and Hutcheson acknowledged that human action is interdependent (Tronto, 1993; 2013). It is the later stages of Enlightenment thinking which focuses on subjects as autonomous individuals and relationships which are rule, role bound and reciprocal (Tronto, 1993; 2013) so that the subject is separate from the other.

Within educational literature, Eraut (2004) encourages construction of learning as a relationship with others. In a work situation, he argues, individuals are always learning through experience, interaction with others and context. He identifies both the individual and the social context as key aspects of knowledge and learning. What appears as intuitive practice is the processing and performance of tacit knowledge or personal theory. This is the combination of everyday and formal knowledge, skills/practices and use of knowledge to support action. Eraut acknowledges that this performance is situated in a particular social context of cultural practices and codified knowledge. It is the interpretation that the individual gives to the situation which links to workplace knowledge.

Workplace knowledge is therefore based on a collection of experiences and relationships. Gooch and Powell's (2012) study of Early Years practitioners working in baby rooms considers articulation of practice by drawing on Bruner's writing of the 'landscape of action' and the 'landscape of consciousness' (Gooch & Powell, 2012:85). It is the routine care that practitioners provide which shapes the learning experiences that babies access. This is the 'landscape of action'. It is, though, interpretation, social meanings, codified knowledge that contributes to and are mediated through the 'landscape of consciousness'. Just as Trevarthen and Reddy (2006) indicate how language acquisition enhances the child's interaction with the 'Other' and the learning experience, Gooch and Powell (2012) argue that the practitioner's opportunity for dialogue enhances reflection and the construction of professional identity.

Dialogue is based on relationships between individuals. Readings (1996) speaks of a pedagogy which is relational so that rather than the teacher being an autonomous

subject, the teacher speaks in dialogue with the student. In Freire's (1970/1993, 1994) writing, dialogue acknowledges the lived experiences of individuals and respects difference between individuals. It highlights the difference between speaking with people to acknowledge their understanding of their world and that of speaking to people. Although not essentially inter-subjective, he does argue that subjectivity and objectivity intertwine. To focus exclusively on subjectivity is to lapse towards sentiment whereas to focus exclusively on objectivity is to disregard, he claims, the humanity of the world. Instead he argues that objectivity and subjectivity are in 'constant dialectical relationship' (Freire, 1970/1993: 32) and this allows for educational practice which begins with the learner and the learner's experience. As Freire (1970/1993: 69) states, 'dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, to name the world'. The emphasis that Freire places on praxis is particularly attractive in this research project focusing on articulation of personal theory. Freire is suggesting that in considering the conjunction of reflection and actions as praxis then the two are always dimensions of dialogue. In casting education as a democratic relationship, Freire (1994: 103) states that 'dialogue is the opportunity available to me to open up to the thinking of others, and thereby not wither away in isolation'. It is an opportunity to learn from the 'Other'; to gain insight into the 'Other's' understandings and experience in the world. This stance aligns with the 'pedagogy of listening' that Dahlberg and Moss (2005) identify as stemming from Reggio Emilia's focus on dialogue between child/teacher. This research study on personal theory begins with the premise that individuals understand and experience the world in particular ways. These understandings and experience relate to practice. In order for a researcher to explore personal theory, dialogue must be present between researcher and participant.

Post- foundational Ethics as a Specific Philosophical Influence

This thesis specifically draws on Flyvbjerg's (2001:55) definition of ethics as 'the relationship you have to society when you act'. This definition of ethics positions ethics as situated decision-making; an embodiment of action more powerful than

intent (Hansen, 1995). In Early Years, this is a focus on what the practitioner is deciding to do in practice and in response to the child. As Woodrow and Brennan (2001) suggest, ethics is a focus by which to consider Early Years practitioners' personal theories, especially as it implies a focus on relationships, connections and interdependence. What is particularly attractive though about ethics is the focus on the everyday decisions that individuals make and which balance between the public and private (Schostak, 2002). It is in this 'in between private/public space' (Kim & Reifel, 2010: 241) that Early Years practitioners often find themselves. Rather than a foundational rule-based, universal Kantian approach to ethics, this post-foundational construct of ethics suggests intelligent problem solving within a context. In this research study, post-foundational ethics provides a conceptual frame to support an exploration of personal theory as it maintains a focus on individual decision making within the particular context of group care settings.

Vasconcelos (2006:170), in her consideration of a Portuguese Early Years centre, eloquently justifies a focus on post-foundational ethics.

'Ethics assumes its greatest relevance in spaces permeated by relationships and warrants special scrupulousness when dealing with people, who because of their age are especially vulnerable. It is in this sense that young children demand an ever greater sense of responsibility, commitment, as well as a profound respect for their autonomy, on the part of those who teach and take care of them.'

Of particular resonance to this research focus on personal theory is her contention that post-foundationalist ethics embraces a personal perspective; a development of a personal stance and professional identity in order to develop an understanding of relationships with the child and parents. This process requires the practitioner to be a conscious and responsible decision maker; a construction of practitioner and personal theory consistent with academic literature (see Stephen & Brown, 2004; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Manning-Morton, 2006; Stephen 2012).

Early Years practitioners' personal theories contribute rationale for practice and decisions made during interactions with children, parents and colleagues. Personal

theories therefore influence the education and care that young children experience in group care settings. It is a focus on this micro level of Early Years theory and practice which leads to the philosophical frame of post- foundational ethics and specifically analytical frame of the Feminist 'Ethic of Care'.

Feminist Ethics

In terms of ethics, Urban Walker (1995) distinguishes between a *theoretical-juridical model* in which morality is codifiable and an *expressive-collaborative model* in which morality is context specific and intersubjective so that decisions are a series of negotiations between individuals and groups. Within the *expressive-collaborative model*, ethics are both descriptive and normative so as to identify what is moral and what morality is for. This post- foundational model of ethics acknowledges that both history and culture socially construct conceptions of authority and participation to 'picture morality as a *socially embodied* medium of understanding, adjustment, and accounting *among* persons in certain terms, especially those defining people's identities, relationships, and values' (Urban Walker, 1995: 741-742, italics included in the original). The *theoretical- juridical model* of ethics stipulates particular actions in particular ways so that ethics are codifiable in contrast to the *expressive- collaborative model* centring on the individual's agency in determining course of action that are appropriate and accountable to other human beings. It is within the *expressive-collaborative model* that the Feminist 'Ethic of Care' is situated.

Feminist ethics draws on ideas of human relationships and acknowledges the role that emotion can play in decision making and actions (Shafer- Landau, 2013). Feminists argue that although women are individuals, many share similar experiences, social roles and concerns particularly in terms of exclusion or marginalisation from the public sphere. Feminist writers (see Tronto, 1993, 2013) acknowledge that this is not necessarily though an essentialist argument; there will be some women who do not share these experiences or concerns and there will be some men who do.

The Feminist 'Ethic of Care' as an Analytical Frame

A focus on the Feminist 'Ethic of Care', Wood and Hilton (2011) suggest, is a useful paradigm for the consideration of decision making in educational contexts. It is an analytical research frame which places context as a key consideration whilst also challenging notions of autonomy and independence (Ward & Gahagan, 2010). In this manner, Goldstein (1998) notes that it is 'perfect fit' with Early Years theory and practice.

Although all care involves moral reasoning, the Feminist 'Ethic of Care' also acknowledges that emotion is present and desirable (Noddings, 2010) thus providing a consideration of the 'passion' (Moyles, 2001) and 'professional love' (Page 2011, 2013) identify as pertinent issues in Early Years. Dahlberg and Moss (2005) refer to the 'Ethic of Care' as ethics which require responsibility for the 'Other', a relational ethics which is 'ground up' rather than 'top down'. This positioning is suitable for this research study's consideration of how individuals engage in educational decision making by focusing on the immediate rather than the managerial or policy level. As an analytical frame, it permits and embraces a consideration of emotional aspects of care; a focus which the Early Years literature indicates may be present in practitioners' personal theories.

The 'Ethic of Care' is situated within Feminist writing and, as Sevenhuijsen (2003) outlines, it prioritizes human interdependency and responsibility. It focuses on care as a moral activity within a particular situation; a purposeful activity of thought and action. In this sense, the 'Ethic of Care' is universalistic although not universal in terms of codes and practices. Although this may invite concerns that the 'Ethic of Care' is too relativistic, Tronto (1993) suggests a focus on 'contextual morality' so that although care arrangements and practices may vary from situation to situation. Care, itself, remains central to being human (McKenzie & Blenkinsopp, 2006).

The Feminist 'Ethic of Care' is distinctive from other writing on care, with the possible exception of Levinas's 'Ethic of the Encounter' as it focuses on caring practices or relationships between care giver and care receiver rather than the individual's caring

dispositions (Tronto, 2013). The focus is on the immediate and practical in terms of the actions of care.

Although many academics contribute to writings regarding the Feminist 'Ethic of Care', it is Nell Noddings's 'Ethic of Care' within Education and Joan Tronto's work in Political Studies that are particularly pertinent to this research study. Noddings's writing is often referenced regarding both Early Years and educational practice so a focus on her work provides further insight to this literature. While Tronto's (1993, 2010, 2013) writing may not be so widely accessed within educational research, her core argument that care is a political issue permits a consideration of power, purpose and plurality (Tronto, 2010) with potential to contribute to Early Years. If care is a political matter, then it becomes possible to challenge the current status of Early Years professionalism. It becomes possible to consider various ways of caring and what that may mean to practitioners' understandings and practice. For as Tronto (2013: xiv) argues, a focus on care 'helps in bringing such discussions to a level which engages with people's real lived experiences and differences' whilst at the same time acknowledging the value and practices of care within society.

Noddings's 'Ethic of Care'

Owens and Ennis (2005) credit Noddings's (1984) work as the first consideration of the 'Ethic of Care' within education. Although Noddings's writing links with the values of Feminism, her writing is clearly focused on a philosophical discussion of ethics within the specific context of teaching (Biesta, personal communication, 2012). Noddings (1984) argues that it is the teacher's sense of commitment and responsibility to the student which enables the teacher to focus on the potential for the student's growth and development. The 'Ethic of Care' focuses on relationships so that the 'one –caring' listens to the 'one- cared for' as it is through listening that one is in tuned to the 'Other' and therefore receiving (Noddings, 1984).

Noddings's (1984) contention is that caring is not a role or a specific disposition; care is a way of being human grounded in action. The 'one- caring' does so through body language, tone, voice, action and as such models a caring relationship. In order to

prompt articulation of rationales for specific and observed episodes of practice, the researcher must be sensitive to the whole of the engagement between the practitioner and the child demanding methods that note body language, tone, and actions. Questions and dialogue within the interview must acknowledge emotion as well as the action. Noddings (1984) theorises that through a dialogue of listening and speaking, the 'one- caring' and the 'one- cared for' engage with each other. Through practice, the 'one- caring' indicates a responsibility for the 'Other', to be attentive and responsive and through confirmation to think the best of the child. Within education, Noddings (1984) argues, the learner must remain at the centre of the process; the learner must always matter more than the subject area.

Noddings's (1984) original work links with a feminine sense of being connected and responsive to others yet her more recent writing (Noddings, 2003) notes that the concept of feminine need not necessarily be an essentialist argument. Instead, Noddings (2010: 146) invites consideration of the language of care as one which may be associated with the feminine: 'relation, response, responsibility, preservative love, attention, attentive love, nurturance, needs, receptivity, reciprocity...'. Specifically, Noddings (2012) distinguishes between the language of empathy and that of sympathy. It is Adam Smith's (1759 cited in Noddings, 2012) use of the concept of sympathy which is congruent, she argues, with the language of caring. Sympathy is connected with a reaching towards the 'Other' to be receptive to feelings and situations whereas empathy is a projection inwards of feelings and situation. Alongside listening, thinking and continuity, sympathy enables the 'one caring' to distinguish between the assumed needs and the expressed needs of the 'one cared for' (Noddings, 2012). It is the assumed needs that are problematic for if the 'one- caring' has not listened to the 'one cared for' then the course of action is determined by the 'one-caring' rather than the 'one cared for'. Noddings (2012) argues that it is the 'one-caring's' responsibility to displace their own needs or their presumptions as to what the individual needs based on codified knowledge and standards in order to attend to the expressed and specific needs of the 'one cared for'. By drawing on Dewey's concept of continuity as a connection between past and future experiences, Noddings

(2010) claims that continuity and understanding of the 'Other' is essential. In her concept of confirmation, the 'one- caring' must be able to envision the best of the 'one cared for' (Noddings, 2010). It is the response and acknowledgement of the 'one cared for' that sustains the 'one caring' (Noddings, 1984).

Tronto's 'Ethic of Care'

Although Noddings links caring to the feminine, Tronto (1993) challenges this stance by outlining that the 'Ethic of Care' relates to values that historically have been linked to women. Referring to Gilligan's (1982 cited in Tronto, 1993) text *In a Different Voice*, Tronto identifies two key issues regarding preliminary writing on the 'Ethic of Care': 1) the essentialist argument that care is women's way of knowing and 2) the subsequent focus on private space. As a counter argument to Kohlberg's focus on boy's moral development, Gilligan differentiates between an Ethic of Justice and an 'Ethic of Care'. Her focus on the 'Ethic of Care' as the woman's voice continues the focus on gender structures and established power arrangements also apparent in Kohlberg's work. Although the focus on context and situation is identified as a particular strength of Gilligan's work (White & Tronto, 2004), Tronto (1993), is critical of Gilligan's containment of care to the personal/private space. Instead, her contention is that there is a necessity to engage with the historical and political contexts of care.

It is this focus on the historical and political context of care which is critical to Tronto's (2013) argument that care is a democratic concern. Noting that earlier Feminist focus on public and private space is outdated, Tronto (2013: 18) suggests that there is a 'case for conceiving care as a public value and as a set of public practices, at the same time, recognising that care is highly personal and in this regard, private'. If the focus on care maintains the private/public binary, then care can be positioned as if concerned with only the private space and therefore of secondary importance to the liberal democratic state (Tronto, 2013). Instead, Tronto (2013) argues that care as a theory must include aspects of the relational, the political and the ethical. There is a requirement to consider how care is a web of relationships rather than the dyad of care-giver and care-receiver that Noddings (1984) suggests. It is by acknowledging this

complex web of relationships that an 'Ethic of Care' permits a challenge to current constructions of gender, class and ethnicity and ultimately the 'relentless hierarchy of power' (Tronto, 2013: 153).

Although both Noddings and Tronto contend that care is a set of purposeful practices centred on relationships, the political focus in Tronto's work leads to some key differences regarding the conceptualisation of the 'Ethic of Care'. White and Tronto (2004) note that Noddings's focus on the immediate, the small circle of close relationships, can be parochial. Noddings's (2002) contention that the family should serve as a model of caring relationships, belies the complexity or construction of the family as a particular institution. Tronto (2010) acknowledges that whilst some families may model aspects of desirable care practices other families may be subsumed in gender hierarchies or poor caring practices. Writing with regards to live- in or daily child care, Tronto (2002) acknowledges challenges that the situation produces in terms of notions of work and relationships; especially those relationships between carer and parent as well as carer and child. In order for substantial improvement to occur, changes must encompass a radical reform in services for children as well as revolutionary change in how responsibility for children is constructed. Drawing on the early Scottish Enlightenment thinkers of Hume, Smith and Hutcheson, Tronto (1993, 2002) charts how particular qualities such as sympathy, benevolence and humanities moved from prominence in society to the private space of the home. It is not the values of care which are in contention but the manner in which these have been socially constructed as the providence of the private space of the home.

Tronto (1993) is also critical of Noddings's refusal to consider care as a political ideology which encompasses rights as well as needs. She argues that to link care with democracy avoids a 'morality first' (1993: 160) argument and encourages a shift in moral boundaries to increase the status of care. To centre care as a political ideal, she contends, requires acknowledgement of humans as interdependent social beings and needs which are inter-subjective. Care and justice sit together. If care is positioned

within neo-liberal ideology, then care becomes privatised and based on individual choice. Justice and responsibility to others do not follow (Tronto, 2013).

Care is therefore a practice which comprises of physical work as well as emotional work. It is about relationships as well as action. To conceptualise care, Tronto (2013) suggests five dimensions of caring processes: 1) caring about, 2) caring for, 3) care-giving, 4) care-receiving and 5) caring with. These align with Tronto's (2013) five ethical elements of care [attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness, solidarity]. It is this conceptualisation of care practice and moral character which are useful in terms of exploring personal theories of Early Years practitioners. Care requires an understanding of the 'Other' to appreciate that he/she is a unique individual with distinctive needs, competencies and experience. It demands sensitive judgements about needs, context, actions and response.

'Caring about', Tronto (1993, 2013) contends is the acknowledgement that care is required. This acknowledgement is shaped by both cultural expectations as well as individual perceptions of situations. 'Caring for' involves the individual accepting some responsibility for the response whilst 'caring- giving' refers to the specific actions to provide care. Tronto (2013) argues that the 'care-receiving' is an important consideration as a focus on the recipient permits an examination of whether care needs have been met. Central to her discussion is that society must acknowledge that everyone has care needs. The fifth dimension of care 'caring with' links with democracy and justice; in a democratic society, citizens have a responsibility to each other to care.

Attentiveness as an element of care is congruent with Noddings's concept of motivational displacement. Tronto argues that although the individual must recognise their own need for care, there must a suspension of that need in order to attend to the other. 'That "others" matter is the most difficult moral quality to establish in practice' (Tronto, 1993:130). Care, Tronto identifies, also requires a responsibility for the 'Other'. Distinguishing responsibility from obligation enables Tronto (1993) to align care with cultural practices rather than codified codes of practice. The ethical element

of competence refers to the specific actions relative to the caring relationship. In this respect, Tronto (1993) specifically acknowledges the importance of context in the decision making process. She argues that it is not enough to meet the standards defined by codes of professional ethics or even to 'hide behind them' but rather it is the emphasis on 'caring well' that is important. Responsiveness involves the care giver reaching out to the one being cared for. As Tronto identifies, this positioning of care fundamentally challenges the notion of the individual as a separate individual as well as the issue of inequality. It is though in the fifth aspect of care that the link with democracy, justice and equality is most prevalent. Here it is the connections between others so that communication, trust and respectful foreground the practice of care as solidarity; a practice of care that embraces the notion of 'caring- with' others.

Positioning care as an ethical practice allows for recognition of the skills, context, concerns and the complexity of Early Years work. In particular, the 'Ethic of Care' provides concepts and a language for a discussion of the findings. It provides, as Moss (2007) suggests, an opportunity to engage critically with the findings in relation to Early Years practice with children aged birth to three years.

Critique of the 'Ethic of Care'

One concern regarding the mobilisation of the 'Ethic of Care' as an analytical frame for this research study is that care can be positioned as an idealistic stance. This concern can also relate to particular gender constructions and therefore replicate the feminisation of care; especially those dispositions aligned with women. In other words, an 'Ethic of Care' may lead to a positioning of care as a natural disposition of women. This is a particular concern in Early Years research as the majority of the profession are women (Cameron et al., 2002).

A response to this criticism is to consider Tronto's (1993, 2013) insistence that care is placed within political and moral boundaries as a response to current patriarchal power arrangements in the contemporary Western world. This placing permits a more critical engagement than perhaps the work of Noddings allows. It, therefore, facilitates the identification and discussion of the research findings by placing emphasis on the

wider socio-political context in which Early Years is situated thus allowing a more critically reflexive level of analysis. If care is a political ideal, such as Tronto suggests, then critical examination is possible of the public/private space as well as the care/compassion and justice/rationality binary which historically have been assumed in many care professions. A reconsideration of care in terms of gender, location and focus is required so to facilitate new normative frames regarding care and democracy and citizenship (Sevenhuijsen, 2003).

The second concern regarding the 'Ethic of Care' is the relationship between care and justice. Tronto (1993) addresses a critique of Noddings's alignment with care as mother and justice as father to specifically acknowledge that care is a nongendered moral voice but that historical gendered arrangements impact and position the public space as male and important (McKenzie & Blenkinsop, 2006). Considering this point further, Rodriguez et al.'s (2006) research regarding the gendered discourse of Spanish nursery schoolteachers acknowledges that an 'Ethic of Care' can reproduce a discourse which is coherent to hegemonic femininity. They encourage a consideration of an 'Ethic of Care' which considers the practices of all teachers, regardless of gender. Within a British Early Years context, Taggart's (2011) analysis of national standards for Early Years professionals acknowledges that care as an ethical concern can move discussion beyond simplistic notions of emotional labour or anti-intellectualism and beyond a foundational understanding of care work or privatised patriarchy. It allows the voicing of questions regarding social justice. He argues that an 'Ethic of Care' is a dominant aspect of informal discourse regarding practice whilst codes of practice mask the complexity of Early Years practice. An 'Ethic of Care', Taggart (2011) suggests, requires a construction of professional identity and practice which has a political and critical understanding of care rather than a focus on the performativity agenda.

The third concern regarding the 'Ethic of Care' relates to Noddings's (1984, 2010, 2012) insistence of care requiring proximity in order for the 'one caring' to be receptive to the 'one being cared for'. This proximity may then be paradoxical in terms

of Early Years group care. It may also link to the requirement for workers to refrain from the expression of emotion in order to construct a particular professional identity which Hochschild's (1983/2003) work on emotional labour identifies. Page and Elfer's (2013) case study research regarding the Key Person Approach indicates that although children and families gain through responsive care and relationships with practitioners, these arrangements place high demands on the practitioner. Elfer (2012) calls for practitioners to be supported in their reflection on the emotions present in their professional labour. In addition to the emotional demands on practitioners which Page and Elfer (2013) identify, there is also the issue of the care provider developing the skills and practices to determine the emotional response required to the 'one cared for'. An analytical framing for Early Years research on personal theory needs to account for both the emotion present in child care and education and the demands on the practitioner.

Both Noddings and Tronto acknowledge that the 'Ethic of Care' refers to situated decision making and action. Indeed, Cockburn's (2005) article on the consideration of children's rights and the Feminist 'Ethic of Care' highlights the specific focus on context as being a key contribution in terms of application of the philosophy to the area of Childhood Studies. Drawing on Code's writing (1995 cited in Cockburn, 2005), he identifies two particular strengths of the Feminist 'Ethic of Care'. The first is a focus on the perspective of the 'Other' so that difference is taken into account. It is the social construction of difference that constructs not only gender difference but also difference in terms of the power differential between adult-child. The second is that context contributes to the interpretation and response to need. A focus on context discourages a positioning of children in terms of future led aims and allows a focus on their current social networks, daily life, needs and rights. It challenges the notion of containing care to the private space as it makes 'women and children's activities' (Cockburn, 2005:76) visible through research and academic discussion.

McKenzie and Blenkinsop identify that Cockburn's (2005) notion of difference is a primary concern regarding Noddings's work. If the individual's circumstances are so

different from the one caring, then the acknowledgment of need becomes problematic. A central concern that Cockburn notes is that of the care-giver and care-receiver relationship as it casts the child as the sole recipient of care; a relationship which fails to acknowledge the contributions children make as carers for themselves and for others. Care based on an assessment of need must, as Tronto (1993, 2013) stipulates, address the historical and social construction of the perception of need. Cockburn (2005: 86) concludes, however, by stating that 'crucially, the Feminist 'Ethic of Care' dispenses with the unhelpful autonomy characterised by universal liberal discourses and places the role of relationships at the heart of social, political and philosophical theory'.

Strike and Soltis' (1998) critique of the 'Ethic of Care' centres on the construction of relationships in the ideal and therefore consolidates the concerns previously mentioned. This construction can become entrenched in foundational thinking that care is natural and related to particular dispositions associated in Western society with women. It, therefore, can mask social injustice (Scott, 2012). Although care relationships may at times be unequal, Noddings (1984) distinguishes between unequal and unhealthy relationships. However, Crigger (1997) notes in her critique of caring in Nursing, these unequal and unhealthy relationships can lead to exploitation and enmeshment. One response to Crigger's (1997) critique is Tronto's (1993, 2013) acknowledgement that all individuals are vulnerable and require care. It is modernity, she argues, which casts this in terms of hierarchies and inequalities. This is some respects similar to Noddings's focus on equal/unequal relationships where she acknowledges that at times the relationship is unequal especially in the circumstances of a young child and an adult. Noddings (2006), though, argues this unequal relationship is addressed partially through the acknowledgment of the 'one being cared for' to the 'one caring'. Dialogue, she notes, is not dependent on words. The infant physically acknowledges care and as the child develops so do aspects of reciprocity and response. Within adult relationships, Noddings acknowledges more possibilities for this mutuality. Tronto's writing though encourages a more critical

examination of the concept of relationship and the possibilities of guarding against parochialism or maternalism in order to focus instead on human interdependence.

A return to Tronto's (1993) 'Ethic of Care' is particularly useful here as Tronto acknowledges the frustration and rage that care givers may feel at times but places this within a wider political and moral context than Noddings. Here, Tronto argues that care as a political idea challenges notions of inequality on a wider societal level. Individuals, she suggests, need to acknowledge that all individuals have different needs and situations in terms of care at different phases of life. These constructions of care challenge private and public space divisions as well as constructions of work. Tronto's 'Ethic of Care' casts care as an aspect of a wider socio-political agenda relating to social justice.

The Case for the 'Ethic of Care'

The 'Ethic of Care' has much to commend it as an analytical frame for this research. Conceptualising personal theory as related to phronesis has implications regarding the choice of analytical frame for the research. Phronesis focus on experience and situated decision making demands a consideration of ethics which is case sensitive. It suggests a value- based decision making process. Tronto's 'Ethic of Care' is congruent with these key aspects of conceptualising personal theory. In particular, an analytical frame has implications for decisions regarding methods for data collection. It can support data analysis and shape the discussion to afford the researcher to consider various possibilities. Gibbs et al. (2007) acknowledge that all research has a responsibility to others. In other words, the 'Ethic of Care' is an appropriate analytical frame congruent with relational ontology. They relate phronesis and the 'Ethic of Care' to Social Science based research requiring the establishment of a relationship with research participants by suggesting that it is necessary for researchers to suspend their own desires in order to be in tune and to act in support of research participants. Researchers owe a responsibility of care to participants choosing to place the practitioners' wellbeing as central in the research rather than a focus on gaining access and gathering data at researchers' convenience.

Noddings (2003) acknowledges that educational research regarding teaching should not focus on performance or outcome improvement but on individual's understandings and experiences. This research study on personal theory is focused on individual practitioner's rationale for Early Years practice; it particularly stresses a web of understandings and experiences. Yet, Flint et al. (2011) note that there is limited literature regarding the mobilization of the 'Ethic of Care' in educational research. Their research study of two primary school teachers' professional development and engagement with university-based researchers suggests that the 'Ethic of Care' is valuable in terms of considering care as intentional actions and orientation rather than care as reliant on individual dispositions. An 'Ethic of Care' works from the premise of interdependency and vulnerability and thus, the researchers consider that they are better able to understand the teachers' perspectives and experience. As Owens and Ennis (2005) indicate in their study of Physical Education teaching, the 'Ethic of Care' allows a focus on the 'who and the why' of teaching rather than on the what. Instead of a research focus on routine tasks, the 'Ethic of Care' as an analytical frame for research encourages consideration of relationships and response. Specifically, the frame embraces consideration of the rationale for action. Shadiow (2009) identifies this point as a particular contribution in her analysis of her own narrative as a teacher. Employing the 'Ethic of Care' as an analytical frame encourages her to consider the role of listening and responsiveness instead of on her 'teacher talk'. The 'Ethic of Care' permits, as McAlpine et al. (2012) suggest in their analysis of PhD student experiences, an interface of the personal and the academic. The focus on relationships, response, and rationale noted by these researchers are consistent with this research study's aim and research questions.

Early Years research also draws on the 'Ethic of Care' as an analytical frame. Goldstein's (1998) study of the experiences and understandings of initial years of primary school teaching in the United States mobilizes Noddings's 'Ethic of Care'. She argues that this is a 'perfect fit' with Early Years Education as it 'allows women, and Early Years educators, to own caring in a way that makes it a strength rather than a weakness' (Goldstein, 1998: 247). The 'Ethic of Care' also influences her choice of

research methods so to encourage close attention to everyday routines well as the deliberate decision making strategies which educators employ. In this respect, and in respect to this research project, the methodology and the methods are congruent with the framing which the 'Ethic of Care' affords. Goldstein draws on the concepts of dialogue, responsiveness and conferment in her analysis of the narratives and therefore indicates a particular way to mobilize the 'Ethic of Care' within the data analysis. Subsequent research (Goldstein & Lake, 2000) uses e-journals of pre-service teachers as a data source to consider understandings of caring. Drawing on Noddings's 'Ethic of Care', the practices of care frame their analysis of the data. This utilization of the practices of care is also pertinent to this study. Vogt (2002) also draws on Noddings's 'Ethic of Care' in her research involving 32 Swiss and English primary school teachers' understandings of professional identity. She uses photos and drawings as well as semi-structured interviews to collect data. The 'Ethic of Care' permits her to focus on care as an ethical pursuit. This focus is valuable and necessary as it avoids a reduction of care to gendered stereotypes or specific tasks. Her data analysis identifies care as a continuum where care as commitment is conceptualised as non-gendered and at one end point and care as mothering is conceptualised as gendered and traditionally Western at the other.

In addition to mobilizing the 'Ethic of Care' as a conceptual tool for data analysis, a focus on the 'Ethic of Care' can also contribute to discussions regarding findings as it maintains a focus on the ethical consideration of care and the socio-political context rather than reducing care to routine tasks. One specific example is Manning- Morton's (2006) work in which she encourages a focus on Early Years practice rather than a deficit model of Early Years practitioners. She draws on the issues relating to private and public space as well as considering the centrality of care within Early Years. Similarly, Dalli (2008) notes that the discourse of the 'Ethic of Care' can lead to new ways to conceptualise New Zealand Early Years practice for children under the age of two. In this research project, discussion of the findings needs to consider the implications of practitioners' personal theories in terms of practice, professional identity and training.

These observations of Early Years academics enhance the decision to draw on the 'Ethic of Care' as an analytical frame for this research on personal theory. In summary, the 'Ethic of Care' permits the focus on the routine practice of Early Years practitioners to consider ethical decision making. It maintains a focus on the construction of practice rather than a 'deficit model' of the practitioner (Manning-Morton, 2006). Although educational research has tended to draw on Noddings's 'Ethic of Care', concerns have been raised regarding her idealised and gendered notions of relationships. Tronto's positioning of care with moral and political boundaries allay many of these concerns. Her argument that care is not necessarily gendered but that rather current constructions of gender place care within a private space and with dispositions associated with women resonate with the stance of this research.

Conclusion

In summary, Tronto's 'Ethic of Care' has much to commend it as an analytical frame for this research study. It prompts an examination of Early Years practitioners' personal theories which is contextual and focused on the everyday but most importantly it provides an analytical frame which values care as an individual response rather than gendered role behaviour or personal dispositions. Its focus on individual understandings and response as well as dialogue is congruent with a research subject area of personal theory. Tronto's (2013) five dimensions of caring processes and five ethical elements of care therefore contribute a useful analytical frame to support data analysis and to discuss findings.

Key strengths of Tronto's 'Ethic of Care':

- Permits an examination of Early Years as a situated practice in which relationships are central.
- Maintains a focus on the emotions present in Early Years Education and Care
- Places care within a political and moral framing rather than care as a series of physical tasks or particular dispositions
- Embraces the everyday activities which comprise Early Years practice
- Privileges non-judgemental dialogue between researcher and participant

Implications for the research process:

- Employing the 'Ethic of Care' as an analytical frame demands that the methodology permits a situated exploration of personal theory
- Employing the 'Ethic of Care' as an analytical frame transcends into the decisions regarding the research design as ethics become central to the data collection process
- The elements/practices of care which Tronto identifies are useful in terms of data analysis and discussion of the findings

Chapter 5: Research Methodology, Methods and Ethics

Introduction

A research project's design requires identification of a research methodology, knowledge claims, and then subsequent data collection methods and analysis. The design also needs to incorporate consideration of trustworthiness and ethics. Many texts on research (see Cohen et al., 2000; Punch, 2005; Cresswell, 2007) imply that this is a linear process with research questions proceeding logically from the research's central aim and then methodology and methods developing from the research questions. Certainly, as Crotty (2004) identifies, congruency is required within the research design and is influenced by the epistemological, ontological and political stance of the researcher. In this regard, political is not a party political stance but instead the role of social research in the contribution to issues such as social justice and praxis (see Flyvbjerg, 2001; Freire, 1994; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; MacNaughton, 2005). In terms of this research project, it is also important to consider the unique experience of a PhD project as it is an apprenticeship into the rigour of intellectual thought and research of a particular academic community. A research degree is an opportunity to conduct a research study concerning a particular subject area which fascinates the individual researcher but it is also required to fulfil requirements of originality and contribution to academic thought. These areas of epistemology, ontology, political stance, originality, and contribution to the field all contribute to decisions regarding research design. As a novice researcher, this process has been fraught with complications and the design process has been anything but the linear process that texts on research methods seem to promise. This chapter outlines this process identifying the decisions regarding methodology and research methods.

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004) suggest that the fundamental division between positivist and non-positivist epistemology influences every aspect of a research project; from the choice of research topic to the claims made by the findings. The epistemological and ontological stance of the researcher matters and influences the project from start to completion for it situates the researcher in terms of understanding the world. This

research acknowledges the socio-cultural context of Early Years theory and practice so that individuals construct meaning and understanding from engagement with the world. The conceptualisation of the construct of personal theory draws on Aristotle's intellectual virtue of phronesis; knowledge and understanding gained through experience and then employed in decision making. The emphasis in the research questions on practitioners' experiences and understandings situate this research as non-positivist.

This chapter begins with the justification of case study methodology as an appropriate one for this research study. Its use as a methodology is first outlined and the value of case study as a contribution to knowledge of the social world is highlighted. Identification of the case is also outlined in this section of the chapter. The multiple case design employed in this research enabled cross case analysis. Cross case analysis enhanced the research design as it strengthened the examination of similarities and differences between cases so as to gain a deeper and richer understanding of personal theory. Working across cases also permitted a degree of anonymity within the findings and thus strengthened the ethical considerations of the research design. In this research study, a pilot study informed the conceptual framework and the specific data collection process of observations and interviews. The pilot study and the implications for research design are outlined prior to description of the case and the data collection methods of observation, photography and semi-structured interviews. The interview evidence was first transcribed and then analysed to identify key themes and findings. This iterative process is described before issues related to the trustworthiness of the research are identified. Finally, the chapter considers the management of ethical issues. Figure 1 represents the research design.

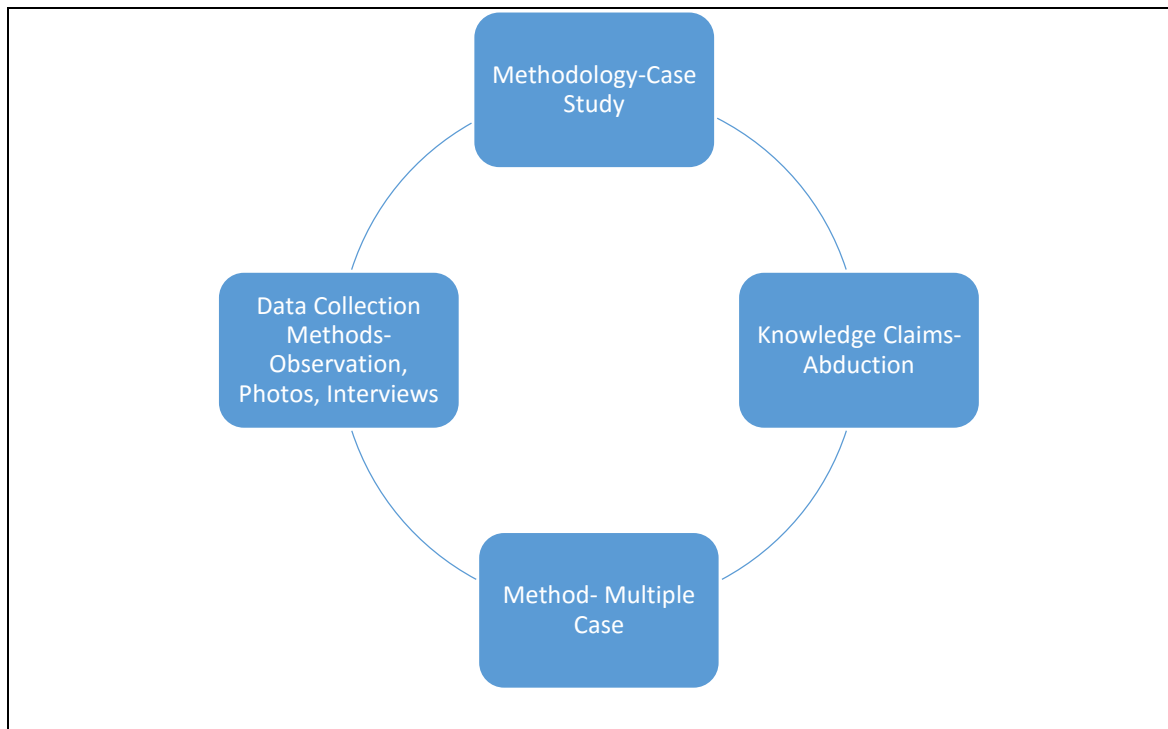


Figure 1: Research Design

The Case for Case Study Methodology

This thesis positions personal theory as action orientating within a specific context. Flyvbjerg et al. (2012) indicate that a research study drawing on the intellectual virtue of phronesis must employ a methodology consistent with the focus on situated and constructed knowledge linked to experience. Case study methodology permits this.

Case study methodology is the detailed and holistic examination and interpretation of a particular case or set of cases of particular social phenomenon within a particular context (Thomas, 2011). As Simons (1996) identifies, the strength of case study methodology is in its acknowledgement of context and the uniqueness of the case; it is a methodology which embraces the richness and uniqueness of human experience. The detailed examination of a phenomenon in a particular context allows the researcher to consider and interpret particular propositions (Yin, 2009); or ‘points of departure’ (Lauckner et al., 2012:8) in order to better understand.

Particularly appropriate to research questions which examine the 'how and why' of a particular social phenomenon, case study methodology enables the researcher to conduct an empirical study within a particular context (Yin, 2009, 2012). This research study considers a particular area of educational theory; Early Years practitioners' personal theories within the particular context of group care provision for young children aged birth to three years. This research's focus on context strengthens the choice of case study methodology for this project. The methodology is particularly appropriate when the phenomenon being studied is so closely embedded in the context that boundaries are blurred (Yin, 2009). This context may be in the immediate sense of the setting and also within the wider socio-political context (Stake, 1995). Social and educational policies as well as regulatory and inspection frameworks indicate that the phenomenon of Early Years practice is such a situation.

Case study methodology can embrace the participant's perspective and the situated nature of the data. Its potential for inclusion can reduce the distance between the researcher and the practitioner (Schram, 2012). As Brooker (2002) notes, the expression of tacit and subjective understandings may be challenging for practitioners. Gooch and Powell's (2013) research focusing on Early Years practitioners' work in baby rooms, however, does indicate that practitioners can articulate conceptualisations of practice through researchers' supportive questioning. Drawing on Brown and McIntyre's (1993) research methods, this research's premise is that articulation of personal theory is supported by the connections between episodes of observed practice, photographic images and interview questions. The researcher's presence in the practitioner's work space as well as observation records enables interview questions relating to shared experience of the setting thus reducing distance between researcher and participant.

The initial decision to consider a case study approach for this research project links to the reading of Hansen's (1995) collection of individual case studies of teachers' personal epistemology and espoused pedagogy. Case study methodology enables Hansen to produce an engaging account of the individual's situation which then aligns

and provide insight with aspects of a reader's experience. As Stake (1978/2000) argues, human understanding is mediated through experience. Case study research reflects and builds on this premise.

[Subject and Analytical Frames within Case Study Methodology](#)

Thomas (2011) argues that a case study must contain both subject and analytical frames (see Appendix 1). The researcher's local knowledge and experience of the case is the subject frame whilst the 'purpose, approach and process' (Thomas, 2011:91) is the analytical frame of the case study. Incorporation of literature and theory in the research's analytical frame distinguishes case study methodology from ethnography or phenomenology. In case study methodology, literature and the philosophical/theoretical frame contribute to the 'methodological steps' of research design (Yin, 2012) for they help establish rationale for research, determine research questions, and identify data collection and analysis procedures. Hawley (2010) identifies the contribution of literature and theory as the means to develop an analytical frame for the research project. This frame then contributes to data collection as it alerts the researcher to topic areas which may be important to collect data about. For example, in this research, the review of literature indicates that a focus on relationships may be important in practitioners' personal theories. This literature influenced the wording of the research questions then subsequently observation and interview questions. Literature relating to subject areas such as personal theory and constructions of mothering, learning and the child also support a systematic enquiry in data collection rather than a reliance on intuition (Yin, 2012). For example, literature related to the status of Early Years suggests that status may influence how practitioners conceptualise Early Years practice. This subject area then became a focus of enquiry in each case rather than a point discussed in one but not in subsequent cases. From the perspective of the Feminist 'Ethic of Care', relationships, responsibility and responsiveness are constructs which appear in the analytical frame. Tronto's (1993, 2013) five dimensions of caring processes and five ethical elements also contribute to the data analysis and discussion regarding findings.

Case study methodology specifically acknowledges knowledge of the subject area and context which the researcher brings to the project (Evers & Wu, 2006). This is consistent with the emphasis placed on holism within case study methodology. A central tenet of the methodology is an acknowledgement that many facets of evidence contribute to understanding the case. Drawing on Popper's work, Evers and Wu (2006) note that observations are relative to what is already known or experienced. Case study methodology problematizes the notion that it is possible to collect and analyse in a theoretical vacuum. By making explicit the analytical framework drawn from literature and theory, the researcher makes clear the decision making process which forms the basis of data collection and analysis.

Identification of the Case

A case study approach though must first establish what the research is a case of (Stake, 1978/2000; Yin, 2009, 2012). Yin (2009) notes, that within case study research, the unit of analysis defines the case. It is particularly important for the researcher to clarify the parameters of the case under consideration so to ensure that the research project is manageable and consistent with its overall aim (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In this particular study, the parameter for the case is the experience of working at practitioner level with children under the age of three who attend group care settings. Discussion with Jean Carwood-Edwards (personal communication, 2008), Head of Early Years at LTScotland, and with Local Government Childcare Partnerships Officers suggested that a focus on qualified practitioners ensured some level of experience and understanding of working with children aged birth to three years. It also supported a focus on personal theory rather than an emphasis on training. The pilot study indicated that a focus on training could be an issue as unqualified staff saw observation visits as an opportunity to ask questions about portfolio building and training. The manager was also inclined to ask questions regarding the quality of staff's work. Both issues needed to be avoided in the research study so that the focus remained on the research enquiry. Another aspect in determination of the case related to regulation and quality assurance procedures. The pilot study indicated that

it was important to remove the possibility of management issues from data collection. Hence, the research study excluded participants whose practice prompted concerns regarding performance and those settings which Partnership Officers and HMIE/Care Commission identified as problematic. These two decisions supported a focus on research rather than staff development.

In this research design, the case study is a multiple case (Thomas, 2011); ten practitioners working in four different settings. This design permits an explanatory purpose to data analysis in order to theory build. It also provides a richer insight into subject matter than a single case study design. Yin (2009) notes that multiple case study design is always preferable over single case study design as the replication of data collection methods promotes a deeper understanding of the social phenomenon. Multiple case study design permits cross case analysis thus obscuring personal details and ensuring greater confidentiality and anonymity to participants. Evers and Wu (2006) indicate that in addition to the case study's analytical framing, data analysis needs to be alert to differences in the data from messages provided by theory and literature. Multiple case study design increases opportunity to explore propositions and tension points in the data as analysis can be both within and across units.

Establishing a research protocol for a multiple- case case study enables general replication of data collection methods to strengthen analysis and theory building (Stake, 1978/2000). Replication of the research protocol allows further confirmation of insights and understandings. In this research study, replication of the protocol for observations, photographs and semi- structured interviews permits deeper insight with regards to the research questions. Although replication is in the process rather than in particular episodes of observation and questions, a richer data set and cross case analysis enables a richer appreciation of personal theory in Early Years practice with children under the age of three.

Knowledge Claims: Abduction

Stake (1978/2000) suggests that case study methodology is particularly appropriate in understanding tacit understandings of individuals as it is congruent with an

epistemology which acknowledges the individual's experience and how they make sense of that experience to construct meaning. Its situated focus allows the researcher to consider particular historical and social contexts and therefore permits construction and deconstruction in order to explore different possibilities (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This is exactly what this research sets out to achieve. The focus is not to establish desirable aspects of personal theory to be tested and then generalised to a population of practitioners. This focus as a research aim would suggest a methodology consistent with positivist epistemology. Case study methodology is non-positivist as its focus is on an in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon. In terms of generalisation of the research findings to a broader community, it is the reader's insight which permits certain aspects of the findings to resonate in order for the case to have meaning (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Although teaching is a situated practice within a particular socio-cultural frame, Evers and Wu (2006) contend that similarities between settings enable professionals to appreciate findings from a case study with respect to their own situation.

Drawing on abductive reasoning, case studies do not attempt to statistically generalise from a sample to a population but to understand the process of a social phenomenon in order to offer tentative conclusions. Thomas (2011) suggests that Pierce's notion of abductive reasoning is central to understanding the unique contributions which case study methodology can make to knowledge. This focus permits a more 'fluid understanding explicitly or tacitly recognising the complexity and frailty of the generalisations we can make about human relationships' (Thomas, 2011: 212). Abduction begins from the premise that all knowledge is tentative. The interpretation is reliant on the researcher's and reader's phronesis to develop an understanding of the problem. It is the bridge between the researcher's experience and interpretations and another's experience which case studies offer (Thomas, 2011). As Formosino and Oliveria- Formosino (2012) contend, it is the reader's connection to the research that permits understanding and resonance.

Yin (2012) refers to case studies findings as analytical generalisations that enable the reader to connect ideas apparent in the case study with other situations. It is the experience gleaned from case studies which contribute to human learning (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Flyvbjerg (2006:236) defends case study methodology when he states

'If one, thus, assumes that the goal of the researcher's work is to understand and learn about the phenomena being studied, then research is simply a form of learning. If one assumes that research, like other learning processes, can be described by the phenomenology of learning, it then becomes clear that the most advanced form of understanding is achieved when the researcher places themselves within the context being studied. Only in this way can researchers understand the viewpoint and the behaviour, which characterizes social actors'.

Case study methodology therefore permits the exploration of personal theory and to consider different ways that personal theory might link to practice in order to offer ways of seeing Early Years theory, practice and professionalism. Dalli (2008) notes that often Early Years theory and practice is considered in a 'top-down' manner so that theory and styles of practice are imposed by policy makers and educationalists. A research project which focuses on personal theory challenges this approach and therefore offers alternative constructions.

A key aspect of case study methodology is the nature of the findings and the dissemination process. Vissak's (2010) contention is that case study methodology may mean that the research report is more accessible to non-academics. If research is to prompt critical thinking and analysis of educational problems then the outputs from research must be meaningful to academics, policy makers and practitioners. To exclude practitioners is to lose their unique perspective and voice. It is this aspect of relevance which enhances a research project; the research must contribute new understanding about the particular subject area in a meaningful and accessible manner (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006). Case study methodology permits a reader without an academic background to follow the interpretation of the narrative and engage with the research. Its focus on relevance to educational theory and practice's broader understandings are its strength in terms of dissemination (Rule et al., 2011).

Key Justifications of Case Study Methodology

- Permits a focus on situated knowledge linked to experience
- Holistic and detailed
- Acknowledges context
- Embraces the participant's perspective
- Acknowledges the contribution of literature and theory to the research process
- Empirical
- Analytical generalisations
- Research reports aid dissemination
- Congruent with the conceptualisation of personal theory as related to phronesis
- Provides a robust strategy for answering the research questions

Implications for this Research Study

- A Multiple Case Study to enable cross- case analysis
- Subject Frame: The Scottish Early Years context and consideration of the specific context of group care setting
- Analytical Frame: Tronto's (1993, 2013) 'Ethic of Care' and the academic literature relating to Early Years
- Parameters of the case: experienced and qualified practitioners working with children aged birth to three years in group care settings

Research Methods

Making decisions regarding data collection and analysis transparent establishes the systematic nature of this research and clarifies the case study research protocol (Yin, 2009). Yin (2012) identifies that too often case study research is solely a precursor to further research and therefore decisions are not well documented. However, establishing a research protocol strengthens the case for the research methods as well as guarding against an accusation of foundationalism that Yin (2009; 2012) indicates is often a criticism of case study research. As Flyvbjerg (2001) notes, Social Sciences may shun case study research for fear of being considered unscientific or anecdotal. Yet, as Thomas (2011) states, if science is considered as critical thinking and reasoning in

order to reflect on pertinent issues and questions then case study research with a clear research protocol is indeed both systematic and scientific.

Previous research studies on practitioners' personal epistemology such as Brownlee et al.'s (2004) study of Australian practitioners working with toddlers in group care settings and Manning- Morton's (2006) work with Early Years practitioners are of particular value in considering specific data collection methods for this research study. Stephen and Brown's (2004) examination of 'insider and outsider' perspectives of Scottish Early Years Education also inform the data collection process. Similarly, although Goldstein and Lake's (2000) and Vogt's (2002) research focuses on Early Years teachers, their work provides insight.

[The Pilot Study: Key Messages regarding Selecting the Case](#)

As Yin (2009) notes, the pilot case study is distinctive from the research case study. The focus in the pilot study should not be on collection and analysis of data but on the process of fine-tuning the case and the methods. It is important to note that at this stage of this research study's design that the initial aim of the research study related to quality provision. Time spent with practitioners during the pilot study redirected the initial focus towards a study of personal theory as it became apparent that practitioners articulated notions of quality as an aspect of personal theory.

The pilot study was conducted in a private nursery in partnership with the Local Authority to provide sessional and full time education and care for children aged up to five years. Located in a purpose- built building within the grounds of another institution, the nursery catered for just over 50 children and was fully subscribed with a waiting list. Staff turnover was low and the majority of staff qualified through the SVQ route. The setting was managed on a day to day basis by a manager although the nursery owner was often on site.

The initial arrangement to visit the nursery was made through contact with the nursery owner. The first visit provided an opportunity to meet the manager and speak to practitioners who worked in the baby and toddler rooms. This visit proved

worthwhile as it established a presence in the nursery and also allowed me, with a 'researcher's hat off', to speak to practitioners who I had taught on previous occasions. The visit provided an opportunity to explain the research's aims so that subsequent visits could focus on observation and interviews. It also enabled discussion about practicalities such as shift patterns, break times and routines. A key aspect of this initial visit was to establish that observation and interview records were confidential and that observations would not be shared with the manager. It was also important to establish that the first priority would always be with the child and therefore if observed practice indicated that a child was at risk then confidentiality would be breached and the incident reported first to the named Child Protection person and then subsequently, if need be, to the Care Commission. It was decided to seek practitioners' formal consent to participate in the research during the second visit. As the owner introduced the practitioners, there was an implied pressure on staff to participate in the research. Also as former students, some staff may have felt an obligatory duty to participate.

In total, five practitioners participated in the pilot; three members of staff who worked in the baby room and two from the toddler room.

Key Messages Regarding Participation for the Research Study

- The initial centre visit was time well spent. It provided an overview as well as an opportunity to meet the manager in order to establish arrangements for subsequent visits and boundaries of confidentiality.
- The choice of settings to participate in the case study needed to ensure that no former connection existed between the researcher and the manager or practitioners.
- Formal consent to participate in the research should be sought without the manager present
- Practitioners and settings identified as possible participants should be free from specific concerns from Local Authority Partnership Officers, HMIE/Care Commission Inspectors and Centre Managers

The Pilot Study: Key Messages regarding Data Collection

Observations were conducted on three separate occasions in each room. On each occasion, the practitioner's consent was sought prior to observation. This rolling consent allowed the practitioner to discontinue participation in the study if they so desired. It was also respectful of the researcher's presence in the practitioner's work space. Asking permission was also intended to limit feelings that the practitioner was being assessed in any way. The first observation did not involve any notes but rather time was spent observing and speaking informally with staff. Lasting about an hour, this first observation was intended to put the practitioner at ease and to have an opportunity to get to know them and the children. On the second visit, observations notes were taken regarding observed practice. As the purpose of the observation notes were to provide interview prompts, detail of interactions with children were noted. These interactions were during activities as well as routine care practices such as feeding. Rather than focus on one particular practitioner, individual practitioners were identified by initials in the notes. The room was then visited an additional two times to observe practice. The timing of these visits was determined by staff shift patterns. After each visit to the setting, field notes were written to record personal thoughts, observations and ideas for interview.

The interviews were conducted after all the observations had been completed. It was very challenging for the nursery manager to allocate staff time for interviews and several short interviews were conducted while children were in the room. This arrangement was distracting to the practitioner and children. To help shape the interview themes, observation notes were reviewed prior to the interview and a list of prompts identified. Interviews were not recorded as it was data collection methods being piloted rather than data analysis.

Key Messages Regarding Data Collection Methods for the Research Study

- The practice of rolling consent helped to establish a working relationship between participant and researcher

- The initial observation enabled informal discussion regarding the setting, the practitioner's experience and training as well as particular issues regarding working with young children. This visit was a positive investment of time prior to subsequent observation periods.
- The observation visits suggested that observation should focus on one practitioner at a time because it was easier to focus and to take notes.
- The observation visits did not impact on staffing requirements but arrangements for staff cover and a private space for interviews needed to be clarified during initial contact with centres.
- Practitioners who were not yet qualified seemed to have greater difficulty articulating rationale for practice. Part of this difficulty was that participants used the opportunity to ask about portfolio building and assessment. It was decided therefore that the research would focus on experienced and qualified practitioners.
- A researcher's presence in the room was of interest to many of the children. Reflection was required to identify how to deal with these situations during observations. It was decided that interaction would occur if children approached. The children were very young and therefore it was not always possible for them to distinguish between the role of a researcher and a member of staff. Sitting close to the activity but not within the activity allowed a less central stance but one which still permitted observation.
- Although practitioners in the pilot discussed specific aspects of practice, they had difficulty articulating hypothetical or holistic aspects of practice. Brooker (2003) also notes this issue. Research by Brownlee et al. (2004) demonstrates that interview questions related to specific interactions with children facilitate discussion. The pilot study indicated a need for examples of specific interactions with children to serve as a point of discussion. Observation notes would provide links to specific events but these were determined by the researcher. To facilitate participants' agency in the research project, other methods needed consideration. Consultation of the National Centre for Research Methods *Real Life Methods* (2008) website led to the idea of using photographs taken by the participant as an interview prompt.

The Research Case Study

Centres and Research Participants

Jean Carwood- Edwards, then Head of Early Years at LTScotland (personal communication, 2008) was contacted to discuss the practicalities of locating and visiting practitioners in settings. It was her suggestion that the benefits of participation in the research study were highlighted to prospective centres and practitioners. The non-threatening nature of the research design was a key feature to stress. She also considered that it would be critical for settings to understand the purpose and potential application of the research. The main benefit identified was that the research design supported practitioner's reflection and critical thinking. She also identified time as a barrier to participation; especially in terms of the interview. Establishment of specific access and time requirements would clarify and reassure centre managers. This discussion reiterated concerns which the pilot study highlighted.

Case study research focuses on knowledge as abduction (Thomas, 2011). The researcher then deliberately selects participants within the parameters of the case; emphasis is not on inference to a wider population but instead on particular cases within specified contexts. In this research, the criteria were: qualified and experienced participants working at practitioner level in group care settings with children aged birth to three years. The other stipulation regarding the selection of the case was that both practitioner and setting were working to levels of practice recognised by regulators and inspectors as acceptable. In order to locate interested centres and practitioners, Local Authority Child Care Partnership Development Officers were contacted. Initially, a Further Education College that offered the Professional Development Award in *Childhood Practice* was considered as an access point to practitioners. Discussions with the Early Years Curriculum Leader indicated that this route would not be viable as liaison would be required with the college, the practitioners and the centres. In her opinion, it was more straightforward to contact centres directly through the Child Care Partnership.

Two Local Authority Child Care Partnership Development Officers were approached to facilitate contact with centres and practitioners. The first forwarded a letter which outlined the research study and the data collection process. One centre, a private nursery, and two practitioners were located and agreed to participate. The second Child Care Partnership Development Officer, who worked in a different local authority, contacted centres directly. Three centres, one private nursery and two local authority nurseries, and eight practitioners were located (see Appendix 2 and 3).

Data Collection: Observations, Photographs and Interviews

Case study research aims to examine the detail of a social phenomenon within a specific context (Yin, 2009). As such, there are no specified data collection methods. Instead it is the appropriateness of the data collection method to the task of understanding the phenomenon which is the criterion for selection (Yin, 2009). Case study methodology permits data collection through multiple processes as various strands of data enhance the understanding of the case (Thomas, 2011). As literature indicated that practitioners may experience difficulty articulating rationale for practice, semi-structured interviews referred to specific episodes of observed practice with children as well as the photographs taken by practitioners (see p. 128-132). The initial stage of the semi-structured interview drew on questions relating to the observation notes and the later stage of the interview was shaped by discussion about the images presented in the photographs. Prior to the interview, each participant was given a disposable camera in order to take photographs of practice. These photographs were subsequently discussed during the interviews. Data for analysis therefore was the interview transcript. Figure 2 illustrates the data collection process.

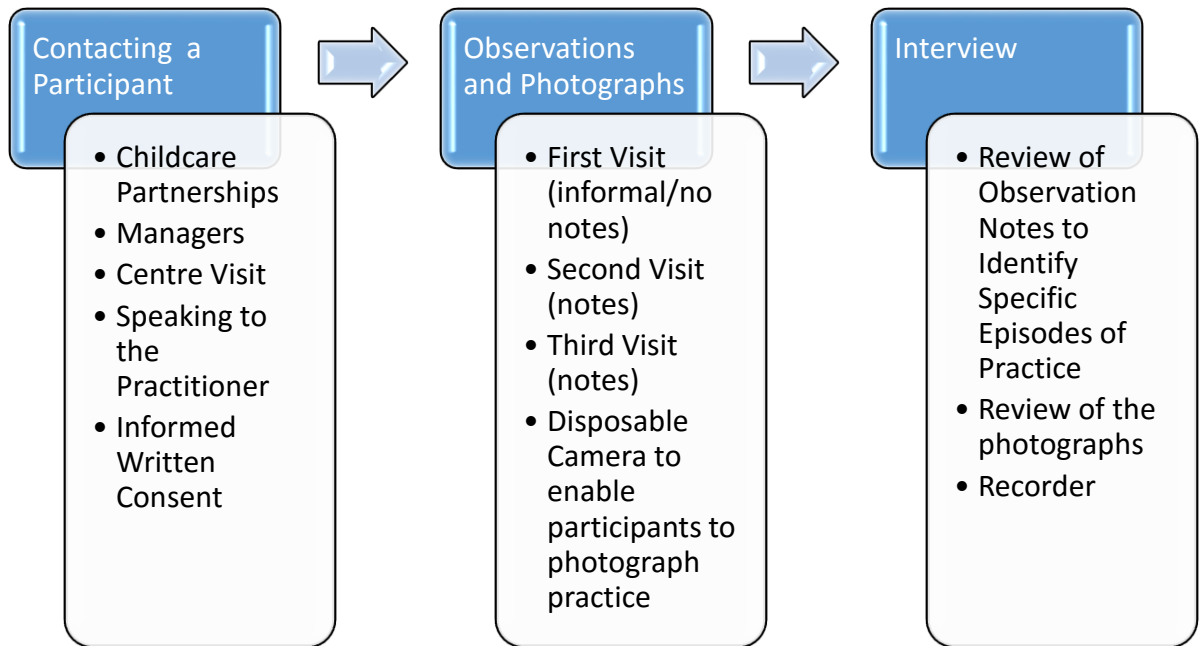


Figure 2: Data Collection Process

Observations

The review of literature indicates that one key commonality of all research studies *relating to the subject area of personal theory is the link between observed practice and the subsequent articulation of personal theory*; researchers based interview questions on specific actions of the teacher or practitioner noted during a period of observation. This focus moves the lens away from thinking of education as a personality driven practice (McIntyre, 2005). Instead, the focus is on immediate decision making in particular contexts (Stephen & Brown, 2004). Linking observations to interviews then permits the researcher to enter into dialogue with the participant to acknowledge purposeful practice and discuss these decisions. Although, as Brown and McIntyre (1993) acknowledge, many teachers can articulate personal theory, this articulation is more productively achieved through links to specific episodes of practice rather than vague discussions about abstract ideas and hypothetical situations.

In order to have records of particular interactions with children to discuss during interview, observations of practice were made during visits to the nursery. Rather a time or event sample, observations took place within the everyday routine of the nursery. Consistent with Cohen et al.'s (2000) guidance regarding observation, the particular focus of the observation was shaped by the particular actions of the practitioner during the time the researcher spent in the setting. The particular aim of the observations was to identify specific interactions with children so that these could then be used in the interviews as a point of reference for discussion. In order to identify a specific episode of practice which could then be related to the interview, the focus was on the practitioner's interaction with a child. During the overall period of observation, the practitioner therefore may have been observed interacting with several different children. For example, in one observation period the practitioner was working with a child who was unsettled during an activity. In another, the practitioner was settling a child for sleep. Routine physical tasks not involving children such as 'tidying up' were discounted from the observations. Practitioners were assured that the focus was on practice rather than a judgement regarding 'quality'. Notes were taken during the second and third observation.

Field notes were made after each visit. The field notes recorded contextual notes of the visit as well as points raised in informal discussions between researcher and participant. These field notes also contained records of the researcher's impressions and queries regarding the observation visit. Given the time between observation visits and the interview, the intention was that these notes would support contextualisation of the observation records and thus serve as an aide memoire.

Prior to the interview, observation and field notes were consulted to identify themes and specific episodes of practice to be referred to in the semi-structured interview. These themes and specific episodes of practice would then provide the context of discussion. Basing the interview on particular incidents and actions therefore grounded the discussion on the experience of a specific episode of practice rather than

the hypothetical or abstract theory. This focus on practice was to facilitate the practitioner's articulation of personal theory.

Photographs

Another method to provide stimulus for the interview discussion was the use of images. The review of literature indicated two studies in which the use of images provided insight into practitioners' decision making processes regarding theory and practice. In the first study, Vogt's (2002) study of primary school teachers' constructions of care, the research drew on data collected from semi-structured interviews, photos and drawings. Her rationale was that different data sources enabled a fuller and deeper understanding of the 'Ethic of Care' and professional identity. She did, however, vary her data collection methods between the two groups of teachers; the Swiss teachers received one set of instructions whilst the English teachers received another. In the second study, Brownlee et al.'s (2004) research of practitioners' personal epistemology, specific episodes of practice were videoed. The interviewer then asked the practitioner to respond to the recording. As with Vogt's research methods, researchers decided which episodes of practice were recorded. Cost and technical issues negated use of video in this research study.

In both research studies, the researcher made decisions regarding images' subject matter. A research study focusing on personal theory requires methods which strengthen opportunities to discuss rationale for practice without imposing a researcher's perspective. As Epstein et al. (2006) indicate, the use of photographs as stimulus for talk can reduce the power differential between participant and researcher in order to prioritize the participant's perspective. Another additional point was that inconsistency within data collection methods in Vogt's study influenced the data analysis. Different teachers were asked different questions depending on whether they were responding to images or drawing their own images. This point emphasised the importance of consistency regarding the use of images in this case study.

The use of disposable cameras in this research project enhanced the participant's decision making. With the exception of one participant who was given the disposable

camera at the end of the second observation visit, practitioners were provided with the disposable camera at the end of the third observation visit. The only guidance provided was that they should photograph images and events which they considered representative of their practice with children aged birth to three years. Practitioners were asked to arrange for the pictures to be developed and funds were provided to cover these costs. This data collection method enhanced the agency of the research participant in shaping the interview's content. The research participant chose the subject matter and the photographs remained the property of the nursery. Photographs were used a prompt for discussion rather than a specific aspect of data for analysis; the focus therefore was on the discussion about the image rather than the photograph itself.

Interviews

Power differential between participant and researcher is a key concern of researchers working within a Feminist paradigm (Punch, 2005). This research study's data collection method specifically addresses these concerns by building trust between researcher and participant over several periods of observation and informal discussions. According to Punch (2005), this deliberate strategy of developing rapport between researcher and participant provides opportunity for gathering richer data. In this study, care was taken to use first names, answer questions, as well as establish interview conditions to enable a participant to speak without others listening or interrupting.

Semi-structured, face to face interviews were chosen as an appropriate data collection method. Not only did they provide opportunity to explore specific interview domains with practitioners (see Appendix 4), but they also permitted opportunity to further develop participants' responses which were particularly interesting. As Cohen et al. (2000) suggest semi-structured interviews enable research participants to shape the interview; either in terms of asking questions, presenting a new topic or in terms of the researcher developing questions from previous responses. Gillham (2000) notes that semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity to gather rich and detailed

responses and that therefore, they are particularly suit research questions aiming to develop understanding of a social phenomenon. In this research study, field notes and observations records were reviewed prior to interview. This strategy identified possible episodes of practice to explore further with particular participants. In addition to observation notes relating to specific episodes of practice, the review of literature presented particular domains to explore in the interview.

Although a list of domains and specific episodes of practice were identified prior to the interview, a semi-structured interview does permit a personalised format for each participant. This personalised process means that interviews may proceed in a unique order and may be developed by probing and checking as well as paraphrasing (Cohen et al., 2000). Inclusion of common domains supported cross-case analysis but the semi-structured nature of the interview permitted inclusion of specific episodes of practice in order to contextualise the discussion. All participants, for example, were asked questions regarding initial training and CPD but the field notes for several participants highlighted specific CPD events which could be referred to in the interview.

The photographs were discussed in the later stages of the interview. Practitioners explained the context of the photograph and spoke about their decision to record the image. Further questioning developed practitioners' rationale for practice illustrated in the photographs.

As the interviews were recorded by using a small digital recorder, it was important to establish that technology was in place prior to the interview. All participants were shown the recorder, provided with an explanation of how it enabled the interview to be recorded and then downloaded to a computer, and asked permission for the interview to be recorded.

Data Analysis

Transcription of Interviews

Richards (2009) suggests that decisions regarding transcription are preliminary in the reduction of data and therefore, transcription is really part of data analysis. Indeed, Kowal and O'Connell (2004) advise that the research study's aim and data analysis plans should shape a researcher's decisions regarding transcription procedures. It is a balance between transcription of interview data to support data analysis and too much detail; the research study's aim clarifies the level of detail required in transcription. This research study is an examination of interview content in order to identify key aspects of practitioners' personal theories rather than a conversation analysis study. It was considered that it was not necessary to transcribe every hesitation in the interview such as um, or er (Stephen, personal communication, 2009).

In addition to these academic details, Sapsford and Jupp (2006) identify that the quality of recording also shapes decisions regarding transcription. A digital recorder which permitted file storage and transfer to a computer was used to record interview data in this research study. The recorder enabled a good quality recording of the interview. As participants were informed beforehand of the storage process for interview data, interview files were downloaded to a password protected computer. Consultation with colleagues indicated that it was preferable to personally transcribe these interview files in order to create word document files to facilitate data analysis. Although time consuming, repeated listening to interview recordings assisted in familiarisation and appreciation of the data (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006; Bazeley, 2007). Initially, a recording of an interview was listened to in its entirety in order to gain a sense of familiarity with the data. A part of the interview was then played and the content typed. By using the stop/play option, the interview could then be transcribed. Bazeley's (2007) advice to not correct grammar or incomplete sentences was followed. Pseudonyms had already been allocated to practitioners so interview transcripts used the initial of the pseudonym to identify responses. Colleagues and children were also

identified by initial. Once the interview had been transcribed then the whole interview was replayed to check transcription. Interview data was subsequently deleted from the recorder to ensure confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Transcripts of interview data provide an opportunity to work with data in order to make sense of it (Richards, 2009). Data reduction through coding enables key messages to emerge and for the parts of the 'jigsaw puzzle' to fit together so that an overall sense of the data set can be gained. In this research study, data analysis was an iterative process of working 'up from the data' (Richards, 2009: 73); questioning, revisiting the data, thinking, noting points of difference. Each interview transcript was initially read through, and then reread, so that annotations could record questions, thoughts, possible links to other sections of the interview and other interviews, and sections of the interview of particular interest. It was at this stage of analysis that a list of initial categories regarding the data was created. Mind mapping was a particularly useful strategy to aid conceptualisation of categories and threads emerging from the data. As Lauckner et al. (2012) suggest, notes and mind maps support this process of contextualising meaning so that the researcher can begin to see how categories weave together.

The intention of the research design was to support cross case analysis. In order to look across the data set, data needed to be coded so that the appropriate point of the interview transcript could be identified, revisited and then eventually that category synthesized across relevant sections of interviews. Richards (2009) distinguishes between topic coding and analytical coding with the latter involving questioning the data to move beyond the description of data and towards abstraction. By linking data to initial categories, then collapsing, expanding, and renaming of categories to form the finalised categories, key themes could be identified in the data set and then eventually findings (see Appendix 6). This statement is not to suggest that data analysis was necessarily straight forward as a process. In the analysis of this data, there were times when reconsideration of data suggested an alternative way of

grouping or teasing apart categories. For example, the coding and consideration of data relating to mothering was an area which altered during data analysis. Drawing on Sapsford and Jupp's (2006) guidance to initially seek out many categories, initial data analysis indicated categories related to parenting/mothering were: trust, responsibility, compensatory, communication with mother during settling in, communication with mother ongoing, being a second mother, becoming a mother, working with mothers, requests from mothers, becoming a working parent, having been mothered, observing colleagues who are mothers, working with colleagues' children. Closer examination of the data then indicated that there were important distinctions about the categories. Requests from mothers, communication with mother during settling in and ongoing could be collapsed into one category of replication of mother's practices because of the way in which practitioners were using this communication to develop practice to replicate the mother. Replication of mother's practices, compensating for parental care and professional practice as a second mother developed into a theme regarding modelling practice on the mother. This focus though on modelling practice was different from the focus on tensions between the mother and the practitioner role which the categories of working with mothers and becoming a working parent indicated. Finally, there appeared to be consistency in terms of the categories of being a mother, having been mothered and observation of colleagues who are mothers as these all linked to the experience of mothering.

Just as it was important to synthesize data, it was also important to acknowledge points of difference or uniqueness which existed in the data. In this research data, individual interviews contained perspectives on Early Years practice that was different from other practitioners. For example, categories and themes identified in the practitioners who worked with babies in the two private centres demonstrated a focus on substitute mothering not present in the local authority baby room practitioner's interview. The identification of these points of difference enabled a richer understanding of the data set. It is this process of interrogating data to ensure findings can be traced to the data which warrants analysis and the research.

Trustworthiness of the Research

Flyvbjerg's (2006) discussion of common misunderstandings regarding case- study research encourages researchers to consider constructs of validity within the context of the subject area's research community. How trustworthy the research is considered to be needs to be placed within the research's paradigm. However, Rolfe and Mac Naughton (2010: 9) argue that the concept of 'good' research is not related to paradigm or to specific methods but to more global principles so that 'good' research is 'ethical, purposeful, well-designed, transparent, contextualised, credible, careful, imaginative and equitable'. This thesis documents the decisions taken in this particular research study in order to provide the reader with insight into the systematic nature of the research process and the philosophical and theoretical frames which contextual the research; this thesis 'tells' the story of this research study on personal theory (Schostak, 2002). Exploration of the socio-historical context of Early Years enables the researcher and the reader to situate these decision making processes and subsequent discussions. It is this focus on context in case study research methodology which leads Flyvbjerg (2006) to identify its authenticity as a particular strength. In this account of the research, the thesis emphasizes the specific Scottish context of the case study to place the research. In terms of ethics, an 'Ethic of Care' informed and shaped decision making throughout the research process. 'Good' research is also aware of its limitations and these are discussed further in the following section.

This research study mobilized several different data collection methods to provide deeper and fuller insight into practitioners' personal theories relating to working with children age birth to three years. The specific episodes of practice observed and the photographs facilitated discussion during interviews. The research design drew on a multiple- case case study with embedded units. Two different possibilities for triangulation, an aspect of concurrent validity (Cohen et al., 2000), therefore present themselves. In this respect, triangulation is not in terms of verifying results as in the positivist paradigm, but in Denzin's (cited in Punch, 2005) reference to the manner in

which triangulation supports consideration of various perspectives and insights in order to present a thoughtful investigation of the research aim and questions. In case study methodology, triangulation provides opportunity to develop a richer data set and analysis.

Limitations of the Research

Although systematic and ethical enquiry supports the researcher's efforts in the production of 'good' research, limitations of the research process also require consideration and acknowledgement. This section of the thesis identifies and discusses three limitations: 1) coder reliability and member 'checking' 2) interviewing as a data collection method and 3) currency of the research.

Coder Reliability and Member 'Checking'

One particular issue with this research study was that it was completed mainly in isolation. As a part time research student whose residence was located a considerable distance from the university, there was not the opportunity to work regularly in a collegiate environment. Academic work benefits from an opportunity to discuss ideas and share practice. In many qualitative research projects, team meetings provide an opportunity to discuss data analysis and coding. Also a shared office space permits informal discussion regarding data analysis. A process of coder reliability 'checking' can provide insight into analytical decisions and can prompt further consideration of different ways to interpret the data as well as confirmation of the researcher's interpretation (Cohen et al, 2000; Punch, 2005; Richards, 2009).

In this research project, absence of coder reliability 'checking' is a weakness of the research design. Although there were many discussions with supervisors regarding categories, themes and findings, there was not the opportunity to have regular discussions with other research students regarding this data. Two key obstacles presented themselves: 1) asking a colleague to do this when there was nothing to offer in return and 2) assurances given to participants regarding the confidentiality of the data. In respect of the first obstacle, the different trajectory of research degrees mean that everyone is at a slightly different point in the research process. For the

process to be meaningful, coder reliability 'checking' needs to be a thoughtful and ongoing process. It should not be a single episode to 'tick' a box in terms of validity. With respect to the second obstacle, verbal assurances were given to participants that only the researcher would handle interview data. Future research needs to broaden this assurance to a wider frame of academics connected with the research process so that coder reliability 'checking' is a possibility.

This second obstacle related to the decision not to mobilize 'member checking' or 'respondent validation' (Richards, 2009: 186) in the research process. Member checking involves participants' consideration of various aspects of data analysis and research report process. Data collection procedures of this research project focus on the individual whilst data analysis and the research report encapsulates the collective. A tension thus appears in terms of 'member checking'; individual participants are only well placed to comment on their own interview data whilst the research design does not provide opportunity for participants to meet and share perspectives. In addition to this tension, the other concern relates to the ethical area of confidentiality.

Participants were based in four settings. In each setting more than one participant participated in the research. Discussing interview data and analysis during 'member checking' may therefore breach confidentiality as practitioners would be able to identify a colleague's account. Issues regarding 'member checking' were discussed during supervision and the process discounted.

Although the research study's design did not include member checking, informal discussions were held with participants each time practice was observed. Field notes indicated that participants commented that the observations, informal discussions and interview prompted reflection regarding practice. In particular, several of the participants mentioned that the collection of images was a worthwhile exercise. The disposal camera had a fixed number of photo opportunities so practitioners had to make specific decisions regarding what image to capture. Two participants identified that this process forced them to consider aspects of practice in a manner different from the use of digital photography. One practitioner used the images after the

interview to produce a display for parents as she thought that the images indicated aspects of practice worth sharing. Participants commented that they benefitted from the focused time. All the settings and participants were told of the process prior to agreeing to participate in the research. Participants showed a commitment to the research process and the indications were that they gained from the formative experience. The agreement with the settings and participants was to the general good rather than specific returns.

Interviewing as a Data Collection Method

Referring to Murphy et al.'s 'radical critique of interviews, Hammersley (2003: 119) notes concern from some qualitative researchers regarding the prevalence of interview data in research. In particular, the premise that it is possible to use interview data to provide insight into participants' thoughts is considered problematic. The 'radical critique of interviews' therefore stresses the interview in itself is a social construction; contextual and discursive. Hence in this research study which mobilizes a post- foundational analytical frame of the Feminist 'Ethic of Care' through the writing of Tronto (1993, 2013), there could be a challenge that the research methods of observation and interviews are foundational and therefore inconsistent with the analytical framing (I 'Anson, personal communication, 2015).

This possible limitation also relates to Sapsford and Jupp's (2006) note that observation notes are shaped by the observer. It is the observer who decides what is considered to be important to note. In a similar respect, the interview process can be shaped by the interviewer as it is the interviewer who determines the questions and shapes the interview. A semi- structured interview though does allow the participant some scope for developing answers and altering the path of the interview.

Additionally, the inclusion of the data collection method of photographs taken by the participant provided some scope for the participant to shape the interview process.

That said, this identified limitation of this research study draws on Hammersley's (2003) response to the 'radical critique of interviews'. In this response, Hammersley (2003) argues that researchers need to consider what interviews can offer in terms of

insight into a social phenomenon and what limitations that interviews present in terms of research claims and conclusions. He contends that although researchers should be cautious regarding interviews as a data collection method, interviewing as a method should not be discounted outright. This research study draws on abduction in terms of its knowledge claims. Its findings are tentative, partial and the researcher's interpretation of the 'best fit' with the data. Generalisation is linked to the reader's experience and understanding; the reader's judgement of the sufficiency and insight offered by the research based on the connections that the reader makes between the research report and experience of the social phenomenon.

Currency of the Research

This thesis draws on research conducted as part of a part time PhD. For various personal reasons, this part time PhD has spanned eight years; a period of time considerably longer than the traditional three to four years for a full time PhD. This extended time frame of study does impact on the research's currency.

During the initial years of the research, there was a scarcity of empirical research which prioritized practitioners working with children aged birth to three years. Brownlee et al. (2004) work in an Australian context and Manning-Morton's (2006) research in England offered some insight into the research process. Over the course of the part time PhD, however, the body of literature and empirical research centring the practitioner's voice has grown. The findings from this research study do resonate with current research in the subject area.

Although the thesis has taken an extended period to complete, consultation with literature enabled awareness of current debates within the field. The thesis has incorporated relevant current literature in order to frame discussion.

Research Ethics

Ellis, in Ellis et al.'s (2008) paper recounting a panel discussion regarding qualitative research methods, acknowledges the complexity of ethics in research where relationships are built. The research's philosophical frame of the Feminist 'Ethic of

Care' positions relationships as central. Furthermore, case study methodology enables research to focus on situated lived experience in a holistic fashion (Yin, 2009). This focus requires researchers to be diligent in questioning and listening to participants in order to develop understanding of the social phenomenon being explored.

It is this particular focus on relationships that Schostak (2002), drawing on Levinas's Encounter with the 'Other', argues needs to be the starting point of research ethics. Consideration needs to be given to ethical issues not only in terms of accessing participants but also in data collection, data analysis and representation. At all points of the research process, the researcher must maintain an appreciation of the power inequalities present; a situation where the researcher's social capital makes their voice heard (Fine et al., 2000). Researchers, therefore, need to consider engagement with the environment and participants in a manner which encourages participation but also avoids dominating (Hill, 2005). One strategy for considering this power divide is to disrupt notions that the researcher is the 'knowledgeable one' and the participant is the 'innocent one' (Jepson, 2005). This strategy requires the researcher's reflexivity to consider some overarching values with regards to the importance of relationships.

Ethics in case study research demands reflexivity and subsequent vigilance in terms of thinking and questioning in order to develop what Warin (2011) refers to as ethical mindfulness. Yet, as Hill (2005) acknowledges, few researchers have specific training in research ethics. Given the situated nature of research ethics in case study research, it also would be an impossible task to prepare specific instruction regarding ethical decision making. Reflexivity, however, provides an opportunity to consider how the researcher as an individual manages the ethical issues present. This reflexivity or ethical mindfulness, deLaine (2000) argues requires maturity, integrity, sensitivity and authenticity. It enables reflexivity to be a resource for ethical decision making (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) and positions research ethics as situated, political and in dialogue with others (Renold et al., 2008). As Nutbrown (2011:11) states, ethics in research are never "done' but always on duty'.

The Feminist 'Ethic of Care' is a key approach to ethics in this research study. Although Adams (2008b) is not specifically writing on the 'Ethic of Care', his argument regarding how the researcher regards the 'Other' shapes the orientation of this research and informs decision making processes. Rather than a specific set of rules and regulations, an 'Ethic of Care' is an orientation to a particular way of being with others. An orientation which embraces humans as unique individuals but of equal worth. The focus is respect and responsive action towards the 'Other'. It is an ethic which places the individual participant as more important than the research. The central tenet that the rights of others are more important than the needs of the research or the researcher guides this research process. It is this emphasis on the responsibility to the 'Other' that Schultz et al. (1997) focus on. Acknowledging that research drawing on an 'Ethic of Care' is unusual in terms of literature dealing with specific research methods and ethics, they argue that Noddings's (1984) concept of fidelity is particularly useful when considering research ethics. Fidelity, being faithful to a relationship, acknowledges that researcher and participant are different individuals and roles but that the researcher is responsible to the participant throughout the research process. In a similar fashion, Nutbrown (2011) speaks of the 'guardian approach' within research; an approach Noddings's 'Ethic of Care' informs. In this approach, the researcher maintains a responsibility for the 'Other' in order to respect the individual participant. This responsibility includes consideration of global values such as honesty, protection from harm, and autonomy (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). It is in this spirit that consideration is given to research ethics in this research study on personal theory.

Although ethics is situated at the end of this chapter, the decision making processes are integral to the case study design. It is useful here to consider Guillemin and Gillam's (2004) distinction between two key aspects of research ethics: 1) procedural ethics and 2) ethics in practice. Procedural ethics refers to compliance with specific legislation and particular codes of research and professional practice in order to gain formal ethic approval, usually by a university ethics committee. Ethics in practice refers to the day- to- day decision making in the research process. Here ethics is positioned as an evolving discussion; a situated practice leading to particular actions

by the researcher (Kilbourn, 2006). This section of the chapter outlines the procedural ethics for this research project prior to examination of three key areas of ethics in practice: 1) rolling informed consent, 2) confidentiality, and 3) use of photographs. These three key areas of ethics in practice demonstrate some of the particular decisions regarding this case study. Additionally, in the general guise of 'ethics in practice', there are the unexpected turn of events which require immediate decisions and actions. A particular example of an 'ethically important moment' demonstrates this decision making.

Procedural Ethics

Procedural ethics tend to deal with prevention of harm, issues regarding access and consent, and confidentiality and anonymity (Kilbourn, 2006). Although Small (2001) argues that codes of ethics can lead to compliancy rather than continual vigilance, he acknowledges that codes do at least require a minimal consideration of ethics. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) echo this sentiment and consider procedural ethics to be a necessary aspect of research ethics. They suggest that procedural ethics encourage the researcher to reflect and articulate considerations such as procedures for consent, confidentiality and minimizing risk.

Prior to the pilot study and data collection, ethics approval was sought from the School of Education Ethic Approval Committee. In terms of the *University of Stirling's School of Education (SOE) Ethic Approval Committee*, the application focuses on research design, consent, confidentiality, data storage and outputs. Three sets of guidelines informed the completion of ethic approval for the research: *British Educational Researchers Association (BERA, 2004)*, *Scottish Educational Researchers Association (SERA, 2005)* and *University of Stirling Code of Good Practice in Research (2002)*. All three acknowledge the research context and the professional decision making of the researcher. *University of Stirling (2002)* guidelines stress the importance of the researcher's self-regulation and honesty. *BERA (2004)* and *SERA (2005)* guidelines acknowledge the power differential between researcher and participant. Specifically, section 18 of the *SERA (2005)* guidelines outlines the need for researchers to

acknowledge the 'bureaucratic burden' (SERA, 2005:7) of participants working in education settings and therefore structure data collection to take place within normal working hours.

The SERA (2005) guidelines identify two overarching pieces of legislation to consider: 1) *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC, 1989) and 2) *Children (Scotland) Act* 1995. The UNCRC acknowledges that the child's vulnerability necessitates enhanced protection of rights. In this research, focus is not specifically on the child but on the practitioner. The research design though allows for access to children and for photographs of children. Hence, it is important to consider the rights of the child as well as the rights of the adult practitioner. Section 1.4 of the Ethic Approval Form deals specifically with this area and outlines procedures in place to protect children. The *Children (Scotland) Act* 1995 outlines regulation of child care centres and child protection procedures. Practitioners and centres participating in research as well as the research design must comply with legislation. A tension therefore could exist between compliance with child protection procedures and the assurance of confidentiality. As part of the consideration of ethics, the decision was taken that centres and participants would be informed that the centre's named Child Protection person would be contacted if child protection issues were observed.

In addition to these points, Child Care Partnerships and centres who offered to support this research need assurance of the researcher's suitability to access child care settings. Although Enhanced Disclosure of criminal convictions is not a guarantee in protecting children, centre managers are legally required to ensure professionals have appropriate checks. The Enhanced Disclosure certificate was obtained and centres were permitted to photocopy the certificate.

Ethics in Practice

The *University of Stirling's* SOE ethic approval form requires researchers to identify strategies in place to reduce the risk of harm and breach of confidentiality. However, ethics in case study research are, as Small (2001:404) states, 'an everyday activity'. Although it is possible to outline procedures to deal with key issues, day- to- day

research activities present different considerations. Research processes associated with case study methodology often evolve as data collection proceeds therefore the researcher needs to maintain vigilance towards ethical decisions during the research process. This section of the chapter discusses three such considerations: 1) rolling informed consent, 2) confidentiality and 3) use of photographs.

Rolling Informed Consent

Cohen et al. (2000) link informed consent to the human right of self-determination. The individual's right to make informed decisions as to involvement in the research is an aspect of self-determination. Although informed consent is a central tenet of procedural ethics, Fine et al. (2000) acknowledge a tension between the emphasis on the right of self-determination and the need of an institution to be seen to take appropriate action. There is, they insist, a need for the researcher to consider what informed consent means in every day terms to the participant. Renold et al. (2008) identify this as an ongoing consideration of consent where the focus is on 'becoming participant'; a shift in thinking about consent so that the participant opts into the research process rather than a focus on consent and any subsequent withdrawal. In 'becoming participant', emphasis is on continual questioning as to whether the participant agrees with the path of the research. This technique, they argue, is consistent with the *Economic and Social Research Council's* concept of 'rolling consent'. The process of 'becoming participant' avoids the traditional research practice of single written informed consent. Instead, 'becoming participant' or 'rolling consent' requires the researcher to continually monitor and check consent.

It is therefore possible to see informed consent as a two staged process: 1) written consent and 2) rolling consent. Written consent allows the researcher to outline the aims of the research, the time involved, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity (Hill, 2005). In this research, a leaflet for participants outlined the research process as well as confidentiality and anonymity procedures, data collection and storage, and research dissemination. A separate written consent form was obtained for each participant (see Appendix 5).

Rolling consent maintains an emphasis on the participant's active decision making with regards to the research. As Hill (2005) suggests, it may be very difficult for a participant to decide not to proceed in the research study. Opportunities therefore must be built into the research process to allow the participant to reconsider the implications in terms of time, emotional involvement, and inconvenience. *SERA* (2005, section 10) guidelines note that informed consent must be voluntary and must be an active rather than an implied process. The guidelines advocate informed consent as a continual process. In this research study, participants were asked on each visit for permission to access the site and observe, take notes, and in the final session to record the interview. Sometimes in a nursery, practitioners need to be reallocated rooms to provide cover for colleagues who are unwell or attending training events. In this research study, participants were assured from the start of data collection that the researcher understood that these situations might arise. If a particular day was not appropriate, they could cancel. In three different centres, there were occasions when participants decided that circumstances were not appropriate for observation or interview and subsequently the activity did not take place. Each time, however, the participant stressed that they wanted to continue with the research and would reschedule. A particular issue for participants was the aspect of a recorded interview and most admitted concerns. These concerns were discussed, the recorder displayed and assurances provided that only myself listened to the recording in order to transcribe data. All practitioners agreed to the interview being recorded.

In addition to the practitioners who participated in the research process, others at the centre were also affected by the research. These included staff and children present in the room during observations. The *SERA* guidelines identify that in some circumstances informed consent is not practical or necessary as the research focus is not on that individual. Observations and photographs during data collection of this research study are such a circumstance. Permission was not sought from parents, children or indeed other staff members present as they were not the focus of the research. It was explained to other staff in the room that observation would centre on the activity of the practitioner rather than the child or other staff members. Although

children under three years may not appreciate the details of a research study, they are entitled to respect and consideration. The observation notes therefore only contain the child or staff member's initial rather than their name. On occasions where parents were present, introductions were made and the focus of the research was explained.

Confidentiality

Hill (2005) distinguishes between a public and social network level of confidentiality. With regards to the public level of confidentiality, it is important that those engaging with research reports cannot identify participants. This level of confidentiality therefore often links to the practice of anonymity (Punch, 2005). Within the social network level of confidentiality, the emphasis is on not sharing information about one person with others also participating in the research process. Research methods which focus on building relationships can place the participant in a vulnerable position; the stronger the relationship and disclosure is, the more vulnerable the participant is (Fine et al., 2000). An 'Ethic of Care' approach to research requires therefore an obligation to the participant to respect their privacy. Information between participant and researcher should not therefore be shared with others.

In this research study, formal consent assured participants of confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were made aware that their name and the centre's name would not be used in any of research records or reports. Information regarding participants and centres is limited in the thesis in order to decrease likelihood of identification. This is consistent with Cohen et al.'s (2000) observation that the more personal detail included in research reports, the more likely that individuals can be identified. Only initials were used in the observation notes. Each participant and centre was allocated pseudonyms and those were used in the transcription of the interview, during analysis and writing. In addition, the multiple case approach in the case study led to data analysis process across the set of interviews. This area of confidentiality can be accounted for in procedural ethics and outlined in the case study protocol (Yin, 2009).

The social network level of confidentiality is particularly pertinent to ethics in practice. As Barker and Willer (2003) identify, this area of confidentiality relates to a balance between 1) maintaining relationships with individuals in positions to control access to participants and 2) drawing boundaries during data collection. Their study indicates a balance between maintaining a working relationship with teachers who permitted researchers access to children in the classroom and the need to maintain the confidentiality of the children's views. Barker and Willer (2003) indicate that teachers did enquire as to what issues children raised. A similar issue presented itself during this study. In several centres, managers specifically requested feedback regarding aspects of the practitioner's work. It was important to emphasize that the researcher role meant that it was not appropriate to comment on the specifics of an observation. Another related issue with social network confidentiality was that in two centres, participants worked in the same room. This was an aspect not originally considered during procedural ethics. In order to maintain confidentiality, only one member of staff was observed at a time. Interviews were conducted in private and content not discussed with others.

Although the emphasis in research ethics is on maintaining confidentiality, there are times when confidentiality needs to be breached. Williamson et al. (2005) suggest that the protection of children should remain a central concern of the researcher, regardless as to whether or not children are the central focus of the research study. This emphasis is consistent, they argue, with *National Children's Bureau* research guidance. The legal position with respect to the researcher's obligation is ambiguous, especially in the United Kingdom. However, the absence of a specific legal requirement does not negate the researcher's ethical duty of care to the child. As Hill (2005) notes, the researcher's moral duty is always to the child. Child Protection is always paramount (Nutbrown, 2011).

Hill (2005) suggests that the researcher clarifies the position with regards to breaching confidentiality at the beginning stages of access and consent. Although as Williamson et al. (2005) identify, other professionals such as Educational Psychologists would not

necessarily clarify in advance a possible breach of confidentiality with respect to concerns regarding children's welfare. In this research, the responsibility to children always outweighs obligations to adults and organisations. Written information and meetings with individuals clarified this stance. During data collection, this matter was not an issue that needed action.

Use of Photographs

The research methods involved participants photographing aspects of the setting and practice. The strategy was that photos would act as interview prompts so that discussion could take place with regards to why the participant had chosen that particular image and what the image represented. One other reason for the use of photographs was that they enhanced the participant's agency (Barker & Weller, 2003).

In the early stages of research design, it was clear that this use of photography may include images of children. This probability indicated particular ethical issues.

Nutbrown (2011), for example, acknowledges that recent cultural shifts regarding risk reduction indicates that research involving children requires careful consideration.

Certainly, Phelan and Kinsella (2013) mention that colleagues advised against the use of photography in a research project involving children due to concerns regarding possible abuse or pornography. The 2009 high profile case of the Plymouth Early Years practitioner charged with assisting a paedophile ring by taking pictures of children in her care coincided with the finalisation of research methods for this project.

Consideration of issues and procedures regarding photography and the use of pictures were established to reassure Childcare Partnerships, centre managers and practitioners that necessary safeguards were in place.

A key consideration of the use of photography in research is the issue of consent of the person in the photograph; whether that is a child or a colleague (Phelan & Kinsella, 2013). All the centres involved in the research used digital photography to document children's development and learning. Parental consent therefore had already been obtained by the centre for photographs to be taken of children and then stored.

Decisions regarding the subject matter of the photographs were made by participants

so the approach to colleagues and children was made by participants themselves. In order to limit the risk of electronic transmission of images, disposable cameras were used. The pictures were the property of the centre and remained at the centre. As participants should not bear financial costs of research, both the camera and funds for developing the film were provided. The use of the photographs during the interviews meant that images themselves were not part of the analysis or of the research outcomes so the dilemma that Nutbrown (2011) identifies regarding distorting children's faces was avoided.

Ethically Important Moments

In a research study, procedural ethics and aspects of ethics in practice can be considered prior to data collection. There are, however, some additional moments in the research process which are spontaneous and which require immediate decision making by the researcher. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) refer to these as 'ethically important moments'. However, many research reports neglect minute detail of ethical decision making, preferring instead to focus on data collection and data analysis (Warin, 2011). Yet, micro ethics is especially pertinent in Early Years research.

Although ethics in practice examines relationships between researcher and participants, how the researcher's presence affects the children in the room is a specific area of micro-ethics to consider. The children in these settings were aged between 6 months and three years so it was difficult for practitioners to fully explain the researcher's role; especially to the youngest children. In order to hear and observe interactions between practitioners and children, it was necessary sit close to activities rather than remain at a distance. From time to time individual children would approach; either to investigate or to try and engage me in activities.

One particular ethically important moment occurred when a young child was being settled into the centre. The child was very distressed on several occasions. However, one morning when I arrived in the room the child was playing quite happily. Upon seeing me enter the room, the child rushed over smiling and put their arms out as if to embrace me. I was unsure as to what to do but decided that it was best to allow the

child to determine the path of interaction. I put my observation book down and knelt down. The child then gave me a hug and I patted the child's back. Having said a hello, the child wandered off back to the activity.

Data collection which takes place in a group care setting does involve children; even if the primary focus of that research is on the practitioner. The researcher therefore needs to be responsive not only to the relationship with the practitioner but also to relationships with children; to not respond to a child would be disrespectful.

Chapter 6: Findings: Characteristics of Practitioners' Personal Theories

Introduction

Based on analysis of transcriptions of almost eleven hours of interviews (ten hours and forty-seven minutes), this chapter focuses on key research findings. Literature (see Brooker, 2002, 2003) indicates that practitioners sometimes struggle to articulate aspects of practice and therefore prompts such as observation records and photographs supported interview discussion in this research project. Practitioners were invited to use disposal cameras to represent their work and these images were drawn on during the semi-structured interviews. Interview data contained discussions relating to observation and field notes as well as discussion of images which practitioners photographed as representative of practice.

Contrary to the suggestions in the literature, interviews indicated that practitioners were enthusiastic about discussing practice and rationale relating to it. Each of the practitioners was able and keen to provide detailed responses to questions. Often it was time which curtailed the interview rather than lack of discussion. None of the practitioners refused to be recorded. All of the interviews lasted over an hour and it was usually the practitioner's concern that colleagues were providing cover that curtailed discussion. With only one exception, practitioners had taken photographs and had images available for the interview. In the one exception, development of the photographs was delayed and a subsequent interview arranged to discuss the images.

Each key finding links to particular themes identified in the data set (see Figure 3). Several categories noted in the data contribute to identification of a particular theme (see Appendix 6). Six key finding characteristics of personal theory regarding practice are outlined: 1) Practice as an 'Ethic of Care' 2) Practice as pedagogy 3) Practice as 'Substitute Mothering' 4) Practice as distinctive for children aged birth to three years 5) Practice as rooted in experience and 6) Practice as personal and emotional activity. Finally, the chapter recaps key findings which are subsequently interpreted and discussed in the Discussion chapter (chapter 7).

Characteristics of Practitioners' Personal Theories	Themes identified in the data
1) Practice as an 'Ethic of Care'	1.1 Caring about the child as an individual 1.2 Attending to children's non-verbal communication 1.3 Non-verbal communication to indicate solidarity 1.4 Responsible and respectful relationships with parents
2) Practice as 'Substitute Mothering'	2.1 Modelling practice on the mother 2.2 The nursery as a home 2.3 Mother/practitioner role tensions
3) Practice as Pedagogy	3.1 Socio-cultural approach 3.2 'Age and Stage' approach 3.3 Play as learning 3.4 Promoting children's independence
4) Practice as Distinctive for Children Aged Birth to Three Years	4.1 Features of child development 4.2 Organisational and government policy 4.3 Acknowledging the differences in caring for children 0-3
5) Practice as Rooted in Experience	5.1 Experience of formal training routes 5.2 Experience of CPD 5.3 Experience of working with Birth to Three 5.4 Experience of mothering
6) Practice as Personal and Emotional Activity	6.1 Emotion as an aspect of practice 6.2 Personal qualities identified as essential to practice 6.3 Practitioners' dealing with emotion

Figure 3 Presentation of Findings

Key Finding 1: Practice as an 'Ethic of Care'

The data indicated that practitioners embraced aspects of Tronto's (1993, 2013) 'Ethic of Care' in their interactions with young children. Central to this was the focus on the child as an individual. In order to respond appropriately to the child, the practitioner needed knowledge of that individual child. The following discussion highlights four key themes: 1) caring about the child as an individual 2) attending to children's non-verbal communication 3) non-verbal communication to indicate solidarity and 4) responsible and respectful relationships with parents.

Caring About the Child as an Individual

All practitioners interviewed spoke of the importance of knowing the individual child in order to provide responsive care and learning experiences. Alice stressed the key importance of knowing the child when she said:

Illustration 1

I have worked in the baby room and they know the children so well and if the children get upset they don't want to come to me cause they don't know who I am and you see how important it is to have the responsive care and relationships between the two. They know the children so well. If they fall, then it is oh they are fine. It is not because I am not known by the other children or that I am not good at my job. It is just that it takes time to build that and you know that you have to invest in them. (Alice, Toddler Room practitioner)

Every practitioner acknowledged that every child was a unique individual with individual needs and preferences. They went on to argue that a key aspect of the practitioner's role was to care about the individual child. Lucy identified this relationship with the individual child as essential in establishing the environment for children's learning. Without this key relationship and knowledge of the child, learning was inhibited. 'Focus on that first and then focus on their learning' (Lucy). Several practitioners stressed that it took time to get to 'know the child' and therefore establish key ways of working with the individual child. Iris, for example, noted that babies had individual preferences on ways to be held, fed or comforted. Some of this

knowledge could be acquired through conversations with 'mum', but over time and continual observations the practitioner would also 'know the child'.

Illustration 2

You have to learn their relationships. I have mentioned that before but you have their feeding, their sleeping, and the child's preferences in order to treat them like an individual. You do need to build up a relationship with specific children who maybe are unsure about coming in the morning and we have a wee boy who comes in with his cars and he has a dummy within 5 minutes we all know that he likes to go and put them in his bag and so we have a routine. You do get to know all the child's preferences (Lucy, Toddler Room practitioner)

There were though four factors which practitioners identified in terms of developing understanding of the individual child: 1) time, 2) informed decision making, 3) the centre's key worker policy, and 4) the child's attendance.

The first factor in 'knowing the individual child' was time; all practitioners identified that it took time to get to 'know the child'. This key factor of time was noted by some practitioners as particularly problematic when it came to covering staff absence. This issue was apparent in Joan's interview. During the interview, an episode was highlighted where one member of the team was absent when a child was settling in to the room. The child was upset and only Joan seemed able to comfort the child.

Illustration 3

J: You know that supply people were as qualified, I don't think they know the children so I think you do double the work and they just go along with you with whatever you do.

D: They are there as a spare pair of hands but they can't necessarily comfort a crying child. Is that the case?

J: They can but they might not necessarily want the supply person so you have to overcompensate for that. If they have been here awhile and they get to know the child, then that is totally different. But for someone coming in for one day then that is totally different

D: Is it hard for them as well?

J: Yeah you can through all the child's routines and that but they still look to you to tell them what to do. (Joan, Birth to Three practitioner)

The second factor in 'knowing the child' was informed decision making. Central to this situation was the decision making needed if the child was upset. Joan identified that practitioners needed to 'know the child' in order to provide comfort and reassurance appropriate for the particular child. This discussion emphasised a sense of responsibility for the individual child. Rebecca noted that when new staff members entered the room, young children often needed additional reassurance and tended to look to practitioners who regularly worked with them. The young child may seek the reassurance of the 'familiar face' as Iris suggested. Mary attributed this behaviour to the adult 'being a stranger in the child's zone' whilst Alice (in Illustration 5) linked it to knowledge and understanding of the individual child. In order to provide care and build relationships, time and emotional investment were required. It was important to care about the individual child.

In Mary's interview, a series of photos showed children engaged in various activities. Mary indicated her understanding of each child's situation.

Illustration 4

This is a sequence with D. She wanted cornflakes so she was able to do this herself and I think she was saying that to him. It is the social aspect of being together. I know he has an older sister. There are quite a lot of things. He does go to playgroup so that is a good thing because he has children on his level. He is with adults a lot and I think there is some misunderstanding. (Mary, Birth to Three Practitioner)

Practitioners were often very specific about practice related to a particular child and distinguished individual needs, preferences and situation as key aspects of decision making and actions. When recounting particular episodes, practitioners identified specific rationale for a particular child and conditions. This distinction resonated with the focus on 'knowing the child' and the requirement for specific and sensitive judgments. Rather than a prescribed or set rulebook, practitioners spoke of

understanding the particular child, the context and appropriate practice. It was this focus which indicated a competence of care exceeding delivery of physical care.

Another factor which practitioners identified as associated with the need to 'know the child' was the centre's key worker policy. Lucy, in her role as a depute manager, acknowledged that it was a challenge to know all the children in the room and therefore she relied on the key worker scheme to allocate staff to specific children. It was the key worker who developed the close bond with the child. Although Vicky did not see the number of children in the room as problematic, she spoke of the key worker's importance in building relationships with specific children. The physical care of specific children enabled this relationship to develop closeness. Personal care routines linked to the room's practice of toileting routines so that key workers changed and toilet trained specific children. Her colleague, Joan, though recognised that logistics of these arrangements could be problematic and therefore she regarded 'having another child now and again is good cause they need to get used to all three of us' (Joan). Alice, though, reported a different stance. She considered that it was important to know all the children in the room.

Illustration 5

What I have found in my practice in the last year is knowing the children, their parents and their background. If someone walked into this room and started talking about the children then it is right, ok, their home life, what is it like? To have that knowledge right here about that child and because I work in such a small room it isn't just about my key children, it is about her key children as well. (Alice, Toddler Room practitioner)

She elaborated how knowing the children could support dialogue with the child and a fuller discussion of the day's events when parents arrived to collect children.

The length of time which children attended the setting also related to practitioners' feelings about 'knowing the child'. All practitioners indicated that they had different relationships with children who attended centres full time. The phrase 'treats it like a second home' was frequently used by several practitioners to describe behaviour of

children who attended the setting full time. This proximity meant that practitioners felt that they formed a different type of bond with full-time children; a closer and more insightful relationship in which the practitioner knew the child. Joan referred to this as 'seeing every side of the child' because the practitioner saw the child who was very tired, hungry or grumpy rather than the child who attended nursery for the session. Her colleague, Vicky acknowledged that in the afternoon full-time children needed different support than sessional children. Full-time children needed 'a bit more time out, a bit of a cuddle, and a bit more of her attention than the sessional children who are here for two and a half hours, enjoy the session and love what they are doing'. Speaking of a particular child, Vicky elaborated 'you have to be able to recognise that as well. She is going to be here until 5 pm and you have to judge their different personalities. Maybe F coming in for an afternoon will not want to come anywhere near you. He will just come in and get on with what he is doing and H is a different personality. She does like to have a cuddle'. Alice also noted that some full-time children 'craved one to one attention' and that practitioners needed to be aware and act on this. Throughout the interview data, it is clear that practitioners valued building close relationships with children who they cared for. They suggested that this close relationship was desirable as it facilitated competent and responsive actions in terms of caring for the child.

Attending to Children's Non-verbal Communication

All practitioners clearly indicated that a key aspect of practice was reading children's non-verbal communication to indicate needs and desires. Reading of children's non-verbal communication was identified as the basis of sensitive responsive judgements regarding children's learning and care routines. It was this attentiveness and solidarity with the individual child which enabled the practitioner to provide competent and responsive care. The following scenario illustrates this point. In this section of the interview, Emma recounted a particular instance of a child who was very difficult to settle one day. She tried various strategies in an effort to determine an appropriate response.

Illustration 6

Yes, especially with babies. Downstairs or with the older group if they have a sore head or belly then they can tell you or if they are going to be sick. Where a baby can't so you are trying to gauge what is wrong. If the baby is crying then you are trying to work out if they are tired or if it is wind or are they unsettled (Emma, Baby Room practitioner)

Emma's contribution indicated the importance she placed on being able to spot when a child required particular attention. This skill of observing and deriving meaning from non-verbal communication was a key aspect of her work with babies. The other two Baby Room practitioners also highlighted the importance attached to reading non-verbal communication and like Emma, this skill was identified as responsive care. Iris's interview demonstrated how this skill was used to respond in particular ways to particular children. Her personal theory was that it was preferable for the adult to allow the child to lead and to let the 'child come to you rather than you going to the child'. This strategy though did not mean that she considered the child should be ignored but instead observed for non-verbal indications that the child would welcome adult intervention and involvement. She particularly emphasised understanding the facial expressions of the children.

Illustration 7

Again this wee one is looking around to have her face dried and that again is why we need to be there. They may not have the language to tell us that but you can tell from the expression. They can't tell us when they want things. We have to know'

'It is the child who leads and even in the Baby Room very rarely would we go and pick a child up for no reason. Do you know what I mean? You have to watch the child. (Iris, Baby Room Practitioner)

During the observations, it was noted that almost all the practitioners would stop speaking and closely look at a child's face. Observation notes indicated that many of the practitioners worked sitting on the floor or crawling on their knees. Other practitioners used a combination of sitting on the floor or sitting alongside children. All practitioners

who worked with babies took the approach of being on the floor with the children. When asked about these actions in interview, Baby Room practitioners reported that they deliberately placed themselves at the child's eye level so that they could observe the child's face. They reported reading the child's non-verbal communication and trying to work out what that individual child wanted or needed. This attentive behaviour of 'reading the child' was particularly prevalent in relation to physical care and could be exemplified when Rebecca recounted her decision that a particular child was ill. She spoke of observations of the child's behaviour and temperament and how these observations compared to her existing knowledge of that individual child. As she noted, these observations and judgements are required when working with children aged birth to three years because 'how else do you know that because they can't say to you- I've got a splitting headache or my teeth hurt'. Joan highlighted the dominance of physical care tasks in her working day and her need to be able to assess whether the child was tired, hungry or needed toileting. These care needs were identified by attentively reading the child's non-verbal communication. Settling a child for sleep was identified by some of the Toddler Room practitioners and all of the Baby Room practitioners as a key decision; for without frequent rest periods they said that a young child struggled to get the most out of learning opportunities presented. Practitioners identified non-verbal signs such as rubbing eyes, playing with hair and even inability to settle and concentrate indicated that individual child required sleep.

[Non Verbal Communication to Indicate Solidarity](#)

Data analysis indicated a distinction between interpretation of the child's non-verbal communication and practitioners' own non-verbal communication as a means of speaking to a child who did not have speech. Practitioners spoke often about the importance of touch and affection in terms of working with children aged birth to three years. Touch and affection were noted as specific aspects of practice which indicated that the practitioner was aware and supportive of the young child; a solidarity of care between practitioner and child. Alice's indicated this when she says

'It is like saying that I care without having to say it'. Mary also spoke of the importance of touch and affection:

Illustration 8

Oh yeah, I think it [touch and affection] are very important. At that age it is the senses that are stimulating. If you are wanting them to bond with you or to feel comfortable in the environment, then touch is a big thing. Giving them a wee cuddle or a tap. How are you doing? Then you get them feeling confident and comfortable and then you talk to their parents (Mary, Birth to Three practitioner)

Practitioners spoke of using touch to 'let a child know you are there' (Joan). Several practitioners spoke about the difference in size between adult and young child; a 'wee tap on the head or touch of the hair' (Joan) were used to provide reassurance and let the child know that 'they are in a safe place' (Lucy). This data was consistent with Mary and Alice's comments on the use of non-verbal communication to reassure young children.

Practitioners' non-verbal communication also linked to how they chose to physically position themselves with respect to the child. Several of practitioners spoke of the difference in size between themselves and the young child. This related to the theme of interpreting the child's non-verbal communication but it was distinct because in this case the practitioner was using non-verbal communication to communicate a message to the child in order to show solidarity. The following conversation with Emma indicated this distinction.

Illustration 9

D: The other thing I noticed is that you are up and down a lot on the floor. You will walk a lot on your knees. You are upright from the knee up but you will walk on your knees. Why?

E: Yes cause you are at their eye level especially when they are feeding. I could take a chair across the room cause it would be easier. I usually have a cushion. But you are making contact with their eyes.'

D: And how do you think that helps? Because I noticed that one day one of babies M was really crying his eyes out. He was under one of the baby swings and you really locked eye contact.

E: I think if you give them eye contact then they feel secure that they know you are there. I used to do that with my own kids. They would be in the highchair and I would be sitting beside them and you are always on the same level. If you are standing up all they are seeing is a belly. If you are seeing a belly, then you are just seeing a big person really. Someone I watched when I first started stood and I just didn't think it was the right thing to do. (Emma, Baby Room practitioner)

Rebecca also made this distinction when asked about working whilst sitting or crawling on the floor. She stated 'I think you do things subconsciously though. It is just respectful to talk to children on their level. It would be quite daunting if they were a wee toddler and you were looking down on them. I suppose young children really understand language so if you are talking directly to them and showing them what to do so that they know they have your full attention then they listen to you'.

All practitioners acknowledged that the decision to use touch and affection was a sensitive one. Some spoke of asking the child if they would like a 'cuddle or hug' and then respecting the child's decision. Vicky reflected on this decision especially in relationship to one child who wanted to be with her all the time.

Illustration 10

D: And with the work you are doing where do you draw the line between a cuddle and too much cuddling? I noticed that with M when he was settling in you would take his hand or hold him up but as soon as you thought he was going to settle you would put him down on the ground

V: Yes, if they can. Well they can't get used to you doing that all the time and you have to be judgemental as well. How long do they need to be sitting in your lap for? Do I need to do that? Do they need the dummy more? It is a comforter for them. They do have to settle so they can join in as that is what they are here for. It would be dreadful if they were on your knee all the time. (Vicky, Birth to Three practitioner)

Responsible and Respectful Relationships with Parents

For many parents, this was the first experience of leaving the child and for the child the first experience of being left in group care. Practitioners recognised that children aged birth to three years were unlikely to be able to recount experiences to the parent and that children under three were particularly vulnerable. The parent, therefore, needed to be able to trust the practitioner. Several of the practitioners identified that their care of children aged birth to three years was therefore a responsibility. Emma demonstrated empathy with parents when she stated 'The thought of leaving a baby with someone else' and then sighed. She elaborated on this point further into the interview. 'I think it [trust] is important cause if you have a good relationship then they can tell you things about the child. They are open to you and things like that and they are quite happy leaving you with their precious little bundle. If you don't have that it must be very hard to leave your child'. In Emma's interview, she spoke several times about this issue.

Illustration 11

I keep saying to the girls that although you are working with the child to the mothers and fathers who might be working full time that is the most precious thing you have from the parents. You have to respect that. It is like a little diamond. If anything were ever to happen, you need to remember that. They might think that the parent doesn't really care cause the child is full time or whatever but to the parent that is their whole world. (Emma, Baby Room practitioner)

Joan also spoke of a parent leaving a child for the first time 'They don't like leaving them, no parent does cause they have guilt issues or whatever but they don't like leaving them. It takes a while for them to trust you'.

Key Finding 1

A key characteristic of practitioners' personal theories was an 'Ethic of Care', with particular focus on attentiveness and responsiveness. The relationship that the practitioner formed with the child displayed solidarity with the child as well as a responsibility for their care.

Key Finding 2: Practice as Substitute Mothering

This finding area related to the identification between the care of the child which practitioners provided and the care which parents provided. Although in the interviews, a few practitioners mentioned both mother and father, the majority of practitioners referred to the child's mother. Interview data indicated that practitioners often identified a need for practice to complement or compensate for the care which the child received at home from their mother; in other words, to provide a 'substitute mother'. Data showed that several practitioners modelled interventions and practice with a specific child in terms of what the child's mother would do or had requested. These practitioners also purposively constructed the nursery environment to replicate features of home. In the local authority centres, several practitioners mentioned that practice intentionally focused on compensating for the child's home situation and parenting. Finally, several practitioners noted tension between their role as carer and that of the parent. These practitioners spoke of practice which reflected this distinction between the two roles and which prioritised the role of the parent.

Modelling Practice on the Mother

At several points in interviews with practitioners working in private sector centres, it was clear that communication with a child's mother led to practice focused on substitute mothering; care for a child that replicated the mother's wishes and style. Both the Baby Room practitioners of private sector centres justified specific care routines by relating to the mother's practice and requests. Iris indicated this replication when she said 'and you follow mum. Do they want them cuddled in? Do they want them straight into the buggy? Do they want them rocked or straight into the cot? We always speak to mum about that in settling in time. Ask them wee sort of questions cause obviously we don't want to sit and cuddle the baby in if mum doesn't really want that...we think it is nice to follow what the mum wants'. Later in the interview, Iris returned to the construction of practice as that of 'following mum' as she spoke about referring to guidelines provided by the mother; especially in terms of feeding and sleep. In one example, she spoke of asking the mother how long the child

should be left to settle. One of the photographs she took of her practice was that of a child sleeping in a buggy with a comfort toy. This image she specifically linked to 'following mum's routine'. In Emma's photographs, she also took an image of children sleeping and then commented that it is the parent who decides where, and quite often when, the child should sleep. Emma's interview also provided a clear example of this replication of the mother's practice.

Illustration 12

E: There was one child every time we were doing activities he was asleep. So I went to D and said that he was asleep when we were doing activities and then when he got older we approached the mother and she was quite happy to begin with but now she has gone back. He was fine but sometimes he doesn't sleep. Sometimes you put him down at 1:30 but he doesn't need a sleep. So the parents said that is fine we will try it but now she wants him back having two sleeps.

D: So do you go with that? Do you accept that the child isn't going to partake in the activity?

E: Well that depends on what the activity is. We can do it in the afternoon with him so he doesn't miss out.

D: So what do you think he is missing?

E: He is missing out on the social thing you know. When he is doing the activity you get the other ones who will do it again but he is missing out being part of the group. But you just have to do what the mother says. (Emma, Baby Room practitioner)

This focus on the mother's wishes was also evident in the two practitioners who worked with toddlers in private sector centres. Lucy linked the use of reward charts and stickers to a particular parent's suggestions. This parent had been using reward charts with the child and wanted the practice continued in the nursery setting. After using the practice with the one child, Lucy had extended it to other children in the room. Katie identified several different practices which specifically related to the mother's requests. Each child in the room had a different routine for sleep. She also spoke to parents and considered their wishes in terms of managing a child's

behaviour. The behaviour management policy of the nursery was the use of 'time out'. However, she acknowledged that parents needed to be consulted and their wishes followed. Throughout the interview, Katie spoke of the child being the parent's child and therefore she needed to develop practice which mirrored the parent's wishes; a substitute for the times which the parent was not present.

This replication of parental practices was not demonstrated in the interviews with practitioners working in the two local authority centres. Vicky, for example, was very clear about her thinking regarding food and drink practices in the setting. When asked about the observation that a child's dummy was placed further and further back on a shelf over a period of weeks, Vicky noted that this was a deliberate practice to reduce the child's use of the dummy. She also noted that the child brought in a drinking cup with juice in it. When the child was offered a drink, it was of water in a standard cup. Her comment was that 'I need to speak with mum about that'. He can have the cup at home but he won't be getting it here as it is not the same cup as everyone else's. His cup has juice in it and no one else is getting juice. I will obviously discuss that with mum'.

Practitioners in the local authority centres acknowledged that for some children in the room, they provided compensatory care. They identified that some children in their care may not receive that affection at home and therefore they were compensating. Hannah spoke of this when considering the particular emphasis her centre placed on family support. She stated 'That they are getting cuddles and affection. I know that now- a- days people say you shouldn't have too much cuddling but in this situation they need that affection. To know that they can come to me and say they need a hug or to G or to A.'.

Several other practitioners spoke of mothering the child. Mary, for example, described physical care and the key worker relationship as being 'like a second mum to the child'. Emma also spoke of mothering in terms of her role as a practitioner and how the young child saw her. In her eyes 'they treat you like a mother ... [in the baby room]'. When asked about a specific practice of holding a baby, she replied that she

treats babies as she would her own children. She suggested that the 'mothering role and identity' was dominant to an Early Years practitioner's identity.

The Nursery as a Home

In line with a focus on mothering, some practitioners also spoke of the nursery as replication of the home. The two practitioners who worked in Baby Rooms in private sector nurseries spoke of their desire for the room to be 'homey'. These were the same two practitioners who spoke about practice as related to mothering; replicating the mothering that the child received and drawing on their own experiences of mothering. Emma identified this as being 'friendly and family orientated' whilst Iris spoke of the Baby Room as 'homey as that we try and give them the same sort of attention and that we try to keep to their routine'. In her photographs of the Baby Room, she identified that she deliberately did not change the layout of the room because she wanted the nursery to provide stability for the child similar to that of the home. The use of soft furnishings and pillows was a specific strategy to make the room more like a home. In Emma's interview, she spoke about her practice of taking new children around the nursery and introducing them to all the staff and children. This practice along with pictures of families and children in the room linked to a specific strategy of making the nursery a 'family environment'.

In one of the local authority centres, practitioners had chosen to use 'real objects' within the room. When asked about the rationale for this choice, Vicky linked it to the home as 'at home they will get real fruit rather than plastic ones and they don't get served their own dinner or lunch on a plastic plate I'm sure at home'.

Although Iris distinguished between opportunities that the child had for social interaction with other children in a nursery environment and a home environment, she also stressed the importance of nursery doing things that a 'mother' would do in a home environment such as taking children for a walk to the park or to the shops. Hannah also noted that it was important for young children to take part in activities outside of nursery. In her case though, it was because the nursery could offer

opportunities that the parent did not and therefore in many cases, she was compensating for the home situation.

Mother/Practitioner Role Tensions

Several practitioners spoke about the challenge of combining paid employment and motherhood. The recognition of the challenge influenced their practice within nursery as well as interaction with the child's mother. In some circumstances, there was a tension between the relationship between parent and child and the relationship between practitioner and child.

Ongoing communication with parents about the child's daily routine and progress was identified as a key aspect of maintaining a relationship with parents. Several practitioners though did voice reservations regarding telling a parent about significant milestones such as walking. This communication was subject to sensitive judgement as to whether the parent would want to know or whether the parent would prefer to witness the event. Emma justified her decision not to inform the parent as 'to me the first step is something the parent should see'. Whereas some practitioners, such as Iris and Vicky, would judge the situation by asking if the child had shown any signs of walking and whether the parent would want to know. This point is displayed in Vicky's consideration of the situation.

Illustration 13

I think I would probably ask them if they had taken first steps at home yet. Then see what their reaction was before considering whether to jump in and say they had been taking steps at nursery. If the parent said they had been walking around the furniture, then I might say oh are they starting to think about maybe letting go. I wouldn't definitely say that they took some steps. I would judge it. Obviously the parent wants to see the first steps as they are the main carer. So if I had been straight in there and say oh he has been walking today then that takes that away. (Vicky, Birth to Three practitioner)

It was the rapid pace of a child's development during the first three years that practitioners recognised as linking to significant and distinctive milestones; milestones different than those for children over the age of three. Practitioners linked these

milestones to particular firsts such as first steps, first word. Data analysis indicated that for some practitioners, witnessing these firsts treaded on the parent's role. For these practitioners, these firsts indicated the child's transition from baby to toddler.

Two of the practitioners who were mothers, Iris and Emma, had cared for their children on a full time basis until the children attended school. Both these practitioners indicated that this was an important commitment to their children; one which provided security and care. The third mother, Alice, had her own mother care for her son full time once he was nine months old. Although she acknowledged that he received loving care and had developed a deep bond with his grandmother, she regretted that she had not cared for him herself. It was the relationship between child and mother that she considered detrimentally affected. She would 'never, never do that again' and 'makes a point of being part time'.

Although all practitioners acknowledged that some form of nursery experience was beneficial for children, they also acknowledged potential complications when it came to nursery provision for their own children. One complication expressed by Rebecca was that her own understanding of Early Years Education and Care would prompt questions regarding practice within her child's setting. Of the five practitioners who expressed a desire to become a mother, all spoke of continuing paid employment; although most specified that it would be on a part- time basis. Practitioners often spoke about the importance that work held for them in terms of identity, wages and challenges but that this would need to be combined with parental responsibilities. Five practitioners (Lucy, Katie, Joan, Mary and Hannah) identified that they would not desire full time nursery for their own children. For these five practitioners combining nursery with care by self or other family members would be the desired option. The following quote from Hannah showed this stance:

Illustration 14

I think I would probably want to be with them, actually. But again I don't want to give up my career either so I think if I did come back it would be as a job share. Cause I couldn't leave them for the 5 days but certainly when they

started school then I would go back. Certainly when they were under 4 I would try and get a part time position (Hannah, Toddler practitioner)

When considering care and relationships with children, all practitioners noted that they considered that there were differences between experiences and relationships of children who attended centres on a sessional basis and those who attended full time. For some practitioners, this reinforced their own stance on care for their own children.

Illustration 15

I just feel that how much time I spend with the children in here and how close I get to them and how close they must get to us in the nursery. I just feel that I would want to spend all my time with my own children. But obviously people have to work and if I had to work because of circumstances then I would but I would prefer to stay at home (Lucy, Toddler practitioner)

Another thread in the data was the complication of work in the same nursery as the child attended. In two centres, centre B and centre D, there were specific instances where practitioners cared for a colleague's child. Practitioners in these centres acknowledged the challenges that such a situation presented and managed. In centre B, Katie noted that there can be a temptation on the part of the parent to constantly 'pop in' to the room to check on the child. This act she indicated did not do 'the child any favours' as it disrupted the routine of the room and child. Katie's observation of this situation had led her to conclude that although she would want her children to attend nursery from about the age of one year, she would not want to work within the same centre. A similar situation was noted in centre D, where in the early days of settling into nursery, the child cried every time the parent was seen. This situation was managed by the parent and in the observations the child appeared settled although according to practitioners there were still moments when the parent was advised 'don't go in' (Alice). In both centres, practitioners noted how such a situation may be challenging for a young child to understand.

Key Finding 2

Practitioners, particularly those working in private sector centres drew on ‘substitute mothering’ as rationale for practice. In private centres, practitioners reported on drawing on replication of the child’s mother practice or compliance with requests. Those in local authority centres were more likely to draw on compensatory models of practice. This focus on mothering extended to their own experiences and aspirations with the majority of practitioners identifying a preference for themselves or a family member providing care for a child.

Key Finding 3: Practice as Pedagogy

All practitioners emphasised in the interview discussions the learning which took place in the very early years; a focus which some identified was overlooked as ‘if they don’t learn at all from that age’ (Joan). For all practitioners, young children were involved with learning and practitioners involved in pedagogy. In the local authority centres, practitioners often spoke of themselves as educators. As Rebecca identified, ‘nursery is a place for learning. They don’t get time to try [sometimes at home]. So we give them time and space.’ This section of the findings therefore focuses on data which indicated particular pedagogical approaches to work with young children. It begins by considering data relating to the socio-cultural approach before moving to the ‘age and stage’ approach to children’s development and learning. The section then focuses on two specific approaches to learning: play and developing children’s independence.

Socio-cultural Approach

Data indicated that some practitioners, particularly the ones in the local authority centres, drew on a socio-cultural approach when considering learning. These practitioners tended to speak about the individual child’s interests and learning as well as personal circumstances rather than a child who was at a particular stage of development. For these practitioners, learning reflected being in partnership with others. Children were conceptualised as rich learners as the following quote from Joan illustrates.

Illustration 16

D: One of the things I've noticed about your practice is that you will often get behind the child. You won't force them to do something but it does appear as if you are guiding them. Is this something you recognise from your practice?

J: I know they are still babies but they are little people and they are independent. I mean the parents are amazed and see a big change in them from when they first start coming here because the children are doing things that they wouldn't normally do like getting their own snack, washing their own hands

D: Encouraging the children to help tidy up

J: and they love it. They aren't being forced to do anything that they wouldn't do on their own anyway. You need to give them time to do things. If you are rushing them all the time they are never going to learn. (Joan, Birth to Three practitioner)

Within this approach, assessments regarding these children's learning were made in relationship to the individual child's progress rather than to specified developmental milestones. When discussing one of her photographs, Alice distinguished between two children's learning by recognising that they were different children and therefore their successes were different. The successes were still important to that individual child and worthy of celebration. Her colleague, Hannah, also acknowledged that children learn and play at different levels. Her stance was that 'children were social beings even from a very young age' and that therefore they learned by observing others.

Practitioners argued that children learned from observing and interacting with other children and with adults. They photographed examples of children being alongside or with other children. These images were then explained in terms of cooperative support as Alice illustrates 'There she is helping S to get her shoes on. Here she is helping her with her hair. It is definitely help, encouragement and positive role modelling'. Hannah had also photographed children working together to build a bus or working together to dig the garden. Although children could learn from each other, adults also supported learning by building on the child's interests as the following explanation from Alice illustrates.

Illustration 17

Especially at that age because you've got a window where it is all new and exciting. If you don't catch it, then it is gone. I mean a lot of children you see their interests coming through (Alice, Toddler Room Practitioner)

Practitioners also spoke of the impact of the child's environment in terms of the child's learning. Vicky, for example, spoke of a child for whom English was a second language. She identified how his experience of migration impacted on his learning. When considering her photographs of children, she often mentioned the specific child's situation and how that may impact on development. One child had older siblings 'so that is going to impact on her' where another child who only has contact outside of nursery with adults was identified as needing opportunities to develop social skills with other children. With regards to one photograph, Hannah spoke of a child who was able to control the mouse and match things up as learning these skills from a father who 'works in a shop with IT'.

'Age and Stage' Approach

Analysis of interview data suggested that some practitioners, particularly the ones in the private centres, related children's learning to a particular age and stage of development, especially in terms of aspects of development. These practitioners tended to be very specific about what particular aspect of development that an activity was targeting. For example, Emma spoke of creating a display which showed parents what skills a particular activity developed; hand-eye coordination, social skills such as sharing, turn taking, fine motor skills.

There was an emphasis in these interviews of development as a linear process. Practitioners frequently spoke of children moving up, preparing children for more structured learning, or being ready for the next stage. Lucy commented, for example, that 'the two to three years' room is more like the preschool room but they (the children) are just not quite there yet'. This focus on age and stage extended to resources as the following annotation of a photograph by Iris demonstrates.

Illustration 18

that one is about providing resources. We have things for their age. Say with the older children you would get them to do something with the box but because he is young he is having fun with that box. It is what he wants to do so it is for that range and age (Iris, Baby Room Practitioner)

A focus on 'age and stage' development was apparent in the interview data (see p. 168) where practitioners spoke about significant milestones of development. Practitioners identified these as 'firsts' such as first step or first word. These firsts, practitioners indicated, were particularly important; memorable moments which indicated significant change in the child.

When practitioners referred to transitions from one room to another in the setting, a focus on 'age and stage' could also be seen in terms of the language that practitioners used. Iris spoke of 'the age group in the room' in terms of what skills the children had developed. Skills such as feeding themselves or putting on their own coats indicated that the children were ready to make the transition to another room within the setting and were often aligned to a particular chronological age. This focus on the child's self-help skills was also evidenced in Emma's interview regarding work with babies. It was babies' dependency which distinguished between the 'hands on' approach she would take in the Baby Room and that she would take in the Toddler room.

Play as Learning

All practitioners identified that children learn through play; both structured play activities and free play. Practitioners often spoke of the specific areas of development or desirable skills that opportunities afforded. There was however a slightly different focus in the private centres where practitioners emphasised the need to build particular structured activities into the session and to ensure that every child had opportunity to access these activities. In the local authority centres, practitioners were more like to embrace free play and exploration thus providing a range of options for children to choose from. The two exceptions to this approach were 1) song/story time

and 2) outings out with the nursery. Practitioners were unanimous in their appreciation of the rich learning both of these opportunities provided children.

In the private centres, practitioners often referred to specific activities in terms of specific developmental outcomes. Katie, when describing a photo of children playing spoke about the fine motor skills and hand/eye coordination that activities such as drawing, cutting, and sticking afforded. Her set of pictures included an image of children threading beads. The accompanying description of the image made reference to the opportunities to learn colours, shapes, sizes as well as fine motor skills. There were activities that were referred to by Katie as 'messy play' and the opportunity to learn by experimenting with the materials 'is greater than the mess'. In both the private centres, toddler room practitioners spoke of specific structured activities where the focus was on both the process and the product; ladybirds and spiders constructed by the children were on display in one of the rooms. Both of the toddler room practitioners noted that these products often demonstrated to parents the learning which was achieved at nursery. Emma, when discussing her photographs and documentation, noted that annotating displays informed parents of potential learning. She added 'that parents though they were just playing and didn't realise it was good for sharing, turn taking, hand/eye coordination'.

Where the private centre practitioners tended to speak in terms of particular developmental outcomes relative to particular activities, the local authority centre practitioners tended to speak about play in terms of exploration and experimentation. Vicky had taken a picture of a child's first experience of using glue. It was an opportunity, she argued, for the child to explore using her senses. Her colleague, Joan, also spoke of how a child uses their senses to explore the various texture of sand. In her description of the learning afforded by the water tray, Vicky noted the opportunity for children to experiment with water to gain understanding about mathematical properties such as volume. Her pedagogical stance was that staff needed to provide the equipment and opportunities but it was important for children to explore on their own. In her opinion, 'children need the time to explore on their own as if an adult is

constantly talking or asking them things then that is limiting' (Vicky). It was Mary who summed up the approach taken to learning in this particular room.

Illustration 19

and I don't think there is going to be an end product. Not that I'm saying that they don't achieve things but if they are going to paint then they are going to experiment. Don't expect them to make a boat. Process is better than product because if you have the process right then your product is going to develop and develop and develop. (Mary, Birth to Three practitioner)

All the local authority practitioners identified that the short song/story time which all the rooms implemented as valuable to children's learning. In particular, these short sessions were identified as preparation for more structured learning in the preschool room or school. These sessions promoted the development of concentration, language, sitting still, following instructions and social skills. As these practitioners had embraced a pedagogy of experiment and exploration, this activity was the one structured activity of the session. Joan in particular stressed the activity's importance.

Illustration 20

They need structure, wherever they go, whatever they do they are going to have rules and boundaries. It doesn't matter what age they are; they are going to have to physically sit for five minutes. The benefits that they get of sitting in a group for these children are great. They might play alongside others in the room but they aren't together whereas at story time they are all together. (Joan, Birth to Three Practitioner)

All the practitioners identified being outside as an important provision. As Alice suggested, being outside was a time for the children to 'be out with an enclosed space with adults right there'. It also provided an opportunity to observe children. In Katie's interview, she also spoke of the importance of a bigger space than the room. Although she indicated that it was possible to improvise in the room, outdoor provision offered children fresh air and an opportunity to physically exercise. Both she and Vicky stressed that it was important to go out in the rain; it was merely a case of appropriate clothing. Vicky's stance was that it was important to think 'of the rain as a resource'.

In addition to being outside, all practitioners noted the importance of taking young children on outings within their local community. These outings provided opportunities to note the everyday things, to talk about the trip and to enjoy each other's company. Rebecca described outings as an 'opportunity to see the world around them' and that these outings 'feel more relaxed'. Several of the local authority centre practitioners noted that outings provided opportunities for children that perhaps parents did not have the time or inclination to provide. For these practitioners, the provision of outings seemed to reinforce the importance of fitting into society. They were everyday events such as crossing a road, going to the park, travelling on a bus or going into a shop that provided children an opportunity to practise skills used in interactions in society. It was also an opportunity to provide guidance on the safety aspects of crossing a street or playing in a park.

Illustration 21

snack shopping, going to the bank, or the post office. These things are part of society and you still have to bring this in. We take children for example to post a letter from the office. We will try our best with the ratios and that to get the majority of children out. Some of them don't see what a post office looks like or a bank because these parents might do it before they pick up the child but these are real life experiences that a child needs. Or it will start feeling that it is not fitting in as such (Mary, Birth to Three Practitioner)

Promoting Children's Independence

Although many practitioners spoke at great length about activities and play, the focus on everyday events and tasks which contributed to the development of children's self-help skills and confidence marked working with children aged birth to three years. For Vicky, this focus on independence and confidence was a guiding principle in decisions regarding the room's layout. She noted that younger children's choices needed to be limited and material accessible for those children who do not have gross motor skills to manage standing, walking or lifting. It was everyday events of preparing to go out in the garden, snack and mealtime, and everyday tasks of tidying, negotiating stairs, brushing teeth, eating, or dressing that all practitioners identified as key learning areas

for young children and preparation for preschool rooms. Supporting these self-help skills took time and patience but the support was viewed as essential to the child becoming increasingly independent and confident. The following quotes indicated this link between supporting young children and independence.

Illustration 22

It is so important cause if one of the children puts on their own jacket...wow I've done it! Just their faces you know- I've done it! It makes them feel that they are so proud. It makes them feel so good. Being independent is very important.
(Hannah, Toddler Room practitioner)

They are learning independence. One of the big things is that because they have come from the baby room we have to prepare them for the preschool room. It is independence and confidence. We try to consult with them a lot to help give them that independence. To let them give their opinion, to make them feel valuable (Hannah, Toddler Room practitioner)

Several practitioners relied on their assessment of the child's self-help and independence to decide whether the child was ready for transition. Rebecca identified the ratio of adult to children as a key criterion in the consideration of whether the child could manage a transition to a different room. Practitioners often referred to the increase in number of children and physical space when the child moved from under three provision to the preschool room. Not only was the ratio different but children needed to be able to cope with larger chairs, larger rooms, and toileting. Vicky indicated this when she said 'leaving a small room to go to a huge room where you need to be able to go to the toilet on your own and where they have slightly bigger furniture'. Iris also noted the shift in focus between the Birth to Three rooms in her setting and the focus in the preschool room. For her, it was essential in the Birth to Three rooms to follow the routine of the individual child whereas in the preschool room the child needed to adapt to the routine of the room.

Key Finding 3

A key characteristic of practitioners' expression of personal theory was the focus on pedagogy although they developed slightly different approaches to support learning. Practitioners working in the local authority centres were more likely to reflect a

socio- cultural pedagogy whereas practitioners working in private centres tended to focus on linear development. Play, either structured or free, was identified as a key way in which children learn. A key aspect of practitioners' pedagogy was the emphasis placed on supporting children's development of independence.

Key Finding 4: Practice as Distinctive for Children Aged Birth to Three Years

The practitioners were all experienced; many had worked with children across a range of ages and in different contexts. Yet, all practitioners identified work with children aged birth to three years as being distinctive from other work with children. This key finding was evident in the responses across several key themes which emerged during the data analysis. These were: 1) features of child development 2) organisational and government policy 3) direct recognition of Birth to Three as a separate practice.

Features of Child Development

Speech was identified as a particular aspect of working with children aged birth to three years that was different to working with older children. All practitioners spoke of how much more challenging the work was because of the young child's limited skills in terms of speech. Phrases like 'to me it was a whole different ball game working with birth to three as with older children, they can tell you what they want' (Joan), or 'in the 'three to five' room you get more invited into play but with the little ones that doesn't always happen (Alice) support this finding. Vicky's clarification regarding Birth to Three practices also illustrated this point.

Illustration 23

It is totally different than three to five because they don't talk back to you. How do you know? You have to get to know them. So it is different in that way. You have to multitask as there are too many of them and such a wide age range. Some are just learning to walk, someone else is doing something different whereas with three to five you could do an activity and have six of them there doing the same thing at different levels. Here you have such a wide age range and different levels. Some are just learning to sit up, some are walking, some are learning to talk. So you are doing something different with each one all of the time. (Vicky, Birth to Three practitioner)

Within the area of language development, practitioners noted that the particular aspect of speech was significant. Practitioners in this study did distinguish between babies and young children within Birth to Three and linked this differentiation to children's speech. In Illustration 23, Vicky provides clarification of the differing needs of children linked to particular aspects of development and at several points she refers to children's ability to talk. Throughout Iris's, Emma's and Rebecca's interviews, mention is made of the distinct manner regarding work with babies. In particular, this distinction related to the requirement to ascertain what babies' non-verbal communication, was saying. They argued that babies without speech demanded particularly attentive and responsive actions from them in order to determine babies' needs. This issue was exemplified by the way in which practitioners who worked with babies chose to sit or kneel on the floor. This proximity meant that they were able to look into babies' eyes and be at the same level as babies.

Organisational and Government Policy

Practitioners identified specific government policy regarding *PreBirth to Three* distinctive from the five specified learning areas associated with the preschool room and *Curriculum for Excellence*. Several practitioners spoke about how there was a direct focus on learning in the preschool rooms. Lucy acknowledged this distinction when she noted 'everything in preschool is about their learning. You've got the five areas and all the observations and what each child can do so then you have the *Curriculum for Excellence* so that is all different'. It was this policy level focus on learning and inspection that some practitioners considered validated work with children three to five years in a manner which was different than work with children aged birth to three years. The next quote from Joan demonstrated this thread in the data.

Illustration 24

We have a Curriculum for Excellence but that doesn't start until they are three. Maybe more emphasis to adapt the curriculum to under three cause I don't see the point of having them in the room when they are babies and having all the

things we do with them and suddenly it is all change. (Joan, Birth to Three practitioner)

In addition to distinction between official *PreBirth to Three* policy and *Curriculum for Excellence*, practitioners also spoke of the ratios when working with different age groups. The ratio of adults to children was linked to a recognition and response to the child's needs. Emma spoke of the length of time that a particular child may need to wait for attention; the ratio of one adult to three children under the age of two years permitted a quicker response than working with children over the age of two years where the ratio was one adult to five children. However, Rebecca, who also worked with babies, identified that the impact of the ratio of one adult to three children under two years was also linked to the age range within the room. This was a very similar stance to the one taken by Vicky when she spoke of the impact of having two children under the age of one year in the room alongside older children. Both Rebecca and Vicky indicated that the composition of the room needed to be adapted to accommodate specific children. This changing situation required a flexible approach to practice.

Baby Room practitioners identified the change in the ratio to be pertinent in their decision to move children to provision for two to three year olds where the ratio was one to five. Rebecca identified that 'some children are just not ready'. For Lucy, this higher ratio of one adult to five children impacted on her work as 'it is a lot more hands on and that means we don't have time to sit and write care routines'. The change in ratio also impacted on decisions regarding the child's transition to three to five provision where the ratio was one adult to eight children. It was the higher ratio of adults to children which practitioners identified as desirable and distinctive of Birth to Three.

In all but one centre (Centre C), rooms were clearly separated into baby rooms, toddler rooms and preschool rooms. Although in Centre C there was one room for Birth to Three provision, there also was a clearly defined space for preschool children. None of the practitioners spoke of crossing the divide between provision for under

threes and provision for over threes. However, practitioners in Centre D had discussed whether to combine the baby and toddler room. This centre also often brought children from the two rooms together for various aspects of the day such as lunchtime. In Centre B, both Katie and Emma acknowledged division of children by age but they also stressed that the nursery provided opportunities for children to visit other rooms. This strategy enabled siblings to visit each other as well as promoting a 'family type' atmosphere. The distinction between under and over threes did, at times, relate to funding and official policy. Hannah noted that 'three to five get attention because they are funded. Well the two year olds are now but mostly it is three to five'. Likewise, Vicky identified that the increase in funded hours for two year olds also impacted on the nursery; especially in terms of staffing.

A key aspect of organisational policy was a focus on documentation. Several practitioners had photographed documentation processes and the area where journals were stored. This process of documentation informed planning as well as being a key source of information regarding the child which could be shared with parents. Images and accompanying text were a key strategy in terms of preparing journals. Whilst practitioners working in local authority centres spoke of having time to consolidate documentation, practitioners in private sector centres spoke of completing paperwork during quiet times. Although all practitioners acknowledged that documentation and journals could be a source of information for parents and colleagues, several practitioners noted that this use was restricted at times. Hannah could see that the children were interested in the journals but some of the parents were not. In Centre C, Joan identified that the distinction between *PreBirth to Three* policy and *Curriculum for Excellence* meant that the documenting process changed and journals were therefore not continuous.

An area of distinctive organisational policy was provision of 'nursery rules'. Practitioners often noted the need for specific consideration of health and safety. When Iris was discussing a photo of an outing, she spoke of the 'rules being there for a reason'. In this situation that children were to be on reins or in buggies as without this

provision, children would trip over each other. However, Hannah took a slightly different stance and suggested that risk taking and challenge were important. Her strategy was to stay close to the child and position herself so she could see everyone. She specified that 'for the little ones, you need to be very close just in case'. As well as ensuring health and safety, rules also encouraged the child to consider others. Mary, in Centre C' justified rules as:

Illustration 25

We do have rules. It is not that we don't have them but maybe they aren't as prominent (as in the preschool room). It makes them less egocentric that this is my world and that is the way it goes. NO! Yes, it is your world but your world has to adapt to other people to help you fit into society. (Mary, Birth to Three practitioner)

Acknowledging differences in caring for children aged birth to three years

Practitioners explicitly recognised that working with children aged birth to three years was a distinct practice. As Mary stated, 'It is the everyday event. I think that is more of under three learning. I am not saying that at three to five they aren't still needing to develop self-help or some children who aren't getting that at home. But with under three it is a different kind of caring and learning. A different kind of balance'.

This distinction was also replicated in the structure of the nursery and others' perception that working with very young children was somehow easy or not related to education. Several practitioners spoke about others' perception that all they do is play with children all day. As Joan highlighted 'when you say to someone you work with under threes they go yeah you get to feed the babies but come on there is a lot more to it than that. I think they think that under threes are just tiny bundles you carry around all day'. Practitioners also reported that many colleagues were reluctant to work with children under three years of age. Rebecca spoke directly of her experience 'trying to get them into the rooms with the young ones. That is the thing about management as well as you can't just put someone in a room if they are not comfortable'. In Vicky's interview, she recounted her initial reluctance about working

in the under three room due to a concern about understanding developmental needs and appropriate provision. Now that she had made the transition she reported 'now I don't want to go back'.

The practitioners in this case study clearly recognised work with children aged birth to three years as a distinctive practice within Early Years. The final word in this section belongs to Hannah.

Illustration 26

The first three years are so, so important to everything. Even their whole future and if they don't grasp a lot of things that they need to learn when they are little like independence and the confidence and the discussion and consulting them. If they are not able to do all of that then they are going to struggle. People just don't realise that these are key years (Hannah, Toddler Room practitioner)

Key Finding 4

A key characteristic of the personal theories of practitioners was their construction of practice with children aged birth to three years as distinctive. They talked about this distinctiveness in terms of the varying patterns of children's development, organisational and government policies and the need to recognise that young children have particular needs.

Key Finding 5: Practice as Rooted in Experience

This finding identified the influences of practitioners' personal theories regarding working with young children. Practitioners' responses suggested that their personal theories are influenced by their experience of training, CPD, everyday practices and mothering.

Experience of Formal Training Routes

Registration with the SSSC as an Early Years practitioner requires successful completion of initial training; usually either a Higher National Certificate (HNC) in *Early Years Care and Education* or a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) in *Children's Care, Learning and Development* at level 3. Additionally, many practitioners had also completed or were working towards the Professional Development Award (PDA); an

award that can be undertaken upon completion of an HNC or SVQ. It could therefore follow that experience gained during formal training periods would be identified by practitioners as influential to understandings of practice with young children aged birth to three years.

Although practitioners acknowledged that qualifications were important to others and for registration, experience of initial training routes were not identified as particularly pertinent to their work with children aged birth to three years. All of the HNC trained practitioners spoke of the qualification's limited focus on babies and young children. Instead, focus was considered to be predominantly on children aged three to five years. Rebecca's observation was that 'for myself, I think they focus on the three to five group rather than the under threes in my HNC class'. This was echoed by other participants who also noted limited focus on Birth to Three during initial training. As Alice acknowledged, the curriculum for three to five year olds was covered during the HNC but she could 'honestly say that I never looked at *PreBirth to Three* until I moved down the stairs. Never had to.' Lucy also spoke of the limited focus on birth to three in her training and again noted the links between the HNC and the three to five age group.

Illustration 27

I would say that it (HNC) prepared me for the three to five age group; a lot of the focus wasn't on children birth to three. The PDA was more on management training so it wasn't a lot to do with the work with children directly. We sort of focused on one to one with staff, staff appraisals so that was different.... I wouldn't say my NC/HNC helped much (Lucy, Toddler Room practitioner)

Joan attributed this focus on three to five year olds in the HNC programmes to numbers of children accessing Early Years education as it was mainly these children who attended Early Years centres. When asked about her experience within the HNC programme, Iris replied:

Illustration 28

All that training when I was doing my HNC, and that was not that long ago when I was doing my HNC, was all geared towards three to five. Definitely. I had already started doing the HNC when I was in the one to two room and then I actually went and worked in the preschool room one morning a week because I felt that the tasks set for the HNC were easier, no not easier, to cover but that you could get more out of them cause the children were talking to you (Iris, Baby Room practitioner)

Iris elaborated on this perspective and identified more global resonance between training and Early Years. She suggested that initial training may not have directly impacted on the way she worked with the youngest children in the nursery but it facilitated justification of guidelines and policies as well as an understanding of specialist vocabulary.

Exception to this stance regarding initial training was the two participants who completed the SVQ as a route to becoming qualified practitioners. These practice-based qualifications are achieved through demonstration of knowledge and understanding and key performance criteria. Both practitioners indicated that the SVQ was a requirement rather than a learning experience specifically pertinent to the work with Birth to Three. Emma's reflection on her SVQ indicated this point.

Illustration 29

It was all just work based. I have found with my PDA that they are saying things and I think oh yes. No that is wrong because with the SVQ they were talking about this thing we had to do from birth to sixteen and that was quite good. I thought I should be doing that with my own kids (Emma, Baby Room practitioner)

In her response, Emma indicated that certain formal knowledge gained from the learning activity was appropriate to her role as a mother rather than her role as a Birth to Three practitioner.

Vicky acknowledged that although she had completed a SVQ, a HNC and a PDA, she initially felt unprepared for work in the Baby Room. Having spoken to staff already in

the room and having read some books, she 'just got on with it'. Although successful completion of qualifications enabled her to gain qualified status, she indicated that she felt woefully unprepared for working with children aged birth to three years. Joan also acknowledged that she felt ill-prepared for working with young children as 'I think I may have only done weeks of placement with babies so to me it was a whole different ball game'.

When reflecting on initial training programmes, practitioners spoke of the need to connect aspects of theory with practice. Several practitioners also noted that placements offered during HNC training were restricted in terms of age group or setting. Mary, for example, noted that all the placements had been in the local authority sector and that she would like to 'try the private sector out of curiosity'. Katie indicated that there was a distinction between being instructed in terms of a theoretical approach and experience gained working with children. For her, one of the key attractions of the SVQ qualification route was its focus on practice. Alice acknowledged the importance of being able to observe and make connections between ideas presented in a college setting and the workplace. She could see clear connections between theories presented during college sessions on child development and milestones but admitted she hadn't really appreciated the importance of the relationships until she worked in a child care setting. Now that she appreciated the role of parents in children's lives, she aimed to incorporate communication with parents into her key worker role. When asked about her initial training, she replied:

Illustration 30

More about theories, on your first day it was about children's milestones and how they grow and learn and then it was like theories and could you see that in practice. And can you see how children do that? You know it was more about that. You knew parents were the primary educators, teamwork, communication all this but I don't think I every understood how important it was. It is only in the last year that I've realised (Alice, Toddler Room practitioner)

Mary also identified the need to connect theory and practice when she described her placement experience. Her initial NC placement had been a negative experience; a

situation where 'we were doing this in the classroom but I wasn't seeing it in placement'. She noted that 'you get it in college but if you don't keep the reading up on it or do it then you don't keep the learning going'. However, this is not to say that she felt that it was a case of applying knowledge straight from the textbook. Mary's argument was that the context of practice was an important consideration and therefore, there was a need for sensitive decision making to transfer information to practice.

Illustration 31

It is definitely not textbook because I am not textbook. They say to you in the textbook -oh an educator is this; an educator is that. I don't think I am. I take bits out of it to support my learning but it doesn't mean I deliver it in that way (Mary, Birth to Three practitioner)

For those practitioners studying towards the PDA, there was acknowledgement that choice of assessment topics allowed a connection between college-based content and work with children under the age of three. There was consensus that the focus of the PDA was on leadership and management rather than direct practice with children. The particular focus on leadership though meant that they regarded the award as career development.

Although practitioners noted particular concerns regarding training routes, they acknowledged that qualifications were important. It afforded a distinction between staff and work experience students as those who were 'qualified' and those who were not. Qualified status said something about them to others. Lucy's comment that 'it was the only way I could go any further' regarding her recent PDA experience summed this up well. Whereas Hannah observed that current qualifications, such as the HNC or PDA, held more cache in the SSSC registration process and with others in the setting and council. She was seeking the PDA qualification as evidence that she was 'up to date'. For Emma, it was the opportunity to gain another qualification that initially led to enrolment on the PDA.

Experience of Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

CPD opportunities related specifically to Birth to Three were identified as particularly meaningful to understandings of work with young children. All practitioners spoke of the value of CPD and of their willingness to engage with it. Central to these CPD courses was the opportunity to meet and speak with practitioners from other centres. Although not a formal aspect of CPD, the majority of practitioners acknowledged that meeting and discussing practice with other practitioners from different centres was a valuable contribution to their own practice. As Lucy acknowledged of her experience on local authority Birth to Three sessions, 'It is good to have people from other centres there as you get different ideas. You know someone doesn't work like you do but you go and wonder how different it will be'. Rebecca recounted one conversation from a recent CPD day where she discussed with staff from another centre about whether children under three should be in the same room rather than separated into babies and toddlers. This discussion prompted her to reflect on her own work and the advantages and disadvantages of grouping children in particular age bands.

Illustration 32

You do get ideas from other nurseries and from talking to other staff members. Everybody works in different ways; every nursery works differently... It is nice to have a fresh look at things (Rebecca, Baby Room practitioner)

Practitioners also indicated how CPD prompted reflection regarding work with young children. At times, this related to specific understandings about communication with young children or documentation. Alice, for example, was particularly enthusiastic about a CPD session on digital photography. Although not specific to work with young children, an appreciation of production and use of images prompted consideration of how techniques could be applied to her decisions to represent rich learning experiences for individual children. In Centre C, a CPD session which focused on the use of natural materials had prompted discussion and reconsideration of materials used in the setting. Practitioners in this setting were adamant that 'real life' objects should be used in the room and articulated reasons for this choice.

A key aspect identified in the data was how practitioners used ideas presented in CPD sessions specifically focused on work with children aged birth to three years to challenge or to reinforce practice. As Iris indicated, knowledge from neuroscience regarding importance of experiences in children's early years strengthened her resolve regarding care and relationships in the Baby Room. Her colleague Lucy, who had also attended specific CPD on Birth to Three, reiterated this stating that 'with Birth to Three, it was a lot more reflective on your practice, how you set out paperwork and evidence; it was mostly based on relationships'. Another key aspect of CPD was that practitioners acknowledged that it encouraged them to continue to develop as a professional.

Illustration 33

I think you go a wee bit stale if you don't go on training for a wee while. I think you just get stuck in a rut. You just get stuck into the old ways. You learn a lot in training. I always learn a lot in training. I always walk out the door thinking I've really learned a lot there then you have a lot of ideas to bring back to the nursery. It just makes you that wee bit more motivated and enthusiastic. That is your job. (Rebecca, Baby Room practitioner)

Experience of Working with Children Aged Birth to Three Years

Two key threads related to this theme: 1) direct experience of working with children aged birth to three years and 2) observations and discussions with colleagues. Although several of the HNC trained practitioners reported struggling to connect theory and practice during initial training, in the work place they felt able to make connections between understandings and work with young children. Much of this was linked to experience of working with children. All practitioners spoke of skills which they developed through experience of work with young children. Mary noted that 'her two years at college was nothing compared to what I have learnt from when I started supply and work'. Her colleague, Joan, also spoke of the learning which takes place from working with young children as this quote demonstrated.

Illustration 34

I think you learn something new every day. I mean I am still learning and things change with the council all the time so if you are not doing the job everyday then you lose a lot of things. The job has changed since I was younger. The more contact you have with the children, the more you learn about their wee quirks, what they are learning, and the relationships with parents. I think it [through experience] is key really (Joan, Birth to Three practitioner)

One particular way in which experience supported practice was the ability to judge when to directly intervene in children's learning experiences. This sensitivity was something that practitioners noted that could not be taught but needed to evolve from experience and reflection. Alice's reflection regarding a child examining the petals of a flower in the garden provided a specific example of this.

Illustration 35

A: I don't think I have a role here. I think that is totally A. She is doing her thing. There is no reason for me to intervene. I could have gone up and said 'what have you got? What is it? But really I felt she needed the time just to look, just to touch it. She wasn't pulling at it. Cause sometimes you shouldn't intervene. It isn't fair. Cause sometimes as well you get a true story of who the child is.

D: So you think it quite important to give that space to the child

A: Yes, sometimes you just have to back off. It is quite difficult to know when to go in. You need to know when to go in and when to leave them. It is a skill I need to get better at. .. I could have done but this time I didn't.

.... Further conversation about the garden and exploration

D: So how would you teach that skill of stepping back?

A: I don't think it can be taught. It is something that you learn from experience. I mean every child is different but sometimes you can sort of figure it out from the situation which way this is going. (Alice, Toddler Room practitioner)

There was also a parallel between experience and personal dispositions such as calmness and patience. These dispositions, identified by several practitioners as essential to desirable Early Years practice, were perhaps present at the beginning of

initial training but they were developed and enhanced through experience. Hannah acknowledged that her calmness 'is practice though I wouldn't have been like that year ago probably that is just experience. A couple of years ago I think I did get quite stressed and worried about the mess and things, where now I don't. I just think well I'll sort it out in the end'.

Whilst discussing feeding practices related to babies, Emma stressed the need for patience and not to rush babies. Her judgements, with regards to the pace and completion of feeding, related to her particular experience of feeding young children. She argued that it was not possible to acquire this understanding from a textbook as the feeling of the act and the expressions of babies had to be observed directly. Vicky also shared this focus on sensitive judgements based on observation of children and experience. She states 'that nobody can say to you to do it this way or for how many times or go away and learn this. It is through experience that you know. It is just natural to do what you do'. This particular emphasis on direct observation was also echoed by Rebecca when considering communication with young children.

Illustration 36

I think it is experience as well cause when I first started in the baby room I wouldn't have had a clue. Obviously it is just picking up on what I have observed people doing. I mean if you had handed me a baby 5 years ago I wouldn't have known what to do but it is just observing. Even when you are out of nursery you see other people with children and you do pick up quite a lot of things so I do think it is your life experience (Rebecca, Baby Room practitioner)

Central to this direct observation was experience of working with colleagues. Every practitioner acknowledged that colleagues contributed to understanding of practice and their role within the team. Rebecca built on her previous focus on life experience by acknowledging that colleagues may bring different life experience to the practitioner role and she could learn from these different experiences. She acknowledged that if she was open minded she could take on-board her observation of their practice and by questioning them further she could understand the justification for a particular style of practice in order to learn. A key example of this

was the specific area of documentation of children's learning where Rebecca reported that observation of colleagues indicated different ways of observing and noting children's progress and interests. The management of children's behaviour was another specific area where practitioners identified benefit from observing a colleague's approach; especially in terms of displaying a calm manner. Katie specifically identified her experience of working with Emma as being central to understanding the importance of staying calm whilst dealing with children's unwanted behaviour. One practitioner though identified that a colleague's stance might also be a point of reflection and challenge to a particular practice.

Illustration 37

Oh yes definitely. I learn you try something and it doesn't work then you try something different. The types of questions that I asked the girls before I came into the room were things like so do you have everything out all at once or do you just have one thing. And they would say no just the one thing. But when I got here and saw how it worked I thought no you can have several things out.
(Vicky, Birth to Three practitioner)

Experience of Mothering

The experience of mothering was one which practitioners identified as informing practice. This experience was in terms of being a mother, having been mothered and observing colleagues who were mothers. The personal situation of the practitioners impacted on how this theme was expressed. Three of the practitioners, Iris, Emma and Alice, were mothers themselves and two, Joan and Hannah, were stepmothers. The group of three practitioners who were mothers directly related their practice to understandings developed during their own experience of mothering whereas the other seven tended to reflect on experiences of being mothered, observations of colleagues who were parents and their own aspirations in terms of being a parent.

Iris, Emma and Alice clearly indicated how experience of being a mother contributed to understandings and actions as a practitioner. Central to this experience was the transfer of skills and practices. Emma, for example, could not distinguish between her role as a mother and her role working with babies. Having been asked about the

difference she replied 'when they are babies, no not, really, it is about the same'. She spoke specifically about using understandings of children gained as a mother in her work when she said 'The place I worked in before here there was a girl that came out of college and technically she knew everything. At the time I wasn't qualified but I was doing the things a mother would do and she would look at me and say you can't do that. I would say why; if the child is crying then why not pick her up and show her where to come'. Similarly, Iris identified that it was her own experiences as a mother that she drew on whilst training and as a practitioner. Describing her work as 'no different as from when I was with my own family', she recounted her first formal training period. In this account, she described how she drew on activities and strategies that she had used with her own children and then based her college work around these.

For the mothers in the case study, experience of mothering provided insight into work with children and parents that could not be replicated in policy or classroom instruction. Iris's reflection regarding her work with babies indicated this mesh between experience of mothering and practice. She stated 'But again I think when you've worked here, you understand what you have done and it is that instinct which is important. You know what to do next. If you have been a mother, you know what to do next'. Experience as a mother also allowed for a sympathetic approach to parents and children; awareness of what the other is experiencing. As Alice suggested 'I would never treat someone else's child in a way that I wouldn't want my own child to be treated. [Being a mother] It makes me aware'.

In several interviews with practitioners who were not mothers, practitioners identified colleagues who were mothers as an important influence on their practice. Rebecca's recollection of her early work reflected this. She noted 'When I first started I was working with A ... She is a lot older and I think she is in her 50s and she is a mum and I think I learnt a lot from her. Really observing your teammate and questioning things to make sure you are doing it right'. Katie also directly acknowledged that Emma

influenced her own practice. It was 'just Emma's way. She is dead calm. Probably through her own experience of having them [children]'.

Several practitioners spoke of the influence that their own upbringing had on current practice. At several points of the interview, they identified specific strategies for working with young children which directly related to their own upbringing. The following exchange with Mary exemplified her acknowledgement of her own mother and grandmother's influence.

Illustration 38

D: One time when I was watching you and the struggle with the apron is the one thing which sticks in my mind. Watching you go back and forth and quite often you would have your hand on her elbow

M: Definitely I mean I am quite a touchy person. I mean I am quite like that because of my own upbringing as well. When you go somewhere you shake hands with someone. My mother is from somewhere else and I don't think touch is such a big thing here in this culture. Not that I mean it doesn't happen but as soon as I go back I do that where I might not do that here especially if people think that you are getting in their space, especially adults. (Mary, Birth to Three practitioner)

Hannah also spoke of her mother's influence. She states 'Yeah very close to my mum. I could say that she has taught me a lot of her skills and that they have come down to me cause she was fantastic. She was a housewife mummy. She wasn't working and she was there every day when you came home from school, she was there every weekend, she was always there. I think that is a great thing.' Although Hannah is not a mother herself, this quote resonated with the emphasis that Iris and Emma placed on a mother's presence and the safety and security offered to young children.

This link with safety and security was also present in terms of using touch and affection as a strategy in work with young children. Katie recalled that her mother and grandfather used to tousle her hair and place their hands on her shoulders and neck whilst talking to her. She used this approach when speaking with young children in her

care. When questioned about this practice, she linked the approach to both her experience and to safety and security.

Key Finding 5

Practitioners talked about their approach to practice developing from experience. They said that aspects of training and CPD enabled them to link theory to practice. They were also influenced by the direct experience of working with children aged birth to three years and observation of colleagues' work. A further experience contributing to rationale for practice was mothering; both experiences of being a mother and being mothered

Key Finding 6: Practice as Personal and Emotional Activity

Rather than maintain a task orientated focus to practice, practitioners identified personal dispositions and emotions as a core aspect of work with children aged birth to three years. This focus indicated emotional demands inherent in practice. It also indicated the desirability of emotion in terms of forming close relationships with children; essential in work with young children. In the first section, data related to practitioners' understanding of the desirability of emotion is outlined. This is followed by a focus on the personal dispositions identified as essential attributes of individuals working with young children. Finally, the management of emotions is outlined.

Emotion as an Aspect of Practice

Just as touch and respect were pivotal in secure caring relationships, 'settling in' and welcoming children to the setting also were noted as a significant aspect of practice related to the 'safe and secure' environment required for establishing and maintaining relationships. Iris frequently referred to specific decisions made to welcome and settle children. She alluded to the quiet, calm atmosphere as essential to the smooth working of the Baby Room. If she remained calm, then the children would remain calm and both practitioners and babies would benefit. She acknowledged 'that everything is going to be new to a baby so it is setting the ground for them to be accepted...just being welcoming and getting them all comfy' (Iris). This focus required her to keep calm and control her emotions because 'if you get all uptight again then the child does'

(Iris). Emma, also a Baby Room practitioner, spoke of babies feeling more secure if the environment was calm and predictable. For her continuity was the key to 'settling in' children and enabled children to bond with the practitioner. An awareness of the child's individual circumstances also impacted on settling children. Several practitioners cared for children who spoke English as a second language. Practitioners empathised with how difficult this must be for a child and ensured additional time and effort was spent making the child feel welcome; dual language books, familiar phrases and additional time spent with the child were all practices employed to ensure a welcoming space. This focus on a welcoming space was echoed in several practitioners' interviews; if children did not feel welcome then 'they pick up on that' (Alice).

Illustration 39

I think every child who walks through that door should feel welcome and I don't just mean children I think any adult who walks in here. I have walked into nurseries before and I've thought this isn't a nice place. I don't feel welcome. ...You should get a smile and a how are you. (Alice, Toddler Room practitioner)

The establishment of a 'safe and secure' environment was associated with routines. Continuity and 'knowing what comes next' (Alice) ensured that children were part of the nursery and provided 'a sense of belonging' (Joan and Rebecca). Practitioners often outlined the daily pattern of the nursery and why they considered this routine was important for children. Although centres did not specify daily practices, practitioners established specific routines in rooms. They noted that this routine 'gives the child their place' (Joan).

Central to care of children was the forming of close relationships with children and their families. This reciprocal relationship demanded that practitioners invested time and emotion. In particular, practitioners spoke of the importance of emotionally caring for children. Iris identifies repercussions of this close relationship when she speaks of the issues relating to transition. Describing walking past a room where children had recently moved to, she noted that sometimes the children were upset when they saw

her. She attributed her own feelings to her experience of leaving her own children saying 'you've had children yourself and you've left them at nursery upset so you think 'oh God'. Joan also spoke of her emotional upset when children moved from a Birth to Three room to a preschool room. She noted that children often displayed a reluctance to engage with her as she assumed children were angry with her for being left. Her response was the 'she could cry'. Developing on this was the acknowledgment that 'you do love them in a way' as children had attended the centre for several years and that a bond between practitioner and children is desirable. Hannah also referred to the impact that children leaving her care had on her. Although she acknowledged that it was a transition, she also admitted that 'I did have a wee tear or two when it was their last day and they were away. You do get a bit emotional'.

This focus led to a particular vulnerability for both practitioner and child; especially when transitions to different settings were required. Emma reported that 'for me, it was just like losing a child' whilst Katie noted 'so I have watched him grow up and I'll be devastated when he leaves nursery'. Katie elaborated on this position to note that these transitions when a child left the room enabled her to appreciate the parents' experience when they left a child at nursery. She acknowledged that as a practitioner she should not have 'favourites' amongst children in the room but physically looking after particular children over a period of time enabled her to build a 'special extra bond'. For practitioners working in centres where children were on the 'at risk' register, concern regarding children's home situation also impacted and resulted in emotional stress. Alice spoke of her concern at 'a child going home to something then it breaks my heart and I know I am not the only one [this happens to]'.

Personal Qualities identified as Essential to Practice

All practitioners spoke about personal dispositions and values which were essential to successfully provide care and support learning for young children. These aspects were present prior to entering training and enhanced by experience. Central to this was the focus on 'being caring'. All the practitioners stressed the need for the individual to be caring, patient and warm towards children as well as an ability to maintain an air of

calmness. These aspects of the individual were noted as personal qualities which impacted on interactions with children. The following interview segments illustrate this thread.

Illustration 40

I: Definitely I think you have got to have patience; you've got to have the right frame of mind to come in here cause I think if you thought you were coming in here for an easy time then you're not. With children they would sense that immediately.... caring definitely caring. I think I can just tell by the way they are with the children cause the baby room is not always quiet and it takes one to cry and that knocks them all off. It can be a knock on effect. And when they are all crying you've got to have a way to react to them without getting anxious or angry cause if you get uptight then the child does sense that from you. (Iris, Baby Room practitioner)

K: Yeah you can get agitated or whatever but the children notice that. If you are constantly shouting, then they obviously know. I think it is better if you just stay calm. (Katie, Toddler Room practitioner)

V: You have to be good at listening to children, at observing, at teamwork, be kind and caring, loads and loads of things like that. You can say that these are the activities that we will set out for them but obviously you have to have those qualities within yourself. (Vicky, Birth to Three practitioner)

J: You do need a natural instinct with younger children (Joan, Birth to Three practitioner)

R: Just to be caring, to be loving towards them, to be in tune with them, to be empathetic (Rebecca, Baby Room practitioner)

H: I think you can teach people to do the job but for somebody to be, I don't know, I think it is a natural thing to really love them and care for them I think it has to be a natural thing. Anybody could be a teacher or a nursery nurse if they did the qualifications and what not but I think there is something in you. Like I learned from my mother and my granny and there is something in your personality to be one of the best. That sort of inbuilt thing. I do think you need to have empathy for them and warmth. (Hannah, Toddler Room Practitioner)

In addition to patience and calmness, several practitioners also identified that individuals needed to be enthusiastic about working with young children. Enthusiasm

indicated that the practitioner cared about the child and was interested in their well-being and progress. Several practitioners spoke about the need for enthusiasm and interest so that the individual engaged with the child. It was this focus on the child that they looked for when students or colleagues joined the room and many of the practitioners noted that it was observation, questioning and chatting to children that indicated enthusiasm.

Practitioners' Dealing with Emotion

For the child, transition was also identified as a vulnerable time. Practitioners reported children being upset if they saw staff from the previous room. Iris, in particular, spoke of difficulties in walking past a room where children were demanding her attention. She reported that she knew that she could go in and settle them but she took the decision that it was preferable to let the current key worker see to the children. Joan noted that although she prepared children for transition when 'you think they were fine and then maybe three weeks into them being there you go in and they wouldn't speak to me. It wasn't until the third child did it to me that I thought 'oh it is cause I left them'.

Over and over again, practitioners referred to the importance they placed on working as a team. This team approach was considered important in terms of understanding practice and providing consistency; both to children and parents. It also provided support for the practitioner. Through team work, they complimented each other's efforts and practice and thereby developed their own practice. Practitioners spoke of the importance of learning to recognise when they needed a break from working on a particular activity or with a particular child. This practice of distancing oneself from a particular situation linked to the importance practitioners placed on remaining calm when working with distressed or angry children. Hannah referred to this as getting someone 'to cover you so that you can go out and sit down or take a wee breather because it is so important that the children don't see you are getting stressed from it'. This break could also be decided upon by colleagues as Joan indicated

Illustration 41

I think you know when it is a good time to step in, when the other person needs a break. When you have a child who is settling in and they cry constantly it can be quite frustrating for you and for them. You know they are going to come out of it but you don't know when. And if you have them crying all the time you still need to think of the other children who are here as well. But it is good for someone to say I'll take them now and we will just get on (Joan, Birth to Three practitioner).

Her colleague Vicky echoed this and also acknowledged that the judgment of when to take turns dealing with a crying child was a key decision to be made in supporting colleagues and developing practice. Working with both Helen [cover] and Joan, Mary spoke of 'not breezing in and doing something I think is right if it is not the strategy which is being used. That is when you need to look at your colleagues about they have been doing'.

Key Finding 6

Practitioners identified the emotional activity of establishing relationships with children as a key characteristic of their practice. They relied on support from colleagues to deal with the emotional demands of practice. Particular personal dispositions such as caring, empathy, patience, warmth and calmness were also identified as important to practice.

Recapping the Findings

It was clear that practitioners considered work with children aged birth to three years to be a complex practice. Practitioners focused on relationship aspects of the work and promotion of learning opportunities. All practitioners spoke of the importance of having secure and positive relationships with young children in their care. In many instances this equated to 'knowing the individual child' so that preferences were known and interpretation of nonverbal communication facilitated this understanding and response. Identification of each child as a unique individual strengthened practitioners' resolve to 'know the child'. Interpretation of non-verbal communication was emphasised as a key aspect of working with young children. All practitioners though acknowledged that this was a two-way relationship; just as they needed to

build an understanding of the individual child, the child and parent also needed to be able to trust and respond to the practitioner. These relationships contributed to the acknowledgement of working with children aged birth to three years as an 'Ethic of Care'.

Data indicates that for some practitioners there was a focus on the replication of the child's mother's practice and a personal theory of practice as substitute mothering. These practitioners acknowledged a discourse of mothering as a powerful influence on practice. Practitioners identified that for many children who did not have speech, particularly babies, the mother was a source of information regarding the child. At times, especially in private sector centres, this led towards a construction of practice which replicated the mother's requests and practice. For practitioners working in local authority centres, the emphasis was sometimes on compensatory mothering. In this situation, practitioners often spoke of the need to provide affection and attentive practices which were not provided consistently at home but were, they considered, necessary for the child.

The discourse of mothering was also reflected in the practitioners' focus on replicating a particular type of home environment. For practitioners working in the private sector centres, this was identified as a home environment and a focus on activities that replicated home life. For practitioners working in the local authority centres, this could be identified as a means of both replicating arrangements in the home and also compensating for the home.

Practitioners indicated though a tension between mothering and the role of the practitioner. This impacted on communication with the parent about the child and the parent leaving the child in someone else's care. The discourse of mothering was also present in practitioners' desired care arrangements for their own children. For their own family, the majority of practitioners preferred to remain at home with young children or to have part-time employment. Difficulties of children being cared for in the same centre as their parents were working were acknowledged.

The promotion of learning was a key feature of practitioners' accounts. All practitioners explicitly acknowledged that the period from prebirth to three years was a significant time in a child's life in terms of learning. Rather than specific outcomes, practitioners stressed how learning took place in everyday care routines; for practitioners, there was no distinction between care tasks and education. A significant focus in terms of learning was on self-help skills and independence. These skills orientated the young child towards future learning and investigation. Practitioners spoke of providing opportunities which supported these areas of learning. These practitioners challenged the construction of a young child as a passive recipient of care routines. It was these aspects of practice which linked to a socio-cultural pedagogy. In places however, practitioners also focused on a linear sequential model of child development; an 'age and stage' approach to supporting learning.

Working with children aged birth to three years was identified as a distinct practice within Early Years and all practitioners acknowledged the influence of experiences and opportunities linked to working with children aged birth to three years as roots of practice. Central to this was the value of experience in working with young children and the insight that colleagues provided. They reported that this direct observation and experience of practice provided particular understandings regarding work with young children which could not be replicated in classroom instruction or gained from secondary sources. Interview data indicated that practitioners were particularly keen to discuss practice with colleagues. Continuous Professional Development opportunities which related specifically to Birth to Three were identified as being particularly important contributions to practice. These could take the form of workshops, visits or informal discussions. Several practitioners mentioned that discussions with colleagues and staff from other settings were particularly helpful and insightful.

It is also evident that although this research study and Scottish policy focused on Birth to Three, practitioners did differentiate within this particular phase of childhood.

Specifically, practitioners spoke about babies and toddlers having distinct needs which demand different practices.

It was clear that practitioners identified emotional aspects with regards to working with children aged birth to three years; specifically, in terms of the emotional demands of coping with young children. Calmness, empathy and warmth were noted as natural and essential aspects of the individual's practice. It was warmth and interest in others which enabled the practitioner to support children settling into the setting, engaging in new experiences or even supporting children whose home lives were unstable. This engagement enabled the practitioner to create and manage a calm atmosphere in which children were secure and confident. All practitioners spoke of the emotional demands of the work role; especially the local authority practitioners who were concerned for children's safety and welfare out with the setting. Closeness of relationships between child and practitioner also placed emotional demands on both practitioner and child. Acknowledgement of emotional demands and colleagues' support were coping strategies identified by practitioners.

Key Findings of this Research Study

- 1.** A key characteristic of practitioners' personal theories was an 'Ethic of Care', with particular focus on attentiveness and responsiveness. The relationship that the practitioner formed with the child displayed solidarity with the child as well as a responsibility for their care.
- 2.** Practitioners, particularly those working in private sector centres drew on 'substitute mothering' as rationale for practice. In private centres, practitioners reported drawing on replication of the child's mother's practice or requests. Those in local authority centres were more likely to draw on compensatory models of practice. This focus on 'mothering' extended to their own experiences and aspirations with the majority of practitioners identifying a preference for themselves or a family member providing care for a child.
- 3.** A key characteristic of practitioners' expression of personal theory was the focus on pedagogy although they developed slightly different approaches to support learning. Practitioners working in the local authority centres were more likely to reflect a socio-cultural pedagogy whereas practitioners working in private sector centres tended to focus on linear development. Play, either structured or free, was identified as a key

way in which children learn. A key aspect of practitioners' pedagogy was the emphasis placed on supporting children's development of independence.

4. A key characteristic of the personal theories of practitioners was their construction of practice with children aged birth to three years as distinctive. They talked about this distinctiveness in terms of the varying patterns of children's development, organisational and government policies and the need to recognise that young children have particular needs.

5. Practitioners talked about their approach to practice developing from experience. They said aspects of training and CPD enabled them to link theory to practice. They were also influenced by the direct experience of working with children aged birth to three years and observation of colleagues' work. A further experience contributing to rationale for practice was mothering; both experiences of being a mother and being mothered

6. Practitioners identified the emotional activity of establishing relationships with children as a key characteristic of their practice. They relied on support from colleagues to deal with the emotional demands of practice. Particular personal dispositions such as caring, empathy, patience, warmth and calmness were also identified as important to practice.

Chapter 7: Discussion: Mobilizing the Ethic of Care and the Literature to Discuss the Findings

Introduction

A discussion of findings permits a researcher to consider key points from the research within a wider context. Where data analysis reduces and narrows data to identify key points, a discussion chapter draws on the philosophical frame and academic literature to place findings within a wider academic discussion. It also permits synthesis of the findings in order to answer the research questions.

This chapter begins by answering the research questions. It then moves to a holistic approach to consider aspects of personal theories identified in the practitioners' responses during semi-structured interviews. Data analysis indicated that practitioners spoke about rationale, or elements of personal theory, in relation to practice. The discussion therefore follows the key characteristics of practitioners' personal theories (see Figure 3 Chapter 6 or Appendix 6): 1) practice as an 'Ethic of Care' 2) practice as substitute mothering 3) practice as pedagogy 4) practice as distinctive for children aged birth to three years 4) practice as rooted in experience and 6) practice as a personal and emotional activity. Discussion of these elements of personal theory considers influences which may contribute to practitioners' particular understandings.

The research considered elements of practitioners' personal theories by focusing on individual practitioners. Although the findings indicated commonalities in practitioners' personal theories, the data also indicated contradictions between individual practitioners in terms of personal theory. These contradictions often related to the specific context in which the practitioner worked as well as individual experience. These contradictions therefore suggest that personal and professional experiences, ethos and organisational policies of centres are important in the construction of personal theory. Commonalities and contradictions are discussed within broader debates indicated by the literature.

The conceptualisation of personal theory employed in this research study drew on Aristotle's (Flyvberg, 2001) virtue of phronesis. Conceptualising personal theory in this respect suggests that a key consideration of the discussion relates to sets of care and pedagogical practices, construction of children's needs, aspects of practitioners' moral character and the influence of experiences which the practitioners in this research study recognised as important in working with children aged birth to three years.

Answering the Research Questions

RQ1: What relationships are identified by Early Years practitioners as particularly influential for their personal theories?

The review of literature indicated that relationships may be an important aspect of practitioners' personal theories and this was demonstrated in the data concerning practitioners' personal theories for practice. Certainly, relationships feature as a key aspect of policy documents such as *Birth to Three* and *PreBirth to Three*. Data from this research study also indicated that relationships are central to practitioners' thinking regarding their work with young children. Relationships dominated the practice of practitioners and discussion about relationships dominated the interviews. Four key relationships were identified as particularly influential: 1) with the child, 2) with the child's parents, 3) between children and 4) with colleagues.

Practitioners acknowledged that as every child was a unique individual with individual needs and preferences, decisions regarding practice were shaped by their understanding of the individual child. This understanding linked to judgments regarding intervention in a child's play or assessment of a child's development. Respect of the individual child was also a key component of practitioners' personal theories of relationships. Children, as individual human beings, were entitled to respect and recognition of their agency. This key construction of the child shaped practitioners' decisions regarding demonstrations of affection, comfort, and personal care.

Although practitioners spoke of children as unique individuals, they did situate this 'unique individual' within a family structure. Relating to both child and parents was a

key aspect of their interview discussions regarding working with children aged birth to three years; although many practitioners did focus on the mother rather than both parents. Gaining the parent's trust was identified as crucial to building a successful relationship with the parent. Trust enabled the parent to leave the child in the setting with the practitioner. Practitioners also recognised tension between the desirability of a positive relationship with the parent and the demands that parents may place on their practice.

Young children may be considered by some to be too young to engage with others but practitioners in this study challenged this presumption. Every practitioner considered children to be social beings, and as social beings, relationships were with both adults and children. Relationships between children developed awareness of others and also of the self. This focus, for some of the practitioners, provided the rationale for decisions regarding play, group activities and mealtimes as they linked relationships to a socio-cultural approach to learning. Although practitioners in both private and local authority centres spoke of children as social beings, a socio-cultural approach to learning was particularly evident in the data regarding practitioners working in local authority centres. These practitioners spoke of children as individuals with personal attributes, skills and circumstances. At several points in the interview data, particularly in reference to the discussion of photographs, practitioners indicated that children's exploration, experience and being with others, both adults and other children, supported learning.

Repeatedly, practitioners referred to the importance they placed on working with colleagues. This team approach was considered important in terms of providing consistency of care and models of behaviour to children. It also provided practitioners with emotional support.

RQ2: What experiences are identified by Early Years practitioners as particularly influential for their personal theories?

Data analysis indicated that the experience of mothering and the experience of being mothered were identified by some practitioners as key influences. This experience

developed personal qualities such as being calm, patient and caring; qualities noted as desirable in work with young children. Experience of mothering also was identified as supporting empathy with parents as well as providing insight and intuition. Several practitioners spoke of replicating care practices which they experienced as children. Another key experience which contributed to practice was the practitioner's experience of working with children; specifically work with children aged birth to three years. This experience was identified as contributing to the development of personal qualities and emotion deemed desirable in Early Years practice. It also provided insight into what strategies were successful and which were not.

Whilst practitioners noted the importance of being able to link theory and practice, they did so in the context of working with children aged birth to three years. In particular, practitioners valued CPD opportunities related to working with the youngest children or to particular skill areas such as photography for documentation. They also valued the experience of discussing practice with other practitioners who worked with children aged birth to three years.

RQ3: What are the key features of Early Years practitioners' personal theory when they work with children aged birth to three years in group care settings?

Practitioners spoke about the emotional aspects of the work acknowledging particularly the need to remain calm whilst working with young children. This personal disposition was deemed essential for successful practice. If the practitioner did not remain calm in response to accidents, misbehaviour, illness or the noise in the room then that would affect children's behaviour. Remaining calm and consistent supported children's sense of security and belonging. It also facilitated smooth-running of the room and the teamwork approached deemed essential for Early Years work.

Rather than identify care as a practice, practitioners tended to refer to it as an aspect of personality. Practitioners indicated that having a 'caring personality' was a key aspect of being an Early Years professional; it was a channel through which the child felt that they mattered to the practitioner. Warmth, a sense of humour, interest, and being welcoming were all attributes linked to having a 'caring personality. A 'caring

personality' was something which practitioners brought to practice. It could not be taught or developed, but was essential for successful interactions with children and their families. Practitioners did not however identify this 'caring personality' as an aspect of being a woman.

The promotion of emotional safety and security of the child was a key aspect of practitioners' rationale for practice. Whilst at nursery, the child needed to feel as if they 'belonged', were welcomed, cared about, and were safe. Consistency and the importance of routines were two key aspects of practice which practitioners spoke of as influential. All practitioners spoke about the reassurance that routine and consistency afforded the child; to understand their place within the group enabled the child to feel confident within the setting. Another key aspect of personal theory was the use of touch. Practitioners identified touch and affection as necessary and desirable in caring for young children. The interviews contained numerous examples of practitioners referring to holding or touching a child to reassure or comfort a child, or providing physical care and assistance. Touch was also a key component of practice regarding communication with young children.

Practitioners identified that children's speech development shaped their work. Although they spoke of the importance of language opportunities such as baby signing, singing and talking with children, they identified that a child's non-verbal communication indicated the child's needs. This aspect of personal theory linked with the interpretation of children's needs and responsive care.

Considering the Findings

Personal Theory as an 'Ethic of Care'

Tronto (1993, 2013) suggests that although the 'Ethic of Care' is an orientation of the individual towards the 'Other', key practices of care are identifiable. Her (2013) five ethical elements of care, demand that the individual is: attentive, responsible, competent, responsive and in solidarity with the 'Other'. These five ethical elements link to her five dimensions of the caring process: caring about, caring for, care-giving,

care-receiving and caring with. Although Tronto (2013) contends that not all the elements must be consistently present, the fundamental premise of an 'Ethic of Care' is that as humans, individuals are always in relationship with 'Others'. Relational ontology is the core of the 'Ethic of Care'.

A holistic approach is necessary to an embodiment of care (Tronto, 1993, 2013). It is not enough to voice intent with regards to care for the practices of care demand intellectual engagement with the context, the 'Other' and the response. Care as a practice requires the individual's participation in sensitive decision –making so to ascertain and respond to the 'Other's' needs. Practice of care challenge a central premises of liberalism that individuals are autonomous. Instead, the practices of care reflect relational ontology so to acknowledge that the individual is always in relationship with others. It is this reaching out to the 'Other' which distinguishes care as an ethic; a way of being with other human beings.

Relational ontology was apparent in the data when practitioners spoke of the importance of children's early experiences with others. At numerous points in the data, local authority practitioners identified practices to support young children's interactions with other children. Mary, for example, voiced the importance of young children developing social skills such as sharing, awareness of others, listening, caring. She placed particular emphasis on these early experiences being preparation for a life with others. There were also examples of practitioners, in both local authority and private settings, identifying the desirability of forming close relationships with children in order to provide responsive care. Emma, for example, noted her close relationship with a particular child in her care and suggested that her understanding of him, his family situation, and his non-verbal communication enabled her to determine when a response was appropriate or when he required different interaction.

Tronto's (1993, 2013) contends that being attentive is not an episodic action as it is an orientation to the 'Other'; an orientation which acknowledges the complexity and individuality of a person. It is the awareness of 'Others' so that the practitioner is able to 'keep 'Others' in mind' in order to recognise changing circumstances or need. All

practitioners working with babies demonstrated this awareness during the observations. Their focus on non-verbal communication to engage and then respond to the child's changing circumstances and physical care needs was exemplified in the interview discussions. Emma, for example, spoke of this attentiveness when she discussed feeding a baby, assessing the baby's response and then gauging her required response. Responsiveness as an element of care suggests sympathetic understanding of need and the action to address that need. The interview data indicated that through the practices of attentiveness, practitioners were able to be responsive to the child. In baby rooms, practitioners spoke of the need to link judgements to interpretation of young children's nonverbal communication. Iris referred to practice which allowed the child to lead so that as a practitioner she followed the child rather than attending to the child for no apparent reason. This responsiveness was also evident in her comments regarding following the child's routine rather than the nursery's routine. Vicky also indicated her responsiveness to a young child when she recounted her interaction with a particular child during a nappy change. Her observations of the child's hand actions and eye movements led to further communication and more emphasis on rhymes.

This attentive and responsive practice needs to align with responsibility. As an ethic, the care giver must establish a trusting relationship with the one being cared for. This trust develops through consistent attentive behaviour by the care giver. All practitioners spoke of trust and identified that children need to feel safe, secure and valued. This focus on trust was apparent in interview data relating to the use of touch and affection. Katie's response, for example, that a 'wee stroke of the hair' indicated that she was there and was intended to reassure the child. This focus on responsibility was also evidenced in practitioners' acknowledgement of the importance of the parent being able to trust the practitioner with the child's care.

However attentive and responsible the care-giver is, competence must also be present. It is pointless, Tronto (1993, 2013) argues, to engage in practices which would harm the care-receiver. Competence as a practice of care acknowledges skills required

by care- givers. The findings of this research study indicate that practitioners acknowledged the importance of compliance with policy and legislation such as the ratio of adults to children, security of premises and health and safety of the environment. In several instances, practitioners referred to specific organisational policy as rationale for practice. It was this knowledge and compliance with government and organisational policy which indicated professional competence. Data analysis also indicated that practitioners focused on linking theory with practice and therefore embraced CPD opportunities focused on supporting their work with children aged birth to three years. Iris, for example, spoke of her awareness of the importance of babies' early experiences in relation to neuro science research; an awareness developed from attendance at Birth to Three sessions organised by her Childcare Partnership.

Throughout the interview data, evidence of the elements of care and an orientation to care can be identified within practitioners' discussions of practice. Practitioners' focus on the child as an individual with unique desires, interests and needs suggested a premise that is not arising from developmentally appropriate practice (Cannella, 1997, 2005), quality assurance criteria or standardised learning outcomes (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). This acknowledgement of the 'Other' positions children as different from the practitioner and from other children in the setting. It is the basis of relational ontology for it does not assumes children's needs but suggests an approach to engaging and ascertaining what individual children are saying. It is practitioners' focus on nonverbal communication and engagement with children which suggests an 'Ethic of Care'. When practitioners working with babies were asked about their practice of close observation of an individual child's face or behaviour, the response linked to assessment of the child's individual needs. Practitioners spoke about developing an understanding of that particular child so that they could assess whether the child was tired, hungry, or restless. Observation notes indicated that practitioners would often stop doing one activity because they had noticed something about another child's behaviour or non-verbal communication. When asked during interview about this observed practice, practitioners related it to assessment of the child's needs. Rebecca

referred to in her judgements regarding a child's health and Katie and Hannah noted supervision of the child to ensure safety. Knowledge of the child was what Emma mobilized when she assessed whether a child was feeding, needing winding, or needing rest. In her interview, Vicky referred to when she considered that the child has received enough physical comfort and therefore can be encouraged to be 'off playing'.

Attentive practice was particularly clear in interview data relating to practitioners who worked with babies. There appeared to be a reliance on a baby's non-verbal communication which demanded that the practitioner was attentive. In the interview data, this attentive observation of a baby's non-verbal communication linked to particular care such as sleep, feeding, engagement with the child. However, in interview data with the two practitioners who worked in toddler rooms in private nurseries, the focus seemed to be more on attentive observation in order to manage behaviour and safety. There was an emphasis on controlling children in one of these interviews; an emphasis not compatible with the 'Ethic of Care'. Controlling children is about managing the care-giver's needs rather than a response to an individual child.

Throughout the interview data, there was overwhelming acknowledgement of the responsibility that Birth to Three practitioners hold. Iris noted this responsibility when she stated 'we have to know' with regards to children who are unsettled. In numerous places in the interviews, practitioners identified the responsibility they have to the individual child. Particular emphasis was placed on the importance of early learning experiences and how nursery prepared the child for future learning and relationships. This was particularly evident in Hannah's assertion that these initial years are key to the child's independence, confidence and autonomy. Earlier discussion in her interview indicated the importance she placed on the practitioner's role in supporting children's self-help and decision-making. It was also apparent in Alice's acknowledgement of the 'huge role' that she played in children's lives and how that obligation to children had potential to be overwhelming.

This sense of responsibility though was not just expressed regarding the child as many practitioners indicated awareness of the responsibility they had to parents. Emma, in particular, placed great emphasis on the responsibility she had for a child. She noted that 'leaving a child must be very difficult'. Throughout her interview there were numerous references to the difficulty that parents must experience when leaving a child and how practitioners were entrusted with a child who was the parent's 'whole world'.

Personal Theory as 'Substitute Mothering'

Although elements of care were evident within the data, contradiction between the 'Ethic of Care' and construction of practice as 'substitute mothering' was also apparent. Analysis of the interview data may have indicated an orientation to the 'Ethic of Care' but practitioners often described this orientation in terms of 'mothering'. Tronto's (1993) consideration of the 'Ethic of Care' is useful in considering practitioners' personal theories relating to 'substitute mothering'. She argues that the socio-historical context of Western society constructs particular understandings of 'mothering' as a self-sacrificing activity occurring in the private space of the home. As Hey and Bradford (2006) indicate, an emphasis on 'mothering' as care also constructs a very particular mother and delineates particular behaviour as desirable. Practitioners who espoused a discourse of 'mothering' often also spoke of responsive care, being attentive to young children, caring for the individual child, and responsibility for children. These are all elements of an 'Ethic of Care' but named as 'substitute mothering'. This focus on 'substitute mothering' was particularly evident in Iris and Emma's interviews; two practitioners who were also mothers themselves and who worked with babies in private centres. An acknowledgement of the replication of the child's mother's practices could also be identified in Lucy and Katie's interviews. These two practitioners worked in toddler rooms in private centres.

Drawing on Freire's (1970/1993) work, this naming of practice as 'substitute mothering' could indicate 'naive consciousness'; an embracement of dominant discourse regarding mothering without the critical appreciation of maternalism which

Ailwood (2008) refers to. The focus on 'mothering' within this dataset is congruent with other Early Years research (Vogt, 2002; Stephen and Brown, 2004; Elfer, 2007).

In the interviews, private centre practitioners often referred to interactions with a child being led by the mother's wishes and practices. Whilst some of this may relate to market model of care provision (Vincent et al., 2004), it may also relate to Singer's (1993) and Moss et al.'s (2000) contention that the mother-child dyad may be of key importance in situating the child's care. Replication of the mother's practice can be considered as attachment pedagogy (Brannen & Moss, 2003); a discourse which Penn (1997) identifies as prevalent within Early Years. However, as Elfer's (2007) case study of a private nursery indicates a careful balance is needed to manage practice and relationships. Although mothers and practitioners may focus on replication of practice in order to provide consistent care to children, it may be challenging for mothers, practitioners and children to manage such close relationships. The private centre practitioners in this study spoke of replication of the mother's practice but only occasionally did they elaborate on the logistical and emotional aspects of such requests. Yet, Page and Elfer's (2013) work indicates that this focus on logistical and emotional aspects requires careful consideration.

Some practitioners, however, did not link rationale for practice to 'mothering'. Vicky and Rebecca, who both worked in local authority settings, focused on the need for practice to extend children's learning. As in Fenech et al.'s (2010) study of Australian Early Years teachers, the naming of activities and rationale for practice focused on education rather than child care. Similar to McGillivray's (2008) contention that a focus on professional educators shifts the focus away from 'substitute mothering'. In both Vicky and Rebecca's interviews, there was a clear focus on learning being the first priority and primary task. Elfer's (2007) case study of an Early Years nursery also indicates that for some practitioners the primary task of the centre is support for learning. Although practitioners also spoke of Birth to Three practices as support for the child's learning, only Vicky and Rebecca identified learning as the primary task.

Personal Theory as Pedagogy

A focus on practice as pedagogy challenges practice as 'substitute mothering' (Moss, 2006; McGillivray, 2008) and instead is congruent with Isaacs's (1932/1968) contention of Early Years as a time of 'rich learning'. The practitioners in this study voiced that children aged birth to three years were continuously involved with learning and that therefore a key focus in practice was support for learning. A key difference between practitioners though was the manner in which practitioners conceptualised children's learning and development; those practitioners in local authority centres positioned children's development and learning within the socio-cultural approach whereas those in private centres tended to position development and learning as a linear 'age and stage' process.

Emma and Katie's focus on the specific learning outcomes related to structured activities is reflective of the developmentality discourse which James et al. (2007) and Cannella (1997) identify as prevalent in Early Years. Although all practitioners spoke of potential learning outcomes related to specific opportunities and experiences, practitioners in private centres tended to see development as a linear progression. Structured activities, therefore, were opportunities to build on particular skill sets related to children's 'age and stage'. A focus on particular learning outcomes is consistent with regulatory inspection regimes which Dahlberg and Moss (2005) contend are key aspects of current Early Years policy within neo-liberal ideology. Inconsistency within the personal theories of private nursery practitioners however can also be identified. Cannella (1997) argues that conceptualisation of child development as a linear process leads to construction of practice as developmentally appropriate (DAP). The contention of DAP is that practice is focused on the normative rather than the individual child. It was clear from the data that practitioners who worked in private centres constructed children as individuals with individual interests, behaviour and personalities. This focus however may have been subsumed by the requirements to document children's development and also justify practice to parents.

This focus on an individual child is more commonly associated with the socio-cultural approach; an approach where relationships are considered key aspects of learning (Carroll-Lind & Angus, 2011). Hannah's contention that children learn and play at different levels was not linked to age but to the specific child and activity. This focus on the specific child was also apparent in Vicky's interview where she argued the importance of knowing the child's situation. It is worth noting here that practitioners in local authority centres did have the opportunity to conduct home visits as well as work in partnership with family support workers. It may be that these opportunities supported greater insight into the individual child's situation and home environment. Although local authority practitioners often commented in interviews about the importance of documentation, this tended to be cast as a means to support development rather than measure development. Alice's distinction between two children's progress reflected this stance when she spoke of celebrating individual achievements rather than comparing children.

Consistent with Stephen's (2012) research regarding Scottish practitioners working with three to five year-olds, practitioners in this research study identified children as learning through play. A play pedagogy (Wood & Attfield, 2005) which was child-centred, adult-facilitated and located in resource-rich environments could be identified in the interview data. However, practitioners in this study differed from Degotardi and Davis's (2008) contention that learning from play was prioritized over routine tasks. Practitioners in this study focused on the everyday events to promote children's self-help skills and confidence. In particular, they stressed the importance of children's learning experiences out with the nursery setting by identifying the rich learning opportunities which outings within the local environment provided.

[Personal Theory as Distinctive as Distinctive for Children Aged Birth to Three Years](#)

Practitioners in this study identified work with children aged birth to three years as a set of distinct practices; different from working with children aged three to five years old within the same setting. As practitioners noted policy, care standards and organisational procedures differed from work with older children in the same setting.

Some of this distinction could be linked to the age stratification and sector provision which Moss (2006) notes as present in British Early Years. Historical divisions of age as well as separation of care and education (Penn, 2000; Moss, 2004) may continue to permeate Early Years provision. In the data, practitioners highlighted the policy and regulatory frames which contributed to particular aspects of practice.

This distinctiveness may therefore be a reflection of what practitioners observe in their work setting. Policy in Scotland separates *PreBirth to Three* (LTScotland, 2005, 2010) from the *Curriculum for Excellence* (HMIE, 2007). The National Care Standards (Scottish Government, 2005) and registration procedures (SSSC, 2007, 2012) also reinforce a separation of Early Years by age of child. Central to this distinction between work with children aged birth to three years and those three to five years was the difference in ratio of adults to children. Practitioners reported that this difference was reflected in how centres chose to organise group care and staffing. In addition, practitioners in local authority centres, reported that documentation regarding children differed between children aged birth to three years and those three to five years. In each of the centres, rooms for children under the age of three were in different physical spaces than the 'pre-school rooms' so that the physical environment was separate. Practitioners working with children under the age of three also used the outside space of the garden at different times from others in the setting. These distinctions in policy and organisational procedures reinforce to practitioners that working with children aged birth to three years is distinctive.

Another consideration is that this research study specifically focused on the current policy context in Scotland; Birth to Three. To a certain extent, this is a limitation of the study as practitioners' responses may reflect the focus on practice within this particular policy context. Although practitioners identified Birth to Three as distinctive, data analysis indicated that practitioners considered there to be diversity within the policy's age range. In particular, there did appear to be differentiation between practitioners working with babies and those working with toddlers. Data analysis indicated that this differentiation appeared linked to language development; in

particular, the development of speech. Further research could, and should, develop this line of enquiry.

However, recent policy such as *Building the Ambition* (Scottish Government, 2014) stresses a seamless approach to Early Years practice and so presents a possible tension between the identification of working with children aged birth to three years as a set of distinct practices and that of a more generalised focus on the Early Years. A focus on commonalities as well as differences may alleviate some of the marginalisation in the Early Years work place that the practitioners in this study have described and McDowell-Clark and Baylis (2012) note.

One important distinction of work with children aged birth to three years that practitioners reported was the need to focus on non-verbal communication; both in terms of the reading the child and the messages conveyed to the child by the practitioner. Although many academics report on the importance of language-rich environments (Goswami & Bryant, 2004; Lally 2009) as well as practitioner engagement with the child (Berthleson & Brownlee, 2004; Degotardi, 2010), the practitioners in this study reported awareness of individual children's needs and interests because of their attunement to non-verbal communication. This highly skilled practice was identified by practitioners as distinct from practice with older children. The data also indicated that practitioners often distinguished between children within the Birth to Three range; often on the basis of speech development. Although the practitioners in this study mainly differed from the observation by Goouch and Powell (2012) that practitioners working with the youngest children in the setting are often less well qualified and experienced than those working with older children, the skills involved with working with the youngest children in the setting merits consideration. The practitioners in this study did not demonstrate Goouch and Powell's (2013) finding that practitioners working with preverbal children may be inhibited to 'talk' with children. The observation notes and interview data indicated an interesting difference in that practitioners in this study had a key focus on communication and considered it a key aspect of practice with young children.

Personal Theory as Rooted in Experience

The practitioners in this study differed from Fee's (2009) conclusion that the SVQ was the most prevalent initial qualification. They did however align with the Scottish Executive's (2002) finding that staff in local authority centres tended to hold the HNC. All practitioners in this study acknowledged the contribution which initial training and CPD provided; especially CPD linked to specific skills and debates regarding working with children aged birth to three years. In particular, practitioners working in local authority centres alluded to the contributions which particular CPD opportunities and experiences afforded their practice and theory. Every local authority practitioner spoke of CPD provision and identified how participation influenced particular decisions when working with children aged birth to three years. For those working Centre C, CPD events had challenged their thinking regarding the use of plastic in the nursery and had strengthened their resolve to provide natural and 'real life' resources. In Centre A, a private centre, both practitioners acknowledged the contribution which the local Childcare Partnership series on Birth to Three had afforded. However, both also acknowledged the pressures on the centre in scheduling the CPD. Given the constraints that Fee (2009) identifies with regards to CPD, it is perhaps challenging for private centres to release practitioners during the working day. As the *National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce* (Scottish Executive, 2006b) recognises, there is a distinction between CPD afforded to those in the private sector and those in local authority settings.

Although practitioners acknowledged the limited opportunities to focus on children aged birth to three during initial training, many did allude to the value of placements during initial training. These placements supported links between espoused theory, government and organisational policy and practitioners' practice. In some respects, placements also enabled practitioners to question and reflect on classroom based learning or observed practice. These placements, although perhaps limited in terms of settings and age ranges of children, did provide some experience of working with children. In this respect, initial training and CPD opportunities are practiced-based

experiences and knowledge, an aspect of phronesis, contributing to practitioners' personal theories.

Practitioners in this study noted the contribution of experience made to practice and to rationale for practice. It was experience that Alice spoke of when she identified how her appreciation of the importance of relationships had developed. In the interviews, practitioners identified the contribution that colleagues made to their knowledge and understanding of working with young children. This professional experience of working with others resonates with Court et al.'s (2009) findings regarding a study of Israeli teachers.

What practitioners spoke of as 'mothering' provided opportunities for them to develop awareness and intuition with regards to working with young children. It provided practitioners with insight to appreciate how parents may feel when leaving a child or when a child demonstrated a 'first'. 'Mothering' enabled a practitioner, such as Emma or Iris, to judge when a child needed physical care. This sense of judgement and intuition, they argued, could not be taught during initial training or gained from a book. This stance of the experience of 'mothering' as preparation for Early Years practice resonates with research findings of MacDonald (1999), Albanese (2007) and Brooker (2014). Although James's (2010, 2012) study indicates that teachers also construed mothering as preparation for teaching young children, primary school teachers tended to focus on interactions between teacher and child thus excluding parents. With the exception of Rebecca and Vicky, the practitioners in this study spoke of practice which may have been informed by the experience of mothering but also was influenced by relationship with the child's mother.

A focus on the personal qualities and experience of 'mothering' was particularly evident in the interviews involving several of the practitioners: Emma, Iris, Hannah, and Mary. There was however a distinction between the four practitioners. Iris and Emma drew on their own experience of having been a mother whilst Hannah and Mary referred to their experience of having been mothered. For these four practitioners, Early Years practice replicated behaviours and emotions associated with

'mothering'; highly desirable behaviours and emotions with regards to caring for young children. This focus can also be found in Osgood's (2005) research in which employment recruitment positioned mothers as having 'natural skills' in terms of working with young children. Osgood's (2004) research indicated that mothers often see Early Years as a form of employment which acknowledges their experience and permits them to combine paid employment with family responsibilities. The employment trajectory that Emma and Iris followed meant that employment in Early Years seemed logical and a natural progression from caring for their own children. In the interviews, both spoke about the personal importance of being at home with their children until the child was settled at school. For Hannah and Mary, elements of practice were influenced by their experience of being mothered and by the observation of their mother's practices.

Personal Theory as Personal and Emotional Activity

All practitioners spoke of natural occurring dispositions as essential personal qualities of a successful Birth to Three practitioner. Care was not spoken of as a practice or ethic but as a disposition. Similar to the initial understandings of preservice teachers in Goldstein and Lake's (2000) study, care was identified as instinctive and natural. Using the 'Ethic of Care' as a lens through which to interrogate the data, it was apparent that attentiveness, responsiveness, and responsibility permeated the data. These practices of care were not spoken of in terms of skills or orientation to young children but rather as an aspect of the individual practitioner's personality.

Several academics (Ailwood, 2008; Kim and Reifel, 2010) link a focus on personal dispositions to gender; a particular construction of women's roles so that Early Years practice develops from desirable and natural dispositions (Colley et al., 2003; Colker, 2008). Ackerman (2006) extends this focus on gender to argue that a focus on personal dispositions contributes to lack of recognition that Early Years is a skill-based practice. Although practitioners in this study did not speak of dispositions in terms of gender, they did speak of dispositions as natural, instinctive and within the individual. All practitioners identified caring, patience, warmth and calmness as personal

disposition or, as Osgood (2005) notes, 'natural skills'. These dispositions were considered important in practice as they impacted on interactions with children, parents and colleagues.

A focus on personal dispositions or vocational habitus may reinforce essentialist and universalistic arguments within Early Years and can be considered criteria for employment suitability (Vincent & Braun, 2011, 2013). When personal theory is conceptualised as phronesis then a reconsideration of personal dispositions as aspects of moral character becomes necessary. Aristotle's (Flyvberg, 2001; Kristjánsson, 2005) contention that phronesis links to character and morality implies attributes and values which practitioners embrace and apply in practice. Phronesis facilitates a focus on the moral character of practitioners and as Carr (2007) argues, this moral character often connects with care, justice and passion. As Taggart (2011) and Egan (2004) outline, Early Years' commitment to children, play and respectful engagements may form a shared value base. Practitioners in this study indicated moral character of compassion, respect, responsibility, trust, and citizenship but spoke of them as personal dispositions. It may be that a focus on personal disposition is indicative of a discourse of young children's care and education rather than critical engagement of the consequences for professional identity and status such a focus may hold.

A key message from the data was practitioners' identification of working with young children as emotional activity. Although in some respects this could be viewed as aspects of Tronto's (2013) dimensions of caring, it can also be considered similar to Hochschild's (1983/2003) analysis of emotional labour. In order to build relationships that enabled attentive, responsible and responsive care, practitioners needed to reach out to the child. This data set highlighted that reciprocal relationships were central in practitioners' personal theories regarding work with young children; a positioning congruent with Tronto's (2013) 'Ethic of Care'. Practitioners identified that young children's particular vulnerability and development meant that response to physical and emotional needs required sensitivity, closeness, maturity and consistency. Positioning the child as a unique individual adds to this complexity of practice as

practitioners developed secure and close relationships with a particular human being. Practitioners indicated this complexity of practice when they noted the difference between relationships with full time and part time children and between key worker children and other children in the room. It was also apparent in their identification of supply staff's difficulty to engage with children and support care. Whilst practitioners acknowledged the desirability of these close relationships, they also acknowledged that distinct practices were required in order to self-manage emotional aspects of practice. This self-management of emotion resonates with Page and Elfer's (2013) research.

One aspect of these emotional demands was the severing of relationships between practitioner and child. In this study, practitioners spoke of the loss experienced when a child moved on from their care. This identification of loss is similar to issues which Manning- Morton (2006) identifies as her analysis also acknowledges the emotional demands in forming close relationships with children. The emotive aspects of work are often cast as unprofessional (Manning-Morton, 2006; Albanese, 2007) yet, as the practitioners in this research study indicated, the development of a close relationship with the child is an aspect of their construction of 'good practice' and 'quality care'. Practitioners acknowledged that loss was difficult for both them and the child.

As a result of these emotional demands, practitioners in this study managed their feelings and developed strategies to remain calm, cope with loss, deal with children's and parents' anxiety. One key strategy which practitioners identified was the support of colleagues. Taking time out from caring for a particularly demanding child or sharing workloads were two practice- based strategies but the emotional support of colleagues was also important. These practices to manage emotionally demanding work are similar to those Quan- McGimpsey et al. (2011) identify. To manage closeness with children, they suggest that practitioners sought reassurance, performed particular rituals of practice, took time out from the work place through breaks or handing over to colleagues.

An additional aspect of emotion was the potential conflict between practitioner's judgements regarding a child's care and those of parents. Practitioners in this study identified instances where parental requests shaped response to a child in a manner different from their own interpretation of the child's needs. This conflict between a practitioner's judgement and that of the parent is also evident in Goouch and Powell's (2013) *Baby Room Project* where practitioners recount instances where difficulties exist in complying with parental requests for particular care routines. Such events challenge the construction of practice as 'shared care' (Singer, 1993) or as a 'triangle of care' (Brooker, 2010) or as a 'key person' (Elfer, 2008) where practitioners and parents work towards mutually agreed judgements and response to children's needs. In terms of an 'Ethic of Care', replication of specific parental requests and practices contest both the dimension of care which Tronto (2013) refers to as 'caring with' and instead facilitate the construction of practice as a form of 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983/2003).

Conclusion

This research has indicated that although there are commonalities in how practitioners theorise practice with children aged birth to three years, there are also contradictions. Central to this debate is the role of practice as an 'Ethic of Care' and as 'substitute mothering'. This particular contradiction shapes engagements with parents and children as well as constructions of professional identity. As this discussion has indicated, it may also link to a consideration of practice as intuitive and based on personal dispositions rather than skill and moral character.

Although all practitioners in this study identified practice with children aged birth to three years as pedagogy, contradictions were also noted in terms of pedagogical approach. This contradiction was particularly apparent in relationship to the context of the setting.

However, all practitioners identified that working with children aged birth to three years shaped practice in particular and distinct ways. They theorised Birth to Three practice as unique, emotional activity which required skill, experience and knowledge.

The implications of these findings and tensions are explored further in the final chapter of the thesis.

Chapter 8: Implications of the Research and Concluding Remarks

Introduction

The emotional and intellectual set of theory and practices is both rewarding and challenging to the individual practitioner. Listening to the insiders' perspective regarding working with children aged birth to three years suggests four key implications of the research study: 1) addressing the emotional challenges faced by practitioners 2) addressing training for practitioners 3) addressing professional identity 4) addressing the discourse of 'substitute mothering'. The contributions of this research to Early Years are then discussed before the final comments of the thesis are made.

Implications of this Research Study

Addressing the Emotional Challenges Practitioners Report

This study's data indicates that practitioner, parent and child relationships is an issue requiring acknowledgment and further consideration. As this study and Powell and Gooch (2012) show, tension exists between the physical and emotional closeness practitioners identify as required in working with children under the age of three and 'pleasing' parents. Several academics such as Taggart (2011) and Quan- McGimpsey et al. (2011) suggest an increasing awareness of the emotional aspects of Early Years work exists, yet further conversations are needed to explore what this means in terms of practice, theory and professionalism. Page (2011) also calls attention to the issue of emotion in Early Years; a concept she refers to as 'professional love'. Practitioners in this study voiced the paradox Moyles (2001) identifies of passion and professionalism. This research data indicated multiplicity of these emotional aspects: closeness to the child, concern for the child, experience of loss as well as the expectation of meeting parental demands. It is, as Vincent and Braun (2013) suggest, emotionally challenging to be 'fun at work' or, as this data suggested, to be compliant.

Further discussion and research are required therefore to explore not only practitioners' understandings and management of personal emotion but also parental

emotion. The practitioners in this study indicated that replication of parental practices and trust are key issues for some parents which impacted on a practitioner's engagement with young children and parents. These emotions experienced by parents are also identified by Vincent and Ball (2001) and Page (2011, 2013). Recognition of Birth to Three practice as an emotional activity may prompt additional support for practitioners by policymakers as well as training providers. Additionally, such recognition could work towards the identification of strategies in the work place to support practitioners.

Addressing Training for Practitioners

Practitioners in this study identified that their initial training periods presented few opportunities to engage with academic perspectives regarding a specific focus on supporting the education and care of children, aged birth to three years. If practice with these young children requires, as the practitioners in this study reported, a distinctive set of practices, then initial training needs to acknowledge and address the possibility that some practitioners will work with the youngest children in the setting. Data analysis indicated that in the absence of espoused formal theory, these practitioners drew on personal and professional experiences and understandings as well as organisational and government policy to inform practice. Several practitioners in this study related this to experience of mothering and learning through practice as well as observation of colleagues.

Yet, research studies demonstrate a relationship between the more focused understandings of young children's development, learning and care and 'quality provision' for children under the age of three (Cameron et al., 2002; Rockel, 2014). In particular, Goldstein and Lake's (2000) research indicate that continued reflection regarding care prompts a more nuanced construction of care and its implications for educational practice. Prolonged consideration of how care is constructed in Early Years provision moved preservice teachers' understandings from gendered constructions of care related to 'natural' dispositions and simplistic notions of love to a fuller appreciation of care as a responsibility to the 'Other'.

The findings from this research suggest that practitioners would benefit from the opportunity to discuss constructions of care and education. Consideration could be given within the curriculum of initial training periods and CPD to create specific opportunities to debate issues relating to supporting young children's care and learning. Central to this could be the inclusion of placements as well as classroom and CPD discussions regarding constructs of care and learning.

Addressing the Discourse of 'Substitute Mothering'

A key message from the interview data regarded the construction of Birth to Three practice as 'substitute mothering' and therefore reliant of particular practices, personal dispositions and experiences. As Tronto (1993, 2013) indicates, this focus on care as 'mothering' is an essentialist argument. It maintains gendered understandings regarding the fulfilment of care tasks are apparent in Western society (Tronto, 1993; Cannella, 1997) so that care for young children is cast as a woman's role or 'mothering' because of naturally occurring dispositions associated with gender. Shifting emphasis away from 'substitute mothering' and towards an ethical relationship between individuals permits a different understanding of Early Years practice; one which is focused on Early Years as site of care, learning and development. It is a shift which may have implications for how practitioners see themselves and how others view Early Years. If Early Years is cast within a framework of care then a focus is placed on emotion, attentive response, competencies and responsibilities.

However, if Birth to Three practices are cast by some practitioners as 'substitute mothering' then questions are raised as to what type of mothering, what experience is essential, who can mother, what practices are desirable and how does provision in a group care setting align with expectations. One implication is that referring to group care provision as 'substitute mothering' may perpetuate tension between the 'mother' and the 'substitute mother'.

Reframing 'mothering' as an 'orientation to care' may present new opportunities to discuss practice. The findings from this research study and the academic literature (see Cannella, 2000; Dalli, 2002; Cook; 2005; Elfer; 2007; Ailwood, 2008; James, 2012; Page,

2011) indicate that further consideration is needed with regards to the discourse of 'mothering' and the construction of the 'mother role'. A more nuanced understanding of care and mothering may present different possibilities for considering Early Years Education and Care for children aged birth to three years.

One implication of the research finding relating to 'substitute mothering' is that it constructs a particular type of Early Years professional identity. Although research participants identified low status as key issues in terms of recognition, connections are not made between a discourse of 'substitute mothering' and low status. Drawing on Freire's (1970/1993) concept of naive consciousness may be appropriate here. Further dialogue with practitioners may support critical engagement with the gendered and maternalistic discourses which shape particular constructions of Early Years professional identity. It may be that practitioners simply did not have the vocabulary to voice the 'Ethic of Care' and therefore drew on more familiar constructions of 'mothering'. These areas require further consideration and exploration.

Addressing Professional Identity

Practitioners spoke of distinctive practices and experiences when recounting practice. Working with the youngest children in society then requires a particular construction of professional identity; one which acknowledges demands and joy as well as the skills and experience related to practice. Practitioners in this study, in line with those in McDowell-Clark and Baylis's (2012) research, acknowledged that parents and colleagues do not always appreciate the complexity of work with children aged birth to three years. The professional identity of Birth to Three practitioners therefore requires further consideration. This thesis suggests that, in line with the research's focus on personal theory, can be considered through the concept of professionalism.

Professionalism's focus is on knowledge, skills and practicalities related to a particular area of practice. The concept is particularly apt to this implication regarding professional identity for as Vincent and Braun (2011: 778) state, 'the specialized or professional knowledge of childcare workers is rooted and expressed in practice'. Professionalism embraces practitioners' tacit and formal knowledge as knowledge is

multi-faceted and socially constructed (Moriarty, 2000). Most importantly, professionalism maintains a focus on the individual's judgements relating to practice. Professionalism is a sense of professional identity which is authentic to the individual and permits a sense of integrity (Roach, 2002). It is a construction of professional identity which acknowledges practitioners' expertise and demonstration of this expertise through practice.

Professionalism as a basis of professional identity acknowledges both expert knowledge and practitioners' expertise derived from experience. As this thesis has suggested, focusing on practitioners' expertise presents a starting point in terms of considering an alternative construction of professional identity from the 'top down' (Dalli, 2008) approach imposed through policy. Articulation of personal theory with regards to working with children aged birth to three years invites practitioners to consider what is important in their work, why it is of value and how it may or may not be reflected in policy; these considerations link to the confidence and critical thinking skills required to develop professionalism. An implication therefore of this research is a focus on the construction of professional identity for practitioners who work with young children.

Key Contributions of the Research

By focusing on personal theory, this thesis has considered practitioners' perspectives on Early Years practice and theory. Specifically, the research has provided an 'insider' perspective in relation to working with children aged birth to three years attending group care settings in Scotland. It is this focus on the 'insider' perspective which is a key contribution of this research to Early Years academic literature. This research's consideration of the space in which practitioners work with young children has challenged the context-free focus present in policy guidance as well as regulatory and inspection frameworks. It has provided, therefore, an opportunity to discuss alternative perspectives regarding young children's education and care.

Research which mobilizes case study methodology provides rich understandings of a social phenomenon within a specific context. This research's focus on practitioners' personal theories identified particular constructions of care, learning, and young

children which have the potential to resonate with others working in Early Years. In some circumstances though, these research findings may challenge thinking regarding practitioners and their practice.

In this section of the chapter the key contributions of the research study are outlined. In the first section, the contributions to academic literature are identified. The second section considers the contribution to Early Years policy and practice that the research may make. A section on contributions to training in Early Years follows and finally the contributions that this study has made to my own learning are identified.

Contributions to Academic Literature

This research contributes to a growing body of academic literature focusing on Early Years theory and practice in relation to children aged birth to three years and the practitioners who work with them in group care settings (see Mc Dowell-Clark & Baylis, 2012; Goouch & Powell, 2013; Page & Elfer, 2013; Rockel, 2009; 2014). Although the research contributes to this wider discussion of Birth to Three theory and practice within Britain and other minority world nation states, a particular contribution of this research is its focus on Scottish Early Years. The Scottish context is unique within the United Kingdom for it is shaped by particular social and educational policy; Scotland's *PreBirth to Three* and *Building the Ambition* policies mean that practitioners work within a very specific context.

As Goouch and Powell (2013) identify in *The Baby Room*, many stakeholders exist in relation to education and care for children under the age of three. Policymakers, regulators and inspectors, academics, practitioners, parents and children hold a vested interest and commitment to services supporting and caring for young children. Of these stakeholders though, only practitioners and children experience the setting's daily routine. This thesis therefore has presented a unique opportunity to consider this experience and the personal theories practitioners mobilize in practice; an opportunity which has the potential to contribute to academic discussions regarding Birth to Three.

If academics have a richer understanding regarding practitioners' personal theories, then a more nuanced discussion regarding support of young children's development and learning in group care settings is possible. Of the various stakeholders, this thesis prioritizes the practitioner's voice. Quite often the most powerful voices in discussions regarding Early Years are those of policymakers, funders, and academics; voices which Stephen and Brown (2004) identify as contributing to an 'outsider' perspective of Early Years theory and practice. This 'outsider' perspective may be very different from an 'insider' perspective of practitioners engaged with the daily delivery of Early Years policy, theory and practice in group care settings. An 'insider perspective' (Stephen & Brown, 2004) is an active construction of practice and theory which is contextual, evolving through experience, and which may or may not link to policy and academic research. It is this 'insider' perspective, this personal theory, which practitioners act upon in their practice thus shaping care and learning experiences for young children (Stephen, 2008). To understand more about practitioners' personal theories provides insight into what practitioners say about relationships, care, and the support of young children's learning.

In particular, this research has addressed Elfer's (2005 cited in Page, 2005) concern regarding the scarcity of research focusing on relationships between children and practitioners from the practitioner's point of view. This study has demonstrated how a philosophical framing mobilizing the Feminist 'Ethic of Care' provides possibilities for thinking about the relational ontology (I'Anson, personal communication, 2015) presumed in Early Years. The analytical framing of the research therefore also contributes to emerging academic discussions; especially in light of Woodrow and Brennan's (2001) assertion that ethics is an area underrepresented in Early Years research. Ailwood's (2012) observation that much of Early Years research is descriptive, a narrative rather than a critical analysis informed by a theoretical frame, is an important consideration. Feminist writing and the 'Ethic of Care' have previously been employed in Early Years research (see Goldstein & Lake, 2000; Vogt, 2002; Fenech et al., 2010) but these studies have focused on teachers and educational

practice with older children. This research study's focus on practitioners working with children under the age of three therefore contributes to the field of literature in Early Years regarding the 'Ethic of Care'.

Contributions to Early Years Policy and Practice

This thesis has acknowledged the rapidly shifting context of Scottish Early Years. Recent policy initiatives such as *Building the Ambition* (Scottish Government, 2014) aim to consolidate and synthesise Early Years so that provision is 'indivisible and seamless' (Scottish Government, 2014:9). This seamless delivery of provision manifests itself in several ways in reference to a focus on Early Learning and Childhood for it: 1) acknowledges young children's care and education as inseparable 2) acknowledges that young children learn through experience whether that is within formal education or out with formal education and 3) aims to provide a holistic approach to practice, theory and policy.

An important consideration in terms of this research study's contribution to the field is the policy's aim to support and develop practitioners; especially their confidence and abilities. *Building the Ambition* acknowledges that quality practice is contingent on practitioners' self-awareness and reflection. This research study's data collection methods of observation, photographic images and semi-structured interview supported practitioners in their articulation of practice and theory. These methods could be therefore a key contribution to *Building the Ambition* implementation. As this research has demonstrated, articulation of personal theory shifts the focus away from professionalism's consideration of outcomes, status and conditions of practice apparent in regulatory frameworks and instead centres a discussion on practitioners' character, values, experience and vision. For as Oberheumer (2005) notes, policy and regulation may or may not be congruent with practitioners' understandings and experiences. Opportunities which involve practitioners considering their own interpretation of values inherent in Early Years begins the process of critical engagement with social and educational policy.

The contention of this thesis has been that the articulation of personal theory enables the practitioner to consider how they see relationships with children and families, the practice of children's education and care as well as the experiences, literature and policies which are valuable in their own learning and practice. The thesis does not suggest that these insights are necessarily congruent with current policy and academic thinking regarding 'quality' provision. Instead, the thesis' line of argument has been that the articulation of personal theory may be considered a starting point for critical thinking and engagement with others within the wider Early Years community. Within Early Years, there is, as Canella (2005) argues, a need to encourage questioning of understandings and practices. It is this questioning which encourages a shift from replication of practice to the critical engagement which policy such as *Building the Ambition* intends.

Critical thinking in Early Years can however be marginalised (Mac Naughton, 2001) in an urgency to discuss curriculum or particular aspects of children's physical care, health and safety. However, to be a reflective practitioner involves a more global understanding of Early Years practice and the practitioners' place within it. It involves articulating the relationship between personal theory and practice (Chivers, 2005); for self-awareness is key in critical reflection (Cottrell, 2005). Identification of individual beliefs, traditions and prejudices is part of this process of self-understanding (Urban, 2008) which Manning- Morton (2006: 48) identifies as a critical component of 'emotionally intelligent practice'. In order to meet the agenda, set by *Building Ambition*, practitioners need to think critically about the work they do with young children, the relationships they build with them and the interactions which support children's learning. As Elfer (2005 cited in Page, 2005) contends, in order to achieve this critical thinking there is a need for practitioners to have opportunities to talk and reflect on their practice.

This thesis therefore has challenged what Manning- Morton (2006) describes as a 'deficit model' of an Early Years practitioner. It has acknowledged the demands of Early Years work and has begun to 'tackle the implicit theory/practice divide that

underlies prevailing conceptualisations of professionalism' (Urban, 2010:3). Biesta (2008) argues that the current focus on evidenced- based practice treats education as a problem and practitioners as problem solvers; as if there is a prescription for practice so that 'one size fits all'. This research has acknowledged the 'messiness' of education (I 'Anson & Allan, 2006) so to position practitioners as skilled decision makers who draw on knowledge and understandings in their work with young children. For as Drummond (1998:335) states, 'what we know about children or think we know shapes what we do for them in the name of education'.

This research has demonstrated that when provided with opportunities to talk, practitioners were able and willing to discuss their practice of working with children aged birth to three years. By linking to shared episodes of practice and images, discussion moved beyond the narrative and towards critical analysis and specified rationale for practice. Discussion also identified experiences and relationships which practitioners regarded as influential in practice. Every practitioner in this study welcomed opportunities for dialogue. In this respect the research is insightful for policymakers, Childcare Partnership Officers and Managers considering ways to enhance practitioners' critical thinking and reflection regarding practice. The link between observation of practice and interview discussions permits opportunities to build trust and communication so as to enhance dialogue. A non-judgemental approach enables practitioners to outline key ideas and values without reproach or in terms of 'improving' practice. In line with Gooch and Powell's (2013:124) *The Baby Room Project*, the provision of space and time for critical thinking and discussion provides a 'model for future professional learning'.

Contributions to Early Years Professional Education

One contribution of this research study is the process which supports Early Years practitioners' articulation of personal theory. Identification of methods which enabled Early Years practitioners to articulate personal theory has potential to enhance delivery of initial training and Continuous Professional Development (CPD). It also encourages practitioners to reflect and engage critically with rationale for practice.

Urban (2010) suggests that understandings of children and childhood intersect Early Years practice. In particular, Freire's (1970/1993) writing in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* contains an eloquent explanation of this interface between educational theory and practice. Educationalists can never separate purpose and intent from actions. Freire (1970/1993) also argues that education must ultimately be about reflection and critical thought which prompt transformation and social change. It is not enough as to be aware as one must also act (Freire, 1970/1993). Research, however, cannot in itself bring social change and some, such as Stephen (personal communication), would argue that its role is to inform rather than act. If more is understood about the personal theories of practitioners working with children aged birth to three in group care settings, then that understanding can enhance initial training and CPD as well as encourage practitioners to critically consider what ultimately they want for the children in their care.

As with Gooch and Powell's (2013) research, this research has placed the importance of dialogue with practitioners as a central premise. Such an approach challenges the current focus on knowledge transfer, expert knowledge and vocational habitus present in many Early Years initial training routes and CPD (Vincent & Braun, 2011, 2013). However, where Gooch and Powell's (2013) work focuses on groups of practitioners, this research study's focus has centred on the individual practitioner. The research design mobilized in this research study allowed individual practitioners to speak about their practice and personal theory without contradiction or input from others. There is a benefit in having the opportunity to explore individual thinking prior to sharing with others. As Moyles (2001) suggests, professional practice requires inner belief. It requires confidence. To be able to articulate without repercussions or condemnation, individual views, experience, and to reflect on what is important in working with young children is, in itself, of value.

A key premise in this research has been that the articulation of personal theory facilitates a practitioner's critical engagement with policy, practice and professional identity. By focusing on personal theory, this research study began with the

practitioner. This premise links to Early Years Professional Education for it also must start with the practitioner. If education is to be a transformative experience, then it must acknowledge the personal as well as the professional (Roach, 2002; Manning-Morton, 2006). Accounts from this research study aim to engage educators in this debate; to consider how devoting time to discussion of practice enhances the practitioner's professional learning in terms of working with children aged birth to three years.

Contributions to Personal Learning

A PhD provides an opportunity to develop not only academic research skills but also personal attributes. I began this research process because I was curious about young children's experience in group care settings; particularly from the practitioner's perspective. I end this research process still curious.

The research process has enabled me to engage with practitioners in terms of academic enquiry. Too often in the delivery of modules, educators are focused on assessment rather than the exploration of ideas. To observe practice and interview practitioners was enlightening; both in terms of what practitioners had to say but also in terms of prioritizing practitioners' voice. The research process has prompted critical reflection about the purpose of education as well as the experience and knowledge students bring to study. In a classroom situation or in exchanges with students, this focus means creating space and time to listen to what students have to say. It means building opportunity into discussions to explore links between theory and practice. As a Social Scientist, it means encouraging students to consider the wider discourses which situate Early Years and Childhood Studies; discourses which include gender, class, and age.

The wider academic discussions regarding knowledge and enquiry have been particularly insightful and transformative in terms of personal learning. I am more aware of the possibilities of research but equally I am also more aware of the limitations. But mostly, I remain curious about construction of Early Years theory, practice and professional identity.

And finally...

This thesis has prioritised practitioners' perspectives of working with children aged birth to three years. By considering personal theories of practitioners, the thesis has acknowledged knowledge and understandings through which practitioners rationalise routine daily practice to support young children's care and education in group care settings. It seems fitting therefore that the final words of the thesis should not be spoken by me, but by a practitioner. This quote seems particularly apt as it encapsulates an orientation to care. When asked what Birth to Three practice was about, the practitioner replied:

'It is about them [the children]. Be all and end all'

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Appendix 1: Subject and Analytical Frames of the Research Case Study

Subject Frame

Context

- Scottish Early Years Policy
- Scottish Qualifications Early Years Framework
- Organisational policies and practices
- Mixed market

Researcher Reflexivity

- Experience as an FE Early Years lecturer, SVQ Assessor and Internal Verifier, Open University tutor in Education

Analytical Frame

Construct of Personal Theory

- **Phronesis**
 - Experience as an aspect of knowledge
 - Applied to decision making so a particular action in a particular time and specific situation

Philosophical

- **Feminist 'Ethic of Care'**
 - Tronto's (2013) five ethical dimensions of care: caring about, caring for, care- giving, care- receiving and caring with
 - Tronto's (2013) five elements of care: attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness, solidarity

Literature

- Conceptualisation of personal theory as a web of understandings which include policy, academic literature, personal and professional experiences and understandings
 - Historical divisions between chronological age and provision and between care and education
 - Constructions of care, learning and mothering
 - Pedagogy: attachment, play, developmentally appropriate and socio-cultural
-

Appendix 2: Vignettes of Settings

Pilot Setting

Location	Large city/ separate building
Management	For profit, one of two nurseries, in partnership with local authority, manager on site
Size	Registered for 50* children,
Hours	7 am - 7 pm Monday - Friday; standard day is 8 - 6 pm
Inspection Report	Well managed nursery offering good quality care and education
General Description	<p>The baby room is a large brightly coloured room with natural light although the windows are curtained and are at adult height. The room is divided into three distinct areas: a sleep area, a play area and a feeding area. Cots and buggies are located in the corner at the back of the room for children to sleep in. A large settee and comfortable chair separates the sleep area from the play area. This space is carpeted and brightly coloured toys are placed on the floor for babies to play with. Many of these toys seem to have lights and sounds. The feeding area is at the front of the room and close to the sink and microwave. Highchairs are placed in a row during lunch and snack time. As this space is on tiled flooring, it is also used for messy activities such as a water tray and painting. Children are taken from the room to a bathroom to have nappies changed. Three members of staff work in the room although shift patterns mean that the particular combination of staff change regularly.</p> <p>The toddler room is filled with natural light as the windows overlook the side garden and trees. A full height wall partition divides the activity space from the sleeping area. The sleeping area is also used for quiet activities such as story time and singing. Sleeping mats are used and each child has their own sleep set of sheet and pillow. Children all went for a sleep just after lunch. The activity area contains child size furniture as well as a reading corner with large pillows. No adult sized furniture is present in the room. Children use the garden during each session and are also taken on walks in the grounds. Two staff work in this room.</p>

Setting A

Location	Small town/ nursery formerly used for retail/office space
Management	For profit, single nursery in partnership with local authority, manager on site
Size	Registered for 60* children, 20* under 2
Hours	7 am - 7 pm Monday- Friday; standard day is 8 am - 5 pm
Inspection Report	Well managed centre providing appropriate care and support for young children
General Description	<p>The baby room consists of one single big room. Changing facilities are at the back of the room. There is also small kitchen space in the room for preparing bottles, meals and snacks. A series of windows alongside one wall fills the room with natural light. However, the height of the windows means that children are not able to see out of them. Cots and buggies fill one corner of the room to serve as a place for children to sleep. There is a large armchair and a rocking chair for staff to calm children for sleep. The majority of the room is a play area and water trays, sand trays and mobile book shelves are all available for children to access. The wall space is decorated with pictures of children participating in activities, drawings and displays. Staff can access various resources such as treasure boxes, shape sorters, balls, rattles, and blocks in order to change activities.</p> <p>Separate from the baby room, the toddler room is a series of smaller rooms. One room is carpeted so it can be used as a gym space and also for sleeping mats. There is limited natural light in some aspects of the toddler rooms. A home corner is in one corner of the main play space and a series of small tables and chairs are used for craft based activities and for snack and meals. There is a separate toilet area with lower level sinks and toilets so children can access them independently.</p> <p>The layout of the rooms and garden separate children by chronological age. Doors between rooms meant that children did not see other age groups regularly. Staff did join with other rooms at the points in the day when fewer children were in the setting.</p>

Setting B

Location	Small town/ detached house
Management	For profit, one of several nurseries in a chain, manager on site
Size	Registered for 60* children, 10* children under 2, 20* children under 3
Hours	8 am – 6 pm Monday- Friday
Inspection Report	Key strengths were care routines, policy and activities, relationships with parents but the nursery could do more to extend children’s learning
General Description	<p>The baby room is bright with natural light. Two alcoves in the room are used for baby mats and gyms. The play area is carpeted and staff can access a variety of toys and books in order to change resources. There is a tray for water or sand play. There are no soft furnishings other than some floor cushions. At certain points in the day, highchairs are used for children to sit in a circle and have meals/snacks. Babies are changed in the bathroom next door to the main room. Down the hall there is a separate babies’ sleeping room.</p> <p>The toddler room is a large room with doors out to the garden. The windows in this room are low enough for children to see out. There is a separate kitchen area and a long bar for children to sit in a row to eat snacks and lunch. In the middle of the room, there are small tables and chairs for children to sit at and be involved in creative activities or construction play. There is a carpeted book corner. The children use the room next door as a sleeping area but mats are also put in the book area for rest periods. There is a separate bathroom. Across the hall, a large carpeted room can be used for physical movement activities. There is also a very large established and enclosed garden space containing play equipment such as a playhouse, tricycles, prams, climbing frames, swings. The surface is a mix of grass and patio slabs. All the rooms can access the garden space.</p>

Setting C

Location	City centre/ in an educational property
Management	Not for profit, Local authority nursery, manager on site
Size	Registered for 70* children, 20* children 6 weeks- 2 years, 15* 2-3 years
Hours	8 am-5:30 pm/ sessional 8:30 am – 11:40 am or 12:45 pm – 3:55 pm Monday - Friday
Inspection Report	Excellent care and educational opportunities and environment provided, staff provided children with choices and respect
General Description	<p>The Birth to Three Room is a very large room divided into various sections. A space for coats and belongings runs along one wall and bookcases keep this section separate from the main play area. The main play area is carpeted and contains a home corner, an exploratory/sensory corner, a book corner and several tables holding activities such as construction, blocks, jigsaws. During each session, staff and children sit together on the carpet for story- telling and songs. All the furniture is child size and wooden. A striking feature of this setting is the use of items which could be found in the home; these are real items rather than toy replicas. A small kitchen area runs along one wall. The area is used for snacks and lunch with children sitting together at small tables during mealtimes. Over lunchtime, sleep mats are placed in the main play area for children to sleep/rest. Another large area opens out from the kitchen area. This area is tiled and contains things like sand trays, water trays, painting easels, play dough, and shelves for documentation. All the equipment is placed at a small child's height so that there can be easy access. There are separate areas for changing children and a toilet area for children who already toilet trained. Although the room does not open to a garden there is access to a large garden space which contains climbing equipment, a trampoline, swings as well as an area for push toys.</p>

Setting D

Location	Outskirts of a city/ in a housing estate/ purpose built
Management	Not for profit/local authority/manager on site
Size	Registered for 30* children 2 months to 5 years
Hours	8:30 am- 5:00 pm / sessional 9-11 (under 3)/8:45-11:55 or 12:35-3:45 for entitled 2-3 years
Inspection Report	Highlighted the focus on CPD and leadership, staff promoted confidence and care in order to provide excellent support to meet children's needs
General Description	<p>The baby room has windows on both sides which are low enough for children to see out of. A set of French doors separate the baby and toddler rooms but children are welcome into either space. There is a book corner in one part of the room and this carpeted space is also used for physical movement such as crawling through tunnels or a small wooden climbing frame/slide. At the other end of the space is a set of tables and chairs for activities such as play dough, puzzles, gluing, modelling. In one corner of the room there is a tiled area and a sand/water tray as well as painting easels and low sinks. In the other corner there is a small kitchen area. A sleep room and toilet area is off the far corner of the room. Two staff work in this room.</p> <p>The toddler room is a rectangular space with a book/quiet area at one end and activity tables at the other end. All the furniture is wooden and child size. Three staff work in this room. Toilets and sinks are in a separate bathroom off the main room. Both babies and toddlers have access to a large garden space although staff did comment that better planning would utilise this space more effectively. The garden contains a large area for tricycles, push toys, slides and a swing. Equipment is stored in a shed and staff access the equipment at the child's request.</p>

Appendix 3: The Participants

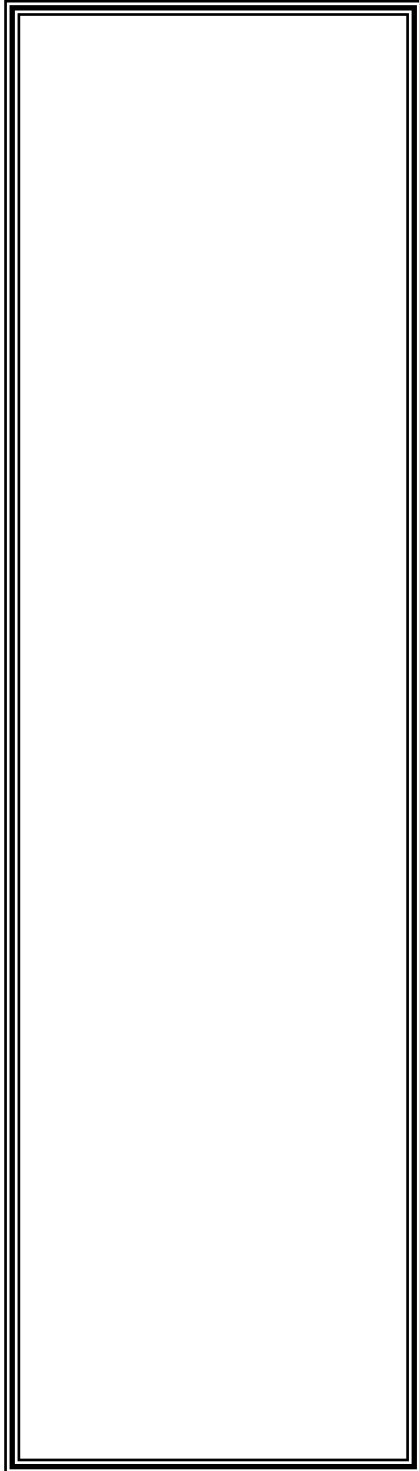
Centre	Participant	Qualification Route	Experience	Number of Observations
Centre A	Iris	HNC day release	Childminder, Nursery working with children under 3 years of age	3
	Lucy	HNC day release	Nursery working in the preschool room and the toddler room	2
Centre B	Emma	SVQ 3 and currently working on a PDA	Playgroup, Nursery working in baby room on a part time basis	3
	Katie	SVQ 3	Nursery for 3 years initially working in baby room for 2 years before working with 2-3 years	3
Centre C	Vicky	HNC	Previously worked in a private nursery before coming to this one. Worked in the preschool room prior to the under 3 room	4
	Joan	HNC	Previously worked in a private nursery before working for the local authority	3
	Mary	HNC	Worked on the supply list prior to gaining a permanent contract with this nursery	3
Centre D	Rebecca	HNC currently working on a PDA	Worked in a school prior to working in the nursery, previously worked with 3-5	3

	Hannah	SNNEB currently working on a PDA	Worked as a nanny, in two private nurseries and then this nursery	3
	Alice	HNC currently working on PDA	Worked in care prior to Early Years, worked with 3-5 before working with under 3	3

Appendix 4: Interview Domains

- 1) Training**
 - a) Initial Training
 - b) CPD
- 2) Experience of Working with Children**
- 3) The Nursery Environment**
 - a) Resources
 - b) Outside/Inside Environments
 - c) Private and Public Sector Context
- 4) Mothering**
 - a) Being a mother
 - b) Becoming a mother
 - c) Practice as Mothering
- 5) Managing Behaviour**
 - a) Rules
 - b) Organisational Practice
 - c) Specific Episodes
- 6) Potential Learning Opportunities**
 - a) Activities
 - b) Everyday events
 - c) Care Tasks
- 7) Working with Children**
 - a) Role in Activities
 - b) Use of Touch/Nonverbal Communication
 - c) Particular Strategies
- 8) Transitions**
 - a) Settling In
 - b) To the next room
- 9) Observations/Documentation**
- 10) Relationships with Child**
 - a) Attachment
 - b) Sessional/Full time children
- 11) Relationships with colleagues**
 - a) Working with supply staff
 - b) Working with Work Experience Students
- 12) Relationships with Parents**
 - a) Parents Leaving Children
 - b) First Milestones

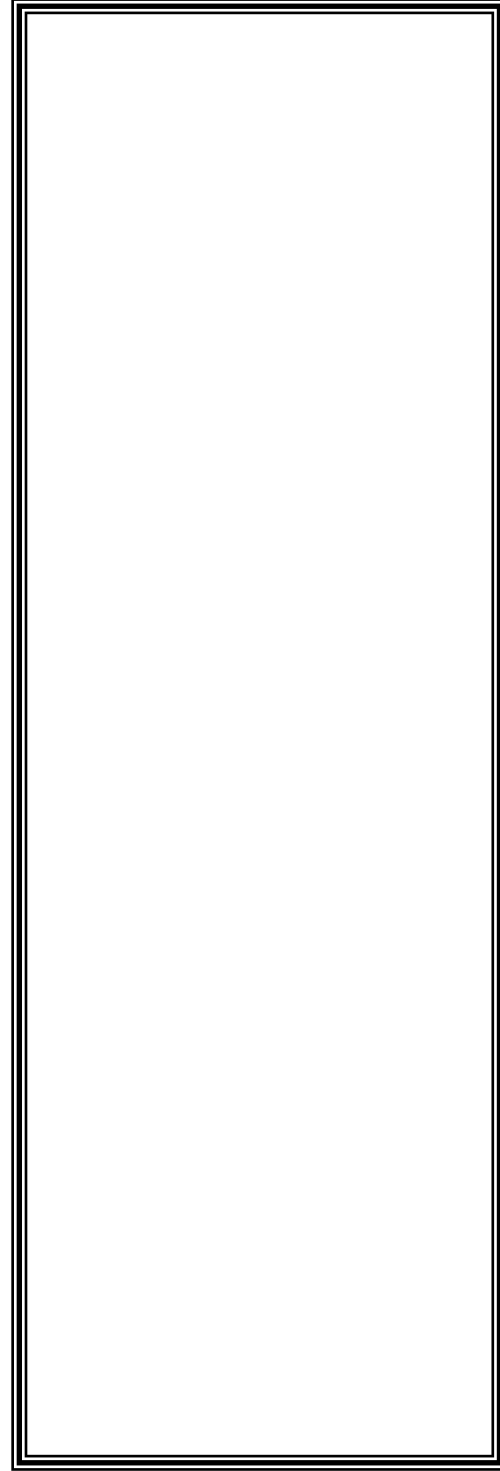
Appendix 5: Information Leaflet and Consent Form



Dorothy Barcroft
Institute of Education
University of Stirling

Stirling

FK9 4LA



Email:

d.a.barcroft@stir.ac.uk

Working with Birth to Three: Personal Theories of Scottish Childcare Practitioners

What is this study about?

A childcare practitioner working with children aged birth to three years is well placed to support children's learning. In a busy nursery however childcare practitioners are called upon to make constant decisions and engage with numerous individuals. Practice is shaped by what has been learnt on training programmes and by personal understandings of how children learn, how care should be given and how children are. It is the personal theories of practitioners and the way they impact on practice which are the focus of this research study.

Who will be involved in the study?

I am the only researcher working on the study. The work is being supervised by Dr. Christine Stephen and Dr. John I'Anson of the University of Stirling. During the study I am planning to observe and interview 16 childcare practitioners who work with children aged birth to three years in private day nurseries.

What will happen during the study?

I will visit you on several different occasions to observe practice and to have informal discussions with you about your work. I will take notes during the observations and will write notes after each visit. Each time I visit you I will ask you if you are still happy to participate in the study. A disposable camera will be given to you after the third visit so that you can take pictures which you feel represents your work. Funds will be provided so that the pictures can be developed. All pictures remain your property. We will then have the opportunity to talk about the pictures and discuss your own ideas about working with children and supporting their learning. This discussion will be recorded on a digital voice recorder.

How will the information be stored?

Your name and the nursery's name will not be used in any of the records. All notes and recordings will be stored in files that only I can access. I will save the recorded discussion on a computer so that I can look at the information.

What will happen at the end of the study?

This study is for the fulfilment of the requirements of a Doctor of Philosophy in Education. At the end of the study I will use the research process and data as part of my thesis. I also hope that this research will contribute to understandings of childcare practitioners' work and therefore will help in the support of practice and childcare. It is likely therefore I will write articles and speak at conferences about the research. It will not be possible to identify specific individuals or nurseries in reports or conferences.

What should you do if you need to know more?

I am always happy to answer any questions you might have about the research process. You can contact me by email or you can speak to me during a visit. Concerns about the project can be made to Head of the Institute of Education- Prof. Richard Edwards, Institute of Education, University of Stirling, Stirling, FK9 4LA.

Appendix 6: Categories and Themes Leading to Characteristics of Practitioners' Personal Theories

Categories	Themes	Characteristics of Practitioners' Personal Theories
<p>1.1-1) unique to the child 2) time to get to know the child 3) relationship with child 4) knowing the home situation 5) fulltime/sessional</p> <p>1.2- 1) reading the child's NVC 2) noting the child's needs 3) managing behaviour</p> <p>1.3- 1) use of touch and affection 2) physical positioning 3) respecting the child</p> <p>1.4- 1) trust 2) responsibility</p>	<p>1.1 Caring about the child as an individual</p> <p>1.2 Attending to children's non-verbal communication</p> <p>1.3 Non-verbal communication to indicate solidarity</p> <p>1.4 Responsible and respectful relationships with parents</p>	<p>1) Practice as an 'Ethic of Care'</p>
<p>2.1- 1) replication of mother's practices 2) compensating for parental care 3) professional practice as a second mother</p> <p>2.2- 1) structuring the nursery environment 2) compensating for the home</p> <p>2.3- 1) working with mothers 2) becoming a working parent</p>	<p>2.1 Modelling practice on the mother</p> <p>2.2 The nursery as a home</p> <p>2.3 Mother/practitioner role tensions</p>	<p>2) Practice as 'Substitute Mothering'</p>
<p>3.1-1) children working with others 2) children's individual progress 3) children's circumstances</p> <p>3.2- 1) developmental areas 2) linear development</p>	<p>3.1 Socio-cultural approach</p> <p>3.2 'Age and Stage' approach</p> <p>3.3 Play as learning</p> <p>3.4 Promoting children's independence</p>	<p>3) Practice as Pedagogy</p>

<p>3.3- 1) structured activities 2) free play 3) outside 4) out with the nursery</p>		
<p>4.1- 1) speech 2) varying development 4.2- 1) government policy 2) local authority policy 3) organisational policy and procedures 4.3- 1) by practitioner 2) by setting 3) by others</p>	<p>4.1 Features of Child Development 4.2 Organisational and government policy 4.3 Acknowledging the differences caring for children aged birth to three years</p>	<p>4) Practice as Distinctive for children aged birth to three years</p>
<p>5.1- 1) HNC 2) SVQ 3) PDA 5.2- 1) direct benefits of CPD 2) indirect benefits of CPD 5.3-1) direct experience 2) observations and discussions with colleagues 5.4-1) being a mother 2) having been mothered 3) observations of colleagues who are mothers</p>	<p>5.1 Experience of formal training 5.2 Experience of CPD 5.3 Experience of working with Birth to Three 5.4 Experience of mothering</p>	<p>5) Practice as Rooted in Experience</p>
<p>6.1- 1) developing safety and security 2) continuity and routine 6.2- 1) caring 2) calm 3) interest 6.3- 1) loss to practitioner 2) loss to child 3) coping strategies</p>	<p>6.1 Emotion as an aspect of practice 6.2 Personal Qualities identified as essential to practice 6.3 Practitioners' dealing with emotion</p>	<p>6) Practice as Personal and Emotional Activity</p>

