



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

**Playing the Assessment Game in Early Childhood  
Education:  
Mediating professional *habitus* with the  
conditions of the field**

**Jo Basford**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Education.

March 2016

The University of Sheffield  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
School of Education

# Abstract

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This thesis is concerned with assessment practice in the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE), and provides an insight into the experiences of five Early Childhood Studies graduates who work in the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector who have achieved either Early Years Professional (EYP) or Early Years Teacher Status.

The aim of the research was to examine how the participants were endeavouring to mediate their professional *habitus* with the culture and practice of their workplace and the wider policy context in relation to assessment. The methodological framework that underpins this study is located within a critical social constructionist stance. Bourdieu's conceptual framework of 'thinking tools', concerned with *habitus*, capital, field and practice, has been utilised in this thesis to examine the relationships that exist between practitioners and other agents in the field of ECE, considering notions of power, class and status and the implications for assessment practice.

The study adopted a collaborative and narrative methodology. The main method employed was the formulation of a focus group, which was supplemented by an on-line discussion site and a personal life history narrative written by the participants. MacNaughton's (2003) model of critical reflection was used as a basis for analysis of literature relevant to the field, assessment policy texts and the empirical findings from the study. This allowed the data to be read from a technical, practical and critical perspective.

The findings from this study reveal how professionals find themselves playing an 'assessment game', resulting at times in distorted assessment practices due to the performative culture that dominates assessment policy. The participants had limited

opportunities to utilise the capital they had gained through their academic studies to fulfil their roles as change agents and transform assessment practices.

Consequently, this study offers an alternative view of assessment that is concerned with a set of commitments, or conditions of the field, that effectively require alternative rules to the game. This set of commitments takes account of relations and relationships within the field in which they are located, therefore viewing assessment as relational. Assessment from this perspective becomes a holistic, equitable and democratic practice, where decisions regarding what is documented and how it is interpreted is something that is negotiated locally, across both home and educational boundaries.

# Acknowledgements

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To my husband Simon, my daughter Rachel and my parents – thank you for the continuous support and encouragement you have given me as I have embarked on this journey.

I look forward to rekindling our family time together.

To my MMU and Sheffield ‘critical friends’:

Thank you for finding the space to listen, guide, reflect and share.

To Professor Liz Wood - my supervisor, mentor and inspiration.

Thank you for your wisdom and your conviction in my ability.

*This thesis is dedicated to the research participants who have made a professional commitment to working with young children and their families.*

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### Abbreviations

<b>AFL</b>	Assessment for Learning
<b>CSE</b>	Compulsory School Education
<b>DS</b>	Discussion Site
<b>ECE</b>	Early Childhood Education
<b>ECEC</b>	Early Childhood Education and Care
<b>EPPE</b>	Effective Pre-school Provision Evaluation Project
<b>EY</b>	Early Years
<b>EYFS</b>	Early Years Foundation Stage
<b>EYFSP</b>	Early Years Foundation Stage Profile
<b>EYP</b>	Early Years Professional
<b>FG</b>	Focus Group
<b>PDR</b>	Plan-Do-Review
<b>PVI</b>	Private, Voluntary and Independent
<b>QTS</b>	Qualified Teacher Status



# Chapter 1

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## Introduction

### 1.0. Introduction

This thesis is concerned with assessment practice in the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE). The research provides an insight into the lived experience of five Early Childhood Studies graduates who work in the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector. All of the participants had achieved either Early Years Professional (EYP) or Early Years Teacher Status, and had been employed specifically to fulfil the role of improving the overall quality of provision within their setting. The aim of the research was to examine how the participants were endeavouring to mediate their professional *habitus* with the culture and practice of their workplace and the wider policy context in relation to assessment. The use of the terms 'habitus' within the context of this research relates to the professional attributes and dispositions that are associated with the field of ECE in which the participants worked. They are aligned to Bourdieu's conceptual framework associated with *habitus*, capital, field and practice. This is articulated in more detail in the following chapter.

### 1.1.Context and rationale for the study

Many practitioners working in the PVI sector have traditionally been members of a modest and localised profession. As a result of policy changes, they are however increasingly required to take on a more assertive leadership role (Brooker, 2007). The influential Effective Pre-school Provision Evaluation Project (Sylva et al., 2004b) was the starting point for the introduction of policy drivers that were intended to improve both standards and outcomes under the guise of improving quality within this sector of the ECE field. Part of this remit included the aspiration to raise the professional status of the ECE workforce through the creation of Early Years Professional (DfES, 2006b) and, more recently, Early Years Teacher Status (DfE, 2013a).

Whilst there is clear evidence that the sector is "becoming more professional" (Nutbrown, 2012, p.5), that it has opened up more opportunities for professional learning (Brooker et

al., 2010), and that it has increased confidence and interest in professional development (Hadfield et al., 2012) through increased capital in terms of qualifications, those working in the PVI sector still find themselves working within “structural injustices” (Osgood, 2009, p.736). These injustices are related to conditions of employment, pay and status that are substantially less favourable than those of their counterparts in the maintained sector (Simpson, 2011; Cooke and Lawton, 2008). Therefore, as Moss and Urban (2010) note, this is a group who can find themselves at the bottom of the “epistemological hierarchy” when research is conducted. Yet, ironically, this is also a group who as a result of increased political attention to the importance of the formative years of a child’s life, have found themselves in an elevated but still submissive position (Osgood 2009; McGillivray, 2008). Consequently, they find themselves in a position where they are required to implement policies, of which their contribution to the formation has been little more than tokenistic, whilst being unable to fully utilise the capital they have gained to inform interpretation of policy. Urban (2012a) articulates this in the following way:

***What counts, the researchable topics (e.g. self-regulation and learning skills, quality assessment, curriculum), is clearly defined by those who count (internationally renowned scientists), rarely by those who are counted. (Urban, 2012a, p.502)***

Thus, part of the rationale for the choice of participants in this research was to explore ways of hearing the stories (Osgood, 2012) of players in the field who possess increased educational capital but appear to have limited power in utilising this capital in order to influence assessment policy and practice.

The policy landscape in the field of ECE adds another layer of complexity that was particularly pertinent to this study. It is the relationship between the PVI sector and the maintained sector - or what Moss (2013) would define as ‘early childhood education’ and ‘compulsory school education’ (ECE and CSE). This relationship has become increasingly political, due in the main to the persistent and dominant ‘readiness’ discourse and concerns that have grown about children entering the maintained (CSE) sector insufficiently prepared and ready to learn (Moss, 2013). A clear argument has emerged suggesting that there is a distinct correlation between readiness to learn when starting school and the quality of the

provision a child experiences whilst attending an ECE setting. Inspection evidence, in particular, highlights that quality of education is often weakest in areas of highest deprivation (OFSTED, 2014a), which as Adamson and Brennan (2014) note, is a result of inadequately subsidised private providers. What is also significant here is that the curriculum requirements for the non-maintained sector are mandatory – even though it is a non-compulsory phase of education. Grieshaber (2000, p.272) notes that by making a document mandatory for practitioners of children in the years before compulsory schooling, the government puts them in a similar position of obligation to those in the compulsory years but without the same level of resources and status to help them achieve this. These issues, in particular, are key features of the dominant discourse that underpins assessment policy and will form the basis for analysis in Chapter 5.

### **1.3. Organisation of the thesis**

This thesis follows a traditional structure, and when read in the order in which it is presented is intended to serve two purposes. The first purpose is to tell the story of the research journey that reveals the lived experience of the participants who were mediating policy and practice with their professional *habitus*. The second purpose is to give the reader a clear sense of how my chosen theoretical and conceptual frameworks provide the lens that was used to collect and analyse the data, as well as make a contribution to the field in which this research is situated.

Following on from this introduction, the thesis is structured in the following order:

#### **Chapter 2 – Establishing a Theoretical Framework.**

This chapter provides an insight into my own professional life history that was used as a method to help establish the research questions for the study as well as the theoretical and conceptual framework that underpins this thesis. I provide an explanation of how Bourdieu's conceptual tools of field, capital, *habitus* and practice, and Glenda MacNaughton's (2003) three curriculum 'positions', can be used as test points for analysis and discussion.

### **Chapter 3 – Literature Review**

In this chapter there is a review of the research and literature pertinent to the field of study. As this research was concerned with both policy and practice, it provides an examination of assessment practice and professional *habitus* from both an international and English perspective.

### **Chapter 4 – Methodology**

This chapter explains the methods and methodology employed in the research and outlines the research procedure.

### **Chapter 5 – Policy Analysis**

This chapter provides an analysis of the current policies related to assessment which provided the context for the research participants during the time of the study.

### **Chapter 6 – Findings**

In this chapter the key findings of the research are outlined in relation to the research questions.

### **Chapter 7 – Discussion Analysis**

Utilising the established conceptual frameworks identified in Chapter 2, the findings are discussed and analysed from three different positions.

### **Chapter 8 – Conclusion**

In the final chapter I provide a concluding commentary that offers a particular view of assessment practice that I suggest could form the basis for an alternative position. This position could be adopted in an attempt to address the issues that were highlighted in this research.

# Chapter 2

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## Establishing a theoretical framework

### 2.0. Searching for a theoretical lens

Embarking on a doctoral journey has allowed me to gain a greater understanding of the significance of theory in educational research. Ball (2010) refers to theory as having a practical role as both a “conceptual toolbox” as a means of analysis, and as a system of reflexivity (p.68). The selection of a “conceptual toolbox” is closely related to a researcher’s epistemological and ontological assumptions. Crotty (1998) defines epistemology as “how we know what we know” (p.8), and refers to Maynard’s (1994) viewpoint that: “Epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate legitimate” (p.10).

In terms of my own epistemological and ontological assumptions, I refer back to one particular unit in phase 1 of the Ed Doc programme which introduced me to the idea of life histories (Basford, 2012). The construction of a life history allows a researcher to locate the social, historical, political and economic “anchor points” (Shacklock and Thorp, 2005) that have shaped personal subjectivities. By looking back at my own life history, it allowed me to reflect on the origins of my own values and beliefs. The narrative format serves as a reflexive tool to help understand how my own epistemological assumptions evolved. The following extracts from my early career life history highlight the origins of my positioning.

### ***Becoming a Teacher:***

I had a fairly traditional education, going through the usual stages of formal schooling in England. This resulted in entering a teacher training college and graduating with a BA (Hons) Education with QTS. I specialised in the three-to-seven age phase. I learnt about Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner; I practised planning, assessing and evaluating learning and got to grips with the responsibilities associated with managing and organising a class of young children. Four years later, I had sufficiently demonstrated that I had met all the required standards to be awarded Qualified Teacher Status, and was successful in gaining employment as an NQT in an Infant School.

### ***Being a Teacher:***

In my first years of teaching, I began putting into practice the mechanics of teaching. I delivered the National Curriculum and used all the strategies expected of me ... particularly the literacy strategy and the numeracy strategy. After four years of teaching Key Stage 1 I moved into the early years age phase. With each change of government came a new curriculum framework to work with, and with that came a new set of guidelines, goals and expectations for both children and practitioners. With each change there also came the increasing regulatory gaze of OFSTED.

Underpinning my work with this age phase was the whole business of play ... how was I to provide authentic play experiences for children that were genuinely valued (by all stakeholders), yet still ensure they were equipped with the required knowledge and understanding, as well as the appropriate dispositions to learning, that would enable them to be successful in our education system?

A key 'Eureka' moment in my life was the discovery of the High/Scope approach (Hohmann, Weikart, and High/Scope Educational Research, 2002). This is a framework that provides a balance of both child and adult-initiated learning experiences, where the philosophical premise is that of active learning and the co-construction of knowledge. It seemed to be a pedagogical framework that fitted with the principles and aims of the curriculum guidelines that I was using, yet allowed space for children to have some degree

of agency in their learning (within the constraints of a goal orientated curriculum). This premise stayed with me, with the sense that learning is about balance. Sometimes knowledge needs to be imparted by a more knowledgeable other, and at other times it needs to be a joint endeavour where the child is treated as a co-constructer and agent of their own learning. But in order for this to happen the educator needs to know his/her learner (whatever age they may be) ... you need to know what makes them 'tick', and you need to value what they bring to the learning context. It was not until later in my career that I found that this is referred to as "funds of knowledge" (Hedges, 2012).

This excerpt from my own life history serves as an illustration of the emerging personal tensions I encountered early in my career. I was becoming mindful that through my training I had become 'enculturated' to adopt a pedagogy that required conformity related to the mechanics of teaching. The discovery of the High/Scope approach, however, served as a pedagogical tool that helped me understand how my own values fitted more with a socio-cultural approach that was concerned with "relational pedagogy", as Papatheodorou and Moyles (2009) term it. Yet it was apparent that I was struggling with the tensions of attempting to mediate intensifying policy drivers with my own values and beliefs.

This form of reflection enabled me to understand how my own position is also influenced by a more subjective epistemological and ontological stance, in that meaning is not only socially and culturally created, but can sometimes be imposed upon individuals and groups who have been marginalised by more dominant groups. Crotty (1989) states that a subjective view of knowledge as meaning does not come out of an "interplay between subject and object but [rather] is imposed on the object by the subject. Here the object as such makes no contribution to the generation of meaning" (p.9). Instead, meaning (or knowledge) is generated through the development of a conscious understanding and interrogation of assumptions, which, in turn, can lead to some form of action that fits with the dominant ideas.

Burr (2004) defines knowledge from a social constructionist perspective as something that "goes together" with social action (p.5) and argues that constructions of the world from this

perspective are bound up with power relations and therefore have implications for what is permissible for different people to do. Foley (2002, p.473) develops this idea further by suggesting that all cultural groups produce an intersubjective reality which is both “inherited” and continuously constructed and reconstructed as it is lived. However, such shared realities are objectified through such structuring practices as policy and regulation.

Social constructionism ideas within an Early Years context are built in part from the “new sociology of childhood” (Prout and James, 1990 cited in MacNaughton, 2003). Such ideas are based on the premise that there are multiple ‘truths’ regarding the child, and therefore there can be no universal or singular certainties. Within the context of this research, I argue that practitioners who have studied childhood through a social constructionist lens are mindful that there is no one ‘truth’ about childhood, and, consequently, no one universal way of working with them. Yet their positioning within the professional field of ECE limits the extent to which they are able to exercise this understanding within their own practice, and instead they find themselves adopting more restrictive practices that are both oppressive and limiting.

The next excerpt from my life history illustrates the emergence of this more critical epistemological and ontological standpoint, influenced by my work with students and practitioners working particularly in the PVI sector:



### *Moving On ....*

After eight years of teaching three to seven year old children and completing my Masters degree in Early Years Education, I moved into Higher Education. At this point I had the privilege and time to take a step back from practice and was able to truly reflect on the issues, tensions and dilemmas that, in my experience, were inherent for practitioners who work with young children. I also became far more aware of the significance of political ideology and its impact on practice. Although I worked to a different set of standards, I was no longer expected to work directly with the ECE frameworks imposed on me as an Early Years teacher – but my students were. A key element of the pedagogical approach at the university where I am employed is the encouragement of students to become critical and reflective practitioners. Whilst I would never dismiss the value of this process – for some students the sense of disruption and the rhetoric/reality dilemma they face once in a classroom can challenge their thinking and the foundations of learning – I believe they have to find ways of balancing their academically informed values and beliefs with the reality of the standards and expectations of a classroom.

It is at this point that I became drawn to the work of Paulo Freire. In the introduction to Freire's seminal text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Shaull (1996) notes how our "technological society is rapidly making objects of most of us and subtly programming us into conformity to the logic of its system. To the degree that this happens, we are also becoming submerged in the new 'culture of silence' " (p15S). Herein lies the dilemma, and the basis of my own positionality: To what extent do practitioners always have to conform to the dominant ideals of practice and pedagogy? Are there sometimes ways to be a little more subversive in order to 'play the game' whilst still holding onto values and beliefs? Yet on the other hand, by embarking on activities in a subversive manner, how can the voice of practitioners ever be anything other than silenced?

Further reflection on working with practitioners in the PVI sector provided an insight into the challenges that were particularly pertinent for those working in this field of the Early Years (EY) sector. This reflection was a significant moment in understanding that there is an internal as well as external hierarchy of power within the EY field.

***Working with practitioners in the PVI sector ....***

**A number of the students I was fortunate enough to work with were those who had taken advantage of the New Labour policy initiative to have a graduate leader in every early years setting by 2015. The majority of these students were working in the PVI sector and had enrolled on the Local Authority (LA) subsidised Foundation Degree in Early Years Practice, in order to ultimately enable them to be eligible to gain *Early Years Professional Status*. During their taught sessions, they talked about their poor professional status, pay and working conditions in relation to their contemporaries in the state sector. They shared personal narratives of how consultants from the LA came into their settings to advise on good practice, some of whom had unrealistic expectations based on their limited knowledge and experience of working in the PVI sector. This good practice was framed as a measure of quality by the regulatory body, OFSTED. Consequently, these practitioners were conscious that in order to gain any form of acceptance within their field they needed to adopt the practices that were advocated by the LA consultants and other external agencies. Yet alongside this, there always seemed to be a sense of hope that things would be somehow better once they achieved their EYP status, as they would have achieved a status that was equal to their teacher contemporaries, and maybe their own practice would be more readily recognised.**

**These conversations made me reflect upon my own personal subjectivities related to this particular sector of the Early Years workforce. As a practicing teacher some years previously, I was appointed as an 'area co-ordinator' with an explicit remit to visit local PVI settings to guide and advise on good practice. I realised I was guilty of making assumptions that the lack of teacher status surely meant that these practitioners were less knowledgeable and capable than myself. Some years later I moved onto a strategic**

management post in a neighbouring LA (ironically, in the LA that many of my students worked in!), and those assumptions were still implicit in the discourses inherent within my team.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu is very relevant here, and his idea that cultural and social inequalities are reproduced through education. What I had illustrated was my own *habitus* towards the PVI sector. I was adopting a point of view that was representative of my own social space – a space that was superior in symbolic capital at least. As a result, my own dispositions towards this sector were reproduced in the *habitus* of my work with the sector. As a teacher, I saw myself as all knowing – and this was confirmed through my growth in cultural capital (I was now in possession of a Masters degree), and economic capital (I was a strategic manager in a LA, with a salary and status that reflected that position). What was also significant, though, was the fact that these practitioners seemed to be willing to sacrifice their own *habitus* (synonymous with their childcare heritage) in order to gain closer proximity to the social space that graduate status attracted. In order to do this they were developing their own strategies to ‘play the game’, with varying degrees of success.

## 2.1. The ‘Golden Thread’

*.... theory is both empowering and constraining. Disciplining oneself towards consistent application of a selected theory situates ones work in a particularly scholarly tradition. Theory thus provides the means for the construction of scholarly argument and the formation of the scholar simultaneously. (Gulson and Parkes, 2010, p.80)*

The process of reflecting on life history narratives was certainly empowering, and enabled me to identify the key concepts and theories that are pertinent to this research. Carr (2000) argues that concepts and theories are not derived from observation, but are *a priori* categories that determine what is to count as a relevant observation when conducting research. He states that “[i]n empirical research there is no telling it as it is. There is only telling it from a theoretically partisan viewpoint” (Carr, 2000, p.441). I concur with this statement, and through the life story excerpts my own partisan viewpoints are brought to the forefront.

I still needed a conceptual tool box which could be utilised throughout the thesis in order to provide the golden thread that captured my epistemological and ontological position and served as a basis for the establishment of the research questions. This required discipline as well as an acceptance of the need to be selective of ideas from key thinkers in the field who have some affinity with my own positioning, and whose ideas would support the analysis of primary and secondary data.

I was particularly drawn to a model of critical reflection used by Glenda MacNaughton (2003), where she identifies three positions, or interests, on a chosen topic in the field of ECE that can be used as a basis for reflection and investigation. This approach is built on the work of Jürgen Habermas, who used critical theory to examine social consciousness (MacNaughton, 2003). Using this framework through a social constructionist lens allows for a critical exploration of assessment practices from a range of positions, with the hope that it allows for an exploration of the issues the participants face from a range of perspectives. MacNaughton refers to these as a “test-point” for reflection. This seemed to be very important, as it allowed me to consider the subject matter from a range of positions. I used this model to create my own conceptual framework to help identify the research questions in the first instance (see Fig. 1).

**Fig. 1 A conceptual framework (adapted from MacNaughton, 2003)**

<b>Interest/ Position</b>	<b>Focus: Concerned with ....</b>	<b>Relationship to research focus</b>	<b>Key thinkers and authors</b>
Technical 'Conforming'	Finding out how things happen and how we can control what happens. Often leads to knowledge that conforms to existing understanding and practices.	What are the dominant policy discourses that are informing assessment practice? What is the impact on professional <i>habitus</i> ?	Bourdieu – <i>habitus</i> , field and capital.  Freire – 'banking' concept of education
Practical 'Reforming'	Finding out what things mean to people and understanding rather than controlling them. Often leads to knowledge that is reformed in the process of gaining new insights.	What are practitioners' own pedagogical beliefs in relation to assessment? What spaces are available to rethink their practices within the context of their own setting?	Moss and Dahlberg - Democratic and Ethical Practice
Critical/ Emancipatory 'Transforming'	Finding out if what we know is in some way distorted or biased, in order to ensure our knowledge is free from bias. Often leads to knowledge that is transformed in the process of critical questioning about whose interests are served by the knowledge we have. That allows us to emancipate ourselves and others.	How can practitioners make the most of the reflective spaces made available to transform their practice, whilst still satisfying the 'regulatory' gaze?	Freire – Critical Pedagogy; <i>praxis</i>  Bourdieu – <i>habitus</i> , field and capital.  Moss and Dahlberg - Democratic and Ethical Practice

In the next two sub-sections I have provided some further insight into how the ideas of the key theorists fit with my conceptual framework. What follows is my interpretation of the central elements of their thinking which I feel relate specifically to the focus of this research.

### **2.1.1. Pierre Bourdieu**

Bourdieu's work has been concerned with notions of power, class and status through his development of a broad theory that explains the reproduction of cultural and social inequalities through education, and the legitimation of these inequalities through misrecognition (Rawolle and Lingard, 2013, p.120). His ideas are complex to interpret, firstly because they rely on others' interpretation of his work from French to English, but also because he seemed to be reticent to offer specific definitions of his key ideas. Bourdieu

developed a cumulative framework of thinking tools concerned with *habitus*, capital, field and practice. They allow for the examination of specific kinds of relationships within the field that can often be overlooked. Numerous authors (Rawolle and Lingard, 2013; Grenfell, 2012; Reay, 2008; Swartz, 1997) have utilised these thinking tools, and they provide particularly useful frameworks for conceptualising his ideas. In the case of this thesis, it is the relationships *within* the social field of early years that are of particular interest to me, as this seems to be an area that has produced limited empirical data. In his text *Distinction*, Bourdieu provides a formula that depicts the essence of how these thinking tools need to be viewed in order to understand their inter-relationship: “[habitus] (capital)] + field = practice.” (Bourdieu, 1986, p101).

By utilising this framework it enabled me to examine the relationships that exist between practitioners and other agents in the field of ECE and the extent to which notions of power, class and status can reproduce certain inequalities and misrecognise differences in individual ability. This can have an overall effect on producing particular types of assessment practices.

*Habitus* can be defined as a collection of dispositions that allow individuals, or groups of agents, to engage with and make meaningful contributions to practice (Rawolle and Lingard, 2013, p.123). Such dispositions are situated in individual and collective histories which are representative of the group’s social and economic status. Through the act of socialisation, dispositions become internalised and they create broad parameters and boundaries of what is possible or unlikely for a particular group in a stratified social world. Therefore, *habitus* sets structural limits to what is possible for a particular social group and it generates perceptions, aspirations, and practices that correspond to the structuring properties of earlier socialisation (Swartz, 1997, p.103). Bourdieu (1998a) referred to *habitus*, as having a “feel for the game”:

*Having the feel for the game is having the game under the skin; it is to master in a practical way the future of the game; it is to have a sense of the history of the game ... the good player is the one who anticipates, who is ahead of the game ... she has immanent tendencies of the game in her body, in an incorporated state: she embodies the game. (Bourdieu, 1998a, pp.80-81)*

When there is a change in objective conditions that do not take account of individual or group *habitus* there becomes a mismatch for those who do not have the “feel for the game” – effectively there are winners and losers. In order to be a winner, Bourdieu refers to the notion of *illusio*, which in simple terms is about having the necessary mindset that realises playing the game is worth the effort. It involves a form of “ontological complicity” between the mental and objective structures of social space. (Bourdieu, 1998a, p.77).

This is an interesting viewpoint when notions of ‘capital’ are added to this argument. Bourdieu used an extended form of capital that looked beyond the economic sphere. He made a distinction between ‘economic capital’ and other forms of capital (such as cultural, linguistic, scientific and literary) which he referred to as ‘symbolic capital’. This form of capital can be understood as types of assets that bring social and cultural advantage or disadvantage (Moore 2012, p.101). The participants in this study had all made deliberate attempts to gain additional ‘cultural capital’ by studying for a degree and gaining EYP or EY Teacher status. This later experience arguably gave the participants the opportunity to transform their *habitus* (Nash, 1999) and to take up different positions and roles (Green, 2013) that had been regulated by their transformed *habitus*. However, as I argue in subsequent chapters, this is not a straightforward endeavour, due to the power relations that exist in the field.

Bourdieu saw social spaces as spaces of competition:

*A field is a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. All the individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies. (Bourdieu, 1998b, pp.40–41)*

The participants within my research were situated within the social space, or field, of Early Years settings. Within this space, they belong to a group of players located in the PVI sector who traditionally possess limited economic and symbolic capital because of their

professional status and working conditions. Therefore, their *habitus* structures both their position in the field and their logic of practice. As a consequence, the dominant discourses within the field become reproduced.

The broader context of the political dimension of the field is significant, as the discourses inscribed in ECE policy documents, such as the EYFS framework (DfE, 2014a), have a direct impact on their assessment practices. They are forced, or at least required, to adopt a range of practices that conform to the dominant beliefs embodied in policy, which consequently preserve the state of play. Assessment is therefore one area of struggle within the wider field of ECE, and as such, is an area of ethical and political concern that is worthy of further examination.

### **2.1.2. Critical Pedagogy and democratic, ethical practice**

Paulo Freire was seen as the originator of the theoretical model of critical pedagogy. The initial ideas that constituted the core of his thinking were freedom, democracy and critical participation (Torres and Gadotti, 2009) in order for teachers to challenge the dominant socio-political and economic structures that prevent the creation of a more just society. Apple (1999) urges that in the political era of neo-liberalism it is important to remind ourselves of Freire's ethical and political concerns, which he felt should be apparent when critiquing social and ideological policy. Freire was particularly concerned with the transformation and emancipation of the lived experiences of those who are oppressed (Freire, 1996). He spoke of the need for educators to 'dare', to have a disposition to fight for justice, and to be "lucid in defence of the need to create conditions conducive to pedagogy in schools" (Freire, 1998, p4).

Within the context of ECE, the socio-political structures such as race, class, gender and ability can marginalise and oppress some children and their families. These structures also offer a particular regime of truth about early childhood education and care which is informed by developmental psychology and adopts a "positivistic and empirical-analytic paradigm" (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). I argue that practitioners in the PVI sector may also



be marginalised and oppressed by the socio-political structures - namely their status in the field, which, in turn, restricts them in challenging such regimes of truth.

However, Freire offered hope for these groups in so much as they had the capacity to be agents of social and cultural transformation (Apple, 1999, pp.18-19). Teachers who possess knowledge of theory and pedagogy can utilise this capacity to reform structures and institutions in the form of human action. The way to do this is through *praxis*:

*...human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it. Human activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action. It cannot ...be reduced to either verbalism or activism. (Freire, 1996, pp.106)*

Through *praxis*, practitioners can challenge dominant discourses and make space for other discourses to be heard (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). In this way, it opens up possibilities for ECE institutions to be places “where the Other is not made into the Same, but which open up instead for diversity, difference and otherness, for new possibilities and potentialities.” (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, pp.1-2).

So now I return to Bourdieu’s metaphor of the structured social space as the Early Years field and offer a concluding commentary. Could it be, that *praxis* may be a vehicle for practitioners in the PVI sector to challenge some of the dominant discourses associated with assessment? To what extent can they bring their theoretical knowledge and professional *habitus* to the assessment game in order to offer other more ethical and subjective opportunities for children to be constructed in different ways that are representative of their social and cultural *habitus*?

## 2.2. Identifying the research questions

*The choice of research stance is never just the reflection of an intellectual preference; it embodies an educational commitment as well. (Carr, 2000, p.444)*

Engaging in personal critical reflection of my own life history was an important process as it allowed me to bring to the forefront the roots of my epistemological and ontological beliefs. What also became hugely significant was my desire to provide a forum for a particular group of practitioners to have their stories heard (Osgood, 2012). I realised that my own professional *habitus* at the start of my career had been oppressive towards this group of practitioners. It was not until I worked with them in a different context that I realised this was the case, and perhaps this thesis is in some way a personal opportunity to provide some recompense and demonstrate my own commitment to equality in the sector. At the time of writing this thesis, policy initiatives in relation to assessment have shifted further towards technical and rational practice, providing an opportunity for a group of practitioners, who are usually seen at the “bottom of the epistemological hierarchy” (Moss and Urban, 2010), to share their own lived experiences of mediating their professional *habitus* with their workplace and wider political discourses.

The research questions for this thesis therefore are:

- What are practitioners’ own *habitus* that shape their theories, beliefs and understanding of the discourses of assessment?
- How do practitioners describe assessment practice in their workplace settings?
- How are practitioners mediating their professional *habitus* with the culture and assessment practices of their workplace setting and the wider policy context?

The following two chapters consist firstly of a literature review, which identifies key themes pertinent to the thesis and secondly, an analysis of the methodology used in order to explore the theoretical and conceptual notions that underpin this study.

# Chapter 3

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## Literature review

### 3.0. Introduction

This thesis is concerned with two interrelated themes in the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE). The first theme relates to research and debate regarding professional *habitus* within the sociological and political field of ECE, whilst the second focuses around the ECE curriculum and associated assessment practice. In order to provide a critical framework for evaluation and discussion of these themes, I have utilised MacNaughton's (2003, p. 4) three positions - conforming, reforming, and transforming - as test-points to help identify the theories, concepts and models that have been applied to the field of research, policy and practice, aiding explanation and justification of the pedagogical approaches that have been adopted in relation to assessment. In order to set the scene, reference is made to the policy context, an area which will be more closely examined in Chapter 5.

Research carried out in the field of ECE has played a key role in the development of curriculum reformation, requiring a different lens to be applied to how learning and development is both understood and supported. A significant issue that has emerged from my literature review and policy analysis is that research in the ECE field has acknowledged the desire to adopt an approach that sits more closely with a socio-cultural theoretical position in relation to curriculum and its associated assessment practices (Edwards, 2007) rather than those related to a child-centred pedagogy (Burman, 2008). Practice, when adopting a socio-cultural perspective, is more closely aligned with a "relational pedagogy" (Papatheodorou and Moyles, 2009) whereby the potential for integrating relationship-based approaches into the ECE curriculum and pedagogy is recognised (Degotardi and Pearson, 2014). This sits alongside the worldwide desire to expand early years' scholarship, professionalise the sector and reposition the field to encourage working across professional boundaries and disciplines (Dalli, 2008). MacNaughton (2003) refers to this as a reforming position.

The adoption of a transforming position has added a further disruptive element to the widely-held assumptions related to child development and practice (Ryan and Grieshaber, 2005). However, Ryan (2008) notes that whilst numerous studies in the field of ECE have utilised a postmodern perspective, there is limited research that actually describes how such a stance can be practised in the classroom. There appear to be three barriers that make it problematic for practitioners, curriculum reformers and researchers to adopt such positions:

- (1) The dominance of conforming policy discourses associated with a developmental/readiness agenda and neo-liberalism, and the resulting implications of accountability, universalism and standardisation. These discourses impact on how the curriculum and its associated assessment practices are mandated, interpreted and applied in practice both locally and globally.
- (2) The significance of practitioner *habitus*, capacity and capability to understand, reflect upon and apply socio-cultural theory in order to reform practice. The dominant constructivist – developmental theoretical paradigms are still evident in both teacher education and practice (Edwards, 2007; Ryan and Grieshaber, 2005) which tend to result in a technicised “outcomes pedagogy” (Moss, 2006a).
- (3) Confusing and interchangeable terminology that is evident in both research and policy texts related to assessment and documentation and learning and development, as well as competing discourses concerned with professionalism in the sector.

I do not intend to address these three issues in turn, as it would be too simplistic to separate them into discrete areas of examination. Instead, I aim to demonstrate how these issues are apparent in research in order to set the scene for the analysis of the primary and secondary data that was collected for this research. The first part of this literature review provides an overview of the theoretical and conceptual ideas that have informed my interpretation in relation to professional *habitus*, assessment and documentation. The second section of this chapter specifically examines research that highlights the key issues for assessment practice within the English curriculum context, with a particular emphasis on the PVI sector.

### 3.1. Professional *habitus*

In educational research, the notion of professional *habitus* is commonly used to explain the system of dispositions which are produced and reproduced within a professional community (Urban, 2008). Bourdieu's belief regarding *habitus* lays in understanding the significance of the inter-relationship between *habitus*, field and practice (Grenfell, 2012). Reay (2004) refers to four related aspects of *habitus*: (i) it is embodied through the process of socialisation; (ii) it allows for individual agency, but also predisposes individuals towards certain dispositions; (iii) personal and collective histories influence it; (iv) it can be reproduced or transformed dependent on whether the conditions in the field encourage replication of it, therefore raising or lowering individual expectations.

An interesting connection that can be made between notions of *habitus* and the concept of funds of knowledge is described by Moll et al. (1992) as the culturally specific bodies of knowledge that include skills and strategies which contribute to household functioning, development and wellbeing. More recent studies, such as the one by Hedges (2012), have looked at teachers' funds of knowledge and their influence on pedagogical decision making. Hedges provided an expanded definition of teachers' funds of knowledge that was concerned with "bodies of knowledge (including information, skills and strategies) that underlie the functioning, development and well-being of teachers in curriculum decision-making and interactions with young children in educational settings" (p.13). Her findings indicated that ECE teachers may unconsciously draw upon their funds of knowledge to inform their daily decision making and their curricular and pedagogical interactions. The idea that *habitus* can be an unconscious feature that informs practice has been an aspect of Bourdieu's theory that has been questioned more recently in the field, an area of debate considered in the final part of this section.

For the ECE professional, the assumed *habitus* that embodies their work predisposes them to certain dispositions that are underpinned by competing and paradoxical (Moyles, 2001) discourses. There are historical perceptions of poorly qualified practitioners who are not sufficiently "expert" in education (Payler and Georgeson, 2013a), yet also assumptions that little professional knowledge is needed due to the play-based nature of the curriculum

(Bradbury 2012a). This sits alongside the traditional construction of the ECE practitioner as caring, maternal and gendered (Osgood, 2009; McGillivray, 2008; Colley, 2006). These constructs assume a lack of educational and social capital (Osgood, 2009) which, although arguably outdated and undervalued (Taggart, 2011), have informed recent ECE policy workforce reforms. These associated dispositions do not necessarily fit with the alternative construct of the Early Years Professional or Teacher who, through gaining educational capital in the form of a university degree, will be sufficiently equipped with capital articulated in the *Early Years Teacher Standards* (National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), 2013) to be “catalysts for change and innovation” (Children’s Workforce and Development Council (CWDC), 2010, p.17). The standards outline for example that Early Years teachers are “accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in their professional practice and conduct” (NCTL, 2013, p.1). Such a commitment to this form of professionalism foregrounds masculinist values and cultures (Osgood, 2011) and practices that value technical, rational approaches as opposed to values that are less hierarchical and more democratic (Moss, 2012). Valuing emotional intelligence as a feature of “emotional capital” (Reay, 2000) forms part of the “vocational habitus” (Colley, 2006; Colley, James, Tedder and Diment, 2003) that shapes the ECE professional.

Reay (2004) states that choice lies at the heart of *habitus*. Such choices form part of what Bourdieu referred to as strategy, or a “feel for the game” (Grenfell, 2012) and are bound by both opportunities and constraints that are determined by external circumstances – namely the state of the field. Choice is also determined by an internal framework (i.e. individual dispositions) that make “some possibilities inconceivable, others probable and a limited range acceptable” (Reay, 2004, p.435). Therefore, if adopting Bourdieu’s position to understand professional *habitus*, it is necessary to explain the resulting logic of practice as the interaction of *habitus*, cultural capital and the field. In his text *Distinction*, Bourdieu provides a formula that depicts the essence of this idea: “[*(habitus) (capital)*] + field = practice.” (1986, p. 101).

From the perspective of the EYP/EY teacher, the extent of choice, or range of strategies that are available, are determined by the conditions of the field. Numerous studies (Rose and Rogers, 2012; Moyles and Worthington, 2011; Adams et al., 2004; Keating et al., 2002;

Wood and Bennet, 2000) have highlighted how the transition from the ideal of the university classroom, where the acquisition of symbolic capital involves the encouragement of students to think deeply about their pedagogical values and beliefs, is challenged once they enter the reality of the workplace. Such studies have highlighted what Rose and Rogers (2012) refer to as a “dissonance” between practitioners’ own principles and values and the reality of the classroom context. The dissonance could be understood as part of the professional dispositions that contribute to notions of professional *habitus*. There are two noticeable tensions that form part of the dissonance. One is the tension between balancing a play-based pedagogical approach, which has been embodied through the personal histories, with the increasing pressures associated with addressing governmental directives related to accountability and school readiness. This tension is apparent not only for practitioners in the PVI sector, but also for Reception class teachers (Bradbury, 2012; Robert-Holmes, 2012) and is a factor that can affect collaborative working within the field. The other is the tension of maintaining a commitment to a relational pedagogy that is embedded in practice (Degotardi and Pearson, 2014; Degotardi, 2013; Page and Elfer, 2013; Osgood, 2010; Elfer and Dearnley, 2007).

Research indicates that despite endeavours to transform the Early Years field, and create a more equal playing field (DfES 2006b) for EYP and EY teachers, the field is still a site of struggle and contention. Possession of social capital is one noticeable factor in this struggle, as professional status is marginalised through differential in pay, terms and conditions (Simpson, 2011; Miller, 2008). The culture and context of the setting is also pivotal in shaping possibilities for transforming practice (Payler and Georgeson, 2013a). Yet the challenges for EYP/EY teachers are not isolated to the work within their settings. There have been numerous studies that highlight how perceived notions of professional competence impact on collaborative working with other professionals (Payler and Georgeson, 2013a, 2013b; Simpson, 2011). When practitioners are required to work across their professional boundaries in a collaborative manner they report instances of “occupational hierarchy” (Simpson, 2011, p. 706) between the position of the teacher and childcare practitioner who has gained EYP status. Professional boundaries are reported as barriers, and in Simpson’s research teachers were “competitive” in trying to preserve their existing social status within the occupational hierarchy (2011, p. 709). Simpson referred to one practitioner using the

analogy of a “wall of cotton wool” (p.710) to describe the strategy a teacher employed as a way of ignoring and resisting practices suggested by the EYP. This is an example of how the conditions of the field can lower the expectations for EYP/EY teachers and consequently close off opportunities to reshape pedagogical practices.

Research, both nationally and internationally, indicates a further divide between the private and non-profit sector (Penn, 2012; Simpson, 2011), and between children’s centres and the PVI sector (Payler and Georgeson, 2013a). The divide seems to be caused by two key factors – one being financial and the other philosophical. When viewed collectively, this can result in very different approaches to how ECE can be delivered between the private and non-profit sector. Financially, the for-profit settings have greater capacity to deal with profit-loss (Blackburn, 2012) in comparison to their non-profit competitors, who have limited resources to ensure sustainability when funding mechanisms change. These economic factors have a direct impact on human resourcing within settings. For example, EYP/EY teachers have reported that finding time to work collaboratively with team members is limited due to the (unpaid) demands of administrative duties that seem to take up most of the time for practitioners – particularly those who also have a management role. This is in stark contrast to leaders in the school sector who are allocated time for such duties outside the classroom (Aubrey et al., 2013).

Penn (2012) argues that, philosophically, non-profit settings tend to take a more altruistic and democratic approach to how their service is developed. Consequently, they tend to work in a more authentic manner with the service users to shape the offer around what families need, as profitability is not seen as the main reason for offering provision. It could be argued, therefore, that a “relational pedagogy” is more apparent in this sector, where the nursery context becomes a site for human relationships and professional *habitus* manifests itself through:

.... reflection, applying theory and self-knowledge to practice, being practical and creative so as to share in many aspects of children’s and young people’s activities, and team work based on dialogue, democratic practice and valuing the contribution of other people. (Moss, 2006b, p.74)



However, it should not be assumed that this is a generalised difference between the two sectors. Brooker's (2010) research, for example, concerning how parents and practitioners construct their mutual relationships, revealed that class and cultural *habitus* can be significant in influencing practitioners' professional role, and also how they construct their relationship with parents. From an assessment perspective this has implications regarding who holds the power regarding whose funds of knowledge are used to create the construction of the child as a learner.

One final consideration in this section is Bourdieu's thinking regarding *habitus* that is problematic for social scientists. It has been argued that Bourdieu overplays the unconscious impulses and aspects of *habitus*, by paying insufficient attention to the everyday reflexive "inner conversations" (Sayer, 2004 cited in Reay, 2004) that actors have when engaged in practice. Such dialogues with the self, allow for a deeper analysis of aspects of identity related to personal and professional commitments and the logic of practice that this produces. Within the field of ECE, research related to reflexivity and praxis has helped to gain an insight into the theory/practice relationship to reveal how focused reflection can determine practice as well as enable a practitioner to understand why there may be discontinuities between personal theory and practice (as outlined, for example, by Fisher and Wood, 2012; Garvis et al., 2011; Wood and Bennett, 2000) as well as to help understand the things that "get in the way" of constructing meaning (Lenz Taguchi, 2005). These are important dispositions that frame part of the professional *habitus* of the Early Years Professional and enable them to become a more "active and reflexive agent" (Simpson, 2010, p.6). This is an area worthy of further examination, and consequently my own research asks to what extent practitioners are able to utilise their professional *habitus* as a strategy to mediate policy and practice.

## 3.2. Assessment and Documentation: Compatible or competing paradigms?

### 3.2.1. Assessment from a conforming position

Assessment, in a simplistic sense, can be described as a process of three stages: the collection of evidence, which informs judgements about learning, which are then translated into outcomes of those judgements (Drummond, 2012). Curriculum and pedagogical frameworks that view assessment in this way view progression in learning from a developmental orientation based on a Piagetian epistemology (Stephen, 2010; Edwards, 2007; Wood and Bennett, 1999). The emphasis, from this perspective, is on identifying developmental norms that occur consistently at a given age. Goals are written in behavioural terms so that achievement can be observed and evaluated. The developmental discourses associated with Piaget are commonly challenged by critical theorists who are seeking to reconceptualise developmental psychology (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kummen, Thompson, 2010), a further exploration of which is included in the following section. However, it is equally important to acknowledge Piaget's legacy to the field of child development and his influence on the ECE curriculum. His idea that the learner needs to physically interact with the world (Goswami and Bryant, 2007; Fox, 2001), and that knowledge growth is a dynamic process of assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration, combined with construction and internalization of action schemas (Nutbrown 2006; Athey, 1990; Phillips, 1995), is a critical component of knowledge construction that is widely supported and consequently reflected in curriculum frameworks. Neo-Piagetian thinkers have continued to build on his legacy by acknowledging the cultural and contextual factors that provide further insight into the differences between and among individuals and groups at the same level of development in order to more fully describe the process of development (Shulman, 1995; Donaldson, 1978).

Bennett (2005) categorises this type of ECE curriculum as a "pre-primary" approach, and MacNaughton (2003, p.135) refers to this as a "conforming" curriculum model. In terms of assessment, it is expressed through the objective observations of children in order to reach a truth about what they have learnt and how they are progressing. Observation from this

position has become the key assessment tool advocated within ECE curriculum models.

MacNaughton (2003) however warns:

*The idea that we can know a child and assess his or her learning by objectively observing their behaviour assumes that we can be a disinterested observer of facts who can acquire objective knowledge of a child. This idea has its roots in positivist and empiricist understandings of knowledge. (p.136)*

It seems therefore that the adoption of a positivist approach to assessment is problematic, as the notion of an objective observer implies that little recognition is given to the social and cultural factors that influence a child's learning, the reciprocal nature of the learning relationship between the child and practitioner (Wood and Bennett, 1999), and learning complexities and learning potential in young children (Drummond, 2012; Broadhead, 2006). Indeed, the thematic reviews of the curriculum undertaken by OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006) have concluded that the adoption of such a position has placed too much emphasis on content, as well as an underlying methodology that focuses on assessment of developmental outcomes, which is unsuited to young children's learning (Bennett, 2005, p.7).

### **3.2.2. Assessment from a reforming position**

The shift, in recent years, from a predominantly developmental-constructivist discourse to a socio-cultural one has been informed by postmodern perspectives regarding the subjective nature of knowledge, and dissatisfaction with the normative approach promoted through Piagetian theory (Edwards, 2007, pp.83-84). This perspective could be described as a reforming position on the early childhood curriculum. It rests on the belief that "education can and should produce a rational individual capable of independent thought and self-discipline – often referred to as the 'self-governing child'" (MacNaughton, 2003, p.155). Bennett (2005) frames the curriculum from this perspective within the socio-pedagogic tradition. Whilst the overarching goals of the curriculum are set nationally, the details are negotiated locally with the intention that they fit with the culture and practice of the community that the setting serves (Bennett, 2005, p.11). This approach to the curriculum and its associated assessment practices has implications for how the child is constructed as a learner and the pedagogical approaches that need to be adopted in order to enable a child to become a 'self-governing child'.

A socio-cultural view of learning and development sees knowledge acquisition and the development of intellectual capacity as “socially and culturally defined’, rather than ‘individually constructed’ “(Edwards, 2005 p.39). Learning within this context occurs through engagement in social and cultural activity, and is demonstrated through the way in which a child has internalised something through his representation and re-creation as opportunities arise (Hedges and Cullen, 2012). From this perspective, the interactions between children and adults are understood as crucial to the process of knowledge acquisition (Edwards, 2005, p.39). Therefore, the conception of outcomes is not associated with a prescribed notion of knowledge, but may encompass such aspects as skills, dispositions and other processes that occur alongside the development of knowledge (Hedges and Cullen, 2012, p.932). Knowledge becomes something that is “culturally embedded rather than developmentally defined” (Fleer, 2003, p56), and thus learning goals from this perspective are formulated as something to strive towards (Samuelsson et al., 2004) collectively rather than a key determinant of individual capability.

At the heart of a socio-cultural perspective is the understanding that acting and thinking with others drives learning through the process of dialogue and interaction (Stephen, 2010). Participation, characterised by communication and shared activity, is seen as a key characteristic of the factors that support development (Hedegaard et al., 2008; Edwards, 2005; Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff, 1990). From a planning and assessment perspective, the curriculum is emergent, as the practitioner responds pedagogically as and when events happen. Observation takes an interpretivist approach, as it is concerned with not only objective observational data but also the child’s own perceptions. In this sense, the practitioner’s focus becomes concerned with the child’s engagement and intentions in an activity, rather than the materials and space that are prescribed within the practice of the institute that the child attends (Hedegaard, 2008).

Assessment practice reflecting a socio-cultural perspective has become predominant in a number of countries across both Europe and the Southern Hemisphere, and has been held in high esteem by such organisations as OECD (2006). The two predominant models are the Te Whāriki bi-cultural curriculum framework in New Zealand (Carr 2001; Carr and Claxton

2002), and the Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards et al., 1998) that originated in Northern Italy.

The emphasis of the Te Whāriki approach adopts a credit-based model of assessment, where children's competencies, dispositions and theory building are documented through the use of learning stories. The adult's role involves "noticing, recognising and responding" to deepen their understanding of learning, whilst also revising any assumptions regarding the competency of the child and his/her family that may otherwise have limited them (Mitchell, 2008). From the perspective of the Te Whariki approach, there is a shift in emphasis from knowledge to knowing. Knowledge is something that is possessed, whereas knowing is a process of "questions-asking", and question-exploring, that allows for the development of working theories (Sands, Carr, and Lee, 2012).

The Reggio Emilia method is characterised by a holistic approach to education which adopts a project work methodology. Such a methodology values multiple ways of learning and uses pedagogical documentation to make visible children's learning process, as well as serve as a tool for reflection on how to improve practice (Lazzari and Balduzzi, 2013, p.153). From Rinaldi's (2006) perspective, assessment and documentation have different purposes; assessments are retrospective whereas pedagogical documentation is more "forward looking". The problems inherent in such a simplistic view are explored in the next section. Scardamalia (2002 cited in Suárez, 2006) terms this process as "collective cognitive responsibility", where there is an emphasis on ideas rather than activities in pedagogical dialogue. More important however is the fact that pedagogical documentation is based on the premise that no one person can verify knowledge about a child's learning as it is something that has to be negotiated between all parties – including the child and the family (Lazzari and Balduzzi, 2013; Forman and Fyfe, 1998).

What is distinctive about both these two approaches is that they adopt a "consultative" approach (Soler and Miller, 2003, p.66) which implies that learning goals are mediated between the child and adult, rather than decided solely by the adult. These are key philosophical characteristics of a relational pedagogy. However, this view is not necessarily straightforward when considering the implications for assessment practice. The assumption

that the goals and knowledge that a child is required to achieve can be determined locally suggests that the ECE institute and the home or community context share the same view regarding the nature of learning and developmental goals. Interestingly, Carr (2001) refers to the narrative or credit model of assessment that is central to the Te Whāriki framework as a conscription, or recruitment, device for children, families and staff to participate in a social community of learners. Yet I wonder to what extent the participation in a social community is truly a two-way process. I argue that practitioners' own professional *habitus*, and the performative culture of ECE, can serve as a lens through which they construct the learner – and at times this can become a deficit construction (Bradbury, 2014 a, b; Basford and Bath, 2014; Brooker, 2011; Hedges, 2010). Consequently, there is evidence to suggest that the application of a socio-cultural theoretical perspective to practice seems to be hampered by similar issues to that in the English context (Edwards, 2007; Bennett, 2005; Anning, 2004), as outlined in Section 3.3.

Several countries, particularly the USA, United Kingdom, Australia and Scandinavia, have attempted to replicate the approaches to assessment synonymous with the Te Whāriki and Reggio Emilia heritage. What seems to have emerged from studies that have explored the practice of transplanting such culturally specific approaches (Bath, 2012; Buldu, 2010; Karlsdóttir and Garðarsdóttir, 2010; Sissons, 2009; Cedarman, 2008; Macdonald, 2007; Duhn, 2006; Nuttall, 2003; Soler and Miller, 2003) into different cultural settings is that it is in fact problematic. The reasons for this seem to be three-fold. Firstly, the desire to replicate an approach in its entirety in other cultural contexts is unrealistic due to the deeply embedded cultural values and principles which underpin the phenomenon (Stremmel, 2012; Buldu, 2010; Dahlberg and Moss, 2008; Macdonald, 2007), as well as the limited political and economic investment in the provision of high-quality services that privilege professional development (Picchio, Giovannini, Mayer and Musatti, 2012). Secondly, interpretations of the purpose and value of documenting learning can be contradictory dependent on the context in which they are being read (Luff, 2012; Tayler, 2011). Thirdly, political and institutional pressure related to accountability has led to a technical and mechanistic approach to assessment and documentation and a loss of practitioner confidence in adopting a practice that fits with personal beliefs (Dahlberg et al., 2006; Sisson, 2009; Cottle and Alexander, 2012).

### **3.2.3. Assessment from a transforming position**

The adoption of a transforming position is concerned more with a philosophical, rather than a practical, stance. It is concerned with the idea that power, discourse and subjectivity are inseparable from learning. There is therefore no traditional curriculum model that can be ascribed to a transforming position, as the emphasis is on an acceptance that there are multiple truths to how a curriculum can be interpreted. The learning goals are understood as “political” and should be set in order to contribute to a more socially just and wise society (MacNaughton, 2003). The Swedish pre-school curriculum is one example of how practitioners and researchers are seeking to deconstruct and consequently reconceptualise, how they see and understand children’s learning endeavours. Goals are formulated for group activities rather than individual achievements (Vallberg-Roth and Månsson, 2011). Interestingly, whilst the curriculum goals are intended to be democratic and to promote gender equality (Lenz Taguchi, 2005), the recent Education Act has seen the introduction of more explicit educational goals in language, mathematics and science (Rose and Rogers, 2012), as well as a requirement to produce Individual Development Plans (Vallberg-Roth and Månsson, 2011). This results in a dilemma synonymous with other curriculum models where the two sets of expectations are incompatible.

Assessment from this perspective is seen as an active endeavour to reflect critically on the implications of viewing a child through one particular lens. This occurs through what Lenz Taguchi (2007) conceptualises as “deconstructive talks”. Lenz Taguchi refers to this as an “ethics of resistance”, where practitioners are required to actively resist their own ideas and assumptions. For example, the starting point in interpreting an observation would be to resist ascribing noted learning behaviour to a prescribed developmental stage or goal. Instead, the practitioner would engage in deconstructive talk with both the child and other practitioners as a way of “thinking otherwise” about what other readings could be taken from the observations. The other element of this approach to assessment is that there is a greater consideration of the implications of surveillance and ethics as a technology for normalising practice (Sparrman and Lindgren, 2010)

### 3.2.4. Documentation and its place in the ECE curriculum

Assessment and documentation are terms inherent in ECE curriculum frameworks, yet depending on the position adopted by the reader (and indeed the text producer), they are not necessarily compatible. They are also sometimes used interchangeably by authors (for example, Dubiel, 2014). The position held by the producer and reader of documentation can result in it having differing functions and purposes. Consequently, this can produce different discourses about children, parenting and education (Alasuutari and Karila, 2010).

Maurizio Ferraris (2013) introduced the concept of “documentality”, his philosophical theory that presents a model of the social world (Alasuutari et al., 2014). Within his theory, he describes documentation as a “representation of some fact” which is accounted for through the “inscription of an act” (Ferraris, 2013, p.250). The inscription is not necessarily in the written form, but also through communication and symbols. To put this into the context of assessment practice – this form of social act (for example, in an observation, or a test) results in an inscription on some form of medium. The medium could be a piece of paper, a computer screen or camera, or even in the practitioner’s head. There are two key elements here that underpin the notion of documentality. One is that the text produces all that is social to us, and the other is that it always involves at least two people (Alasuutari et al., 2014, p.5). This means that forms of documentation are seen to have agency in a number of different ways:

*The forms [of documentation] structure and influence the actual parent–practitioner interaction, for example by suggesting particular roles and positions for practitioners and parents. They also introduce particular issues as important in childhood and hence, imply specific systems of meanings as the expected ways to consider childhood, children and their education. Consequently, the forms produce orientations for the practices of education and also direct the functions of ECEC. (Alasuutari and Karila, 2010, p.102).*

This perspective offers a useful framework to understand how forms of documentation can be used to exemplify the significance of dominant theoretical and political discourses that underpin assessment policies and their consequential practices. It also complements MacNaughton’s test-point for reflection. For example, from a conforming position, it could



be argued that by adopting a pre-primary approach to the curriculum, documentation is seen as a surveillance tool for governing both the child and the practitioner as a means of normalisation and accountability (Bath, 2012; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). The act of gathering empiricist observations, which are inscribed through the form of such texts as portfolios or developmental tracking sheets, frames the adult as a technician (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005), but also as the expert in child development and parenting (Alasuutari and Karila, 2010). The agentic power of the documentation is evident. The text sees the child and parent as an object to be used to evidence quality and validate the practice in the setting. In addition to this, it also produces certain types of pedagogical practices that fit with a conforming position.

If we were to apply a reforming position to documentation, the agentic power takes on a different guise. Rather than documentation being seen as a surveillance tool, it instead becomes a pedagogical tool. Documentation from this perspective sits more closely with a socio-cultural, reforming view of assessment. The texts that are documented are co-produced, and the child and family have greater agency through their involvement with what is recorded. The texts are multiple, rather than singular, or as Carr (2014, p.269) describes a “mosaic of document artefacts” that are embedded in the social life of a classroom community. Adults use the texts that are produced to give them a deeper insight into children’s interests and learning dispositions, which, in turn, help them to consider their role in supporting the learning process. As Rinaldi (2006) would say, this promotes a “pedagogy of listening”.

Finally, documentation from a transforming position takes on a different guise again. A transforming position is concerned with “problem posing” (Freire, 1996) and, according to Lenz Taguchi (2010), can be defined as a verb rather than a noun. In this sense, documentation is an act of revelation and provocation. It provides spaces to reveal children’s interests, to reveal silences, and to resist against dominating discourses. In this sense, the documentation acts as an agent in itself. For example, children are encouraged to revisit and engage with the documentation in order for them to bring their own interpretations to their work. In some sense the Reggio Emilia approach endeavours to do this through its use of documentation to deconstruct dominant discourses, and thus “create

a possibility for subverting governmentality and subjectification” (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p.109).

What has emerged from this review of literature so far is a key area of tension. The socio-pedagogic tradition presents an ‘ideal’ - but what are the consequences for the learner if the learning practices and associated activities have different meanings in different parts of the field? Hedegaard (2008) suggests that through participating in institutionalised practice, and using the spaces and materials that have been initiated by the practitioner, children’s activities are restricted and the conditions for development are determined (p.16). This is a pertinent suggestion, and one which I argue is a potential barrier towards adopting a transforming position. Hočevara et al., (2013) add to this debate, significantly noting that “It is paramount that consensus is not just another name for majority rule. And it is also important to acknowledge the objective fact that consensus in a community is not always possible” (p.484). The notion of consensus is an interesting concept, and one that is a particular area of tension for EYP/EY teachers. So far, then, this review of literature has illustrated how positions of power in the field can determine consensus and silence other possibilities.

### **3.3. Assessment Practice in England: a Conforming Model**

The inception of the Educational Reform Act (DES, 1988), and its consequential national curriculum, was constructed around the concern to “raise educational standards” and deliver an effective workforce to enable economic recovery in the UK (Anning et al., 2004; Anning, 1998). The impact on both young children and Early Years practitioners was significant, as it has resulted (to date) in four different curriculum frameworks. All have common learning outcomes or goals which are expected to be achieved in order to ensure readiness for school (Roberts-Holmes, 2014; Whitbread and Bingham, 2011; Aubrey, 2004; Anning, 1998). These curriculum models are representative of Bennett’s (2005) definition of a ‘pre-primary approach’. The curriculum had consequently become a “standardized script” (Delaney and Graue, 2012, p.198), which arguably allowed for limited interpretation for practitioners, and prioritised development over learning (Grieshaber, 2008). It therefore

seems that the relationship between assessment of learning, evaluation of teaching and accountability become inseparable.

### **3.3.1. Assessment for learning**

The aim of the Assessment for Learning (AfL) projects in the UK (Black et al., 2002, 2003, Black and Wiliam, 1998a, 1998b) was to provide an alternative strategy for improving educational outcomes that looked beyond assessment of learning at a given point in time. The underpinning pedagogy was founded on the concept of a more personalised approach to learning with the aim of making learners aware of how they are learning (Blandford and Knowles, 2010). The authors of *Inside the Black Box* (Black and Wiliam, 1998b), *Assessment for learning: beyond the black box* (ARG, 1999) and *Assessment for learning: 10 principles* (ARG, 2002a) intended to change the discourses associated with assessment (Daugherty, 2007) so that greater attention was given to metacognition and the role of the adult in supporting the learning process. Within the field of Early Years particularly, language and context plays a crucial role here, and the work of Vygotsky and related others (such as Engström et al., 1999; Rogoff, 1998; Bodrova, 2008) highlight the significance of cultural tools or artefacts as resources for stimulating thought and language. Notions of funds of knowledge (Gonza´lez, Moll and Amanti, 2005) and children’s working theories (Hedges and Cullen, 2012) have also gained greater recognition, and are seen as powerful sources of information for the practitioner in supporting children’s progression in learning within different zones of proximal development that are child-initiated and adult-led (Broadhead, 2006). This form of assessment is termed ‘dynamic assessment’ and is illustrated usefully by Berk and Winsler (1995, cited in Dunphy, 2008):

*The focus of dynamic assessment is on the assessor’s ability to discover the means of facilitating the learning of the child, not on the child’s demonstration of ability to the assessor. (p.139)*

The inception of the AfL projects happened at a significant time, when ECE found itself hosting two competing discourses and ideologies. On the one hand ECE was firmly on the Government’s agenda to improve educational standards through the emphasis on early intervention, along with initiatives such as the literacy and numeracy strategies. On the

other hand, policy makers and practitioners were still committed to the notion that ECE should promote a distinct pedagogy and way of constructing the young learner that should be reflected in the purposes of such settings (Aubrey, 2004). Practitioners were consequently left in a space that was offering contesting discourses regarding both their role and the purpose and value of assessment. It seems that practitioners were required to manage a paradigm shift in their understanding of AfL from a procedure to an inquiry model. They also needed to view assessment as part of the learning process, not apart from it (Serafini, 2000), which would require specific guidance and professional development. This was noted by Swaffield's (2011) research regarding the implementation of AfL strategies within schools. Teachers who were most successful in implementing AfL possessed the dispositions to resist the performative culture of standardised assessment practices. Interestingly, it has been noted that there has been less support and guidance relating to AfL available for EY practitioners. Research by Robson and Hargreaves (2005) found that policy guidance has been ambiguous in relation to the place and purpose of thinking skills within the ECE curriculum. Indeed, as Blandford and Knowles (2010) note, other than the findings from the EPPE (Effective Preschool Provision Evaluation) project (Sylva et al., 2004b) and REPEY (Researching Effective Pedagogy in Early Years) project (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) which highlight the relationship between opportunities for Sustained Shared Thinking and Attainment, further evidence-based research that examines the impact of AfL on EY provision is lacking.

### **3.3.2. The relationship between play, learning and assessment.**

Within an EY context the natural place for creating metacognitive learning opportunities to occur is through the creation of an "enabling environment" that allows for "planned, purposeful play" (DfE, 2014a). The relationship with Vygotsky's notion of play as a "mechanism for propelling child development forward" (Bodrova, 2008, p.358) is apparent here, as it provides the most relevant, as well as more natural, space for children to develop higher levels of self-regulation and thinking skills. Yet studies have highlighted numerous tensions for practitioners in their struggle to create authentic play opportunities that support a pedagogy that enhances and deepens understanding of the learning process for

both the child and the adult. I have grouped these tensions into two broad themes, each of which I will examine in turn:

- (i) The culture of performativity: 'The magnetic pull'
- (ii) The role of the adult: 'Lost in translation'

### **3.3.3. The culture of performativity: 'The magnetic pull'**

MacNaughton (2003) argues that a commitment to technical curriculum design is implicit in the adoption of a conforming curriculum position. Pedagogically, the consequences of this are that the planning, assessment and evaluation cycle, which is inherent in Early Years practice, becomes a performative act, or as Ball (2003) would argue, a "fabrication" to ensure the production of measurable outputs. This is a key dilemma for practitioners when taking account of the significance of adopting a playful pedagogy as a tool for supporting progression in learning. It seems that practitioners have felt "trapped" between the competing imperatives of teaching and assessing "the basics" of delivering a developmentally appropriate and a play-based curriculum (Anning, 2010, p.23).

There seems to be no doubt that the recognition of the holistic nature of learning and the role of play that has been outlined in the curriculum frameworks to date has generally been well received by practitioners (Cottle and Alexander, 2012; Brooker et al., 2010). Yet arguably this has resulted in practitioners adopting the "folklore tradition" (Anning et al., 2004) of a curriculum that follows the interests of children. It seems that the notion of a well-intentioned child-centred approach has created an idealised version of what interests and motivates children (Anning, 1998), as the topics that genuinely interest children, such as gun and superhero play, music and popular culture, are not necessarily the basis of planning due to the adult values that are placed on certain types of play. The work of Jarvis (2007) and Holland (2003), for example, documents the tensions that children and adults encounter when children follow interests that are not approved by adults. Another dimension to this argument is that children are motivated by the prospect of pleasing "significant others" in their lives (Wood, 2009), and therefore will seek to respond to the pedagogical interactions they are faced with in order to satisfy the adults. For example,

Robson and Rowe (2012) noted the influence of the adult presence for initiating exploration and that children were more likely to be receptive to ideas that came from an adult rather than a child. It therefore seems that despite practitioners' commitment to a play-based pedagogy, their self-reported beliefs do not necessarily match their pedagogical behaviours (McCullen et al., 2006; Linklater, 2006; Keating et al., 2002; Wood and Bennett, 1999; Bennett et al., 1997).

One of the consequences of practitioners' idealised interpretation of the place of play in the assessment process is that the act of listening becomes a tokenistic exercise (Brooker, 2011). For example, the "learner identities" teachers construct of some children are based on preconceived ideas influenced by the curriculum and accountability environment (Dubiel, 2014; Fisher and Wood, 2012; Rogers and Lapping, 2012; Hedges, 2010; Canning, 2007) or stereotypes and assumptions of "learner identities" related to their gender, cultural and social background (Bradbury, 2014; Bradbury, 2011). Brooker (2011) offers an explanation for this based on Bourdieu's notions of social and cultural capital. She argues that if educators endeavour to understand the cultural values, the underlying goals and values which run "invisibly" through family life (*habitus*, in Bourdieu's term) then this would enable them to support the important meanings play holds for children. This requires a more authentic relationship with children and their families, which Moss and Dahlberg (2005) refer to as the "ethics of the encounter" (p.13). The term originates from the work of Levinas (1989), and my interpretation of this from an assessment perspective is that it requires the practitioner to value the child as the Other (rather than an other). In order to do this, they are required to create a relational and authentic space between themselves and the child in order to listen and understand the child from an objective position, where there is no preconceived construction of the child based on predetermined categories. The consequence of this is that:

*The child becomes a complete stranger, not a known quantity through classificatory systems and normative practices whose progress and development must be steered to familiar and known ends.  
(Moss and Dahlberg, 2005, p.93)*

Daniels' (2013) research project provides an example of an endeavour to create an approach that promoted positive learning dispositions and supported the mediation of home and school culture through the use of photographs contained in learning stories. Yet Daniels noted how the prescriptive nature of the list of dispositions attributed in the curriculum framework, and the fact that such a time consuming approach was not a statutory requirement, meant that there was a temptation for the photographs to be used to produce "evidence of learning goals rather than provide an insight into the child's unique approach to learning" (p.312). As Wood (2010) reminds us, it therefore seems that when practitioners are confined to delivering a goal-orientated curriculum, the choices and opportunities for children to engage in play initiated by their own interests become limited, as do the opportunities for the practitioner to view the child through a lens other than prescribed in the curriculum. Bourdieu would refer to this as a form of "symbolic violence", as the curriculum demands of the EYFS framework legitimise the necessity to view a child's play in a particular manner. Consequently, as Brooker (2011) argues:

*A pedagogy of play could be said to offer an excellent smokescreen for the exercise of power over families as well as children; at the very least it makes it possible for practitioners, **knowing what families want**, to ignore their wishes they themselves **know what is best for children**". (Brooker, 2011 p.143)*

This poses a question related to the involvement of parents in completing documentation such as learning journeys and profiles. To what extent can the information shared between the home and setting be understood and interpreted authentically if the practitioner possesses a particular cultural and social *habitus* that may be different from the child? This is an issue that has received mixed responses from practitioners, and the cultural and social capital possessed by parents appears to have some bearing on the nature of the involvement of parents in the documentation of learning. Research by Brooker et al. (2010) revealed that some practitioners perceived the involvement of parents in assessment as a mechanism for strengthening partnership, and helping parents to understand the work of the pre-school and their own contribution to their child's learning. Children's centre staff, in particular, seemed to be most comfortable with seeking opportunities for parents to contribute to portfolios, whereas head teachers expressed concern that parents may use

the information to compare performance of other children. It also seemed that parental contributions were most valued when parents offered information that the practitioners did not know about a child. The explanation for those parents who were deemed reluctant to contribute to portfolios was either that they didn't see they had a role to play, or that the language of the EYFS was not 'parent friendly'. The significance of parental cultural capital is noteworthy here. Findings by Coleyshaw et al. (2012) disclosed how some practitioners in fee-paying settings felt under pressure to produce evidence - in the form of children's paintings - to satisfy parental demands related to value for money. The symbolic force of the curriculum determined in the performative field comes into play here again – but from this perspective, the notion of the parent as a consumer in the field provides them with a false sense of power as to how the curriculum is enacted to serve the needs of their child.

The performative goals of the curriculum are a notable factor in this debate. Drummond's research noted how the achievement of predetermined "stepping stones" outlined in curriculum guidance was of higher priority to reception teachers than celebrating the "unforeseen, spontaneous, individual acts of meaning making" (Drummond, 2008, p.12). Cottle and Alexander (2012) noted in their research that whilst teachers endeavoured not to be driven by externally imposed targets and retain a child-centred approach, most of the observed interactions with the children in the research were for managerial or monitoring purposes. These findings were echoed in the EYPS report related to children's perspectives of the framework, where it was noted in settings that adopted a more rationalist technical approach, the observations produced tended to be determined by EYFS criteria (Coleyshaw et al., 2012). Research by Garrick et al. (2010) suggests that the use of documentation of children's achievements was predominantly constructed by, and aimed at, adults (Bath, 2012, p.192). Setting records entitled 'My learning Journey' appeared closer to summative, rather than formative, assessment and it seems that the policy and regulatory context were contributory factors for this approach to assessment.

For practitioners working on school sites, the demands of the curriculum and testing frameworks seem to be equally problematic (Nah, 2014; Roberts-Holmes, 2014; Bradbury, 2014; Bath, 2012; Cottle and Alexander, 2012; Bradbury, 2011; Brooker et al., 2010; Adams et al., 2004). The most noteworthy research in this area has been conducted by Bradbury



(2014; 2013; 2012a; 2011). Her findings highlighted the seeming pressure on teachers to provide data that produced scores that were acceptable to the local authority (Bradbury 2013, p.663), which in her reported sample, situated in an area of social and economic deprivation, resulted in assessment results being 'deflated'. This type of insight provides an example of the disciplinary technology that sits within the current accountability system, and its powerful role in producing inequality (Bradbury, 2011) and reinforcing deficit learning models of children who live in certain areas. The reductive effect of a testing policy was also noted in Roberts-Holmes's (2014) research, where the testing of phonics became a key signifier of development that placed an emphasis on curriculum progression rather than progression in learning. A "good level of development" was characterised by the extent to which children had made progress in their phonic knowledge. I argue that both these studies illustrate how the "magnetic pull" (Basford and Bath, 2014, p123) of learning goals creates deficit learning constructions of some groups of children. This provides a moral and ethical dilemma for teachers who seek alternative ways of understanding progression, which are based upon an ethics of care (Osgood, 2006b). Indeed, Brooker et al.'s (2010) research highlighted concern by practitioners of the "damaging effect" on their relationships with parents by sharing developmental information – particularly if it highlighted a delay. There is a clear difference between performance and internalisation of learning (Moyles, 2010), and when reporting mechanisms for assessment are concerned with performance, there seems to be limited opportunity for an engagement with discussion about the complex nature of the learning process – and thus seeing documentation as a transformative tool for revelation and provocation. Here I return to a key point that I made in the introduction to this chapter related to confusion and interchangeable terminology. I find great resonance with Wood (2013) who argues that "[h]ow progression is defined through curriculum content is not the same as progression in learning" (p.69). It seems that for practitioners in England in particular, that whilst they look towards assessment models that emphasise progression in learning, the culture of performativity in schools means that opportunities to reform and challenge dominant assessment practices become problematic

### **3.3.4. The role of the adult: ‘Lost in translation’**

It has already been established that the role of the adult in supporting and mediating the learning process when adopting a dynamic approach to assessment, is a central tenet to practice, and that play is deemed as the most natural context for this to occur. Yet I argue that *how* practitioners interpret their role is fraught with tensions.

The starting point for this discussion is the curriculum and its associated terminology related to play and the adult’s role in assessing and documenting learning. There is limited research that examines the effectiveness of one curriculum model over another (Barnett et al., 2008; Stephen, 2006) as findings have tended to be used to contribute to the quality of provision debate. Much research has tended to examine the differences between child-centred and more didactic practices and the impact on children’s cognitive, social and emotional development through longitudinal studies (see, for example, Sylva et al. 2004b; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Marcon, 2002 ) which note the counter productivity of over formal approaches. In spite of the claims that are made, there is still little empirical evidence related to the efficacy of play-based learning. Professionals in the field are accused of advocating the value of play from an ideological rather than evidential basis (Anning, 2010, p.26), which as Stephen (2006) argues, means the debate related to the benefits of different curriculum models becomes “stronger on assertion than evidence” (Stephen, 2006). The issue is compounded by the fact that, when international comparisons are made, it is apparent that the diversity in structural aspects such as group size ratios and qualification requirements mean that it is difficult to ascertain which curriculum model has the most significant impact on quality and child outcomes (Leseman and Slot, 2014; OECD, 2006). It is interesting to note that there has been limited practice-based research that has examined the extent to which these elements have been embedded in practice that supports progression in learning. What seems to be absent from research – both locally and internationally - are studies conducted in the field of ECE that have provided an insight into how practitioners align their assessment practices with their curricular orientations (Pyle and DeLuca, 2013). In addition to this, I argue that there is also limited research that provides an insight into practitioners’ understanding of key pedagogical features that are intended to support a

dynamic assessment approach. Two particular and very relevant pedagogical examples are the Plan-Do-Review (PDR) approach and the notion of Sustained Shared Thinking.

The most noteworthy of longitudinal studies have been the High/Scope (Schweinhart et al., 2005) and EPPE studies (Sylva et al., 2004b), which have both informed policy that sits with the intertwined neo-liberal discourses of educational effectiveness, school readiness and quality. Two key pedagogical features of these studies that relate to Assessment for Learning are the PDR element of the High/Scope daily routine and Sustained Shared Thinking that evolved from the EPPE and REPEY projects. The PDR element of the High/Scope approach is intended as the “centrepiece” of the active learning approach as it is concerned with collaborative interactions between the child and the adult to support metacognitive thinking about learning and associated dispositions. It is described in the following way:

*In making daily plans, following through on them and recalling what they have done, young children learn to articulate their intentions and reflect upon their actions. They also begin to realise they are competent thinkers, decision makers and problem solvers. (Hohmann and Weikart, 2002, p.167)*

The process of Sustained Shared thinking is described as:

*An episode in which two or more individuals “work together” in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend. (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002, p.8)*

When considering the principles of AfL and the impetus for children to develop dispositions that enable them to think about, understand and articulate their own learning, then these two aspects of practice would seem to be appropriate pedagogical interventions to support children’s metacognitive approaches and their progression in learning. However, how these interventions are translated in practice may not necessarily result in the way the authors intended. From a High/Scope perspective, one reason for this is the interchangeable terminology used for the ‘review/recall’ element of the daily routine. The authors of the approach use the term ‘recall’, yet the discourse of PDR methodology of the approach

replaces the term 'recall' with 'review'. As Jordan and Powell (1990) noted, although the distinction may be "purely semantic", it arguably reflects a significant shift away from the rhetoric of the pedagogical rationale (p.31). From personal experience as a trainer and practitioner of the approach, it was not uncommon to see the 'review' element of the routine becoming a systematic recall of play choices that had been made rather than an evaluative appraisal of the reasons for play choices; the realisation (or otherwise) of intentions and the implications for future choices and plans (Jordan and Powell, 1990). More recent research echoes similar issues. Coleyshaw et al.'s (2012) study examined the extent to which practitioners with EYP status use and respond to children's perspectives to inform their practice and the quality of their provision. It revealed that where practitioners held a relatively naïve view on how to include children's perspectives, the interpretation centred on the facilitation of children's choice and access to resources and activities, rather than how to co-construct participation with children and provide feedback to them. Bradbury's (2012) research with reception teachers highlighted similar issues, as they seemed to construct their role as an "enabler of learning" where there were assumptions that by merely organising a variety of activities, the children would "naturally" make progress (p.180). In research about Assessment for Learning in the EYFS by Blandford and Knowles (2010), whilst practitioners were mindful of the importance of providing immediate feedback, the respondents in this research framed both their planning and feedback within the domain of the adult/curriculum orientated goals. Involvement of children in the planning process was perceived as involving them in 'next steps' of learning and providing justification for their actions. The question then arises, to what extent do these practices address the more subtle metacognitive aspects of learning which are related to dispositions and attitudes rather than the extent to which a goal has been met?

The key implications for practice are the significance of the practitioners' professional *habitus* and how these play out as strategies related to reflection, skill and confidence to share control of the learning process. In such models, the cyclical relationship between formative assessments, planning and evaluation are apparent, and opportunities are more readily available to the learner for feedback regarding their learning. However, research by Cottle and Alexander (2012) and Payler (2007) noted that the availability of opportunities for the creation of "interactive spaces" (Payler, 2007, p.251) and "sustained complex

interactions” (Cottle and Alexander, 2012, p.648) for children to take risks, seek clarification and receive tailored assistance in order to reach understanding about their learning, was greater in children’s centres and pre-school/nursery settings than school sites. Interestingly, what was also significant in Payler’s (2007) research was that, when the focus of the interaction was more geared towards learning outcomes rather than metacognition, children who were deemed as ‘less capable’ were less likely to benefit from such interactions.

When opportunities for inter-subjectivity arise, a child’s response may not always be verbal. Flewitt (2005) noted the impact of a practitioner’s ability to respond to the multi-modal dimensions of children’s expressions and meaning making, which included silences and non-verbal signs of expression, on how they perceived children’s performance in playgroup. As Stephen (2010) notes, emotional interactions are not always considered in discussions of effective pedagogy, and, subsequently, this remains an area which is under-developed in empirical work on children’s learning. She suggests that some of the ‘taken for granted’ pedagogic actions, such as supporting, modelling and providing affirmative feedback, are undervalued and, therefore, are not seen as contributory actions and interactions to support learning. As Wood (2013) notes, it seems that when appropriate support is provided by the teacher, the PDR process can provide meaningful space for opportunities to support children to plan and evaluate their learning and self-initiated activities. Yet when practitioners have to contend with working with larger groups of children (the intended ratio for High/Scope was 1:8) and the time constraints due to curricular demands, alongside a limited theoretical understanding, it is understandable why the intended purpose of the approach becomes lost in translation.

Similarities regarding the role of the adult in the PDR process can also be made with the practice of Sustained Shared Thinking. Siraj-Blatchford argues that, in this approach, for the resultant learning to be worthwhile the content of the engagement should be in some way “instructive” (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009, p.153). Anning (2010) and Wood (2007b) argue that by advocating for potentially instructive play, the cognitive gains (in particular mathematical and linguistic) become privileged and the physical, social and affective outcomes of play become side-lined, as well as, I argue, any real emphasis on learning characteristics and

dispositions. Play consequently becomes limited to achieving defined learning outcomes. For example, Wild's (2011) research noted how the instructive element of the approach in shared thinking episodes resulted on occasions of "over-privileging talk". Consequently, practitioners underestimated the potential for simple shared endeavours that involve silences, observations and consideration in the development of thinking (Wild, 2011, p.230).

Whilst it seems that practitioners' interpretation of certain pedagogical approaches may be a source for confusion, interpreting the 'should', 'could' and 'must' requirements imbued in the EYFS curriculum framework may further compound the confusion. One issue is the notion of mediation and intervention. For example, intervention appears for some practitioners to be misconstrued as interference or interruption of the learning process (Yelland, 2011), where it could be argued that once an adult has intervened in a child's play it becomes difficult to make an accurate and objective assessment of what a child is able to achieve independently of the 'more knowledgeable other'. Whilst Bodrova (2008) argues that a contributory factor relating to the decrease in adult mediation during play is the move towards a pre-primary curriculum, Katz (1999) suggested that a misinterpretation of relevant theory, that forces practitioners to adopt a literal approach, may be a more likely cause:

*Believing that children "construct their own knowledge," some adults do little more than set out a variety of activities that children enjoy, while studiously avoiding formal instruction in basic academic skills. (p.2)*

There is significant skill required in knowing when and how to interact with the children in order to avoid a "watching and waiting" approach (Wood and Attfield, 2005). Such "moments of invisible possibility" (Dubiel, 2014, p.68) are sometimes literally momentary and fragile and rely on practitioners making a decision in a split second. Such decisions require confidence and theoretical knowledge to achieve the balance between intervention and interference, which, according to Siraj-Blatchford (2009), is only realised in a "minority" of high-quality settings where highly trained and professional educators are employed (p.157).

What, when and how to assess is another source of contention for practitioners. The 'mythical' split of the relative percentages of adult-initiated and child-initiated activity

remains a focus of debate in the field (Brooker, 2011; Anning 2010). Pedagogical practices that take into account peer relationships and the fundamentals of democracy and citizenship have been limited by the fact that assessment guidance talks about what children can do independently of the adult (Brooker, 2011). Teachers have highlighted the difficulty of assessing against profile statements and the fact that they could be interpreted subjectively. The disparities in assessment judgements made by practitioners between the PVI settings and schools have also been noted. Participants in Brooker et al.'s (2010b) research suggested that this was because there were different values placed on child development, as well as the significance of the context for the child. There also seemed to be a "perceived requirement" to identify a value to every activity. As well as being unsure of how to interpret assessment requirements outlined in the curriculum frameworks, practitioners in the PVI sector were particularly unsure of the assessment requirements by other stakeholders such as OFSTED and the Local Authority (Brooker et al., 2010b).

### **3.3.5. Concluding commentary**

The review of literature has highlighted the inter-relationship between professional *habitus* and assessment practice. Both local and international research demonstrates how neo-liberal discourses that underpin ECE policy are shaping practice within and across boundaries in the ECE field, and how those players who possess the most appropriate capital have the greatest success in shaping practice. Yet research also indicates that the desire to adopt a reforming position is common, where new forms of capital are being put to the test. The possibilities for transforming practice through a critical pedagogy lens still seem to be very much philosophical, and therefore aspirational.

Practitioners are therefore faced with competing paradigms with which they are required to work. This raises the question of whether a culture of individualised auditing can ever be compatible with a culture of collaborative knowledge-building (Wood, 2013) which is both democratic and ethical in its approach. The nature of the relationships between all of the players in the field is a key factor, but more significantly it is the extent to which the field allows for relationships to be formed in an equitable and authentic manner that takes account of and seeks to understand both personal and professional *habitus*.

In Chapter 5 I provide an analysis of key policy texts that provide the political and contextual landscape for this research. The chapter utilises some of the literature and theoretical frameworks that have been captured here to serve as a basis for analysis and conceptualisation/reconceptualisation.



# Chapter 4

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## Methodology

### 4.0. Introduction

The focus of this thesis is concerned with interrelated aspects related to assessment in the ECE field. These are assessment practice, policy and professional *habitus*. The aim of the research is to explore practitioners' experiences of meditating their professional *habitus* with assessment policy and practice within the current policy context in England. The decision to locate the research within the PVI sector was very deliberate, and the rationale for this was outlined in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2 I discussed how the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underpin this study have been determined. A significant element of this process was a consideration of my own professional life history. By reflecting on the various contexts in which I had worked with practitioners from the PVI sector, it served to remind me of the professional tensions and assumptions that face graduates working in this field. Bourdieu's conceptual tools of *habitus*, field, capital and practice helped to frame the research questions, as I was particularly interested in looking at the inter-relationship between the personal, the professional and the political, and its implications for assessment practice.

#### Research Questions

- What are practitioners' own *habitus* that shape their theories, beliefs and understanding of the discourses of assessment?
- How do practitioners describe assessment practice in their workplace settings?
- How are practitioners mediating their professional *habitus* with the culture and assessment practices of their workplace setting and the wider policy context?

This chapter is organised in four sections. It begins by discussing the methodological framework in which the research was located. Drawing on the discussion in Chapter 2, I will discuss how my own ontological and epistemological positioning served to frame the methodological approach in which the study was located. In the second section, the methods employed to answer the research questions will be discussed. This will include a

discussion of the ethical issues that needed to be considered when conducting the research. The third section outlines the research procedure, beginning with an outline of how participants were selected for the study. This section then provides details of the purpose and procedures of the two focus group sessions that were conducted in order to gain the data for the research. The final section outlines the methodology employed regarding the analysis of data.

#### **4.1. Methodological Framework**

The methodological framework that underpins this study was informed by my own interest in seeking a way for graduate practitioners working in the PVI sector to have their 'assessment stories' heard. In Chapter 2 I identified how reflecting on my own life history helped to understand how my personal ontological and epistemological position is framed within a critical social constructionist stance. Knowledge from this perspective can be understood to be "ideological, political, and permeated with values" (Schwandt, 2000, p.198). Such a position assumes that constructions of the world and the actors who operate within it are bound by power relations. For those actors in a weaker position within a field, their professional identity and consequential roles are imposed upon them by those who hold positions of power. This view can be applied to the sample of participants in this study. Despite their increased symbolic capital, their position within the ECE field meant that they had limited opportunities for "unified resistance" (Osgood, 2012) to the normative and performative discourses which policy imposed on them. The additional reminder that this group also tends to find themselves at the "bottom of the epistemological hierarchy" (Moss and Urban, 2010) in relation to their contribution to policy was a further motivation to seek a way to gain a greater insight into the lived experience of assessment practice for those working in this sector.

Goodley, Lawthorn, Clough and Moore (2004) acknowledge that once the life or lives you are interested in have been identified, the research project becomes bound up with your own theoretical positions and so the narrative should be underpinned unequivocally by the aim of empowerment (p106). It is at this point that I provide a further consideration of my

rationale for using a life history approach in this research. Goodson (1995) provides a distinction between a life story and life history methodology. The former is a personal reconstruction of experience, whilst a life history takes a more accumulative approach. In addition to the inclusion of life story accounts, other people's accounts, documentary evidence and a range of historical data (p97) may also be captured. This allows for the provision of a "dialogue of a *story of action within a theory of context*" (Goodson, 1995, p97) which in turn helps to understand the powers of culture that define those particular ways that enable people to act and not act in specific ways (Tierney, 1998, p54). I deliberately chose not to elicit accounts from other practitioners that worked with the participants, as this was not within the scope of the research aims. There were practical constraints to involving other practitioners, but more importantly, the core aim of this research was to identify the aspects of their professional lives that were most significant to the participants. I did however see the value of using documentary evidence in terms of assessment texts that were self-selected by the participants. This allowed for an identification of the intertextual factors that contributed to the inter-relationship between (habitus + capital), field and practice. By providing opportunities for participants to share narratives within the socio-political context in which they existed, it helped to provide an insight into what they were understanding were the opportunities and constraints that framed their life experiences (Reay, 2004, p433) in relation to both the past and present. Viewing these life experiences within the context of the field served to provide an understanding of how their own personal and professional habitus was shaping their own assessment practice.

An important dimension to this approach is the relevance of reflexivity. Reay (2004) reminds us that "habitus operates at an unconscious level unless individuals confront events that cause self-questioning, whereupon habitus begins to operate at the level of consciousness and the person develops new facets of the self" (p437-438). Capturing my own life history was therefore equally important in this research, as it helped to understand my own subjectivities in relation to practice and the workforce. For both myself and the participants, the act of creating physical and mental spaces to reflect on significant events in our lives was a key part of the process in helping to make the unconscious aspects of our habitus more conscious.

Yet I also needed to be realistic about the impact my study could possibly have. I found resonance with McArdle's study into EC arts education whose rationale was not to see research as an endeavour to "solve the 'problems' of the field" (2001 cited in McArdle and McWilliam, 2005, p.325) in order to produce formulas and ways of working that would create a particular pedagogical or professional model. It would be naïve to think that such a small scale study could in any way transform practice that was so strongly determined by the global and local political imperatives that all of the education sector face. Instead, I saw this research as an opportunity to open up thinking about the "normalizing categories" (McArdle and McWilliam, 2005) and current articulations of terms commonly associated with assessment practice.

To adopt a social constructionist position the researcher must:

*...not remain straitjacketed by the conventional meanings we have been taught to associate with the object. Instead, such research invites us to approach the object in a radical spirit of openness to its potential for new or richer meaning. It is an invitation to reinterpretation. (Crotty, 1998 p.51)*

Adopting this perspective required a willingness to seek methods that offered an insight into the multiple ways in which the participants' roles played out in their own workplace, as well as the meaning they and other actors in the field were attributing to assessment discourses. Bourdieu's conceptual tools served as a useful methodological framework that I felt would enable me to approach the study in a way that would open up the potential to gain richer insights into the subject matter and help to challenge some of the assumptions regarding professional identity and assessment practice.

Bourdieu developed a "theory of practice" in order to account for the "ontological complicity" (Grenfell, 2012, p.44) between objective structures and internalised structures. Grenfell interprets this by explaining that individual action emerges from an unconscious calculation of profit (which in the first instance may be symbolic) and the strategic position of the self in a social space (or field) to maximise the capital available to them. In relation to my research, this position is relevant as I was interested to examine whether the participants viewed their assessment practices as a form of game playing (Basford and Bath, 2014), and whether this was either a conscious or unconscious endeavour. This required me

to consider to what extent the capital the participants had gained from their undergraduate studies had structured their *habitus*, as well as the extent to which the objective structures of the field were structuring their *habitus* to be reproduced, limited or transformed.

Bourdieu does not use binaries, nor does he separate theory from empiricism, as he sees them as relational. He argued that the adoption of either a subjective or objective position did not allow for a sufficient understanding of the social world (Grenfell, 2012). In order to endeavour to seek validity in research, a researcher needs to seek to understand the structures and mechanisms of a social space where, through collective histories, a greater understanding of the relational factors can be gleaned. What this does not do is result in universal validity, but it allows for insight into the distinction, or differences, between social sites. The *habitus* of the researcher is therefore equally as important as the *habitus* of the participants of a study. Bourdieu believed research *habitus* required “socio-analysis”, which is a capacity to reflexively understand the positioning of the researcher in respect of “what is being researched and in relation to the intellectual field in which the research is located” (Rawolle and Lingard 2013, p.118). Familiarity with the research field can be an aid to reflexivity, as you are not positioned entirely out of the field (Green, 2013). This helps to gain an insight into the “deepest logic of the social world”, with the objective of “constructing it as a ‘special case of what is possible’... an exemplary case in a finite world of possible configurations” (Bourdieu, 1998a, p.2). This premise serves as the starting point for my research, as Bourdieu argued that a precondition for understanding practice is for the researcher to be able to critically reflect upon both the social and epistemological conditions that result in practical action. I was not positioned entirely out of the field, having had previous professional experience of working with participants in the area as well as having academic interests located within ECE (as outlined in Chapter 2).

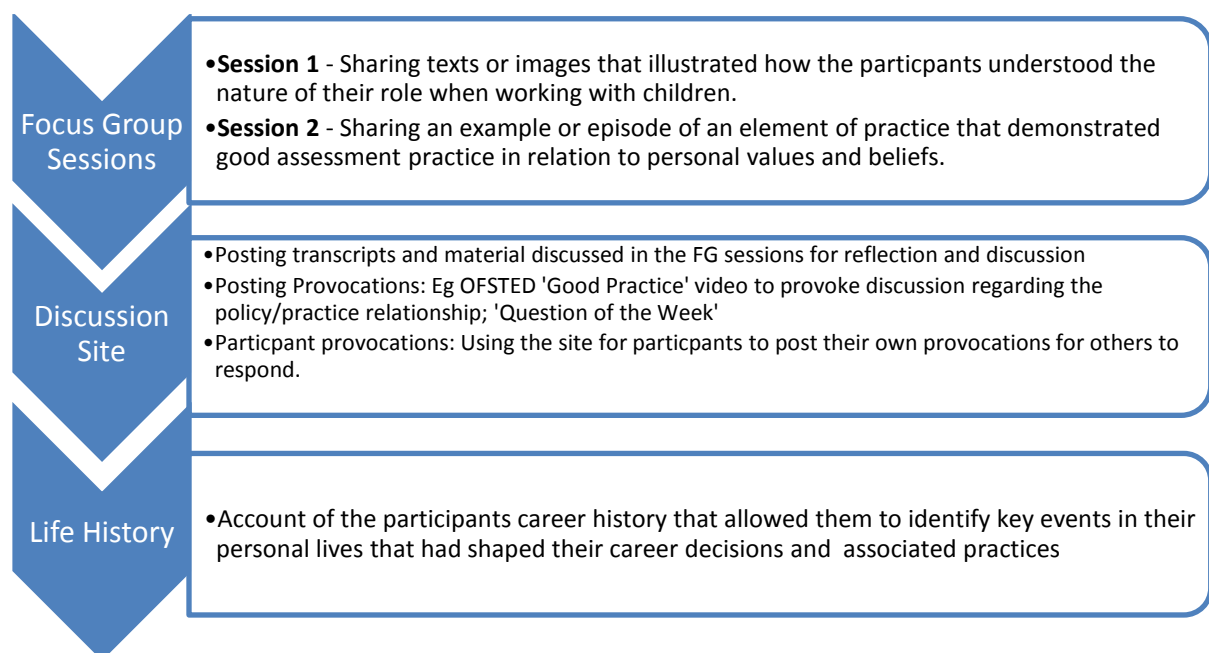
Conversely, it is important that as a researcher, familiarity with the field does not lead to assumptions, or a position of privilege, when translating the discourses of others (Deer, 2012). It requires the researcher to engage in “participant objectification” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.68), where they are mindful that there can be a variety of viewpoints on the object of study that can coexist. Indeed, as the literature review highlighted, there were multiple viewpoints regarding professional identity, assessment practice and

documentation, which needed to be considered when reflecting upon the social and epistemological conditions in which the study was located. There was also the possibility that my own experiences of working in this field served to form a particular lens in which I viewed the sector. The adoption of MacNaughton's (2003) three positions was a methodological principle which I used in the analysis of the findings in order to attempt to address this issue. One other way of engaging with participant objectification is to regard the participants as "theory – generating agents" rather than objects of interpretation (Grenfell, 2012, p.37). Therefore, I needed to seek a way of having "intensive encounters" with the participants who live by a specific cultural construction in order to be able to portray the space in a "provisionally accurate manner" (Foley, 2002, p.473). Through the act of collaborative reflection we were able to inductively consider ways in which sense could be made of the relationship between *habitus*, field and practice. The following section outlines the methods I employed that were intended to allow the participants to be theory-generating agents, and provide the space for reflection and critical thinking.

## 4.2 Research methods

I was keen to utilise research methods that brought participants together into a space that would allow them to engage with dialogue in order to promote deeper thinking about how they were mediating their professional *habitus* with their workplace settings and the wider policy context. As I was also placing considerable significance on the participants' *habitus*, there was a biographical element to the study that it was important to capture. It seemed, therefore, that some form of narrative inquiry was the most appropriate method to employ. Narrative inquiry allows participants to "explain, entertain, inform, defend, complain and confirm or challenge the status quo" (Chase, 2005, p.657). It moves away from questions regarding the factual nature of the narrator's commentary and instead highlights versions of the self, reality and experience – or in other words, how their *habitus* plays out in their own unique context. The environment in which the narrative takes place is also significant. The story told in a formal interview context may become a different version to that told in a more informal context. I wanted to bring together the participants into a mutually supportive setting that would enable them to share their assessment stories so I set up a Focus Group (FG). I also felt it was important that they revisited their stories, in order to

reflect upon them and generate their own meaning and interpretation, and, therefore, arranged for the FG to meet on two occasions. In addition to this, I also created a closed social network Discussion Site (DS) where the transcripts of the previous session were posted. The DS was intended to be used by the participants to share their *praxis*-orientated reflections as well as pose questions to each other. As Griffiths and Macleod (2008) argue, *praxis* is open to revision when narratives are shared, and this was an important methodological consideration. Figure 2 summarises the methods employed to generate the data.



**Fig. 2: Overview of methods employed to generate data.**

#### **4.2.1. Reflection as a methodological tool**

In my review of literature in the previous chapter I identified how the possession of a reflective disposition can help practitioners become more “active and reflexive” agents (Simpson, 2010) and serve as a tool to transform practice. Yet there is a concern that reflection tends to be undertaken superficially (Hedges, 2010). However, it seems that when the researcher takes on the role as an advocate and partner in a study (Fontana and Frey, 2005) this can aid the process of reflection. To help evaluate the most suitable method for

this study that would facilitate reflection, I reviewed previous studies in the field that had adopted collaborative approaches (Fisher and Wood, 2012; Hedges, 2010; Lenz Taguchi, 2005; Moyles, Adams and Musgrove, 2002). The studies brought together an ‘expert’ research partner with practitioners into reflexive, discursive spaces. A number of these studies were utilising an action research model to address issues that had been identified in the context of practice. Reflection in this context formed part of a self-reflective enquiry (Fisher and Wood, 2012). Whilst the intention of my research was more concerned with problem posing rather than problem solving, I could see how the strategies that were used to aid reflection could be utilised.

Hedges’ (2010) research views the researcher as a “critical friend” where they took on the dual role of researcher and professional learning facilitator in order to understand the context of the teachers’ practices before introducing a professional learning dimension. Hedges adopted four different strategies to aid the reflective process, three of which were relevant to my own study (the fourth strategy was concerned with trialling new practices in the setting). These were: (i) provision of data for teacher reflection; (ii) use of data as evidence to inquire into and shift practices; and (iii) provision of research-based readings. I could see how these features could form the basis of the strategies I would employ to encourage reflection. I imagined that the FG would provide the context for the generation of data that they would reflect upon. I saw my role as involving some form of challenge in encouraging them to think reflexively about how and why assessment was enacted in the way that they described. This could be extended into the DS, where I could also include research-based readings and policy texts to provoke a more theoretical basis for their thinking. However, it became apparent very quickly that the time available for the participants outside the FGs was very limited, and this impacted significantly on the extent to which the DS was utilised. The reasons for this are outlined later in this thesis.

#### **4.2.2. Selecting the sample and location**

The purpose of a focus group is usually to explore group norms, and there has to be some “common ground” between the participants for differences in views and experiences and tensions to emerge (Macnaghten and Myers, 2007, p.69). I was mindful of Flick’s (2009)



advice that it is generally more appropriate to work with groups of strangers, rather than participants who are familiar with the researcher, when conducting a focus group interview. This is because there can be a greater tendency for some assumptions to be implicit. This was a particular dilemma for me, as the chosen participants were ex-students who I had previously worked with in a student/tutor relationship. I had built a relationship with them in the past, which may well have given them an insight into my own positioning. Cousin (2010) warns of how such a status may lead the participants to feel impelled to provide “wound based narratives” (p.16) that are commensurate with their perception of my own positionality/views regarding assessment dilemmas. Yet Puchta and Potter (1999) suggest that adopting a phenomenological approach to a focus group methodology necessitates the researcher to be able to share the experience of the “consumers” (participants) through some form of personal involvement (p.317). In this case, I had previous personal involvement with the students at university and also of assessment practice when I was myself an ECE practitioner. Indeed, studies have found that focus groups tend to work particularly well with groups who have “well developed routines for talking to each other” (Macnaghten and Myers, 2007, p.69). This provided some reassurance in the decision to work with ex-students. I was also reminded of the fact that the participants had moved from being my ‘charges’ as students into the field of practice. Therefore they had varied and additional knowledge on which to draw, which was important for me to acknowledge. They had effectively become the ‘experts’ in the field, and my role was to understand how they were mediating their expertise within the local and political context.

The recruitment of the sample was carried out by sending an open letter (Appendix A) to the previous three cohorts of full time and part time students who had studied on the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies degree programme at University in which I worked. The letter included a detailed outline of the participant’s role in the study. I was very clear that a key requirement for joining the group was a willingness to engage in reflexive and critical dialogue: “a demonstration of an interest in forming a ‘community of practice’ with other ECE graduates who would look forward to an opportunity to reflect upon, discuss and possibly challenge practice, particularly in relation to assessment and documentation”. Initially there were ten responses to the invitation. I followed each response up through an email exchange in order to provide further detail on how the study would be conducted.

Out of this initial sample, five respondents were able to commit to the study (see Appendix B for participant details).

Conducting the FG session in a neutral, yet familiar, territory was important. The university campus where the participants had studied their degree had been a place where they had engaged in critical reflection and challenge, this was a place where they had shared stories of their own practice, and considered the dilemmas inherent in trying to make sense of their own values and beliefs within the context of their workplace. In agreement with the participants, therefore, we met in a space at the university that allowed for an informal seminar style seating arrangement. We met at the end of their working day so tea, coffee and light snacks were made available for them on their arrival.

I had initially intended for the group to meet on four different occasions. However, it proved difficult to find a mutually convenient time for all of the participants to meet on more than two occasions – and unfortunately one of the members was unable to attend the second session due to ill health. Fortunately, the two sessions that did go ahead provided a large amount of rich data, and I was satisfied that, alongside the other two data collection methods, I had sufficient data that would allow me to examine the subject in detail. The following sections provide further insight into the three data collection methods that were employed.

#### **4.2.3. Focus group (FG)**

The FG was formed over a period of five months, and generated documentation in the form of transcripts of the dialogue that occurred. Methods utilising focus groups have been traditionally associated with market and military research in order to elicit groups of service users to inform policy and gain feedback in an efficient and cost effective manner (Macnaghten and Myers, 2007; Flick, 2009). Yet in the field of social sciences, a growing interest in seeking data that evolves from participants interacting with others in a local setting (Barbour, 2007; Krueger and Casey, 2009; Macnaghten and Myers, 2007; Morgan, 1996), has led to a new interest in a focus group methodology.

Most recently, Kamberlis and Dimitriadis (2013) have developed the focus group system in such a way that it complements a more critical approach to research, their method being concerned with emancipatory pedagogy and *praxis*-oriented inquiry. The term *praxis* that I refer to here is grounded in Freire's understanding that it is defined as a human activity consisting of reflection and actions, which are formulated within a theoretical framework (Freire, 1996, p.106). Such a process can occur when practitioners jointly participate in studying their own individual *praxis* (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). Traditionally, focus group discussion is led by a moderator - a role which demands skill in facilitating group discussion (Puchta and Potter, 2004). This is particularly important in less structured focus groups where the purpose is to facilitate, rather than direct, discussion (Morgan, 1996). However, my role as moderator in this research went beyond this traditional interpretation, as I had to take into account the three functions highlighted by Kamberlis and Dimitriadis (2013): "the pedagogical, the political and the empirical" (p.19). In order for the participants to make sense of the factors that affected their values, beliefs and practices, I needed to find ways of helping them "connect the dots" between their personal lives and the wider cultural, historical and economic relations in which they exist (Fine and Weis, 2005).

The three functions of a focus group that Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013) refer to provide an analogy of a prism to represent the inter-relationship between the three functions within the context of critical theory:

*...all three functions are always at work simultaneously; they are all visible to the researcher to some extent; and they all both refract and reflect the content of focus group work in different ways. (p.20)*

What makes this approach different from the more traditional perspectives of a focus group, is the significance of the dialogic and transformative nature of the interactions that happen within a small, intimate group of participants. Dialectical thinking involves searching out contradictions and is an open and questioning form of thinking which requires reflection back and forth between elements (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

From a pedagogical perspective, a focus group can become a collaborative site, more commonly termed a community of practice, to pose problems and consider ways of

interrogating and changing lived experiences that have previously been silenced or even invisible. Indeed, Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013) refer to it as a “problem-posing pedagogy” (p.23). By forming a focus group over an extended period of time, the participants become a community of practice in themselves, the purpose located within a discourse of meaning making (Moss and Dahlberg, 2008). From this, opportunities were created to transform, consolidate or affirm participants’ values and beliefs, as well as generate solutions to dilemmas that may emerge from the collective discussions. A key element of this approach is the notion of control. As Lincoln and Guba (2003) note, for researchers adopting a critical theoretical approach, they need to be mindful of the necessity for members of the research group to take control of their futures in order to find solutions to the dilemmas that may emerge. This fits with the emancipatory element of such an approach which aims to foster democracy and community empowerment. One particular aim of my research was to enable the participants of an under-represented group in the field of ECE (namely graduates working in the PVI sector) to have a forum to reflect on their own pedagogical beliefs and practices related to assessment. The FG therefore became a site for reflexivity that was led by the participants.

The political function of the focus group approach has its roots in second and third-wave feminism. One principle orientation of feminist research is that it is critical, political and praxis orientated (Weiner, 1994). The link to Freire’s critical and pedagogical practices is relevant here, and is particularly pertinent to this study. As I argue in Chapter 5, the discourse associated with assessment practice is now firmly set within a regime of measurement where political pressure related to accountability has led to technical and mechanistic approaches to assessment. However, my concern throughout the evolution of this research was the fact that I was of the opinion that practitioners within the field of ECE are indeed oppressed by political regimes related to assessment practice. Yet this could be a potential “blind spot”, such as Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013) allude to, that assumes that practitioners do feel constrained by pedagogical expectations.

This point leads to the final function of the method adopted – the empirical element of the research. The establishment of the FG created a “work group” whose key function was to discuss the empirical material that could be interrogated by the group. The nature of the

empirical material was intended to allow for the drawing out of “complexities, nuances and contradictions” (Kamberlis and Dimitriadis, 2013, p.51) that were intended to “clear the fog of unacknowledged subjectivities” (p.30) from both a researcher and participant perspective.

This led me to consider the power of visual ethnography, where images or texts can serve as a starting point for the participants to reflect upon their pedagogical and philosophical values that inform their practice. Pink (2007) used photographic interviews as a visual ethnographic method to produce “knowledge, self-identities, experiences and emotions” (p.82). Such an approach uses inter-subjectivity between the researcher and the research context to gain a deeper understanding of the worlds that “other” people live in (p.24). In the Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning (SPEEL project - [Moyles, Adams and Musgrove 2002](#)) a similar principle was applied to encourage deeper thinking and conceptualisation in relation to reflection upon personal practice. The researchers worked with their participants to focus on a recent image of practice in order to draw out and revisit pedagogical dilemmas which were pertinent to each practitioner.

Before I began to examine the pedagogical dilemmas that the participants in my study were encountering, it was important to gain an insight into the characteristics of their own professional *habitus*. I was reminded of Graue’s (2008) suggestion that research should look more closely at the nature of the teacher-child interactions to understand the impact our practice can have on the lives of children. Whilst I was unable to observe such interactions, it seemed important to gain an understanding of how and why participants described the nature of their relationship of the children they worked with. In the first FG session, I invited the participants to share a text or image that was representative of their beliefs. The inter-subjective nature of how the group were encouraged to function meant that participants could question each other to gain a deeper insight into their values and beliefs. In the second FG session I continued with the use of texts, by asking the participants to bring some form of documentation that illustrated either an event or an example of assessment practice that they felt illustrated their values and beliefs.

#### **4.2.4 The Discussion site (DS)**

The main aim of the DS was to provide extended opportunities to engage with the issues and ideas that had been explored in the FG, and had three key functions:

- 1) Noticeboard: To post the transcripts of the FG sessions for member checking and other information regarding agreeing arrangements for the time and date of the FG sessions.
- 2) Reflection point: To reflect upon the discussions held in the FG within the context of their own workplace.
- 3) Provocation: To post articles/texts of interest (by either myself or the participants) or questions that emerged from the transcripts.

I had initially considered providing the participants with research journals to record their reflections of significant events or provocations that were relevant to the research, but it quickly became apparent that this would have created additional demands on the limited time they had available to engage with the project. All of the participants were familiar with using social networking sites, and four out of the five participants already had user profiles on the Face Book networking site. Following an unsuccessful attempt to set up a private group on a blog site, the participants suggested utilising their existing profiles to set up a closed group that would be used solely for the study. The fifth member was happy to create a profile on the site to use for the purpose of the project.

Providing opportunities to enter into a discursive space beyond the two FG sessions offered a number of benefits to the researchers in terms of their collaborative role in the study. One advantage of using an online environment was that it offered the opportunity for the participants to post their responses and provocations at any time and from any location where they had access to the technology. The asynchronicity of online discussion meant that participants were not restricted to responding to current threads (Ping and Tan, 2001), but could pick up on earlier discussions if they wished to. Further, the DS allowed for quieter members of the group to form considered responses that they may not have the opportunity to offer in a traditional FG. There was one particular member of the group who had a tendency to dominate discussion, so there was a danger that this may have influenced

what was said, or not said (Flick, 2014), and I felt that the DS facilitated a more equal power balance as other group members were able to offer their thoughts without interruption. The act of producing text can also be seen as a means of controlling (through such actions as editing and backspacing) the way the self is presented to others (Markham, 2005, p.795). This was particularly relevant when considering the relationship between the participants' *habitus* and the field. Bourdieu may argue that the way young adults use social media as a cultural practice distinguishes them from older adults. They are comfortable in using the strategies associated with communicating in this context, and arguably can utilise these strategies to give them the power for their voice to be heard. Additionally, the site also reduced the likelihood of coercion and pressure to be compliant with group opinion, as the participants could log off at any stage to provide greater protection (Kenny, 2005, p.418). However, in this study it is important to note that the group were mutually supportive and empathetic of each other's circumstances. The ethos of the group was to share and reflect upon narratives, and where consensus was apparent, it was understood as a form of solidarity rather than coercion.

At the beginning of the study, the participants provided in-depth responses to one of the provocations I posted (see Appendix C, OFSTED, 18<sup>th</sup> April post), and this was quickly followed by a further provocation from one of the participants (25<sup>th</sup> April). I was hopeful that the site would become a useful platform for gaining further insight and understanding of each other's experiences, and that their postings would allow them to articulate the things that were important to them. Following the analysis of the transcription from the first session I posted two further questions, but the response rate was less fruitful. I have already acknowledged that time was a significant barrier. Perhaps, though, this was an indication that there was some disconnection between what we collectively understood to be important elements regarding assessment practice that were worthy of unpicking. I was drawn back to Hedges' (2010) research and was reminded of the fact that she had spent time in her participants' settings to become familiar with the context in which they were working. On reflection, this was perhaps a limitation of my own research, as spending time in their settings may have helped me to gain a greater insight into the features of their assessment practices that were relevant to their own work.

### **Capturing life histories**

Bourdieu observed that the aspirations and practices of individuals and groups tend to have a direct correspondence to the formative conditions of their respective *habitus* (Swartz, 1997, p.103). When considering the relationship between professional *habitus* and practice, it is important to understand the routes of the participants' "practical knowledge" and "practical wisdom" which, according to Caduri (2013), is a type of knowledge that can never be divorced from values. Caduri makes it clear that it is not enough to gain an insight into a participant's personal life, the narrative must reveal something about the relationship between the personal and practical. The intentions, therefore, are holistic:

*In order to understand why a teacher chooses to act in a certain way we need to explore the purposes and intentions, the values, ideals and norms, that are established on past experiences and which govern people's lives, in the sense of motivating them to behave in a particular manner. (Caduri, 2013, p.49)*

In order to understand the relationship between the participants' *habitus* and practice I asked them to provide a brief 'life history' narrative of their journey towards becoming, then subsequently being, an Early Childhood practitioner (Appendix D). This provided some insight into the formative conditions that had led them to the career they had chosen and how their previous experiences had served to shape the values and beliefs that underpinned their relationships with children. A life history account includes the economic, political, social and cultural elements of a participant's life which they have mediated as part of their development process (Suárez-Ortega, 2013). The participants were asked to write their narrative at the end of the study, rather than at the beginning. I felt that the time that they had spent engaging in reflexive and critical discussion during the study had effectively placed them in a space where they may have become more conscious of the significance of their earlier experiences, the social, cultural and political dimensions of their lives and their newly gained capital in shaping their values and beliefs. I anticipated that their narratives would therefore reveal features of their *habitus* including elements that they may not have previously considered. The depth of reflection was variable amongst the participants. Chapter 6 considers this in further detail.



### **Ethical considerations**

The ethical principles that underpin this study were informed by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) ethical guidelines, and were approved by the University of Sheffield's ethical procedures (Appendix E). At the outset, the participants were required to give informed consent in order to ensure that they understood and agreed to their participation in the study without any duress (BERA, 2011, p.5). The participants were provided with an information sheet (Appendix E), and an introductory meeting was arranged to outline the intentions of the research, their role in the study and aspects of confidentiality that were pertinent to the study. The participants were also reminded that they could withdraw from the research at any point.

Macfarlane (2010) offers an alternative perspective of research ethics which I felt were relevant to my own study. He reframes ethics as a "virtue-based approach to ethics" which focuses on *being* ethical, rather than *doing* ethics (p.23). In practice, this relates to the real life issues that may occur throughout the duration of the research, rather than simple adherence to the more procedural ethical practices outlined by university ethics committees. Such an approach demands a necessity to adopt a reflexive state of mind and to be self-critical of one's own performance as a researcher (Macfarlane, 2010, p.24) to avoid some of the 'vices' associated with ethical research. Timescale limitations and data misrepresentation, resulting in either concealment or exaggeration in order to make the research 'fit', were two relevant examples of opposing 'vices' of which I need to be mindful of as a researcher. There were time limitations for both the participants and myself, which meant that it was important for me to look for ways to ensure that the participants' narratives were represented accurately. Strategies related to member checking are one way of ensuring that data is captured accurately. Transcripts were posted on the DS for feedback, but not all of the participants commented. Therefore, when we met for the second session, I began by inviting the participants to share their thoughts on the key themes and issues that they felt had emerged to date. This provided me with a sense of the features of their working practice that were significant to them, and therefore I was mindful that they needed to be represented in the findings.

### 4.3. Research procedure

<b>January 2014</b>	Letters inviting participation in research sent out to ex-students.
<b>February 2014</b>	Sample recruited.
<b>March 2014</b>	Initial meeting. A code of practice agreed (Appendix F) and an opportunity to ask further questions in order to confirm participation in the group.
<b>April 2014</b>	First Focus Group session. Group Agreement, regarding code of conduct for FG and DS, established. Participants shared an image or text that illustrated how they understood the nature of their role when working with children. Discussion Site formulated. Group Agreement and transcript of first session posted. OFSTED provocation question and post by Lucy.
<b>May/June 2014</b>	Discussion Site questions formulated: What are the unique features of the setting in which you work? Do you have a mission statement that sets out the values and purpose of your setting? How do involve your children in the assessment and documentation in your learning?
<b>July 2014</b>	Second Focus Group session. Shared an event or an example of assessment practice that illustrates values and beliefs. Discussion Site: Transcript of second session posted and feedback invited. Life History Accounts: Participants invited to write a narrative account of their journey towards becoming an EYP/EY teacher.

### 4.4. Data analysis

#### 4.4.1. Selecting a data analysis approach

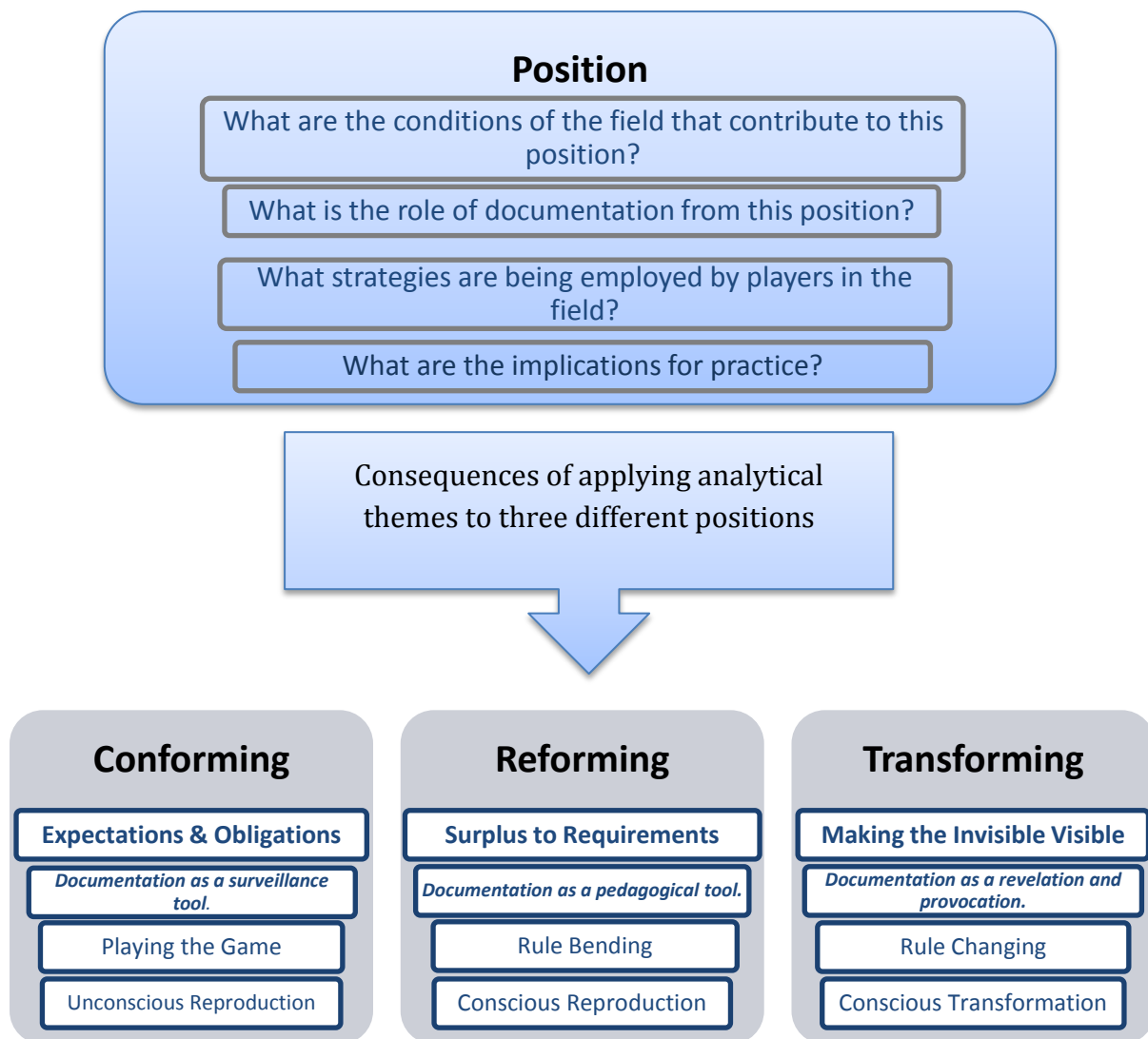
Bourdieu saw reflexivity as an epistemological premise, in that any piece of research should be critically reflexive so as to unveil the un-thought of categories and avoid predetermination (Deer, 2012). It was important therefore that I found a method of data analysis that allowed me to search for ‘unthought-of’ categories. The broad principle of thematic analysis that Braun and Clarke (2006) outline was a useful starting point, as it is a method that can be employed to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes within data (p.4). By intersecting this type of analysis with MacNaughton’s (2003) three positions it enabled me to view the same data through three different lenses, examining it from a technical, practical and critical perspective. The adoption of a transforming position, in particular, meant aspects which are typically hidden from a conforming or ‘practical’

position can be revealed. The purpose of the analysis was not to necessarily identify problems, but to seek ways of understanding the relationship between professional *habitus*, the field and practice – or in other words “the pedagogical, the political and the empirical” (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2013, p.19) - features of the lived experience that create a particular logic of practice.

#### **4.4.2 The data analysis process**

I adopted the phases of thematic analysis that are outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Following familiarisation with the data, I generated initial codes from across the entire data set where extracts from the data were collated (see Appendix H for an example of initial coding). The codes were then collated into themes (Appendix I). At this point I intersected MacNaughton’s (2003) three positions in order to see whether the themes fitted with any of the three positions. This was not a particularly neat procedure, and could not be done in a systematic manner. As I read and re-read the data, I began to realise that the three positions could not be viewed in isolation of each other. There seemed to be a consequential relationship between all three positions, and this was best illustrated in the form of a mind-map (Appendix J). A mind-map reflects natural thinking patterns, where relationships between ideas, values and beliefs can be portrayed (Burgess-Allen and Owen-Smith, 2010). Some of the codes and themes that had initially been created appeared on the mind map, and began to emerge as questions regarding the implications for adopting different positions in the interpretation of the data.

Bourdieu’s conceptual tools also came into play at this point as they served to provide a framework for a series of reflexive questions that would form the basis of the analysis chapter. The following diagrams illustrate how the thematic framework was constructed, and the key themes that emerged from the questions from each position.



**Fig. 3 Thematic framework for analysis of themes**

In the following chapter I provide an analysis of the policy context in which this study was located. At the beginning of the chapter a rationale for how the analysis was conducted is provided. The principles adopted were in line with those outlined in this chapter – thus maintaining the ‘golden thread’.

# Chapter 5

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## Policy Analysis

### 5.0 Rationale and purpose of chapter

The election of the New Labour government in 1997 marked an era of increased attention on ECEC, which was concerned particularly with reducing poverty and increasing life chances through 'early intervention' (Moss, 2014). British research examining the effects of poverty and social deprivation was in its infancy, and so findings from international research, such as the US High/Scope Perry Preschool Programme, were used to inform UK policy. The key factors that contributed to improved life chances for economically disadvantaged children and families were multi-faceted, and included principles related to targeted intervention; attendance at high quality pre-school; active parental engagement and systematic evaluation and monitoring (Faulkner and Coates, 2013). The New Labour government's own commissioned research – the Effective Provision of Pre-School Evaluation (EPPE) project (Sylva, et al, 2004) was instrumental in reinforcing the findings from the USA studies. It highlighted the positive impacts that high quality early years education can have for children, particularly those from low-income groups. The application of these principles to New Labour governance saw the inception of the Every Child Matters (HM Treasury, 2004) policy context. In line with Labour political ideology, there was an increase in centralisation of responsibility at national level as well as public expenditure of ECEC (Moss, 2014).

By this point in time, education had become the product of globalisation, where educational knowledge was reworked in terms of the skills, competencies and dispositions required by the economy. Parents and pupils were positioned as consumers (Ball, 1999) and competition and entrepreneurialism was openly encouraged through a continued emphasis on 'standards' and 'performance' (Bochel and Daly, 2014).

The period of 2010-2015 saw a Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition government in power, where their defining role was to cut public expenditure and adopt a new approach towards children's services that saw a retreat in universal support for children and families and increased levels of state intervention focusing on more disadvantaged families (Daniel, 2014). The ECM policy agenda 'disappeared' (Moss, 2014) and the focus shifted to

standards, accountability and restructuring of the school system. The longstanding Conservative interests of 'freedom' for individuals, families and schools meant that state responsibility was replaced by localised demand and provision of schools and children's services, where accountability was increased through market mechanisms (Bochel and Daly, 2014). Whilst there was still a commitment to raising the status and quality of the children's workforce, demonstrated for example by the Nutbrown Review (2012), concerns remained regarding the impact of reduced expenditure and investment in early years provision (Nutbrown, 2013) and increased emphasis on testing and accountability (BERA/TACTYC, 2014). A Conservative government came into power in 2015 and the commitment to cutting public expenditure now continues through the introduction of challenging policy initiatives related to childcare availability and closing achievement gaps (Merrick, 2016) as well as a continued emphasis on accountability through baseline testing. This is despite the sector's plea to abandon its intentions (Bradbury and Roberts- Holmes, 2016).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a critical analysis of assessment policy in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), to identify the key narratives, and consider how they may be read within the context of practice in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Much writing on education reform takes the meaning of policy for granted and can be seen to "solve a problem" through the production of policy texts (Braun et al., 2011). However, if policy analysis is only seen as a superficial attempt to check the extent to which a problem has been solved, then the "messy, contested, creative and mundane social interactions" which are involved in policy enactment go unrecognised (Ball et al., 2012). Furthermore, opportunities to consider how policy narratives may be read in different contexts within a social field can be missed. This thesis is concerned with the implementation of assessment policy within the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector, and the intention is that, through the adoption of a critical social constructionist lens, I will consider the implications for practice as a result of different readings of assessment policy narratives.

## **Establishing a Framework for Analysis**

Neo-liberal policy discourses have seen an increased responsibility for delivering public policy transferred to third parties. Salamon (2002) defines this new relationship between

governmental agencies and third party actors as “third party government” (p.2). Within the field of ECE, the PVI Sector is the third party that has received increased opportunities to deliver public policy concerned with Early Childhood Care and Education (ECEC). Third party government creates complex, interdependent relationships between public agencies and their third-party partners, as there is still a necessity for policymakers to achieve accountability for how public money is spent.

Salamon (2002) devised a ‘tools of governance’ framework for examining this complex relationship. The framework looks at tool dimensions, or technologies, that embody a programme, and intersects these with a range of criteria for assessing the likely impact of policy tools on programmes. The tools, or technologies, synonymous with assessment in ECE programmes are concerned with grants and subsidies, outcomes-based measurement, regulation and accountability. Salamon explains this process in the following way:

*.... these tools define the actors who will be part of the cast during the all-important implementation process that follows program enactment, and they determine the roles that these actors will play. Since these different actors have their own perspectives, ethos, standard operating procedures, skills and incentives, by determining the actors the choice of tool importantly influences the outcome of the process. (2002, p.10)*

Bourdieu’s notions of field and *habitus* fit well with Salamon’s analogy. Practitioners in the PVI sector have their own perspectives, ethos and operating systems - or “feel for the game” (Bourdieu, 1998a) - related to assessment practice which could be classified as their *habitus* within the PVI field. The choice of tools underpinning assessment policy are both technical and political decisions which, Salamon argues, determine the level of discretion and influence actors have in determining how, and the extent to which, policy will be implemented. This is an interesting argument, as it implies that third-party partners may have an increased amount of power in how they implement policy. As suggested in the introductory chapter, the level of discretion and influence is limited for actors within the PVI sector, ironically as a result of the tools that are required to be utilised.

A review of literature related to policy analysis in the field of ECE indicates that Salamon’s framework has been used to examine broader aspects of ECE policies in the United States

and Korea (see Tayler, 2011). There seems to be no published research using Salamon's framework in England, however. Appendix K provides an overview of the framework that I created for this study based on Salamon's model to aid the analysis of assessment policy. I devised a matrix of Salamon's intersecting criteria and tool dimensions that enabled me to identify key questions, factors and tensions relevant to identified policies that could be plotted onto the matrix. This served as a basis for consequential policy analysis in this chapter and analysis of the empirical data captured in my own research.

The political and social factors that inform policy are commonly termed policy 'drivers' and/or 'levers' - or as Lingard and Rizvi (2010) prefer: "tactics and strategies" (p.37) - that are used at the formulation and implementation of policy. Steer et al. (2007) usefully provide definitions for, and thus distinctions between, the two terms. They define policy 'drivers' as "cues to action" by those who manage and determine public services (Steer et al, 2007, p. 177), which can be communicated in a range of textual formats such as official policy documents, evidenced-based research and ministerial statements. Such drivers provide the framework for action to be taken as a method for addressing the problem created by the policy creators. Policy 'levers' can be defined as the "governing instruments", or the functional mechanisms that government and its agencies use to direct, manage and shape change in public services (Steer et al., 2007, p.177). Salamon (2002) would refer to these as the 'tools of governance', which is the terminology that will be used throughout this chapter.

Whilst Salamon's tools of governance helped to provide a framework for analysing the impact of policy tools, it was also necessary to find a framework that allowed for a deconstructive documentary analysis of relevant policy drivers and levers that have informed assessment policy and the creation of its relevant policy tools. Lubeck (1996) notes that the practice of deconstructing provides a way to interrogate and question what is understood as the constructs, categories and theories that underpin a textual narrative. Deconstruction from a social constructionist perspective assumes that the knowledge claims that are made in policy are likely to serve the interests of some better than others (Lubeck, 1996), and therefore allows for alternative readings of texts that may well serve the interests of the 'other'. A framework that allows for an alternative reading of policy texts requires what Ball (1993) refers to as a "toolbox of diverse concepts and theories" (p.10),



highlighting the complexity of the relationship between policy intentions, texts, interpretations and responses (p.13). This fits with a trajectory studies framework of analysis, which traces policy inception and enactment through to implementation. Hence, it takes account of how narratives underpinning policy texts may be interpreted by the different actors, through a range of different positions (MacNaughton, 2003). Ball (1993) provides a framework that outlines three contexts of policy making: (i) influence, (ii) policy text production and (iii) context of practice.

This framework will form the basis of the policy analysis (see Fig 4.). In order to examine the contexts pertinent to assessment policy, a range of policy texts have been selected (see Appendix L). I have selected policy texts that begin with the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project (EPPE) (Sylva et al., 2004) followed by others that were either commissioned by the government or third party reports. The EPPE project (Sylva et al., 2004) was a government commissioned research project that has made a significant contribution to the debate about ECE through its production of research evidence that has informed consequential policy (Sylva et al., 2007). Significantly, this project also marked a turn towards an 'effectiveness' paradigm where quality of ECE provision became defined by pre-determined outcomes and value for money.

A series of key questions have been identified for each stage/context of the policy analysis. In the final stage (context of practice) I provide two readings of policy analysis. The first reading examines how texts may be interpreted in practice by reading them through the lens of the dominant, 'conforming' discourses identified in the first stage of analysis. The second reading examines how the reading of policy through an 'other' lens provides for a different 'reforming', or 'transforming', interpretation of policy within the context of assessment practice. Both of these readings will be framed within the context of practice within the PVI sector, where Salamon's framework will be utilised more explicitly.

Policy Analysis Framework (adapted from Ball, 1993)			
CONTEXT OF INFLUENCE	CONTEXT OF POLICY TEXT PRODUCTION	CONTEXT OF PRACTICE READING #1	CONTEXT OF PRACTICE READING #2
[Policy Drivers and Levers]	[Performative Texts]	[Tools of Governance]	[An 'Other' Reading]
Where is policy initiated? What dominant discourses emerge from the policy narratives?	What texts are produced that inform assessment policy? How may these texts be read in relation to the dominant discourses?	How may texts be interpreted in practice? Why may texts be interpreted in a certain way?	How may texts be interpreted in an 'other' way that takes account of a different paradigmatic lens?

**Fig 4. Policy Analysis framework.**

## 5.1. The Context of influence

### 5.1.1. The global and local dimensions

The emergence of neo-liberal ideology has led to a shift in policy formation, where policies are now located within a global system as well as a national context (Lingard and Rizvi, 2010). Consequently, education reform has moved from a state-centred public welfare tradition of educational provision, to a practice that is more greatly aligned to private sector organizations. This is exemplified by the Department for Education (DfE) who legitimise a working relationship between the state and private sector in England, which includes a clear message regarding how the relationship will be managed:

*We are establishing a strong relationship between central government, commissioners and providers, and at a local level, based on effective collaboration, targeting of resources, and strong systems of accountability. (2011a, p.13)*

The influences of the World Bank and other bodies such as UNICEF have resulted in an increased emphasis on a 'needs centred' discourse, which Mahon (2010) argues has

provided a justification for programmes that target disadvantage. The additional interest in neuro-scientific perspectives of child development has also drawn greater attention to notions of critical periods, neglect and the environmental impact on education. These global influences play out in distinctive ways within the policy framework in England. The Field Report (2011), for example, outlines the need to provide strategies to prevent “poor children from becoming poor adults” (p.6), and the Allen Report (2011) notes that society’s health, social and behavioural problems have not been addressed because of delayed intervention that “increases the cost of providing a remedy for these problems and reduces the likelihood of actually achieving one” (p.4). The Coalition government’s policy, *Supporting Families in the Foundation Years* (DfE, 2011a), illustrated how these principles have been translated into policy:

*Our focus throughout is on children’s development, so that by the age of five children are ready to take full advantage of the next stage of learning and have laid down foundations for good health in adult life. (p.4)*

Further, through consultation on the EYFS:

*...the Government has made clear its view that teaching in the early years should be focused on improving children’s ‘school readiness’, guiding the development of children’s cognitive, behavioural, physical and emotional capabilities, so that children can take full advantage of the learning opportunities available to them in school. (p.62)*

The investment of public money on improving children’s school readiness is clear, as is the desire to foster a sector which is “entrepreneurial, sustainable and socially responsible” that aims to “draw on the ideas of professionals from maintained, private, voluntary and independent providers ...to stimulate its growth and culture of innovation” (DfE, 2011a, p.33).

Such a commitment to this new governance (Salamon, 2012) creates a conundrum for government, in terms of how to govern without government (Ozga, 2008). Through the allegiance with globalisation and dominance of the Anglo-American discourse concerned with positivist and technically instrumental ideals (Moss and Dahlberg, 2008), the draw to utilise tools or conditions that are concerned with standardisation, quality, benchmarking

and data harmonisation (Ozga, 2008, p.266), becomes the core policy lever. This is particularly significant for the PVI sector as the government has limited power regarding the conditions that are forced on settings in receipt of public money (Penn, 2014, p.39), and so the only mechanism to assure a return on public investment is to regulate through measurement of outcomes. Salamon (2002) would refer to this as a 'coercive' tool that, through systems of standardisation, restricts opportunities for practice which is sufficiently localised and culturally appropriate. Assessment policy and practice are thus implicated in these neo-liberal discourses as a means by which measurement of children's progress and practitioner performance can be achieved.

Whilst the rationale for the key policy drivers seems to be derived from human capital theory, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has also been a further global policy driver and provides a contrary view to programmes that target vulnerable children (Penn, 2011). The OECD has played a critical role in the formulation and dissemination of a paradigm that advocates public investment for social, rather than economic, benefit (Mahon, 2010). The *Starting Strong II* (OECD, 2006) report highlights concern with treating ECE as an economic activity and consequently recognises a number of issues and limitations of the reliance on the private sector in providing ECE who, if they fail to deliver policy, could result in serious consequences for the development of young children (Farquhar, 2013, p.292). Whilst the report does not advocate any particular curriculum model it does raise concerns about the 'schoolification' of ECE services. The Starting Strong report paid particular attention to ECE pedagogy, and offered an alternative social pedagogy approach that combines "care, upbringing and learning, without hierarchy" (OECD, 2006, p.59). This view is representative of the turn towards a curriculum approach that takes account of the socio-cultural context of learning where participation and voice are guiding concepts (Buchanan, 2013). The criticism of a school readiness approach is levelled at the English system, reflected in concerns expressed by numerous academic groups (British Educational Research Association (BERA)/TACTYC: Association for Professional Development in Early Years, 2014; Early Childhood Action, 2012) who outline the potential detrimental effect on children's learning and development as a result of such performative policy demands. This tension between competing views is apparent in much ECE curriculum and assessment policy, and the final reading of policy seeks to provide an

alternative reading that acknowledges the paradigmatic shift to a social pedagogic reading of assessment policy. It is also worth noting, however, that the 'toolkit' analogy associated with the most recent, and relevant, OECD *Quality Matters* report (Taguma, Litjens, and Makowiecki, 2012) is still concerned with discourses regarding measurement of quality. For example, one measure recommended by OECD to ensure quality was to create instruments which could be used to measure curriculum appropriateness and teacher competence (OECD, 2004, p.29). As Farquhar and Fitzsimons (2013) note, this therefore seems to be a mere rhetorical device in which the dominant discourses still portray education as a mechanical process which is subject to remedies and improvements of a technician nature (p.48) to help solve the problems of underachievement and disadvantage.

### **5.1.2. Emerging dominant discourses**

The ECE sector is seen as the solution to solving the wider economic and social problems that are impacting on educational outcomes, and consequently situates them as a "producer of predetermined outcomes" (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p.5). The language of expediency, productivity and commodification are representative of the tools of governance that drive policy. Indeed, as Gammage (2003) notes, government agencies talk about the education "industry", or "delivering" a curriculum (p.353) as if children were components in a factory. Closer examination of key policy texts produces an analogy of a production line, or a "delivery chain" (Ball et al., 2011, p.514) where children are constructed as commodities and settings form the beginning of the production line that is required to be quality controlled to ensure expedience in productivity.

Such an analogy sits with a scientific discourse of developmental psychology which sees development as an individual endeavour, and the child as an "isolated unit of development" (Burman, 2001) who needs to be 'ready' and fit for purpose for their role in society and contribute to the knowledge and information-based economy. Within this discourse, knowledge is devoid of social and cultural differences, therefore exacerbating social divisions rather than remedying them. Such a reductionist approach means that teaching and assessment techniques reinforce structures of individualism (Burman, 2007) and

standardisation. In addition, this discourse assumes development occurs in a predetermined manner, that is defined through surveillance and control (Canella, 1997).

The second reading of policy aims to identify specific policy texts that have been produced to inform assessment policy and reflect on these identified dominant discourses.

## **5.2. Context of policy text production**

### **5.2.1. Identification of relevant policy texts**

For the purpose of this section of policy analysis, I have identified a range of texts that have informed assessment policy in chronological order of evolution (starting with the EPPE report). Whilst the key symbolic tool is the EYFS framework (DfE, 2014a), other texts are also relevant in this analysis. The texts are grouped by purpose and are all policy related in that they were produced to inform policy either as a report, guidance or commissioned research/reviews (Appendix L). A colour coding system was then adopted which identified five key themes in which to locate the policy evolution framework (see Appendix M).

### **5.2.2. Reading the policy texts**

I argued in the previous section that the dominant discourses that emerge from recent policy narratives are concerned with the notion that the ECE sector is seen as the starting point for ensuring readiness for learning and knowledge production. Readiness and expected development are noted as indicators of quality. Moss and Dahlberg (2008) define quality as “generally understood as an attribute of services for young children that ensures the efficient production of predefined, normative outcomes, typically developmental or simple learning goals” (p.4). They link the term ‘quality’ to the idea that it is a concept that is concerned with an evaluation of the extent to which a service has conformed to the adoption of methods which produce universal and objective ‘norms’. Such an approach results in a mechanistic approach to assessment, or a “technology of distance” (p.5) that

allows for performance to be compared globally – irrespective of geographic, social or cultural diversity.

The relationship between quality and outcomes is significant. Numerous policy texts frame positive outcomes as a measure for quality (OFSTED, 2014b; DfE 2013(a); DfE 2013(c); Nutbrown, 2012; Tickell, 2011; Field, 2010; OECD, 2006; Sylva, 2004a). The drive for standardisation is a significant tool of governance, which is intended to address the wide variations in quality of ECE programmes – particularly across the PVI sector. This was first evidenced in the findings from the EPPE project (Sylva, 2004a) and continues to be a key policy driver. The EYFS framework (DfE, 2012 and 2014a) stipulates two points of statutory assessment – a progress check at age two and assessment at the end of the EYFS in the form of a profile. These are two outcome-based universal measures of quality which, under the guise of efficiency and manageability (Salamon, 2002), are tools which have been “radically simplified” (Tickell, 2011, p.6) to reduce bureaucracy.

### **Two Year-Old Progress Check**

The progress check is intended to take place between the ages of 24 and 36 months (DfE, 2013b). It is worth noting that the details of the requirements are outlined in the *Early Years Outcomes* (DfE, 2013b) document, which states that it is a

*...non-statutory guide to support practitioners. It can be used by child-minders, nurseries and others, such as Ofsted, throughout the early years as a guide to making best-fit judgements about whether a child is showing typical development for their age, may be at risk of delay or is ahead for their age. (p.3)*

Whilst this may be non-statutory guidance, the notion that the document will be used by OFSTED as a tool for measuring whether children are developing ‘typically’ for their age is suggestive of a positivist approach that situates practitioners under the regulatory gaze and effectively coerces them to follow the guidance. Interestingly, Dubiel (2014) also notes that the production of this new document by the DfE was an exercise in separating out age band descriptions from the Characteristics of Effective Learning (Early Education, 2012). This exercise allowed the DfE to ‘distance’ themselves from *Development Matters* (Early

Education, 2012), and its associated messages located within a broader social-cultural discourse. The National Children's Bureau (NCB) were commissioned to provide further guidance regarding how to conduct what is now commonly termed as the "EYFS progress check at age two". The advice states that the check should be "based on skills, knowledge, understanding and behaviour that the child demonstrates consistently and independently" (NCB, 2012, p.3). Such an emphasis on 'typical' development provides a contradictory perspective to that articulated in the government commissioned Early Years Learning and Development, Literature review (Evangelou et al., 2009) which notes how contemporary research has highlighted the complexity of a child's developmental pathway:

*Developmental theories such as those of Piaget have been linear, with children following similar pathways to adulthood. This is embodied in the 'stepping stones' in the EYFP. New theories assume that development proceeds in a web of multiple strands, with different children following different pathways. (p.8).*

The emphasis on observing the child in isolation is another indication of a positivist paradigm. The only reference to a child's interests is within the context of "achievements and actions". OFSTED (2014a, p.10) provide an example of "excellent practice" where a practitioner conducted "meticulous assessment" that allowed her to check what a child knew and identify gaps in skills in order to feed into an integrated review so that concerns regarding progress could be quickly identified and addressed. Whilst I would not disagree that this is necessary practice, such practice that privileges developmental deficits omits to provide a broader and deeper insights into the social and cultural attributes that contribute to a child's learning characteristics. The inclusion of the child's 'voice' is referred to in the guidance. The term 'voice' is suggestive of an approach that values a child's contribution to the learning process; however the example given of practice to illustrate this is of a child choosing a photograph of himself hanging up his coat independently (NCB, 2012, p.9). This is an action that can be matched against the prime area of 'Health and Self Care' and fits with 'typical' development in the corresponding development band. Such conflicting messages create confusion. On the one hand, assessment is seen as an endeavour to provide insight into the individual characteristics of the child, yet on the other hand, the characteristics are pre-determined, which according to Burman (2010) means the child becomes a



“prototypical subject” (p.36) , that delimits any form of evaluation or diverse constructs of childhood. *The Healthy Child Programme* (Department of Health, 2009), and its subsequent reviews, outline the intentions for Health Visitors to contribute to the two year-old check. However, the Allen Report (2011) notes confusion regarding where the accountability lies for the completion of the check (p.xix). This is compounded by the fact that practices in the social field of health traditionally adopt competing professional discourses which are underpinned by more positivist ontological and epistemological assumptions in comparison to the education profession. The health sector seem to favour an ‘ages and stages’ approach that involves the administration of a standardised assessment that is easy to administer (Bedford, Walton, and Ahn, 2013). Salamon (2002) notes that collaboration replaces competition between the public and private sector, and is seen as a desirable “by product” of new governance that can be useful in helping solve public problems (p.15). Therefore it could be argued that assessment can be seen as a coercive tool to draw together professionals across the field. Indeed the evaluation of two year olds in schools projects (Greene et al., 2015) reported the necessity to work collaboratively with other providers. However, taking into account the apparent lower status of the workforce in the PVI sector (Osgood 2009; Cooke and Lawton, 2008) in comparison to the health sector, this report raises an interesting question regarding whose professional judgement will be most likely to be validated.

### **The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile**

The confusion continues when attempting to read policy texts concerned with assessment at the end of the Foundation Stage. *The Foundation Stage Profile Handbook* (Standards and Testing Agency, 2013) outlines two purposes for assessment in the Reception year, which give importance to summative assessment strategies:

The primary purpose of the EYFS Profile is to provide a reliable, valid and accurate assessment of individual children at the end of the EYFS ... In addition, the Department considers that a secondary purpose of the assessment is to provide an accurate national data set relating to levels of child development at the end of the EYFS which can be used to monitor changes in levels of children’s development and their readiness for the next phase of their education both nationally and locally (p.7).

The revised EYFS framework (DfE, 2014a) also defines assessment as having a dual purpose. The formative purpose is seen as an “integral part of the learning and development process” (p.13) and to monitor progress against expected levels. However, the summative purpose is more explicitly and repeatedly defined:

*Each child’s level of development must be assessed against the early learning goals ... Practitioners must indicate whether children are meeting expected levels of development, or if they are exceeding expected levels, or not yet reaching expected levels (‘emerging’). (p.14)*

This is further reinforced by the announcement of a return to baseline assessment at the beginning of the reception year in order to establish ‘floor standards’: “The reception baseline will be the only measure used to assess progress for children who start reception in September 2016 and beyond.” (DfE, 2014b, p.7) The justification for this approach is to ensure progress is measured in a fair way so that children can be compared with others at the same starting point, and is therefore seen as an efficient method for ensuring reliable data is produced. Yet the idea of assessing levels of development against learning goals highlights another ontological confusion.

The drive for certainty and reliability of data is reinforced by OFSTED (2014a), the key regulatory body for quality assurance, who express concern about time lost when assessment information is unreliable:

Children do not make rapid enough progress because far too many settings pass on unreliable assessments. Too often time is lost through unreliable and inaccurate assessment, time that cannot be gained. (p.4)

The sense of a need for expediency in assessment processes that allow for practitioners to quickly complete accurate assessment of children’s starting points in order to meet individual needs from the moment children start (OFSTED 2014a) is noticeable. What is significant here is the further insight into the apparent subjectification of both practitioners and children, who are seen as ‘products’ of human capital to enhance economic productivity (Penn, 2002), as well as the implication that evidence provided by the PVI sector is assumed to be of poor quality, unreliable and unworthy.

The Starting Strong report (OECD, 2006) highlights that the readiness discourse, that is apparent in policies such as the EYFS, is orientated towards cognitive development, emphasised through the acquisition of a range of knowledge, skills and dispositions. I argue that in English assessment policy the emphasis on dispositions is superficial. On examination of the two year progress check and the *Early Years Outcomes* (DfE, 2013b) document it is clear they privilege knowledge and skills. The only document that provides an alternative theoretical paradigm for practitioners to work with is the *Development Matters* (Early Education, 2012) document. Whilst the authors of the document provide further guidance that advocates a socio-cultural approach (Moylett and Stewart, 2013; Stewart, 2011) the political discourse does not seem to fit with such an approach. The publication *More Affordable Childcare* (DfE 2013a) reminds practitioners that there are only two statutory assessment requirements – namely a progress check at the age of two and the EYFS profile at the end of Reception. It adds that the requirement to complete learning journeys, or other similar documents that are synonymous with a social pedagogic approach to assessment, may be a “misconception” (p.42).

The level of ambiguity and contradictory perspectives that appear to be present in assessment guidance raises the question of the effectiveness and manageability (Salamon, 2002) of the tools of governance that are currently in place. Evidence outlined in the research report by Evangelou et al., (2009) highlighted two key factors that were recommended for consideration in the revision of the EYFS (2012). The report questioned the historically favoured linear progression of learning because of its tendency to “simplify and ... homogenise development” (p.29). It also provided a clear acknowledgement that cultural contexts can influence learning trajectories, including the nature of the engagement between the child and the adult (p.59). This was reinforced in non-statutory guidance: “knowing the level of a child’s attainment within a particular area of learning does not tell you anything about the child’s process of learning” (Moylett and Stewart, 2013, p.7). Yet the emphasis on a positivist theoretical perspective in assessment policy, compounded by the “regulatory gaze” (Osgood, 2009, p.740) of OFSTED, provides a “magnetic pull” (Balford and Bath, 2014, p.123) for practitioners that seem to have significant implications for policy implementation. This magnetic pull fits with Grieshaber’s (2005) reference to an “agenda of

standardisation”, where she argues that opportunities to engage “pedagogically with different cultures, languages and backgrounds has been forced to take a back seat” (p.4).

Wood (2010) notes that such “ambiguous policy recommendations” (p.10) can result in a collision of approaches between a cultural transmission/directive approach and an emergent/responsive approach. In the final two sections, the two approaches provide a useful model in which to frame alternative readings of assessment policy text. The first reading of policy interpretation adopts the former approach, as this is the reading to which policy frameworks give more status (Wood, 2010, p.12). The second reading of policy fits with an ‘other’ interpretation of policy through an emergent/responsive lens.

### **5.3. Context of practice - Reading #1**

#### **5.3.1. Interpreting texts in practice: powers of persuasion**

The adoption of a social constructionist lens to policy analysis acknowledges that the way in which texts may be interpreted is a social action (Ball, 1993) dependent on a number of social, cultural and institutional factors. However, as Scott (2000) argues, if policies are to be enacted in the way that produces the intended outcomes, then they become an exercise in persuasion, manipulation and power (p.8). One key element that helps with this process is the extent to which texts are intertextually compatible (Ball, 1993; Scott, 2000). When examining in more detail the evolution of assessment policy the dominant discourses repeatedly refer to narratives of quality, measurement/outcome and readiness. Bourdieu would argue that these discourses act as a form of *doxa*, where there is an assumption of universal consensus of the state meanings (Bourdieu, 2001) associated with quality, measurement and readiness. These discourses fit with a pre-primary (Bennett and Neuman, 2004) curriculum model, or cultural transmission/directive model (Wood, 2010; 2013), where the educational activities provided are geared towards the knowledge, skills and understanding that are described in curriculum policies. The implications for practice are that the focus becomes concerned with creating learning situations that provide optimal opportunities in which children are able to perform the desired learning behaviours that can be matched against desired learning outcomes.

### 5.3.2 Assessing the individual – tokenistic collaboration?

It is particularly noteworthy that policy guidance requires practitioners to make observations in order to note learning on an individualistic basis. This is further reinforced by the expectation that learning behaviours have to be observed independently of others in order to codify against the Early Learning Goals (ELGs). The EYFS framework further emphasises this:

*Practitioners must consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning and development. (DfE, 2014a, p.8)*

Yet the reference to children's interests only seems to serve as a vehicle for planning learning experiences. There is a much greater emphasis on practitioners identifying knowledge and skills (DfE 2014a; OFSTED 2014a), and this is also evidenced in the policy guidance regarding sharing information with parents (DfE 2012 and 2014a; NCB 2012; STA 2013; OFSTED, 2014a). Wood (2007a) provides an insightful argument related to potential weaknesses in a "needs and interests" (p.124) discourse. She questions the extent to which children's interests are able to become their own goals, and argues that these may more commonly become hijacked by outcomes-driven goals. Her argument can equally be applied to the above policy statement. The grouping of needs, interests and stages of development in policy texts seems to be used interchangeably, and the role of the adult seems to be facilitative in creating opportunities that allow children to demonstrate the desired knowledge and skills (Wood, 2007a, p.123). The implication here is that practitioners may find themselves using their observation of children's interests as a pedagogical tool for matching behaviours to developmental outcomes, at the expense of using children's interests as a starting point for determining the knowledge and skills that may emerge from collaborative engagement. It seems reasonable, therefore, to suggest that the 'unique child' ethos of the EYFS and *Development Matters* is framed within a discourse of individualisation, and, as Hatch and Grieshaber (2002) note, observation seems to have

been lost as a curriculum development tool and has instead become a tool for accountability.

The expectation to categorise the individual child (using the terms emerging, expected and exceeding) also has practice-based implications. The use of the term emerging in EYFS policy documentation is used as a definition of a child who has yet to reach the desired level of development. It seems that guidance from OFSTED (2014a) reinforces this notion, with a recommendation to “increase the provision of direct teaching over the course of the year” (p.24) for children from disadvantaged areas. Not only does this notion of effective practice reinforce the deficit model of assessment, but it fits with Urban’s notion of a policy tool that sees “more of the same” intensified literacy and numeracy based instruction as being an effective solution to the problem of disadvantage (Urban, 2012.p 498). Therefore, if the objective to ‘narrow the gap’ is met there is the danger that this will result in unintended consequences, such as creating pressure to skew an otherwise broad and balanced curriculum to meet goals that are not appropriate for all children (Pugh, 2010, p.9).

This argument could equally be applied to those children who are meeting or exceeding the expected developmental goals. File’s (2012) suggestion that children from the middle and upper class are assumed to reach the desired goals without much emphasis on curriculum and instruction (p.24) is pertinent. The fact that goals are already mapped out means that children’s destinations have already been predetermined, and do not take account of a journey that takes the learner on a different “route” or over a different “terrain” (Graue, 2008, pp.444-445). The label for a child who has met or exceeded the expected developmental goal provides a “heightened sense of destination” at some later point in time (Graue, 2008, p.445). If they are unsuccessful in reaching the desired goal, it is not until that point that the attention then reverts back to the type of instruction that has failed the child. I argue, therefore, that the current emphasis on addressing deficits in learning at a set point in time places limitations on all children’s opportunities to understand and share their learning potential.

### **5.3.3. Assessment of development, rather than documentation for learning.**

Learning and development are terms used interchangeably in policy texts. This leads to the question as to whether policy is concerned with learning *or* development, and whether they

are compatible expectations for a practitioner to document. By the end of the Reception year there is an expectation to provide evidence of:

*...the attainment of each child assessed in relation to the 17 ELG descriptors, together with a short narrative describing the child's three characteristics of effective learning. (STA, 2013)*

In practice, the statement translates into a requirement to collate evidence to make judgements about attainment against a set of predetermined Early Learning Goals (development) as well as an expectation that practitioners have sufficient insight into the individual learning characteristics that enable them to describe a young learner's attitude and dispositions to learning. Luff (2012) argues that this provides a contradiction for practitioners as they are required to follow children's individual interests as well as ensure that every child makes progress towards the same prescribed outcomes (p.141).

The performative and normative practices that are advocated and reinforced through the coercive tools of governance, however, suggest that the emphasis on assessing development takes precedence over documenting learning. Documentation within this context is seen as a performative text that is used as evidence of tracking development and judging the effectiveness of teaching and learning, rather than as a pedagogical tool for documenting the complexity of the learning process. Grieshaber (2008) notes that the dominance of developmental and learning perspectives in ECE has forced both "teachers and teaching" to take a back seat (p.506). I would take this argument further by suggesting that the dominance of developmental statements in policy means that both teaching *and* learning have taken a back seat, and there is a danger that the focus of practice is concerned only with assessing development against measureable outcomes and creating a controlled learning environment to ensure this.

The first reading of policy in the context of practice provides an argument that the tools of governance coerce practitioners into standards-based approaches. Graue (2008) argues that the "strategic overlay" (p.445) that is integral to policy narratives means that any practitioner who argues against standards-based approaches may be seen as an indicator of low expectations and unprofessional behaviour. The argument framed within the neo-liberal discourse of readiness provides political legitimacy (Salamon, 2002) for the policy

texts. Yet ultimately, as Graue (2008) also asserts, the assessment of development becomes a tool for repressing both the early childhood practitioner and their “least powerful students” (p.445).

## **5.4. Context of practice – Reading #2**

### **5.4.1. An ‘other’ reading – opening up possibilities**

The purpose of this second reading is intended to serve as a starting point for thinking about other ways of reading assessment policy texts. In the previous section, the reading of policy texts sits well with Dahlberg and Moss’s (2005) own view of the dominant views of ECE institutions, where “Large, complex and contestable concepts such as ‘the child’, ‘education’, and ‘evaluation’ are reduced to a small, simplified and technical discourse of classifications, norms and criteria.” (p.2). Dahlberg and Moss do not dismiss the need for accountability and checking development – and neither do I. Rather, they ask for an opening that allows other perspectives to join the established approaches to assessment. Pence and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2010) refer to this as a “‘both/and’ dynamic” (p.16).

The opening up of other perspectives views assessment through a social pedagogic lens. This requires practitioners to “go beyond thinking about formal learning as sets of skills and knowledge that need to be reproduced or demonstrated in set pieces” Yelland et al., 2008, p.9), but instead views the relationship between learning, development, assessment and documentation as inter-related pedagogical attributes that are complex rather than simple. Wood’s (2010) emergent/responsive approach to the curriculum is a helpful lens to use when reading policy texts from this perspective, because the pedagogical approach is responsive to children’s cultural practices, meanings and purposes (Wood, 2013, p.73). Consequently ‘readiness’ to learn is seen as an attribute that pre-exists in a child, rather than something that is waiting to happen through measured intervention.

### **5.4.2 Making collaboration authentic**

Working in partnership with other professionals and parents is clearly outlined as an expectation in policy texts (DoH 2009; Field, 2010; Tickell 2011; DfE 2012 and 2014a). In



order to avoid a unilateral relationship between home and school (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2007), a reading of texts through a socio-cultural lens is required. A socio-cultural model does not separate the child, parent and practitioner - it adopts a relational pedagogy. The adoption of a relational pedagogy is understood as an “empowering force”, as it is concerned with both the individual and the collective (Papatheodora, 2009, p.25). Policy documentation notes the significance of interaction as a response to detailed observations (DfE 2013a; STA 2013; DfE 2014a). When information is shared between home and setting, it therefore becomes less about evaluating a child’s knowledge and skills, and more concerned with understanding a child’s learning from a range of perspectives. In this way, there is greater potential for sharing information between the setting and home to create a more authentic dialogue that allows the practitioner to gain an insight into children’s funds of knowledge and working theories (Hedges, 2011) which may be otherwise go unnoticed in their observations.

Documentation also takes on a different stance from this reading, as it becomes a joint endeavour which is intertextual in nature. The documentation produced not only illustrates children’s development, but also illuminates the practitioner’s work and the conditions for children’s learning (Alasuutari et al., 2014). Framing documentation in this way can open up opportunities to break down dominant discourses through the process of self-reflexivity (Dahlberg et al., 2006), and opens up possibilities for providing alternative constructions of the child as a learner.

### **5.4.3 ‘Emergence’ as a competing paradigm**

The adoption of a socio-cultural approach to assessment uses a child’s emerging ideas, behaviours and ‘working theories’ (Hedges, 2011 ; Carr, 2001,) as a positive indicator of the child being “ready, willing and able” to learn, which Carr (2001, p.23) refers to as a “credit model” of assessment. Such behaviours are indicative of positive learning characteristics, and are exemplified in non-statutory documentation Development Matters. Learning characteristics are framed in the following way:

*The ways in which the child engages with other people and their environment – playing and exploring, active learning, and creating and*

*thinking critically – underpin learning and development across all areas and support the child to remain an effective and motivated learner. (Early Education 2012, p.4)*

By using Wood's (2010) emergent/responsive approach, the notion of emergence shifts from a deficit model to a model that is transformative. This perspective also allows for a different reading on readiness, where it shifts from potentially exclusionary concepts that are concerned with measuring learning to it being an active, relational concept that is concerned with creating conditions to produce learning (Evans, 2015). Such an approach allows for what Lenz Taguchi (2007) refers to as "deconstructive talk" (p. 284). The idea of emergence now sits more closely with the practitioner to begin with, as well as the child. Knowledge that children bring is seen as the starting point for building on a deeper and more complex engagement with play and learning, but more importantly it allows for different readings of a child's learning to emerge. Lenz Taguchi notes that this approach allows for difference to be understood as a productive force, rather than a threat to consensus, as it undermines and challenges assumptions, values and practices (p.284). Assessment from this perspective places a greater emphasis on children's play. It is more concerned with documenting the complexity of play, and seeing it as a starting point rather than an end point. Play activities are documented as increasingly complex as the practitioner's own knowledge and understanding of the child emerges.

## **5.5. Concluding commentary**

Ball (1993) notes that policies are both encoded and decoded in complex ways and, just as they are intended to solve problems, they can equally pose problems for their subjects. The predominance of a neo-liberal discourse assumes that the relationship between the state and ECE settings is contractual (Miller and Smith, 2011), and therefore there is an obligation for policy to be adhered to. However, the adoption of 'third party governance', and the plethora of policy texts means that policy is always open to interpretation.

This analysis of assessment policy has, in the first instance, identified the dominant, conforming discourses that are evident in policy texts. Using Salamon's tools of governance framework has allowed for a consideration of the impact of the different policy tools on both the practitioner and the child who is being assessed. It also highlights how assessment

cannot be viewed in isolation from curriculum and its associated pedagogies. By reading policy texts through a positivist lens, the coercive nature of the accountability and measurement tools form a particular lever that give political legitimacy for their presence in policy. Practice that is technical and mechanistic becomes “morally valorised” (Buchanan, 2013, p.25). Yet close scrutiny also highlights the potential for confusion in interpretation through the numerous terms which are used collectively and interchangeably, but can have very different meanings. The adoption of a socio-cultural lens allows for a different reading of the same texts. What is significant about this reading is that it highlights the complexity of learning. It situates learning as open to multiple readings, which therefore make it difficult to reduce into universal measures. It also leads to the question of whether the policy tools chosen fit with the desire for a more ethical and democratic assessment of pedagogy. Indeed, File (2012) asks the pertinent question: “are the tools we have to assess effectiveness sufficient to understand learning among groups of diverse individuals?” (p.23).

It seems that practitioners are therefore charged with playing a game, a game that allows them to perform their technical assessment duties to satisfy the gatekeepers of regulation, whilst also satisfying their own ethical and moral duties to the children and families who they work with (Basford and Bath, 2014, p.129). The coercive nature of the policy tools – particularly those evidenced in OFSTED policy narratives - arguably restricts the opportunities to adopt a more democratic pedagogy and its associated assessment practices. In Chapters 6 and 7 the findings and analysis from the data collection provide further insight into the impact of the identified tools of governance for a group of practitioners working in the PVI sector.

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# Chapter 6

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## Findings

### 6.0. Introduction

The findings from the Focus Group (FG) and Discussion Site (DS) are presented in this chapter. The research questions that were identified in the introductory chapter form the structure for their presentation.

The three research questions are:

- What are practitioners' own *habitus* that shape their theories, beliefs and understanding of the discourses of assessment?
- How do practitioners describe assessment practice in their workplace settings?
- How are practitioners mediating their professional *habitus* with the culture and assessment practices of their workplace setting and the wider policy context?

### 6.1. What are practitioners' own *habitus* that shape their theories, beliefs and understanding of the discourses of assessment?

Bourdieu was clear in his thinking that practice was not a result of one's *habitus*, but rather an individual's relation between their *habitus* and their own current circumstances (Maton, 2012) – namely their position in the field. He also noted that the formative conditions that influence an individual's *habitus* are directly related to their practice and aspirations. In order to gain a sense of how the participants' life experiences may have contributed towards the structure of their *habitus*, I asked each of them to provide a brief life history that accounted for their career history. I deliberately left this task open-ended in order to allow them to identify the key events in their personal lives that had shaped both their career decisions and associated practice. The task took place at the end of the data collection phase, as I had hoped that their attendance at the FG sessions had opened up spaces in their own thought processes that would enable them to reflect more deeply.

However, the depth of the participants' responses was varied. Interestingly, Jackie and Kathy's were the most detailed accounts, which may or may not have been indicative of the extent of their life experience in comparison to the other three participants who were at the early stages of their career.

In addition to the life history narrative, the FG sessions provided further data that enabled me to build up a picture of the relationship between the participants' *habitus*, their position in the field and their assessment practices. The first FG session was concerned with gaining an insight into the participants' philosophical and pedagogical beliefs that underpinned their practice and aspirations. I asked the participants to bring a text or image of some description that illustrated how they understood the nature of their role with the children they worked with. Jackie and Lucy brought poems to illustrate the significance they placed on the relationships they built with the children in their care (Figs 5 and 6). Kathy shared a picture of a male practitioner to illustrate how she felt males were misrepresented in the sector. Ruth shared a quote from a text (Nutbrown, 2006) and Helen brought her 'Busy Day' book. There were two noticeable features that seemed to be representative of common dispositions amongst the participants. One was concerned with their aspirations to gain further qualifications (capital) that would enable them to make a contribution to the education of children. The other was related to the importance that they placed on the relationships they formed with the children and families with whom they worked.

**Children Learn What They Live (Jackie's poem)**

If a child lives with criticism  
he learns to condemn.

If a child lives with hostility  
he learns to fight.

If a child lives with ridicule  
he learns to be shy.

If a child lives with shame  
he learns to feel guilty.

If a child lives with tolerance  
he learns to be patient.

If a child lives with encouragement  
he learns confidence.

If a child lives with praise  
he learns to appreciate.

If a child lives with fairness  
he learns justice.

If a child lives with security  
he learns to have faith.

If a child lives with approval  
he learns to like himself.

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship  
he learns to find love in the world.

by Dorothy Law Nolte (1954)

**Fig. 5: Jackie's Poem**

### **Forever in my heart (Lucy's Poem)**

Although I'm not their mother, I care for them each day.  
I cuddle, read and sing to them, and watch them as they play.

I see each new accomplishment, I help them grow and learn.  
I understand their language, I listen with concern.

They come to me for comfort, and I kiss away their tears.  
They proudly show their work to me, I give the loudest cheers!

No, I am not their mother, but my role is just as strong.  
I nurture them and keep them safe, though maybe not for long.

I know some day the time will come when I will have to part,  
but I know each child I cared for is forever in my heart!

**Fig. 6: Lucy's poem**

#### **6.1.1 Aspirations to gain 'capital'**

All of the participants had aspirations to become qualified teachers in their formative years. For Jackie, Helen and Ruth their personal circumstances had not allowed them to follow the traditional route to gaining Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Following on from their degrees, all of the participants went on to gain either Early Years Professional (EYP) or Early Years Teacher status, and were employed on the basis of their status. Jackie and Kathy held management responsibilities in their pre-school, whereas Helen, Ruth and Lucy, being employed in day nurseries as either EYPs or Early Years Teachers, did not. However, they did have a supervisory role in their designated 'room'.

#### **Working in a pre-school site: Jackie and Kathy**

Jackie and Kathy were the most experienced members of the group, and their journey towards gaining graduate status had spanned over a twenty five year period. They had

balanced working in childcare settings with their continued professional development and their roles as mother and home-maker. Both Jackie and Kathy initially studied for a Foundation degree on a part-time basis. They continued to third year in order to gain an Honours degree.

Jackie's rationale for gaining a degree was initially to meet the requirements of New Labour policy at the time (DfES, 2006b), which was to increase the number of graduates employed in the PVI sector. Yet as she gained graduate status, she noticed how the increase in capital had been significant in relation to her new found knowledge giving her the confidence to lead and change practice.

*I have met many practitioners and have worked with the best and the worst. I believe that the beliefs and values of a person working in education and their personality is key to success.*

*Before my degree I was of the opinion that a qualification isn't going to help the person do their job better, that the morals, values and personality was of higher value. However, during my time at Uni, I have learned that by gaining my qualification I am able to provide confident leadership in my setting and implement ideas and changes that are based on a breath of knowledge.*

*I look at my time at Uni as a massive CPD training and now that it is finished I do miss that time to meet others and hear new ideas and discuss issues within society that affect children and their families. [Life History excerpts]*

Kathy's career had taken a similar pathway. However, her desire to study at degree level was initially more concerned with personal development than Jackie's was. There was, therefore, less of a sense of coercion, and a greater sense of personal aspiration and desire to increase her capital.

*From the moment I started studying for my degree my whole life changed. Having worked in the Early Years sector for a number of years I felt quite confident when I started studying. I met some amazing people and university gave me a thirst for learning, it was an experience I will never forget. I loved the fact that all of my knowledge was current and up to date, enjoying researching. I felt quite lost when my degree finished. [Life History excerpt]*



As Kathy finished her degree, the pre-school in which she worked was relocated to a school site. The change in location meant that there were greater opportunities to work alongside the teachers in the school. She talked about this as an experience that “opened” her eyes to the progress children made in the reception class. This point in her career created a sense of disruption. She found herself questioning the values, beliefs and experiences that had structured her *habitus* as a pre-school practitioner, and consequently found her practice shifting towards a school-based model.

*I enjoyed working in the nursery but in the reception class I loved seeing the progress that children made, the ones that really wanted to learn and requested to learn more. I wanted to bring my experiences from university into the classroom, celebrating all of the different learning styles that children have, using my child development knowledge to the max. My ethos then really seemed to take a turn, previously I was a great believer in the High-Scope model, attending lots of courses and implementing it into my setting. Now this would just not work in the school I am in. I like the school model now, but still firmly believe in the play-based curriculum.  
[Life History excerpt]*

The shift in her thinking also seemed to be associated with her desire to become a qualified teacher. She was continuing with her professional journey by enrolling on the School’s Direct programme. Kathy saw that her previous experience, qualifications and role as a mother would give her an advantage in the field.

*I feel that I have a head start on some of the other trainees as I have worked with young children for the past thirteen years now and I have a good university degree, meaning that I have current knowledge of child development and the Early Years curriculum. I have also had my own children, which is, no doubt, the most valuable experience that can ever be gained. I really want to teach now, with high aspirations of maybe becoming a head teacher!! I would also love to take my Masters degree ...  
Let’s see! [Life History excerpt]*

This desire to be ‘ahead of the game’ played out in the FG sessions when the participants talked about their assessment practices. This was not necessarily a straightforward endeavour and there were a number of barriers that caused them to feel compromised in how they mediated their *habitus* with the expectations of the setting.

### **Working in a day nursery: Lucy, Helen and Ruth**

Helen and Ruth did not have the necessary entry requirements to gain a place on a Primary Education course, and were offered the BA in Early Childhood Studies as an alternative programme of study. They experienced a shift from disappointment in not being able to initially train as a teacher, to a sense of revelation as to how their degree pathway had provided them with capital that they did not know existed. For Lucy, her experience of studying at University, and taking part in the Erasmus mobility scheme in Sweden, changed her mindset:

*The idea of a set curriculum and testing just did not appeal to me any longer ... I saw a different culture of teaching where it was less of a strict and controlled learning environment, more of an exploration environment for learning, children were allowed to explore and understand the real world [Life History excerpt]*

Ruth talked about the BA Early Childhood Studies degree course being “tailored” to her interest in the Early Years phase and her career desires, and following completion of her degree she then gained Early Years Teacher status. She felt this was a “natural progression” that would “open up more opportunities in the field of the Early Years”.

Helen reflected on the capital she had gained during her degree course which had “inspired” her more than she “would ever have imagined”. Her increased understanding regarding effective pedagogy was evident in her accounts of how she utilised her knowledge to change practice:

*I loved being able to put my own stamp on things. For example, moving toys down off high shelves as others didn't want them ruined and creating new and exciting areas such as investigation. [Life History excerpt]*

### **Aspiration versus reality**

The reality of gaining capital through achieving graduate status did not always meet with the aspirations held by some of the participants. The extent to which they could utilise their knowledge to shape the assessment practice in their settings was variable, and seemed to

have some correlation with the organisation and structure of their settings. There were practical limitations, such as the availability of time to work with other practitioners in developing practice, but the position they held in their setting was a more noteworthy factor. Ruth articulated this in the FG session when she expressed that capital, in the form of knowledge, was not sufficient to inform assessment practice. There was also a necessity to possess a position of power in the setting, such as Jackie and Kathy did. The other participants, however, were answerable to their managers and in the first FG session Ruth highlighted the difficulties inherent in such a position:

*Well I was just thinking about what you were saying ... Just then, you said about people who are based in the office and someone like yourself [Jackie/Kathy] who has to do both...But you'll probably find that your knowledge supports what you're saying...whereas they're [nursery managers] just thinking from a more management base...The ticks to be done...I'm finding that what I'm trying to do I'm struggling to do alone. I'm training to be an Early Years Teacher ... And I've been a pre-school room leader...But I find it really difficult to be the room leader and the Early Years Teacher trainee...It's difficult to manage all those roles. You can't be the room leader, answering the phone and the door, and interacting with the children, and writing, planning and talking to the parents. [FG Session 1]*

The participants interpreted this in terms of professional mistrust of the types of practices that could typically be seen to encourage changes to assessment practice. Jackie experienced a clear sense of professional trust amongst her staff:

*... we are a group of four staff and we are all mature...and we have all been there for years...and we sit down and talk things through together.... [FG Session 2]*

Other participants were not as fortunate, as Lucy explained:

*... we're not allowed to talk throughout the day (?!)...because we've had complaints to say we are...You know ...if you like see a child doing something we talk to each other about it, it is like being 'seen' we are ignoring the children and not being with them. So now throughout the day we have to be completely focused on children. Which is fair enough, I think it needed to be done at our setting with the staff that we've got. [FG Session 2]*

Kathy highlighted how she wanted to encourage more formal learning in the activities that were planned. Her main concern was that she wanted her key working groups to have a similar objective for their activity so that she could “keep control over it” without being too prescriptive. Here her shift towards a more formal pedagogy is illustrated:

*...because EYP's, who are this 'catalyst of change' isn't happening with some of my practitioners...And they still like to do the creative sticking and gluing every day...And quite a lot of the Jolly Phonics and the numeracy isn't coming into their planning. So I need to have it ...Because I'm starting QTS soon, I need to know what their individual planning looks like.  
[FG Session 2]*

### **6.1.2. Relationships – ‘knowing the child’**

All of the participants talked about the value they placed on building authentic relationships with the children and families with whom they worked. They felt that by ‘knowing’ a child they were in an informed position to support their learning and development needs and to make accurate judgements regarding their assessments. For Jackie in particular, her life experiences had clearly shaped her values and beliefs regarding her work with children. Once she became a mother, her own experiences of being on the “other side of the fence” reinforced her strong belief in the importance of parental partnership.

*When I first embarked upon my career path as a nanny...I met many [other] nannies, not all were as professional unfortunately and I have always felt that both the care of children and the education of young children was crucial to children's successes in life. I was privileged to be part of another family's life for 10 years and now with these children now aged 26, 24 and 22, I can see that they have been successful and furthermore they recall their time with me warmly and with happiness.*

*When I had my own children, I then saw caring for children from the other side of the fence and it wasn't as easy. I wanted to be part of their life, in particular their early education life too but I was never invited in after many offers given to help at their pre-school ... Anyway, this feeling of being kept at arm's reach has really shaped my work in my current role and over the time I have turned this round and work hard to include all my families and engage them in the life of pre-school. [Life History excerpt]*

The participants' increase in knowledge and understanding of child development theory had also contributed to the significance they placed on relationships. In the first FG for example,

Ruth brought an excerpt from Nutbrown's *Threads of Thinking* (2006, p.52), which she read out to the group:

*"Whatever theory of learning is adopted, it is clear that the development of meaningful relationships is crucial to positive and meaningful learning in the early years for adult and child"... I picked that one because as soon as I read it I sort of thought ... it was about knowing the children - getting to know those unique little independent people ... and thinking about assessment, what good is assessment if we don't know the child?  
[FG Session 1]*

There was an agreement amongst all of the participants that the commitment to building authentic relationships should be a collective endeavour amongst all team players of a setting. Helen stated:

*The part I most enjoy in my job is the relationship with the children. I felt that I showed staff to enjoy and laugh with the children, not to just sit, observe, tell them what to do and what not to do etc. I believe I have a brilliant relationship with the children, as they respect me as a teacher figure but also they can talk and laugh with me as a friend. I feel that my practice needs more staff that come into the setting feeling motivated and wanting to create new things for the children to enjoy, not just a normal 9 to 5 job [Life History excerpt]*

Yet what seemed to be apparent from the group was their own questioning of whether the discourses around care and education were compatible when thinking about assessment. Explicit in this was the emphasis they placed on an ethics of care, which was highlighted in the two poems that Lucy and Jackie shared in the first session. The participants began to question how this seemed less important when working with older children. Lucy referred to herself as being a "mother figure" to the children who she worked with, which she felt showed....:

*.... the care side of practitioners ... whereas schools don't really have that, but I think that's what separates us,. [FG session 1]*

Jackie summarised these tensions in the following way:

*... and I kind of think you know, maybe I'm obviously against the government on this one - I'm not here to observe and assess or make them*

*hit targets at age 3, 5 and whatever, I'm here to do this one [points to line in the poem ]...I want them to find love in the world, to be quite at peace. I think that's more important you know as a child...we bring them up socially to be able to achieve all this and I think if you have all this [pointing to poem] it's not going to be for everyone, you know, look at all the flak that settings in disadvantaged areas are getting. Are they really failing children in disadvantaged areas or is society failing children in disadvantaged areas? It's not the only thing that is going wrong in that area is it? It's not settings it's a lot of other things. [FG Session 1]*

It was also evident how the policy tensions impacted on their relationships with parents, and their expectations regarding the setting's role. Some parents had expectations that sat within the readiness discourse and were keen to find out how their children were progressing in early reading and maths. This meant that the participants' commitments to an ethic of care were sometimes compromised:

*Jenny: I think early years can get children ready for school but does it have to be this great big thing, this mountain their making of it, but I suppose actually it's parents who find it hard. I think because as much as I am trying hard there are always parents who are pulling you the other way.*

*Helen: I totally agree!*

*Ruth: ....and sometimes they can sort of do completely the opposite of something you've done, and undo all that.(pointing to poster)*

*[FG Session 1]*

For Lucy and Karen, their concerns were related to ensuring that parents were authentically involved in contributing to their child's portfolio, and that they were valued. Lucy commented:

*....what you see in the settings and what parents see at home as well. So like, they'll come in and say "but my child can do that". But I'm not allowed to mark it if I've not seen it ... [FG Session 1]*

Helen reflected on this by considering how some parents seemed less concerned about the academic aspect of their development and placed greater emphasis on personal relationships:

*Lucy: Don't you think parents are different though aren't they? Some parents do want to know more about the academic side.*

*Helen: I know, I totally agree with you.. but I know myself that I have had a*

*lot of parents that have come to me that have really valued that we know their children on a personal level rather than looking at them like 'this is their file and this is what they can do'. I think that's a lot more important to know them personally. [FG Session 1]*

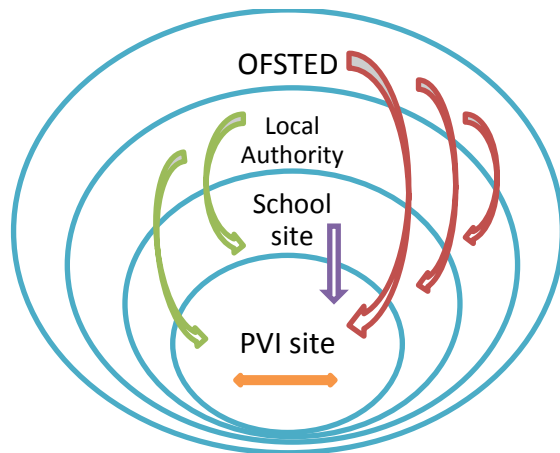
Whatever the nature of the relationship with parents, it seemed that the main barrier for forging relationships was the general “pressures” of implementing the EYFS. This is exemplified in the following section.

## **6.2. How do practitioners describe assessment practice in their workplace settings?**

The assessment practices that the participants described were observation based. The main purpose of observation across the settings was to provide evidence of specific learning behaviours and developmental characteristics that could be mapped against *Development Matters* (Early Education, 2012). All of the participants talked about how they used their observations to ‘track’ progress to the EYFS (DfE, 2014a), which then enabled them to plan for ‘next steps’. The decision regarding what was an appropriate next step tended to be informed by either *Development Matters* (Early Education, 2012) or an interest in an activity or resource that the children had been engaged with.

During the course of the two FG sessions, and the DS, it was apparent how the discourses associated with the purpose and value of assessment was sometimes interpreted differently as a result of the custom and practice of each setting. The participants began to draw their own conclusions as to how the interpretation of assessment policy by different players in the field produced particular types of assessment practices. The field, in this sense, can be usefully illustrated ecologically, in the form of power relationships within and across different parts of the field (see Fig. 7). The diagram illustrates the hierarchical nature of the power relationships across the fields – yet what was also significant was the impact of the power relationships *within* each of the participants’ own workplace. As a result of these relationships, it seemed that practice became restricted and the opportunities for the

participants to utilise their professional *habitus* to challenge and change the dominant discourses of assessment were, at times, limited.



**Fig. 7: Ecological power relationships**

The following two themes illustrate how the power relationships affected the interpretation of assessment policy.

### **6.2.1. Interests, learning and development ... lost in translation?**

The practice of using observations to plan for children's interests was something that all the participants felt posed a challenge for their setting. The EYFS (DfE, 2014a) states that:

*Practitioners must consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning and development. (p.8)*

The participants reflected on this expectation from a position of authenticity, and questioned the extent to which they could genuinely meet the needs of all the children in their care. If this expectation is understood in its literal sense, then the number of children practitioners are usually responsible for in a key group makes this an unrealistic expectation. Jackie commented:

*What you end up doing, is how I feel I do, [I plan for] some of the children's interests ... How do I fit them all in? I have a key group of 10 ...I can't meet*



*every child's interests every day. I can't do it. [FG Session 1]*

This was compounded by the requirement of the 'flexible' offer of nursery funding. For some children, who only attended at the beginning and end of the week, the participants found they were assuming that a child's initial interest had been sustained until they returned at the end of the week. For Lucy and Helen, in particular, the expectation to indicate the focus of children's interests on daily and weekly planning sheets added a further dilemma. On some occasions the chosen interest was not always relevant to the children attending the setting that day. Lucy explained:

*It's hard as well...as at the minute I've got one child comes in on the Monday...He's not in again till Friday, so like for that one day I've got to get their interests...they don't want to do it by the Friday - especially a baby! [FG Session 1]*

The participants had all endeavoured to find ways to address the issue of authenticity. For example, Kathy had chosen to adopt a 'best fit' method, where she took a more generic approach by planning topics based on a "variety of interests". Jackie had shared mind maps showing children's interests with parents. I was left wondering to what extent they found they were able to include the voice of the child in their assessment practices, that would help to give some further authenticity and help to gain a deeper insight into the children's interests and needs. I posted a question on the DS that was intended to provoke some discussion amongst the group regarding this aspect of their practice.

29<sup>th</sup> June 2014

Jo: *I have another question for you all...How do you involve your children in the assessment and documentation of learning?*

Lucy: *We have summary sheets at the end of each half term in their profiles which children are asked to comment on mainly pre-school but on what they can do and what they enjoy doing and how their interests have changed...*

6<sup>th</sup> July 2014

Helen: *We have similar to Lucy where we ask the children questions such as "what do you think they are best at doing?" Or "what do you like to play at nursery?" And they answer which goes on the summary sheet. They also have an 'all about me' sheet at*

*the front of their file which are usually filled by the parents with their child, as it asks what their likes and dislikes are, what they know about their family/culture/religion. The children also ask us to take photographs of things of what they have done because they want them in their file, or they often hand us pieces of work to use as well.*

This provocation, and the FG sessions, allowed the group to begin to form their own conclusions about the impact on their practice of working with a statutory framework that is based on measurable outcomes. They saw the EYFS (DfE, 2014) framework as a mechanism for determining what type of learning was valued, which effectively meant that the interests of the child were only of interest to the adult if they could be measured or tracked. Jackie reflected on the restrictive nature of working with the framework in one of her posts on the Discussion Site: “Now I am writing this and thinking about what we do, it does make me feel that I could do so much more if I was not feeling so restricted by these EYFS statements”.

This excerpt from session 1 was a key moment in the research that provides a powerful illustration of the significance of the hierarchical power relationship both within and across the field. Lucy’s comment epitomises how she was torn between her own pedagogical values and beliefs and the perceived expectations of both the setting and OFSTED to provide evidence of progression.

Jo: *Are you saying that you pick up on the interest more so...if it fits with the EYFS?*

Lucy: *Yes, because you have to in the end...Obviously there are some things that I would put down...You know...This is just something that they want to do, but at the end of the term I have to ‘sign off’ documentation to show that,...I have to have evidence. I’d love to be able to put out whatever they want any time.*

Throughout the research the participants used the terms ‘learning’ and ‘development’ interchangeably when they talked about the purpose of their documentation. Further probing of their references to the Characteristics of Effective Learning (Early Education, 2012) in their practice, revealed the extent to which developmental rather than learning behaviours were the main focus of their assessment practice. Learning characteristics

tended to be used as another category for recording behaviours, rather than as a lens that could be utilised to gain a deeper insight into children’s learning dispositions or funds of knowledge. For example, Helen referred to one observation that she felt could be used to categorise a particular learning characteristic (Early Education, 2012): “Yeah...she is creative and critical thinking”. By their own admission, learning characteristics were seen as ‘add ons’ that had “slipped into the new EYFS” (Jackie) and consequently were not given a great deal of attention by staff. This was compounded by an apparent lack of understanding by other staff in the setting in knowing how to support such characteristics as part of the learning endeavour.

Helen: *I’ve got a boy that really won’t sit, and I ask him to count something out or I show him a number, by asking what it is, he’s like not interested at all...all he wants to do is play with trains, so then I’ll say to the parents...The best thing for him is to do these kinds of activities with incorporating in small world toys. I’ve tried to explain that to staff and I think they are struggling to understand how they can fit the two together to get there [FG Session 2]*

### **6.2.2. OFSTED as a regulatory mechanism: Playing the game**

There was a perceived expectation of the types of assessment practices that were deemed by OFSTED to be necessary in order to be judged as a ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ setting. This perception of accountability to external forces played out in all of their narratives of assessment practice, as well as their comments on the discussion site (Appendix C, OFSTED video thread). In their own settings, the participants talked about the necessity to provide visible evidence, as well as demonstrate how the leadership in their settings had systems for supervision, monitoring and appraisal to ensure standards were being met by all practitioners. They acknowledged that although none of the practices they alluded to were ‘statutory’, they found themselves in a “Catch-22” (Jackie) situation of needing to have sufficient paperwork to prove their worth.

For Ruth, Lucy and Helen in particular, the interpretation of the type of assessment practices that OFSTED would deem appropriate tended to result in mechanistic approaches to evidence gathering and documentation. They talked about how the *Early Years Outcomes* (DfE, 2013) were being interpreted in a hierarchical and literal manner. This resulted in a

requirement to collate a number of observations in order to assure a developmental judgement was accurate.

*Ruth: That's what you find yourself doing sometimes...When you haven't got that observation to 'prove' that they've done it because if the observations not there...even though we know that child... [FG Session 1]*

*Jackie: Physical proof you need, because you feel like your own professional judgement isn't going to be good enough. [FG Session 1]*

*Helen: You see we are not allowed to do that.. It has to be tracked...I can't put anything in that isn't tracked. [FG Session 2]*

Lucy acknowledged the importance of making reliable, consistent judgements:

*If you've got one piece of evidence, a lot of the staff would say "that's it, they've done it" ...Whereas...that might have been a one-off, they might not actually be able to do it...It might have been a fluke...They might be able to do it but they haven't got that back up. [FG Session 2]*

She was also mindful of how a literal interpretation resulted in practices where children were put in "boxes" and, consequently, judgements were neither authentic nor ethical:

*We do long observations which don't show nothing and we've told the manager they don't show nothing...We have to do it every half term...Every six weeks we have to do one for each child. Sometimes that's not showing anything...Like sometimes you do sit and think..."Oh I didn't see that before, I didn't look at that child in that sort of way". Whereas sometimes you're doing it for the sake of 'it has to be done'...And we've told the manager...And that's it...It needs to be done. That's the response we got...It's been brought up in team meetings, it's been brought up to the regional manager.*

*Our area manager will come round every few weeks and she'll go through our profiles, and if there is anything that's not...Or if you can see, say, you know...when a child really enjoys going on the bikes...and that's really all they do...So you got a few photos of them doing it...throughout the progress...So you can see them growing up ...But that will get ripped out because it's already been in the profile, that shouldn't be in there again. If they've done it, they've done it - ticked off and go on to the next thing. [FG Session 1]*

An additional consequence of this type of practice meant that there were missed opportunities to gain an insight into learning characteristics or funds of knowledge.

*Helen: ... in our tracking...Where it talks about say, them mixing colours - we have columns next to each statement, three different columns where there are three spaces for three different observations. And when the columns are done you don't put anything else to do with that within their file...yeah, I know (!?) [laughs] ...So when you doing a lot of creative activities...And you're getting a lot of different stuff...You can't put the rest of it in their file because it has already got three pictures or observations in it. [FG Session 1]*

On other occasions the observations were amended in order to make them 'fit' for their designated purpose.

*Ruth: ...when I've been checking reports, one that I'd actually wrote I felt that I really knew that child, and what they were up to. But I couldn't 'fit' them into a box...and I thought I'll sort of 'highlight' across the boxes they were in ... and that caused a major thing because they weren't 'fitting' into one, so I found myself trying to then change what I wrote...[FG Session 1]*

The challenge, therefore, for the participants was the extent to which the evidence that was produced was deemed to be reliable and valid. Lucy, Hannah and Ruth talked about how they were expected to check and moderate the assessments made by other members of staff. Interestingly, this happened on a one-to-one basis, and it was not always done with the other member of staff present.

There also seemed to be some concern if documentation of learning showed too much progress. Lucy problematized this in terms of children being "too ready" when they moved from one room in the nursery to the next:

*I have been pulled up...and also the Two's [room hosting toddlers] have been told off...If I was to mark in babies at 20 to 36, if I was to mark in there, then they went to Two's that would be taken out because then they've not got anywhere to go. [FG Session 1]*

The requirement to demonstrate added value meant that despite children making good progress in the pre-school and nursery settings, the documentation that was sent over to

the receiving room or school was sometimes disregarded. This went as far as schools apparently amending judgements of the levels children had achieved in order for them to be able to demonstrate good progress. Kathy and Jackie shared anecdotes of how the records that they had sent over to the reception class had been “marked down” so that children who they deemed to have made progress that exceeded expectations were downgraded to the earlier band.

*Jackie: I've got to say that I've been told by the reception class teacher that it doesn't really matter what we put, because the head will mark them straight back down to 30 to 50 months for every single child because they want to prove that they have made progress. [FG Session 2]*

*Jackie: We're not, not getting them ready. We are, but schools are in effect marking them down, so they can show they've made progress and yet ....*

*Kathy: I don't think they look at those transition sheets you know.*

*Jackie: Now I know they don't...They go in a cupboard, or it stays in the file, and they don't look at it. [FG Session 1]*

Lucy also talked about how the validity of the records that had been compiled by staff in the pre-school room had been questioned by teachers in the feeder school.

*Lucy: We've just done a pre-school tracking meeting and the results back were "they can't possibly be that high"...they wanted evidence, if that is what they think it is...*

*Jo: And what did they class as evidence?*

*Lucy: They wanted observations, photos, our planning to see if we had planned for them to be able to achieve...They wanted it for about 20 children!*

Jackie used the analogy of a “criminal offence” to describe this type of practice, but acknowledged that schools found themselves under equal pressure to prove their worth and consequently had their own “game plan” by “massaging” the data that was sent over to the school in order to demonstrate to OFSTED added value.

## 6.3. How are practitioners mediating their professional *habitus* with the culture and assessment practices of their workplace setting and the wider policy context?

### 6.3.1. Having a feel for the game: Doing things differently

As the participants shared their narratives, they began to draw conclusions about the problematic nature of the assessment practices that occurred in their settings. They created their own analogies of the necessity to ‘play the game’ in order to satisfy other stakeholders, both internal and external, to their setting. Alongside this there was a competing desire to find ways to subvert the system whilst still satisfying those players who held a position of power. The group acknowledged that the rules of the game were different depending on the setting in which they worked. Kathy articulated this in relation to different types of “pressures”:

*See we [Kathy and Jackie] have school pressure don't we? We have the school pressure where I feel that academically the children going from my setting have to reach a certain standard academically. But ... It's your actual managers who are putting down that sort of protocol ... It's just awful (!?) [FG Session 1]*

For Lucy, Helen and Ruth, their desire to approach assessment differently was more closely aligned with aspiration than a reality. They had talked about instances where they had either questioned the underpinning philosophies that seemed to be driving the assessment practices, or they had requested time to work with staff in their capacity as EYP/EY Teacher to develop practice.

*Helen: No matter how many times you go into the office and say “look, can we please do this, this is a really good idea it will benefit all the children in the nursery - not just pre-school” and still nothing gets done. [FG Session 2]*

Their main area of concern had been in relation to the level of prescription that guided their everyday practice, which was closely related to the pressures of accountability and (mis)interpretations of assessment policy. Jackie and Kathy had more power to utilise their

capital in order to explore other approaches to assessment and documentation. However, their aspirations and rationale for their alternative approaches were very different and this revealed an interesting relationship between their *habitus* and their practice.

The focus of the final session was for the participants to share a piece of documentation that they felt demonstrated good practice in relation to their own values regarding assessment and documentation. Jackie's belief in the importance of parental partnership was very evident in the example that she shared with the group. She had introduced a system of communicating with parents on a daily basis via email, which had increased involvement of parents and enabled her to gain a more authentic insight into the lives of children:

Jackie: *When I started this job I thought "how can I include parents and make them feel wanted?"...We tried various ways of communicating with parents...We tried diaries - totally impossible with 20 children each day, you get no time. We tried boards by the door, again totally impossible with 20 children...So now I send an email at the end of each day. It takes time - sometimes it can take me an hour ...Sometimes I have to do it at 11 o'clock at night. It's one email and its blind copied to all parents...It runs through our day...It gives a really good idea of what's going on...sometimes I put names on, if its big ... We talk about 'wow' moments children have shared with us...Particularly at transition time some children are upset about going to school but we've had a good chat about it, we talk about that and that's included in the email...One of my worries was that it would be used [as] an avenue to moan at me...I've not had that...In fact, the only time parents use it is to tell me "thank you my child's had a lovely day"...Parents are saying that the email is just fundamental to everything that goes on about keeping parents informed and they feel so much more part of it than they've ever felt before and for me...I guess that email hits all those dots as to why I am in childcare because I want to provide that nurturing, supportive environment for children away from the home but keep parents involved so they don't feel on the outside like I did when my children went through it. [FG Session 2]*

The group were particularly interested in the idea of the 'wow' moments, and how they were utilised in relation to planning and assessment:

Jo: *So those 'wow' moments or episodes...Do you use those to give you more of an insight into their learning...Or do you use any of it more to track their development against Development Matters?*



Jackie: *I wouldn't say that most...They fit with Development Matters, but to be honest I use the 'wow' more as a celebration of their uniqueness...In a way ... It depends what your theme is in the setting...One child came in...He was really, really into Jack and the Beanstalk...growing beans at home.*

Jackie then explained how the initial interest evolved into the creation of a performance stage, using blocks and other materials, and new role play corner that led into a production. She talked about how other children brought their ideas, integrating it with the film *Frozen*. It worked well for the child who only attended nursery on a Monday and Friday, as he had been involved in the plan for a production on the Friday via the email correspondence. He had returned on the Friday enthused and equipped with props and ideas.

Helen's desire to be more authentic was also evident in the examples that she shared with the group. In the first session, Helen had shared with the group her 'Busy Day book'. This provided an insight into how she was endeavouring to give more credence to the notion of interest as a vehicle for making learning 'fun', rather than as a vehicle for collating evidence of progression. Interestingly, as she introduced the book, she almost dismissed its credibility, yet the contents provoked discussion amongst the group about how the inception of a provocation from the children led to opportunities for exploration and critical thinking.

Helen: *Mine isn't as deep as everybody else's [!?!]I've literally brought a file that I put together of everything that we do with the children ... Just because it's nice for all of us, as staff and for the parents and for the children to look back on and see what they've enjoyed. Their facial expressions...I don't know...Just doing things for the sake of having fun...Learning through that rather than sitting and doing like, table top things all the time so ....*

Everyone looked at the pictures with great interest.

Jo: *Making an "udder"!!*

Helen: *I loved that!...with a glove...And milking...And that just came because they were drinking the milk in the afternoon and they were talking where milk came from...And we did that...I don't know...It's nice to look back on and see how much fun...They asked me to do that one day and that didn't really fit in to any plans...But I thought "no" [laughs]*

Jackie: *But that's for fun...Children loved it!*

Jo: *So you documented it on there [the Busy Day Book]...Did you document that anywhere else?*

Helen: *See...Some pictures go...Like this...In their files...I separate them all into the children's profiles...When I'm going through the files and I see a photo...I think "oh"...Where am I going to fit that?...although it's a really great photo of them doing something really, really good...I don't put in the file. It ends up in here...Can you see what I mean?*

Helen placed a great deal of value on the documentation process. However, she did not allude to it being used as a pedagogical tool – and in hindsight, this is something that would have been useful for me to explore further with the group. Her reasons for collating such detailed documentation seemed to be concerned with creating a more holistic picture of the child as a learner that went beyond tracking progress towards the Early Years Outcomes. Her rationale for this approach was illustrated in the second session where she had brought one child's Learning Journey document to the group to share. It was full of annotated pictures that the children had done whilst in pre-school, observations (written and photographs) and other texts including a 'home share' sheet. It was about 15 centimetres deep.

Helen: *This is what we sent to the school...which is a lot [?]*

Kathy: *...and does school take notice of that?*

Helen: *...When they come and see children on their visits, they flick through these sometimes and talk to the children about the pictures in it and stuff, but I doubt that when it gets sent to school that they sit down and flick through. Like seven of them that I've sent to school...Because there is a lot in it...I don't want to like limit what's in it 'cos like I said last time, if I've got loads of creative pictures in here, I don't want not to put them in, that's what the children are interested in and it does build up and at the same time I'm adding things in like to do with number work...their phonics...So that's why it gets like so much ...*

Out of the whole group, Lucy seemed to be the most restricted when it came to opportunities available to her for adopting a pedagogy that allowed more freedom and flexibility to work with children's interests in a manner that was not focused on evidencing

and tracking progress. Although she had a sense of what type of approach she would like to adopt, she was unclear of how to put this into practice:

*...You can fit with the children...As long as you've got time and you're not concentrating on writing it down...If you've got that time you can do a lot more with the interests...It's just the fact that we have to plan for their interests before we actually do it...It's taking a lot of time up anyway, I think you would get a lot more if you could sit with the children...Free flow kind of as an assessment tool...But then I don't know how you'd document that [?!]  
[FG Session 2]*

The expectation to document learning seemed to be one barrier, and the other was more concerned with her professional role. It seemed that professional status was a better regarded form of capital than professional qualification.

Lucy: *In my company, me as an EYP isn't really acknowledged as much as I think if it was more of a higher like a deputy or manager. That's the only way that I would be to change anything. I would be prepared to do more at home like Jackie, if I got the recognition. [FG Session 2]*

Unfortunately Ruth was not able to attend the second session, and therefore there was less data available to draw informed conclusions regarding how she was mediating her *habitus* with practice and policy. It is noteworthy that Ruth has only just qualified as an Early Years Teacher. Her earlier references to the challenges she was facing with the competing demands of her role was perhaps indicative of her realisation that the rhetoric of the Early Years Teacher being a “change agent” is a less straightforward endeavour than she had anticipated. On the one hand she was mindful of the need to play the game. Her feedback on the discussion site after watching the OFSTED video *Right Start: Early Years Good Practice* [OFSTED, 2014c], revealed a desire to gain further capital that would enable her to produce tracking documentation that would satisfy OFSTED:

Ruth: *I enjoyed watching these videos too! Does anyone have any resources or reading to recommend on tracking? It's not something I am very familiar with, but in the video it appeared that it was being used to help practitioners see the holistic picture of the child? It just looked like a lot of coloured boxes to me! [DS]*

Yet on the other hand, she had also revealed to the group the importance that she had placed on relationships. Like Lucy, she was questioning the authenticity of “planning to interests”, when the learning environment that was created tended to be determined by the adult:

Ruth: *Planning for interests, then it becomes an adult planned thing, you know, if you put something out and you want them to do it, you take away the love of what they are doing in the first place. [FG Session 1]*

Out of the entire group, Kathy seemed to be the most comfortable in adhering to the rules of the game. Her desire to gain Qualified Teaching Status was seen as an increase in capital that would provide her with greater status and therefore power in the field. She was keen to gain credibility with parents:

*Do you know what really upset me, is that I had a comment this week...A parent with a child with special needs...He says “we’ve come to review this statement now, and there’s all these targets here”, and he said to me “but you’re not teachers are you, so you wouldn’t know how to review targets” ... At the moment I’m in that area where you’re a EYP/EYT and nobody really knows what the heck that is ... So there is no respect for it ... Then when you’ve got QTS and you can put on your wall ‘I am a teacher’ they’ll be all over you won’t they like a rash (?!)...and you’ll get more pay. [FG Session 2]*

Kathy was to embark on the Graduate Teacher Programme in the following academic year, and this led her to question whether her change in status would also mean her professional judgements were more likely to be valued by the school:

*Let’s say at the end of my 12 months when I get QTS ...Do you feel ...Or I feel that maybe they might take what I wrote on my transition sheets more seriously than they do now. [FG Session 2]*

In preparation for her increased status, Kathy seemed to be adopting a more authoritative role in her pre-school. She referred to the necessity to maintain control of the practices in her setting, and was therefore imposing greater accountability on herself as well as the other members of the team. In the final session, Kathy had brought an example of a newly devised planning document that she wanted to introduce to the setting. The rest of the

group questioned the expectations that she was placing on herself. Kathy, though, was confident in her own conviction:

*So you see, if someone comes in and asks me “what are their next steps?” ... I feel that I should know them...All 50 of them...I think it’s an expectation. [FG Session 2]*

As a form of conclusion for this chapter, it seems that there are a number of factors that contributed to how the “unconscious relationship” between the individual participants’ *habitus* and their position within their fields resulted in particular logics of assessment practice. Bourdieu talks of *habitus* as a structured and structuring feature, and that the aspirations and practices of individual and groups have some correspondence with their personal *habitus* (Swartz, 1997, p.103). Aspiration seemed to be a particular feature for the participants in this research. At times the aspiration to gain greater capital, and therefore give them a stronger position in the field, was not necessarily compatible with the desire to utilise a relational and ethical pedagogy. The “magnetic pull” (Basford and Bath, 2014, p.123) of regulation and accountability meant that assessment policy tended to be interpreted in such a way that it produced a particular *doxa* related to assessment practice. The participants offered their own analogy of game playing that fits with Bourdieu’s analogy of a social space, being described as a competitive space in which the struggles to either transform or preserve the field are played out. In the following discussion chapter, I will use MacNaughton’s (2003) three positional lenses to consider the implications for assessment practice when adopting different positions.

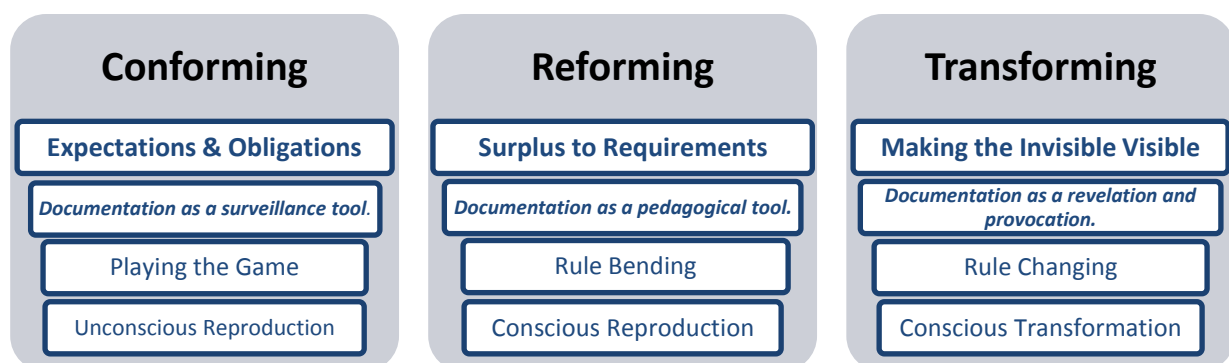
# Chapter 7

## Discussion and analysis

### 7.0. Introduction

The intention of this chapter is to provide an analysis of the findings represented in Chapter 6 using MacNaughton’s (2003) three ‘test-point’ positions. This allows for three different readings of the data collected as well as a critical consideration of the implications and consequences for assessment practice in the field. Bourdieu’s (1986) conceptual framework related to “[*(habitus)(capital)*] + field = practice” will intersect with the analysis to help understand how the structural elements of the field of study impact upon the way in which practitioners are able to mediate their professional *habitus* within the context in which they work.

The review of literature and analysis of assessment policy texts established that the dominant discourses that underpin policy and consequential practice are located within a ‘conforming’ position. By examining the findings from all three positions, this enabled me to think of ‘other’ possibilities for assessment practice in order to make a personal contribution to the knowledge and debate within this field of study. The structure of this chapter will therefore take each position in turn, which will be located within an identified theme (Fig. 8) that evolved from the data analysis process that was identified in Chapter 4.



**Fig.8: Thematic overview**

There are four layers to each position. The top layer is the title of each overarching theme that encapsulated the range of factors that informed the reading of the data from the chosen position. Underneath each of the titles are three further themes that are concerned with:

- (i) The discourses that underpin the use of documentation, and how these produce orientations for the practices of assessment as well as constructions of the learner. I utilised Ferrari's (2013) theory of "documentality" to illustrate the different agentic powers of documentation from each reading.
- (ii) The strategies the participants used to utilise their professional *habitus* to inform and influence assessment practices.
- (iii) The implications for the ECE field in adopting the chosen position.

## 7.1. A Conforming Position: expectations and obligations



In the analysis of assessment policy (Chapter 5), the tools of governance (Salamon, 2002) related to grants and subsidies, outcomes-based measurement, regulation and accountability were identified as the "technologies" that embodied ECE programmes. The participants in the research made reference to all of these as policy levers (Steer et al., 2007). They talked, for example, about the statutory requirements to provide evidence of progression, the requirement of a 'flexible offer' in the use of nursery funding and the

pressures to satisfy the regulatory gaze (Osgood, 2006) of OFSTED. Consequently, this led to a sense of both expectation and obligation regarding what type of assessment practices were deemed appropriate. The tension for the participants was that, whilst they were conscious that these technologies were reproducing conforming practices, there were other players within their field who seemed more unconscious of the implications for their practice when applying the strategies that were described. This tension forms the main part of the discussion for this section.

### **7.1.1. Documentation as a surveillance tool**

The discourses that underpin documentation from a conforming perspective are concerned with individuality, normalisation and accountability (Bath, 2012; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). The participants talked in detail about the demands to provide evidence of children's learning and development that they understood to be an expectation of OFSTED, and "physical proof" of the professional judgements that they were making. Documentation from this perspective was therefore seen as a coercive tool (Salamon, 2002), which structured both their assessment practices and governed both the practitioner and child in a particular way.

From this position, the documentation of development is privileged over learning because it sits with the positivist Piagetian claim that development precedes learning (Grieshaber, 2008; Edwards, 2007). Consequently, the emphasis for the practitioner was in identifying and tracking developmental norms, which for Lucy, Ruth and Helen in particular, resulted in mechanistic and artificial practices of collating observations that could be "fitted" onto a developmental tracking sheet. From this perspective, the construction of the child as a learner is reduced to an "isolated unit of development" (Burman, 2001) which assumes that development occurs in a predetermined way, and readiness is determined by the developmental category in which they fit.

The curriculum frameworks (DfE, 2014a; 2013b) that the participants were required to use to inform their practice served as a particular lens that shaped the way in which they interpreted children's play and structured learning activities. Bourdieu would argue that



they therefore served as a form of ‘symbolic violence’ that structured their practices. Symbolic violence is a central concept in Bourdieu’s notion of reproduction. It refers to the way in which culture is imposed upon individuals or groups in such a way that it is recognised and legitimated to validate and preserve control in the social field (Green, 2013, p.142). There are a number of examples from the data that illustrate how the interpretation of the curriculum frameworks reproduced certain types of practices that fit with previous research in the field (Coleyshaw et al., 2012; Cottle and Alexander, 2012; Garrick et al., 2010). For Lucy and Helen, this was interpreted as an expectation by setting managers that they needed to continuously be ‘with’ the children to observe and instruct. All of the participants talked about how the planning documentation they produced had tendencies to be reductive and superficial, as the activities they planned were based on limited notions of interests that were determined by the *Early Years Outcomes* (DfE, 2013b). The consequences of this interpretation are considered in section 7.1.3. For Kathy, this manifested itself by her desire to add further structure to her planning so that she was able to provide evidence of a commitment to more formal learning. Arguably, she was endeavouring to ensure that the children in her care would be equipped with the necessary capital to ensure readiness for school. Both of these examples fit with Urban’s (2012) notion of the “more of the same” policy narratives that argue for the promotion of early literacy and numeracy and education as a means of reducing deficits in learning.

Brooker (2011) argues that the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) and its related assessment practices have provided a “smokescreen” that has exercised power over both families and children, by determining what parents needed to know about their children. The practitioner from this perspective is seen as the “expert” in child development and parenting (Alasuutari and Karila, 2010), and has the power to determine what information is deemed important to be shared. Helen, for instance, provided an insight into how she utilised her capital to provide a parent with counting strategies through the use of small world toys. Yet, as I argue later, this power is superficial, and forms part of the “*illusio*” (Bourdieu, 1998a, p.76), or mind-set that is enhanced through the illusion that the gaining of EYP/EY teacher status affords powers that enable the utilisation of newly gained capital.

### **7.1.2. Playing the Game**

Bourdieu (1998a) referred to *habitus* as having a “feel for the game” (p.25), where success in the field is determined by the embodiment of strategies which allow for the social, cultural and political dimensions of the field. The dimensions of the ECE field from a conforming position view development as universal, are embedded in a performative culture and are concerned with the individual. As a consequence, the participants found themselves playing the role of rule enforcers and regulators in their own settings. They talked of the necessity to ensure there was sufficient evidence to “sign off documentation”. In Lucy and Helen’s settings, the notion of sufficient evidence was quantified by their managers. They referred to rules that had been imposed on the settings regarding the number of observations required and the expected timescales in which they should be completed. In Helen’s setting, they were “not allowed” to make judgements about children unless they had been “tracked”, whereas in Lucy’s setting, if there were too many observations they were “ripped out”. Such acts of “fabrications” (Ball, 2003) are a particular strategy that organisations employ to elude or deflect direct surveillance, which requires the players to submit to the disciplines of performativity and competition (Ball, 2003).

#### **Kathy**

Out of all the participants, Kathy seemed the most comfortable in adopting the role of rule enforcer. By her own admittance she had grown to prefer “the school model” rather than the High/Scope model. This was an interesting assertion to make taking into account that she also acknowledged that she still firmly believed in “the play-based curriculum”. Perhaps it was indicative of both Anning (2010) and Wood’s (2010) assertions that practitioners can feel trapped between the competing imperatives of teaching and assessing the ‘basics’ and a developmentally appropriate, play-based curriculum. The practitioners, therefore, can find themselves confined to a pedagogy that supports a goal-orientated curriculum. This provides an interesting argument, as the underpinning philosophy of the High/Scope approach is based upon an open, goal-orientated framework underpinned by active learning and, according to MacNaughton (2003), sits with a reforming approach. However, the success of the approach is based on skilled and sensitive adult support with small numbers of children. Perhaps Kathy felt that staff lacked sufficient capital to influence their

pedagogical interactions, which was compounded by the large numbers of children in her setting. In addition to this, her desire to be “ahead of the game” on her teacher training programme was also indicative of her rejection of an approach that did not allow her to use the pedagogical strategies which she perceived would be more widely accepted in the education field. Instead she was looking to gain capital that she could transpose.

‘Transposability’ is a term Bourdieu attributed to the forms of capital that are capable of generating practices that conform to the principles of a greater number of the field (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p.33). Kathy was aware that her current position in the field was that of a weak “market” position (Ball, 2003, p.225), and she needed to succumb to performative demands in order to at least maintain her position.

### **Ethics**

The data revealed a further strategy that was employed by both the participants and other players beyond their own setting that was a more underhand ‘game plan’. It was concerned with the manipulation of data that meant that the documentation was not always an accurate or authentic representation of the progress a child had made. Ruth, Helen and Lucy talked about making changes to the judgements that were made in order for observations to “fit” the formats that they were using.

Of greater significance however was how teachers and head teachers in the feeder schools used their educational and social capital to influence the manipulation of data in order to position themselves advantageously. The documentation that was received from the PVI settings was questioned regarding its validity, which in turn questioned the professionalism of the players within that field. Such instances of “occupational hierarchy” (Simpson, 2011, p.706) help to reinforce the deficit construction of the ECE practitioner as insufficiently expert (Payler and Georgeson, 2013a) to make judgements that are trustworthy and reliable. This is yet another strategy that serves to preserve positions in the field.

The findings of Roberts-Holmes (2012) suggest that the highly subjective nature of EYFS assessment and the lack of moderation opportunities between the PVI and maintained sector could be one of the reasons why there is distrust in the data that is shared across

professional boundaries. However, looking back at the research conducted by Bradbury (2013; 2012a) and Holmes (2014) it is noticeable that Reception teachers have reported finding themselves in an equally submissive position due to the power that the Local Authority hold in validating the claims teachers have made regarding the production of their EYFSP data. It is therefore evident that notions of hierarchical power within the field mean that the strategies the actors in the PVI sector are able to employ are constrained by their position.

Ball's (2003) position, once again, is a useful one to draw upon here. He argues that the policy technologies of the market, managerialism and performativity that underpin neo-liberal educational reform have effectively created new "ethical systems" (p.218), essentially Bourdieu's 'rules of the game'. These are based upon institutional self-interest, pragmatics and performative worth, and have replaced the 'older ethics' of professional judgement and co-operation. In the samples from the study, co-operation within and across boundaries had been replaced by competition, which is another form of coercion which can restrict individual or group behaviour (Salamon, 2002).

This debate is particularly significant when placed in the context of the new baseline assessment (DfE, 2014b) that is due to be introduced during the completion of this thesis. On the one hand, the shift from a system of assessment that is based on professional judgement and co-operation to an objective, on-entry baseline assessment should eradicate the practices which have been previously alluded to. On the other hand, this is a superficial and misinformed solution to a fundamentally harmful approach that will further distort the principles and practices that underpin the EYFS (TACTYC/Early Education, 2015), and equally discourage collaborative working due to the fact that assessment practices in schools will become incompatible with those in pre-schools.

### **7.1.3. Unconscious Reproduction**

Bourdieu argued that not all predispositions (i.e. *habitus*) are readily available in certain circumstances as it is dependent on whether the field is conducive to the *habitus* that is being expressed (Rawolle and Lingard, 2008). Here Bourdieu's notion of *doxa* comes into

play. *Doxa* refers to the “apparently natural beliefs or opinions which are in fact intimately linked to field and habitus” (Deer, 2012, p.115), that result in ‘natural’ and unquestioned practices. This notion in itself raises interesting questions regarding what are considered the “natural beliefs and opinions” that are associated with the PVI sector and their role in the education of young children. How do these play out in pedagogical expectations? Here I refer back to Osgood (2012; 2009) and McGillivray (2008) who remind us of the dichotomous tensions that currently exist within the ECE workforce. These tensions are concerned with the competing constructs of a caring, maternal and gendered workforce and/or a professional, degree educated and highly trained workforce (McGillivray, 2008, p.246). It seems that the participants found themselves caught in between these two constructions when they reflected on the significance of their own professional *habitus* and the importance they placed upon establishing authentic relationships:

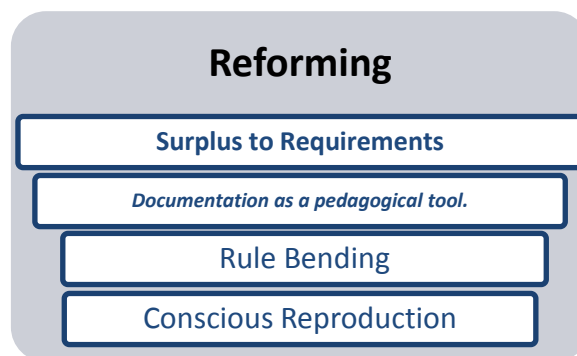
Ruth:            *We’re trained to understand children and look after them and do our best to be that key person role there...and then you’ve got things like that [i.e. tracking documents] always at the back of your mind. You have to think about it because you’ll be in trouble if you don’t...[FG Session 1]*

When this perspective is situated within the field of study, it produces a number of further ironic tensions that draw me back to Bourdieu’s notion of *doxa*. *Doxa* acts as a symbolic form of power that requires those who are subjected to it not to question its legitimacy or the legitimacy of those who exert it (Deer, 2012, p.117). Therefore, it helps to explain why both the school staff and other pre-school staff seemed to be unwittingly conforming (Osgood, 2012) to the reproduction of discourses of universalism and standardisation. More significantly, it also helps to explain why the managers in the PVI settings seemed to be rejecting, or at least detaching (Osgood, 2012) themselves from, the caring and relational *habitus* that had traditionally embodied their professional roles.

Whilst the participants were conscious of the consequences of *doxa*, it is neither possible nor fair to judge whether the nursery managers and school based staff were *as* conscious. Either way, the consequences for the child are significant. Despite the fact that the practitioners were endeavouring to play the accountability game by providing profile data, the profiles were disregarded or marked down by the teachers who received them.

Potentially, the children who were marked down in the profiles were starting their school career in a position of disadvantage, where the judgements made on their readiness to start school were distorted as well as delimiting.

## 7.2. A Reforming Position: surplus to requirements



A reforming position is concerned with finding out what things mean to people, in order to understand, rather than control, a situation. By engaging in a process of dialogue and reflection, we can therefore gain new insights and knowledge that is reformed (MacNaughton, 2003) through such a collaborative endeavour. When the participants were brought together to share their own narratives it allowed them to question some of the assumptions that underpinned their practice. It also enabled them to think more consciously about their beliefs regarding assessment practice. One of the most striking outcomes from the group discussion was the extent to which the conditions of the field had made the participants begin to question their own value and worth as an EYP/EY Teacher, and whether their desires to be agents of change could only ever be aspirations. They felt that their role was marginalised, and they were thus 'surplus to requirements'.

This theme also became very significant to my own insights as a researcher and created a personal sense of disruption, particularly when I reflected upon the impact of their settings' assessment practices for the child and family that they described. A reforming position sits closely with a socio-cultural view of learning, which is concerned with seeing learning as a

joint endeavour, and knowledge is seen as something that is “culturally embedded rather than developmentally defined” (Fleer, 2003, p.56). In relation to assessment this means that knowledge *about* a child, as well as the *type* of knowledge that is valued, is culturally and collaboratively negotiated. Whilst the participants expressed concern and a desire to do things differently, they did not seem to be considering how other theoretical and reflexive positions may help them to reform practice. I began to question to what extent the capital they had gained (which was very much located within a socio-cultural framework) at university had become embedded in their professional *habitus*, and could therefore be a strategy that they could use to affect change. It seemed that somewhere along the way the capital they had gained had become lost in translation, and was not being used to question practice in the way that I imagined. Capital had effectively also become surplus to requirements. Bourdieu argued that the formation of embodied capital entails prolonged exposure to a specialized social *habitus* (Moore, 2012, p.107). Was it, therefore, that the conditions of the field did not allow for prolonged exposure to working practices of critical, reflexive thinking? This was certainly the case in Hedges’ (2012) study, where in New Zealand socio-cultural theory is not yet embedded in teacher education or practice, in spite of Te Whariki, the New Zealand ECE framework, being framed within a socio-cultural perspective. It would therefore seem reasonable to argue that the expectation that socio-cultural theory could be embedded in the English context, which is based on a pre-primary model (Bennett, 2005), is still merely an aspiration.

This led to a further question regarding whether my own personal subjectivities and expectations were unrealistic regarding the theory-practice relationship. I had to remind myself of the unique position that I was in as a researcher. Due to the nature of the previous relationship I had with the participants, I did have some insider knowledge of their *habitus* and the contexts in which they were working. Maybe this caused me to make unrealistic assumptions about how their *habitus* may be playing out in their own settings. However, I was still effectively an outside observer, as I had not actually seen their practice. I was drawn back to Hedges’ (2010) research regarding her role as critical friend. The time she had spent as a participant observer before the research began had helped her “get to know the realities of each setting” (p.303). Perhaps if I had done this myself the knowledge of each setting may have led to a different understanding of how the participants’ roles were

perceived by others as well as themselves. As an academic I possess sufficient social and cultural capital to place me in a position of power. I can present the 'ideal' to students, and encourage them to adopt a reforming and transforming position to help them become critical reflective practitioners. Yet I also needed to remind myself to be realistic, rather than idealistic, when considering the conditions of the field. Indeed, research has highlighted the challenges of applying a social, cultural pedagogy (Edwards, 2007; Bennett, 2005; Anning, 2004), as well as the challenges practitioners face when they transition from university to the classroom (Rose and Rogers, 2012; Moyles and Worthington, 2011; Adams et al., 2004; Keating et al., 2002; Wood and Bennet, 2000). Therefore, maybe the best that these practitioners could possibly do was bend, rather than change, the rules of the game. As Swartz (1997) relates:

*Actors act through time without the benefit of the totalising view available to the outside observer. Moreover, they organise their activities practically rather than seek to satisfy formal standards of logical coherence. Actors draw upon cultural and social resources, not for logical purposes, but for the practical purposes of getting on in everyday life. (Swartz, 1997, p.59)*

As a consequence of these noted tensions, and in the spirit of a reforming position, the nature of the discussion and analysis in this section will be more concerned with problematising the consequences for the child as well as the practitioner when certain factors in the field become surplus to requirements. In the final 'transforming' section, I then seek to look for possibilities in addressing the tensions identified.

### **7.2.1. Documentation as a pedagogical tool**

When assessment texts are collaboratively produced they have the potential to reform themselves into a pedagogical tool. Through the creation of texts, a process of acting and thinking with others drives the learning process, occurring through dialogue and interaction (Stephen, 2010). This process also allows the child to be viewed and constructed in multiple ways. In Chapters 3 and 5, I examined how viewing the child through a conforming lens can produce a deficit construction of the child (Bradbury, 2014a, b; Basford and Bath, 2014; Brooker, 2011; Hedges, 2010). The findings from my own sample concurred with this notion.



The examples the participants shared regarding the assessment practices in their settings highlighted how assessments were focused on gaining evidence of individual development, and that they were an isolated act. They found the systems that were embedded in the setting for collecting observations meant opportunities for interpreting the child's interests or capabilities in multiple ways were closed down. Ironically, this meant that judgements were either inflated or diminished, as Lucy experienced:

*If you've got one piece of evidence, a lot of the staff would say "that's it, they've done it"... Whereas necessarily that might have been a one-off, they might not actually be able to do it ... It might have been a fluke ....*

*So you can see them growing up ... But that will get ripped out because it's already been in the profile, that shouldn't be in there again. If they've done it, they've done it ... 'ticked off' and go on to the next thing. [FG Session 1]*

Apart from Jackie, the participants found limited time to come together to engage in processes that allowed for pedagogical cognitive thinking which placed an emphasis on ideas about children's learning (Lazzari and Balduzzi, 2013; Suarez, 2006; Forman and Fyfe, 1998), and allowed for such multiple interpretations that a socio-cultural pedagogy allows. This was evidently one of the barriers that limited opportunities for pedagogical conversation to occur.

### **Interests**

I was also left wondering whether the participants' own interpretations of how they could use their documentation as a pedagogical tool to help with the resources of the learning environment was limited. They understood that part of their role as EYP/EY teacher was to model good practice, which from Helen's perspective involved "moving toys down off high shelves as others didn't want them ruined and creating new and exciting areas such as investigation". From this perspective, their documented observations were used as a basis for determining the resourcing of the provision. During the FG sessions, they had expressed concern about the logistics of supporting the interests of all the children and "fitting" them into their planning and daily routine through the provision of resources and spaces in which to follow through their interests. Jackie's example of the performance, based on the film

*Frozen*, that evolved during class, highlights her endeavour to include children's multiple interests and their funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti, 2005), through enhancing the provision on offer. Yet, as Hedegaard (2008) reminds us, this approach does not necessarily enable the practitioner to gain an understanding of children's motives and intentions for engaging in such activities. Instead, it could arguably be interpreted as an example of the participants' idealised (Anning, 1998) interpretation of the "folklore tradition" (Anning, Cullen, and Flear, 2004, p.13) of a curriculum that follows the interests of children. This argument also extends into how the participants incorporated children's own perspectives regarding learning. For example, in both Helen and Lucy's settings, children's viewpoints were garnered by asking them what they felt they were "best at doing", or what they liked to "play at nursery", which then formed part of their summative assessment. However, as later discussed, Helen's provision of her 'Busy Day Book', and her commitment to inviting children to select photographs to put in their profiles, was an indication of her desire to allow for the documentation of other aspects of children's learning that would normally be surplus to requirements.

### **Learning or development?**

Numerous other studies (Bradbury, 2012; Coleyshaw et al., 2012; McArdle and McWilliams, 2005) have concluded that it is not uncommon for the inclusion of children's perspectives to be interpreted as the facilitation of choice and activity, rather than how to co-construct participation and provide feedback that would support their extension of learning. I have also been mindful of Payler's (2007) research regarding the consequences of gearing interactions towards learning outcomes rather than metacognition. This left me wondering to what extent the participants themselves were seeing the significance of using their pedagogical documentation to gain an insight into broader perspectives related to learning, rather than just development. Consequently, in the second session, I pursued this a little further by asking about the "Characteristics of Effective Learning" (Early Education, 2012), and how this featured in their documentation. They admitted that a focus on learning characteristics was another feature that was indeed surplus to requirements. Jackie provided a useful insight into why this could be the case:

*I do like the fact that there are characteristics of effective learning too but I feel these are best seen in child-initiated play. It feels like the Development Matters statements are more academic whilst the characteristics of effective learning are more personality traits to me but this is an area I am working on at the moment. [DS]*

I feel this comment serves to highlight the nub of the issue in helping to understand why the opportunities to use documentation as a pedagogical tool seemed so limited, and, at best, tokenistic (Brooker, 2011) for the participants. The performative demands of their daily professional lives meant that there was insufficient space to create opportunities to consider how they could mediate the competing ontological and epistemological perspectives concerned with learning and development. At university they had actively engaged with debates concerning the competing theoretical perspectives associated with learning and development. This should have put them in a position of the 'more knowledgeable other' to support and guide others in their settings in order to affect change. Yet once they found themselves in the practical space of the work setting, there were numerous factors that got in the way.

Fisher and Wood's (2012) study examining the effectiveness of adult-child interactions, and Hedges' (2010;2012) studies concerned with teachers' funds of knowledge, revealed the challenges of making sustained changes to practice, and the necessity for time, commitment and expertise. A significant feature of their studies was the role of the Early Years expert who acted as co-researcher and reflective partner, and supported the process of change and development. Effectively in my study, I was the external expert who could act as the reflective partner for the participants. Most importantly I was an outsider, and I could help the participants to reflect outwards rather than inwards. Indeed, towards the end of the study, there was a clear sense of realisation from the participants about the challenges that they were facing:

Helen: *But it made me think...It reminded me of why I wanted to do this job and what I actually believe...And you do get stuck into a rut sometimes...*

Jackie: *I think if I didn't have...And that's what I'm fearful of...Is that rut...Because I'm not doing uni now... 'cos I'm not seeing practitioners outside my little box...As*

*the case may be...I feel there could be a time when I'm that practitioner that is doing the same thing the same way all the time...And the only way to evolve and do things is to know what other people are up to...And keep in touch...But that's really hard when we are all busy ...*

Their concern regarding being “stuck in a rut” was perhaps an indication of how they were realising that the choices they had in relation to their practice were bound by external circumstances, and as Wisneski and Reifel (2012) remind us, “we put out of our minds those ideas that we believe to be important but that are not the topic of current practice or focus” (p.177). In addition to this, they were beginning to understand how the vocational *habitus* and funds of knowledge of the other practitioners had predisposed them to certain dispositions and beliefs about children and how best to support them. The challenge for them was that they did not have the luxury of an ‘external expert’ (whose symbolic capital places them in a position of power) to support the change process, nor the idealised conditions synonymous with Reggio Emilia that are embedded through a pedagogy of listening (Rinaldi, 2006) that allow for continuous dialogic and reflexive practices. Instead, they were required to act as expert, role model *and* facilitator in such a way that fitted with the hegemonic governmental discourses around professionalism in ECEC (Osgood, 2012) that seemed to be incompatible with a relational pedagogy.

### **7.2.2. Rule bending**

I have already argued that the objective conditions of assessment policy encouraged practice dispositions that were more compatible with the positivist, performative discourses in which policy is situated. The possibility of adopting a *habitus* more closely aligned with the subjective conditions (a socio-cultural discourse) seemed to be increasingly “unthinkable” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.21) to the participants. Swartz’s (1997) interpretations of Bourdieu’s work are particularly helpful to further explain this. As Bourdieu would argue, those who hold weaker positions in the field tend to adopt more subversive strategies than those who hold positions of power (Swartz, 1997). It therefore seemed that the best that the participants could do was explore strategies that would enable them to bend the rules. Bourdieu argued that the strategies an actor employs are based on a “sense of honour” rather than conscious, rational calculations. This sense of honour is derived from sets of

dispositions that manifest themselves in a practical sense in relation to what is seemed appropriate, or possible, in situations of challenge, constraint or opportunity ( Swartz, 1997, p.99). Swartz (1997) notes how *habitus* has an “innovative” capacity, where creative approaches are taken to deal with the discrepancy between external demands and customary habits. This inventive capacity stems from both experience and capital.

This is an interesting insight and left me questioning to what extent there was a discrepancy between the external demands and the customary assessment habits that the participants talked about. As the findings revealed, there seemed to be little discrepancy between these two elements, the reasons for which have been previously outlined. There were, however, two participants who seemed to be more successful in using their practical knowledge to find ways to bend the rules. Jackie and Helen seemed to demonstrate the most innovative capacity to find creative ways to deal with the internal and external discrepancies. How their strategies played out in their settings was very different, and in this section I aim to unpick how their inventive approaches fitted with the “sense of honour” that formed part of their *habitus*. Whether their strategies were conscious or unconscious is more difficult to ascertain, and the following section will consider this in further detail.

### **Jackie**

Throughout the study, Jackie seemed to be the most confident member of the group to assert her values and beliefs. She was clear from the outset about the importance she placed on establishing authentic relationships with parents, as well as the significance of the emotional aspect of her work. Her extensive years of experience, as well as her domestic role as mother, were arguably a feature of her funds of knowledge that had become embedded and so were able to inform her practice. This meant that the power between the parent and practitioner was mutually constructed (Brooker, 2010). From the outset of the study she also challenged governmental discourses by questioning whether policy was merely a rhetorical device (Farquhar and Fitzsimons, 2013) intended to remedy social injustices:

*...and I kind of think you know, maybe I'm obviously against the government on this one - I'm not here to observe and assess or make them hitting targets at age 3, 5 and whatever I'm here to do this one [points to*

*poem] ... I want them to find love in the world to be quite at peace. I think that's more important you know as a child...we bring them up socially to be able to achieve all this and I think if you have all this [pointing to poem] it's not going to be for everyone you know, look at all the flak that settings in disadvantaged areas are getting. Are they really failing children in disadvantaged areas or is society failing children in disadvantaged areas? It's not the only thing that is going wrong in that area is it? It's not settings, it's a lot of other things. [FG Session 1]*

This view led her to question how an emphasis on readiness had become a “mountain” that had influenced parents’ expectations about the role of pre-school in preparing their child for school. She, therefore, found herself looking for ways that would satisfy the dominant policy discourses alongside her own competing values and beliefs. Her example of the development of an email system to involve parents had evolved into something far more powerful than she had possibly imagined herself. She had initially intended the email system to help “include parents and make them feel wanted”, but what she also found was that it opened up opportunities to share the “wow” moments that created an authentic bridge between home and the setting. Jackie acknowledged that whilst most of the “wow” moments fitted with *Development Matters* (Early Education, 2012), and the key person had the choice as to whether to include it in their profile book, the information that was being shared gave her an insight into each child’s “uniqueness”. I do not know whether this insight was used as a basis for informing the type of interaction that was used to assist a child to move through their zone of proximal development (and on reflection, this is a limitation of my study). However, Jackie’s further example revealed how one child’s initial “wow” moment was expressed by an interest in Jack and the Beanstalk which evolved into an integrated and collaborative production of the film *Frozen*. Jackie had managed to create an “interactive space” (Payler, 2007, p.239) where the development of the theme had offered opportunities for more sustained and complex interactions (Cottle and Alexander, 2012), allowing children to take risks, problem solve and seek tailored support in order to reach a greater understanding of their own learning. At the same time, Jackie was able to “tick the boxes” to help secure a good judgement from OFSTED regarding parental partnership and documentation.

## Helen

Helen's 'Busy Day Book' is another example of a strategy employed to bend the rules. Helen's 'sense of honour' was embedded in the importance she placed on enjoyment in learning activities. She had previously talked about how the capital she had gained in her degree studies had made her aware of different perspectives concerning childhood. The constructivist principles of active learning and intrinsic motivation seemed to underpin her professional *habitus*, and formed part of the funds of knowledge she had gained during the time she had spent in placement in childcare settings. This was exemplified when she explained that the documented activities that were included in her 'Busy Day Book' valued "learning through that, rather than sitting and doing like, table top things all the time".

Helen's rationale for the creation of the book was to provide a place for the photographs that had been taken of the children that did not "fit" anywhere in their profiles, as she felt such documentation had value and was too important to discard. The book was used as an artefact for children, parents and staff to look back on "doing things for the sake of having fun". It was effectively an "add on" to her pedagogical activities, as opposed to an integral part of the day (Stremmel, 2012, p.140).

Helen shared one particular moment (making an udder) that had been recorded in the book that illustrated the rich potential for children and staff to engage in an authentic collaborative manner. The children had been drinking milk one afternoon and this had provoked a discussion amongst them about where milk came from. The discussion evolved into them working alongside Helen to make an udder from a rubber glove. The process of co-construction assumes "intersubjectivity and encouraged both adults and children to have an active role in the teaching and learning process" (Hedges and Cullen, 2005, p.72), and thus exemplified how socio-cultural principles could help to respond to children's interests that went beyond providing resources. From this perspective, the artefacts that the children were using were cultural tools which they were appropriating to guide, shape and transform for their own meaning and purpose (Wood, 2013). This was not a pre-planned activity that had been based on a previous interest - it was based on the here and now. The focus of Helen's attention shifted from looking for responses that fitted with developmental goals, to assessing how she could support children's motivational learning dispositions.

This type of pedagogical intervention demanded of Helen a certain degree of confidence and subject knowledge, which would enable her to utilise a naturally created space for children to develop higher levels of self-regulation and thinking skills. In Hedges and Cullen's (2005) research regarding teachers' subject knowledge, they found that subject knowledge was commonly under-emphasised during spontaneous interactions. The example that Helen gave, however, seems to contradict this idea. The spontaneous interest sparked by the children's question "where does milk come from?" seemed to open up opportunities for new, unplanned knowledge to be gained. Yet, as Robson and Hargreaves (2005) found in their study of how practitioners support the development of young children's thinking, this was an implicit, rather than explicit, pedagogical feature that was not necessarily a conscious act, and in Helen's case may have been of no benefit other than making time for fun, impromptu experiences.

### **7.2.3. Conscious reproduction**

Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* can only fully be understood when it is also read within the context of the field in which it operates. Institutions play a key role in determining how the rules of the game (in this context assessment policy) can be unconsciously maintained, created and, in many cases, regulate normative understandings of "best practice" (Gerrard and Farrell, 2012, p.9). The participants were conscious that they were using strategies that were reproducing practices that sat within a conforming position. Consequently, the richer and more nuanced observations that provided an insight into learning characteristics and dispositions became "surplus to requirements". Therefore, progression in the areas of learning and development that were deemed important behaviours to be 'school ready' were valued and privileged.

It seemed that the spaces that were made available to participants during the FG sessions helped them to gain an understanding as to why both they and the other players in the field were employing the strategies that they described. There was certainly a sense of what Rose and Rogers (2012) refer to as "dissonance" (p.45) between the values and beliefs that formed part of their professional *habitus*, and the reality of the workplace. There was a commitment to an ethical and relational pedagogy from the participants, exemplified



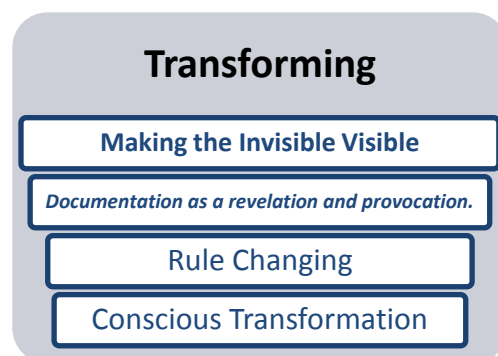
through the importance they place on 'knowing' a child. Yet it seemed that until they found themselves in the reflective space that was away from their field, they were less aware of how their commitment to a relational pedagogy had become disrupted. The adoption of a reforming position highlights a distinct gap within the field, which lends itself to the analogy of a playing field. On the one side of the field practitioners find themselves in a position of professional obligation and expectation to interpret assessment policy as a performative text. On the other side of the field, practitioners find themselves adopting a more reflexive position. Yet this reflexive disposition was less secure, and therefore seemed to be less embodied in their *habitus*. The conditions of the field meant that opportunities were limited to question the dominant discourses, or *doxa* related to assessment practice, and consequently practice became distorted. Bourdieu refers to this reflective disposition as a "strategy", which is a part of *habitus*. The strategy is concerned with actions that "involve uncertainty even in normative situations and that actions occur over time rendering the outcome seldom clear to the actors involved" (Swartz, 1997, p.99).

It is important to note, however, that the extent of uncertainty was not the same for all of the participants. The position they held within their different settings was a significant factor. Both Jackie and Kathy held management responsibilities, and effectively had more power and professional experience to draw upon. Conversely, Ruth, Lucy and Helen found themselves in a peripheral position regarding decision making, so the forces at play were maintaining current practices. Their endeavours to displace and challenge practice that the EYP/EY teacher role suggests were silenced by their managers in numerous ways. It may well be that their managers had inaccurate and misinformed perceptions of the EYP/EY teacher role, or they were threatened by the 'new' knowledge that they were bringing into the settings (Payler and Locke, 2013). Either way, the strategies employed by their managers to maintain their own power regarding pedagogical decision making were synonymous with the wall of "cotton wool" analogy that Simpson (2011, p.710) used. These included false promises to find time to work with staff and the enforcement of rules that were intended to ensure the weaker practitioners were conforming to corporate expectations. These strategies contributed to the practitioners' sense of uncertainty about their status and to some extent their practice. The consequences thus resulted in "inauthentic practice and

relationships” (Ball, 2003, p.222) where they had become mindful of how the metrics of accountability were distorting their practice.

I return here to one of the tensions I raised earlier related to notions of interest as a way of exemplifying the consequences of such inauthentic practice relationships. I argue that only identifying interests that ‘fit’ with curriculum outcomes, or asking children of their opinion in a tokenistic manner, can result in “contrived joint participation” (Sewall et al., 2013, p.50) which gives the illusion of power sharing. Equally, this can be applied to the examples given regarding partnership with parents. Until such rule bending strategies, that both Jackie and Helen alluded to, become embedded in everyday assessment practices the rules of the game will remain the same.

## 7.2 A Transforming Position: making the invisible visible



In this final section of discussion and analysis, I look for possibilities in addressing the tensions identified in the previous two sections. The intention is to pave the way for the conclusions that I have drawn from the entire research project, as well as provide a justification for my offer of a set of principles that should underpin assessment practice (or in other words alternative ‘rules of the game’). A transforming position is concerned with a series of commitments related to theory, practice and professionalism that MacNaughton (2003, p293-294) captures in the following way:

- An early childhood professional is *strategic and reflective* because he/she uses specialised knowledge as the basis for actions, and questions the effects of specialised knowledge in action.
- An early childhood professional works with others in the learning context to build a *critical community*. Each person's history, knowledge and social and cultural identities are valued, validated and included.
- An early childhood professional practices *socially just teaching and learning ...by* reading, questioning, researching and reflecting upon who is advantaged and disadvantaged by how teaching and learning occurs...and acting to create changes that work for social justice.

The notion of commitment is a significant feature of a transforming position, which Bourdieu may argue is a particular disposition that shapes an individual's *habitus*. Yet as this study has shown, when the conditions of the field do not give players agency to develop the same dispositions or commitments, it becomes difficult to transform the field. The consequences are, as Ryan (2008) notes, that whilst numerous studies in the field of ECE have utilised a transforming position, there is in fact limited research that actually describes how such a stance can be taken in the classroom. The two examples of 'rule-bending' illustrated in the previous section provide some small insight into the possibilities of how a commitment to a transforming position could be translated into practice. Such invisible practices that are deemed surplus to requirements need to be made visible in order for the effects of the dominant discourses previously described to be questioned and acted upon.

A commitment to building a critical community allows for marginalised (or invisible) players with increased symbolic capital to be noticed. This creates opportunities to share multiple insights into children's lives and for judgements made about children to be based on dialogue, democratic practice and valued contributions (Moss, 2006). Dialogue needs to be both internal and external to the self; therefore there should be as much emphasis placed on the conscious as well as unconscious impulse and aspects of *habitus*. Here as well, notions of *praxis* also become relevant. Freire (1996) reminds us that in order to transform there need to be two constitutive elements of the word – namely *action* and *reflection*. If one is sacrificed, even in part, then the other immediately suffers (p68). Documentation can

help with this process; when viewed from this position it takes on its own agentic or human function by helping to reveal other insights into a child's being, as well as provoking questions that challenge and disrupt everyday pedagogical strategies.

### **7.3.1. Documentation as a revelation and provocation**

Documentation is a tool for democratic meaning-making because it “is an ethical and subjective means of assessing what children know and understand, in contrast to processes for judging, measuring, or critically examining children’s work in relation to some standard of acceptability” (Stremmel, 2012 p138). The subjective nature is important here, as it is suggestive of being open to interpretation, and what it reveals is only partial. Pedagogical documentation in itself is an active agent in generating discursive knowledge (Lenz Taguchi, 2010), and sees the environment and its materials as having agentic powers as well. Seeing documentation from this position requires a pedagogical shift from understanding learning as linear to a rhizomatic, multidimensional process (Blaise and Ryan, 2012 p88). The practitioner has a responsibility to create conditions that allow for a departure from dominant patterns of learning and development. This demands acceptance that the “line of flight” to becoming is infinite and therefore impossible to plan in advance (Evans, 2015). This view can be exemplified to some degree by returning to the example of the rubber glove episode provided by Helen and allows us to view what had been documented in ways that may not previously have been considered. The glove had become an udder, causing the gaze to shift from the individual children as objects of intervention and their development ‘from within’ to the phenomena taking place in the intra-actions in-between the child and objects and matters around (Lenz Taguchi 2010, p88.)

Lenz Taguchi (2010) suggests that a traditional use of documentation (as a pedagogical tool) is concerned with what children do and say. By accepting that the artefact that is used as part of the documentation produces only a “constructed cut” of an event that took place, it helps to displace or disrupt thinking about pedagogical practices and the structures in which they are taking place. I do find myself troubled, however, by the examples I have read of an “intra-active pedagogy” (Lenz Taguchi, 2010), and the extent to which such a position can be embedded into a pre-primary curriculum model. Dahlberg and Moss 2010 (cited in Lenz

Taguchi, 2010) remind us that by avoiding curriculum and its evaluation (or as I argue, playing the game), then there is a risk that their associated contestable processes will be replaced with invisible and unaccountable ones. The best we can hope for is therefore to openly work the tension between the two directions. Practical constraints regarding time and resources to allow for opportunities for such deconstructive talk are an everyday barrier for practitioners, despite the claim that recent policies have reduced bureaucracy (Tickell, 2011). There is also evidence to suggest that where attempts have been made to use documentation to gain an insight into learning dispositions (Daniels, 2013) or learning from the child's perspective (Bath, 2012; Garrick et al, 2010) there is a danger of them resulting in nothing more than a tokenistic attempt to change the rules. It seems that a contributory factor is the perceived institutional value that is placed on providing *physical* evidence to enable quantifiable judgements to be made regarding children's learning and quality of provision. I return at this point to Ferraris's (2013) notion of documentality. He would argue that an assessment document is an institutional object, and an institution is a specialisation of social reality. The type of document that is valued is therefore representative of society's view of the purpose of that institution. Ferraris also reminds us that documentation is a "representation of some fact" which is accounted for through the "inscription of an act" (Ferraris, 2013 p250). The inscription does not necessarily need to be in written form, it can be in the form of an interaction. If we were to imagine that the representation takes the form of the sharing of a photograph or retelling of a learning event with at least one other, there is potential for that learning event to be interpreted in more than one way. We can then imagine how this may play out if multiple inscriptions are shared across multiple boundaries (ie home, school, and nursery). The following section draws on other empirical work in the field to help further identify the principles that need to underpin this view of assessment and documentation practices.

### **7.3.2. Rule Changing**

#### **The theory- practice relationship**

I have been particularly drawn to the work of Grieshaber, and her arguments related to the necessity to interrupt stereotypes in order to transform practice. Grieshaber (2008) acknowledges all theories have limitations and constraints, and so using complementary

and even conflicting theoretical positions can be advantageous. This is because it allows the practitioner to “respond to the unexpected, and create the unexpected”. It involves theoretical rule bending, breaking and making – effectively rethinking the rules of the game. I see theory as a tool or a rule that can be used to help understand and explain a pedagogical situation as well as to help justify pedagogical decisions to external powers such as OFSTED (Payler and Georgeson, 2014). For the EYP/EY teacher, their increased social capital means that they have gained additional theoretical tools that they can utilise in their work with children. Grieshaber (2008) talks about “illicit”, underground classroom activities (such as Helen’s ‘Busy Day book’) that do not traditionally sit within a conforming position, but when practitioners have other tools to draw upon, they are able to see the potential in responding to such pedagogic occasions in other ways. Such actions open up dialogue to question the implications of ignoring such learning events. This includes opportunities for a deeper and more critical engagement with children’s play (Wood, 2013) which results in a willingness to be uncomfortable about what play may be telling us about aspects of a child’s own *habitus* that has previously been silenced. It therefore helps to question the extent to which the enacted curriculum (or rules of the game) may be reducing or increasing possibilities to learn and explore (MacNaughton, 2003), as well as repressing the practitioner and child. These possibilities can extend to interpretations of the lexicon of related policy that are assumed to have universal meaning. In chapter 5 (section 5.5.3) for example, I explored how the lexicons of emergence and readiness can be read differently.

For such practices to be possible within a performative field, it requires both courage *and* knowledge to look beyond assessment practice as a measurement for mastery of knowledge, and see it as an examination of possibilities (Ryan and Grieshaber, 2005). A characteristic of neo-liberal policy is that it acts to separate individuals – both the child and the practitioner in their attempts to achieve targets and standards (Osgood, 2009). The application of socio-cultural and critical theoretical perspectives looks for ways to bring individuals together through its agentic capacity and seek ways to expand the margins of manoeuvrability (Sumsion, 2005). A study by Alvestad and Röthle (2007) that looked at strengthening educational practice in pre-school teacher education provides a practical example to draw upon. The creation of a “discourse community” served as focal point for university tutors, students and setting supervisors to come together to look at making more

critical links between theory and practice. Bourdieu would argue that this type of engagement within the field requires a tacit acceptance that the field of struggle is worth pursuing in the first place, and requires *illusio*, or a belief in the worth of the game (Swartz, 1997, p125). This would allow for the “assumed consensus that comes with the dominant group, to make way for the contradictions and inconsistencies that accompany all forms of diversity, and to undermine notions of homogeneity” (Grieshaber, 2008, p515). *Illusio* in this sense takes on a different role than it does from a conforming position. It becomes a necessary feature of *habitus* in the endeavour to transform practice. In relation to the narratives that the participants shared it is possible to imagine how the resulting inconsistencies and distortions in practice could have been brought into question if there had been structural opportunities to determine whether there was consensus in the judgements being made. The argument that I am therefore offering proposes that when opportunities are created to form communities of discourse and draw actors together from *across* educational boundaries, there is some possibility that assessment practices can become multi-faceted rather singular.

### **Boundary relationships**

In order to transgress traditional educational boundaries, they first need to be made visible (McArdle, 2005). Research increasingly shows that too many assumptions have been made regarding the professional constructions and identities of those who work with children in the field of ECE (for example Moss, 2013; Payler and Locke, 2013; Osgood 2012; Cottle, 2011). When this gaze is extended to the broader multi-disciplinary field, it seems that the policy landscape has further complicated this matter, and practitioners can find themselves trapped between competing imperatives (Cottle, 2011; Anning, 2005). There are emotional costs to the practitioner that make them feel incompetent (Bradbury, 2012), or as this research has revealed, mistrusted. Freire (1996) talks about how the creation of “horizontal relationships” based on love, humility and faith can produce a logical consequence of mutual trust between the dialoguers (p72) within and across the field. This draws me to a second proposition regarding rule changing, and the necessity to pursue ways of working professionally that allow for dialogue to reveal insight and understanding of the *habitus* that frames practitioners’ practice.

Research that has explored inter-professional working within the EY field provides useful theoretical and conceptual frameworks to draw upon when considering how to look for ways to create discourse communities. Anning's (2005) early research on the impact of multi-agency working serves as a reminder of the requirements to work at highly sophisticated levels in order to juggle the competing demands of their professional values and beliefs with those of other professionals, alongside those of the communities they serve. Similar challenges were expressed by the participants in my study; one of the barriers that reduced opportunities to engage discursively with colleagues was the interpretation of local and national policy that did not allow for personal values and beliefs to be considered. Studies by Edwards (2011) and Payler and Georgeson (2013a) provide some principles and models of inter-agency working that offer a response to Anning's expressed concern. A key feature that underpins Edwards (2011) approach is the engagement of possibility thinking, where participants are encouraged to consider "alternative imaginative perceptions" (p36) which could shape future action. One of the examples provided by Edwards (2011) concerns the assessment of a child and illustrates how this looks in practice. By engaging in "where to" conversations with the child, carers and practitioners, this provides an opportunity to think about the child's longer term needs. More importantly, such conversations also open up possibilities for relational forms of agency for both practitioners and families to seek others ways of acting that are not bound by bureaucratic procedures. This example could equally be related to the two year-old progress check (DfE 2014; DoH, 2009) and if the above principles were applied, there would be less of an emphasis on the deficit outcomes that an 'ages and stages' approach encourages. A greater emphasis could also be made on seeing the value of combining the knowledge and skills of all actors to support positive and ethical outcomes and raising aspirations and potential for the child in the future. This comes back to notions of ethical and democratic practice, as outlined by Dahlberg and Moss (2005) and Moss and Urban (2010). In order for such an approach to be successful, there are certain pre-requisites that need to be in place. Time is needed to engage in boundary talk that enables the recognition of longer term goals, the revelation of problems, and the mutual recognition of what knowledge individuals can bring when working across boundaries. This has resourcing implications, but more importantly a commitment from all parties. If rules regarding assessment practice are to be reworked, then courage and confidence can be gained through the agentic powers of working



collaboratively. Payler and Georgeson's (2013a) research related to interprofessional working noted how when staff actively sought to "shift boundaries by stepping outside the usual structures of routine interprofessional arrangements" (p49) they were able ensure a more coherent approach to the progress of a child. I argue that these principles should equally be applicable to intra-professional working in order to change the rules of the game.

### **7.3.3. Conscious transformation**

I understand that conscious transformation involves reflexivity and a willingness to be challenged, which I have argued are key features of capital gained on an ECE university programme. Conscious transformation therefore requires a *habitus* that is comfortable with disruption and tension in order to make meaningful contributions to practice, and influence change. It requires actors not to succumb to the "seductive power" (Osgood, 2012) of dominant discourses concerning being a professional and its associated strategies to conform to policy. The field in which *habitus* exists also provides the conditions in which *habitus* can transform practice. As this and other studies have revealed however, the micro and macro political dimensions of the ECE field continue to be barriers to transforming practice.

The conditions of the field that allowed for the participants in the study to utilise their EYP/EY teacher 'capital' seemed to match those of the findings of the longitudinal report regarding progress, leadership and impact of EYP status (Hadfield et al, 2012). The impact of their role in the study was dependent on experience; their role and the type of setting they were in, as well as the extent to which their role was recognised and valued by other team members. This seemed to match with the small sample from my own study. The overarching success of their role was related to the extent to which structures, roles and cultures had become *embedded*. In the final chapter I revisit this feature as part of the framework I offer regarding future assessment practice. Another contributory factor is the practitioner's ability to utilise personal action potency to shape practice. As noted by Payler and Georgeson (2013a), status, history and structural arrangements of the setting produces a 'fund' (or capital in Bourdieu's term) that serves to shape strategy.

For the five participants in this study, there were different sets of conditions that needed to be embedded in their settings in order for them to begin to transform practice. It is noticeable that the practices that could emerge may produce very different and localised outcomes, but they all demonstrate how thinking discursively about their practices would allow them to work more authentically towards a relational pedagogy. The following insights are merely provocations based on the stories that the participants shared.

Helen needed to be able to find opportunities in her setting that allowed for the creation of a discursive community in order to seek out the previously silenced or invisible provocations that her Busy Day book had revealed. For Jackie, perhaps shifting the gaze from interests to interactions may have offered opportunities for her team to give equal status to learning characteristics as well as developmental outcomes. The nature of the transformation for Kathy was more closely related to her personal *habitus*. She somehow needed to find a way for her commitment to play-based learning to be recognised as valuable and necessary, rather than it being marginalised because of the perceived value placed on formal learning. Finally for Lucy and Ruth, their *habitus* (and associated capital) needed to be recognised by others who held positions of power in their setting so that they were given opportunities to become rule changers rather than rule enforcers.

## 7.4 Concluding Commentary

Osgood (2012) offers a counter narrative of professionalism, which she defines as “professionalism from within” (p131) which is characterised by “affectivity, altruism, self-sacrifice and conscientiousness” (p131). These dispositions fit with the principles of a democratic and ethical stance (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005) and emancipation and conscientiousness (Freire, 1996). Such dispositions place the child at the heart of everyday practice, and account for the emotional and relational aspects of the role of an ECE practitioner. Whilst all of the participants were aspiring to these characteristics, the performative culture of the field meant that they found themselves in positions of isolation rather than collaboration. Whatever position is adopted when reading the data from this study, I conclude that assessment practice has become distorted and consequently

“inauthentic” (Ball 2003). In the final concluding chapter, following a consideration of the limitations to the study from a methodological perspective, I offer a view of assessment that requires alternative rules of the game in the form of a set of commitments. These commitments view assessment as relational and are based on principles that are embedded, authentic and negotiated within and across the field.

# Chapter 8

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## Conclusion

### 8.0. Introduction

This final chapter has three purposes. Firstly, to reflect back upon the research process and consider the extent to which my chosen methodology enabled me to address the research aims and questions. Secondly, I consider the key findings from the study alongside the implications for the participants and the wider field in telling their assessment stories. The final section looks to the future. Drawing from my own findings and the wider field of research, I offer a framework of principles and commitments related to professional *habitus* and assessment practice. When these are applied to the ECE field, I suggest that they could form the basis of a strategy that serves to address the pedagogical, ethical and democratic tensions that were identified in this study. As a final point, I conclude with a consideration of further research that looks to apply these principles into practice.

The three research questions (RQ) for this study were related to identifying, understanding and analysing:

RQ1- Practitioners' own *habitus* that shaped their theories, beliefs and understanding of the discourses of assessment

RQ2- How practitioners described assessment practice in their workplace settings

RQ3- How practitioners were mediating their professional *habitus* with the culture and assessment practices of their workplace setting and the wider policy context.

In this concluding chapter, reference to how the three research questions were answered will be made through the insertion of [RQ 1,2 or 3] to orientate the reader towards the relevant question.

### 8.1. Reflecting back upon the research process

The rationale for this research was to provide an insight into the lived experience of assessment practice for Early Childhood Studies graduates who work in the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector. The neo-liberal discourses that underpin

educational policy have had a significant impact on this particular group of practitioners. Whilst they have received increased political attention and have been encouraged to increase their social capital through further training and qualifications, the 'structural injustices' within the field mean that they have found themselves in an elevated but still submissive position (Osgood 2009; McGillivray, 2008).

The methodological framework that underpinned this study was located within a critical social constructionist stance. Any knowledge claim that is made from this perspective takes account that constructions of the world are bound by power relations; thus knowledge can be understood to be "ideological, political, and permeated with values" (Schwandt, 2000, p198). Bourdieu's (1986) thinking tools: "[*habitus* (capital)] + field = practice" served as a conceptual framework to help explain and understand the nature of the relationships that exist between practitioners and other agents in the field of ECE. It also allowed me to consider how notions of power, class and status may have served to be (i) reproducing certain inequalities; (ii) misrecognising differences in *habitus* and therefore (iii) producing particular types of assessment practices.

Reflecting on my own professional life history at the inception of this study helped me to understand my own *habitus* and how my subjective construction of this professional group (certainly at the early stage of my career) was both elitist and misunderstood. This was a consequence of the *doxa* that was prevalent in the field. At the time I was working in the school sector, where its economic capital brought with it more status and power than cultural capital (Thomson, 2010 p70). The cultural capital that embodied the PVI sector was underpinned by maternal and caring discourses and as such made them the poor relation to practitioners in the CSE sector. It was not until I worked with them in an academic context that I truly understood the challenges they faced in being recognised as professionals in their own right. There was therefore an emancipatory element that underpinned this research. It needed to employ a methodology that would allow me to challenge the dominant socio-political and economic structures that influence both assessment practices and the construction of this group of practitioners by seeking other ways in which they could be understood.

I wanted to find a way of opening up spaces that would allow this group of practitioners to tell their own stories of how assessment policies were enacted and mediated in their workplaces. I wanted this space to allow them to think in the discursive ways that had formed part of their *habitus* during their degree studies. This would enable them to engage in *praxis* so that collectively, we could problematise dominant discourses and make space for other discourses to be heard (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005), as well as understand the past and present experiences that had shaped their professional *habitus*.

### **8.1.1. Methods**

The dialogic and praxeological intentions of this study meant that I needed to employ data collection methods that lent themselves to narrative inquiry within a collaborative context. Praxis is open to revisions when narratives are shared (Griffiths and Macleod, 2008), and so I felt the Focus Group and on-line Discussion site were appropriate methods that allowed the participants to revisit their narratives. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013) see the FG approach as having three specific functions, namely: “the *pedagogical*, the *political* and the *empirical*” (p19). When the group came together, the sharing of empirical material served as a powerful way for them to begin to understand their own subjectivities (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2013), as well as the significance of policy interpretations in shaping assessment pedagogies. The group participants were comfortable sharing their assessment stories and their desire to listen to and support each other was also significant. They formed their own conclusions about the tensions that they experienced in both mediating local and national policies and the personal challenges that they faced in using their symbolic capital (as an EYP/EY teacher) to either play the assessment game, or seek ways of subverting the rules.

### **Methodological Limitations**

My original intention had been to conduct four focus group sessions, and I had imagined that the final two sessions would have provided opportunities to engage more deeply with the theoretical dimensions that inform pedagogy in ways similar to when they were students. Time limitations were a logistical barrier that meant we were only able to meet

twice - it also seemed initially that time was equally a factor in engagement in the Discussion Site. The participants actively engaged with the site at the beginning of the study, but during the study this tapered off. At the end of the last session I asked the groups to reflect on the research process. The group were unanimous that meeting “face to face” was more preferable than the discussion site as they felt “when someone says something you can bounce off it” [Lucy]. Jackie provided another perspective that offered a different reason as to why there was less engagement with the discussion site. The following excerpt from the second FG session provides this insight:

- Jackie: *Your questions were too hard too!..You know the one about how do you involve children in your assessment...*
- Kathy: *Were they ?*
- Jackie: *...I just sat at it and looked at it and thought...Do I?...Maybe I do..*
- Jo: *So it made you think*
- Jackie: *I couldn't answer you because I thought...'Should I be?''...And then I had to go through that whole...What's that word...dis...*
- Jo: *Disequilibrium?*
- Jackie: *yeah that one! And I'm thinking...God who've I turned into...Which theorist...*

The intention of using the discussion site was to enable the participants to have a means of controlling how the ‘self’ was presented to others (Markham, 2005). Did Jackie feel that there was an expectation to present her ‘self’ in such a way that demonstrated her professional worth through her knowledge of theory? If this was the case, then I was not sure whether this was an expectation she had imposed on herself, or whether it was an assumed expectation that I had placed upon the group.

The intention of posing a question was to provoke deeper thinking about their practice. As Hedges (2010) reminds us, unless practitioners are encouraged to engage in theoretically informed dialogue then reflection can be merely a superficial endeavour. Interestingly, there was only one instance in the study where an opportunity arose to draw the participants towards thinking about the theory/practice relationship. It evolved from a comment made by Jackie, who alluded to parental involvement being seen as a “triangle”

between the “parent, practitioner and child”. This was a pertinent point at which to remind the participants of Margaret Carr’s (2001) principles behind Learning Journeys. What is noteworthy in this situation was that the initial provocation had come from the participants themselves. Conversely, on the discussion site I posted a question, which on reflection was based on my own subjectivities about what ‘good’ assessment should look like (namely, involving children in an authentic manner). I wanted to gain a sense of how this featured in their own practice. Whilst I was seeing my role as the critical ‘expert’ friend to seek ways of making the unconscious more conscious, I had shifted the attention away from the empirical and pedagogical narratives that were important to the participants to aspects of practice upon which I placed importance. This was a learning point for me as a researcher. It reminded me of the importance of a “virtue-based approach to ethics” (Macfarlane, 2004, p.23) and the importance of being critical of one’s own performance as a researcher. As the question was posted on the discussion site however, arguably the participants were still able to exercise their power through choosing not to answer the question. The use of MacNaughton’s (2005) three positions in the analysis of data provided a vehicle for addressing researcher bias. Examining the narratives through three different lenses served as a “test point” to read the data from a technical, practical and critical perspective.

As a form of summary regarding the methodological aspects of this study, I believe that the narrative approach produced rich and nuanced data that gave a provoking insight into how the participants were mediating their professional *habitus* within their workplace settings and the wider policy context. In the following section, I draw on the literature review, policy analysis and my own findings to consider the interrelationship between *habitus* and field and the consequences for assessment practice.

## 8.2. Implications of the Study

### 8.2.1 The EYP/EY Teacher as a professional – the poor relation?

Bourdieu argued that “social inequality is rooted in objective structures of unequal distributions of types of capital” (Swartz 1997, p145). For practitioners working in the PVI sector, the distribution of both economic capital (in terms of funding and pay conditions) and cultural capital (namely qualifications) has meant that they have effectively been the poor relation to their counterparts in the CSE sector. Despite the recent review of the



workforce (Nutbrown, 2012), there still remains disparity and inequality for those who have achieved graduate status (Nutbrown, 2013). Previous research (Roberts- Holmes, 2013; Osgood, 2012; Simpson 2011) identified factors such as misrecognition of the role of the EYP/EY Teacher and the tension between emotional and technical characteristics of the role created a form of “bounded agency” (Simpson, 2010 ) where their position in the field determined the extent to which they could exercise their capital to influence practice. In this study, these factors were of similar significance.

This misrecognition of the professional role was a form of *doxa* that had created “shared but unquestioned opinions and perceptions” (Deer, 2012 p115) across the field. For the participants this had created an internalized sense of limits and therefore *habitus* regarding the extent to which they could use their capital as an agentic force in challenging the mechanistic and technical assessment practices that seemed to be the expected rules of the game. A further problem with *doxa* is that it misrecognises differences in individual ability. As Kathy recognised, the tensions that the participants experienced in utilising their role seemed to be in some ways different dependent on their position in the setting as well as their location in the field. Lucy, Helen and Ruth were young and relatively inexperienced in comparison to Jackie and Kathy. Their more extensive experience had therefore given them the confidence to at least bend or subvert the rules in ways which meant that they were able to utilise their *habitus* in order to satisfy the regulatory gaze - whilst still holding onto their own values and beliefs. [RQ3].

In Chapter 5 I explained how Salamon’s (2002) “Tools of Governance” framework could be used to examine the complexity of the interdependent relationship between the state and the private sector. The tools or technologies synonymous with assessment in ECE programmes are concerned with grants and subsidies: outcomes based measurement; regulation and accountability. Salamon (2002) argued that some “tools of governance” potentially give more power over to the private sector. This is not, however, a straightforward argument when considering how notions of quality are characterised *across* the PVI sector. Previous arguments (Penn 2012, 2011; Simpson 2011) have been made to suggest there is tendency in the for-profit sector for economic principles to drive decisions made regarding quality provision, as opposed to those that are more philosophical for the non-profit sector. The pedagogical implications are that this produces binary opposites

resulting in either technical, rational practices or more democratic, relational and ethical practices (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). Whilst my study was concerned with only a small scale sample, it seems that this argument is applicable. Jackie and Kathy both worked in non-profit organisations, so they had multiple roles where they had had relative control over the management of both the staff and the finances. They therefore had much more power to influence practice that fitted with their values and beliefs. For Jackie, her values were deeply embedded in a relational pedagogy and she sought strategies that would create more authentic relationships with parents. She was endeavouring to use documentation as a pedagogical tool that gave a richer insight into children's funds of knowledge. Conversely, Kathy had experienced a shift in her *habitus*. The *doxa* seemed to have taken the form of a misrecognized shared allegiance to the "rules of the game" (Deer, 2012, p117). Her desire to increase her symbolic capital to gain 'teacher' status had led her to succumb to more formalised school-based practices that she felt would give her an advantage in the field. She was seeking ways to amend her documentation so that it could be used as an accountability tool to monitor her own staff and have information readily to hand regarding children's performance. [RQ1]

For the other three participants, their ability to influence assessment practice was far more limited. The corporate 'rules' regarding expected assessment practices were embedded in the performative culture of their settings. Lucy, Helen and Ruth found themselves adopting the roles of rule enforcers, where they had submitted to the perceived rules of the game that were deemed to satisfy the regulatory gaze of OFSTED. Helen in particular, however, seemed to have some "innovative capacity" (Swartz, 1997) to seek ways to mediate the performative demands of her setting with her own *habitus*. This was exemplified in her 'Busy Day book'. Yet as previously argued, the book contained examples of children's activities that were deemed surplus to requirements. Helen and Lucy also talked about how their quests to challenge assessment practices were silenced by those in positions of power who used avoidance strategies synonymous with the wall of "cotton wool" (p710) analogy that Simpson (2011) used. I argue that the consequences of such endeavours meant that their role as agents of change was little more than tokenistic. [RQ1,2& 3]

It seems that whilst the financial tools of governance arguably give the sector some autonomy, those concerned with outcomes-based measurement, regulation and

accountability had greater coercive powers. Other research has highlighted how 'schoolification' and readiness discourses dominate the relationships between and across the field (Roberts- Holmes, 2014; Moss, 2013; Roberts-Holmes, 2012) and the findings from this study concur with this argument. A distinctive consequence of this ecological power relationship seemed to be a lack of trust in professional competence across the sector.[RQ 3]

### **Distrust**

All of the participants had stories to tell about how the assessment documentation that they had formulated was, on occasions, disregarded by others in the field, leaving them with a sense that there was distrust in their professional competence. When transitional records were shared with other practitioners either in their own setting or across the field into schools, it was not unusual for the validity of the claims that the participants had made regarding progress to be challenged. One explanation for this professional distrust is that the policy discourses concerned with measurement of quality, reliability of data and teacher competence (OFSTED, 2014a; OECD, 2004) were acting as forms of symbolic violence to validate and preserve the field. It is important to acknowledge that teachers also find themselves in positions of vulnerability as a result of policy and its associated regulatory mechanisms (Bradbury 2012; Roberts-Holmes 2012). This seemed to result in "inauthentic practice and relationships" (Ball 2003, p222) where the manipulation of data is a strategy that only schools have at their disposal to employ. [RQ2]

This sense of distrust is something that has troubled me outside the boundaries of this research. Professionally, I find myself in situations where school teachers talk of their mistrust of the information that they receive from their pre-school provider that feeds into their schools (and indeed, earlier in my career, I was equally guilty of such assertions). Narratives regarding the need to disregard profile data and "start again" are not an uncommon assertion to be heard from reception class teachers. Undoubtedly these perceptions and practices are partly as a result of the policy context. I argue however that they are also related to a broad lack of professional understanding of the PVI sector and the skills and knowledge that EYP/EY teachers possess which equip them with a *habitus* that is

based on “dialogue, democratic practice and valuing the contribution of other people” (Moss, 2006 p74). [RQ3]

The new baseline assessment proposals (DfE, 2014b) add a further layer of complexity to this issue. The concerns from the field regarding baseline assessment (BERA/TACTYC, 2014; Early Childhood Action, 2012) are rightly located in the impact on the child. Yet there are further concerns regarding the impact on the PVI profession. As I and other academics have argued (Basford and Bath, 2014; Luff, 2012; Wood, 2010) the current assessment models across the fields are paradigmatically incompatible. If the desire to create an even playing field across the sector is still apparent, then for professionals in the PVI field to prove their professional worth, they will surely find themselves creating assessment strategies that fit with a positivist model based on measurement and standardisation. The two year-old development check (DfE, 2013b) is perhaps an early indicator of the direction of travel in which policy may take us.

Whilst Salamon (2002) advocates that third party governance has enabled collaboration across the field to replace competition, this study has shown that this was not necessarily the case for these practitioners. Professional status rather than qualifications seemed to determine power. Relationships of inequalities played out within and across field boundaries. I argue therefore that we need to seek ways to create conditions that place much greater emphasis on professional relationships. Here I am drawn back to notions of a relational pedagogy, as well as studies by Edwards (2011) and Payler and Georgeson (2013a) that have identified the significance of boundary talks in order to open up *conscious* spaces to share, understand and utilise teachers’ funds of knowledge. Such opportunities help to position children as competent and complex learners, providing an authentic insight into the social and cultural attributes that contribute to a child’s learning characteristics. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) remind us, a truly relational pedagogy cannot become a reality unless all the conditions for true democratisation are fulfilled (p79).

## 8.2.2 Making the Unconscious Conscious

This research has examined how underpinning conforming discourses have resulted in reproducing constructs of learners that reinforce deficit views of children and their families. Equally, it has highlighted how it has unconsciously reproduced inequalities in the ECEC sector. This has resulted in a distorted view of assessment practices and distorted view of professional roles. Despite commitment from the academic field to push theoretical boundaries that offer other ways of understanding learning and development, such knowledge is not being transposed into practice (Ryan, 2008). For reasons outlined previously, practitioners in the PVI sector (and indeed teachers) have found themselves conforming to practices that have preserved the field [RQ2]. Whether this is a conscious or unconscious act is more difficult to ascertain. It has been argued by numerous authors that *habitus* is not necessarily an unconscious feature (Reay, 2004), and that insufficient attention is paid to the reflexive “inner conversations” that occur in everyday practice. My findings suggest that there is potential for *habitus* to be unconscious if there are no opportunities made available to bring these to the forefront of discussion. The participants talked of their fears of becoming “stuck in the rut” by the demands of pre-school life. They referred to physical and human barriers that made it increasingly difficult to play out their role of “active and reflexive agent” (Simpson 2010, p6), which is epitomised by the EYP/EY Teacher status. [RQ1]

The discursive and collaborate space created through the Focus Group allowed for more conscious reflection. This is evidently an important disposition to possess if practice is to be transformed. Bourdieu (2008) argues “It is by knowing the laws of reproduction that we can have a chance, however small, on minimizing the reproductive effect of the educational institution” (p53). It therefore seems that if there is a chance that the reproductive effects of the conforming assessment practices that have been exemplified in this study can be reduced, then it requires a *conscious* and *collaborative* approach across the field.

It is at this point that I am drawn back again to notions of a relational pedagogy, as well as the work of Edwards (2011) and Payler and Georgeson (2013a) related to inter-professional working. I argue that the principles of boundary talk that open up spaces to share, understand and utilise practitioners’ funds of knowledge should equally be applicable to

*intraprofessional* working in order to change the rules of the assessment game. In the final section, I offer a way forward regarding assessment practice. It is not a model of practice, but a set of commitments that serve as a starting point for viewing assessment as a relational practice.

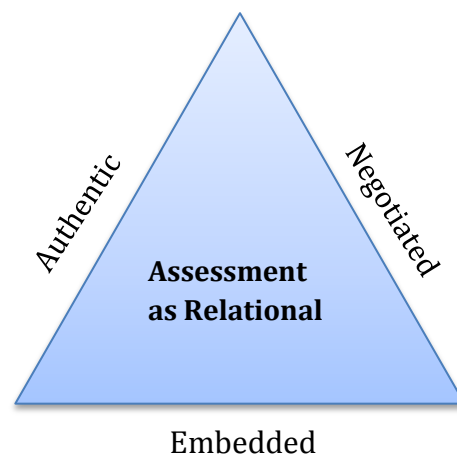
### 8.3. Looking Forward

Relationships have been a recurring theme in this research. The study has highlighted how the conforming position of the curriculum has produced inequalities across the field. Adopting a reforming position in the data analysis revealed the practical consequences of such a position. Professional relationships with the state are of a submissive nature, which is a consequence of the tools of governance that determine the roles that actors play (Salamon, 2002). A further consequence of a conforming position is that this creates an ecological power relationship which is hierarchical in nature. Power both *across* field boundaries and *within* boundaries seems to be determined by professional status, rather than professional qualification or, as Bourdieu would argue; economic capital brings with it more status than cultural capital [RQ1]. There are consequences for the child and family as well. A conforming position privileges the individual and privileges a focus on *development* rather than *learning* (and indeed teaching). It also produces specific systems of meanings regarding the ways in which we are expected to consider childhood, children and their education. It effectively places the practitioner as the 'expert' in child development and parenting (Alasuutari and Karila, 2010). Assessment and its corresponding documentation from this perspective is a repressive tool (Graue, 2008), rather than a tool for opening up possibilities of providing alternative constructions of the child as a learner. [RQ2]

#### 8.3.1. My contribution to knowledge

I am offering a view of assessment that requires alternative 'rules of the game', or conditions of the field. This is a set of commitments regarding assessment that forms part of the professional *habitus* for all players in the field. This view adopts a transforming view of assessment that endeavours to make the invisible visible. The 'invisible' are regarded as the

child, the family and the 'other' practitioners. This set of commitments takes account of relations and relationships within the field in which they are located. It therefore views *assessment as relational* (Fig 9). It takes a view of assessment that is holistic, equitable and democratic, in which decisions regarding what is documented and how it is interpreted are negotiated locally across both home and educational boundaries.



**Fig 9. Assessment commitments**

The set of commitments are not intended to be a model of assessment; rather they are principles that help to view assessment not as an isolated act, but a collaborative endeavour. They are based on the view that assessment practice is determined by the conditions of the field and the actors who co-exist within the field. There is therefore a relationship between all of these features. This view of assessment realises that there are certain expectations and obligations that cannot always be resisted, which thus shape part of our professional *habitus*. *Habitus* is also concerned with dispositions, values and beliefs, however; when they are shared across professional boundaries, there is potential to address the ethical and democratic tensions that this and other studies have identified.

**Commitment 1: Assessment practice is Authentic.**

Authenticity in assessment is concerned with a commitment to constantly strive to look at, listen to, and learn about a child from an objective position. The term objective is deliberate here, as I refer to it as a conscious endeavour to step back from our own subjectivities that we bring to an assessment moment. As both this research, and the wider field (Bradbury,

2013; Bath, 2012; Daniels, 2011) has shown, these subjectivities can undoubtedly be influenced by curriculum guidelines and goals. Therefore, authentic assessment requires a conscious awareness and commitment towards looking for ways to avoid a preconceived construction of the child based on predetermined categories. Rinaldi (2006) refers to this as a conscious and collective process of “deciding what to give value to” (p70). Authentic documentation involves revealing significant learning episodes that provide an insight into the cultural and social aspects of a child’s life. Finally, authenticity in assessment is inclusive of the child, family and professionals. It looks for ways to involve all stakeholders in contributing to and interpreting learning in order to support both present and future learning.

**Commitment 2: Assessment practice is negotiated.**

Negotiated assessment practice is concerned with “mutually beneficial dialogue” (Moss, 2013, p15) in order to agree what is assessed, what is documented and how it will be interpreted. Negotiated assessment acknowledges that every player has something to offer, and seeks ways to find this out. Negotiated assessment practice seeks to find consensus, but acknowledges how the expectations and obligations of the field can sometimes limit possibilities. Negotiated assessment practice looks for practical solutions to locally identified problems.

**Commitment 3: Assessment practice is embedded**

Embedded assessment practice seeks to find ways to embed systems and structures across the field. It looks for ways that offer consistency in what is assessed, and how assessments are interpreted. Assessment practice is also embedded in *praxis* and continuous professional development. There is a commitment to seeking discursive opportunities to reflect upon and understand the pedagogical principles that underpin assessment practice.

**8.3.2. Further research: putting principles into practice**

Hedges’ (2010) research views the researcher as a ‘critical friend’ where they take on the dual role of researcher and professional learning facilitator in order to understand the context of the teachers’ practices before introducing a professional learning dimension. This



is relevant to my own research. The participants expressed a desire to continue to meet, and to seek my help as the expert 'critical friend' to explore avenues for transforming assessment practice. I see the potential in this form of research for providing an insight into the context of the challenges within the field, and would look forward to an opportunity to apply the principles of *assessment as relational* to work across boundaries in the form of research knowledge exchange.

It was agreed that following completion of this thesis, I would seek funding opportunities to work with the group in their settings in formulating an action research project related to assessment practice. This study was concerned with problem posing rather than problem solving and I would adopt a similar position in a further study. I would aim to use the *assessment as relational* commitments to help to identify the localised issues and tensions that practitioners across professional boundaries have identified relating to assessment. The local dimension is important because if assessment practice is to be ethical, authentic, embedded and negotiated, then this has to be a collaborative endeavour.

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## Appendix A

Faculty of Education  
MMU Cheshire  
February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014

### Invitation to participate in research.

Dear Early Childhood Studies Graduate,

I am writing to ask whether you would be interested in participating in a piece of research that is associated with my Doctoral Thesis. The research is concerned with assessment practice.

There have been a number of recent policy changes in relation to assessment requirements for all practitioners in the Early Years sector. I would like to find out what your experiences have been in relation to this element of your practice. During your degree course, you were encouraged to develop your own philosophy and thinking about childhood and what is described as 'good practice'. So I am also interested to find out how you are mediating the values and beliefs that you developed during your degree course, with the practices of your setting, and the wider policy context.

These are my research questions:

- What are practitioners own theories, beliefs and understanding of the discourses of assessment?
- How do practitioners describe assessment practice in their workplace settings?
- How are practitioners mediating their professional beliefs and identity regarding assessment practice with the culture and practice of their workplace setting and the wider policy context?

#### *What would your involvement in the research project entail?*

I am looking for up to 6 practitioners who work in either the Private, Voluntary or Independent sector. The selected practitioners would form a Focus Group, who would meet 4 times between February – July 2014. The Focus Group would be held at MMU, each session lasting about two hours. It would be held at a time that is mutually convenient for all participants.

The purpose of the Focus group would be for you to form your own 'community of practice'. During the Focus Group sessions you would share your assessment stories in a collective, collaborative and supportive manner. The Focus Group would be a site for you to explore issues, celebrate good practice, and sometimes be challenged! My role will be to facilitate the discussions that you have and support the processes of critical reflection.

You will need to be willing to share your experiences, and provide support to others in the group. The Focus Group will be a confidential site. You will be asked to agree on a code of practice that means that all information that is shared in the Focus Group will be anonymous. It will not be shared with any other parties, and any data that is presented in my doctoral thesis will only be as a result of you giving informed consent.

Therefore, a key requirement for selection to be involved in this research project is a demonstration of an interest in forming a 'community of practice' with other ECE graduates who would look forward to an opportunity to reflect upon, discuss and possibly challenge practice, particularly in relation to assessment and documentation.

#### *This is the intended timetable for data collection*

<i>Date</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
February 2014	Initial introductory meeting. A code of practice will be agreed as well as an opportunity to ask further questions in order to confirm your participation in the group.
Early March 2014	Session 1: Sharing values, ideas and beliefs that influence your assessment practice.
Early April 2014	Session 2: Sharing practice: Assessment practice in your own settings
Early May 2014	Session 3: Exploring issues (i)
Early June 2014	Session 4: Reflection and moving on: What have we learnt and what next ?

***What do I need to do next if I would like to be considered as a participant in the research?***

Please reply to this email ([j.basford@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:j.basford@mmu.ac.uk)) no later than **February 10<sup>th</sup> 2014** stating your expression of interest. I will then reply to you by February 17<sup>th</sup> to acknowledge your expression of interest and invite you to an introductory session at MMU. This will be an opportunity for you to meet other potential participants and to be given informed consent and information sheets. The aims and objectives of the research will be shared and time will be given for further questions to be asked. You will then be given a two week 'cooling off' period to decide whether they wish to be involved in the research. Please note that you have a right to withdraw from the research at any point in time.

***To summarise, recruitment of participants will be based on the following criteria:***

- (i) Employed in a Private, Voluntary or Independent Early Childhood setting.
- (ii) The demonstration of an interest in joining a group of other Early Childhood practitioners to share and reflect upon assessment practice.
- (iii) The demonstration of a willingness and interest to engage in opportunities for reflexive dialogue. Participants will also need to demonstrate an understanding that participation in the research may result in identifying tensions and dilemmas related to assessment practice within the participants own workplaces and see disruption as an opportunity for professional development rather than a threat.
- (iv) A commitment to attend all six Focus Group sessions for about two hours at mutually agreed time and date.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like any more information.

With very best wishes

*Jo Basford*

## Appendix B

### Participant Details

Name *	Qualifications/ Graduate Status	Setting	Role
Helen	NVQ L3; BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies. EYPS	Day Nursery	'Senior' Practitioner
Jackie	NNEB FdA Early Years Practice; BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies. EYPS	Pre-School	Setting Manager
Lucy	BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies. EYPS	Children's Centre Nursery	Room Leader
Kathy	NVQ 2 and 3 FdA Early Years Practice; BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies. EYPS	Pre-School	Setting Manager
Ruth	BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies. EY Teacher Status	Day Nursery	EY Teacher and Room Supervisor

\*Participant's names were changed to pseudonyms.

## Appendix C

### Discussion site transcript

**17<sup>th</sup> April 2014**

Jo: Welcome to our closed forum. This is a site created especially for you to share your thoughts, ideas and challenges regarding assessment practice

**18<sup>th</sup> April 2014**

Attachments added: Jackie and Lucy's poems

**18<sup>th</sup> April 2014**

#### OUR GROUP AGREEMENT

We have agreed to:

- Change names of children; parents; staff and outside agencies in order to ensure confidentiality in both the Focus Group and on the Blog
- If concerns arise, we will have someone to talk to both inside and outside the group. Share our stories and anecdotes about assessment practice
- Share our documentation and how we observe practice and assess the children we work with.

During the Focus Group, we will....

- Listen to each other (active listening)
- Talk one at a time
- Ensure our mobile phones are in our bags (on silent!)

**18<sup>th</sup> April 2014 [OFSTED video upload]**

Jo: Good Practice: As illustrated by OFSTED ...To what extent does the practice in your setting reflect any of these principles that are exemplified?

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/right-start-early-years-good-practice-films-assessment>

**23<sup>rd</sup> April 2014 21.10**

Kathy: I enjoyed watching these films! I loved the open air nursery, as I'm currently developing my outdoor area I picked up some tips... I agree with the concept of allowing children to take risks and feel that they do have less accidents



when not wrapped up in cotton wool... However being in a school environment with a strict health and safety coordinator we have soft surfaces, traditional climbing frames and rope bridges. My staff would be nervous and request constant supervision especially near the pond, climbing on the blocks etc... I loved it though

Kathy: Also I like the idea of the learning journeys going out to parents everyday, like a diary, as my parents only see their's [sic] every half term. It would be nice to do home visits and visits to other nurseries but because of the budget restraints I don't think this is possible. The role of the adult was impressive in the sure start nursery, asking open-ended questions, being at the child's level, knowing when to intervene in their play... Putting the child at the centre of their own learning. Also I like the fact that they allowed the indoor resources to be transferred outside so play can be developed... This is not often seen in reception class... But I would like to do it in my nursery.

**24<sup>th</sup> April 2014**

Ruth: I enjoyed watching these videos too! Does anyone have any resources or reading to recommend on tracking? It's not something I am very familiar with, but in the video it appeared that it was being used to help practitioners see the holistic picture of the child? It just looked like a lot of coloured boxes to me!

Jo: This is the link to your LA Early Years site. It does not provide any exemplification for 'tracking development'. I'll do a trawl to see what else is on web. [http address for Local Authority]

Jackie: oh, I watch the videos and at first felt sick because of the typed, bound learning journeys. However after watching them all, I could see that we were doing very similar things and it gave me a bit of peace of mind. I love the idea of sending it home too daily, but logistically this would be hard- I also feel that the daily email system that we have adopted this year helps us to keep parents informed and in turn parents are also sending in photos of their child's weekends, interests and updating health issues to. It works very well. Downside is that I have to do this in the evening ! arrrrh. I do do a group tracking too, but I am going to do it on a larger spreadsheet, but this does help me to see how the children are progressing as a whole and it has also enabled me to focus on specific areas of development when a large number of children do not make steady progress. It has enabled me to be more reflective about learning environment.

Jackie: I loved the setting too, I was envious of the areas and wonder where they got the money !!!!! But it has given me the confidence to consider the less is more approach and that open-ended resources that can be moved and used by children are very important. The simplicity of a treasure chest in the sand

put with pirate waistcoats and hats just brought the children alive. I want to visit them in real life too.

Jackie: By saying less is more, I mean less expensive things such as climbing frames etc and more of the everyday things such as large boxes, then making stuff, large boulder area for clambering on, tyres, growing pits and when not growing they can be digging pits !!! Oh if only I had more time in a day (and more money in my pocket).

Jackie: Kathy - you mentioned a strict health and safety coordinator- maybe she needs to see this film. There were lots of different areas in the settings too which helped to distribute the children around. I think this may be a good natural way of focusing children's play. I am going to forward the short videos to my staff as CPD training too.

Jo: Here is a document I have found on the web that is an exemplar tracking form. It looks like the guidance is that you allocated different colour code each time you track development [calderdale assessment tracker.pdf]

Ruth: Thanks Jo I will have a read.

Jackie: We use something very similar to this to help us keep track of children's progress. We use different coloured highlighters for each room when cross-referencing our observations and this serves to show us their progress and helps to reflect upon where our setting practice. For instance, if we are not getting much observations on numeracy - we ask ourselves why and what can we do to develop this. I do like the fact that there are characteristics of effective learning to but I feel these are best seen in child initiated play. It feels like the development matters statements on more academic whilst the characteristics of effective learning are more personality traits to me but this is an area I am working on at the moment - what do you think. I do find that the EYFS development matters age ranges and stages a bit tad exasperating as there are things that should be there that is not all there is a vast jump from 30 to 50 months to 40 to 60 months. I feel this jump makes it hard for children to progress on paper as we cannot confidently mark off the statements because they are too broad, thus it could be seen that children are not making enough progress and mask the amazing progress they are really making. Also, we are advised to follow the letters and sounds of phase 1 programme for phonics but the 40 to 60 months fits in phase 2 onwards. Now I am writing this and thinking about what we do, it does make me feel that I could do so much more if I was not feeling so restricted by these EYFS statements.

Okay, I am off my soapbox -what do you think?

Helen: Hi all ! Did we decide on a next meeting date I can't remember !

Ruth: Don't think we did ! I think we all just said a Tuesday would be a good day again ! 😊

Jo: Hello Everyone. I am going to send you an email that has the transcript of our Focus group. I would be grateful if you could read it and check for accuracy. Can you try and read it using two 'heads'..... (1) purely to check for accuracy (2)what emerges as significant for you? If you could share your thoughts in this FB space, then together we should be able to come up with a 'next steps.

Ruth: Thanks Jo I will have a read

Jackie: We use something very similar to this to help us keep track of children's progress. We use different coloured highlighters for each rem when cross referencing our observations and this serves to show us their progress and help us to reflect upon where our setting practice. For instance, if we are not getting much observations on numeracy - we ask ourselves why and what can we do to develop this. I do like the fact that there are characteristics of effective learning too but I feel these are best seen in child initiated play. It feels like the development matters statements are more academic whilst the characteristics of effective learning are more personality traits to me but this is an area I am working on at the moment - what do you think. I do find that the EYFS development matters age ranges and stages bit a tad exasperating as there are things that should be there that is not or there is a vast jump from 30 to 50 months to 40-60 months. I feel that This jump makes it hard for children to progress on paper as we cannot confidently mark off the statements because they are too broad, thus it could be seen that children are not making enough progress and mask the amazing progress they are making really. Also, we are advised to follow the Letters and Sounds Phase 1 program for phonics but the 40 to 60 months fits in phases 2 onwards. No I am writing this and thinking about what we do, it does make me feel that I could do so much more if I was not feeling so restricted by these EYFS statements. Ok, I am off my soap box - what do you think

**25<sup>th</sup> April**

Lucy: [http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/news/1143653/active-learning-nursery-enforcement-notice-ofsted?utm\\_content&utm\\_campaign=25.04.14+NW+Update&utm\\_source=Nursery+World&utm\\_medium=adestra\\_email&utm\\_term=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nurseryworld.co.uk%2Fnursery-world%2Fnews%2F1143653%2Factive-learning-nursery-enforcement-notice-ofsted](http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/news/1143653/active-learning-nursery-enforcement-notice-ofsted?utm_content&utm_campaign=25.04.14+NW+Update&utm_source=Nursery+World&utm_medium=adestra_email&utm_term=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nurseryworld.co.uk%2Fnursery-world%2Fnews%2F1143653%2Factive-learning-nursery-enforcement-notice-ofsted)

After reading this I'm pretty sure I'm right in thinking the new early years statutory framework recently published to be in place September 14 states the removal of risk assessments? Surely this OFSTED report clearly shows why we need them. Who writes these new publications.... They really do sit in the offices without any understanding of nursery life. Just saying

Jackie: Yes, this is true but one that I personally will not be doing. I think risk assessments for certain aspects are essential, however sometimes they can be very restrictive to staff and put them off carrying out activities due to the perceived higher risk and extra paperwork to, for instance going out on visits in the local area. But risk assessments to ensure the day-to-day safety are a must. Why can't we lose paperwork in another area in which children's safety would not be affected ! For instance letting practitioners track children's progress from the knowledge gained from interacting with children and not having to produce a piece of evidence for it (such as planning sheets, observation or photo). I certainly know that there are only a few parents who want to see all this paperwork and others just say they want to see their child's happy and enjoying coming to school- they love seeing photos of the children involved in their play and learning.

Jo: Ok - here is the transcript of our session. Any emerging thoughts?  
There is so much really interesting 'stuff' that you shared last time, and think it would be helpful if you all had a bit of time to think and absorb what was said.  
At the moment I am inclined to think that we only need to meet face to face one more time. I will take some advice from my supervisor - but I think this will also be dependent on how you want to utilise this FB page.  
Please share your thoughts and ideas.  
Hope you managed to enjoy the Easter break..and Lucy..do you have a new job now ?!!!!

Lucy: Awh thankyou for remembering.... I did get the job!! However post slightly changed I am moving settings still within the company but I will now be at another of our settings in crewe twos room senior I am happy ... iv just got back from the lakes so will have a read of this over weekend and give my feedback hope you all had a lovely easter x

Kathy: I feel the same when reading the transcript as I did when we actually discussed issues and experiences on the night of the session. It actually opened my eyes when I realise how much more freedom I had in my setting compared to the girls in a day nursery establishment. Initially I felt that being in a school setting would bring with it a lot more protocol to follow, however I am able to decide, set my rules effectively. County give me guidelines of what they would like to see as regards tracking, planning, profiles etc. I conversed with my staff and we decide how everything should be done. I believe that it is this that who know the children best, they know what works. It seems that Lucy and Helen should be able to voice their own opinions on what works best for their settings.

Kathy: We actually have the freedom to display all photos of the children in their profiles even if they do not relate to statements. Our profiles contain observations, photos and children's work but I do not connect them all to the statements. I used to do that but to be honest parents did not understand what that meant anyway. They would rather see a photo with a lovely

comment underneath that talked about the experiences that the child has taken part in, comments they had made. My staff track using development matters/early years outcomes, they all know where their children are at. We pass transition sheets onto reception but they do not take notice of well we feel children are at, they just do their own baseline assessment.... I wonder what year one teachers take notice of where reception teachers feel their children are at the end of the reception year ! Again I feel that because I think teachers respect what other teachers say but do not really listen to what nursery staff think may be clouded my judgement

#### **28<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

Jo: Hi everyone,  
I would like to begin to pose some questions each week in the build up to our final get together in July. These questions are intended to provoke you to think more deeply, and perhaps differently about the issues we have been exploring. Watch this space, as the first QUESTION OF THE WEEK will be posted shortly !

Jo: QUESTION OF THE WEEK. #1  
What are the unique features of the setting in which you work? Do you have a mission statement that sets out the values and purpose of your setting? Please share .....

#### **4<sup>th</sup> June 2014**

Jo: Hello...is anyone out there ?!!

Jackie: Why such a hard one! Well, we do have a mission statement for my setting which supports the catholic ethos. It states that children will be supported physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually and spiritually at our setting. I guess that this can be considered our uniqueness and is seeing the child holistically.

Ruth: Our ethos is about creating a loving, homely and nurturing environment where children feel safe and happy to learn. We aim to provide children with happy memories from their nursery experience, and a place where parents feel happy to leave their children. I think the consistent staff team supports our ethos because the regular faces for the children and parents promote and build on the relationships we form with the children, creating a family like environment and a place the children can feel at home.

#### **29<sup>th</sup> June 2014**

Jo: I have another question for you all.. How do involve your children in the assessment and documentation in your learning?

Lucy: We have summary sheets at end of each half term in their profiles which children are asked to comment mainly pre-school but on whT they can do and what they enjoy doing and how there interests have changed..

Jo: Thanks Lucy....so when you say you ask the children to comment, do you mean they comment on the profile that you share with them ?

#### **6<sup>th</sup> July 2014**

Helen: We have similar to Lucy where we ask the children questions such as "what do you think they are best at doing?" Or "what do you like to play at nursery?" And they answer which goes on the summary sheet. They also have an 'all about me' sheet at the front of their file which are usually filled by the parents with their child, as it asks what their likes and dislikes are, what they know about their family/culture/religion.

The children also ask us to take photographs of things of what they have done because they want them in their file, or they often hand us pieces of work to use aswell. X

#### **7<sup>th</sup> July 2014**

Jo: Please read the post for May 22<sup>nd</sup> to remind you of the activity we will be doing.

#### **8<sup>th</sup> July**

Helen: just wanted to say thank you Jo for creating the chance for me to be able to discuss my highs and lows of my career. It has been lovely to discuss with people who truly understand my thoughts and beliefs...xx

Lucy: [liked]

Jackie: well said Helen ! I hope we can continue in some form. Thank you Jo for keeping the grey matter going !

#### **9<sup>th</sup> July**

Jo: Many thanks everyone, as we discussed in the session, I intend to provide further opportunities for us to regroup, and explore ways that we can work with your managers and the LA in response to this research. In the meantime, I will post the transcript for the second session for you to check for accuracy, comment on or make any amendments.

## Appendix D

### Life History Accounts

#### Jackie

**Current Job:** Pre-School Leader/Manager since 2005.

**Overview of Setting:** The setting is a pre-school for children aged three and four years of age. It is located on the grounds of a Catholic Primary School in what is considered a fairly affluent area. It is owned by the Catholic Church and managed by the Head Teacher of the Catholic Primary School. The Pre-School has been in operation since 1979, starting in the Head Teacher's office for 2 hours a day, then being housed in a pre-fabricated building at the back of the building which it outgrew over time as the opening hours and popularity increased. Five years ago the Diocese of \*\*\*\*\* funded a building for the pre-school which I was lucky enough to be included in the design of this.

The new building is a modern purpose built unit and can accommodate up to 25 children at any one time. We open term time only and at present operate three days 9am to 3pm and two days 9am to 1pm. However, this is likely to change from September 2015 to five days a week. At the time of your research, we were fully subscribed with a waiting list. The majority of the children that attend the setting feed into the Catholic Primary School, however some attend our setting but will go to other primary schools in the area.

The pre-school employs four members of staff including me. I work with the children daily and have responsibility for key groups, as well as carrying out Managerial tasks, such as recruitment, policy writing, admissions, staff CPD, booking training etc. I have three hours a week non contact time to carry out these tasks – obviously not enough!!!! I have a deputy that works every day and then two part time early years practitioners.

**Qualifications, and my journey to gaining them:** I gained 7 O'Grades when I was at High School and wanted to stay on to go my Highers and eventually train to be a teacher. However, my family's belief was that getting a job was more important and after much fighting, we compromised together and I attended a Further Education College gaining my NNEB qualification.

In 1987, I left college and started a job as a Nanny in London and stayed with that family for 10 years. I then sought a new career and undertook courses at adult education centres and in local colleges to gain the secretarial skills to work in an office. I then worked as part of the secretarial firm of a pension fund in central London for the next two years before moving up \*\*\*\*\* in 1999.

For the next six years, I spend the time at home bringing up my two children and during this time I also worked locally as a part time Nanny for two years and then I completed a Teaching Assistant Level 2 course with \*\*\*\*\* College. Once both my children entered mainstream education, I applied for my current position.

Within the first six months in my present role, it was deemed by [The LA] that my NNEB was not fully relevant due to it being gained prior to the Children Act 1989. Therefore, I undertook an evening class to gain my NVQ 3 in Child Care, Learning and Development at \*\*\*\*\* College over the period of one academic year. Of course, as soon as I had done this the ruling on my NNEB was reversed and it is now deemed a full and relevant qualification.

I worked for many years at this level and in 2009 (I think) embarked on my Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Studies (I think that is what we called it) at MMU. I did this firstly to meet new recommendations being put in early years policy but over time enjoyed the learning process (not the essays). I then continued after the FD to complete the degree and gained a BA Hons Early Childhood Studies as well as gaining my Early Years Professional Status in 2013. I have undertaken my degree for my job and on gaining my degree and EYPS have not received pay rise to reflect this – no money in the PVI early years sector!

I am now currently not studying but I have been considering my options with regards to gaining QTS. I have found that this is currently not an option as all avenues involve me giving up a job I love (and hate) and enjoy to complete which is not a viable option for me financially. I will continue to look into this and seek a way to complete this.

**CPD and 'other' experiences that have been influential in shaping your practice, values and beliefs:** When I first embarked upon my career path as a nanny, I didn't know if I would be any good at it. I met many Nanny's, not all were as professional unfortunately and I have always felt that both the care of children and the education of young children was crucial to children's successes in life. I was privileged to be part of another families life for 10 years and now with these children now aged 26, 24 and 22, I can see that they have been successful and furthermore the recall their time with me warmly and with happiness.

When I had my own children, I then saw caring for children from the other side of the fence and it wasn't as easy. I wanted to be part of their life, in particular their early education life too but I was never invited in after many offers given to help at their pre-school. I believe that getting children's first experiences in education right, by which I mean, enjoyable, fun and engaging, then children will learn to love school and learning can be fun. I just have to remind myself of this when times are hard and we are being asked to do ever more.

Anyway, this feeling of being kept at arms reach has really shaped my work in my current role and over the my time I have turned this round and work hard to include all my families and engage them in the life of pre-school.



I have met many practitioners and have been worked with the best and the worst. I believe that the beliefs and values of a person working in education and their personality is key to success.

Before my degree I was of the opinion that a qualification isn't going to help the person do their job better than the morals, values and personality was of higher value. However, during my time at uni, I have learned that by gaining my qualification I am able to provide confident leadership in my setting and implement ideas and changes that are based on a breath of knowledge.

I look at my time at uni as a massive CPD training and now that it is finished I do miss that time to meet other and hear new ideas and discuss issues within society that affect children and their families.

## Helen

I began my journey into working with children through my NVQ 3 in Childcare and Education. During this time I experienced two placements, the first being \*\*\*\*\* Primary school. I truly enjoyed each day of working with year 1 and feeling apart of teaching children something new and being to share their learning experiences with them. This placement motivated my idea of wanting to become a teacher. My second placement was at The Nursery (the setting where I currently work). At nursery I felt that I was surrounded by a mixture of practitioners, some who loved their job and others who urged me to do enter this profession due to money. No matter which advice i listened to, I decided for myself that I had a really good experience with early years, which then lead them to offer me a casual position there. Still after my enjoyable early years experience I still wanted to be a teacher. However, due to my grades in high school I could not apply for Primary Teaching at MMU, to which led me to begin Childhood studies. To my surprise, studying this degree inspired me more than I would have ever imagined. To discover all different perspectives in childcare and childhood and to be able to look at all areas of working with children, opened up my thoughts and ideas to where i wanted to go in my career.

After finishing my degree there happened to be a job available in the nursery which i was part time. The position was in the Pre School Junior room, working with 3-4s. Within 3 months I was promoted to Senior of the Pre school Senior room, where children who were moving to school in that year were. I loved being able to put my own stamp on things. For example, moving toys down off high shelves as others didn't want them ruined and creating new and exciting areas such as investigation. The part I most enjoy in my job is the relationship with the children. I felt that I showed staff to enjoy and laugh with the children, not to just sit, observe, tell then what to do and what not to do etc. I believe I have a brilliant relationship with the children, as they respect me as a teacher figure but also they can talk and laugh with me as a friend. I feel that my practice needs more staff that come into the setting feeling motivated and wanting to create new things for the children to enjoy, not just a normal 9-5 job. We have a lack of motivation coming from the top of the hierarchy of staff, which is an element to which I think stops us achieving this. However, I am currently I in the process of working with all the rooms, and offering praise, encouragement and ideas to all. I hope my aim of creating a happier and more exciting setting will soon be achieved

## Kathy

I left school wanting to pursue a career in science, obtaining BTEC National and Higher National in Chemistry. I worked in a laboratory for eight years, after which I left to have my two children. When my eldest child became school age I volunteered as teaching assistant and I also volunteered at my youngest child's pre-school. The Pre-school asked me if I would like to do some paid work for a couple of hours each week, which I did until my youngest started school.

From this moment I worked as a pre-school assistant for a couple of years full-time, before becoming a pre-school supervisor. I remained in this post for a further five years whilst my children were young, as the hours suited me. I obtained NVQ's level two and three in Early Years Care and Education. The pre-school was charity-run and popular in a small town. As my children started to become more independent I decided I would like to develop my career opportunities and decided to study for a degree.

From the moment I started studying for my degree my whole life changed. Having worked in the Early Years sector for a number of years I felt quite confident when I started studying. I met some amazing people and university gave me a thirst for learning, it was an experience I will never forget. I loved the fact that all of my knowledge was current and up to date, enjoying researching. I felt quite lost when my degree finished.

When I received my degree and EYP I knew that I did not want to finish there. In my opinion EYP's do not have pay, respect, or recognition for the work they do. My Pre-school won a tender to move to a site on school grounds which really opened my eyes. I started to work with teachers in the school, working in the reception class during the week. I enjoyed working in the nursery but in the reception class I loved seeing the progress that children made, the one's that really wanted to learn and requested to learn more. I wanted to bring my experiences from university into the classroom, celebrating all of the different learning styles that children have, using my child development knowledge to the max. My ethos then really seemed to take a turn, previously I was a great believer in the High-scope model, attending lots of courses and implementing it into my setting. Now this would just not work in the school I am in. I like the school model now, but still firmly believe in the play-based curriculum.

I am now on the School's Direct Programme in pursuit of QTS. I feel that I have a head start on some of the other trainee's as I have worked with young children for the past thirteen years now and I have a good university degree, meaning that I have current knowledge of child development and the Early Years curriculum. I have also had my own children, which is, no doubt, the most valuable experience that can ever be gained. I really want to teach now, with high aspirations of maybe becoming a head teacher!! I would also love to take my masters degree.... Lets see!

## Lucy

I started childhood studies at \*\*\* university with the mind-set of becoming an infant teacher. Throughout the course my mind-set changed and the idea of set curriculum and testing just did not appeal to me any longer. My idea of a career changed I wanted to be in a role where I was more of supportive understanding fun and flexible role model to children. After going to Sweden for 3 months with university this idea only grew I saw a different culture of teaching where it was less of a strict and controlled learning environment more of an exploration environment for learning children were allowed to explore and understand the real world. Once finishing my degree I went to America for 3 months as a full time carer for the disabled I thoroughly enjoyed it and I believe it made me understand the importance of individuals and how to adapt activities to suit everyone.

I went on to do my early years professional status where I experienced a variety of nurseries I got a feel for different types of learning different nurseries different styles and tried to implement some of my own ideas. Once achieving my EYPS my idea was to become a family support worker but I felt I needed to have a better understanding of real life events with children I become a room leader within an open plan nursery within a large company within that I discovered many advantages and many challenges to this working environment.

When choosing a nursery to work for I was very much led by child initiated play and child led routine nurseries rather than set routine and activities. Since then I have been noticed as an influential member of staff I have been moved to different sites within the company that have been struggling and have been given more responsibility in terms of training and supporting staff members in understanding the importance of child initiated activities and play. I really enjoy working with children each day is different and I found it very influential to hear about other people's views. I enjoy going to other nursery's gathering new ideas and seeing new perspectives. I think sharing ideas and experiences is a crucial element to childcare practice it helps us grow as practitioners it has definitely helped me.

## Ruth

### Qualifications

- I completed my A levels after my GCSE'S after being slightly unsure about what I could and want to do at college, even though I always knew I wanted to work with children. I gained A levels in Health and Social Care, English Literature and Sociology. During my time in 6<sup>th</sup> form and learning about career paths and university, I decided I wanted to be a Primary school teacher in the early years. I applied to \*\*\*\* \*\* and \*\*\* and for a place on the Primary course. I gained an interview at \*\*\*\* \*\* however wasn't offered a place. I then received a letter from \*\*\* stating I didn't have a place on the primary course, however offering me a place on the Early Childhood Studies degree. I had never heard of the course before and was quite disappointed about the thought of not doing Primary Ed, so put the letter away and had a thought about another option. However after reading it again, I realised that the degree they had offered was much more tailored to my interest in the early years and a lot more suitable for my career desires. I then completed my degree and gained a 2:1. During my degree I gained my license to practice which gave me my level three qualification. This enabled me to get a part time job as a nursery practitioner alongside university which helped me put my theory into practice. I then went on to gain my Early Years Teacher status at \*\*\*. I wanted to complete this because I felt it was a natural progression from my degree and would open up more opportunities in the field of the early years.

### Overview of the setting/Experiences

- I currently work in a pre-school unit in a day nursery. I started at my setting in July after being offered a post during my first post graduate placement. During the summer I helped cover holidays and worked across the rooms, however as of September I started as the EYT and supervisor in pre-school. The setting is an outdoor nursery with a very caring and home driven ethos. The setting also offers forest school sessions and this is a big part of the nurseries culture. The members of the team are all full time, which I believe helps the children settle as there is continuity and familiarity for children, parents and practitioners.

## Appendix E



 <p>The University Of Sheffield.</p>	<h3 style="margin: 0;">The School Of Education Ethics Application Form for all STUDENTS</h3>
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This form has been adapted for The School Of Education, and agreed with The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)

Complete this form if you are a **student** who plans to undertake a research project which requires ethics approval via the University Ethics Review Procedure. If you are a member of staff or are submitting an en bloc ethical review, this is the wrong form.

Your Supervisor decides if ethics approval is required and, if required, which ethics review procedure (e.g. University, NHS, Alternative) applies.

If the University's procedure applies, your Supervisor decides if your proposed project should be classed as 'low risk' or potentially 'high risk'. For the purpose of ethical review all research with "vulnerable people" is considered to be High Risk (eg children under 18 years of age).

Date:	November 7 <sup>th</sup> 2013
Name & Registration No of applicant:	Jo Basford 110115207
Contact details (University email address & telephone number):	<a href="mailto:edqib11@sheffield.ac.uk">edqib11@sheffield.ac.uk</a> 07944 374519
Applicant's signature:	
Research project title:	Assessment Practice in Early Years Settings: A Game of two Halves ?
Programme of study:	EdD
Module code:	Thesis
Is the research ESRC Funded?	No
Is the research project High or Low risk (please tick as appropriate)?	High <input type="checkbox"/> Low <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
What type of student are you (please tick as appropriate):	Undergraduate <input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate Taught <input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate Research <input type="checkbox"/> PhD <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MPhil <input type="checkbox"/>
I confirm that I have ethically approved the above named project.	<b>Supervisor's name: Professor Elizabeth Wood</b>  Signature:  Date: 22.11.13

This form should be accompanied, where appropriate, by all Information Sheets/Covering Letters/Written Scripts which you propose to use to inform the prospective participants about the proposed research, and/or by a Consent Form where you need to use one.

Jo Basford  
Early Childhood Education

**Head of School**  
Professor Cathy Nutbrown

School of Education  
388 Glossop Road  
Sheffield  
S10 2JA

21 January 2014

**Telephone:** +44 (0)114 222 8096  
**Email:** edd@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear Jo

### **ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER**

#### **Assessment Practice in Early Years Settings: A Game of two halves?**

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved, and you can proceed with your research.

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely



Professor Dan Goodley  
**Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel**

CC Prof. Elizabeth Wood

## Appendix F

### Information Sheet for Participants: March 18<sup>th</sup> 2014

1. **Research Project Title:**

Assessment Practice in Early Years Settings

2. **Invitation paragraph**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Please take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

3. **What is the project's purpose?**

There have been a number of recent policy changes in relation to assessment requirements for all practitioners in the Early Years sector. I would like to find out what your experiences have been in relation to assessment practice.

During your degree course, you were encouraged to develop your own philosophy and thinking about childhood and what is described as 'good practice'. So I am also interested to find out how you are mediating your values and beliefs with the practices of your setting, and the wider policy context.

These are my research questions:

- What are practitioners own theories, beliefs and understanding of the discourses of assessment?
- How do practitioners describe assessment practice in their workplace settings?
- How are practitioners mediating their professional beliefs and identity regarding assessment practice with the culture and practice of their workplace setting and the wider policy context?

4. **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen to be invited to become a participant in this research project because you expressed an interest in being involved. A key requirement for selection to be involved in this research project is the demonstration of an interest to form a 'community of practice' with other ECE graduates who would look forward to an opportunity to reflect upon, discuss and possibly challenge practice. You have demonstrated that interest!

There will be up to 6 other participants who have expressed the same interest. They will join you in forming a Focus Group.



**5. Do I have to take part?**

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this research project. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time. You do not have to give a reason.

**6. What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you chose to take part in the research, your period of involvement will be from March – August 2014. During this period of time, the data collection will take place between March and July 2014.

This is the intended timetable for the Focus Group to meet:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
<b><i>March 18<sup>th</sup> 2014</i></b>	Initial introductory meeting. A code of practice will be agreed as well as an opportunity to ask further questions in order to confirm your participation in the group.
<b><i>Early April: Session 1</i></b>	Sharing values, ideas and beliefs that influence your assessment practice.
<b><i>May: Session 2</i></b>	Sharing practice: Assessment practice in your own settings
<b><i>Early July 2014</i></b>	Reflection and moving on: What have we learnt and what next ?

The purpose of the Focus groups is to provide you with an opportunity to share your assessment stories in a collective, collaborative and supportive manner. The Focus group will be a site for you to explore problems, celebrate good practice, and sometimes be challenged! My role will be to facilitate the discussions that you have and support the processes of critical reflection.

You will need to be willing to share your experiences, and provide support to others in the group. The Focus Group will be a confidential site. You will be asked to agree on a code of practice that means that all information that is shared in the Focus Group is not shared with any other parties.

The Focus Group will be extended to a closed online forum. The purpose of the forum will be for you to share further significant thoughts and reflections on practice with the rest of the group at significant points in between the face to face sessions. You will decide as a group the parameters of the forum and how you wish it to be used. The same code of practice as the face to face sessions will be applied.

**7. What do I have to do?**

You will need to attend all 3 Focus group sessions. Each session will last approximately 2 hours, and will take place as a twilight session on a day and time that has been mutually agreed by all participants. You will also agree to make contributions to the online forum. The sessions will take place in teaching room on the Crewe campus of Manchester Metropolitan University.

**8. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?**

Data collection will be in the form of three types:

- (i) Video recordings of the Focus Group discussion.
- (ii) Audio recordings of the Focus Group discussion.
- (iii) Transcripts of the focus group and forum discussion.

The video/audio recordings of the Focus Group sessions will only be used for analysis. No footage will be shared in any public context. No other use will be made of the video recordings, and the footage will be destroyed at the end of the research project (once the thesis has been successfully completed and accepted).

Audio recordings and transcripts will only be retained if data could be used for a different purpose. Separate consent will be obtained and the purpose of the use of the recordings in another context will be made explicit.

**9. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

The reflexive nature of this research may lead you to question your own practice, values and beliefs. You will need to be willing to be challenged and see this is an opportunity for professional development rather than a criticism. I will be unable to comment on or provide any support regarding practice in the participants' settings for the duration of the research – both during the Focus group sessions and afterwards. However, participants may refer to each other as a method for collaborative support. I will endeavour to recruit participants who are like minded and are committed to providing mutual support.

You will also be asked to consider what support you may need outside the Focus Group on a professional and personal level to address any issues that you may need to further explore as a result of the research.

**10. What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will provide you with an opportunity to revisit your professional values and beliefs. It is also hoped that by providing an opportunity to join a collaborative community it will provide a forum for your 'voice' to be heard. I intend to use your 'stories'

as data that gives an authentic insight into your first hand experiences of mediating your values and beliefs with policy expectations.

**11. What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?**

If the research study stops earlier than expected, you will be informed as soon as possible. It is anticipated that this would only happen if there were unforeseen circumstances such as ill health or the Focus Group needed to be disbanded.

**12. What if something goes wrong?**

If you have a complaint regarding how the research has been conducted by myself, you will be able to raise the complaint with my Supervisor (Professor Elizabeth Wood. e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk). She will investigate the nature of the complaint. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation, then you will be able to contact the University's Registrar and Secretary (registrar@sheffield.ac.uk)

If you have concerns related to the conduct of other participants in the Focus Group, then you will be able to raise the complaint with me. If the participant has not followed the agreed code of practice, then appropriate action will be taken. This may involve the participant being asked to leave the group. All members will be reminded of the code of practice at the beginning of each Focus Group session. It is hoped that this will be a sufficient measure to ensure that no participant feels they are being judged or treated disrespectfully.

In the event of the sharing of a disclosure that concerns the physical or emotional wellbeing of a child or practitioner, participants must agree to follow appropriate safeguarding procedures.

**13. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All the information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Unless participants agree for their first name to be used in the transcripts and the final research document, then all participants will be given a pseudonym. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

**14. What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The final results of the research will be published in the form of my EdD Thesis.

**15. Who is organising and funding the research?**

This independent research is for my EdD thesis

**16. Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been ethically approved via Sheffield University's School of Education ethics review procedure.

**17. Contact for further information**

Jo Basford

[j.basford@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:j.basford@mmu.ac.uk)

Tel 0161 247 5107/07944 374519

**You will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.**

Thank you for taking part in this research project.

*Jo Basford*

## Participant Consent Form

**Title of Project: Assessment Practice in Early Years Settings:**

**Name of Researcher: Jo Basford**

**Participant Identification Number for this project:**

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated *18:03:14* for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.
4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant  
(or legal representative)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person taking consent  
(if different from lead researcher)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

*To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Lead Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

*To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*

Copies:

*Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy for the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.*

## **Appendix G**

### **Focus Group Code of Conduct**

#### **We have agreed to:**

Change names of children; parents; staff and outside agencies in order to ensure confidentiality in both the Focus Group and on the Blog

If concerns arise, we will have someone to talk to both inside and outside the group.

Share our stories and anecdotes about assessment practice

Share our documentation on how we observe and assess the children we work with.

#### **During the Focus Group, we will....**

*Listen to each other ( active listening)*

*Talk one at a time*

*Ensure our mobile phones are in our bags (on silent !)*

## Appendix H

### Example of Initial Coding #1 for FOCUS GROUP 1 and FOCUS GROUP 2

Data Extract	Coded for:
<p>[J]When Ofsted can come in they will ask “ so how are the boys doing against the girls ?” So we have to know exactly where they are</p> <p>[L] . I’m not allowed to put them.... you know, if they have missed out a few in the 8 to 20 boxes.... But then I’ve got the 16 to 26 boxes and they’re doing them pretty confidently- all of them... But if they haven’t done 8 to 20 then I’m not allowed to start on the second box</p> <p>[L]our area manager will come round every few weeks and she’ll go through our profiles, and if there is anything that’s not.... Or if you can see, say, you know... when a child really enjoys going on the bikes... and that’s really all they do... So you got a few photos of them doing it.... throughout the progress..... So you can see them growing up.... But that will get ripped out because it’s already been in the profile, that shouldn’t be in there again. If they’ve done it, they’ve done it-ticked off and go on to the next thing.</p> <p>[Jo] are you saying that if a child is say in the 16 to 26 box in one aspect of development is there an expectation that he couldn’t possibly be in a later age band in another area of development?</p> <p>[L] ....they’re okay to be progressing but they have to be secure in the area before they can go on. But some things like.... In some of the categories, some of the ones below I think, like 8 to 20 is for babies, [states] “be able to say they have done a poo in their nappy”, I just don’t think that’s possible... for some yes..... yet some of the other ones that are below [in the 8-20 category] are easier but I wouldn’t be able to mark that off because they’ve not done it.... even if there’s just one..... I can’t mark it off, or track it, they might be... pretty much done all of them but because they’ve not done that one they’re held back.</p> <p>Ruth: That’s what you find yourself doing sometimes..... When you haven’t got that observation to ‘prove’ that they’ve done it because if the observations not there... even though we know that child..</p> <p>Jackie: Physical proof you need, because you feel like your own professional judgement is isn’t going to be good enough.</p> <p>Lucy: But even in the baby room, even though that’s what like I feel, I still have to do all the EYFS tracks and every day has to be like a</p>	<p>Mechanistic Diagnostic Assessment practices</p> <p>Tracking</p> <p>ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING</p> <p>‘Next steps’</p>

	<p>learning process even though even when their....[unsure of word ]..... But like when a parent comes in I say "we do this for all the different areas.." and the parent will say "...but they're not really bothered all they want to do is be there.. But obviously I have to share that information because that is what nursery is about.</p>	
Kathy:	<p>So you see, if someone comes in and asks me 'what is their next steps'?... I feel that I should <i>know</i> them .. All 50 of them... I think it's an expectation</p>	
Jo:	<p>Ok, so you feel it is an expectation that you have some system that enables you to tell them the learning and development story for each child?</p>	
Kathy:	<p>Yes</p>	
Lucy:	<p>Surely next steps for learning and development isn't going to change that much from week to week.... We look at ours half termly and highlight them off when they've done them... And then every half term we'll go back and decide on the steps. You</p>	
Jo:	<p>How do you decide what the next steps are?</p>	
Helen:	<p>If I found that a group time was really successful with one child, then I will think of another activity that is similar to that but adapt it and bring other elements in...</p>	
Kathy:	<p>It's moving the child on from where there are really isn't it?</p>	
Jo:	<p>and what's driving that .... What's determining that?</p>	
Lucy:	<p>Mine is determined by the EYFS...Development Matters ..... All of my statements for next steps have to come out of the next steps of Development Matters... Even, I've brought it up in meetings saying that they're not really next steps in the EYFS 'cos because once the able to hold a pen - they should build able to kick a ball (!) that's not relevant.... That's not the next step, that's completely different... And it is something that I have brought up.... Because a lot of my are like... They can say a sentence -and now they're gonna tell a story.... And that's not the next step... They need to be able to have a wide vocabulary so.... Mine is off the EYFS, but I don't necessarily think that is the <i>right way</i></p>	
Jo:	<p>May next steps sometimes be to plan, or give them an experience?</p>	
Helen:	<p>There are three different ways that I plan next steps... Which is one I just said; one like Lucy says which I do think is silly, like when they've climbed on a climbing frame and I've wrote the next step is for them to throw a ball that is ridiculous (!?)</p>	
Kathy:	<p>The two don't match!!</p>	
Lucy:	<p>...On an observation form if I see them... say playing in the sand then next one would be an extension of playing in the sand...</p>	



	But that isn't my next steps of planning on the wall	
Jackie:	..yes, they are two different things...	
Jackie:	I think when you're planning..... When you put next steps ... you send a little report... And the next steps will say "we'll be working towards.." I think those want only come to update... then the next half term we'll be measuring against them. If they've made it or not.... There is another box that states progress made towards the next steps..... So I put "such and such as achieved step one.. And the next step is..... Almost there but needs more time to consolidate in this area. So then I've got come up with two more next steps. One's got to be the same and the next one..... So they are measurable, you are measuring against if they've achieved them.	
Helen:	I have a sheet like this with next steps on, but all it says is just one column with the child's name, a column for next steps and then the date where I've taken the next step from ..... So it might have been an observation from over here. The sheets are in the staff's file, and if they're stuck for an activity to do for small group from a large group discussion, I look down that sheet and just see what they could use from the next steps.	
Kathy:	You see, I've taken this from the internet..... I just wanted to get what are the people we using....	
	<i>The group discussed the implications for the proposed new baseline assessments, and the fact the EYFSP will be optional.</i>	
Lucy:	But then OFSTED, when they come in they want to see what you are doing for the children and what progress they are making, and how you are moving their progress on.	
Kathy:	Your tracking..	
Lucy:	So we are still going to need evidence, even if it's in one of their folders.	
Jackie:	We are stuck on that kind of thing, it call comes down to evidence in the end...So we are on a Catch-22 you, we don't have to do statutory do any of this, you could just not do it, but... How do you track children without putting paperwork into place?	
Lucy:	I couldn't do my two year old checks if I didn't have my profiles (?!)	

## Appendix I

### Identifying themes from collated codes

<b><i>One Size Fits All</i></b>	Mechanistic; Diagnostic Assessment practices
	Tracking
	Ages and Stages
	Categorising learning - Fitting a child into a box
	'mis' interpretation of policy ?
	Impact on the child because of assessment
	Constructions of the child Deficit model
Transitions	

<b><i>Playing the Game</i></b>	Game Playing
	Conforming
<b><i>Conforming</i></b>	OFSTED pressures and expectations- Tools of Governance
<b><i>Playing by the Rules</i></b>	Magnetic pull – wanting a structure
<b><i>Field of Forces</i></b>	School Readiness
<b><i>Habitus?</i></b>	Impact of assessment in wider practice 'interests' Role of the adult – 'extending' learning Individual rather than collective
	'habits of seeing' Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010)

<b>Expectations</b>  <b>In relation to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Status</b></li> <li>• <b>Context</b></li> <li>• <b>Each other</b></li> </ul>	OFSTED pressures and expectations
	Expectations of the day nursery setting (Corporate pressures)
	Expectations of the school
	Differences in expectations
	Power relations  Not being listened to/opinion valued  Status as an EYP – professional status versus professional qualification
	Different roles and responsibilities  Relationships with parents  Different interpretations of the child ?  Power

<b>Readiness</b>	School Readiness
	Expectations of the school
	Reducing expectations/ aspirations  Unintended outcomes of policy - Being 'too' ready ! an'other' reading of readiness

<b>Consequences</b>	Transitions
	Being 'too' ready ! an 'other' reading of readiness
	Reducing expectations/aspirations Unintended outcomes of policy
	Impact of assessment in wider practice 'interests' Role of the adult – 'extending' learning Individual rather than collective
	Assessment as procedure (Serafini, 2000)
	Impact on the child because of assessment
	Constructions of the child Deficit model

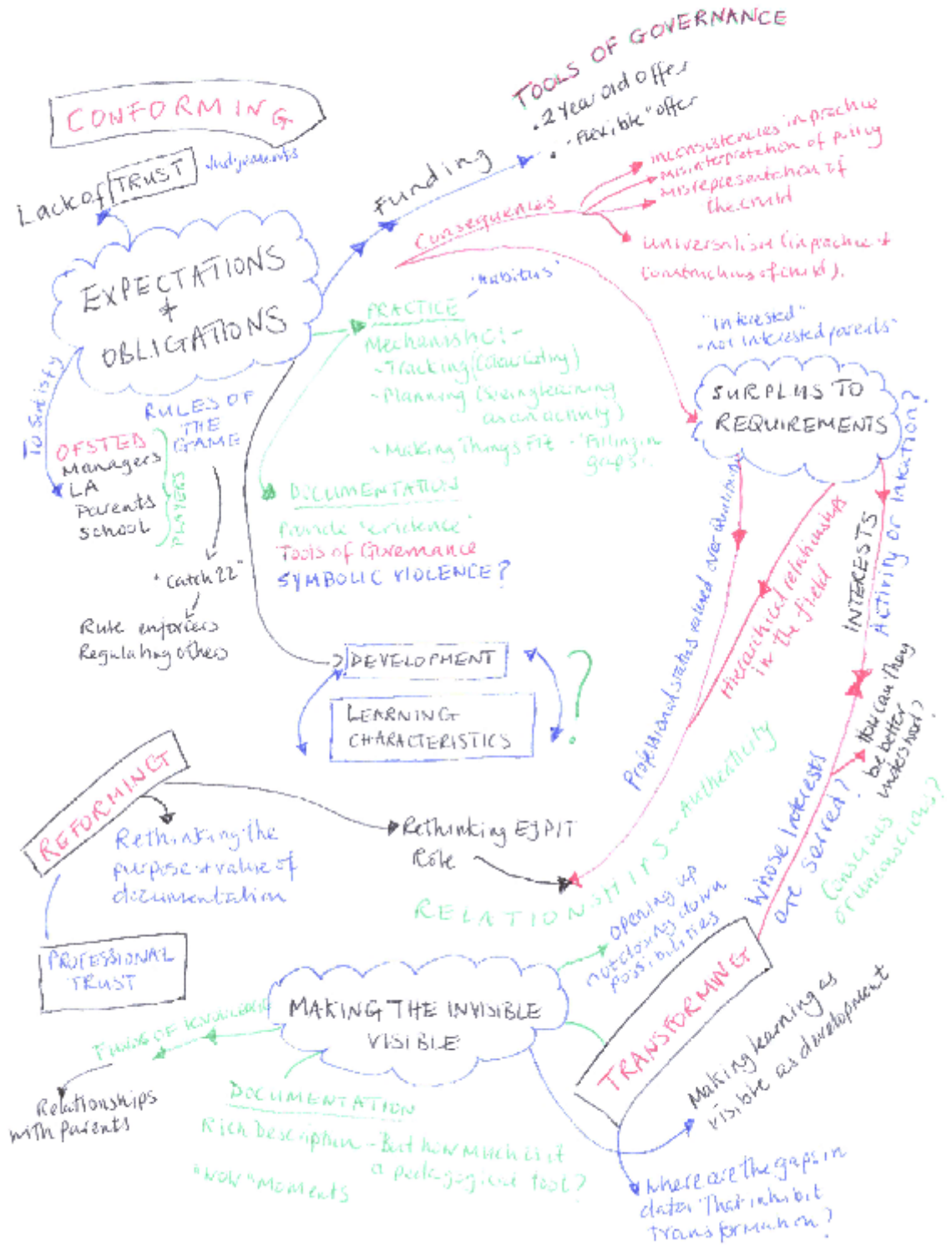
<b>Rule Bending</b>	Questioning the purpose of assessment Questioning policy
<b>Subverting</b>	Wanting to do things differently
<b>Agency</b>	Examples of doing things differently/ Alternative interpretations of policy
	Subverting
	Questioning the purpose of assessment Questioning policy
	Wanting to do things differently
	Examples of doing things differently/ Alternative interpretations of policy

<b>Power Relations</b>	OFSTED/Tools of Governance
<b>Micro, Mezo and Macro</b>	Power relations Not being listened to/opinion valued Status as an EYP (preserving status)
<b>Force Field/magnetic field</b>	Differences in expectations Expectations of the day nursery setting (Corporate pressures)
<b>Symbolic violence ?</b>	Impact on the child because of assessment Constructions of the child Deficit model Relationships with the child 'knowing' the child Authenticity Relationships with parents Different interpretations of the child ? Power
<b>Reflection</b>	Recognising difference between practice, values , beliefs and in children !!

<b><i>Understanding of purpose and value of assessment</i></b>	'mis' interpretation of policy ? Distortion of practice
	Mechanistic - Diagnostic Assessment practices Tracking
	Using assessment to inform planning (but what about interactions, mediation, ZPD?)
	Ages & Stages Categorising learning Fitting a child into a box Authenticity ?

# Appendix J

## Mind map



## Appendix K

Policy Tool framework, adapted from Salamon (2002, p22-41) and Tayler 2011

<p><b>Criteria for assessing likely impact of policy tool/ Policy tool Dimension</b></p>	<p><b>Effectiveness:</b> <i>Focus mainly on results – the extent to which an activity achieves its intended outcomes.</i></p>	<p><b>Efficiency:</b> <i>Balances results against costs. What is the most efficient tool that achieves the optimum balance between benefits &amp; costs ? (at what cost?)</i></p>	<p><b>Equity:</b> <i>Redistribution, by channelling benefits to those who lack them</i></p>	<p><b>Manageability:</b> <i>‘implementability’ – the ease or difficulty involved in operating programs</i></p>	<p><b>Political Legitimacy:</b> <i>Tool choice can affect the overall sense of legitimacy of policy from the public eye.</i></p>
<p><b>Directness:</b> <i>The more the various functions involved in the operation of a public activity are carried out by the same institution, the more direct the tool.</i></p>	<p>2 year old check – function involves health &amp; education. Competing approaches?</p>	<p>DfE (2013a) OFSTED sole test of quality/fitness of EY provider</p>		<p>Dfe (2013b) Two statutory assessments requirements – intention to reduce bureaucracy. Reductionsit?  Tickell Review (2011) – focus on reducing quantity/ bureaucracy of</p>	<p>Using OFSTED as the main function for measuring quality provides reassurance to the public – a trusted judgement ?</p>



				documentation.	
<b>Automaticity:</b> <i>The extent to which a tool uses the existing administrative structures to produce its effect, rather than having to create a special administrative apparatus</i>	Dfe (2013b) Two statutory assessments requirements – outcomes based. Building on existing assessment policy.	One universal ‘measure’ of quality & attainment, using existing regulatory body.  Socio cultural perspective?		OFSTED (2013) – constantly changing finding stream result in projects to improve outcomes that are unsustainable.	OFSTED already exist – new inspection framework (OFSTED 2014b) with greater emphasis on assessment & impact of teaching in relation to progress
<b>Visibility:</b> <i>The extent to which resources devoted to a tool show up in budget &amp; policy review processes</i>	How can settings genuinely engage parents in order to raise attainment, when funding for projects etc.. is inconsistent & unsustainable?		Pupil Premium and Disadvantage funding to settings in areas of higher socio & economic deprivation. ‘Incentivised compliance.’		
<b>Coercion:</b> <i>The extent to which a tool restricts individual or group behaviour as</i>	Outcomes orientated assessment & inspection leads to a technical approach to assessment.	It is more cost efficient to measure development rather than	OFSTED (2014a) – unreliable assessments, expectation of ‘rapid progress’.  Areas of disadvantage		Reporting mechanisms:  Publication of OFSTED reports

<p><i>opposed to merely encouraging/discouraging it</i></p>	<p>Documentation is seen as a text for evidence against outcomes.</p>	<p>learning – but at what cost? (to the child, setting &amp; family)</p>	<p>of poorer quality (re:workforce &amp; practice) – greater expectation to conform &amp; comply with dominant interpretations of practice (limited discretion)? Necessity for skilled leadership to allow for ‘other’ interpretations of assessment policy tools.</p>		<p>EYFSP data reported to LA</p> <p>To what extent do the tools &amp; mechanisms strengthen the capacity of practitioners to respond to local needs?</p>
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## Appendix L

### Key Policy Documents

<b>Government Reports or Policy Guidance</b>	<b>Governmental Commissioned / Principle Agent Reports or Policy Guidance</b>	<b>Governmental Commissioned Reviews</b>	<b>Third Party Reports</b>
DH (2009) <i>Healthy Child Programme. Pregnancy and the first years of life</i>	Sylva et al (2004) EPPE Project	Evangelou et al (2009) <i>Early Years Learning and Development. Literature review.</i>	OECD (2004) <i>Starting Strong. Curricula and Pedagogies in Early Childhood Education &amp; Care. Five Curriculum Outlines</i>
DfE (2011) <i>Supporting Families in the Foundation Years</i>	Field (2010) <i>Field Report- The Foundation Years: Preventing poor children becoming poor adults</i>	Tickell (2011) <i>The Early Years: Foundations for life, health and learning. An Independent Report on the Early Years Foundation Stage to Her Majesty's Government</i>	OECD (2006) <i>Starting Strong II. Early Childhood Education and Care</i>
Allen (2011) <i>Allen Report – Early Intervention: The next steps</i>	Early Education (2012) <i>Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).</i>	Nutbrown (2012) <i>Foundations for Quality. The independent review of early education and childcare qualifications. Final Report</i>	Taguma et al (2012) <i>Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: United Kingdom (England)</i>
DfE (2012) <i>Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage. Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five</i>	NCB (2012) <i>'Know How'. The Progress check at age two</i>	Greene et al (2014c) <i>Two year olds in schools: summary of delivery approaches and support needs. Baseline survey of schools. Research report.</i>	
DfE (20132a) <i>More Great Childcare. Raising quality and giving parents more choice</i>	STA (2013) <i>Foundation Stage Profile handbook (2014)</i>	Greene et al (2015) <i>Process evaluation of the two-year-olds in schools demonstration project Research Report</i>	
DfE (2013b) <i>Early Years Outcomes. A non-statutory guide for</i>	OFSTED (2013) <i>Unseen Children: Access and</i>		

<i>practitioners and inspectors to help inform understanding of child development through the early years.</i>	<i>achievement 20 year on</i>		
<i>DfE (2013c)More Affordable Childcare</i>	<i>OFSTED (2014a)Are you Ready ? Good practice in school readiness</i>		
<i>DfE (2014a) Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.  Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five(revised)</i>	<i>OFSTED (2014b)Sector Report 2012/13: Early Years</i>		
<i>DfE (2014b)Reforming assessment and accountability for primary schools. Government response to consultation on primary school assessment accountability</i>			

## Appendix M

### Policy Evolution

Quality Narrative	Measurement/Outcome Narrative	Readiness/Development Narrative	Collaboration Narrative	'Other'/competing Narrative
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Date	Policy Text	Author	Key Messages
2004	The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report	Sylva. K, Melhuish. E, Sammons.P, Siraj-Blatchford. I, Taggart, B	<p>High <i>quality</i> pre-school provision has a <i>positive effect</i> on <i>children's intellectual and social behavioural development up to the end of Key Stage 1 in primary school.</i></p> <p>Pre-school can play an important part in combating social exclusion and promoting inclusion by offering disadvantaged children, in particular, <i>a better start to primary school.</i></p> <p>Pre-school has a <i>positive impact on children's progress</i> over and above important family influences.</p> <p>The <i>quality</i> of the pre-school setting experience as well as the quantity (more months but not necessarily more hours/day) are both influential. (Sylva et al viii)</p> <p><i>Several features of the quality rating scale were related to increased intellectual progress &amp; attainment at entry to school.</i></p>

			<p><i>EPPE has influenced policy because its findings are large scale and broadly representative, longitudinal and based on 'value added' analyses that established the measurable contribution of a range of influences on children's development. This has enabled government to identify the relative costs and benefits that might be expected to accrue from investments of public money to enhance public services (TLRP, 2007)</i></p>
2004	Starting Strong. Curricula and Pedagogies in Early Childhood Education & Care. Five Curriculum Outlines	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	<p><i>"Respecting the individual child as a subject while affirming the existence of general common goals creates tensions." (p26)</i></p> <p><i>"all curricula should give centres, teachers and children the largest possible freedom, but still retain the direction of overall common goals". (p26)</i></p> <p><i>"Instruments should be used which measure above all curriculum appropriateness and teachers competences" (p29)</i></p> <p><i>"There is much reference to <b>quality</b> in ECEC discourse and research, but often without giving the word any precise definition or meaning. <b>Unless meaning is defined, it will not be possible to evaluate or develop quality.</b>" (p29)</i></p>
2006	Starting Strong II. Early Childhood Education and Care	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and	Factors which contribute to increased investment in ECEC include: the wish

		Development	<p>to increase women’s labour market participation; to reconcile work and family responsibilities on a basis more equitable for women; to confront the demographic challenges faced by OECD countries (in particular falling fertility rates and the general ageing of populations); and the need to address issues of child poverty and educational disadvantage.(p12)</p> <p>In order for ECEC policy to be effective, it needs to adopt a systematic and integrated approach which is collaborative and participatory.</p> <p><i>The search for a more unified approach to learning between ECE and the primary school system has led to the adoption of two different approaches – a ‘readiness’ model and a social pedagogic model.</i></p> <p>The notion of ‘ universal ‘access to services is complex and can be approached in a number of ways.</p> <p>Most countries are underspending on ECEC services – direct public funding leads to benefits in relation to <i>quality</i> and governmental steering of EC services.</p> <p>There is a necessity for appropriate training and working conditions for ECEC staff – this is variable across countries.</p> <p><i>“For ECEC policy to be well informed and realistic, administrations need to organise data collection and monitoring in the ECEC field more energetically.” (p15)</i></p>
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			<p>Proposal of 10 policy areas of consideration by governments:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>To attend to the social context of early childhood development.</i></li> <li>2. <i>To place well-being, early development and learning at the core of ECEC work, while respecting the child's agency and natural learning strategies.</i></li> <li>3. <i>To create the <b>governance structures necessary for system accountability and quality assurance.</b></i></li> <li>4. <i>To develop with the stakeholders broad guidelines and curricular standards for all ECEC services.</i></li> <li>5. <i>To base public funding estimates for ECEC on achieving <b>quality pedagogical goals.</b></i></li> <li>6. <i>To reduce child poverty and exclusion through upstream fiscal, social and labour policies, and to increase resources within universal programmes for children with diverse learning rights.</i></li> <li>7. <i>To encourage family and community involvement in early childhood services.</i></li> <li>8. <i>To improve the working conditions and professional education of ECEC staff.</i></li> <li>9. <i>To provide freedom, funding and support to early childhood services.</i></li> <li>10. <i>To aspire to ECEC systems that support broad learning, participation and democracy.</i></li> </ol>
2009	Early Years Learning and Development. Literature review.	Evangelou, M., Sylva, K., Kyriacou, M.,	The review defines development within the 'interactionist' tradition that conceives of development as located within nested social contexts



		Wild, M., & Glenny, G	<p>(Bronfenbrenner, 1979).</p> <p>“Formative assessment will lie at the heart of providing a supporting and stimulating environment for every child. <b>This may require professional development for practitioners and liaison with individuals and agencies outside the setting</b> “(p5).</p> <p>“Developmental theories such as those of Piaget have been linear, with children following similar pathways to adulthood. This is embodied in the ‘stepping stones’ in the EYFP. New theories assume that development proceeds in a web of multiple strands, with different children following different pathways” (p8).</p> <p>Many references in the EYFS to parental partnership are concerned with assessment of development and the reporting of progress of statutory responsibility.</p> <p>The use of narrative and guided interaction in supporting all domains of development is very significant.</p>
2009	Healthy Child Programme. Pregnancy and the first years of life	Department of Health	<p><b>The implementation of the HCP should lead to....readiness for school &amp; improved learning (p8)</b></p> <p>The HCP needs to adapt to the changing environment, and local programmes will provide...a major emphasis on parenting support..application of new information about neurological &amp; child development ..emphasis on integrates services.</p> <p>Focus on vulnerable families to reduce inequalities &amp; low attainment.</p>

			<p>Screening of social, emotional needs; parental perceptiveness in addition to physical development.</p> <p>Practitioners need to have knowledge &amp; understand of child development in order to recognise ‘normal development’.</p> <p><b>Important to avoid a ‘tick box approach’ – should be undertaken in partnership with parents.</b></p>
2010	Field Report- The Foundation Years: Preventing poor children becoming poor adults	Frank Field	<p>“To prevent poor children from becoming poor adults the Review proposes establishing a set of <b>Life Chances Indicators</b> that measure how successful we are as a country in making more equal life’s outcomes for all children. “</p> <p>The establishment of “ the ‘Foundation Years’ covering the period from the womb to five. <b>The Foundation Years should become the first pillar of a new tripartite education system:</b> the Foundation Years leading to school years leading to further, higher and continuing education. “ (p6)</p> <p>Greater accountability in relation to OFSTED ratings and reducing attainment gaps.</p> <p>Two year old health check and EYFS profile data to form part of the national measure for ‘Life Chance Indicators’.</p> <p><b>The annual publication of a measure of ‘ service quality’ which captures access to high quality services.</b></p>
2011	Supporting Families in the Foundation Years	DfE	<p>Establishing a ‘strong relationship’ between government &amp; PVI sector, through <b>accountability systems.</b></p>

			The need for a focus on child development to ensure ‘readiness’ for next stage of learning and foundations for good health in adult life are in place.
2011	Allen Report – Early Intervention: The next steps	Graham Allen, MP	<p>Raise awareness of the benefits Early Intervention designed to build “social and emotional bedrock” in children 0-3 through policy.</p> <p>The prime focus of the foundation years from 0-5 should be to produce high levels of ‘school readiness’.</p> <p><b>Partnership working between the DoH &amp; DfE to produces a ‘seamless Foundation Years Plan’.</b></p> <p>Regular assessment of development focussing on social and emotional development in order to be ‘school ready’.</p> <p>“Accountability is confused and divided, policy is incomplete and there is an unnecessary separation between the Healthy Child Programme reviews and the Early Years Foundation Stage assessments.”(pxix)</p> <p>Rigorous methodology adopted for evaluating and assessing Early Intervention programmes to determine where public &amp; private expenditure should be targeted.</p>
2011	<p>The Early Years: Foundations for life, health and learning.</p> <p>An Independent Report on the Early Years Foundation Stage to</p>	Dame Claire Tickell	<p><b>Key recommendations of review include:</b></p> <p>Introduction of a requirement for practitioners to provide to parents and carers, a short summary of their child’s communication and language, personal, social and emotional, and physical development between the age of 24-36 months. <b>Ideally, shared with health visitors, to allow the professional knowledge of early years practitioners to inform the</b></p>

	Her Majesty's Government	<p><b>health visitor led health and development review at age 2.</b> Not a comprehensive 'measure', more of a signpost.</p> <p>Reduction on ELGs and introduction of three-part scale ('emerging, excepting and exceeding') to define the level of development most children should have reached.</p> <p>'radically simplified' EYFS profile reduced to 20 pieces of information that capture children's level of development.</p> <p><b>Ofsted and local authorities work together</b> to produce clear, consistent advice on the things that early years settings have to do, and do not create unnecessary burdens by asking for things that are not specified in the EYFS.(p7)</p> <p>Three learning characteristics describe <u>how</u> children learn &amp; need to be fostered in order to build capacity for future learning.</p> <p>"The provision of meaningful interaction between adults and children to guide new learning is an essential element of the EYFS." (p29)</p> <p>"observational assessment is integral to effective early years provision" (p30)</p> <p><b>"I support the involvement of children in assessment activities, which I think is both empowering for children and a good learning experience in itself. In addition, I strongly support the involvement of parents and carers in ongoing, formative assessment and recommend no changes to the EYFS requirements on formative assessment"</b> (p31)</p> <p>"A universal assessment would also allow local and national data to be collected on children's readiness to begin formal schooling at age 5.... This</p>
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			measure could also be used as a baseline from which to measure children’s subsequent development through school”.(p33) This should NOT be used for school – level accountability, <b>but instead as a method for holding government and LA’s accountable for quality of services.</b>
2012	Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: United Kingdom (England)	Taguma.M, Litjens. I & Makowiecki, K	<p><b>“England considers improving quality through family and community engagement as a priority, as cooperation between the ECEC sector, parents and the community can contribute to providing a more continuous child development process.”</b> (p7)</p> <p><i>“England could learn from New Zealand, Nordic countries and the United States, as they have taken measures including engaging parents in curriculum development; training staff on communicating with parents; and implementing home programmes to improve parenting and literacy.”</i> (p8)</p>
2012	Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).	Early Education	<p><b>“On-going formative assessment is at the heart of effective early years practice.”</b></p> <p>“Development Matters might be used by early years settings throughout the EYFS as a guide to making best-fit judgements about whether a child is showing typical development for their age, may be at risk of delay or is ahead for their age. <b>Summative assessment supports information sharing with parents, colleagues and other settings.”</b> (p3)</p>

			<p>“Children develop at their own rates, and in their own ways. The development statements and their order should not be taken as necessary steps for individual children. They should not be used as checklists. The age/stage bands overlap because these are not fixed age boundaries but suggest a typical range of development.”</p>
2012	<p>Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.</p> <p>Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five</p>	Department for Education	<p>1.7 Practitioners must consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, using this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning and development</p> <p>1.8 When assessing communication, language and literacy skills, practitioners must assess children’s skills in English. <b>If a child does not have a strong grasp of English language, practitioners must explore the child’s skills in the home language with parents and/or carers, to establish whether there is cause for concern about language delay.</b></p> <p><b>2 Year Old Check: 2.3:</b> Practitioners must review progress, and provide parents and/or carers with a short written summary of their child’s development in the prime areas.</p> <p>2.4 Beyond the prime areas, it is for practitioners to decide what the written summary should include, reflecting the development level and needs of the individual child.</p> <p><b>2.5 Practitioners must discuss with parents and/or carers how the summary of development can be used to support learning at home. Practitioners should encourage parents and/or carers to share information from the progress check with other relevant</b></p>

			<p>professionals, including their health visitor, and/or a teacher.</p> <p><b>EYFS Profile: 2.6 The Profile must reflect: ongoing observation; all relevant records held by the setting; discussions with parents and carers, and any other adults whom the teacher, parent or carer judges can offer a useful contribution.</b></p> <p>2.7 Each child’s level of development must be assessed against the early learning goals, indicating whether children are meeting <i>expected</i> levels of development, or if they <i>are exceeding</i> expected levels, or not yet reaching expected levels (<i>‘emerging’</i>).</p> <p>2.11 Early years providers must report EYFS Profile results to local authorities, upon request.</p>
2012	A Know How Guide. The EYFS progress check at age two.	National Children’s Bureau	<p>The progress check has been introduced to enable earlier identification of development needs so that additional support can be put into place.</p> <p><b>The progress check is required to provide information to parents about the prime areas of learning &amp; development</b></p> <p>The check:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• should be completed by a practitioner who knows the child well and works directly with them in the setting. This should normally be the child’s key person;</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• arises from the ongoing observational assessments carried out as part of everyday practice in the setting;</li> <li>• is based on skills, knowledge, understanding and behaviour that the child demonstrates consistently and independently;</li> <li>• takes account of the views and contributions of parents;</li> <li>• takes into account the views of other practitioners and, where relevant, other professionals working with the child;</li> <li>• enables children to contribute actively to the process.</li> </ul>
2012	<p>Foundations for Quality. The independent review of early education and childcare qualifications.</p> <p>Final Report</p>	Professor Cathy Nutbrown	<p>“the evidence has also shown us that high quality early years provision can narrow the gap in attainment between economically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children “ (p13)</p> <p>Fundamentals of expected qualifications should include....”<b>thorough understanding of child development and play</b>, providing a grounding in the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of children from birth to seven. This means understanding how and why children do what they do, when they might develop certain skills and abilities, how best to meet their developing needs and interests, how to encourage their play at different stages of their development, when there might be issues of atypical development – and whether these are a cause for concern – and what a practitioner can and should do to encourage and support children as they grow and learn.(p18)</p> <p>This should be coupled with an...”<b>understanding of how it can be applied most effectively</b>. All babies and children are different, and working with them should never be a matter of ‘ticking boxes’ –</p>



			<p>reducing the complexities of children’s developing minds, bodies and emotions to a set of simplistic targets and statements. To be effective, early years practitioners must be able to make careful observations of children, and interact with them to form an understanding of each individual child, applying what they know about how children develop and play in a reflective and considered way. “ (p19)</p> <p>Elements of child development which are of importance include an understanding of: language development; special educational needs and disability; the importance of play in children’s lives and learning.</p>
2013 (a)	More Great Childcare. Raising quality and giving parents more choice	Department for Education	<p>“More great childcare is vital to ensuring we can compete in the global race, by helping parents back to work and readying children for school and, eventually, employment”. (p6)</p> <p>A “rigorous regulatory and inspection regime” focussing on quality rather than processes, and provides parents with assessments in which they have confidence. Current regulations place too much emphasis on “trivial issues” such as floor space &amp; ratios, rather than “how well adults are interacting with children”</p> <p>Change to welfare requirements so that settings can operate using higher ratios when there are better qualified staff – so that settings will be able to “offer more high quality staff” (p30)</p>

			<p>“The best providers understand that the quality of staff, and their engagement with children, are key to the best outcomes for those children. This must remain at the heart of Ofsted’s inspection regime.” (p33)</p> <p>“An Ofsted inspection rating should be the sole test of whether a provider is fit to offer the early education programme for two-, three- and four-year-olds funded by the taxpayer.”(p36)</p> <p>“We want to make it easier for the entrepreneurs running good and outstanding nurseries to move into new areas, where there is not sufficient high quality provision.” (p40)</p>
2013 (b)	Early Years Outcomes. A non-statutory guide for practitioners and inspectors to help inform understanding of child development through the early years.	Department for Education	<p>Non statutory guidance to make ‘best-fit’ judgements about whether a child is making typical development, is at risk of delay or is ahead for their age.</p> <p>Tables for each area of learning &amp; development are presented that indicate what practitioners should be observing a child doing at each stage, if they are developing typically.</p>
2013 (c)	More Affordable Childcare		<p>In the drive to increase quality of provision, there needs to be a greater incentive for good providers to provide childcare in disadvantaged areas.</p> <p>“A provider’s ability to deliver government funded early education places should depend primarily on Ofsted’s judgement of their quality.” (p29) Therefore, there will be fewer conditions set by the LA to be eligible for funding.</p> <p>Two statutory assessment requirements:</p>

			<p>Progress check at age two &amp; EYFS profile at end of Reception.</p> <p>The requirement to complete such documents as Learning Journeys is a 'misconception'.</p>
2013	Foundation Stage Profile handbook (2014)	Standards & Teaching Agency	<p>Purpose of assessment at the end of Foundation stage is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to provide a reliable, valid and accurate assessment of individual children.</li> <li>- to provide an accurate national data set related to levels of child development in order to monitor development and assess readiness for the next phase of education.</li> </ul> <p>Assessment should primarily be based on observation and interaction in a range of daily activities and events. Spontaneous, independent and consistent learning should be noted in a range of contexts.[how does this fit with Baseline testing proposals?]</p> <p><b>Accurate assessments takes account of contributions from a range of perspectives (including the child &amp; parents).</b></p> <p>Observational assessment is the most reliable way of building up an accurate picture of children's development and learning – especially where the attainment demonstrated is not dependent on overt adult support.</p> <p><i>'Responsible pedagogy'</i> enables each child to demonstrate learning in the fullest sense. Effectiveness of assessment processes is dependent on biological and cultural aspects of development; an engaging and</p>

			<p>relevant curriculum; an enabling environment; high quality adult interaction.</p> <p>Accurate assessment of effective learning characteristics depends on observing learning initiated by the child. [contradiction to baseline]</p> <p>Practitioners are required to make a 'best fit' judgement related to the given category.</p> <p>"Within the EYFS Profile, the ELGs for communication and language and for literacy must be assessed in relation to the child's competency in English. The remaining ELGs may be assessed in the context of any language – including the child's home language and English." (p15)</p> <p>"Practitioners should reflect on their observations and ensure that the provision enables all children, regardless of their stage of development or interests, needs and inclinations, to demonstrate attainment in ways that are motivating to them" (p16)</p> <p>The characteristics of effective learning describe factors which play a central role in a child's learning and in becoming an effective learner. They are vital elements of support for the transition process from EYFS to year 1. [they] run through and underpin all seven areas of learning and development, representing processes rather than outcomes. Information describing the child's characteristics of effective learning will provide year 1 teachers with vital background and context when considering the child's next stage of development and future learning needs.(p19)</p>
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			Observations related to play are only mentioned in: Playing & exploring; ELG 08 Making relationships; Expressive arts & design – playing with media & materials and ELG17 being imaginative
2013	Unseen Children: Access and achievement 20 year on	OFSTED	<p>OECD highlights association between disadvantage and poor educational outcomes as a significant weakness of the English Educational system.</p> <p>Emphasis on the importance of the early years for breaking the cycle of disadvantage and supporting parenting and parental involvement.</p> <p>Too many practitioners are underqualified; <b>Teachers need to be better equipped to assess and track progress</b></p> <p>Quality of provision weakest in areas of high deprivation. Projects for supporting improvements are too often short term, temporary and subject to constantly changing funding streams</p> <p>Positive gains reported in the Foundation stage are not maintained or built on sufficiently at start of school</p>
2014a	<p>Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.</p> <p>Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five (revised)</p>	Department for Education	<p>Key messages remain the same although amendment to staffing ratios to take account of key messages in More great Childcare</p> <p><b>4. The EYFS specifies requirements for learning and development and for safeguarding children and promoting their welfare. The learning</b></p>

			<p><b>and development requirements</b> cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the <i>areas of learning and development</i> which must shape activities and experiences (<i>educational programmes</i>) for children in all early years settings;</li> <li>• the <i>early learning goals</i> that providers must help children work towards (the knowledge, skills and understanding children should have at the end of the academic year in which they turn five); and</li> <li>• <i>assessment arrangements</i> for measuring progress (and requirements for reporting to parents and/or carers).</li> </ul> <p>1.9. In planning and guiding children’s activities, practitioners must reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice. Three characteristics of effective teaching and learning are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>playing and exploring</b> - children investigate and experience things, and ‘have a go’;</li> <li>• <b>active learning</b> - children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements; and</li> <li>• <b>creating and thinking critically</b> - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things.</li> </ul> <p>2.2. Assessment should not entail prolonged breaks from interaction with children, nor require excessive paperwork. Paperwork should be</p>
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			<p>limited to that which is absolutely necessary to promote children’s successful learning and development. Parents and/or carers should be kept up-to-date with their child’s progress and development. Practitioners should address any learning and development needs in partnership with parents and/or carers, and any relevant professionals.</p> <p><b>There is no mention of play within the context of using it as an observational basis to inform assessment.</b></p>
2014b	Reforming assessment and accountability for primary schools. Government response to consultation on primary school assessment accountability	Department for Education	<p>The most appropriate assessment approaches in the Foundation Stage are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the existing statutory two-year-old progress check undertaken in early years settings;</li> <li>- a short reception baseline that will sit within the assessments that teachers make of children during reception;</li> <li>- a phonics check near the end of year 1;</li> </ul> <p>Reception baseline assessment will be the starting point to measure school’s progress. It will be the only measure used to assess progress for children who start reception in September 2016 and beyond. The EYFS</p>

			<p>profile will be longer be compulsory</p> <p>51% of respondents were opposed to the introduction of a baseline assessment, expressing concern that it was too early to assess children; that it would devalue the EYFSP &amp; that it could have a negative impact on a child's transition to school.</p>
2014c	Two year olds in schools: summary of delivery approaches and support needs. Baseline survey of schools. Research report.	<p>Department for Education</p> <p>Vanessa Greene, Puja Joshi, Cathy Street and Emma Wallace</p>	<p>Echoing discussions held at the first project workshop in November 2013, respondents indicated their main reason for delivering provision for two year olds was to increase children's school readiness in order to improve children's outcomes (83%), to create links with parents at an earlier stage (55%) and/or to address a perceived lack of provision for two year olds in their local area (34%).</p>
2014 (a)	Are you Ready ? Good practice in school readiness	OFSTED	<p>"Gaps in achievement between the poorest children and their better-off counterparts are clearly established by the age of five. There are strong associations between a child's social background and their readiness for school as measured by their scores on entry into Year 1." (p4)</p> <p>"Children do not make rapid enough progress because far too many settings pass on unreliable assessments. Too often, time is lost through unreliable and inaccurate assessment, time that cannot be regained. This is partly because there is no nationally set baseline which defines school</p>



			<p>readiness” (p4)</p> <p>“Quickly completing an accurate assessment of a child’s starting point or baseline was common to all successful settings visited. It is of particular importance in areas of deprivation, where children often arrive with learning and development delays. In order to catch up, children require high-quality provision and individualised support on arrival in a new setting”(p6)</p> <p>“Underpinning the success in helping children make rapid progress in developing areas of weakness, the very best settings knew their locality well and had identified common areas of weakness in children’s starting points. Accordingly, they completed additional baseline assessments that provided a more detailed identification of children’s knowledge and skills. Settings made effective use of a range of standardised assessments of a child’s hearing vocabulary (receptive), phonological awareness and expressive language.” (p6)</p> <p>“Accurate assessments of children’s attainment on entry placed a strong emphasis on gathering parental views and information, and helping families to understand what was expected in terms of children’s level of ‘readiness’. “(p9)</p>
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			<p>“Importantly, we found rigorous cross-moderation resulted in more consistent assessment practice that ensured children’s progress was uninterrupted and their special educational needs and/or disabilities identified. “ (p11)</p> <p>“Increasingly, settings were using new software and technology as assessment tools which recorded images, allowed cross-reference to EYFS outcome statements and age bands, and were used to identify children’s next steps” (p13)</p> <p>“The best settings tracked each child’s progress and then used this information to shape the professional development of their staff “ (p18)</p>
2014 (b)	Sector Report 2012/13: Early Years	OFSTED	<p>“<b>Though there is some evidence of better outcomes for children overall, in 2013, only a little more than a third of children from low income backgrounds reached a good level of development.</b> “ (p7)</p> <p>“-It should be easier for parents to compare the quality of services for children before the start of Reception.</p> <p>-There should be clear accountability for outcomes and Ofsted should have the means to hold providers fully to account for their performance, particularly where they are in receipt of public</p>

			<p>money.”(p8)</p> <p>New inspection framework places greater emphasis on learning &amp; development, including <b>assessing how well teaching</b> is enabling children to make progress towards achieving ELG’s.</p> <p>The introduction of a reception baseline assessment is needed in order to understand the true impact of a school in adding value, or to be able to distinguish between the contribution of a school compared with provision before a child starts school.</p> <p>There is currently no means of judging whether the development assessed by the early years provider has actually translated into a good level of development once at school and therefore it is not possible to assess the range of factors (such as type of setting, number of hours in a setting, staff qualification) that result in the best development outcomes.</p> <p>Data on outcomes are critical to ensure that providers can be held to account for the impact they have (p14) [<b>Direct contradiction to Tickell’s recommendation that assessment should not be used as an accountability tool</b>]</p>
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			<p>Suggestion of external marking of reception baseline to allow for standardised assessment that would allow for comparison from one school to the next.</p> <p>Parents are ultimately accountable for a child’s development, and the system could do more to help them meet their responsibilities – eg provision of a list of ‘essential skills’ to be mastered before the starting school.</p> <p>Responsibility for improving outcomes for children from the most deprived backgrounds sits clearly with local authorities. (p24)</p> <p><b>The information held in health records on the outcome of the two-year-old check should be transferred to the integrated education records at the start of Reception.</b></p>
2015	<p><b>Process evaluation of the two-year-olds in schools demonstration project</b></p> <p><b>Research Report</b></p>	<p>Vanessa Greene, Puja Joshi, Cathy Street and Susan Soar; Ashley Kurtz</p>	<p>Main findings</p> <p><b>Schools should consider working collaboratively with other local providers of provision for two-year-olds in their area</b>, to learn from their experiences and expertise and potentially, to share resources and training opportunities. There is no ‘blueprint’ model and what is key is that the provision fits well within the local area and also, the ethos and strategic aims</p>

			<p>of the school overall.</p> <p>Skills (and time/capacity) to <b>engage with and work in partnership with parents</b>, are also vital and schools need to learn from others working in the sector on effective strategies for engaging and supporting parents.</p> <p>P14</p>
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