From Training to Qualification: The journey of Level 3 early years student-practitioners.

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

Doctor of Education

The University of Sheffield

Faculty of Social Sciences

School of Education

Submission Date: 25th January 2017

Abstract

The thesis focuses on the experiences of sixteen to nineteen year-old, full-time, Level 3 early years student-practitioners and considers how their understanding of the role of the practitioner changes from the start of their course to when they commence employment. The aim is to develop a coherent understanding of their developing knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions in preparation for employment. The study uses a mixed-methods approach to identify how their pre-service qualification contributes to the development of their practice. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected using an on-line survey, a focus group and semi-structured interviews. From the one-hundred and fifty-eight responses to the survey, seven student-practitioners participated in a focus group and three participants, who had taken up employment, were interviewed.

Building on existing research, which has provided strong evidence to show the impact of highly qualified staff on children's outcomes, this study concluded that young, developing practitioners are motivated, knowledgeable and passionate about their contribution to children's learning and development. Of central importance to them were: the development of caring relationships and communication. Knowledge of child development theory was considered an essential knowledge base for ECEC practice; however, the newly qualified practitioners were unprepared for the level of responsibility of being in sole charge of children's care, learning and development.

The study has contributed a new understanding of the process of transformation of the student practitioners in three dimensions: Principles, Professional, and Practice. However, the transformations are not consistent and do not represent each student-practitioner in the same way; The constant across all student-practitioners is the Level 3 qualification, which, the thesis argues, is a proxy for what the student-practitioners know, can do, and understand, as well as a catalyst for their continued individual development.

Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have the completed without the help of many people.

First of all I wish to thank my family, my husband Rob and my children Fiona and James for their support throughout my doctoral journey. Their patience and encouragement has kept me going in the difficult times.

Thank you to my inspirational, patient, supportive supervisor Prof. Cathy Nutbrown. I'm thankful for her continued support, advice and guidance.

I am grateful to my friends and colleagues:

> To Dr. Jackie Musgrave, who helped shape my research focus, who has been both friend and critical friend throughout the process.
> To Louise Stafford and Katie Lee, for their encouragement and feedback.
> To Jenny Worsley and Faye Stanley, who provided the space and time for me to complete my thesis.
> And to my Sheffield Ed.D critical friend, Dr Jo Basford, for always being at the end of the phone to reassure me when my confidence wavered.

I am grateful to friends who have supported me and not complained when I change plans because I am studying. I am indebted to Manda Humphrey for feeding me and my family when I did not have the time or inclination to cook.

And finally...

I will always be indebted to my amazing participants who gave their time and shared their stories.

Contents

Glossary

AoC	Association of Colleges: The Association of Colleges (AoC) is a not-for-profit membership organisation set up in 1996 by colleges to act as their collective voice
Awarding Body	An awarding body designs, develops, delivers and awards the recognition of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) of an individual following an assessment and quality assurance process that is valued by employers, learners or stakeholders. Awarding Bodies are regulated by Ofqual for qualifications delivered in England
BTEC	The Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) is a provider of secondary school leaving qualifications and Further education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. BTEC is owned by Pearson Education Ltd; qualifications are currently being rebranded as Pearson
CACHE	Council for Awards in Care, Health and Education: The leading awarding body for Childcare and education qualifications, formerly (NNEB)
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council Sector skills council (NGO) established in 2005. Closed in 2012, its responsibilities passed to the Teaching Agency now the National College for Teaching and Leadership, NCTL
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care - refers to all aspects of the workforce, sector and provision for children aged 0-7
EYE	Early Years Educator - New term for Level 3 practitioners holding a full and relevant qualification
EYFS	The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum guidance sets standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to 5 years old. All schools and Ofsted-registered early years providers must follow the EYFS, including childminders, preschools, nurseries and school reception classes
EYPS	Early Years Professional Status - Graduate Leaders in Early Years Settings, introduced by the CWDC. Replaced by EYTS
EYT	Early Years Teacher Status replaced EYPS after which it was originally modelled, but with changes to the standards assessed. EYTs are specialists in early childhood development trained to work with babies and young children. EYTS does not confer Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)
GLF	Graduate Leader Fund Government funding, ring-fenced for upskilling existing staff in the PVI sector to graduate professionals, for recruitment of graduates or as a salary incentive. Replaced by the Early Intervention Grant (EIG)
Level 3	Usually studied in post 16 education - equivalent to A levels and International Baccalaureate
Level 3 National Diploma	A level 3 Diploma enables learners to gain the relevant underpinning knowledge and 750 hours of work-based practice experience which licences practitioners to work with children from birth to 5 years, unsupervised. Upon achievement of the Level 3 Diploma learners will be able to access higher education or enter the workforce
MGC	More Great Childcare. The policy response to the Nutbrown review of early years qualifications published in 2013. MGC introduces the new statuses of Early years Educator and Early Years Teacher

NCTL	National College for Teaching and Leadership: The body responsible for setting criteria for Teaching Standards including EYE and EYT
NNEB	The Nursery Nurse Examining Board - two year diploma in childcare. NNEB was taken over by CACHE. NNEB Was considered the gold standard in early years training
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications: Competency based qualifications that generally rely on observed work practice. Usually for employees to gain accreditation for s skills while working
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development: The mission of the OECD is to promote policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.
OFQUAL	The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills this is the department responsible for inspection and regulation of the early childhood sector
PVI	PVI providers - private, voluntary and independent childcare providers as opposed to maintained providers which fall under the state system. Some are run for profit and some are not for profit businesses.
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status: QTS required in England and Wales to work as a teacher of children in state schools under local authority control, and in special education schools
SFA	Skills Funding Agency – Funding for Adult Skills, under the auspices of the department for Business, Innovation and Skills

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on the experiences of sixteen to nineteen year-old, full-time Level 3 early years student-practitioners from seven colleges in England. It considers their understanding of how the role of the early years practitioner changes from the start of their course to when they commence employment, to identify the benefits of their pre-service qualification to the development of their practice and preparation for employment.

In a climate of constant policy turmoil in the early years sector, the thesis attempts to capture the voices of student-practitioners, which are largely absent from the literature and marginalised in policy (Skeggs, 1997; Lather, 1991) and make the case for a fully qualified workforce. I begin by outlining the rationale for the study, discuss the importance of the issues at the heart of the thesis, and consider the changing nature of the sector.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

In 2015, a suite of Early Years Educator (EYE) qualifications were introduced for students wishing to pursue a career in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Successful achievement of the qualification confers the status of 'Early Years Educator'[1]. The changes to the qualifications followed prolonged debate about the quality of ECEC in England (Tickell, 2011). One aspect, which attracted significant attention, was the quality of the workforce, particularly their qualifications; this was explored in an independent review of qualifications, led by Professor Cathy Nutbrown (2012b). I was a member of the expert panel for the review; it was during this experience that I began to question the relationship between what a qualification *is* and what it *does*, and how it fits with the requirements of students, policy and employers. This held a particular interest to me in my role as Head of School for Early Childhood Studies at a Further Education (FE) College. I started to question what the students understood of the early years practitioner's role, what knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions they required to become practitioners, and how their interpretation changed during and after completing their Level 3 qualification. I then considered how congruent their construct was with policy and practice. As I began to read, it became clear that the literature about the role and identity of Early Years Professionals (EYPs) and other graduate practitioners is abundant (Hadfield, et al., 2012; Rose and Rogers, 2012; Osgood, 2012; McGillivray, 2010), but voices of the pre-service,

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[1] Early Years Educator: this replaced the 'licence to practice' and allows practitioners to work, unsupervised with children aged 0-7

Level 3 student-practitioners, who go on to make up the majority of the workforce, were absent from the literature as is the impact of their Level 3 qualification

Following the publication of the Nutbrown Review (2012b), the timing seemed perfect to focus on the impact of a fully Level 3 qualified workforce, with new 'full and relevant' robust Level 3 qualifications. The Nutbrown Review was responded to by Government in January 2013 when the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Education and Childcare, Elizabeth Truss, published 'More Great Childcare' (MGC) (DfE, 2013a). This document accepted five of the nineteen recommendations from the Nutbrown Review (2012b). Three of the five recommendations referred to changes for the Level 3 qualifications (Appendix 1). This resulted in the introduction of the status 'Early Years Educator' and a revised set of criteria for Level 3 qualifications, focussing on the development of children aged birth to seven, rather than the previous iteration which included children aged from birth to nineteen. Recommendations, 5,6, and 7, which recommended a phased move for all practitioners counting in ratio to have a minimum Level 3 qualification by 2022, were left 'under review' (DfE, 2013). The refusal of Government to implement the Nutbrown Review (2102b) recommendations meant that my progress was thwarted.

A second false start came with the Government's late response to the Nutbrown Review (2012b). The publication of 'More Great Childcare' (DfE, 2013a) alluded to a 'new' Level 3 status of EYE and that of Early Years Teacher (EYT). Excited by this opportunity to track the development of the EYE, I was again hindered by the slow machinery of Government which meant the EYE criteria would not metamorphose in to a qualification until 2014. MGC (DfE, 2013) failed to take up the Nutbrown's (2012b) recommendations for a fully qualified workforce. I determined that articulating the current student-practitioners experiences would be relevant and important to establish how they articulate what it is to be an early years practitioner, in order to identify any changes brought about by the introduction of EYE in future research. Since starting this study there have been many policy shifts. I drew my line in policy development in March 2014 when ministers confirmed that they would not be moving towards a minimum Level 3 qualified workforce, despite overwhelming support from academics, practitioners and employers (Eisenstadt, Sylva, Mathers, & Taggart, 2013; Nutbrown, 2012b). Therefore this study focused on Level 3 student-practitioners' experiences as they prepared to enter the workforce, and makes a claim for a Level 3 qualification as a minimum requirement for all practitioners counted in the adult: child ratio in ECEC settings.

The Key Issues

There are four key issues at the heart of this study.

- The absent voice of the Level 3 student-practitioner in policy and literature.
- The changing nature of the ECEC sector and therefore the changing role of practitioners.
- The readiness of newly qualified practitioners for the role as it is articulated in policy, research and by employers.
- The value of being qualified

There are many terms that need clarification, qualification being one of them. In the literature, it appears that there is confusion between a qualification and National Occupational Standards (NOS). I use the term 'qualification' in the context of this thesis to mean a recognised accredited, certificated programme of study that has been developed in accordance with the NOS. One that is recognised by the Quality Curriculum Authority (QCA) and is, in turn, recognised by The Education Funding Agency (EFA), who receive Government funding to support 16 to 19-year-olds in education and training. For people aged 19 or over The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) receives an allocation from The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). This is relevant to this study as colleges and training providers will only run courses that are funded; funding is attached to qualifications which are approved by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) therefore funding is a lever to ensure policy direction is embedded in the qualifications.

Within this definition of a qualification there is also delineation between types of Vocational Education and Training (VET). One type is Competency Based VET, characterised in England by National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Then there is National Diploma VET; for example BTEC National Diploma in Children's Care Learning and Development or a similar National Diploma for example, CACHE Diploma in Childcare and Education, which are a blend of assessed competence and academic study that explores the theoretical underpinning knowledge of ECEC practice. The full-time, Level 3 CACHE and BTEC National Diploma courses are the focus of this study.

Perhaps a more pressing clarification (which is discussed in chapter three) is that of the nomenclature for the student-practitioners and the sector in which they work. Throughout this thesis, I refer to 'student-practitioners' that is a student enrolled on a Level 3 National Diploma qualification and 'early years practitioner' to describe a qualified Level 3 practitioner.

1.3 The Research and Field Questions

The aim of this study is to contribute towards developing a coherent understanding of the experiences, knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions gained by Level 3 early years student-practitioners in preparation for employment.

To answer the research question: *What are the benefits of pre-service qualification to the development of early years practitioners' practice*? The following field questions were used to examine the perspectives' of student-practitioners, to establish how they articulate what it is to be an early years practitioner, and how they have applied their learning in practice.

The field questions are:

- What knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions are required of an early years practitioner?
- How do the Level 3 National Diplomas develop students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions?
- How well do Level 3 National Diploma qualifications prepare students for the ECEC workforce and meet the demands of policy and employer expectations?

To answer these questions, a range of data collection methods were used. Participants from seven colleges in England responded to a questionnaire, which identified volunteers who participated in further surveys, interviews and a focus group. These methods generated qualitative and qualitative data. Data were analysed using a constant comparative approach as outlined by Glense and Peshkin (1992) and Wolcott's three stage model (1994). A comparison was made in order to develop the theoretical properties of each theme, which is discussed in detail chapter 5.

1.4 Positionality: A short history of 'how I got here'

In this section, I explain my positionality and why this underpins a study investigating the Level 3 student-practitioners' journey.

My interest in this area of research has been formed from my professional role as Head of School for Early Childhood Studies in an FE College and as a Nursery Nurse (Level 3), having worked with young children in primary schools for ten years.

> 'If we regard children as brilliant, capable, strong and clever, then we must show that the people who work with them are also brilliant, capable, strong and clever' (David, 2004, p.27)

David's words are central to the decisions I have taken in this thesis, to my actions, with regard to ECEC and to the education of early years student-practitioners in my care. I will explain how David's statement has shaped my work, my research and how they encapsulate my values and beliefs, both personal and professional, and therefore express my positionality.

As an Early Years Practitioner

In 1992 I was working as a part-time FE tutor (teaching marketing) when my youngest child started (state) nursery, this part-time commitment enabled me to *help* in the nursery, playing with the children, painting, singing songs and reading stories. I loved it. Working alongside the nursery nurses, I became aware that my ontological assumptions of childcare work were being challenged. My notion that ECEC did not require skill, knowledge or theoretical foundations were tested. I came to realise that there was more to working with children than keeping them occupied. I observed practitioners manage children's individual differences and how they planned opportunities for the children's learning. The practitioners were purposeful in their work. I wanted to find out more.

A chance meeting with a college tutor, who came to observe a student in the nursery, encouraged me to join a part-time National Diploma course for mature students. This engagement in the foundations of ECEC ignited my professional and academic interest in the field. I worked as a practitioner in a variety of roles in primary schools for ten years, mainly in nursery and reception. At the time, qualifications were desirable, but not essential, the main qualifications being the NNEB or the BTEC or CACHE National Diploma.

One of my duties was to mentor student-practitioners; one which I enjoyed, possibly more than they did, as I sought to assess their progress through understanding of child development, developmental theory and their application of this knowledge in their activity planning and their assignments. I became aware of the difference between students studying for National Diplomas and those completing NVQs. The National Diploma students were able to reflect on their practice in terms of theoretical understanding of child development. I recall engaging a National Diploma student in a debate about Chomsky (1968), Skinner (1991) and language development and how these theories related to what she had observed. In contrast, the NVQ student had no theoretical underpinning knowledge; she was unable to join the discussion, exemplifying the difference between the knowledge and experiences gained through types of qualifications.

At this time the National Joint Council for Local Governments introduced the Single Status Agreement (1997). This agreement required councils to end the historic pay discrimination in Local Government by reviewing pay and grading structures to make them equal pay-proof.

Teaching Assistants (TAs) had enjoyed the same conditions as teachers, with pay adjusted to account for school holidays. The Single Status agreement ended this arrangement and introduced pro-rata pay and conditions that reduced the already low salary by twenty-five per cent. This is when I found my voice. Until this time I had not been aware that I was a feminist (Lather, 2001), in fact it is only since reading for my MA that I was able to label my position as such. The professionalism and contribution which the TAs made were dismissed by Local Authority officers who were ignorant of the role. I took on the role of union representative and fought to have TAs recognised as professionals and to maintain our terms and conditions. On reflection I can see how having to articulate the value and worth of the TAs role to councillors and Local Government officers was the start of my interest in the training and development of early years practitioners, and locates this study in a post-modern, feminist paradigm, giving voice to marginalised and rarely heard early years student-practitioners (Skeggs,1997; Lather,1991).

I became acutely aware of the ontological and epistemological assumptions made about the profession by the Local Authority officers and councillors who were unaware of how the role of the TA had evolved from that of a classroom helper to a para-professional. At the time I assumed their lack of knowledge was ignorance. I now understand the decision and approach taken by local authority officers and councillors to be politically intentioned in order to avoid acknowledging the worth of TAs and to exclude them from the debate, denying parity of employment terms and conditions with teachers. Following two years of mildly successful negotiations, I left a job I loved and returned to teaching in FE, this time in the Early Years Department, coincidently or serendipitously, following a discussion with the same tutor.

Head of Department for Early Years in a College of Further Education

The previous discussion illuminated my passion and drive for wanting to develop knowledgeable, passionate practitioners. I joined the Early Years Department in an FE college as a lecturer in 2002. Having taught for three years, I was promoted to Head of Department. This provided the opportunity to influence the curriculum and the delivery of early years qualifications. NVQs, Level 2 and 3, were part of the school's curriculum offer for adult learners in employment. The courses were assessed in the workplace, with assessors confirming students' competence of knowledge and skills mainly through observation and professional discussion. While I accepted that NVQ students may have more practice-based skills, it seemed incongruent that an NVQ qualified practitioner would not have the same theoretical knowledge as a National Diploma practitioner. To ameliorate the differential, college-based taught sessions were introduced for all work-based qualifications. While at odds with other training providers'

models, and not popular with all students, it sat more comfortably with my values of providing well-qualified, knowledgeable practitioners. Equally, with the development of the Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree in Early Years (SEFDEY) it became apparent that my teaching and assessing staff, in line with many FE Early Years departments, would need to develop their knowledge beyond Level 3. I introduced a Higher Education staff development programme for my team, which led me to The University of Sheffield in 2006 to study for my MA and ultimately to the Doctor of Education (Ed.D).

As a Researcher

My own engagement in postgraduate studies has fostered my interest in the development of the ECEC workforce. My Master's dissertation centred on the impact of the SEFDEY on practitioners' personal and professional development (Perkins, 2008). The findings, though not generalisable, were congruent with the findings of the longitudinal study, The Effective Practice for Pre-School Education Project (EPPE) (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blachford, and Taggart, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2014) in the belief that outcomes for children are enhanced when knowledgeable and capable practitioners lead practice. In contrast to the EPPE findings, which focused on the children's outcomes, I found that the practitioners' meta-awareness of their impact was particularly important. Their Higher Education (HE) experience gave them confidence to challenge practice, colleagues, other professionals and policy. The findings of my small-scale study resonated with the subsequent University of Wolverhampton study on the impact of Early Years Professionals (EYP) (Hadfield, et al., 2012). Following the policy announcement in 2013 that the Government was no longer pursuing a fully qualified workforce, my belief in the importance and relevance of brilliant, capable, strong, and clever practitioners (David, 2004) informed my approach to this research.

Having discussed my positionality, acknowledging how it affects my approach to my research, I have avoided excessive 'navel-gazing' yet sufficiently established my place within the context of this research (Sultana, 2007, p.376). In the next section I will summarise each chapter.

1.5 Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2 – Political Context

This chapter provides an overview and analysis of recent policies relating to the ECEC workforce and their qualifications. The chapter includes a discussion of the Nutbrown Review (2012b), Foundations for Quality: The independent review of early education and childcare qualifications and considers the global context of the ECEC workforce.

Chapter 3 – Literature Review: This chapter reviews the research and literature concerned with the professionalisation of the ECEC workforce and the role of qualifications in developing competent knowledgeable practitioners.

Chapter 4 Methodology: This chapter explains the methodology employed in this research and outlines the research procedure. The chapter considers the choice of research question, ethical issues, recruitment of participants and the discussion of methodological choices

Chapter 5 Analysis of the Data: This chapter explains the process of data analysis and development of a conceptual framework. The model of the Three Dimensions of the Developing Practitioner is introduced and explained and provides an insight into the participants developing knowledge skills attitudes and dispositions.

Chapter 6 Findings and Discussion: In this chapter the key findings of the research are analysed and discussed using conceptual framework of the Three Dimensions of the Developing Practitioner. The chapter provides a coherent understanding of the experiences, knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions gained by Level 3 early years student-practitioners in preparation for employment

Chapter 7 Conclusions and Recommendations: This chapter reflects on the key findings of the research and establishes my contribution to the knowledge base in ECEC. The chapter concludes with a reflection on my personal learning and identifies areas for future research.

Chapter 2 Political Context

2.1 Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in England

This chapter provides an overview and analysis of recent policies relating to the ECEC workforce and their qualifications. The chapter includes a discussion of the Nutbrown Revciew (2012b), Foundations for Quality: The independent review of early education and childcare qualifications, and considers the global context of the ECEC workforce.

In this thesis I seek to influence change and therefore acknowledge the political intentions of my work (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012). I had pondered how to begin this section on policy in England; examining and articulating the theoretical assumptions underpinning the decisions made throughout the research process proved to be part of my learning journey. There is much repetition of content in English ECEC policy in the twenty-first century (see table 2.1), however the rhetoric remains the same in terms of the workforce; a quality workforce with graduate leadership (DfE, 2013a; DCSF, 2008a; DfES, 2005a; HMT, 2004; DfES, 1997). Yet, despite cross-party agreement, there has been little change in regulation. Therefore this chapter on policy context stands apart from the literature in chapter three because it sets the scene for that literature review.

ECEC policy and provision is complicated. The student-practitioners in this study had to be equipped to negotiate the complexity of policy in order to understand and carry out their role as early years practitioners of the future. In the case of this study, the problem was created in part by the complex patchwork of mixed economy ECEC provision which allowed for different staffing and qualification requirements depending on the type of setting (Faulkner and Coates, 2013; Kempton, 2014) and ever-changing expectations of the practitioners.

The problem has been compounded by the plethora of policy initiatives and regulation that advocated for a professional workforce yet failed to regulate in order to achieve that goal (Campbell-Barr, 2014; DfE, 2014; DfE, 2013e; Nutbrown, 2012a; 2012b). These problems are not easily resolved through technical processes, they are messy and confusing (Urban, 2008). A view echoed by Bertram and Pascal (1999) when reviewing ECEC policy in England for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). They noted

> Over time, the absence of a nationally coordinated Early Childhood Education and Care policy had created a wide range of different systems of provision under different authorities and regulations. This diversity and complexity has made concise explanations to an international audience not familiar with the UK ECEC system challenging for the authors (p.6).

Subsequent policy initiatives have not improved this situation. In 2016 English ECEC policy remains disconnected and confused, particularly in terms of the workforce and their qualifications. It is still possible to work in ECEC without having any relevant qualifications (DfE, 2014). I argue that the workforce (which the students in this study have now joined) are constructed in policy in opposing positions, as both saviour in improving outcomes for children, particularly the most disadvantaged and simultaneously, as chaotic and disordered.

Policy relating to ECEC has a long history, for this thesis I take 1997 as the policy starting point. This is when the OECD launched an international study exploring childcare provision. The policy end date for this thesis is 2014, when the revised Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in March 2014 was launched; this was the first year of my data collection. Policy in England assumes an homogenous workforce offering a 'one size fits all', without differentiating between the type of setting or terms and conditions of their employment (Campbell-Barr, 2014; Kempton, 2014). With each policy announcement, the workforce and their qualifications are problematised, emerging as both a concern, in terms of their ability to deliver quality, and a solution to socio-economic imperatives such as child poverty and social inclusion (Field, 2010; Sylva, et al., 2004; HMT, 2004). This will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.2 Overview of Policy 1997- 2014

This section begins with a critical overview of English policy and key reports pertaining to ECEC which have implications for the workforce, and, like the students in this study, those choosing to join that workforce. The overview cannot be exhaustive as there was a plethora of initiatives and policy announcements during this period, which did not directly mention the workforce and their qualifications. I will discuss how policy discourse has positioned the workforce in contradictory terms depending on the political imperative of the time (Osgood, 2012) .

The policy in England, through the 1980s and 90s, was education focused on raising standards for school aged children. Pre-school age children were largely absent from the political agenda. This changed in 1996 when the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) introduced Desirable Outcomes (1996) a curriculum for pre-school children. The curriculum was a requirement for settings offering the free nursery education entitlement for four-year olds, established by John Major's Conservative Government.   In 1997 the OECD began an international discussion to explore provision of ECEC. The resulting report, 'Starting Strong'. Early Childhood Education and Care' (OECD, 2001) set the agenda for change and a focus on ECEC. Following the 1997 election, in England, the newly elected Labour Government,

introduced the National Childcare Strategy (DfES, 1997) which brought together care and education under the auspices of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). As well as having responsibility for delivering free early education places, the strategy included funding for staff training and development and to develop a training framework for workers preparing to implement the Early Learning Goals (DfES, 1997). This was the initial indication that that the workforce was not fit for purpose and in need of reform. Equally the policy suggested the need for a training and career framework, this has yet to be realised.

The OECD report (2001) identified the disparity across member states in their provision for the youngest children in terms of funding, staff qualifications and outcomes, with England being amongst the lowest. Lord Laming's report into the death of Victoria Climbié, who died at the hands of her carers, highlighted the need for coordination of the mainstream services responsible for children's health, education and wellbeing (Laming, 2003). Lord Laming's report informed the subsequent 2004 Amendment to the Children Act 2004 (HM Government, 2004) and Every Child Matters (ECM): change for children (DfES 2005), set out the desire for integrated children's services. This resulted in unprecedented political attention on the provision of ECEC and a focus on the workforce, their qualifications and the changing role of practitioners in response to this perceived crisis in the childcare workforce.

Every Child Matters, called for the crossing of professional boundaries, and to 'break down professional boundaries' (DfES, 2005b, p.10). This implies that the early years practitioners are professionals. However, they do not appear in the list of professionals in a multi-disciplinary team (ibid., p.62), in spite of ECEC workers being the second largest group working with children (363,000), with school staff being the largest group (670,000) (ibid., p.84). Taking up this challenge, the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) was charged with improving outcomes for children and young people, with a focus on developing an integrated children's workforce. This included health, social services, youth work, sport and culture, justice and education and early years provision. The CWDC (2010) developed a 'common core of knowledge and skills' (p.2) to be incorporated in to a suite of qualifications for everyone working with children and young people, from birth to nineteen, thus diluting the previous ECEC qualifications which focused on children from birth to seven. The common core included multi-agency and integrated working, prioritising communication, safeguarding and child development. This requirement to liaise with other professionals highlighted the lack of professional status for early years practitioners and created barriers where some professionals were not willing to cross professional boundaries (Sloper, 2004) thus subjugating the knowledge (Foucault, 1980) and experience of the early years practitioners.

The majority of policies relating to the ECEC workforce draw on the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project, a longitudinal study funded by the DfEE that tracked 3,000 three-year-olds, to identify effective practice in early years (Sylva, et al., 2004). The outcomes from the EPPE study asserted the positive impact of qualified practitioners and, in particular, the effectiveness of graduate-led practice on outcomes for children, especially for the most disadvantaged children (Sylva, et al., 2004).

The argument for graduate-led practice is present in a raft of policies. For example the Ten-Year Strategy: Choice for Parents, Best Start for Children (HMT, 2004) called for a better qualified workforce, suggesting that the level of qualified staff was unacceptable as well as the quality of the qualifications. The Ten-Year strategy asserted that all day-care settings were to be 'professionally led' (HMT, 2004, p.1) without defining what is meant by 'professional'. I will discuss professionalism in chapter 3. The rhetoric in policy is for 'quality provision', with emphasis on the quality of the workforce. The main driver in the policy, then as now, was an economic one; it was about availability and affordability in order to enable women to return to work. I suggest the qualification of the workforce was the lever to make this happen (OECD, 2012).

> Working with pre-school children should have as much status as a profession as teaching children in schools. Inspection is one lever for driving up quality. A first class workforce is also fundamental. This will mean reviewing the qualifications and career structure and investing in training and support in order to further develop a workforce fit to deliver the kinds of services children and parents expect in the 21st century (HMT, 2004, p.4)

On the one hand, this statement lauds the early years profession. On the other hand, it asserts that the qualifications and career structure require investment to develop a workforce fit for the job that is to be done.

The then Labour Government's belief in a graduate-led workforce was affirmed by the investment of £305 million in a Graduate Leader Fund (GLF) (Mathers, et al., 2011) which supported PVI settings to employ graduates by offering financial incentives. An evaluation of the GLF demonstrated significant improvements in quality, where settings employed a graduate with Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) compared with settings who did not have a graduate in place (Mathers etal., 2011). Mathers and Smee (2014) also argue that graduates make a significant difference to outcomes for children, particularly those in the most disadvantaged areas. A further consideration is that by definition, a graduate is at least twenty one years of age with more practice experience, conferring a level of maturity and arguably, graduate attributes, 'what makes higher education distinct from other forms or 'levels' of learning' (Barrie, 2004, p.262). This suggests that graduates have a level of knowledge and

skills beyond the technical, and potentially conferring professional status, as with the EYPS (CWDC, 2006) and the Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) introduced in 2013.

The students in this study followed a comprehensive and robust qualification yet the career they have chosen is still perceived to be of low status as indicated in MGC (DfE, 2013a) thus reaffirming the need for change.

2.3 Policy Drivers for Early Childhood Education and Care

Through this unprecedented attention in policy, the ECEC workforce has come to be constructed as the means by which Government achieves its goals for an economically stable nation as well as addressing the many social ills (Osgood, 2007).

Government has long recognised the collective interest in ensuring that children get a good start in life:

> Investment in children to ensure that they have opportunities and capabilities to contribute in positive ways throughout their lives is money well spent and it will reduce the costs of social failure (HMT, 2004, p.7).

The economic benefit is clearly stated. Children need a good start in life to become economically active citizens. I argue that reducing the cost of social failure is a huge responsibility to bestow on an unqualified, and for the most part, young workforce (DfE, 2011b). In addition to developing children to become financially active citizens, a further economic responsibility was bestowed on the ECEC practitioner; practitioners became responsible for enabling parents to work, further adding to the nation's prosperity. In terms of policy discourse the ECEC worker became the means of 'meeting the childcare challenge' (DfES, 1997) meaning high levels of responsibility for those who work with young children, one which is explored in chapter 3 and in the data, chapter 6.

In 2013, almost a decade after the publication of both the Ten-year Strategy (2004) and the first phase of the EPPE study (Sylva, et al., 2004), familiar rhetoric from these documents reappeared in policy. In 2013 MGC, drew on the EPPE findings stating, 'Children made more progress in pre-school centres where trained teachers were present' (DfE, 2013, p.15) and yet failed to legislate for a qualified workforce (DfE, 2014) in spite of a key recommendation in the Nutbrown Review (2012b), an invited independent review for Government.

In line with other OECD countries, ECEC policy in England has developed due to two key drivers: economic and educational. The economic imperative requires high employment as a

means of growing the economy (Council of the European Union, 2015; OECD, 2013; Rüling, 2008; DfES, 1997). In order to maintain a high employment to population ratio, there is a need for mothers to work. To facilitate this, there needs to be sufficient, good quality, affordable and accessible childcare.

The second driver, education, was seen to be a means of addressing inequalities in outcomes for children, particularly for children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (Council of the European Union, 2015; DfE, 2013; Field, 2010, Sylva, et al., 2004). I have discussed the key landmark policies highlighting their aims and the implications for the workforce as they have led to the current situation the students at the heart of this thesis face in terms of their qualifications, what they need to be able to do once in practice and their career opportunities. Table 2.1 summarises the rhetoric in those key policies and reports from 1997 to the latest iteration of the EYFS in 2014 which is the articulation of policy and contains the regulatory requirements for ECEC.

These policies and reports were selected to show how the nature of working with children has changed over time and therefore the expectations of those choosing to work with children have changed too (DfE, 2015b; DfE, 2013; CWDC, 2009b; DCSF, 2008a). I then discuss the policies and whether the rhetoric turned in to reality, in terms of the workforce and the implications for student-practitioners. From this activity, I identified three themes that are consistent, persistent and impervious to changes in Government and relate to the ECEC practitioners' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions; these are shown in table 2.1 (p.22).

I will discuss each theme and relate it to the expectations and implications for the student-practitioners. All of the documents call for high quality provision, without a clear definition of what quality is. Defining quality is a richly debated subject (Mathers and Smee, 2014; DfE, 2013e; DfE, 2013c; Nutbrown, 2012b; Moss and Dahlberg, 2008; Sylva, et al., 2004) one which there is not room to discuss fully in this thesis. What is commonly postulated in the literature is the contribution and impact of a well-qualified workforce on quality therefore the quality provision in terms of the workforce and qualification will be discussed.

1. The quality of the children's workforce (qualification, structure, discourse) – yellow section
2. Social inequality (outcomes , 'closing the gap', poverty) – Pink section
3. Economic benefits (labour market supply, benefits, linked to poverty and shortage of labour female employment trends – Blue section

	National Childcare Strategy (1998)	10-Year Strategy (2004)	Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy (2008)	The Tickell Review (2011)	The Nutbrown Review (2012)	MGC (2013)	EYFS (2014a)
High quality provision	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Narrowing the gap	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tackle social disadvantage	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School-readiness				✓	✓	✓	✓
Economic benefit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Women and labour market	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Poor quality workforce	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Qualified workforce	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Raising value and esteem	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Graduate leaders	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
QTS				✓	✓	✓	
EYPS				✓	✓	✓	
Min. L 3 to count in ratio		✓	✓	✓	✓		
English and maths				✓	✓	✓	✓
Leadership			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Career structure		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Pay		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Funding for training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-service qualification				✓	✓		

Table 2.1 Themes in key policies and reports from 1998 to 2014

Of note is which of these political aspirations have come to fruition and which remain as rhetoric. These themes are interrelated and are discussed as they arise in the literature. The next section focuses on Foundations for Quality: The independent review of early education and childcare qualifications (Nutbrown, 2012b) and MGC (DfE, 2013a).

2.4 The Quality of the Children's Workforce

The most significant and consistent discourse in policy is quality, though it is not clearly articulated what quality provision looks like in any one document. In each policy the poor quality of the workforce is emphasised and the need for a well-qualified workforce is lauded, suggesting this is a key aspect of quality provision.

In regard to the ECEC workforce, Dame Clare Tickell (2011), in reviewing the EYFS recommended,

> ... that the Government retain a focus on the need to up skill the workforce, to commit to a Level 3 qualification and to maintain the ambitions for a graduate-led sector [...] I recommend that the Government review the content of early years training courses to test the strength and quality of these qualifications (p.42).

This review was led by Professor Cathy Nutbrown (2012a; 2012b) and here I must declare my positionality in that I was a member of the expert panel for the Nutbrown Review. The year long review received over 1,300 responses, in either writing or attendance at public consultation events (DfE, 2012). This was a high response when compared to response rates to other public consultations. Considering that there are over 11,000 EYPs and a wider workforce estimated at around 483,660 (DfES, 2005) the representation of views is low perhaps indicating an apathy among practitioners to engage in reform. An alternative argument is not one of apathy, but of lack of communication in a disparate and unrepresented workforce. There is no regulatory or professional body which makes communication with the whole workforce impossible.

Nutbrown (2012b) offered nineteen recommendations (Appendix 1). Three key recommendations set out a route for a fully qualified workforce. Recommendations 5, 6 and 7 recommend a phased introduction for all practitioners to have a Level 3 qualification. Recommendation 16 set out a route for an Early Years Teacher with QTS and suggested career framework, including job titles and levels of qualification. The recommendations were a culmination of views of employers, practitioners, academics, college and university staff delivering ECEC qualifications, training providers, professional organisation and students; a good representative sample of those engaged in the sector (Nutbrown, 2012b). The respondents recognised the need for a fully qualified workforce while acknowledging that some of the current CWDC and NVQ qualifications were unfit for purpose. The Nutbrown Review indicated that the vast array of qualifications in ECEC led to confusion for employers and potential practitioners.

2.5 Early Years Qualifications

The student-practitioners in this study were studying BTEC or CACHE Level 3 National Diplomas. The National Diplomas are a similar model to the Nursery Nurse Examining Board (NNEB) qualification which was referred to as the 'gold standard' in the Interim Report on early years qualifications (Nutbrown, 2012a, p.22). The NNEB was a pre-service qualification that required two years of study, supported by significant work placement (750 hours) experience in a variety of settings. Much of the dissatisfaction about the quality of qualifications

raised by the sector during the Nutbrown Review consultations was concerned with NVQs and the CWDC Level 3 Diploma, which are competency-based qualifications which lacked academic rigour and in-depth study of the theory underpinning children's learning and development (Nutbrown, 2012a; Pugh and Duffy, 2013). There was unprecedented media attention when the Nutbrown Interim Report (2012a) was published, which led to a barrage of media headlines and readers' responses that reflected the public's perception of ECEC practitioners, their work and their literacy skills . The Daily Mail headline read:

> Nursery staff and childminders are able to work at pre-school groups without basic literacy or numeracy skills, according to a new report (Mail Online, 2012).

The Telegraph went further with:

> Nursery workers so illiterate they struggle to read stories aloud (2015).

Neither of these statements appeared in the interim report (2012a), however they do illustrate the public perception of ECEC practitioners as poorly educated. Readers' responses questioned the need for a qualified workforce implying the work is considered to be low in status and value.

The Nutbrown Review (2012b) challenged awarding bodies with developing new qualifications that would reflect the exacting standards of the NNEB and include the latest research and theoretical knowledge. This was actioned by NCTL and qualifications that meet the criteria (see appendix 2) carry the EYE status (NCTL, 2013c).

In January 2013, the then Minister for Education and Childcare, Elizabeth Truss MP, responded to Nutbrown's recommendations. The main thrust of MGC (DfE, 2013a) places improvement firmly at the feet of the workforce, asserting that it will:

- build a stronger, more capable workforce, with more rigorous training and qualifications, led by a growing group of Early Years Teachers;
- drive up quality, with rigorous Ofsted inspection and incentives for providers to improve the skills and knowledge of their staff;

Truss goes on to state, 'the quality of the workforce and the qualifications on offer at the moment are not good enough. Staff are on low pay and in too many cases lack basic skills' (ibid., p.6). The issue of poor basic skills, that is English and maths is one not for this thesis. The lack of acknowledgement that this is a national problem (BIS, 2013), not just for ECEC practitioners, was excluded from the minister's announcement and added to the negative discourse of the illiterate and poor quality ECEC practitioner. The minister laid the solution

squarely at the door of ECEC, arguing that ECEC practitioners need good literacy and numeracy skills to ameliorate this problem for future generations. The ECEC practitioner once again becomes the solution to overcome poverty and social disadvantage.

I will now discuss this policy announcement and its potential impact on the students in this study as well as considering how it addresses the recommendations from the Nutbrown Review (2012b).

2.6 The Nutbrown Review and More Great Childcare

The Level 3 Debate

The focus of this study is to argue for a minimum Level 3 qualified workforce, in line with the recommendations from the Nutbrown Review (2012b). There were two key issues raised relating to the Level 3 qualification; the level to which staff counting in ratio should be qualified and the quality of the qualifications. Nutbrown recommended that 'The EYFS requirements should be revised so that, by September 2022, all staff counting in the staff to child ratios must be qualified at Level 3 (recommendation 5).

Each policy has expounded the positive impact of well-qualified practitioners on outcomes for children, that in turn should meet the aspiration of narrowing the gap achievement for the most disadvantaged children, yet successive Governments have failed to legislate for a minimum level of qualification. Despite the rhetoric for a qualified workforce throughout MGC (DfE, 2013a) the response stated that this was still under consultation. When the revised EYFS (DfE, 2014a), was published, the adult to child ratios remained the same, allowing unqualified practitioners to count in ratio.

The NNEB was the original professional qualification recognised as being appropriate for people working with young children. The NNEB was a Level 3 qualification, that is a post-compulsory education qualification, similar to A-levels. Other Level 3 qualifications such as BTEC and CACHE National Diplomas and more recently the Children and Young People's Workforce Diploma have been considered to be a licence to practice[2]. This term has evolved over time; there is no actual licence, however certain vocational qualifications that combine knowledge and practice have been the benchmark for practitioners to work unsupervised with children. Since the introduction of NVQs in 1997, these competency-based qualifications also conferred licence to practice. The CWDC created a list of qualifications that they considered

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[2] Licence to Practice – A Level 3 qualified practitioner who is able to work unsupervised with children.

'full and relevant' (NCTL, 2014), establishing a permanent record of qualifications that are counted in the ratio of adults to children requirements of the EYFS (DfE, 2014a).

When articulating an aspiration for a fully qualified workforce, it is assumed that the minimum level is Level 3 however, the regulation allows for one Level 3 practitioner, 50% to hold Level 2 with the remainder being unqualified (DfE, 2014). Nutbrown (2012b) set out plans to achieve a fully qualified Level 3 workforce, led by graduates. Although the rhetoric implies that the workforce is poorly qualified; the early years providers' survey (DfE, 2011b) showed an increase to 84% of the full day-care workforce having Level 3 qualifications and 11% with Level 6. Comparing this to the 2009 survey (DfE, 2010a), the levels had remained static; this could be due to a number of factors. Many Local Authorities had funded qualifications for staff in PVI settings, however there has been a reduction in funding for qualifications due to significant cuts in funding from central Government (Local Government Association, 2014; Gamabro, Stewart, and Waldfogel, 2013). Similarly funding for adult skills has been reduced (Skills Funding Agency, 2015) resulting in learning providers increasing fees for Level 2 and 3 qualifications and reducing the number of applicants. In my own institution, we saw a decrease in the number of adults, applying for EYE qualifications. Funding is one reason; the requirement that students hold GCSE English and maths grade C is another[3].

A further explanation could be that the number of day-care settings has fallen (DfE, 2014b) which could result in a deficit of qualified staff; providers may be taking advantage of the regulations that still allow for 50% of staff to be unqualified (DfE, 2014a). The Childcare Providers Survey (DfE, 2011b) distinguishes between qualifications held by staff in different types of provision, full day-care, Early Years Foundation Stage (maintained Primary and Nursery Schools) and Childminders confirming the complex and varied nature of the ECEC sector. It is therefore not only challenging to navigate but also questions the validity of the data. These data show that significant progress has been made in the level of qualified staff working with young children which therefore raises the question why there is still reference to a poorly qualified workforce in contemporary policy and research (Blades, Greene, and Wallace, 2014; Paull, 2014; Campbell-Barr, 2014) .

These data could suggest that the study reported in this thesis could be redundant; because qualified staff now exceed the number of unqualified staff. These data also indicate that the majority of unqualified staff are working in the most disadvantaged areas and in private day-care settings (Speight, Maisey, Chanfreau, et al., 2015; Kempton, 2014; DfE and HMT, 2014)

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[3] This requirement was amended in 2015 to allow students under 19 on full-time programmes to be working towards GCSE English and maths

and the majority of qualified staff work in the maintained sector (DfE, 2011b), so there is an uneven spread across settings. Therefore without regulating for a fully qualified workforce, where qualifications are achieved before being employed, the policy aim to narrow the gap for disadvantaged children will not be met.

A Graduate-led Workforce

The argument for creating a graduate workforce is evident in each policy considered in this study. As discussed previously there is a wealth of research supporting the positive impact of graduates in ECEC. Truss (DfE, 2013a) and Tickell (2011) stated an aspiration for a graduate-led profession and a qualified workforce, reflecting the aims of the Ten-Year Strategy (HMT, 2004). Nutbrown (2012b) called for 'A new early years specialist route to QTS, specialising in the years from birth to seven' (recommendation 16) and recommendation 19 called for the Government to consider 'the best way to maintain and increase graduate pedagogical leadership in all early years settings' (2012b, p.73). A view shared in the ten-year strategy for childcare.

> Research shows that settings with well trained and appropriately qualified staff offering the right learning and development opportunities lead to the best outcomes for children. In particular, the quality of the leadership of a childcare setting has an important influence on the overall quality of care provided, with evidence showing the settings led by a teacher or another graduate are particularly effective (HMT, 2004, p.25)

This resonates with the discourse in policy; suggesting that qualifications need to be more robust and practitioners need to be qualified (DCSF, 2008a; DfE, 2011a). Nutbrown's recommendations echo the aspiration for a career structure and graduate-led practice, advocated in the various policies from the last twenty years (Kempton, 2014).

During this period of policy overload, the notion of graduate-led practice is a recurring theme. The evidence is overwhelming that children make better progress where there is a graduate leading practice. A further possible policy direction was indicated by Estelle Morris, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in Tony Blair's Labour Government. Acknowledging the low status of the children's workforce, she declared her aspiration for the professionalisation of ECEC.

> … to get to a point where parents had ambitions for their children to grow up to become children's services professionals as they do lawyers and doctors […] I would like the children's workforce to have its place in the sun alongside teachers and doctors. Everybody knows what those professions do. We have a fair way to go, but I do think this Government is up for it (2005, pp.).

From Morris's declaration for a 'place in the sun' to MGC's 'hope' that parents will come to recognise Early Years Teacher and Early Years Educator titles 'as benchmarks of quality' (DfE,

2013a, p.7) little has changed. I hold the view that parents may respect the title, if they understood what such titles stand for, however the Government has done little to support this. Although EYT has the same entry criteria QTS, including passing the skills test, they are not awarded QTS, denying EYTs parity with their school-based counterparts (Eisenstadt, et al., 2013; Nutbrown, 2013). Without professional recognition, I contend there will be no parity; it is smoke and mirrors, giving the illusion of status without equality. As Nutbrown (2013) points out in her impassioned response to MGC's proposal,

> So how will be Early Years Teacher feel when told that she or he cannot teach children in Year One because they are not sufficiently qualified to do so? And how will they feel about the investments they have made their qualifications when they realise they cannot achieve the kinds of promotion opportunities open to teachers of older children? And why is the title teacher being used to mean something quite different from the commonly understood established and accepted meaning? This reaches deep into the heart of the culture and nomenclature of UK practice (p.7).

Similarly, concern was expressed by other leading academics

> Early Years Teacher will not enhance the status of those working with young children because they will not have comparable training or qualified teacher status and therefore will not be eligible for teacher pay and conditions. They will simply be second class 'teachers' (Eisenstadt, et al., 2013).

Following the launch of the EYTS Elizabeth Truss, made a speech at the think tank Policy Exchange, on the quality of teaching in the early years (2014). The event launched an early years route for the Teach First programme which offers high-achieving graduates a funded opportunity to achieve a PGCE and QTS. Graduates must commit to teaching in a state school serving low-income communities for a minimum of two years (Teach First, 2015).

In her speech, Truss stated, 'A teacher is a teacher - regardless of whether they are teaching a 14-year-old the cosine rule or helping a 3-year-old speak in full sentences' (2014). In the question and answer session, I asked whether the Teach First graduates would have EYTS or QTS. Truss expressed a desire for a single set of age-appropriate qualifications acknowledging that we are 'not there yet' and that EYTs should have comparative value and esteem. She explained that this was not possible because of 'other reforms that are taking place' (2014). The Minister did not expand on this, my assumption (and one held by many) at the time, was the protected status of QTS, and the terms and conditions associated with it, may change with the growth of academies. Academies' spending agreements allow them to employ teachers without QTS (DfE, 2012). The 2016 white paper, Educational Excellence Everywhere recommended the replacement of QTS with new accreditations based on 'teacher effectiveness in the classroom' (DfE, 2016, p.32) suggesting the end of QTS.

Following Truss's response, the Teach First graduate, Max Gregory, offered the following insight

> *… for me, I wouldn't have taken the opportunity to work in early years had that PGCE not been on offer. I speak for colleagues as well, who are looking for, in the longer term school leadership positions that Early Years Teacher status wouldn't necessarily open up for us.*

Max's honesty, echoes the views of Amanda Timberg (executive director at Teach First) who confirmed that

> *... the PGCE is one of the things that makes Teach First very attractive to the types of graduate that we get through […]. We wouldn't be able to offer an early years opportunity without having the PGCE 3 to 7.*

On the one hand we have the Minister's rhetoric for equity of esteem and value and on the other a very clear message that there remains a distinction between EYT and QTS and there is no enthusiasm from Government to change this.

Having established that EYTs are teachers in name only, I draw one possible conclusion for not awarding QTS, and that is one of economics. I suggest there are two financial issues at play. Firstly, EYTs will not have QTS and therefore not be subject to the pay scale and benefits that are enjoyed by schoolteachers. Therefore settings can set pay and conditions, which have traditionally been low in the PVI sector, enabling the Government to deliver affordable childcare. I argue that affordable childcare was the priority, exemplified in the policy document, 'More Affordable Childcare' (DfE, 2013c) and MGC (DfE, 2013a). While early education is missing in the titles, it is evident in the body of the text.

Their Level 3 National Diploma will position the student-practitioners in this study well for progressing to graduate level study. As there is no regulatory requirement for practitioners to have a full Level 3 qualification, I proffer that this uncoordinated and incoherent approach adds to the confusion in terms of the expectations of the ECEC workforce. This perpetuates the two-tier system of early childhood education on one hand and care on the other. A system where the children in most need often have access to the poorest quality (Kempton, 2014; Gamabro, Stewart, and Waldfogel, 2013; Field, 2010). Without addressing the inequalities in funding between maintained and PVI settings, the lack of regulation for qualified practitioners, in spite of every policy and report asserting the benefits of a fully qualified, teacher-led workforce the aims of the policies, narrowing the gap and eradicating child poverty, will not be met (Gamabro, Stewart, and Waldfogel, 2013).

2.7 A Global Context

International policy is challenging to compare as there are many variations in the provision of ECEC (Campbell-Barr and Georgeson, 2015b; Urban and Vandenbroeck, 2011). There are different school starting ages, funding levels and curriculum expectations; all grounded in the nations' cultural beliefs about children, childhood and education (Pascal, et al., 2013; OECD, 2012).

The OECD confirms that the issues for consideration in international ECEC policy are similar to those in England; that is economic and social concerns (2013). Demand for ECEC provision has grown due to a need for women to participate in the labour market, creating a need for affordable childcare. In addition, the evidence that quality ECEC attendance improves the long-term outcomes for children has been a driving force in international policy development (OECD, 2013).

Qualification levels vary across nations and direct comparisons are almost impossible as each country's policy is dependent on the age of the children, the type of provision and the level of funding (Campbell-Barr and Georgeson, 2015b; Pascal et al. , 2013; Urban and Vandenbroeck, 2011).There are different titles used in different countries which also makes comparisons difficult. Titles include: pedagogue, teacher, hokushi, educator, and practitioner; each complicated by the level and length of qualification and whether there is in service or preservice training needed (Campbell-Barr & Georgeson, 2015b). For example, Sweden and Denmark have a 50% graduate-led workforce; in New Zealand the Government's target is 50% for teachers working with infants and toddlers and 80% for ECEC specialist teachers teachers working with young children (2-5 years) (Logan, Sumison, and Press, 2015). In contrast, primary and state kindergartens require 100% qualified teachers as it is in England. In Japan, Nursery workers are required to be licensed, having completed pre-service junior college training to certificate level (undergraduate level).

Australia's ECEC provision is closely aligned with UK policy. They have had a significant programme of reforms for of ECEC, aiming for consistency across states and territories (Logan, Sumison, and Press, 2015). Unlike England, the Early Childhood Reform Agenda (Council of Australian Governments (COAG), 2009a) required all educators to have a relevant qualification, a Level 3 or 4 certificate, commensurate with the Level 3 National Diploma or an Advanced Diploma, equal to a Foundation Degree. A small number of educators have bachelor's degrees although this is not a requirement in some levels of provision. Centre-based care requires an early childhood teacher (graduate level) either full or part-time, depending on the number of

children enrolled. Teachers are supported by educators, 50% of whom must hold, or be working towards a Diploma, suggesting they have achieved a Level 3 certificates already. The remaining 50% of support staff must be working towards a certificate. The Australian model, like others with a mixed economy of provision, is complex. What is consistent is a drive towards a qualified workforce. The reform agenda acknowledges the international research that demonstrates the positive impact on outcomes for children and families of well-qualified, graduate practitioners (OECD, 2012; Moss, 2008; Sylva, et al., 2004).

Where countries have universal, state maintained provision, the level of qualification requirements are clear, and often higher (Campbell-Barr and Georgeson, 2015b; OECD, 2012). Where countries apply a mixed economy approach to ECEC provision, as in England, the picture is less clear, complicated by a mix of interdependent requirements. With children aged birth to three being educated and cared for by less well-qualified staff in spite of the recognition of the positive impact of qualified staff in producing improved, long term outcomes for children (Logan, Sumison, and Press, 2015; OECD, 2012).

2.8 Conclusion

In summary, the last Labour Government's (1997-2010) policies were focused on an integrated workforce that required professionals to work together, yet the policy failed to develop a professional career structure for the ECEC workforce. The Coalition Government (2010-2015) focussed on affordable childcare. The newly elected Conservative Government (2015-) shifted the focus to education, arguing that this will 'close the gap' for the most disadvantaged children. I contend that there is a lack of clarity about what policy makers are trying to achieve and how they are going to achieve it. The policies discussed here are consistent in demonstrating that a teacher-led, with qualified support, workforce is 'what works', yet there is less attention on the means to achieve these aims.

In this chapter I have reviewed the trajectory of ECEC policy in England and concluded that policy asserts that a well-educated children's workforce will contribute to economic sustainability in terms of securing human capital for a future labour force as well as saving future costs to the welfare state (Field, 2010; Rüling, 2008). I have discussed the Nutbrown Review (2012b) and the Government's response, 'MGC' (DfE, 2013a) and considered the international perspective. I conclude that while they seem to aspire to the same objectives, the execution of the policy is incongruent with its stated aims.

I have explained the relationship between policy and the student-practitioners in the context of this study. I will now discuss how the early years practitioner has been positioned within the

literature, considering qualifications, the role of the adult working with children and professionalism.

Chapter 3 Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter defines the role of the adult in ECEC settings drawing on research by Rose and Rogers (2012) and Brock (2012), who proffer frameworks for clarifying the role. It then seeks to address whether, having completed their qualification, the student-practitioners are professionals. The concept of professionalism is discussed, considering the formative works on professionalisation of the ECEC workforce by Osgood, (2012) Colley, (2006) and Manning-Morton (2006), attending to identity and aspects of professionalism. It then examines the place of qualifications in developing professional practitioners. The section concludes with a discussion on the professional competencies and dispositions and considers international perspectives on qualifications in the ECEC workforce.

This chapter explores the literature that relates to the research question: *What are the benefits of pre-service qualification to the development of early years practitioners' practice*?

The literature was drawn from the searches of the following key words and terms in peer-reviewed journals, policy documents and relevant popular media

- Early years policy
- Early years workforce
- Early years and childcare qualifications
- Student-practitioners
- Quality in early years
- Professionalism

To answer the question as to whether the student-practitioners in this study are employment ready, once qualified, is complicated. It raises the question of whether they are considered professionals once they are qualified. They will be qualified with a 'full and relevant qualification as defined by the NCTL (2014), they will count in the adult to child ratio and, according to the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) , as the only stipulated level of qualification in the regulations, can lead practice. Therefore, I assert that these newly qualified practitioners are the professionals in ECEC settings. Yet the introduction of the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) (CWDC, 2006) and more recently Early Years Teacher (EYT) DfE, 2013b) suggests that Level 3 is not sufficient.

> *If we regard children as brilliant, capable, strong and clever, then we must show that the people who work with them are also brilliant, capable, strong and clever' (David, 2004, p.27).*

David's declaration brings together policy, discourse, ontology and epistemology of the childcare workforce. She entreats that we 'show' that the workforce is 'brilliant, capable, strong and clever' … she implies that it is... yet the perception remains as a deficit model. This thesis seeks to demonstrate the place of a pre-service, qualified workforce in realising David's declaration.

The ECEC workforce is multi-layered and complex. It engages with many disciplines including education, health and social services and is undertaken with a range of job roles and titles, and carried out in a variety of settings (Nutbrown, 2012b; Brock, 2012; Lloyd and Hallet, 2010). As there is no consistent nomenclature for Level 3 practitioners or career structure, this has led to much confusion and different understandings of professional identity and function. There are different regulations and qualifications, depending on the type of the setting (Chalke, 2013; Nutbrown, 2012b; Moss, 2008). For the purpose of this study, the focus is on practitioners working in ECEC settings in the PVI sector in England, and working to the requirements of the EYFS (DfE, 2014a). They are the largest sector of the children's workforce (Mathers and Smee, 2014) and are known as 'early years practitioners' a term which came in to general usage in PVI settings, in the literature and in policy (Moyles, 2001). The Rumbold Report (1990) suggested the term Educator for those working in ECEC settings, later Moyles (2001) suggested the term practitioner, to include all adults working directly with children to avoid confusion. The diverse workforce can include practitioners from health, social work and education. The waters were muddied with the introduction of the Early Years Professional (EYPS); a status introduced by the CWDC (2006) which implied that Level 3 practitioners, and others not holding EYPS were not considered to be professionals (Moss, 2008) thus adding to the confusion for practitioners, employers, parents and the general public. To answer the research question, I aim to establish the knowledge, skills and attributes of early years practitioners, identified in the literature, to enable a comparison between the espoused requirements and those of the student-practitioners in this study; thus demonstrating the value of their pre-service qualifications.

Much of the literature relating to early years practitioners is rooted in the notion of professionalisation of the workforce; therefore, in this section, I will review the literature relating to professionalisation. The student-practitioners in this study will have a Level 3 National Diploma, which confers 'a licence to practice' and is described by the NCTL (2014) as 'full and relevant' to count in the ratio of adults to children. As this is the only qualification stipulated in the statutory requirements in the EYFS (DfE, 2014a), it follows that this is the professional standard required by Government.

I will begin by defining 'profession and professionalism' as described in the literature, concluding with a summary of what, in the literature, constitutes a professional practitioner to facilitate an analysis of the students, practitioners and managers participating in this study understanding of the role of the professional practitioner. That is, the knowledge, skills and attitudes that exemplify a professional practitioner. What is not included is a discussion on the gendered and classed nature of the workforce and its impact on low status and pay (see Colley, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Osgood, 2005). These are commendable and serious positions which are well documented, however, the focus of this study is to develop a coherent understanding of the Level 3 National Diploma student-practitioners' experiences and the impact of their qualification.

> This is Josie, she's our Level 3, rather than, This is Josie, she is in charge of our baby room. (Nutbrown, 2012b, p.45)

This quote from a respondent to the Nutbrown Review exemplifies the need for a recognised professional status and career structure that meets the needs of this complex sector (It also made me speculate as to how they would introduce the unqualified practitioner who is counted in the ratio in that setting). The statement resonated with me as one of the participants in my Master's research, a Foundation Degree graduate, described being called 'the agency' rather than addressing her by name or role. This lack of a consistent nomenclature results in the negative identity and perceived lack of professionalism for those working with young children (Campbell-Barr, 2014; Page, Clare and Nutbrown, 2013; Nutbrown, 2012a) and contributes to the lack of a description of the role of the professional practitioner. There is of course more to being a professional or belonging to a profession than a name, but terminology is important.

3.2 Professionalism

Much is written on the subject of professionalism. Whether the practitioners in this study can be considered professional depends on one's definition of a profession. In this section, I consider how the terms profession and professional may be applied to the student-practitioners, once qualified.

Flexner (1915) is credited with the transformation of the practice of medicine in to a 'profession' in America; asserting the need for entry requirements to medical school and a consistent, shared understanding of the content of medical education. He suggested that a profession involves intellectual operations with individual responsibility, a shared understanding of the nature of the work, is predicated on science and learning, is self-organised and altruistic in motivation. He later suggested that social work did not qualify as a profession

as it lacked 'communicable techniques' due to the broad nature of social welfare issues and that social work 'lacked an exclusive knowledge base and framework' (Syers, 2008, p.1). At a conference of social workers, he reflected on nursing as a profession. Considering their supporting relationship to the doctor's expertise he asks, 'Can an activity of this secondary nature be deemed a profession?' (Flexner, 1915, p.576).

Flexner's model recognises the value of higher academic qualifications. Social work and nursing are now graduate professions. While many nurses still work under the direction of doctors, their graduate level education allows a degree of autonomy suggested in Flexner's (1915) model. For the student-practitioners in this study, when qualified, they will be working in the PVI sector; they will be the lead practitioner and therefore have the level of autonomy, and exclusive knowledge base of child development and pedagogical theory. Conversely those working in the maintained sector, who work under the direction of qualified teachers, would not be considered professionals in Flexner's model.

Schön (1983) suggests that professional competence is gained through the application of knowledge in practical situations and reflection, a definition more resonant with education and care. Eraut (1994) is more succinct, offering three elements to professionalism: a specialist knowledge base, autonomy and service. Reflection is defined as a skill in the caring professions, for example nursing and social work and is an element in the EYE criteria (NCTL, 2013c), thus moving a graduate-level skill into a Level 3 role, arguably moving ECEC from technicist to professional practice.

Brock (2012) suggests that the definition of professionalism should come from the practitioners themselves. She offers a typology of professionalism comprising seven interrelated dimensions, see table 3.1 (2012, p.35). Rose and Rogers (2012) constructed a model to explain the role of the adult in ECEC settings. This too has seven elements, which they refer to as the 'seven selves of the plural practitioner', recognising the multiple, yet distinct roles of the adult. Table 3.1 shows how Brock's (2012) typography and Rose and Rogers's (2012) model of the plural practitioner have defined the role in different ways; neither offers a common framework or description of the role of the practitioner for newly qualified or student-practitioners to measure themselves against. Brock's (2012) model of professionalism identifies the components that contribute to a professional workforce whereas Rose and Rogers offer characteristics.

Brock's Typology (2012)		Rose & Rogers Seven Selves of the Plural Practitioner (2012)
•Knowledge •Education and training •Skills •Autonomy •Values •Ethics •Reward		•The critical reflector •The carer •The communicator •The facilitator •The observer •The assessor •The creator

Table 3.1 Typographies of Professionalism

Rose and Rogers' (2012) found that practitioners

> ... had to be a different person depending on what they were doing at any one time […] Some of them commented on how what they do links directly to who they are-to their sense of self (p.3).

The plural practitioner model was constructed by working practitioners undertaking a foundation degree; the 'seven selves' are based on the practitioners' practical experiences suggesting that these are the actual requirements to carry out the day-to-day professional role.

Brock (2012) drew on the experiences of twelve experienced practitioners to construct her typology. The respondents included nursery nurses, teachers in nursery and reception classes, Headteachers, nursery managers and lecturers from further and higher education. None of the practitioners in Brock's study worked in the PVI sector, all were qualified to a minimum of Level 3 and aged between twenty-four and fifty-five (It is of note that Brock referred to them collectively as Early Years Educators). Brock's typography resonates with both Eraut (1994) and Schön's (1983) models of professionalism. I question whether the views of twelve, disparate individuals are representative of the ECEC sector as a whole. Brock (2012) acknowledges the 'enormous' size of the workforce, however the model does not take account of the different levels of responsibility for practitioners in the PVI sector. In contrast to those working in the maintained sector, Level 3 practitioners often lead practice or manage settings. Brock's model is idealistic and at odds with policy. While qualifications and reward are desirable, they are not a requirement of EYFS (DfE, 2014a).

Brock (2012) foregrounds the knowledge requirements for professional practitioners, emphasising the importance of theory and child development, concurring with Nutbrown's (2012b) recommendations. Brock also asserts the need for practitioners to engage with and shape national policy (2012) a view echoed by Campbell-Barr and Georgeson (2014), Osgood

(2012) and Rose and Rogers (2012). I will return to the Government competence requirements of the practitioners in England later in this chapter.

3.3 The Professional Practitioner in Policy

I have discussed in Chapter 2 how the practitioner is constructed in policy changes, dependant on the social concerns, financial imperatives and political ideology of the Government of the day. In the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) and MGC (DfE, 2013a), professionalism is not exemplified however it is represented through statutory requirements, by the need to achieve targets and meet regulations (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010, Moss, 2010, Osgood, 2009). The Government expects the sector to define what it is to be professional (DfE, 2013a), however this assumes that the workforce has the infrastructure to do so. I suggest that this assumption is due to a lack of understanding of the varied nature of the ECEC workforce and the mixed economy of provision in which they work. My assumption is that policy makers are familiar with the compulsory education sector and its infrastructure and have expectations that the PVI sector is the same; it is not. Moss (2010) notes in his discussion on the need to raise the status and professionalism of the ECEC workforce , 'the world of early childhood rarely venturing into the world of 'older childhood', to challenge, contest or just dialogue [...] existing in self-imposed isolation' (p.9). This suggests that the ECEC workforce does not have the ability, or possibly the inclination, to engage in creating its professional identity, and therefore construct the role of the practitioner. The sector, as with professionalism, is also not clearly defined. I often question 'who is the sector' who leads, directs and regulates; this is not answered in the literature. For ECEC practioners to act as professionals and challenge policy they need to recognise their role and ability to effect change. This lack of a single leadership body allows policy makers to infer what is required without clear articulation.

ECEC training is a highly regulated sector in terms of what is taught, measured and valued, leaving little room for practitioners to be autonomous. The prescriptive nature of the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) suggests ECEC is not a profession but is technicist in nature, with ECEC workers acting as conduits for policy makers (Lee, 2014; Ball, 2008). Professionalisation becomes a disciplinary mechanism for the enactment of policy, valuing what can be measured and devaluing the caring role which is immeasurable and hard to document (Lofdahl and Folke-Fichtelius, 2015; Manning-Morton, 2006; Osgood, 2006) and therefore appears to be absent in descriptions of a professional ECEC practitioner in policy.

Policy focusses on a technical–rational model where regulations, targets and standards prescribe what it is to be professional and challenge the autonomous, critical notion of professionalism.

Examples include the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS), Early Years Educator (EYE) and Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS), where a set of standards and criteria are set out for practitioners to meet to be conferred with a status. In contrast to the implied definition of what it is to be a 'professional' in policy, there is an abundance of research that defines a professional ECEC practitioner. The majority of the research is focused on graduates and not the Level 3 student-practitioners who are the participants in this study.

3.4 The Professional Practitioner in Research

In discussing the state of education at a time of crisis, Moss ((2010) suggests that all educators, including ECEC educators, should be considered professional and need to be able to

> … construct knowledge from diverse sources, involving awareness of paradigmatic plurality, curiosity and border crossing, and acknowledging that knowledge is always partial, perspectival and provisional (p.15).

Moss's definition depicts a professional as more than a technician, following a formulaic process to achieve predetermined outcomes. He defines a professional as a critical thinker, adaptable, reflexive and innovative (2008). Moss assumes a well-educated workforce as a prerequisite for professionalism, agreeing with Urban (2008) who argues that professionalism 'embraces openness and uncertainty and encourages co-construction of professionals' knowledge and practices' (p.135).

This vision of professionalism is evident in research with undergraduates and graduates with EYP status. For example, Rose and Rogers' (2012) research with undergraduates on their Foundation Degree highlighted the complexity of the adult role in working with children, advocating socially-just and child-centred interactions predicated on practitioners' higher level knowledge and skills. They note the importance of observation and assessment; however, these are discussed in terms of child-centred practice not as performativity or competence.

A further dimension, and arguably one which challenges traditional definitions of professionalism, is the place of emotion in ECEC practice. In addition to the agreed knowledge requirements of child development and developmentally appropriate pedagogy, (Moyles, 2013) and developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1992), Osgood (2010) and Colley (2006) recognise the un-measurable qualities required of professional ECEC practitioners which include love, empathy, developing positive relationships with children and families (Page and Elfer, 2013; Manning-Morton, 2006). These attributes construct a weighty definition of a professional, graduate practitioner, not all recognised in the EYE or EYT standards (NCTL, 2013a; 2013c) (see appendix 2 and 3).

Here I note Moss's insight, reflecting on the title Early Years Professional (2008, p.121) he states, 'Other workers, by implication, will not be professional'. Other non-professionals are represented differently in research. In a small scale study, based on sixteen early years students, from two institutions, Alexander (2002) found that the students were not reflective and did not value the theoretical part of their programmes of study. Alexander's study indicated a lack of professionalism, in terms of the definitions of professionalism discussed previously and are aligned with a technicist model. Alexander goes on to assert that the Level 3 practitioner has the disposition for working with children such as patience, kindness, ability to work with others in a team and is practical (2002) . While these are desirable qualities, they are not included in the qualification criteria (NCTL, 2013c) and cannot be expected to be learned in training.

Alexander (2002) highlights students' lack of ability to reconcile what is learned in college and with what they see in placement and suggests that the knowledge may not be appropriate any more, 'located as it is in child development theory' This suggest she takes a post-constructivist position, which argues against the normative approach of child development. This ideology is contrary to the majority of research that suggests child development is the single most important knowledge ECEC workers need (Blades, Greene, and Wallace, 2014; Hadfield, et al., 2012; Nutbrown, 2012b). This is something I explored with the student-practitioners in this thesis as child development is a substantial part of their qualification.

In contrast, the students in Vincent and Braun's (2011) research with Level 3 student-practitioners offers a view of engaged, motivated students, looking for validation through the moral worth of working with children. They position the student-practitioners in terms of 'dispositions; tendencies to think, feel and behave in particular ways ... expected of 'people like us', they cite ECEC courses as redemptive, for students who had often 'operated at the margins of their school' (p.205). This view of ECEC students, and therefore the future workforce, as low academic achievers with little social and academic capital, is extoled in much of the research (McGillivray, 2010; Brownlee, Boulton-Lewis, and Berthelsen, 2008; Colley, 2006; Osgood, 2005; Simms, 2006) adding to the ontological assumption that ECEC work is not a profession.

Alexander (2002) also suggests that the learning at Level 3 is superficial, in spite of the students' proclaimed commitment to their work with children. She suggests that it is connected with the students' previous experiences of learning. I would like to suggest that the knowledge, skills and attributes required of ECEC practitioners cannot, and should not, be expected of students working towards Level 3. It seems to me that as the job role changes, more gets added to the Level 3 qualification, rather than recognising the need for different levels of practitioners,

as advocated by Nutbrown (2012a), which would allow for different levels of knowledge, practice and responsibility. Taking on board these notions of professionalism, the ECEC workforce are then positioned as technicians. However, as Oberhuemer (2005) notes, there is a blurring of the lines between education and training in the development of ECEC practitioners that fails to recognise, 'the wider reaching aims of professionalisism as identified by the research community' (p.7). Similarly, Urban (2008) acknowledges the limitations of criteria-based training such as NVQs:

> The technical connotations of training point to a particular concept of learning through instruction, repetitive practice, etc., it is about acquiring skills to deliver technologies.… Its connotations contradict the very essence of professional and educational practices as a transformative practice of mutual dependence of respect, Co-construction and shared meaning making between human beings (p.150).

NVQs were the main qualification for 'work-based training such as apprenticeships and for upskilling unqualified practitioners. Competency-based qualifications are the focus of Urban's comments and are often seen as a tick-box exercise lacking in academic rigour. The work-based competency route suggests that work experience can compensate for the theoretical knowledge element that is a feature of the full Level 3 National Diplomas, which are the focus of this study. The content and delivery of ECEC qualifications were addressed in the Nutbrown Review (2012a, 2012b). The recommendation included a return to content and format of the NNEB, however competency-based qualifications are still available for employed practitioners training in-service such as apprentices or unqualified practitioners.

3.5 The Value of Being Qualified

The Level of Qualification

At the heart of this thesis is the argument for all practitioners working with children in ECEC to be qualified because research shows that the outcomes for children are better where there are well-qualified practitioners supporting their learning and development (Sylva, et al., 2010; 2004). However the level of qualification is open to debate. Whether there should be a graduate level profession, as with teaching and nursing or whether there is a graduate-led profession supported by suitably qualified assistants. The literature shows an inexorable correlation between the quality of provision and qualified staff. The longitudinal studies, 'Effective Provision of Pre-school Education' (EPPE) (Sylva, et al., 2004) and 'Effective Provision of Pre-school and Secondary Education' (Taggart, et al., 2015) both found that graduate-led practice was a significant indicator of quality. In addition long-term outcomes for children were

improved, with children who attended high quality early years provision achieving better than their peers at GCSE, concurring with the OECD report (2014) .

International research concurs, finding a correlation between the quality of services and the qualification Level of ECEC staff (Bertram and Pascal, 2013; Early, et al., 2007; Fukkink and Lont, 2007; Sylva, et al., 2004). It can be concluded that staff qualifications matter, the consensus being that a bachelor's degree is the ideal level for the core professional in a setting. Yet the literature is unclear as to whether the argument is for a fully graduate profession or a graduate-led profession.

The complex nature of provision makes a comparison challenging, however, the Competence Requirements for Early Childhood Education and Care (CoRe) (European Commission Directorate, 2011) study suggests the importance of pre-service training with a need for continuing professional development is the way to improve quality. The study's aims were to identify the many concepts of competence and professionalism for ECEC practice and to identify ways of developing a competent professional ECEC workforce. A key focus is the level of the qualifications of ECEC staff.

Although the literature, and policy, identifies the benefits of a bachelor degree for ECEC practitioners, a degree is not the most prevalent level of qualification for ECEC practitioners globally. The Level of qualification requirements varies across the EU countries. The Comparison of International Childcare Systems Report (Pascal, et al., 2013) found that practitioners in the geographical European countries were more highly qualified than non-European countries, with higher performing countries in Europe having high levels of qualified staff; Finland having the highest level of qualifications and training. England scored well in this study. However, I suggest that the data is not reflective of the qualification levels in the PVI sector, as it includes provision in the maintained sector, where graduates lead practice and funding in the maintained sector is higher, which contributes to the improved outcomes (Gamabro, Stewart, and Waldfogel, 2013; Urban and Vandenbroeck, 2011). In England it is acceptable to work without a qualification, with practice in the PVI sector, being led by Level 3 qualified practitioners (DfE, 2014a). In Ireland, practitioners working in private provision do not need to be qualified (Urban and Vandenbroeck, 2011). There is an intention to develop a fully qualified Level 5 workforce by the end of 2016 (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2016). This is equivalent to Level 3 on the English qualification framework (European Commision, 2016). Ireland's workforce is already 90% qualifed to this level, the Government have committed funding to reach their target.

This move by the Irish Government to regulate for a fully qualified workforce follows Australian and New Zealand Governments' policy direction for a fully qualified workforce (Campbell-Barr and Georgeson, 2015). The Australian Early Childhood Reform Agenda, required all practitioners working in early childhood programmes to hold a qualification (Department of Education and Workplace Relations (DEWR), 2009) and in contrast to the regulations in England, all ECEC educators must hold or be working towards a qualification. While this does mean some practitioners are working, unqualified, however, in England, there is no requirement to be in training.

The Australian ECEC system has three types of qualification; a one-year certificate, which is held by the majority of practitioners, which is equivalent to to the CACHE or BTEC Level 2 Certificate; a Diploma in Childcare and Education, which is a two-year vocational qualification aligned with the National Diplomas being undertaken by the student-practitioners in this study, and an Early Childhood Teaching qualification, which is a three or four-year university degree. Australia has a mixed economy provision, similar to England, however the qualification requirements are common to all types of provision, with long day-care centres and preschools required to employ teachers with specialist early years teacher qualifications (Campbell-Barr and Georgeson, 2015) therefore the Level 3 practitioners are working under the direction of qualified teachers.The Australian model offers some clarity regarding qualifications and expectations.

Similarly New Zealand ECEC centres, which include kindergartens and education and care services, are teacher led and 50% of the supervising adults must be qualified and registered as ECEC teachers. The New Zealand Government offers a funding incentive to centres that employ at least 80% of staff who are qualified early years teachers, recognising the value and impact of qualified staff on quality provision.

As I discussed in chapter 2, there is a mixed picture of regulation with regard to qualified staff and their level of qualification. It appears that the international direction of travel in the OECD (2014) countries is in favour of a graduate-led workforce with all other staff fully qualified with ECEC specialised qualifications (Campbell-Barr and Georgeson, 2015b; Urban and Vandenbroeck, 2011). The literature suggests a number of benefits when children are in the care of qualified staff, including improved outcomes for children, particularly those who are considered disadvantaged. There is a cost benefit in investing in quality ECEC provision. Long term economic benefits include reduced crime and 'reduced need for rehabilitation and treatment' (Pascal, et al., 2013, p.32; Field, 2010); and staff qualifications are a key indicator of quality.

Similarly, an American study indicated a higher-level study in child development or childhood studies as most effective in improving outcomes. The study of students on an Associate Degree program (equivalent to a Foundation Degree) found that there was a correlation between quality outcomes and qualification levels of staff noting where graduate staff were employed, children were more likely to 'play in a more complex way with objects and their peers' (Howes, 1997, p.421). Although a small-scale study, it adds weight to the growing body of evidence. Similarly Pascal, et al., (2013) found that,

> ... qualified staff provide children with more curriculum-related activities (especially in language and mathematics) and encourage children to engage in challenging play. Less qualified staff have also been shown to be better at supporting learning when they work with qualified teachers (p.31).

There is ambiguous use of the term 'qualified staff'' which here is unclear, though assumed, that this refers to graduates. It seems that the 'less qualified staff' may refer to practitioners like the student-practitioners in this study, with some level of qualification. The report concurs with the findings of the EPPE research (Sylva, et al., 2010; 2004), indicating that outcomes for children are better when graduates lead practice, with qualified support staff. While the focus of this study is not to decide on the level of qualification, this report offers convincing evidence of the benefit of all staff being qualified.

The literature suggests that the benefit of a qualified workforce meets the Government's stated aims of overcoming social and economic disadvantage, as well as preparing children for school. The CoRE report, (Urban and Vandenbroeck, 2011) suggests that early years practitioners need particular knowledge and skills to deliver this level of quality; these will be discussed in the next section.

3.6 Competence Requirements

The aim of this thesis is to show that the knowledge, skills and attributes gained through the students' Level 3 National Diploma qualification prepares them well for employment, making the case for pre-service qualification. I have already argued that qualified staff improve outcomes for children and society. The content of the qualifications is an indicator of the professional competencies required to be a practitioner (Urban and Vandenbroeck, 2011). In England, the content for the EYE and EYT are set by NCTL (2013c; 2013a). Government is setting standards, rather than a professional ECEC body, thus content is 'ideological, political, and permeated with values' (Schwandt, 2000, p.198). The standards reflect the current and previous Coalition Governments' standards for ECEC practice, thus a measure for the student-practitioners' progress in this study.

The EYE is the only required qualification required by the EYFS (DfE, 2014) therefore the criteria must be the minimum expectations. By introducing the EYT standards, this suggests that there is more required of ECEC practitioners than the Level 3 EYE. There are six EYE overarching criteria and eight EYTS standards (Table 3.2). In analysing the standards in both qualifications, there is little difference.

The main principles are almost identical, with the EYTS having a greater emphasis in the language used for accountability and assessment. The EYTS standards have two additional requirements:

> 2.1 Be accountable for children's progress, attainment and outcomes (NCTL, 2013a, p.2)

> 8.4 Model and implement effective education and care, and support and lead other practitioners including EYEs (NCTL, 2013a, p.5).

Early Years Teacher Standards (Standards are numbered 1 -8 – see Appendix 3)	Mapped Early Years Educator Criteria (Criteria are numbered 1 -6 numbers refer to the relevant criteria as per the EYE document – see Appendix 2)
1. Set high expectations, which inspire, motivate and challenge all children.	2. Plan and provide effective care, teaching and learning that enables children to progress and prepares them for school
2. Promote good progress and outcomes by children.	1. Support and promote children's early education and development
3. Demonstrate good knowledge of early learning and EYFS.	2. Plan and provide effective care, teaching and learning that enables children to progress and prepares them for school
4. Plan education and care taking account of the needs of all children.	2. Plan and provide effective care, teaching and learning that enables children to progress and prepares them for school
5. Adapt education and care to respond to the strengths and needs of all children.	2. Plan and provide effective care, teaching and learning that enables children to progress and prepares them for school
6. Make accurate and productive use of assessment.	3. Make accurate and productive use of assessment
7. Safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and provide a safe learning environment.	5. Safeguard and promote the health, safety and welfare of children
8. Fulfil wider professional responsibilities.	4. Develop effective and informed practice 6. Work in partnership with the key person, colleagues, parents and/or carers or other professionals

Table 3.2 A Comparison of Early Years Teacher Standards and Early Years Educator criteria

The EYE criteria (4.1) requires EYEs to 'demonstrate a good command of the English language in spoken and written form' (NCTL, 2013c, p.7)

I assume there is an expectation that graduates can meet this criterion. These standards set out the current Conservative Government's (2015 -) competence requirements for practitioners, although EYTs are expected to lead EYEs and to be accountable for children's outcomes. As PVI settings are not required to have EYTs, this role for managing other practitioners must fall to the Level 3 practitioner in charge. In both descriptors, the need for practitioners to be able to demonstrate their knowledge of child development is evident and to provide developmentally appropriate practice

It is widely acknowledged that underpinning knowledge of child development is essential for all ECEC practitioners (Campbell-Barr and Georgeson, 2015b; Brock, 2012; Nutbrown, 2012b; Urban and Vandenbroeck, 2011). Understanding child development allows practitioners to provide developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1992) based on observation and assessment. Being able to put this knowledge into practice through work placements, allows the development of the student-practitioners' skills and practice, with the support of experienced practitioners before being in a position of responsibility. The combination of work based practice alongside theory and knowledge development is identified as good practice in developing professional practitioners (Campbell-Barr, Georgeson, and Varga, 2015; Nutbrown, 2012b; Urban and Vandenbroeck, 2011) and is a pillar of the qualifications the student-practitioners in this study are undertaking.

The CoRe (2011) data include graduate and non-graduates, and the study notes the differences between requirements in many countries between primary and pre-primary schools, as it is in England. In England, the Level 3 practitioner has to deliver the same curriculum guidance and assessments as maintained schools, suggesting the expectations must be the same. The competencies in the CoRe research reflect the criteria in the EYT and EYE standards, with the addition of awareness of social and political issues and children's rights, a view echoed by Campbell-Barr and Georgeson (2015) and Brock (2012). In Campbell-Barr and Georgeson's (2012) comparison study between English and Hungarian practitioners, the English practitioners (graduates) rated more highly the need to be politically aware, particularly in terms of understanding how policy shapes practice in contrast to the Hungarian practitioners who had a more autonomous role. Political awareness is one of many aspects not included in the regulatory exposition of the role. Others include attitudinal competences discussed previously, such as caring, loving, affection and emotional competence (Page and Elfer, 2013; Osgood, 2012; Colley, 2006); personal attributes such as patience, humour and determination are offered as ideal qualities for ECEC practitioners (Campbell-Barr, Georgeson, and Varga, 2015). These unmeasurable and potentially unteachable qualities add to the complex and multifaceted role of the ECEC practitioner represented in policy and literature.

3.7 Conclusion

In reviewing the literature, I conclude that there is a propensity to see professional practitioners as graduates; the literature highlights the difference between graduates and Level 3 practitioners. Graduates are more aligned with Brock's (2012) model of professionalism particularly in terms of knowledge, education and training and engaging with policy whereas the participants in Alexander's (2002) and Vincent and Braun's (2011) research are positioned as technicist, meeting the set of criteria without necessarily engaging with theory or policy and unable to reflect on their practice. This suggests that the content and level of qualification is an essential element of delivering quality ECEC provision. A qualification is recognised in the literature as an essential element of being a professional. There is much debate about the level of qualification required for early years practitioners in England, however the EYFS only requires a maximum of Level 3 (DfE, 2014a) and this is the focus of this study. Throughout this section, I have established that the rhetoric for a qualified, professional workforce is consistent both in policy and in research, without a common definition of what can be expected of an ECEC practitioner. The next chapter sets out the methods and methodology of the study and how I generated data to add the Level 3 student-practitioner' voice to the debate on the place of qualifications in developing ECEC practitioners.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain and justify the decisions made in the design of the study in order to answer the research question: *What are the benefits of pre-service qualification to the development early years practitioners' practice*? The study involved one hundred and fifty-eight student-practitioners from seven colleges in two online surveys; seven participants in a focus group and three interviews with participants who had progressed in to employment following their course.

In undertaking this study, I am seeking to contribute a coherent understanding of the experiences, knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions gained by Level 3 practitioners in preparation for employment. Once qualified, these participants will meet the regulatory requirements for all practitioners working with children. They will count in adult child ratios and be able to lead practice. As this is the only mandatory requirement in the EYFS (2014a) and continues to be the focus of Government attention (Gyimah, 2016; DfE and HMT, 2014), I therefore acknowledge the political intentions of the research (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012; Pring, 2000).

As discussed in chapter 1, I embody multiple roles which position me both as an insider and outsider in this research (Merriam et al 2001). I hold the position that children deserve to have educators who understand how they think, grown, learn and develop (David, 2004). I believe these qualities are gained through engaging with robust ECEC qualifications. In chapter one, I discussed how my own experience in gaining a qualifications as a Nursery Nurse made me realise that the combination of theory and practice prepared me for my role as a practitioner. I discussed how, as a manager of the ECEC department in a Further education College, I was fully aware of the content of the qualification and the experiences offered to the students on their course. This personal experience and the closeness with participants in my home institution meant that I had insider knowledge. Clough and Nutbrown (2012) and Merriam et al (2001) and suggest an insider's perspective enables the participant views to be revealed. There were times when participants from my own institution considered me to be an insider. For example in the focus group discussion, it became evident that we shared ideals about the value of gaining a qualification in order to prepare students for employment. It could be argued that this was because these participants have experienced the ethos established in the department. This was one of the reasons for included participants from the wider FE sector. My positionality has therefore influenced the research question and the methodological choices made.

I will begin this chapter by explaining how I came to the research questions, and the chosen methods, including a reflection their strengths and weaknesses. This section will also outline the ethical concerns and how these were addressed.

4.2   Developing the Research Question

This study addresses a key issue affecting ECEC student-practitioners and staff in seven Further Education colleges and whether the quality of their vocational qualification prepares them for employment. The Wolf Report (2011) reviewed vocational and technical qualifications in England, acknowledging that some vocational qualifications do not prepare young people for the labour market. The Review recommended that post-sixteen education should include work experience as part of their course to develop students' employability skills. As early years students have always had significant work experience as part of their course, this seemed an appropriate focus for my thesis. This sat well my engagement with the Nutbrown Review (2012a) as an expert panel member and I wanted to build on this exceptional experience. The Nutbrown Review addressed the wider issue of workforce qualifications; in the executive summary of the Final Report, Nutbrown (2012b) stated:

> Some current qualifications lack rigour and depth, and quality is not consistent. I was concerned to find a considerable climate of mistrust in current early years qualifications, and anxiety, which I share on my reading of the evidence, that standards have in some respects declined in recent years (p.5).

This focus on the quality of qualifications interested me as this related well to my role as manager of the early years department. Throughout the review, and in agreement with the Nutbrown's recommendations, I have been an advocate for a minimum Level 3 qualified workforce. Recommendation 5 (Appendix 1) called for the EYFS to be revised so that only qualified staff holding Level 3 qualifications should be counted in adult to child staff ratio and that qualifications should be revised to ensure future practitioners have the relevant knowledge and skills to support children's learning and development. Nutbrown's (2012b) recommendations regarding the required practitioner knowledge was translated in to the EYE Standards (NCTL, 2013c) and new qualifications were put in place for delivery in September 2014; the recommendation that only Level 3 qualified practitioners should count in the adult to child staffing ratio was not actioned (DfE, 2013).

An unexpected announcement from the DfE in March 2014 confirmed that the Government would not move towards a minimum Level 3 qualification for all early years practitioners counted in staff to child ratios. This led me to question, why not? I believe in the value of pre-service knowledge and experience to ensure that people who care for children understand and

can meet their needs. And as the literature review has shown, qualified practitioners make a difference to children's learning and development. As previously discussed, there is a dearth of literature about the experiences of Level 3 students and their qualifications, yet more than thirty thousand students each year enrol on to Level 3 early years courses, with an average of eighteen thousand enrolling in September on full time Level 3 courses (Ofqual, 2014). I was keen to explore the student-practitioners' motivations for qualifying before gaining employment, to know what they believe to be the role of the practitioner, how well they fit that role and how their qualification has supported that development.

4.3   Recruiting Participants

In this study, access to suitable participants was a consideration (Denscombe, 2007). Participants needed to be studying a full-time Level 3 ECEC National Diploma course, and initially, not in employment. I had considered only drawing on the student-practitioners in my own department, however when reflecting on my role as Head of School, the influence of my values could be very evident in the participants' responses (Palys, 2008). I decided to broaden the survey beyond my own institution to include student-practitioners from other FE colleges. The participants were all on full time college-based, ECEC courses in six FE colleges and one Sixth Form College. One option was to follow a small group of student-practitioners from their first day through to employment; however time to carry out data collection was limited due to the need to complete my research within the two year time frame. I considered including just second year students, but this would have meant missing an important part of the student-practitioner's journey, during which they develop their own construct of being an early years practitioner, not influenced by their learning and more likely to be influenced by hegemonic notions of what it is to be an early years practitioner.

Therefore I included year 1 and 2 student-practitioners in the survey, recognising that I would not be able to compare the responses directly but acknowledging the value of the collective responses of an homogenous group (Blair, Czaja, and Blair, 2014). I then revisited the original respondents in 2015 via email, to review their progress on their journey; twenty responded.

All but two participants were female, which is reflective of the percentage of men working in the ECEC sector (Nutbrown, 2012a). The participants were all aged between sixteen and twenty-one. Initially it was anticipated that the participants would be less than nineteen years of age, however it emerged that where students have progressed from Level 1 and 2 courses and were now studying at Level 3, therefore over nineteen, it was appropriate to include them as participants.

Participants from the initial survey volunteered for each of the follow up surveys, focus group and interviews. The employers' perspective adds a third dimension to the study and enables data to be analysed through a different lens (Brookfield, 1998). As the enactors of policy their views on what they require from an early years practitioner in their settings was essential to develop a coherent picture of whether policy and practice are congruent. The employers interviewed were people I have met through my professional networks and were approached by email to request their participation rather than face-to-face which could have added pressure to participate. The ECEC sector is so diverse it would be impossible in this small-scale study to represent all areas of the sector, however the participants represent the main providers in the sector: a headteacher in a maintained children's centre and a manager in a private day-care setting.

4.4   Locating a Paradigm

Locating my study within a research paradigm has concerned me from the beginning. The term itself is open to interpretation, contesting definitions include a 'basic set of beliefs that guides action' or the more complex 'net that contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological and methodological premises' (Guba, 1990, p.17). As Wellington (2000) cautions, to hold a binary view of an approach is a 'dangerous tendency' (p.199). I have heeded this advice and have used what I call a *paradigmatic brew*, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, suggesting that I am a 'methodological pragmatist' (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973) or a bricoleur, selecting an approach that 'is practical and gets the job done' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.3) borrowing from many different disciplines. I have used several approaches in order to explore the complex and messy nature of ECEC policy's impact on the workforce and their qualifications (Wood and Bennet, 2000) and to foreground the student-practitioners' voices (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Wellington, 2000) within that space and to obtain the maximum meaning from the data.

This multi-method study draws mainly on qualitative data to show the student-practitioners' developing understanding of their role as they progress through their qualification and in to employment. Quantitative data from the survey facilitated statistical analysis to identify common themes as the student-practitioners progressed through their qualification. By following this up with the qualitative data from the focus group and interviews, the gap in knowledge and skills between being a student and a practitioner was identified. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data I was able to establish a framework for analysing the three dimensions of the developing practitioner. The research design therefore employs a mixed methods approach (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, 2011).

Whilst a binary definition might seem to sit neatly with my research, it became clear that I was taking a political stance in this study (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012) as I am seeking to challenge the current policy by making a case for a qualified children's workforce, at a time when the Government had dismissed this position (DfE, 2013). The notion of a single paradigm in research is contested by Clough and Nutbrown (2012) who argue that these fixed descriptions of paradigmatic approaches are 'gross characterisations' (2012, p.19) they suggest that 'we come eventually to locate in continually related - rather than opposed - ways of constructing the world' (ibid.). It is this continually evolving approach that I described as a *paradigmatic brew*. I will next explain how the study sits within each of these approaches.

The Study is Political

The political climate in 2016 was one in which ECEC was seen as the panacea to inequality and poverty. The Conservative Government of the day were funding early education for two-year olds to reduce the gap in attainment for the most disadvantaged children (DfE, 2015d). While early education is seen as a solution, there remained no will to legislate for a qualified children's workforce. Regulations in the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) continued to allow unqualified staff to count in the adult to child staffing ratio. In chapter 3, I demonstrated the positive impact on outcomes for children where qualified practitioners were employed (Mathers and Smee, 2014; Gamabro, Stewart, and Waldfogel, 2013; DfE, 2013e; Sylva, et al., 2004). As James (1993) notes, Government often ignore evidence if it is inconsistent with their political agenda. The Government instead chose to keep the existing regulations for a minimum of one Level 3 practitioner with fifty percent of staff being qualified to Level 2 and the remainder unqualified (DfE, 2014a). It is this policy context that locates this study in a political paradigm. As Clough and Nutbrown (2012) argue,

> ... all social research takes place in policy contexts of one form or another, research itself must therefore be seen as inevitably political (p.14)

The purpose of this study was to provide evidence of the contribution and value of the Level 3 practitioners, demonstrating their knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions gained during their course of study. The study provides clear evidence of the benefit of pre-employment training and qualification which in turn improves outcomes the children.

The Study is Interpretivist

I have discussed previously my positionality, recognising how my multiple roles impact the focus of the study. While the data are reported in the student-practitioners' own words, how I have chosen to use it is influenced by my values and beliefs in terms of how the student-

practitioners' experiences are connected to policy and practice thus recognising the inter-subjectivity of the findings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The subject of the research, the data collection methods and the framework for analysing the data (discussed in chapter 5) are my choices, the findings are my interpretation of what the data revealed (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, 2011). It was important a to consider the ethics of my choices and how they might impact negatively on the participants (this is discussed in 4.6, p.67). This need to account for multiple persectives locates the study firmly in an interpretivist paradigm. By adopting a paradigmatic brew, this study constructed a theory to explain the experiences gained by Level 3 early years student-practitioners as they progressed through their course: *The Three Dimensions of the Developing Practitioner*, this is discussed in chapter 5.

I have discussed my approach to this study as being a *paradigmatic brew*, which in turn led me to use a variety of methods for collecting data. I will justify my choice of methods in the next section.

4.5 Methods

The methods chosen sit within the interpretivist paradigm. I am in agreement with Greene, who describes herself as a 'practical methodologist' (Greene, 2013), recognising that all methodologies and methods have something to contribute to the research process. In this study the data are both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative data provides a profile of the student-practitioners, which is something that Nutbrown (2012b) recognised as lacking; there is no accurate profile of the workforce in terms of age, gender and qualifications. I am not suggesting that this small-scale study is addressing that gap; however it does present an overview of the student-practitioners attracted to ECEC courses and gives some indication of the future workforce profile. The majority of the data is qualitative, collected through three surveys that included open response questions, one focus group and five interviews. The mixed methods approach allowed for triangulation of the data (Greene, 2013), albeit from different perspectives and sources, which according to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) can provide broad yet focused perspective. They suggest:

> Pragmatic researchers also are more able to combine empirical precision with descriptive precision […] Also, armed with a bi-focal lens (i.e. both quantitative and qualitative data), rather than with a single lens, pragmatic researchers are able to *zoom in* to microscopic detail or to *zoom out* to indefinite scope. As such, pragmatic researchers have the opportunity to combine the macro and micro levels of a research issue (p.383).

This description resonated with my research. Similarly, Morse and Niehaushas (2009) defined mixed methods as

> ... scientifically rigorous research project, driven by the inductive deductive theoretical drive and comprised of a qualitative or quantitative core component with a qualitative or quantitative supplementary component (p.14).

To answer the research questions the core component of the study had to be the student-practitioners' qualitative views of ECEC practice as well as their broader overview of the impact of their qualification on their perspectives and practice. Supplementary quantitative data were used to generate a student-practitioner profile and indicate where there is significant agreement or disagreement with a particular element. For example in the first survey 100% of respondents mentioned safeguarding or keeping children safe as being one of the roles of an early years practitioner.

I adopted a mixed methods approach, collecting data in three phases of the student-practitioners' journey. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used for data collection (figure 4.1).

The Surveys

The first stage of data collection was via a survey. An email invitation to participate was distributed via the Association of Colleges (2014) newsletter. Six colleges contacted me following the invitation. Including my own institution, seven colleges placed the link to the survey on their Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) platforms, with an invitation to students on Level 3 National Diploma courses to participate in the survey. This broader, homogenous sample allowed me to recruit participants who were not known to me, therefore not influenced by my own values and beliefs and gain a broader profile from range of student-practitioners.

Survey 1	Survey 2	Focus Group:	Interviews	Survey 3
Initial Survey: 158 participants	Follow-up Survey: 21 participants	7 participants	3 Newly Qualified practititioners	Progression Survey: 11 participants
		4 going to employment and 2 to Higer Education	2 Employers	
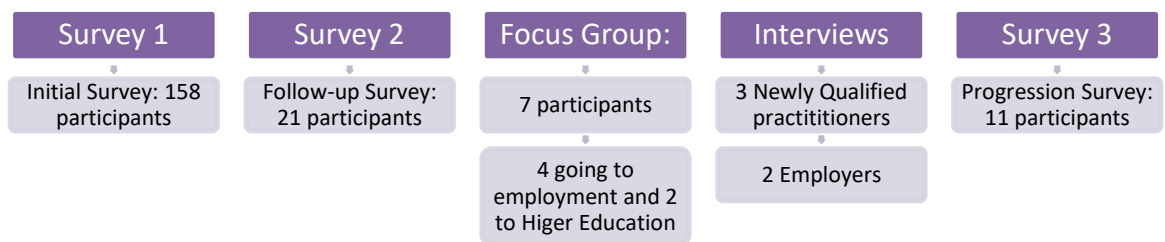
Figure 4.1 Order of data collection

The aim of the Initial Survey (Appendix 7a) was to establish the student-practitioners' profile and their perceptions of the qualities, skills and function of an early years practitioner. I piloted the questions with six student-practitioners and three colleagues who have experience in using questionnaires. They noted that it was possible to skip some questions; I amended this for the demographic data, however left choices open for the remaining questions, allowing participants the choice to opt out. I took this decision because being required to answer all questions before proceeding may have encouraged participants to exit the survey. By allowing participants to

skip questions that they may choose not to answer, or may not know the answer to, reduced the overall nonresponse rate (Blair, Czaja, and Blair, 2014).

Denscombe (2007) points out that a survey is useful to identify willing respondents who could volunteer to become participants in other aspects of the study. One hundred and fifty eight student-practitioners, from seven colleges responded to the initial survey. Sixty-nine respondents indicated that they were willing to participate in further research.

The Follow-up Survey, (Appendix 7b) ascertained the impact of the participants' learning journey on their developing understanding of the role of an ECEC practitioner and identified any change in the student-practitioners' perceptions regarding their understanding of the role, the skills and qualities required to be an early years practitioner. This survey also asked participants about their confidence in various aspects of ECEC practice and their intended destination on completion of their course. The survey link was emailed directly to respondents who had agreed to participate further. This survey repeated questions from the initial survey to establish a shift in respondents' thinking, after a year of studying. Of the Sixty-nine invitations to complete the survey, twenty-one completed questionnaires were returned. From this survey three respondents agreed to participate in interviews (Denscombe, 2007) as they had secured employment in ECEC settings.

The Progression Survey (Appendix 7c) was completed a year later and explored how the student-practitioners were progressing in their career or further study. The results from Surveys 1 and 2 had provided a clear idea of their views about being an early years practitioner. This survey addressed if and how student-practitioner views had changed over period of time, and their views on the usefulness of their course in preparing them for employment. The number of participants at this later stage of data collection was low (n=11).

The 158 respondents were grouped into cohorts at the start, middle and end of their course (figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 Number of survey participants at each stage of the course

While the attrition rate between surveys was disappointing there was a spread of responses across the three points in the course. This drop out was expected. The attrition rate in longitudinal studies is acknowledged as people move on, change contact details or lose interest in the research (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011). In some research this could be seen as

problematic, for example in healthcare where patients leaving the study could affect the effectiveness of a treatment (Thomson and Holland, 2003). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) suggest that participants cannot be considered representative of the original sample, however I contend the data collected in survey 2 and 3 built on the original survey responses and added to the understanding of the student-practitioners' experiences as they prepared for employment.

A web-based survey tool was used for each survey, which allowed for data collection from a number of geographical areas. It also meant that it was straightforward for college staff to share via their VLE. The online tool also offered elements of statistical analysis and enabled me to filter responses from participants in different locations and at different points in their course. This data mining approach facilitated the separation of responses from participants who intended to work in ECEC and those with other career trajectories (Blair, Czaja, and Blair, 2014).

A comparable approach of revisiting the initial participants was used by Madill and Latchford (2005) in their study of the developing identity of medical students. The approach elicited the students' constructs of their professional identity, identifying themes of dedication, competence and responsibility. In a similar study, Lown, Davies, Cordingley, Bundy and Braidman (2009) investigated medical students' perceptions of professional and personal development using a predetermined set of standards that measured the similarity between the ideal medical student and their own self-perception, revisiting the student-practitioners during their programme and at the end of their studies. In contrast to this, I did not offer predetermined criteria as I wanted the student-practitioners' own concepts to be the focus as they embody their professional selves.

There were limitations to questionnaires. There was no opportunity to clarify meaning with respondents or to check that they understand the questions and some questions were missed (Blair, Czaja, and Blair, 2014). To add rich, dialogic, qualitative, data (Krueger and Casey, 2015) a focus group was organised to develop my understanding of some of the responses to the questionnaire and to add a more focussed exploration of the student-practitioners' journey through their qualification.

Focus Group

The aim of the focus group was to explore in more depth, if and how the student-practitioners' thinking about the role of the early years practitioner had changed since they started their qualification and to reflect on the learning that took place during the year and since the initial survey. Kreuger and Casey (2015) suggest a focus group is an effective method for gathering

qualitative data from an homogenous group through focussed discussion. As the participants were predominantly older teenagers and inexperienced in reflective practice, I used a creative approach to collecting data in the focus group. I was inspired by Nutbrown's paper, 'A box of childhood: small stories at the roots of a career' (2011) in which she reflected on her childhood and assembled nine objects that represented events which may have shaped her career as a teacher and as an academic. While the objects themselves are proxies for the stories, the stories provide the insight in to the values and beliefs she has brought in to her work. Using creative methods enabled student-practitioners to tell their own stories, prompted by the use of identity boxes and symbolic objects, which produced a collection of auto-ethnographic narratives (Chase, 2011) through which to explore their experiences of professional formation.

Seven student-practitioners responded. I explained the process and purpose of the group, reminding the group of the survey and outlining this next phase of the study (Krueger and Casey, 2015). I obtained their consent to take photographs and to record the session. I made available a selection of boxes in different sizes and a wide selection of craft materials, familiar to any early years student. We agreed a time limit for the construction of their boxes, and I observed the process. As they began, the student-practitioners gathered a selection of resources. After about eight to ten minutes, they returned items to the craft trolley and began looking carefully for specific items. I thought of Nutbrown's (2011) process of selecting the objects for her 'box of childhood', which she selected then rejected, prioritising the stories she wished to tell. The room became quiet while they worked. Once everyone was ready, the student-practitioners shared their stories.

And my first started at school when we got to go down and teach all the other primary school children. Then I went to college and 'done' my Level 2 and when I come up to Level 3, they gave me a chance, had faith in me. And then I struggled with it and I had more support and I went from little knowledge to having loads of knowledge and now I am going to work and that's it.
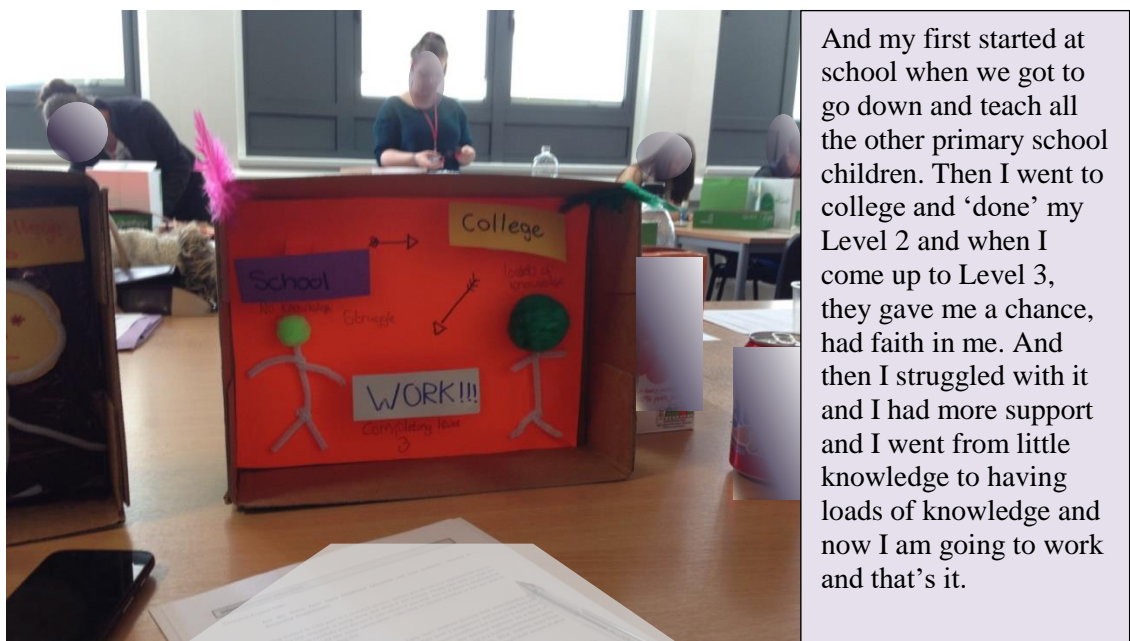
Figure 4.3 Grace's identity box

I had previously used this method with Foundation Degree (FD) students as part of their research methods module (Kendall and Perkins, 2014). It had proved to be successful in eliciting detailed narratives of the students' journey to being and becoming an academic, and at the same time developing the students' 'understanding of qualitative research in a way that is practical, accessible, creative and innovative' (ibid., p.4) .

Use of this approach with the student-practitioners on the cusp of their next step in to employment or HE, allowed for the dual identity of student and practitioner and facilitated reflexive opportunities to connect their motivation for joining the early years course, their experiences while on the course and how well they feel prepared for the next step. Creating the identity boxes before telling their story gave student-practitioners the opportunity to reflect on the key events or critical incidents and to reconfigure and reorder them in to the story they wanted to tell (Pink, 2007). In her exploration of creativity in qualitative inquiry, Clarke-Keefe (2009) suggests

> … that pictorial models, colors as well as moans, laughter, movements and the like can be critical companions to linguistic expression and productive sites for examining subjective experience […] Often, I can see it before I can say it. I can sense it before I can make sense of it linguistically (p. 17)

Lee, one of the student-practitioners commented on how the process had reminded her of events and feelings forgotten, echoing Clark-Keefe's assertion. It was interesting that she had recalled feelings about the role I had played in her progress from her starting point on a Level 1 course and how she was now 'successful' at Level 3. The process of storytelling, following the creative activity had, as Schön (1988) suggests enabled Lee to recognise her transformation.

In the case of this thesis, the student-practitioners are transitioning into practitioners. By creating the identity box beforehand, they were better able to recall and retell the significant factors in their transition to date; enabling them to articulate and make sense of experiences. In using this approach the participants maintained control over what they chose to share and what they chose to keep private (Waller and Bitou, 2011). This approach provided a medium for understanding parts of the student-practitioners' lives and experiences but cannot be seen as an 'absolute representation of a given state' (Cook and Hess, 2007, p. 43).

In sharing their stories, the student-practitioners appeared quite open about their journey and experiences. As I was familiar with the group, I was aware, and fully respectful of, the student-practitioners choosing to edit their responses (Clark-Keefe, 2009; Pink, 2007). I believe the use of the identity boxes gave them thinking time to consider what to share with me and the group. When I look at my research journal notes, I am reminded of feeling 'disappointed' as the

student-practitioners had not responded in the same way that the FD students had, with rich description of their academic journey; the stories were short and they lacked reflexivity. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2011) discuss the potential of focus groups to produce weak evidence. I wondered whether this is a failing on my part, deciding not to probe more deeply or, is reflective practice a skill that develops over time and the differential between Level 3 and FD expectations. Does reflexivity come with maturity? These issues are explored in depth in chapter 5.

The student-practitioners were intrigued by hearing everyone's story and a further, spontaneous discussion ensued on the impact of their qualification on their practice (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2011). The familiarity of the group members, with each other and with me, meant the discussion flowed, creating the rich data I had hoped for. As the researcher, I was able to inhabit 'an evidentiary middle space, gathering empirical material while engaging in dialogues that help avoid premature considerations of their understandings and explanations' (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2011, p. 548). For example, the discussion turned to some of the less professional settings they had been in on placement. They reflected on unprofessional behaviours such as unpleasant gossip or using their mobile phones, which the student-practitioners suggested questioned the quality of the management in the settings not dealing with issues. They also considered the importance of the relationship between the college and their placements, and how that relationship creates a cohesive experience for the student-practitioners.

The next stage of the study was the semi-structured interviews with student-practitioners who had progressed in to employment in ECEC settings.

Semi-structured Interviews with Newly Qualified Practitioners in Employment

The purpose of the interviews was to explore the relationship between qualifications, policy and practice. Having collected data from the survey I used the interviews to enable participants to describe in more detail, their experience of working in ECEC. As previously stated I wanted to give voice to the young, newly qualified practitioners, to enable them to articulate the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions they have acquired through their training and in their subsequent employment, therefore a face-to-face interview seemed the most appropriate method.

I decided to use Semi-structured interviews as they are 'useful when the researcher is aware of what she does not know and is therefore in a position to frame the questions that will supply that knowledge' (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011, p.270). Unstructured interviews are, 'useful

when the researcher is not aware of what she does not know and therefore relies on respondents to tell her!' (ibid.). What I did not know was how the new practitioners are applying the knowledge required from their qualification and whether they are consciously doing so. What I had some idea of, is what they think the role of the early years practitioner is, gained from the surveys and focus group.

Amelia	Sharn	Chloe
•Employed for 6 months •Recruited from the focus group •BTEC Level 3 Diploma CYPW (full time) •Works in private day-care -small chain of 5 settings •Known to the researcher	•Employed for 3 months •Recruited from the initial survey •Level 3 CACHE Diploma in Child Care and Education •Private day-care •Not known to the researcher	•Employed for 3 months •Recruited from the initial survey •Level 3 CACHE Diploma in Child Care and Education •Private day-care •Not known to the researcher

Figure 4.4 Newly Qualified practitioners, interviewed in this study

Sharn and Chloe's interviews were carried out in their settings and Amelia's at the college where I worked. Participants chose the location for the interviews in order to put them at their ease. I have known Amelia for three years and believe we had a good professional rapport. I had not met Sharn and Chloe, however we had several email exchanges in which we began to form a relationship, which I hoped would provide a less formal atmosphere in the interview. I was concerned by Oakley's (1981) assertion that 'rapport in this sense, is not genuine in that the researcher is using it for scientific rather than human ends' (p.55) similarly Dunscombe and Jessop (2002) suggest that this is a 'detached form of friendship which the researcher uses for their own ends' (p.110). Mindful of this, I discussed informed consent at the start and end of their interview and again when I sent the transcript for their confirmation of accuracy. The newly qualified practitioner interviews lasted for forty minutes.

The interview questions were compiled following analysis of the data from the surveys and focus group. I used an edited version of the EYE criteria as a starting point for the interview questions as these reflect the content of the participants' Level 3 Diploma thus:

'Tell me how you ....'

1. Support and promote children's learning and development
2. Assess children's progress

3. Safeguard and promote the health, safety and welfare of children
4. Work with, colleagues, parents and/or carers or other professionals

These criteria-based questions offered a starting point for the interview providing an outline of the role of the early years practitioner and facilitated scope for eliciting examples of their practice. The qualitative nature of the questions enabled the discussion to flow. Supplementary and probing questions were asked to move beyond the EYE (NCTL, 2014) criteria. This did not appear to constrain the participants' responses. For example, when talking about promoting children's development, Chloe talked about outdoor play, which led to discussing the routine for children getting ready to go outdoors, which then led to her discussing the morning routine of the 'golden wall' where children are allocated a place on a star or a dark cloud, depending on their behaviour. This discussion then led me to ask about theory and managing children's behaviour. Chloe then began to reflect on this process and began to question its appropriateness for the children. The use of semi-structured questions allowed for data to be compared across people and sites (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011). In structuring the some of the interview questions, I allowed for comparison of responses, however, as Oppenheimer (1992) notes, the way the interviewees interpret and respond to a question will be different which can impact on the data.

Conducting face-to-face interviews provided the opportunity to clarify and extend my questions. This was particularly useful when asking the newly qualified practitioners to reflect on whether they use anything they learned on their course in practice. While health and safety content were easily recalled, the newly qualified practitioners were unclear on how they applied theory in practice, yet I know they had written about this in their assignments. I used probing questioning (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011), for example I asked how they approached planning for children; this provided the interviewees with 'aha' moments when they made the connection between planning and ensuring the activities were developmentally appropriate (Bredekamp, 1992).

The interviews took place three months into their new role as practitioners. This enabled the participants to settle into their role, reflect on their progress and to consider how well prepared, they were for the workplace. In discussion with the participants, it was agreed that they would keep a diary in order to recall significant events when it came to the interview; the format for the diary was agreed with participants (figure 4.4). There is debate as to whether significant or critical incidents should be the focus of reflective practice. Schön (1983) and Kolb (2005) suggest there is much to be gained from unpacking the everyday practices as a way of improving performance or extending knowledge, whereas Gibbs (1988) and Rolfe (2001) take the stance that critical incidents need to be the focus in order for the practitioner to better

manage critical events. Alexander (2002) suggests that reflection is not a strength of childcare students, therefore I used Schön's model to support the newly practitioners to reflect on the day to day events.

Task / Decision/Problem/event	Brief Description	How it went	Why I think this	Any other comments
Nappy changing with X age 3m	Used the changing mat, sang nursery rhymes while I changed her nappy – she smiled and giggled	Went really well – she was happy	I was communicating with her and developing our relationship	-

Table 4.1 Example of practice diary

The diaries were not intended to be reflective; they were intended to inform the discussion in the interview; participants were encouraged to reflect on their learning journey. Reflective practice is a criterion for EYTs, is one of elements of the Plural Practitioner (Rose and Rogers, 2012) and is embedded in the EYE criteria. Therefore asking practitioners to keep a diary was appropriate, however only one of the newly qualified practitioners kept notes which she referred to in her interview supporting Alexander's (2002) assertion that systematic reflection is not a strength of early years students. However during the interview, the newly qualified practitioners did share many examples of reflective practice, although they did not label it as such.

The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. I transcribed the recordings myself, though time consuming, this enabled me to engage with the data. The transcripts were member checked (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011). Participants confirmed the transcripts for accuracy and reconfirmed their permission for me to use the data.

Focussed Conversation with Employers

In contrast to the newly qualified practitioner interviews, I used the less structured approach of a focussed conversation with the employers. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) suggest this is an effective method for obtaining the respondents' deeper attitudes and perceptions; in this case how they perceive the value of staff with pre-service qualifications as well as their expectations of early years practitioners. The focused conversations came to a natural conclusion after about an hour. The discussion included the importance of qualifications and whether or not there is a benefit to employing practitioners who have completed a Level 3 qualification rather than unqualified practitioners; what they look for when employing a practitioner, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and the employers' views on current ECEC policy. The discussion was led by the respondents, with some refocusing on the research topic from me (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011, p.413), hence this led to two different accounts. The

employers are from different sectors of the fragmented ECEC sector, private day-care and a maintained children's centre. This gave me the opportunity to identify if there is a difference in opinion on the value of qualifications and the expectations of Level 3 practitioners between the different settings.

The interviews were recorded with participants' permission, which enabled me to concentrate on listening to what they said and to not miss any points (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011). The interviews were transcribed and sent to participants for accuracy checking. All participants approved their transcripts and reiterated their permission to use the data.

4.6   Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained, following the University of Sheffield's regulatory procedure prior to commencement of data collection. Attention to ethical issues is an essential and moral obligation of a researcher (Cannella and Lincoln, 2007). In this study the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) guidelines were considered in the construction of the proposal and throughout the process. I considered the balance of harm and effect on the participants, confidentiality, and informed consent as well issues relating to power and the right to withdraw. A further ethical consideration was the potential impact of the findings on my institution; permission was granted for the study to go ahead.

Informed Consent

I have already discussed how anonymity and confidentiality were maintained through the use of the on-line survey. An explanation of the project was included at the start of the survey, to ensure student-practitioners understood what the project was about and how their information would be used. Participants confirmed that they had read the information and were willing to participate. Although parental consent was not obtained, the project details and Survey instruments were reviewed by managers in colleges before being placed on their VLE. Participants were able to choose whether to engage in the survey and whether to answer all of the questions.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants who engaged in focus groups and interviews. They signed a consent form after reading the participant information sheet to indicate that they were giving consent to the data being used. All participants were given the opportunity to withdraw their consent if they so wished. Participants were asked to member check the transcript of their narratives. If the participant decided to withdraw consent, then their

decision would be adhered to and the data not be used, however this was not the case as all participants agreed that the data could be used.

When considering potential ethical issues the students' age was of concern. The definition of a child is anyone under the age of eighteen. BERA guidelines refer to the UNCRC Article 12, stating, 'children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity (2011 p.6). It is the policy in the institutions engaged in this study to seek views from students regarding their study experience and parental consent is not required for this activity. Clarification was sought regarding the inclusion of sixteen year old students in the electronic survey. I obtained confirmation that this was acceptable practice to the university for the participants in the survey. As the focus group and interviews were placed at the end of the students' course, all were aged eighteen or over, therefore parental consent was not required (BERA 2011).

Consideration was given to all stakeholders at each stage of the research process. In this case that includes the students, the college management teams, the staff in the early years Departments and the settings where the student-practitioners were on placement. It is important to maintain confidentiality in terms of the data as well as the identity of the participants. I had a position of privilege as manager of the department. It was therefore essential that the process was transparent throughout the project in order to develop and maintain trust with all stakeholders; similarly with the other colleges who agreed to participate.

The power relationship is one which I needed to give great consideration to, in respect of the students' right not to participate, their right to withdraw at any time and their right to withhold the data. It is possible that they felt obligated to participate given my position of authority; for my home institution students because I was their Head of School, and in the other colleges as I was a researcher and external visitor, invited by their managers.

I needed to be prepared to hear things that might not be as I expect, give students permission to speak freely and to be honest without fear of being judged. Before commencing the data collection it was important to establish a mutually respectful relationship with the participants and to be explicit regarding their rights. The ethical issues were discussed in depth in the ethics approval process.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anonymity

As an ethical researcher it is my responsibility to ensure the anonymity of my participants. This is particularly key in this study as the majority of the participants are aged between sixteen and eighteen years of age (BERA, 2011). I have already discussed the issue of anonymity in relation to the on line survey. In the focus groups and interviews, participants' have been anonymised by using pseudonyms to avoid recognition. In the photographs taken in the focus group activity, participants', faces have been blurred to avoid identification.

Confidentiality

It was important to protect participants' anonymity. Consent to use images and recordings from the focus groups and interviews were highlighted on the participant information sheet and on the consent form and a verbal reminder given at the start of each activity; permission was sought and granted. Data were stored securely; photographs and recordings are stored on a password protected USB and on my own computer; participants may have access to all photographs relating to them on request.

The audio recordings and photographs of the artefacts made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations, publication and lectures. No other use will be made of them without participants' written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. Voice recordings were used solely to transcribe participants' discussion and will therefore be destroyed when the study has been disseminated.

4.7   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have identified the methods used to gather data to answer the research question: 'What are the benefits of pre-service qualification to the development early years practitioners' practice'? I have highlighted the political nature of the study and explored the impact of my positionality on the choice of methodology, methods and justified my approach to collecting the data. The chapter has explained how ethical concerns were addressed to ensure participants' confidentiality and rights were respected. In the next chapter, I will discuss the approach to data analysis.

Chapter 5 Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The chapter begins with an explanation of the data analysis process drawing on Wolcott's (1994) three-stage process of description, analysis and interpretation and Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach (2006). I then discuss creating a framework from the themes generated. Following this, I present and discuss the findings of the research in relation to the research question.

The aim of this study was to establish a coherent understanding of the experiences, knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions gained by Level 3 early years student-practitioners during their course. My research question, '*What are the benefits of pre-service qualification to the development early years practitioners' practice*? ' specifically required the identification of their shifting conceptualisations of the practitioner as they progress through their course. This chapter discusses the approaches taken to the analysis of the data.

Data were collected over a two-year period, from surveys, interviews and a focus group. Braun and Clarke (2006) assert the importance of a researcher being explicit in how the data is analysed in order to evaluate their research, therefore in this next section, I explain the process of analysing the data.

The analysis and interpretation is multi-layered, much like the data collection methods. Although collected from individuals, using three methods and bringing their stories together allowed me to identify common elements as well as differences in their experiences on their course and their journey in to employment. Rapley (2011) suggests this layering is a strength of qualitative research.

By layering the data collection methods, starting with the survey, adding the focus group and then interviews, I was able to use what was learned from each stage and take it into the next. This was a messy process. Clough (2002) suggests educational research is not a tidy process. He suggests that by stepping out from conventional approaches, in which researchers often seek legitimacy, 'perhaps, so too will 'messiness' of method emerge as a respectable form of understanding' (p.83). The focus group was an example of messiness. I set out with the intention of using the identity box activity and listening to the students' stories and had not expected the rich discussion that followed the planned activity. This added another layer of data. Working through the multi-layered data I was able to present a coherent understanding of

how the experiences of the Level 3 student-practitioners prepared them for employment. The framework for presentation of the findings is discussed in the next section.

5.2 Finding a Framework for Analysis

In chapter 4, I referred to my *paradigmatic brew;* it became clear that I would need to apply a similar approach to the presentation and analysis of the findings. The description stage (Wolcott 1994) allowed me to become familiar with the data. I generated initial codes from the survey, and then applied these to the focus group and interview data. I considered a number of approaches not only to presenting the data but also to the process of analysis. One consideration was Bourdieu's (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) notion of habitus as a means of analysing the data, however I concluded that this could lead to findings based on the gendered and classed nature of ECEC work or vocational habitus (Vincent and Braun, 2010; Colley, 2006; Osgood, 2005). Habitus suggests there is one way of being, conformity to a fixed identity. This study is not concerned with identity rather the participants' articulation of the knowledge and experiences gained on their course. This study intends to identify the transition from student to practitioner identifying the value of their qualification. While not disregarding the importance of the students' identity and gender, the focus of this study is their learning journey and the value of their qualification as preparation for employment. As previously mentioned the data were generated using students' words to describe their experiences and their developing knowledge, qualities and skills, without losing the essence of the student-practitioners' voices.

I turned to the work of Wolcott (1994) who offers three categories: description, analysis and interpretation, to generate themes for analysing the data (figure 5.1). The data were collected using three methods, the surveys, the focus group and the interviews. I began with the survey data.

The data from the survey was both qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative data relates to the demographic profile of the participants, including their qualifications and career aspirations; these data are presented first to create a profile of the respondents (see section 6.2). As previously discussed, ECEC practitioners are often represented as lacking academic capital, and choosing ECEC as a default career (Vincent and Braun, 2011; 2010; McGillivray, 2010). It was important to me, that before presenting the data relating to their developing knowledge, skills and attributes, that I established a clear picture of who the respondents were and where they came from, at the start of their journey.
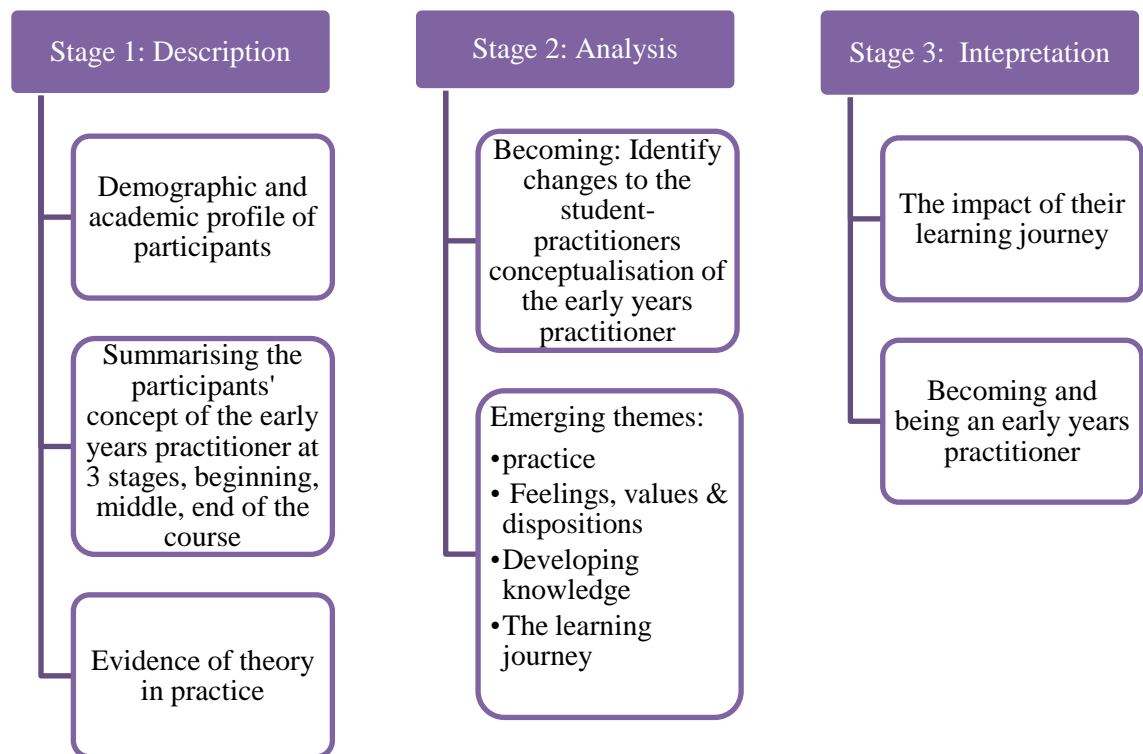
Demographic and academic profile of participants

Summarising the participants' concept of the early years practitioner at 3 stages, beginning, middle, end of the course

Evidence of theory in practice

Becoming: Identify changes to the student-practitioners conceptualisation of the early years practitioner

Emerging themes:
•practice
• Feelings, values & dispositions
•Developing knowledge
•The learning journey

The impact of their learning journey

Becoming and being an early years practitioner

Figure 5.1 My application of Wolcott's 3 stages of data analysis

The next phase of analysis considered the student-practitioners' changing exposition of the practitioner and how they explain, enact and embody the role as they progressed through their course.

To begin the process I used content analysis (Krippendorff, 2013) to gain a sense of what the student-practitioners considered important in terms of their developing understanding of their role. I recognise the limitations of this approach as it is descriptive and offered what the participants think but not the why. Wanting to foreground the Level 3 practitioners' voice I had not offered any categories in the surveys for the respondents to describe the qualities and skills of a practitioner or definitions of the practitioner's role; I had not anticipated the large number of responses (158 in the initial survey). My aim was to foreground the Level 3 students' voices as they are rarely represented in research. However, to include 158 unique profiles, each with five qualities and five skills, as well as a short paragraph describing the role of the practitioner was unattainable in a project of this size.

There are many meanings associated with participants' voice in research. In representing the student-practitioners' voices, I wanted the participants to be able to speak for themselves. Therefore, when presenting the findings (chapter 6), I made extensive use of the written and oral responses, using their exact words, including hesitations and dialect (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Braun and Clarke argue that it is naive to think that the researcher can 'give voice to their

participants' (2006, p.7) as what is included is selected by the researcher, which is the case in this study. The number of respondents makes it impossible to represent each individual. An alternative view is offered by Clough (1998) in reflecting on the challenges of representing the voices of children with special educational needs; he uses the analogy of 'turning up the volume' (p.129). So rather than giving voice to each participant, in some cases I conflate their responses to that of a group (Krippendorff, 2013) who reflect the student-practitioners' experiences.

I revisited the data several times. Starting with the survey data, I sorted the data in to three data sets, students at the beginning of their course (n=69), the mid-point (n=89) and the end of their course (n=20). For each set, I took the students' descriptions of the role of the early years practitioner and the required qualities and skills and created a spreadsheet. I highlighted key words and phrases that were similar, for example, *confidentiality* and *being confidential, knowledge of the EYFS* and *EYFS* and combined these to reduce the number of concepts (Appendix 5 shows the full list). This dataset was subject to several revisions. See appendix 5a which shows the final revision of the data from the survey responses.

I returned to the questionnaires many times to review how respondents had used the words in their description of the role of the practitioner along with the qualities and skills they considered essential, to assist in organising the data. For example, '*an early years practitioner is a person that helps children to learn and develop and also care for the needs of the child'*. This instance was coded as providing physical care needs whereas participant 11 states *'the role of the early years practitioner is to be a caring person who is a good listener and can understand a child's needs easily'* is attributed to a personal attribute or quality. This gave me the opportunity to engage with the individual responses and to begin to build a picture of the participants' conceptualisation of the early years practitioner and their developing practice. What was interesting was the broad spectrum of students' experiences and concepts of the role of the practitioner. From this initial tagging of similar concepts, I then looked for emerging themes to find a framework for analysing the data.

5.3 Generating Theoretical Framework

The next step was to generate the framework for analysing the data. I had considered a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) as I had started with data collection, before writing the literature review (Charmaz and Bryant, 2011) and was not sure what would emerge.
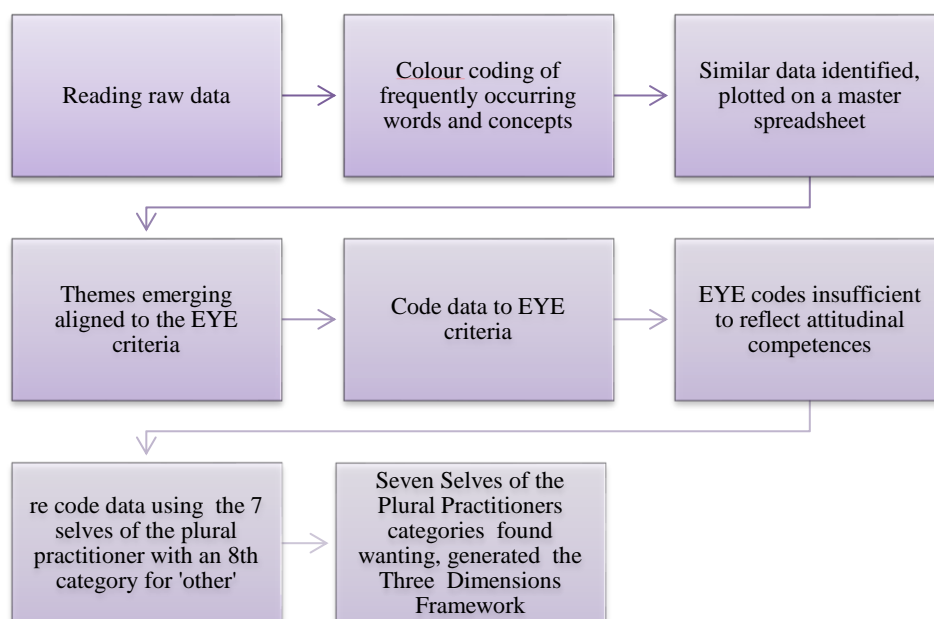
Figure 5.2 The Process of generating themes

Figure 5.2 shows the many attempts to find a framework for analysing the data. I had specifically not used any particular framework in structuring the survey questions to foreground the students' voice. Initially, it appeared that the responses could sit within the framework of the EYE Criteria (NCTL, 2013c, p.3):

- Support and promote children's early education and development
- Plan and provide effective care, teaching and learning that enables children to progress
- Make accurate and productive use of assessment
- Safeguard and promote the health, safety and welfare of children
- Reflect on practice and identify own professional needs
- Work in partnership with key person, colleagues, parents and/or carers or other professionals

As discussed in chapter 3, the EYE criteria are an expression of the Government's expectations for practitioners working with children; it also reflects the content of their qualification, therefore to analyse the students' responses in this framework seemed appropriate. I completed this first attempt at coding the data using the survey results however, there were aspects in the responses that did not fit for example, '*having a sense of humour, being enthusiastic, having patience, love working with children'*. This deficit became more apparent when I attempted to merge the focus group and interview data in to the framework. It became clear that this was insufficient to express the complex nature of the respondents' articulation of the role. I then considered using the framework of the Seven Selves of the Plural Practitioner (Rose and Rogers, 2012) to analyse the data but, as the model is based on responses from graduate practitioners, I thought this may be too complex for the emerging student-practitioners. However the data suggested otherwise and I recoded the data using the 'Seven Selves' as the

framework for coding and analysis. Therefore, I went back to the data from the surveys, the focus group and the interviews, and allocated responses to the following categories.

- Critical reflector
- Carer
- Communicator
- Facilitator
- Observer
- Assessor
- Creator
- Other

This framework was found wanting because it did not allow for the unique responses from the participants and there was a danger that the richness of the data would be lost in the analysis. The data that did not fit, which I categorised as *other* initially were of great interest. These were unique to Level 3 student-practitioners, relating to their experiences through their programme of study and into employment. This therefore adds to the body of knowledge in respect of the newly qualified early years practitioners and what their prior learning contributed to their construction of the role. Having completed this analysis, I found the Rose and Rogers' framework, while a useful framework to explain an experienced practitioner's role, inadequate for capturing the students-practitioners' experiences.

Making decisions about which category to allocate their complex and holistic responses needed a framework that allowed for unique and intertwined responses that showed the students' emerging, yet diverse journeys. Throughout their journey, the data shows how the students formed and reformed their understanding of being an ECEC practitioner, at each stage there was a re-imagining of 'self'. The students' changing conceptualisations of the practitioner was energising; I began to see the influence of their learning in their responses. I was able to explore this in more depth with the students in the focus group and the interviewees. With the addition of this rich qualitative data, the Three Dimensions of the Developing Practitioner framework emerged (Figure 5.3).
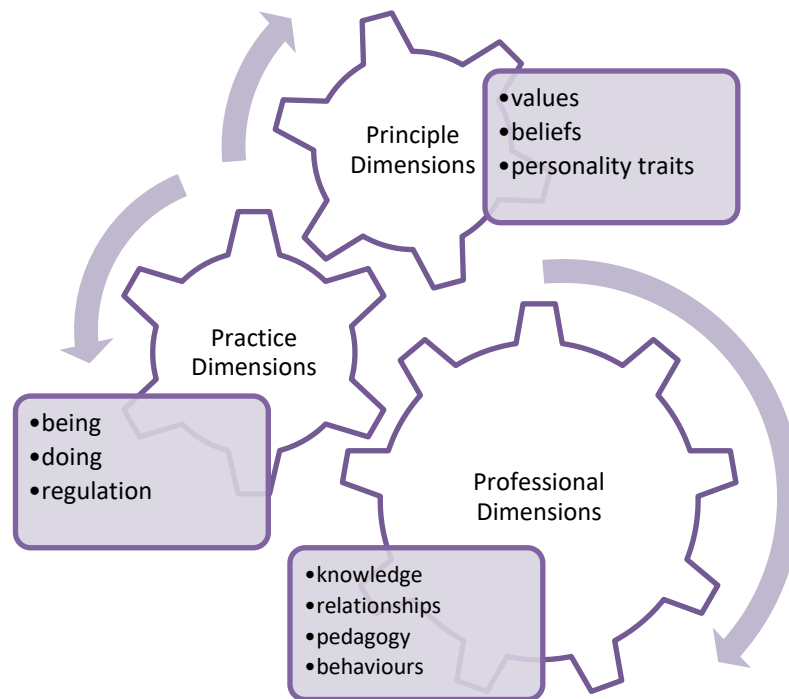
Figure 5.3 Three Dimensions of the Developing Practitioner framework

In analysing the data using this framework, it was important to remember that the respondents are developing their knowledge and practice; they are emerging practitioners. Different aspects were important to individual respondents at different points in their course. There are no professional body guidelines to work towards, therefore no existing template to measure the student-practitioners' progress. Without a definitive definition of an ECEC practitioner, the Three Dimensions of the Developing Practitioner emerged from the student-practitioners themselves and provides an understanding of how their' knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices developed as they progressed through their course.

I revisited the data, listening to the audio files several times. In doing so I became familiar with each participant's story. After several rejected attempts, what emerged were three distinct dimensions:

- Practice Dimensions: Technician, Essential aspects of the role of an early years practitioner
- Principle Dimensions: Values, Personality traits, beliefs, dispositions
- Professional Dimensions: Stepping up – beyond being a technician

Within each dimension, subthemes were used to analyse the data, as shown in Figure 5.3, above.

The literature on professionalisation of the ECEC workforce includes an argument for practitioners' personal characteristics to be considered as an aspect of their professionalism. The literature refers to characteristics, personality traits, attitudes, dispositions and qualities (Campbell-Barr, Georgeson, & Varga, 2015; Osgood, 2010; Moyles, 2001; Katz, 1980). While I agree that these characteristics are desirable, I argue that they are not essential to becoming a practitioner. Therefore I allocated these personal attributes, dispositions, qualities to the Principles Dimension. The remaining data relate to the work of the practitioner; however there are elements that resonate with the definitions of professionalism offered by Brock (2012) Schön, (1983) and Eraut (1994). The notions of autonomy, reflection, application of knowledge in practical situations and service. These elements I categorised as Professional Dimensions. What remained was, what I considered to be the essential aspects of basic practice for example physical care, planning for learning and regulatory requirements. In addition, I believe developing caring relationships is an essentail aspect of practice, therefore caring in all its forms was included in the Practice Dimension. Equally, I considered communciation skills as an essential element of practice, as these skills are needed to develop the relationships with children, families, colleagues and professionals.

I allocated the concepts to the relevant dimensions. Table 5b in the appendix shows the concepts allocated to each dimension. Following this, the data were then sorted by point in the student-practitioners' two-year long course: start, middle and end. To adjust for different sample sizes at each point, a weighting factor was used to equate the data between responses. The weighted data gives equivalent values per person for each response which allows for a comparison as the student-practitioners progressed through their course. A detailed analysis of the dimension for each stage can be found in appendix 5.

Having completed this phase of analysis of the surveys, I moved on to the focus group and interview transcripts. The process of describing, analysing and interpreting (Wolcott, 1994) began with the revisiting of the transcripts and (re) listening to the audio files. What I began to hear was the passion, commitment and determination of the participants; their struggle to attain a status, that to them had value, yet incongruent with the epistemological construction of ECEC practitioners (DfE, 2013; Hadfield, et al., 2012; Osgood, 2010).

Having transcribed the interviews and focus group recordings, as with the survey data, I looked for the dominant themes to identify key concepts and phrases. Following aborted attempts to analyse the data using the EYE criteria (NCTL, 2013c) and the 'Seven Selves of the Plural Practitioner' (Rose and Rogers, 2012), I distilled, and interpreted the data using the *three*

*dimensions of the developing practitioner framewor*k. Table 5.1 shows an example from Amelia's interview of how I approached this analysis.

Extract from Amelia's interview	Dominant themes	Dimension
		Professional Dimension
I always try and think of what the child likes to do - every child is not the same they got their own things that they're interested in … like me I was interested in the creative theory. I wasn't really interested in the other theories that I was more interested in the creative try and bring whatever the child is interested in try and bring it in as much as I can into whatever I'm doing with the child. There is one child that was really interested in football so I brought football into counting activities and he counted the football and a girl like teddies so we did some work with teddies… so I change it for the child because they are not going to be interested in just counting your fingers/hands	Every child is not the same.	Pedagogy: following child's needs and interests
	Like me, I was interested in the creative theory. I wasn't really interested in the other theories	differentiated to meet individual needs
	so I change it for the child because they are not going to be interested in just counting your fingers/hands	Empathy
		Practice Dimension
	interested the creative side and I try and bring it in as much as I can into whatever I'm doing with the child.	Being Creative
We have, every month like, a meeting with the manager and she reflects on your work. It's like a staff profile to see where you are if there's any problems stuff like that, she also especially with me as I am new, she guides me and if I have an idea she helps expand it for me so how I can take it into practice. It's not only with activities and it helps for when Ofsted It helps to have the health and safety stuff, RIDDOR, it's like a mini quiz we've got going on. She tests me on it and she knows that I've developed and I understand more. And sometimes she'll just ask me random questions just so I'm used to it for when Ofsted do come in because I will be asked because I'm the newest one		**Professional dimension**
	… meeting with the manager and she reflects on your work.	
		Supervision & Support from manager
	She guides me and if I have an idea she helps expand it for me so how I can take it into practice.	Knowledge development
		Practice Dimension
	it's not only with activities and it helps for when Ofsted It helps to have the health and safety stuff,	Health and Safety
		Ofsted
	And sometimes she'll just ask me random questions just so I'm used to it for when Ofsted do come in because I will be asked because I'm the newest one	Regulation

Table 5.1 Example of analysis of Amelia's interview using the 3 dimensions framework

One of the aims of this study is to show the student-practitioners' journeys through their Level 3 qualification. As discussed in chapter 4, the identity box activity was a stimulus for charting this journey. It was only on reflection that I recognised my own subjectivity had clouded my ability to see the richness of the data. I considered leaving out the focus group data as I could not see how it added to the research. However, transcribing the audio recordings and reviewing the photographs prompted a process of reflexivity. As Day (2012) suggests,

> what we 'see' in our qualitative investigations must thus be reflexively thought of as 'what we think we see,' questioning the basis upon which we have made this interpretation (p.64).

Day here suggests that reflexivity is a useful tool to understand the complexities in analysing qualitative data, in this case, what I did not see. Day's (2012) argument for suggesting the use of

reflexivity to unpick my reasoning made me, question my disappointment and my motives for leaving out the data. As discussed in chapter 4, my disappointment came from my preconceived expectations of what the activity would bring; I did not see how to connect the stories with the rest of the data. Only when transcribing the interview data did I see the value of the focus group data. It provided the final piece of the puzzle, the bridge between student and practitioner. I realised that my data analysis needed to be inductive and holistic, I needed to consider all of the data together to generate themes and present the findings.

Wolcott (1994) argues that within the raw data, participants 'speak for themselves' (p.10)., I found that the combination of the focus group and interview data brought to life the previously untold and unseen aspects of the students-practitioners' experiences, aspirations and struggles to achieve their qualification. In the next chapter, the findings are presented and discussed, foregrounding the student-practitioners' voices in navigating their journey on to, and through, their course.

Chapter 6 Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is a critical discussion of the findings in light of the literature discussed in chapter 3 and explores the ways in which the student-practitioners developed during their Level 3 diploma course; and how their experiences provide answers to the research question *What are the benefits of pre-service qualification to the development of early years practitioners' practice*?:

The field questions provide the structure for the presentation of the findings.

- What knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions are required of an early years practitioner?
- How do the Level 3 National Diplomas develop students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions?
- How well do Level 3 qualifications prepare students for the ECEC workforce and meet the demands of policy and employer expectations?

The first section (6.1) offers a profile of the respondents' academic achievements on joining the course, reasons for wanting to work in ECEC and their career aspirations. This includes the student-practitioners' articulation of their knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions, as they progress through their course (6.2). These data are discussed through the different dimensions of the student-practitioners' experiences:

- The Principles Dimension
- The Practice Dimension
- The Professional Dimension.

The next section (6.3) shows the connections between the student-practitioners' course of study and their journey, considering the impact of their learning. The third section considers the student-practitioners' perceptions of the impact of the Level 3 qualification in preparing them for employment in the ECEC sector.

To assist with clarity in reading the findings, figure 6.1 provides key to who the respondents are. One hundred and fifty-eight student-practitioners participated in the surveys. Of these, seven participated in the focus group and three provided interviews. In addition, one manager of a day-care setting and one children's centre leader partook in interviews. As previously stated, one aim of the research was to give voice to the Level 3 student-practitioners. Their responses, written or oral, are represented in italics, and include the exact words, including lapses, syntax, pauses and rewording of thoughts (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).
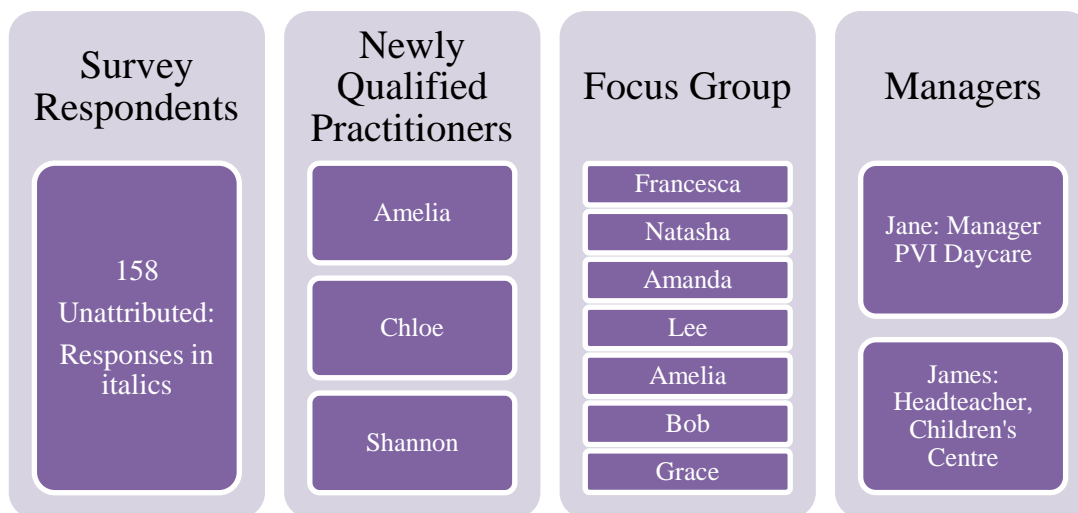
Survey Respondents	Newly Qualified Practitioners	Focus Group	Managers
158 Unattributed: Responses in italics	Amelia Chloe Shannon	Francesca Natasha Amanda Lee Amelia Bob Grace	Jane: Manager PVI Daycare James: Headteacher, Children's Centre

Table 6.1 Key to the respondents' roles

6.2 What Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes, and Dispositions are Required of an Early Years Practitioner?

This section begins with a profile of the respondents' academic achievements on joining the course, reasons for wanting to work in ECEC and their career aspirations. As previously discussed there is an epistemological construct that presents young people attracted to working in ECEC as uneducated and lacking in motivation or aspiration. This view is perpetuated in the literature (Vincent and Braun, 2010; Alexander, 2002) and in the media (Mail Online, 2012). The purpose of this first set of data is to challenge the negative perceptions and to establish a contemporary profile of ECEC student-practitioners.

The participants reflected the ECEC workforce profile in England, with the majority being female (98%) and white (89%) (DfE, 2014b). It was surprising that so few participants were of an ethnic minority heritage given the large number of respondents. These data are interesting as 115 of the 158 of respondents live in the counties of the West Midlands, West Yorkshire and Lancashire. These areas have the highest proportion of ethnic minorities residing outside of London and employ higher than the national average number of BME early years practitioners (DfE, 2014b) yet there were a relatively small number of participants in the surveys from ethnic minorities. This suggests that, although not for discussion in this study, Nutbrown's (2012a) recommendation that the Department for Education should conduct research on the number of Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) staff in order to identify and address any issues was justified.

Educational Attainment

In the media, early years practitioners are often portrayed as having low levels of academic skills (The Telegraph, 2015; Mail Online, 2012) yet the student-practitioners in this study are

very well qualified with the majority having more than the Government's floor standard of five GCSEs grade C or above (DfE, 2015c). This is shown in Figure 6.1.
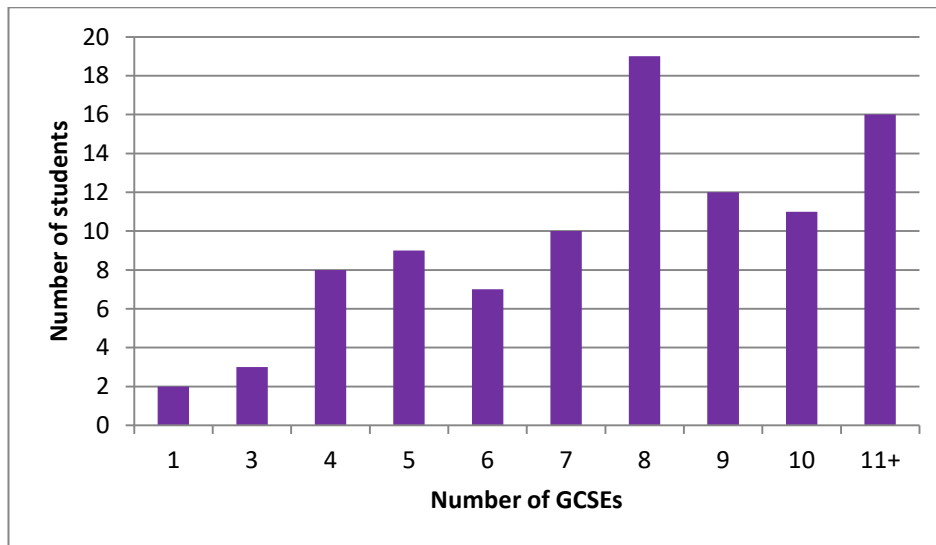

Figure 6.1 Total number of GCSEs held by respondents

I believe this is due to colleges having entry criteria for Level 3 programmes; I would therefore suggest that this strengthens the argument for having pre-employment qualifications.

Practitioners' levels of English and maths skills were highlighted as a weakness within the ECEC workforce in the Nutbrown Review (Nutbrown, 2012a) and in MGC (DfE, 2013). Similarly, Alexander's (2009) research with the heads of eighteen ECEC settings, expressed concerns about the impact of low academic skills. They were concerned particularly about their writing ability.

> Our interview data revealed concerns about the academic capability of newly-qualified practitioners, notably that some were unable to write well enough to complete the requisite reports and observations on children (p.18).

The majority (128) of student-practitioners in this study have Level 2 English with the majority having English Language GCSE grade C. A significant number also have GCSE maths and science (see figure 6.2 below). I offer two explanations for this discrepancy between the literature and the participants in this study. First of all the literature, (DfE, 2013a; Nutbrown, 2012b; Alexander, 2009) refers to the existing workforce who may well not be Level 3 qualified as there is no requirement for practitioners to be qualified (DfE, 2014a), others may have taken alternative routes into their role rather than a Level 3 full time, college-based course. In my experience, many training providers and colleges do not insist on English and maths as entry criteria for part time mature learners. Therefore it is possible that practitioners have progressed into their career without any qualification in ECEC or English and maths GCSEs.
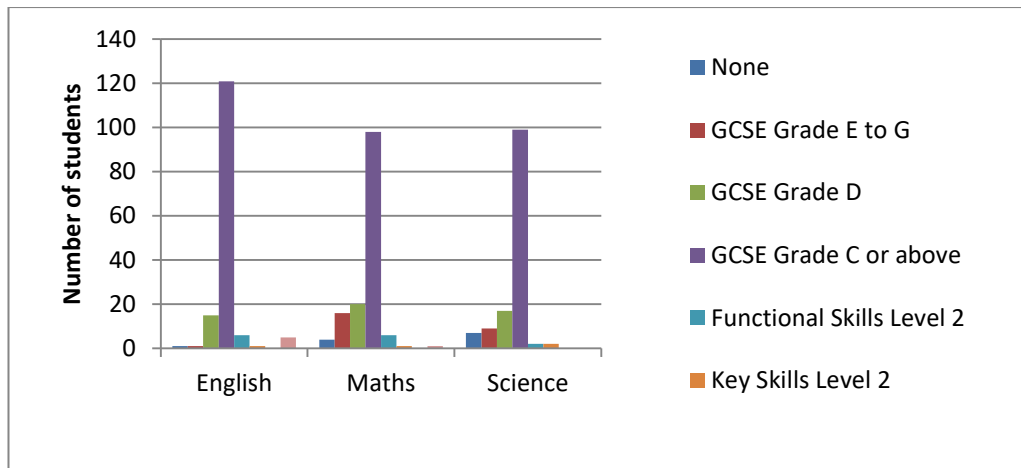
Figure 6.2 English, maths and science achievements

The more likely explanation is that the majority of FE colleges require English and maths GCSE grade C as entry criteria to Level 3 diploma programmes. This could suggest that one solution to raising the level of practitioners' English and maths skills would be to have these as entry criteria and full Level 3 qualifications to be completed before being employed, a view shared by the respondents to the follow up survey.

This picture is at odds with the negative discourse relating to the education level of ECEC practitioners implied in policy and the media. The media portrayal of early years practitioners suggests that ECEC is not a career choice but a default 'job' exemplified by the Daily Mail readers' responses to the Nutbrown Review who suggested that,

> The only ones that 'choose' these jobs are the ones that can't get better easier, better paid work elsewhere: they are not choosing it out of some great 'vocation', some genuine love of babies, but out of boredom and desperation.

And

> ... a profession that bases its recruitment on teenage girls with no qualifications who don't know what else to do with their lives?' (Mail Online, 2012)

These views are perhaps drawn from television programmes like the two BBC (2008; 2004) documentaries in which undercover reporters worked as volunteers in a number of nurseries. They exposed poor practice, with practitioners showing a lack of engagement with and respect for the children. In England, vocational education is perceived as low status (Chalke, 2015; Billett, 2013). Billet's (2013) research in to the status of vocational education identified that in countries where vocational courses are perceived as low status, that teachers of vocational education are seen as 'mere implementers and assessors of what others have decided should be learnt' (p.10) thus positioning the status of vocational courses as low standing and, by association, the students who take them and the careers to which they lead. This low public

perception of ECEC work is evident in the literature. As discussed in chapter 3, Vincent and Braun's (2010) study suggested the students had limited options based on their academic achievement and their socio-economic and cultural status, concurring with Skeggs (1997). In contrast to the student-practitioners in this study, the students in Skeggs' (1997) research had low academic achievement and saw a caring course as 'something at which they were unlikely to fail' (p.58). Following these comments it was important to explore the student-practitioners' reasons for choosing a career in ECEC.

6.3 Motivation for Choosing ECEC as a Career

This deficit discourse is incongruent with the findings in this study. The question asking student-practitioners to explain their reasons for choosing an ECEC course was open text; therefore the data generated are the students' words. Many of the responses began with *'I have always wanted to work with children'*, which indicates a career in ECEC is not a default option but a well-considered choice.

Whether that enjoyment comes from the 'moral worthiness' (Vincent and Braun 2010, p.207) of the work is unconfirmed however the notions of *'help and helping, rewarding, making a difference'* were featured in many of the qualitative responses. There could be a temptation to attribute this to the epistemological view of ECEC as a caring, feminised vocation (Alexander, 2002; Noddings, 2003; Skeggs, 1997). However, I would suggest that there are many careers where a key reason for choosing it would be the individual's enjoyment of the work.

> *I always wanted to help children get the best start in life, I think working with children is the most rewarding job a person could do. To make a small difference to children with additional needs. I really enjoy spending time with children helping them to develop and learn.*

Many of the respondents talked about wanting to make a difference to children's lives, acknowledging the importance of children's early experiences and their impact on later achievements (Taggart, et al., 2015; Sylva, et al., 2010) . Others noted how their own experiences have influenced their choice, for example:

> *I have always wanted to work with children with special needs and disabilities; this is because my little brother is Autistic and I have always been passionate about working with children with similar needs.*

These positive and altruistic motivations concur with Cooke and Lawton (2008) who found that 'commitment to the job' (p.16) and personal reward in supporting children's progress were the most common motivations noted by young people working in the sector.

Concurring with Alexander's findings (2002), the majority of students (85%) had some form of previous experience of working with children before commencing the course. The majority through their work experience during Year 10 at school; others listed being in the Brownies and babysitting experiences or family members working in the sector, which suggests they are making an informed choice to work with young children. One response stood out as summarising the views of the many:

> *I want to work with children because I consider it to be quite rewarding, being able to help young children to learn and make progress with their development. It is a very important role and responsibility, and I thoroughly enjoy every second of it. I have wanted to work with children since leaving [primary] school in year 6 as, I had already by then, experienced looking after young children through babysitting jobs. I feel a great sense of achievement when I do well in work placements, especially when I have connected and communicated with children, parents and practitioners in a positive way. I have taken something different away each time, and I continue to learn new things about myself, and about children. This career path in general is on-going in terms of gaining experiences and knowledge, and in my experience, every school [placement] I have worked at has been different. It's quite exciting and I look forward to seeking employment in child care when I have progressed through college and further [higher] education.*

This respondent was in the second year of her Level 3 programme, and intended to progress to HE on completion of her course. It is noteworthy that she intended to work in childcare following her degree as, with the introduction of the SEFDEY, there were concerns that, once qualified to degree level, practitioners would leave the PVI sector and take up more lucrative careers in the maintained sector (Kendall, Carey, Cramp, and Perkins, 2012; O'Keefe and Tait, 2004; Moss, 2003). This potential exodus has not been considered within current policy particularly with the equity of entry criteria for EYTS and QTS, but without a professional recognition and equity of pay and conditions.

With the policy change for schools to offer provision for two-year olds (DfE, 2013b), there is potential for qualified ECEC practitioners to work in the maintained sector, which could bring greater financial rewards, particularly with the increasing number of academies which are able to determine staff pay (Long, 2015). This student-practitioner's aspiration for progressing to HE could perhaps be a positive response to the rhetoric in policy for a graduate-led profession (DfE, 2013) or as a result of the promotion of degree level courses in ECEC by various learning providers.

6.4 Career Aspirations

In the initial survey 97% of respondents confirmed that working with children will be their life long career. It could be anticipated that this might change over the duration of their course,

however their desire to work with children did not diminish in the later surveys. More than 68% were intending to take up school-based employment as teachers, teaching assistants or special needs assistants. 39.82% of this group are aspiring primary school teachers. It could be that the epistemological view and deficit discourse surrounding working with our youngest children prevails. The low status of working with babies was highlighted in Goouch and Powell's (2012) work with baby room practitioners. They state, 'practitioners have variously described themselves as being unimportant, invisible and, in one notable example, the lowest of the low' (p.82). Perhaps therefore respondents are seeking perceived higher status careers working in schools (Kendall, Carey, Cramp and Perkins, 2012) albeit still with children under seven years of age.

Students and universities are increasingly recognising the National Diplomas as providing a good grounding for higher education level study (Masardo and Shields, 2015). In recent years, students with BTEC National Diplomas from my home institution have joined degree courses unrelated to ECEC such as criminology, psychology and business. The course is particularly valued as a good grounding for primary teaching courses due to the significant placement experience and underpinning knowledge of national curricula and legislation that prepares students well for teaching courses.

In summary, in this study, the profile of a student-practitioner is a white British, female, with at least 5 good GCSEs, is well motivated, has clear career aspirations and will most likely access higher level study; a different picture to that presented in the media.

6.5 Dimensions of the Level 3 Student-Practitioner

The knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions of an early years practitioner are the subject of national and international research (Georgeson and Campbell-Barr, 2015; Urban and Vandenbroeck, 2011). As discussed in Chapter 3, there is agreement that the role is complex. In policy, the role of the Level 3 practitioner in practice is positioned as technicist, constrained by the regulatory framework of the EYFS (DfE, 2014a; Moss, 2010) for others it is professional, encompassing personal as well as practice based elements (Brock, 2012; Osgood, 2010). As discussed in the literature review, these professional constructs of the practitioner are largely based on graduate practitioners who may also have Level 3 ECEC qualifications, and often are employed in ECEC settings. This thesis focussed on the experiences of the developing Level 3 student-practitioner and the impact of their qualification as they progress through their course. These experiences are discussed in terms of professional, practice and principle dimensions, as discussed in Chapter 5.

What emerged from the data is that the student-practitioners develop in different aspects at different times, with the qualification process acting as a catalyst for the student-practitioners' transformations. At the start of the student-practitioners' qualification the Three Dimensions were of a similar weighting, with Practice dimensions being slightly lower. Figure 6.3 gives an overview of how the students' perceptions shifted during their course.

	START	MIDDLE	END
PROFESSIONAL DIMENSIONS	1.594202899	1.033707865	2.2
PRACTICE DIMENSIONS	1.376811594	1.168539326	1.6
PRINCIPLE DIMENSIONS	1.347826087	1.157303371	0.8

Figure 6.3 Change of focus at the start, middle and end of course (as discussed in Chapter 5)

These changes are discussed in detail in the next section.

6.6 Practice Dimensions: Technician:

Care
- care for
- safeguard
- physical care
- health and safety
- develop relationships

Compliance
- confidentiality
- policies and procedures
- antidiscriminatory
- hygienic
- time management
- punctuality
- role model
- EYFS

Planning for Learning
- EYFS
- planning
- interact with the children
- develop children skills and knowledge
- extend learning
- imagination skills
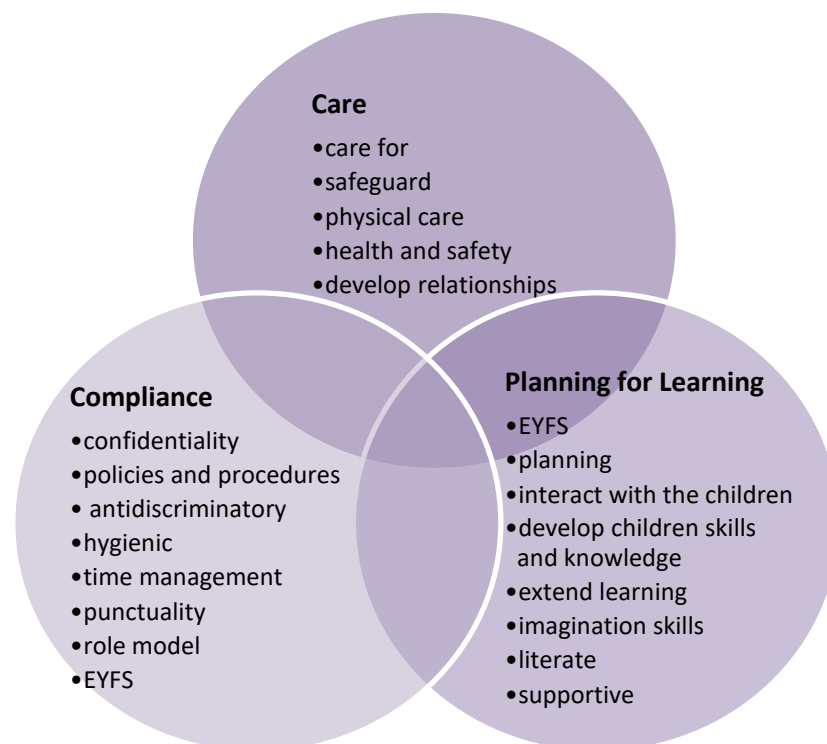- literate
- supportive

Figure 6.4 Summary of Survey Responses: Dimensions of Practice

The key elements which emerged from the analysis were those related to caring for children, meeting their physical care needs, keeping children safe, safeguarding and planning for learning, including planning to the EYFS requirements.

Care and Caring

The participants' voices were clear that caring is an essential part of being an early years practitioner. 'Caring' was the most often used term in the survey; one-hundred-and-thirty-two participants indicated that caring for children was a key function of early years practitioners. They indicated that caring was both a skill and a personal quality, referring to *physical needs, safety needs and being caring*. One participant used of the term *Full understanding of how to care for a child,* this suggests that there is specialist knowledge and expertise required in this area, and that the student understands that children have a range of care needs, indicating students' developing understanding of ECEC in terms of a career and the skills required. Chalke's (2015) research exploring professional identity with graduate practitioners, found practitioners were clear that caring is part of that professional identity, while acknowledging these as functional aspects of practice. Similarly, Osgood (2006) emphasised the need for practitioners to have a caring disposition.

In Chapter 2, I discussed how the separation of education and care in policy results in a lack of value afforded to the caring aspect of working with young children. MGC, refers to 'high quality nursery education and childcare' (DfE, 2013, p.2) yet this is not translated into policy. The absence of *caring* in policy is testament to the difficult nature of quantifying what it is to be caring, yet it is perceived as an essential quality. This was evident in the requirements to meet EYPS, while there are no specific criteria for care and caring, the standards had this introduction:

> All good early years practitioners care for and nurture the children in their care, whatever their background or circumstances. [...] They know that a loving and stimulating environment can give young children confidence and enable them to flourish. But effective early years provision involves more than care, a warm and stimulating environment and well-placed optimism. (CWDC, 2007, p.8).

The final sentence is an indication of the subjugation of care and an indication that the policy view of effective ECEC provision at the time and did not consider care as essential. Similarly in the introduction to the consultation on the EYE criteria the value of love and care is acknowledged in delivering positive outcomes for children.

> High quality early education and childcare, delivered with love and care, can have a powerful impact on young children. The evidence is clear that a good start in these early

years can have a positive effect on children's development, preparing them for school and later life (NCTL, 2013c)

In the final published criteria for the content of EYE qualifications, care is conditional on preparing children for school, requiring practitioners to, 'Plan and provide effective care, teaching and learning that enables children to progress and prepares them for school' (NCTL, 2013c, p.6). The findings of this study concur with literature which asserts the need for caring practitioners, who can develop effective responsive relationships with children (Page, 2011; Taggart, 2011). Sharn describes the importance of developing bonds with children through the key person system.

> *Their key worker is there so if they get upset or anything like that, as things like putting them to bed or do their bottles then they got that bond with just the two members of staff in that room so they feel comfortable and settled.*

Sharn attaches great significance to this, particularly for the very young children. She recognises the importance of key relationships in supporting children's emotional wellbeing, implying that caring is an element of the practitioners' specialised knowledge and skills. In the literature Page (2011) and Elfer (2006) affirm the importance of caregiver relationships in babies' emotional development and the importance of professional love. Research suggests that babies and young children need to develop meaningful relationships with responsive, respectful adults, as demonstrated in Sharn's example, and that there are critical periods for development, where knowledgeable and skilled practitioners can enhance children's life chances (Page, Clare, and Nutbrown, 2013). It is this notion of caring as a skill that led me to include caring in the Practice Dimensions rather than a principle or personality trait (Osgood, 2010; Brock, 2006). This resonates with Noddings' (2003) concept of an ethic of care that is based in reciprocity, rather than personal attributes.

The nature of caring is multifaceted and is recognised as being an important aspect of working with children; developing attachments and creating a secure emotional base. Respondents also highlighted the importance of the physical act of care routines such as potty training, hygiene, feeding and keeping children safe which are not often featured in the literature but essential aspects of the role of the practitioner.

Amelia recognises the importance of physical care routines in contributing to children's emotional development:

> *... if they're still in nappies and potty training, ask them throughout the day if they need the potty then they can be just yes or no and [they can] decide 'I need the potty now'. You can ask them throughout the day. It's just getting them used to the potty and used to*

> *knowing when to go ... it helps them become more resilient and independent when they go up into preschool.*

Rose and Rogers (2012) research identified the concept of 'the carer'. They suggest caring is an emotional and moral act, that encompasses nurturing relationships and 'interactional synchrony' (p.32). In this definition, there is an absence of the physical act of caring for children. Perhaps because their participants were under-graduates who may be in positions where they do not carry out care routines or it could be that these are taken for granted activities. As Taggart argues, the daily enactment of care routines come from conscious effort and are therefore perhaps considered a task, technicist or 'functional' (Goouch and Powell, 2012, p.82) in nature, and therefore not considered as professional. Amelia's example of potty training suggests the physical care actions, though, do require conscious attention, and are more than technicist. She recognises the value of routine in developing the child's resilience and independence.

For student-practitioners approaching completion of their course, care and caring was replaced by knowledge of the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) and planning activities that are linked to the EYFS. It could be that their programme of study was focussing on curriculum planning or that they are learning in practice that planning is a priority. A possible explanation for the changing priority is that, for students at the beginning of their journey, their responses were influenced by the hegemonic notions of working with young children, with a focus on care rather than education.

Participants alluded to care giving and routines including toileting and toilet training, children becoming independent by helping to serve and clear away after lunch and putting on their own coats and boots when going outside to play. Jane, the manager also referred to practitioners being able to respond appropriately to children's care needs by recognising children's signals and body language when they need the toilet, or sleep or *'attention to a runny nose'*. Jane is valuing the practitioners' instincts to care for the child's physical needs, an emphasis which is often lost in literature or generally undervalued as noted by the practitioners in Powell and Goouch's (2012) baby room study. While a professional practitioner needs many other attributes and knowledge, these care routines are fundamental to child's well-being. These are essential childcare practices, however the importance of the relational and emotional act of caring had a greater emphasis from all of the interviewees, expressed as keeping children safe.

Keeping Children Safe

Keeping children safe was identified as a one of the main roles of the practitioner after caring for children (n=102). This included health and safety and safeguarding. Comments included,

> *To make sure the health and safety of the children is the number one priority as all children have the right to feel protected and safe.*
>
> *Making sure that the setting is safe, secure and hygienic before allowing the children to enter.*
>
> *An ability to comprehend risks and hazards in the setting [...] make sure the setting is a safe and secure environment for children, visitors and staff.*

Student-practitioners demonstrated their awareness of the legal duty to provide a safe environment for children such as health and safety as well as safeguarding legislation. Chloe gave an example of what she had learned about risk assessment on her course made her aware of being vigilant in the nursery:

> *... and obviously risk assessments were a massive thing in college so I know when I'm here I'm very aware for example, at snack time if there's a sharp knife or move it away, so the things that I learned at college just run through your mind they're like a habit.*

The respondents are very aware of health and safety requirements and locate these in the need to keep children safe. Others referred specifically to protecting children in terms of safeguarding, citing legal requirements and the need to understand child protection and policy:

> *... remembering the welfare of the child is paramount so the safety of all children should be considered at all times.*

Amelia and Chloe noted that safeguarding was a significant part of their course, which raised the question about children's safety where there are practitioners who have not had this training. I acknowledge that there are Local Authority (LA) safeguarding courses which are a requirement for Ofsted, however the content is not as in depth as the learning these students will have had on their National Diploma course. The LA courses are not available on demand; therefore there are times when practitioners are working with children without this knowledge and understanding. This may lead to missed opportunities to identify children at risk of abuse or neglect.

Another aspect of caring is developing relationships, which is embedded in the EYFS, Personal, Social and Emotional Development (DfE, 2014a). In facilitating the development of positive relationships for children, it follows that practitioners should be able to do this effectively. The ability to develop relationships was raised by the managers and is a key feature throughout the data. James (Headteacher) discussed the importance of relational skills in caring for children:

> *quality of interactions with children, listen talk, warm caring interactions, take an interest in the children's ideas [...] seeing children as individuals, developing positive relations with parents [...] the ability to form strong relationships with key children.*

Similarly Jane (Manager) offers:

> *(Practitioners must) like…love the children no matter what they look like or sound like … because some of them have got funny cries, yes you do need to love all of that, their strange mannerisms that they have got …*

Jane is drawing attention to Carl Rogers' (1967) notion of unconditional positive regard. Hochschild (1983) exemplifies the challenge of unconditional positive regard, recognising the need for 'deep acting' when this is an expected aspect of the work:

> To be warm and loving toward a child who kicks, screams and insults you - a child whose problem is unlovability requires emotion work (p.52).

The use of the term 'acting', suggests that the skills required for caring and emotional work can be developed. Page (2011) offers the term 'Professional Love' to explain the complex nature of caring relationships with children, and while none of the student-practitioners used the word 'love' for the children there are examples of Page's (2011) concept of professional love. Tuning in to babies' and children's' needs (Page, Clare and Nutbrown, 2013) was mentioned by Amelia and Sharn. Amelia described how important it is to build resilience for the two-year olds in her room by building children's confidence and self-esteem through developmentally appropriate, child-centred practices and developing positive relationships. Sharn discusses the value of the key person system for developing '*bonds'* with the children particularly when they first start at nursery. I asked her if she could relate this to any of her learning in college:

> *That's attachment theory and stranger fear and Mary Ainsworth … and Harlow and the monkeys… Bowlby … so yes it is quite important for them to have that secure attachment ... that attachment-base.*

Drawing on her college learning of attachment theory (Bowlby, Ainsworth, Boston, and Rosenbluth, 1956) Sharn goes on to give a perfect example of her application of theory in practice. She described an event where there was to be a staff change in the baby room where she works:

> *It appeared on the rota that there was going to be two members of staff that they [the babies] weren't really familiar with and I knew from the stranger situation theory that they were going to be upset, and perhaps unsettled so I brought this up with members of the senior staff and they changed it so that there was one familiar member of staff all the time, just because I thought, I know how my children are going to react.*

It is interesting that it was Sharn, a newly qualified member of the team who identified this as a potential issue. Sharn used her theoretical underpinning knowledge of attachment theory (Bowlby, et al., 1956) to challenge the decision and plan a suitable alternative. I suggest that this shows Sharn exhibiting ethics of care (Noddings, 2003) or professional love (Page, 2011) in

wanting to ensure the child's emotional wellbeing through an unconscious application of attachment theory and her knowledge of emotional development. Sharn demonstrated the value of her pre-service learning, knowledge and experience and highlighted her transition from technician to professional practitioner. This conscious act of caring is described as emotional labour by Taggart (2011) and Colley (2006) among others, who argue that it is this emotional aspect of the work is an essential aspect of a professional ECEC practitioner, however it is missing in policy. I return to this in the next section (6.7) which discusses the Principles Dimension.

The notion of the caring practitioner is evident in every data set indicating agreement that caring, in all its forms, is central to the work of the early years practitioner. The relational aspect of caring for children is acknowledged in the EYFS (DfE, 2014a). In the EYE criteria the health and safety aspects of practice are evident '*Safeguard and promote the health, safety and welfare of children'* (NCTL 2013c, criteria 5 p.8). Care is mentioned '*Plan and provide effective care, teaching and learning that enables children to progress and prepares them for school'* (NCTL 2013c, criteria 2 p. x); this criteria is focused on planning for learning and with no further mention of care or caring in the text. This lack of acknowledgement of these important caring and relational skills in the EYE criteria suggests that ECEC is viewed as purely technicist in nature and ignores the key qualities or attributes that are needed to provide effective care. Although foregrounded in the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) how to deliver 'positive relationships' is not explicit. Rose and Rogers (2012) and Campbell-Barr, et al. (2015) imply the ability to provide care and develop relationships is dependent on the attributes and characteristics of the practitioners. As James (Headteacher) noted when looking to appoint new staff he looks for:

> *… the ability to form strong relationships with key children … other things we can develop, relational qualities we most value –we look for them and we can support the rest.*

These qualities are evident in the responses to the survey and in the interviews, these qualities are considered hard to teach and even more difficult to measure (Campbell-Barr and Georgeson, 2015; Taggart, 201; Moyles, 2001). This suggests that these are innate qualities, yet if they are essential in a professional practitioner; it raises the questions as to how trainers and employers can evaluate a candidate's ability in these aspects? This lies outside the scope of this study and therefore I cannot address this question in this thesis, however it would provide an interesting focus for further research.

The survey data, and the literature (McGillivray, 2010; Vincent and Braun, 2010; Moyles, 2001) suggests candidates with these qualities are drawn to working with young children but there is no guarantee that this is the same for all applicants to ECEC courses and careers. In my

experience, some applicants have been coerced by parents or careers advisors to enrol on the course. Others choose ECEC courses at the lower levels (Level 1 and 2) because of the low GCSE entry criteria requirements. Nutbrown (2012b) referred to the 'hair or care stereotype' (p.9) with learning providers acknowledging some applicants were directed to these courses because they could not get on to the beauty or hairdressing courses. Early years courses were seen as a choice for applicants with poor academic achievement (Skeggs, 1997), noting that careers advisors and course providers have been known to steer lower achieving students towards these perceived easy options.

I have argued that caring should be considered part of early years practice. I recognise the feminised nature of caring work and the argument posited in the literature that careers in caring are female oriented. However, I am not persuaded that women have an innate caring disposition, and I am in agreement with Hochschild (1985) and Skeggs (1997) who, some decades ago, argued that women are socialised into caring dispositions. Little seems to have changed. Though not necessarily innate, it seems inevitable that more women than men will be attracted to care work. As Osgood (2010) points out ECEC is 'deemed hyper feminine' (p.121) associating this with the lack of professional recognition for the emotional labour of working ECEC, particularly in policy. I agree with Taggart (2011) who argues that there is a difference between these perceived innate qualities for caring and those which can be rehearsed and reproduced. Therefore, in constructing the Three Dimensions of the Developing Practitioner framework I considered these soft skills of care, caring and developing relationships to be an essential part of ECEC practice.

Planning for Learning

It is apparent that many of the respondents recognise the planning cycle as an important aspect of their role. The survey results show planning activities is ranked as second to that of caring, with 72 responses specifically referring to the EYFS (DfE, 2014a). Participants then go on to relate the EYFS to aspects of planning for learning including providing resources, observation and meeting children's individual needs. The responses to the survey show a distillation of the role between the start and end of the course. The EYFS is paramount in the responses for students-practitioners at the start of their course. This could be because the EYFS is new to them and they are required to refer to the EYFS in their assignments, their first year studies are focused on the EYFS.

> *The role of an early years practitioner is to support children with their development while following the EYFS […]*

They plan for children's development, observe children and know the EYFS and National Curriculum.

At the end of the course, the student-practitioners show their developing understanding of the role as separate from their studies. They note the pedagogical aspects of the practitioners' role rather than the statutory curriculum; this could be a sign of their developing professionalism. Oberhuemer (2005) suggests that a structured curriculum framework, such as the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) 'undermines professional independence' (p.12) while it does provide structure and guidance, which is arguably useful for the practitioner in training. As the student-practitioners gained experience, they began to expand their definitions, based on their developing knowledge base and their growing confidence:

> *... be able to plan activities for children at the correct level of ability so that the activities aren't too easy or too hard for the children to complete.*
>
> *Early years practitioners have a crucial role to play in finding ways of engaging and collaborating with children in writing, of creating interesting and purposeful opportunities [...] both indoors and outdoors, and planning higher levels of adult-child interaction that support(s) children's thinking.*
>
> *To provide stimulating activities that are educational and beneficial.*
>
> *[early years practitioners] also need an enabling environment to help them [children] learn as it stimulates their brains and helps them to think.*

Here the student-practitioners are beginning to use the language of the EYFS. At the mid-point in their course words such as '*wellbeing, rights, policies and procedures, risk and challenge* start to appear in their responses. There is reference to theory, for example Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of human needs is mentioned by one participant, in terms of ensuring practitioners meet the children's needs, creating an appropriate, safe and stimulating learning environment; though this connection to theory is not common in the survey responses. There is an interesting discussion to be had regarding whether the qualification, based on policy direction and ideology, confines students to the reproduction of that language and practice and does that limit their engagement with other debates about ECEC practices. The question is whether Level 3 is a site for critical debate or is it a starting point for the reproduction of political will. There is not room for discussion in this thesis, however it does suggest the need for engagement with higher level qualifications and the need for graduate practitioners.

At the start of their course , student-practitioners' survey responses described *knowing* the EYFS. Over time *accountability* for children's learning emerged, that is the requirement to record and respond to the planning, to ensure *'everyone can know what the children have done that day'* (Chloe*).* For the newly qualified practitioners' planning was discussed in a variety of

ways. For example Amelia and Chloe talked about the weekly and daily planning for activities. I asked Amelia for an example and she shared her experience of planning to a theme of The Forest:

> *We had a campfire, not an actual fire but like sticks around and then logs all set up and paper as you would for a campfire … so one day we were reading a story about a campfire and the next day I went out with the children in the garden and I sang songs around the campfire with them so it was like continuing from the story so we kept bringing up things from the story … they were saying they did this in the story… They have marshmallows and toasted them on the fire but we have got no marshmallows… or a fire … the fire don't work so… (smile, chuckle) … but we pretended it did … we role played and continued with the story so I wrote it on the continuing planning.*

Amelia here is describing how she is creating opportunities for following the children's interests to enhance their learning, rather than continuous provision. Chloe describes her understanding of continuous provision. As mentioned before there are elements of assessment mentioned in her description:

> *We have EYFS planning which is weekly planning which involves letters and sounds and what we are doing in the garden and then we have continuous planning which we will put our next steps on. For example one of mine is about copying letters in their name, so I have the name cards out or tracing paper or dotting the name things so they can copy the formation's sounds … so hard when they are only 3 or 4. And then you put initials of the children that is focused for and then a circle if it's next step or a child initiated activity so two bits of planning to look at.*

In their examples, Amelia and Chloe refer to continuous provision (Bryce-Clegg, 2013) yet their examples are not what are generally understood to be continuous provision. That is the provision of well-planned resources and environments that allow learning to continue without the presence of an adult. Unlike Amelia, Chloe included reference to the curriculum, the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) and the Letters and Sounds (DfE, 2008) the phonics programme linked to the communication and language area of the EYFS. Chloe also indicated how they differentiate the reporting of Early Learning Goals (ELG) (DfE, 2015a) achievements and child initiated activity, in hindsight, I could have probed here to see if there is a different value placed on these. This separation of child initiated and ELG could be to complete the EYFS profile which asks practitioners to report on the pupil's attainment in relation to the seventeen early learning goals (ELG) descriptors, as well as describing children's characteristics of effective learning.

The EYFS (DfE, 2014a) is outcomes driven; Chloe is showing her awareness of the accountability imposed by a regulatory framework and recognises how this restricts her practice. Woodrow (2004) discussed how the professionalism of the Australian ECEC worker was diminished with the introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework (Council of Australian Governments, 2009b) as their autonomy was restricted by control and accountability.

Chloe's recognition that this is not the best practice for children of this age demonstrates her knowledge of child development and developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1992), however she is compliant, suggesting she has not yet learned to 'play the game' (Basford, 2016). Basford's (2016) study explores assessment practices of graduate practitioners and demonstrates how they 'find ways to subvert the system whilst still satisfying those players who held a position of power' (p.115). The literature suggests this level of autonomy comes with experience as well as higher academic qualifications, and is present in the discourse of professionalism. Katz (1985) included autonomy in her definition of professionalism. Similarly Brock's (2012) typology of professionalism suggests, 'Recognition of specific professional knowledge and expertise regarding young children's learning and development' (p.35) as one aspect of professional practice. Chloe had the developmental knowledge that the children were not ready for the writing activity but lacked the confidence to challenge the practice. This could in part be due to the transition from student to practitioner. As a student, Chloe will have been working under the supervision of a qualified practitioner and therefore without the power to make decisions. However the data show that there is evidence of the newly qualified practitioners' developing autonomy; this transition to becoming the responsible person is discussed later in the chapter.

In contrast to Chloe's example, Sharn reflected on being able to make decisions. She explained that their planning is based on the child's stage of development and that the planning is displayed on the board. Interestingly she commented that planning is like an evaluation, '*you can see how effective that resource was in developing the child*', suggesting she sees planning as part of a cycle. The developing confidence of Sharn and Amelia is exemplified in their pleasure at planning for their children. I asked Sharn how she felt about planning now she is employed:

> *You feel a bit more important, and part of the team. Because you are part of the team, where there are only two of you in the room you feel there is a more equal partnership and that your ideas are as important as somebody else's, so if you want to plan something then you can.*

> *It took a while [to know that I can] and people would ask my opinions on things and I would think like 'ooo I don't know' and then I realised I can suggest things and it just got better like that. I think it was a confidence thing at first because I felt going from being students ....it is quite hard to come away from being a student and becoming a member of staff.*

This realisation that she can, and indeed must, plan for her children led to our final discussion topic on the difference between being a student on placement and being an employee. This is discussed later on in this chapter in 6.10. In terms of the practice dimension, the prime roles student-practitioners identified were caring for and keeping children safe, and planning for

learning. The survey results show these two factors increased in prominence through the duration of the course (Figure 6.5).
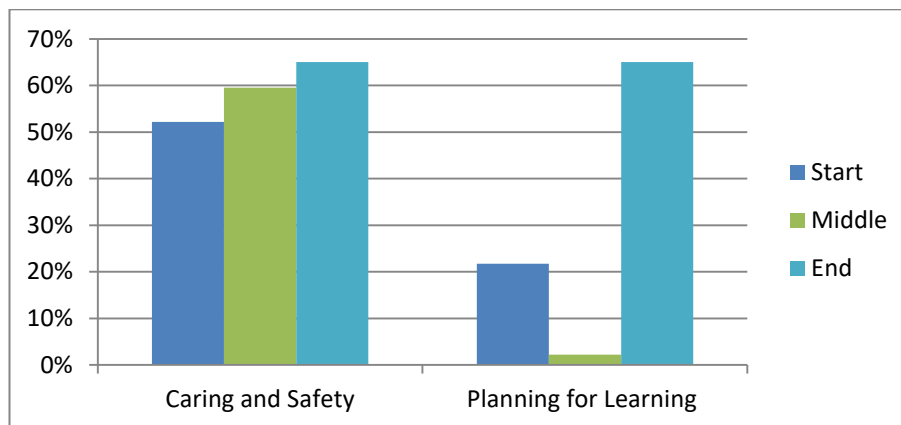

Figure 6.5 Survey results showing the increased value added to 'Caring' and 'Safety' and 'Planning for Learning'.

Other aspects of practice, for example, time management, application of policies and procedures, interacting with children and knowledge of policies and procedures which were evident in responses from student-practitioners at the start of their course, though small in number, were not mentioned in the other surveys. This could be that at the start of the course this was new knowledge and therefore at the forefront of their thinking. An alternative view is that these became part of the student-practitioners' vocational habitus (Bourdieu, 1992). Bourdieu's concept of habitus is a way of understanding the student-practitioners' changing conceptions of ECEC practice. Bourdieu suggests that these conceptions can be influenced by policy, in this case by the statutory curriculum, as well as by the profession itself, that ways of being a practitioner based on their developing work experience and the need to conform to the placement's policies and procedures. The concept of habitus is also a way of being, and is enmeshed with personal qualities that create professional identities. I am not suggesting that the student-practitioners are professional yet, however they do identify with the values, attitudes and dispositions offered in the literature (Campbell-Barr, Georgeson, and Varga, 2015; Moyles, 2013; Osgood, 2012). These are discussed in the next section.

6.7 Principles Dimension: Values, personality traits, beliefs, dispositions

Dispositions
- patience
- reliable
- trustworthy
- honest
- calm
- thoughtful
- understanding
- kind
- open

Characteristics
- friendly
- fun
- happy
- bubbly
- polite
- trusting
- sense of humour
- high self-esteem

Attitudes
- enthusiastic
- motivated
- hard-working
- dedicated
- love what they do
- positive attitude
- passionate
- open minded
- positive

Values
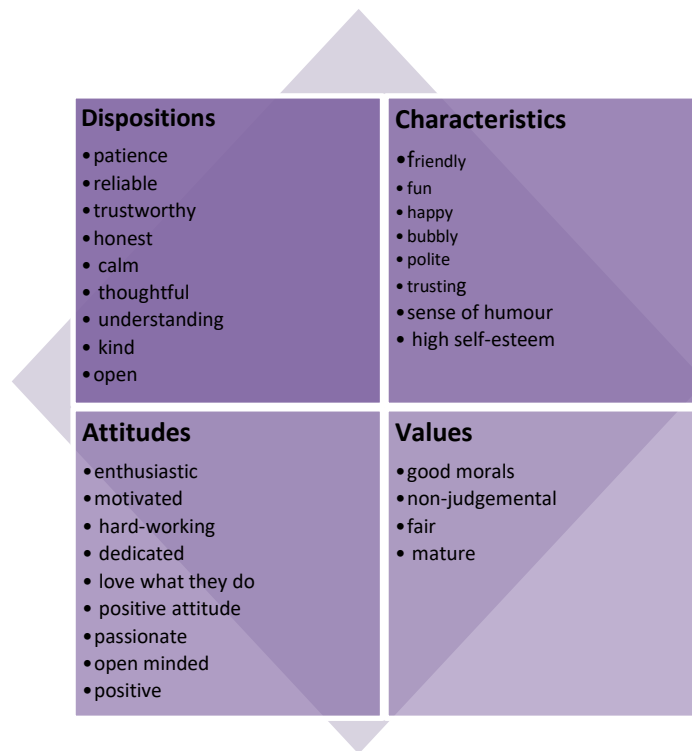- good morals
- non-judgemental
- fair
- mature

Figure 6.6 Summary of survey responses: Principles Dimension

There were a wide range of principles that participants identified relating to this dimension, with many words in the list appearing only once (see Appendix 5). The attitudes, dispositions and values student-practitioners are developing relate to employability qualities for example 'hard-working', 'honesty' and 'reliability'. Others are more personal characteristics such as 'bubbly' 'happy', 'fun' and 'enthusiastic'. While they may be considered desirable characteristics, it is possible to be an early years practitioner without them because they are not included in policy as essential criteria for ECEC practice. Figure 6.7 shows how the participants' emphasis on certain principles changed during the course of the study.

It is interesting to note that the personal values were mentioned by individuals at the start of the course, however these were less evident at the end of the course (see figure 6.3 and 6.8). Participants listed many attitudes and values as similar to those found by Campbell-Barr, et al. (2015, p.317) and Brock (2012) which included *enthusiasm, sense of humour, kindness, patience and passion.* However, *patience* was the most enduring principle, as the student-practitioners' gained more placement experience, they become more aware of the need for patience.
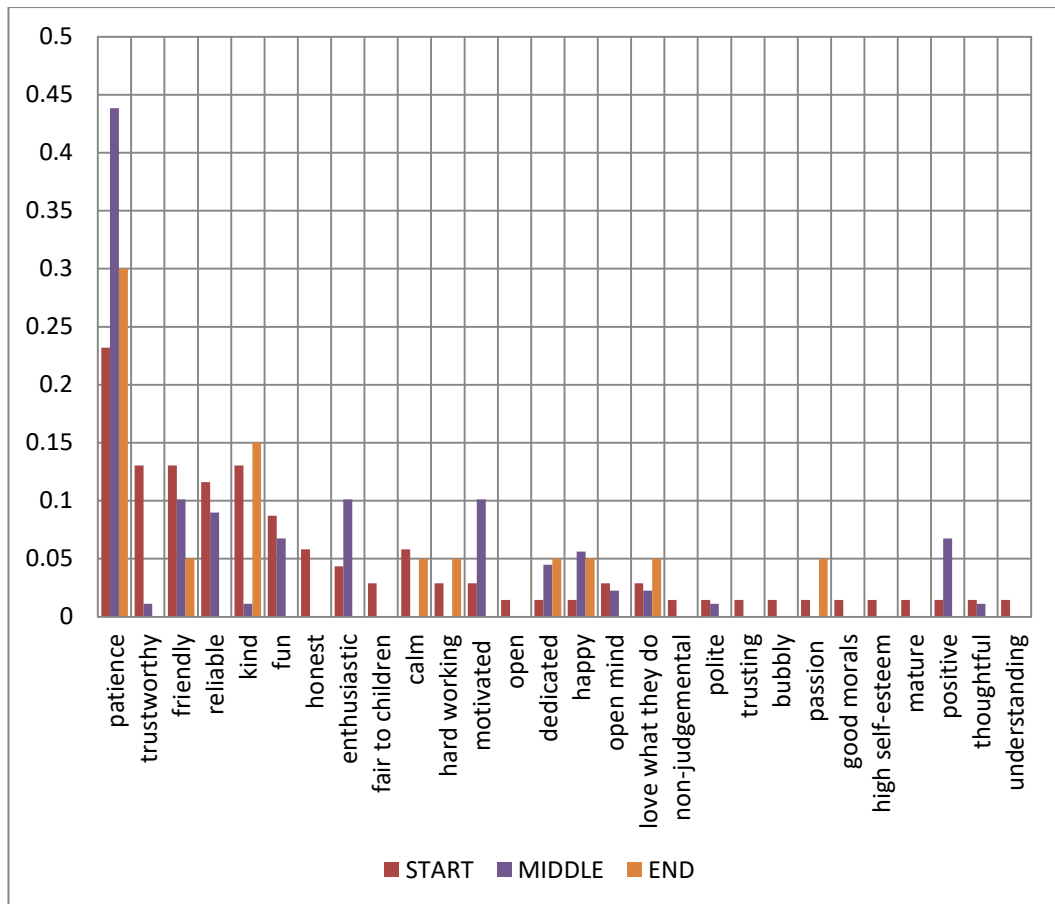
Figure 6.7 Changing principles at 3 points in the course: Start (September, year 1) n=69, Middle (September, year 2) n= 8, end (July year 2) n=20. Weighted values)

In their study with first year early childhood studies degree students and graduated students in Greece, Rekalidou and Panitsides (2015) found that 'patience' was ranked as the highest characteristic required to be an early years teacher; ranking it higher than knowledge and skills. They attributed this high-ranking to classroom management and managing children's behaviour. This is evident in this thesis as participant 4 explained how, for her, the uncooperative nature of children requires forbearance:

> *... to be friendly and confident around children ... to love what they do because the children need to be looked after and care for also they (practitioners) need to be patient with children as they will not always do as they are told.*

This comment has a sense of frustration, the implication being, you have to love the job because sometimes the work is challenging (Horchschild, 1985). This response could be related to the yet undeveloped behaviour management techniques, or as Francesca (focus group member) noted that children do not always comply with students' requests, discerning the difference in the level of authority between practitioner and student. Another participant located the need to be patient in terms of children's learning, recognising that:

When they are learning and developing, they need support and will not always do something first time round.

These comments suggest that patience is needed to be an effective practitioner; for managing children's behaviour and planning and assessing their learning. There is evidence here of the student-practitioners' developing knowledge of theory and pedagogy. Whether they can articulate this as such at this point was not evident as the question did not require further exposition: However, Amelia, Chloe and Sharn were able to do so.

Considering the other principles, the findings concur with some elements in the literature. For example Vincent and Braun (2011) describe the fit between the personal characteristics and working with children:

> The students understood the 'right person for the job' as someone possessing highly gendered characteristics stripped of any dangerous or negative inferences. Thus, the 'good' childcarer was warm, 'bubbly', and responsive... Successful students worked hard to conform to idealised versions of the consistently 'smiley', patient and calm practitioner, thereby embarking on a creative project of the self (p.782).

The students in the Vincent and Braun study were drawn from 42 Level 2 and 3 NVQ students in FE colleges and of a broader age range (between 16 and 49) than the student-practitioners in this study; therefore, a different age, range, a different mode of study and a different focus. Vincent and Braun's (2011) study explores students' perceptions of professionalism, not a term introduced to my participants. As discussed in chapter 3, the nature of professionalism is subject to debate (for example see Chalke, 2013; Brock, 2012; Moss, 2010; Osgood, 2010). In spite of the differences in the cohorts, there are similarities in responses in terms of the personal characteristics, *bubbly, enthusiastic, patient and calm*. The notion of creating an ideal self suggests, as Taggart (2011) does, that these characteristics can be developed. One argument is that the qualification, moulds the student-practitioners in to fit the ideal practitioner, yet what constitutes an ideal practitioner is contested and complex. The many constructions vary dependant on the practitioners experience, level of qualification and the environment in which they are employed. For the student-practitioners in this study, at the start of their journey, it is not surprising they identify with the ontological and epistemological personal characterisation of working with young children and are yet to form a professional identity.

The overall findings from the survey show that the participants' responses in this dimension reduced over time (see figure 6.3). This is not to imply that the participants consider the principles to be unnecessary or of less importance than the practical skills, but as previously mentioned, I believe it to be due to their evolving understanding of ECEC practice and what it is to be an early years practitioner. Colley, et al. (2003) describe this as a 'process of orientation to

a particular identity, a sense of what makes the right person for the job' (p.488). The data suggests a fundamental change in their developing identity as a practitioner which is evidenced when comparing the data as they progressed through their course; they began to foreground the professional and practical dimensions. The student-practitioners formed values and beliefs, and over time, these became embedded in their personal and professional construct of being an early years practitioner. This implies that these principles can be learned, challenging the binary of the nature versus nurture debate in terms of these qualities being innate. This indicates that it is the dynamic interaction between nature (innate) and nurture (knowledge and experiences) through which ECEC practitioners adopt these characteristics. I argue that the qualification process provides the opportunity for this dynamic interaction.

6.8 Professional Dimensions: Stepping up

Skills
communication
organised initiative
problem-solving
team work

Personal
confident empathy commitment
respectful professional   approachable
listening

Application of Knowledge
pedagogy reflection child development theory
legislation education   inclusive practices
qualifications   be up-to-date
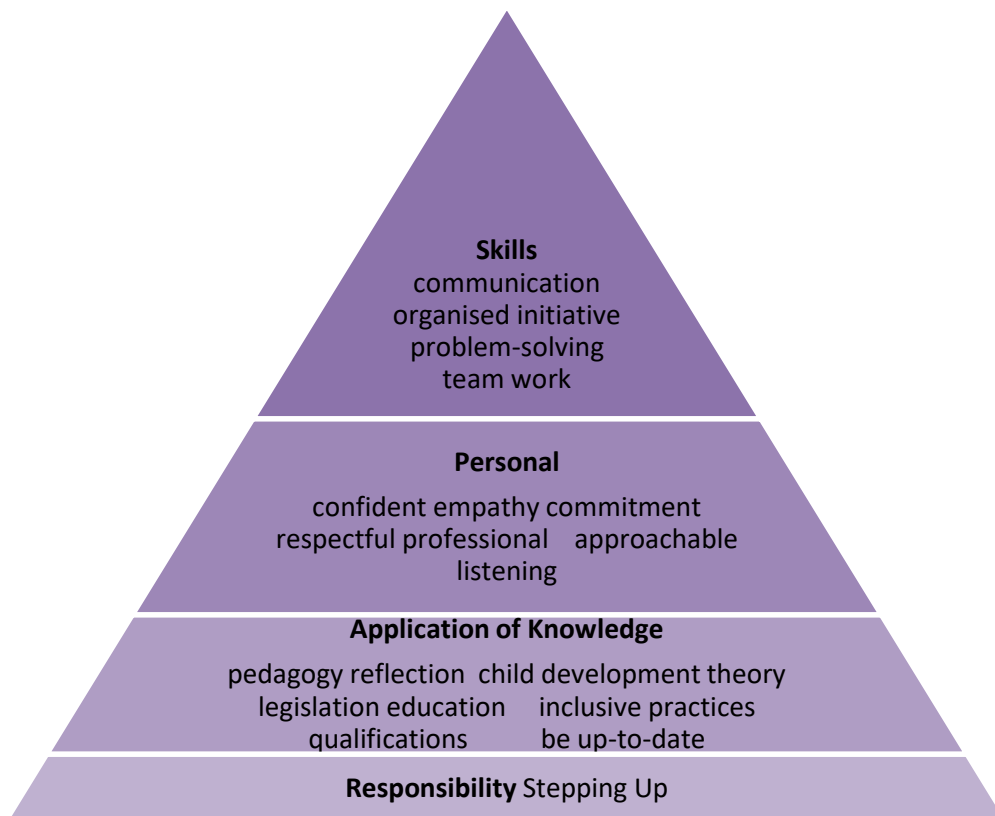
Responsibility Stepping Up

Figure 6.8 Summary of survey responses: Professional Dimensions

As previously discussed, the notion of professionalism is complex. Much of the literature focuses on existing practitioners, in many cases graduates or students on Early Childhood Studies Degrees, and considers professional identity. The focus of the study reported in this thesis is to understand the experiences, knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions gained by the Level 3 student-practitioners as they prepare for employment. The professional dimension includes examples of where participants evidence their transition from student to practitioner. I

argue that this is where students move beyond the technicist approach, where the alchemy of experience, knowledge, theory and practice create an emerging practitioner. Figure 6.6 shows a summary of the survey responses categories in to the professional dimension.

The changing discourse in the survey data shows how the student-practitioners have developed their practice and have begun to apply their knowledge and skills. Figure 6.9 shows the changes over the period of study. The diminishing personal characteristics of *happy, bubbly* and *fun* are replaced by examples of professional competence, for example being confident, being organised and growing recognition of the importance of their knowledge and application of child development theory. There is overwhelming recognition of the importance of communication and the understanding of child development. This need for these factors was emphasised by Nutbrown (2012b) in the review of early years qualifications.

Communication

Communication is multifaceted. There are the student-practitioner's own communication skills, their communication with children, with their families, with other professionals and with colleagues in the workplace.
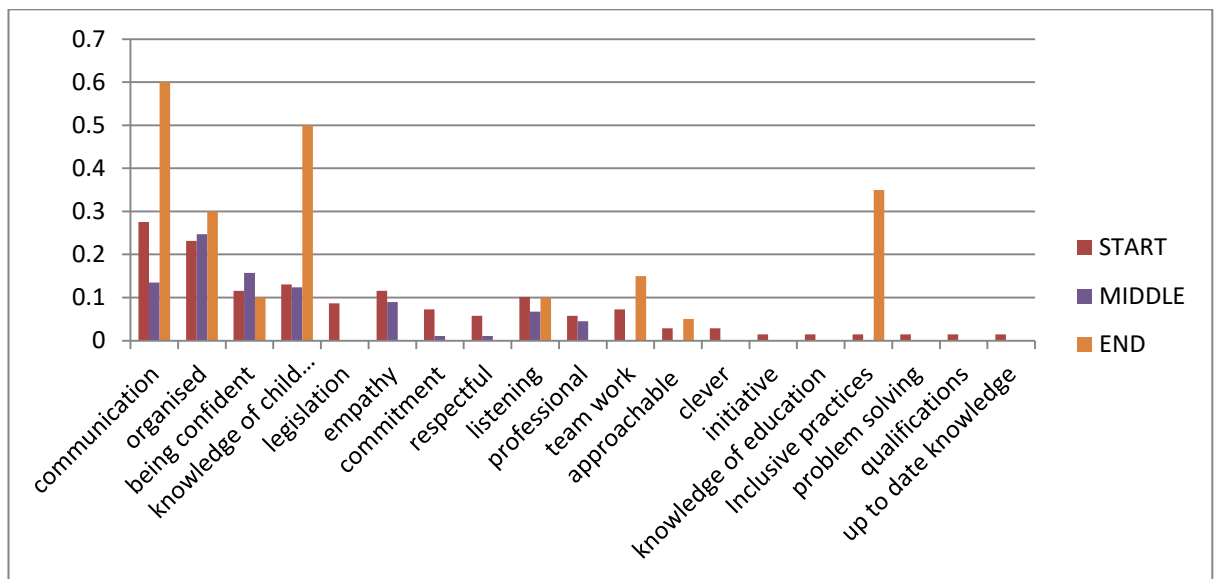
Figure 6.9 Changing Professional Dimensions at 3 points in the course (Start: n=69, Middle: n= 89, end: n=20. Weighted values)

Literacy

The literacy skills of early years practitioners were highlighted in the Nutbrown review (2012b) and in MGC (DfE, 2013a) which resulted in the GCSE grade C requirement for all Level practitioners counting in the adult to child staff ratio (DfE, 2014a; DfE, 2014b). Nutbrown (2012b) made a sound argument for practitioners to have good English and maths skills in order

to support children's literacy and numeracy development. The debate about whether GCSE is the appropriate qualification for early years practitioners is ongoing, largely because it is proving difficult to recruit sufficient practitioners with these qualifications (DfE, 2016; NDNA, 2016). The National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) survey highlighted the current difficulty in recruiting Level 3 practitioners, and progressing qualified Level 2 staff due to the GCSE grade C requirement (2016). From my experience in FE, the introduction of the GCSE requirement had a detrimental impact on recruitment of students to Level 3 courses and adversely affected the progression of Level 2 students. Pressure from the PVI sector has resulted in the DfE (2016) consulting on whether to amend the literacy and numeracy requirements for EYEs. Rather than amend the entry requirements, I suggest that the issue lies with the GCSEs themselves, and the relatively low number of pupils leaving compulsory education with higher grades. However that does not diminish my belief in the requirement for ECEC practitioners to have a good standard of written and spoken communication.

Student-practitioners' Communication Skills

I was interested in the significant increase of reference to *communication* being reported in the survey, which suggests the student-practitioners have recognised the need for effective communication as stated in the literature (Campbell-Barr and Georgeson, 2015; Page and Elfer, 2013; Rose and Rogers, 2012; Nutbrown, 2012b). There are a number of possible reasons for this.

One reason for the change over time could be physiological. Medical research suggests that the teenage brain is undergoing psychological and social change (Christie and Viner, 2005). The research shows teenagers may feel self-conscious, particularly as they move in to the adult world in their placements. Chloe acknowledged this feeling; she talked about how her reticence to engage with adults, stating, '*I don't even like talking to my friends' parents*'. She acknowledges how her confidence has grown since being employed although she was reticent to do so at first, and needed reassurance from her colleagues. The young newly qualified practitioners are required to interact with unfamiliar adults, for example other practitioners, managers and parents in the setting and, as they move in to employment, professionals from other agencies such as social workers and speech therapists.

There is some debate as to whether there is effective communication between early years practitioners, young or more mature, (non-teachers) with other professionals, particularly health professionals. The disparity in their level of qualification is noted as a barrier to the equity of the ECEC practitioner in the review of the progress check for two year olds (Blades, Greene, and Wallace, 2014) and noted by Early Years Professionals (EYP) in the longitudinal study of

EYPs by Hadfield, et al. (2012). The ontological assumptions of ECEC practitioners was evidenced in the comments from a social services manager, where the idea of status is found to be a barrier to multi-agency working.

> Moving into Education was like a whole new culture. They are very status conscious, and where I would anticipate that the person at the bottom of my team, in terms of payment and grade, should be able to talk to somebody in Education, to ask the same questions that I could phone up and ask, and receive the same answers. But that's not always the case and, I must say, that's very frustrating (Atkinson et al., 2001, p.131).

The subjugation of ECEC practitioners by other professionals, is possibly as a response to how ECEC practitioners are positioned in policy and in the media. One interviewee in the report stressed the importance of 'professional respect' in order for multi agency working to be effective. Atkinson, et al. (2001) elaborate, stating:

> … you have got hierarchical positions, and yes we know that if you are a psychiatrist you have had this training and that training and you have trained for ten years as opposed to five, but it's about they themselves understanding that maybe, just something that someone says is just as important (p.141).

This suggests that being confident to communicate with other professionals who perceive their higher status, due to to their higher level of qualification, might present a challenge for the newly qualified practitioners. However, the interviewees did not mention this as a challenge perhaps because of their limited experiences with multi-agency working. They do recognise that they need effective communications skills for this purpose. Amelia had the opportunity to work with the speech therapist, and shared the positive impact on her own professional development through this experience

> *I've only had 3 sessions so far with her on the videoing but I have noticed a difference. She also shows the videos of how well I've developed as well, so it's not just about the child. The child's developed and it's me as well ... and it's good because I've learned a new theory and how to develop the child's speech*

Amelia goes on to explain how she applies what she has learned from the sessions with the speech therapist to support other children's language development, demonstrating her developing self-efficacy and ability to transfer knowledge and skills to other situations (Rogoff, 1990).

Rekalidou and Panitsides (2015) in their study with undergraduates and graduated students in Greece identified a number of factors that related to the teachers' communication skills. They described these as 'communicative competences' (p.346). These skills were rated above knowledge and skills, though lower than 'patience' and 'love for children' (ibid., p.342).

Similarly the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) project states that effective settings had 'good communication' (Siraj-Blatchford, et al., 2002 p.43). Communication was identified as a practitioner's most important skill by Chloe.

> *Because [you have to] communicate with the children, children's parents, people in your room, other staff, other agencies. And if you are not going to communicate nothing's going to get done, you're not going to get along with anyone*

Chloe is acknowledging her understanding of the wider role of a practitioner beyond the interaction with the children. Communication with parents and carers is a key aspect of the practitioner's role (DfE, 20 14; Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva, 2010; Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Gilden, and Bell, 2002). Sharn gave an example of her developing confidence in her understanding of the need to communicate effectively with parents.

> *At first I wasn't so confident talking to parents and because we do page [tick chart assessment] here and a page there on what the children did that day, what they ate, what they played with for example. And at first I used to just read off it because I wasn't confident. I kind of went home and thought about it. I need to think of one good moment from that day and just tell them about that day and the rest they can look at [for themselves] so it's more of a chat rather than just reading off the page. And sometimes I show like photos and stuff now, so they can see what their child is doing. (**HP** and how does that go down?) They absolutely love it!*

As I recall this conversation, I can see Sharn's smile and the affirmative nod, knowing that she had done something well. This example shows her ability to reflect on practice and to think critically. She is showing empathy for the parent, providing an opportunity to share the essence of the child's day. She is showing the parents that she knows and cares for their child; in this way she is developing a trusting relationship with the parents. The practitioners in Musgrave's research (2014) recognised the importance of warm and trusting relationships and found that these qualities were valued by parents. Sharn stepped up. By reflecting on the process from the parent's point of view, she changed her practice and the process, suggesting she feels ready and confident to make changes.

Similarly Chloe is developing her confidence in communication with parents. She relies on the settings protocol when giving feedback to parents.

> *Here we use like the sandwich, start with a positive and negative and positive. It took me a while to get it in to my head. It's hard especially when you're saying that their child hasn't done well today, perhaps not listening. They always hear the negative especially if it's a recurring thing – I know what I am going to get told today…*

Chloe's example raises the difficulty in reporting a child's progress to parents, particularly if there is a potential concern, for example the child's behaviour or delayed development.

Recognition of the challenges of working with parents was highlighted by Nutbrown (2012a) Managing difficult conversations or working with parents who may have their own problems was also discussed in the National College's (2013b) report, 'Being and becoming': under threes in focus: Leadership in the early years'. This report acknowledged the challenge for young practitioners

> ... is not easy and can cause high levels of anxiety, particularly for young and less experienced early years practitioners, many of whom who are themselves still learning to manage their own responses to challenging situations (p.17)

This suggests that there is an argument for practitioners to have reached a level of maturity before they can count in the adult to child ratio. Chloe and Sharn are now over eighteen and demonstrated their developing emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) in how they communicated with parents.

I have previously stated my belief that all practitioners should be qualified before being able to count in the adult to child ratio, this is not only because of the knowledge and experience they bring to their practice but also they would be eighteen years of age or more, when their own emotional and social development may have moved beyond the awkwardness of adolescence (Christie and Viner, 2005). For me this is a particular concern for apprentices as they can be counted in ratio, at sixteen years of age (DfE, 2014).

Sharn exemplifies the importance of effective communication stating

> *... you have to communicate well because you're advocating for the child*

Sharn works in the baby room; this insightful comment demonstrated her understanding of her role in promoting children's rights (United Nations, 1989). Sharn also demonstrated this in the earlier example where she recognised the distress that may be caused for the babies due to staff changes. In the previous section Jane discussed the need for practitioners to tune in to the children's needs. Listening to children in order to meet their needs featured in twenty-six participants responses in the surveys. This notion of attunement helps to improve the quality of communication between the practitioner and child (Page and Elfer, 2013; Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva, 2010; Nutbrown and Page, 2008). Jane, the day-care manager talked about the importance of practitioners tuning in to children's non-verbal signals making the connection between the need for communication to provide effective care:

> *The care kind of stuff actually recognising that a child doesn't know that their nose is running, offering drinks throughout the day, the child doesn't recognise thirst or hunger they need to think for the child they need to think about sleep, why they crying ... It's back to communication those body language signals.... This particular cry is because I*

am tired and you need to help me make that decision because I can't make that decision for myself. And when they're not well and they've been sat on your lap all day, not joining in, how do I respond to that? I need to think why, what did the parents tell me, were they wake in the night, has been some trauma at home. It's picking up all of these signals. It is communication that is key.

Jane recognised the needs for practitioners to observe children as a way of identifying their needs particularly as young children's communication skills are still emerging (Reccia and Minsun, 2010). The importance of observations (and assessment) was emphasised in the Nutbrown Review (2012b):

> A tool by which a proper understanding of a child can be reached. This has long been the bedrock upon which early years practitioners have built their practice and it must be a core skill that all potential early years practitioners acquire (p.21).

In analysing the data it became evident that as the participants progressed through their programme and in to employment, their understanding of observation changed. At the start of the course observation is seen in terms of regulatory a requirement for recording and reporting children's progress (DfE, 2014). The survey data indicates a tendency to conflate observation, assessment and planning with responses focused on the EYFS and milestones. This suggests observation is a process for assessment and auditing progress. Observations are recorded on '*post-its*' or on their *planning sheets* for the '*next steps*' in terms of the EYFS requirements. Jane, the manager also referred to observation somewhat wistfully, as having to:

> *back everything up with a piece of paper when actually you just want to play with the farm or just to sit and squish the play doh around… Just the taking part of it… No end product.*

Jane's comment suggests her compliance in observation for accountability and how assessment gets in the way of being with the children. It is reasonable to assume this need for accountability will be transferred to the practitioners in her setting. The responses from students at the start of their programme suggest assessment is more about accountability and statutory requirements, often leading to a tick box approach to meeting the early learning goals. The question is, has this approach come from what the student-practitioners have been taught on their course or from what they have seen in practice? For the students in this study, observation will have been a discreet module in their qualification. They will have been taught a variety of observation methods and completed a number of observations with children aged from birth to eight years old. They will have been required to analyse their observations to the EYFS, developmental norms and theory, as well as planning the next step. The observations student-practitioners complete for their coursework are part of their assessment process. They often bear little resemblance to the process used for observations carried out in the workplace, exemplified by

Chloe's response *'Oh my gosh, it was so long ago since I've done a proper observation erm…'* Chloe's response suggests that the post-it-note approach is learned in the work place, not on the course. This difference in practice was noted by all three newly qualified practitioners, suggesting a gap between the course content and practice. I would argue that the practice of post-it note observations was a result of the introduction of the EYFS profile, which encourages a tick box reporting approach. This lack of analysis in work-place observation was noted by Musgrave (2014), when collecting data for her research into the impact of chronic health conditions on inclusive practice. Through detailed analysis of her observations of a child with diabetes, Musgrave identified how 'some of the routines led to unintentional exclusive practice' (2014, p.207). This suggests that children's individual needs are not being met if the tick box approach to assessment is in use. I asked the interviewees to consider what they had learned by completing *proper observation*. When encouraged to reflect, they recognised how they had become familiar with (learned) the developmental norms, ages and stages of development and to apply theory to what they had observed.

The process of writing up observations resonates with Vygotsky's notion of private speech theory. The process serves to facilitate critical thinking, connecting ideas, and actions and developing memory (Winsler, 2009). Equally, the process is one of reinforcement, aligned with the behaviourist theorists, such as Skinner (1991 [first published 1957]). This metacognition perhaps explains the move in practice from *proper observations* to the *post-it note* as the more experienced practitioners apply their existing knowledge, without the need for the full written account. However Musgrave's experiences in the setting suggest this is not the case (2014).

Rose and Rogers (2012) suggest that meeting the ELG are of less importance, and suggest that the purpose of observation and assessment should be about enhancing learning rather than checking competency which, they suggest, can lead to monitoring children's deficits rather than celebrating their ability to be competent and confident learners. They suggest the practitioners' views of children and childhood affect the assessment process and argue that what is assessed is what is considered of value by the adult and disregards the children's own ideas and interests. This is the case for some student-practitioners in this study, because respondents refer to the need to track children's progress against the EYFS and the profile, prioritising the regulatory requirements. This could be because they limited experience of observation for assessment. It could be that the language of assessment is not used in during their course. The focus on observation as a tool for assessing the students' knowledge of development may overshadow the application and purpose of observation and assessment in practice (Basford, 2016; Musgrave, 2014). That said, the data also point to observation as a reflective process to inform planning and to support children's individual development suggesting perhaps that for some of the

student-practitioners they have moved in to a stage of unconscious competence (Robinson, 1974).

One respondent suggests the practitioner's role is to:

> *... observe the children carefully and think of ways to help the children move forward in their education, by planning activities. Furthermore, through use of observation, early years practitioners could also pick up on any additional needs a child may have, which is the first step towards getting help for them.*

Chloe gave an example of this. She used the mapping and tracking observation technique (learned in college). She had noted one of her key children did not settle to any activity for long, she reflected that this could be poor concentration. Taking this systematic approach she was able to identify that the child responded well to adult led activities. She then consulted with the child's parent to find out the child's preferred activities at home and put those in to her planning. While this information was used to manage the child's engagement in activities, it was only after further reflection Chloe considered another possible cause:

> *I don't think it's helped that her days have been cut down so she's not in here so much I also noticed that she used to have sleep when she was here for her full days but I notice that when she doesn't have sleep her behaviour is more hyper ... yes ... when she has a sleep she is calmer in the afternoon.*

Chloe has drawn on her knowledge of child development and care, she has recognised the effect of the lack of sleep and rest has affected the child's concentration and the impact on her learning.

More often, observations are less systematic and, like in many settings, the newly qualified practitioners use post-its or specific observation sheets to write down what they have seen which is then added to the child's learning journey or profile later on (Musgrave, 2013). What is interesting is that the newly qualified practitioners describe recording activities that relate to the early learning goals, however in their discussion they have observed much more about the individual child which does not get recorded. For example, Chloe was able to clearly articulate the play preferences of her children, noting that they are conforming to stereotypical behaviours with the girls liking drawing, role play and dolls and the boys' preference for trains and cars. Sharn talked knowledgeably about the babies in her room and reading their signals when they are distressed or need attention. Amelia described not wanting to interrupt the children's high levels of engagement for snack and lunch. This shows the newly qualified practitioners are constantly observing, reflecting on and applying their knowledge of child development. These aspects are not recorded for the EYFS profile (DfE, 2015a) and may therefore appear of less importance.

Rose and Rogers (2012) note the observation practice of reporting significant achievements, trying something new or applying a skill in a different context. Chloe describes this practice in her setting:

> *We have wow moments ... they're little slips of paper with the child's name date and a brief description of what they have done or what they have said and then you link it to the EYFS area, aspects, phase and characteristics of learning and then note whether it's adult led, child led, child initiated or part of the EYFS planning.*

In contrast to this, the graduates in Rose and Rogers study (2012) look beyond the policy constrained observation in terms of meeting the EYFS requirements and are able to offer examples of beyond the milestones, analysing the data, looking at schema development , symbolic representation, looking at the processes of children's learning and development as well as the outcomes.

The data suggests that the newly qualified practitioners are developing their observations skills. They can observe children systematically and, when encouraged to reflect on the observation, are beginning to make sense of those observations drawing on their own learning of child development and learning theories and their knowledge of the children in their care. They are able to apply their analysis to inform their interactions with, and planning for the children.

As well as monitoring and tracking children's progress the opportunity to identify children's needs was noted as another purpose of assessment. In the survey seventeen respondents included meeting children's individual needs in their description of the role of the early years practitioner, with only one mention of special needs and four references to inclusive practice but not used in the context of assessment.

Throughout the interviews the newly qualified practitioners' conversations suggest that they are continually assessing children's progress (formative assessment). They are consistently talking about '*next steps',* and starting with '*where the child is'* as exemplified by Amelia's example of watching a child with scissors:

> *if you're watching a child cut and they can't use their scissors properly you know their motor skills are not developed that well. You know that if they're holding a pencil in a tripod or pincer [grip] or something then you know that they need further development on that ... when if you doing an activity with a child and they don't really understand it... it's not the activity just the ... how it is being taught and then you do it again... but not the same activity, but similar stuff and then about two weeks later you come back to doing it [the assessment] probably exactly the same as the original one and they're pretty much doing it on their own.*

Amelia is describing Vygotsky's theory, of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) something I know she will have learned during her course; another example of being

unconsciously competent (Robinson, 1974). As well as showing her understanding of the value of formative assessment and the need to provide activities that are meaningful for the child, in order to practice and master a skill, Amelia is demonstrating her knowledge of child development.

The examples from the data show how student-practitioners and the newly qualified practitioners were consciously or unconsciously competent (Robinson, 1974) in applying the learning from their course. This is evidence that the qualification (Level 3 National Diploma) acts as a proxy for what the student-practitioners know. During the period of their course they have acquired a clear understanding of the role of an early years practitioner which they have developed in a safe supported environment.

The Three Dimensions of the Developing Practitioner Framework show that the findings concur with the literature in terms of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions required of an early years practitioner. The students have developed these during their two-year programme of study, however the data also shows is that there is inconsistency in their application of that knowledge in practice.

Here I return to the metaphor of alchemy. At the start of their transformation process, student-practitioners are beginning to experience the world of ECEC, as yet without the theoretical underpinning knowledge and experience of working professionally with children. As their knowledge and experience grew, they started to question their original concepts of ECEC. Then for some, they began to let go of uninformed ways of being. There is realisation that there is more to ECEC than they original thought, however they did not yet a have a stable vision of themselves as practitioners. As the student-practitioners moved in to employment there was some indication that they were beginning to recognise the connection between theory and practice albeit at different levels of application.

The findings suggest that student-practitioners are at different stages of transformation at the end of their course. I argue that this is because there are many variables in their individual experiences. They each have different starting points in terms of life experiences, background, educational attainment, personality and dispositions. The learning process will have been different for each participant, as was the quality and support received in placement and in college. It is the combination of these factors that create unique practitioners which suggests the qualification is not a guarantee of a good practitioner; however I argue that the right qualification is a catalyst, facilitating the transformation process.

In the next section I will discuss how the Level 3 National Diploma course has contributed to the student-practitioners' transformation.

6.9 How do the Level 3 Diplomas Develop Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes, and Dispositions?

In this section I will reflect on how the student-practitioners' experiences on the Level 3 National Diploma course have contributed to their development. I have come to realise is that the experience is different for every student-practitioner. As demonstrated in 6.1 and 6.2 the student-practitioners' educational attainment and the motivations for wanting to join the course are very different. In this section I show how their experiences during their course, and in to employment, were also very different.

The student-practitioners are studying a range of Level 3 courses. They are in a transition period from National Qualification Framework Qualifications (old NQF) to new NQF, with some Qualification Credit Framework (QCF) qualifications, which were introduced by the CWDC (2009a) and that have now been phased out, as have NVQs, yet employers still refer to NVQs and in some cases Nursery Nurses when advertising posts. The Level 3 National Diplomas are different in character to NVQs and other competency based qualifications. All respondents have a blend of placement and theory. The surveys indicate student-practitioners spend on average, 60% of their time on theory and 40% in placement which is in line with the recommendations from the Nutbrown Review (2012b) [4]. The student-practitioners are working the equivalent of a full time working week. Compared to other Level 3 subject options or A-levels, this is very intensive, and arguably should prepare student-practitioners for the world of work. This model is recognised as good practice in the international literature; according to Urban (2008) this blend of placement and theory transcends the limitations of competence based qualifications and enables education to be transformative.

About the Course

The survey results unsurprisingly show placement as being the part of the course that the students enjoy most. Participants mentioned the interactions with children as being the most enjoyable. Many commented on their enjoyment of placement in terms of supporting children's learning as well as learning from experienced practitioners:

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[4] N.B. this split of placement and academic study has always been the case for full National Diplomas and the NNEB but not for NVQs or part time work-based CWDC Diplomas

I enjoy learning about safeguarding, children's development and positive relationships the most as they are very interesting subjects and it shows how I can build a better relationship between myself and the child. Safeguarding helps me understand what signs to look out for if a child was being abused or hurt etc. Child care is interesting because it helps me really understand what a baby needs and how to care for them properly.

I feel that being Level 3 qualified supports you on understanding of the policy and procedures, also for safeguarding children. With your Level 3 course you do placement which will give you a bigger chance to support you on your academic work. I enjoy placement the most as I get hands on experience working with children and I get to learn as I work.

I find my placement experience the most enjoyable part of my course as it allows me to learn in a hands on way and receive support from staff whom are experienced in that job role for a number of years.

A small number of respondents enjoy the theory aspect noting its benefit to understanding and improving practice:

I enjoy the theory part and being able to practice this within placement. I have learnt how I can plan activities to promote development.

I enjoy sitting and doing the work. I enjoy it because I love writing and getting my head down. I also like the messy and creative part because it is very fun and keeps me occupied.

The benefit of work experience (placement) was recognised as providing an insight in to employment, comments included:

'The practical part as this helps me experience what it will be like when I become a teacher'.

I love my work experience as it gives me real insight into the work industry.

This insight in to the reality of working with young children is a benefit to the student-practitioner and to employers. The retention rate of ECEC practitioners has been highlighted as a continuing problem by the NDNA in their recent providers' survey (2016). This is a consistent concern raised by Simms (2006) Rolfe, Metcalfe, Anderson, and Meadows (2003) and Cameron, Owen, and Moss (2001) who cite the major reasons being, low status, low pay and lack of career progression; none of which has changed in spite of the evidence in the literature and a raft of policy initiatives.

One of the benefits of acquiring a qualification before being employed is the opportunity to see if the role meets your expectations. The continual shaping and reshaping of ECEC policy and the practitioners role means that there may be a gap in participants' understanding of the role.

This is evident in the data as, at the start of the journey the responses are centred on the romanticised aspects of working with young children. This vision is modified through the multiple placement experiences accessed during the course and the learning programme, with the broader definitions of the role of the ECEC practitioner appearing in the later responses, including responsibility, accountability and a greater awareness of the need to understand developmental theory. For some students undertaking ECEC courses, this misconception results in them leaving the course or completing the course and using the Diploma credits to take them in a different career direction. This has been my experience when working in an FE College, and now in HE.

Over time, the responses in the follow up surveys become more focused on the relationship and between theory and practice, and the impact they are making as exemplified by a second year student at the end of her course:

> *(I enjoy) placement because I understand what it's like to be in a work place environment and I am able to apply the knowledge I am learning somewhere where an impact is made and it helps others and I am able to see the development of a child first hand.*

Here the respondent is recognising the impact her contribution has as well as acknowledging that theory has a place in practice. The blend of work placement experience and theoretical knowledge was discussed in the literature review. Alexander (2002) suggested that students were not able to reconcile the relationship between theory learned in college and their work placement. She argued that lecturers held 'an ideal world view of what happened in placement' (p.3) suggesting that the quality in some settings does not measure up to what is being taught. There have been many changes in policy and procedures in ECEC since Alexander's study. The professionalisation agenda has led to more practitioners holding Level 3 qualifications and a growing number of graduates are in PVI settings (DfE, 2011b). According to the EPPE (Sylva, et al., 2010; 2004) research, settings where graduates lead practice, supported by qualified practitioners there is a positive impact on the children's development. The Nutbrown Review (2012b) expressed the need for training providers to only use placements rated good or outstanding by Ofsted so that only good or better practice is passed on to trainees.

The quality of the placement does impact on the learning journey. During her time studying, Amelia reflected on the varying quality of work placements and the impact on her learning. In one setting she was moved between groups several times a day, with no clear direction and no time to get to know the children:

I didn't know where they were they where they are in their development I didn't know what they liked. I was sitting on the carpet and I was talking to this one child but that child did not really know me very well because I was never in the room – the children don't know me. Developing relationship with children is important - because I wasn't really with them, that didn't happen.

Amelia is able to reflect on the impact of the experience and recognised the setting's shortcomings. She went on to discuss two issues. First of all the lack of consideration for the children's learning where she identified the need for a consistent presence in order to develop a relationship with children so that you can meet their education and care needs. Secondly she reflected on the poor experience for her, as the staff in the setting were underprepared for supporting student-practitioners. In contrast to this, Amelia's next placement (which is now her place of employment) provided a positive experience.

There are a number of considerations regarding the quality of placements. First of all students are exposed to a variety of practice in ECEC. For students on full time National Diploma programmes, they are required to experience a range of placements working with children across the age range from birth to age seven. These include day-care, schools and in most cases experience with children with special educational needs. This breadth of experience ensures student-practitioners are exposed to a range of practices and supported by differently qualified and experienced practitioners. This is not the case for trainees following employment-based routes such as apprenticeships (and previously, NVQ qualifications). By remaining in one placement students potentially imitate the practice of that setting, and without comparison to other settings, their professional development is limited, as described in Amelia's example above. In the review of early years qualifications, Nutbrown (2012b) recommended that only settings graded good or outstanding by Ofsted should be used for student placements (p.7) so that students can observe high quality practice. Again, this presents a challenge for work-based practice routes as poor quality settings are less likely to employ a graduate and are more likely to employ unqualified practitioners (Gamabro, Stewart, & Waldfogel, 2013) thus removing the opportunity to learn from outstanding practitioners.

A small number of survey responses commented on the learning whole experience, valuing the tutors' support:

*I enjoy working in a team and helping the other students if they get stuck on some assignments. I also enjoy the tutors they make me feel comfortable to go and speak to if I need any extra help. I like how ***** always likes to be involved in things out of college and it makes her feel proud.*

This comment is interesting as the student has considered her response carefully, reflecting on her learning journey, recognising the wider value of college based support in making the

connections between theory and practice and the importance of respectful, reciprocal relationships needed for ECEC practice, in her own learning journey. This interplay between student and lecturer would be an interesting aspect to research in future.

While 45% of respondents in the initial survey want to progress to Higher Education, the progression survey responses indicate that Level 3 was an appropriate qualification for early years practitioners. In response to whether ECEC should be a graduate profession, no one considered that it should be. Comments included, '*early years is not as complicated as teaching…'* another offered '*no* (not a graduate profession) *because it is more about looking after the child in terms of getting dressed/feeding ….*' Interestingly, this participant is now in her second year of a B.Ed. Primary teaching; she is asserting a difference between care and education. She noted '*mother-like, caring and helpful'* as the most important qualities of an early years practitioner.

Amelia also thought that Level 3 was sufficient:

> *I feel that nursery practitioners that are Level 3 can work at same standards as practitioners that are at a higher level. Being Level 3 qualified is enough to understand about policy and procedures, also safeguarding.*

Amelia seems to value the experience gained over time as being of equal value to a graduate, however it is interesting to note that many staff in her setting have foundation degrees or an Early Childhood Studies Degree and therefore it could be argued that the quality of her mentoring has been of a good standard, making the case for graduate practitioners. Amelia's experience is congruent with the EPPE (Sylva, et al., 2004; 2010) study which found that where Level 3 practitioners were placed with, and mentored by teachers the practice of the Level 3 practitioner improved and was often better than that of Level 3s who were not mentored by teachers. Amelia is also considering HE in the future which suggests that being in an environment with well-qualified practitioners is motivating and encourages professional development.

Preparation for Employment

In transition from student to practitioner, the newly qualified practitioners began to recognise how, as students, they had no responsibility for the children or for the myriad of duties they will undertake as a qualified practitioner. The newly qualified practitioners have recognised the benefits of the knowledge and experience they have gained on their qualification but they have not been responsible for putting them in to practice. They are protected by the boundaries, the things they are not allowed to do:

> *I think there's a massive difference and to me it quite a while to realise that working and being an employee I've got more **responsibility** than being a student.*

Sharn talked about how as a student, her practice was focused on whichever module they were studying at the time. She goes on to recognise that the modules are related to practice:

> *... even though had done stuff before, it was just different doing it every day ... it has become part of the routine now rather than just doing it to get it signed off.*

Understanding the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) was one of the main aspects of their course that the newly qualified practitioners valued. They each talked of how often they refer to it every day in planning and assessing progress and reflect how difficult it must be for practitioners, for example apprentices, without this knowledge.

Amelia was in placement at the nursery where she now works. She animatedly described some of the tasks she is now responsible for now she is employed:

> *... well when I got employed I was asked to do more stuff at the nursery that students don't really get asked to do so was going off doing baby bottles, going off to do snack, dinner, going to get the kids from the school, I was doing like nappies runs and it was just really ... Like when I got home I was whoa it's only an extra hour that I'm doing but **what** I'm doing, but what you do ... like, as a student I have to clean up that room but as staff you have to deep clean up the room, it is different.*

Amelia's response gives a sense of the change of pace between being an employee and being a student, not only the longer hours but also being continually on the go. Sharn too acknowledged this difference, '*you're sort of chilled out in the week in placement*'.

Amelia's reference to the cleaning up being her responsibility for health and safety now, was a lightbulb moment for her. She recognised that she cannot walk away as she did as a student. This indicates her awareness of the responsibility and accountability she now has. As employees the boundaries are no longer there. The newly qualified practitioners said that they are still finding out what the boundaries are. It was at this point that Chloe, Sharn and Amelia had the realisation that generally there are no boundaries, it is their responsibility, and they are responsible for it all. In addition to the many and complex task the students are responsible for, the overwhelmingly emotional responses were related to being in sole charge and responsible for the children which is evident in Sharn's response:

> *You get left alone as well ... this is when it started occurring to me that it IS my responsibility. I definitely think you need the college course.*

Amelia agrees, recognising the value of her college experience:

> *As a student … It's like you don't have the responsibility it was a big smack in the face when I first started but it's got me 100% ready, without being in placement I would have gone in to a job and been really clueless.*

Sharn's experience of being left alone was on her first day as a new employee; as a Level 3 she is in adult: child ratio and can work unsupervised (EYFS, 2014a). Similarly Chloe reflects on the impact of being in left in charge:

> *When I first got left alone with the children I felt really nervous… because obviously as a student I never had … there was always someone there. I was quite nervous. I still get nervous if I go into another room and a member of staff says can you watch my room while I just pop out … it is quite scary, being left... like, accusations and all that…*

This reference to *accusations* suggests that Chloe is fully aware of the need to keep herself safe as well as the children (Munro, 2011; HM Government, 2010; Piper & Smith, 2003). Having completed a module on safeguarding in her course, she is recognising that being left alone with the children means there is potential for her to be implicated in a safeguarding issue, and rightly finds this *'scary'*.

As Jane, the manager put it:

> *… they find themselves in their room and they are left, with that responsibility, that's when it really hits them … yes I'm getting paid for this but the responsibility now is mine and if that one argues, that one wets themselves, I actually have to deal with that, I can't just draw it to somebody else's attention… because now I'm an employee, expected to do what I'm contracted to do […] and to understand that you are now responsible for that group of children. You can't just go to the toilet or when you go off to get the snack tray you have to think about the rest of the children IT IS YOU.*

Jane's view is congruent with the newly qualified practitioners. She recognised that, as students, there were many things they did not get engaged with or were not allowed to do. There was always someone there as a safety net, to make sure they do not cause any harm. They were clear on their role as students, however, now as newly qualified practitioners, every aspect of the complex role they described so well is now their responsibility and they are accountable; there are no boundaries.

With accountability and responsibility comes documentation. Amelia, Chloe and Sharn commented on the amount of paperwork that they are now responsible for. As students they were not allowed to contribute to the setting's planning or assessment. They mention other paperwork as well such as risk assessments, first-aid reporting:

> *You don't actually see how much is involved until you are actually in the job and then you're like … oh my God there is so much paperwork (Sharn).*

Amelia commented on the varying experiences in different placements:

> *You do get some places that don't allow students to be involved in planning or to have any idea of what to do or what the real job is really like.*

What is interesting for me is, that as part of their course, the students will have completed observations (assessment) planned activities and completed risk assessment (either looking at the safety of an outdoor area or for a fictitious trip). The connection does not seem to have been made between the paperwork they are required to do for their course and what they actually have to do in their role as an early years practitioner. Whether this connection has not been made clear in their lectures, in placements or whether it is the newly qualified practitioners themselves that have not seen the relationship is something worth exploring in future research. My assumption is the difference between course work and workplace paperwork is the accountability and responsibility attached to planning and assessing children's progress, health and safety issues or safeguarding reports.

A further difference raised by the newly qualified practitioners is that of having responsibility for the health and safety of the children. Chloe describes what she sees as a big difference between being a student and a practitioner:

> *I think there's a massive difference and to me it quite a while to realise that working and being an employee, I've got more responsibility than being a student. A lot of places wouldn't let me do first aid; even if it was just a cold compress, and obviously ... wasn't left alone with the children when I changed a nappy ... had to have somebody with me. In some places they wouldn't let me put suncream on the children, so going to placement from college I knew my boundaries, what I could and could not do. Obviously now, here I can be left alone with the children, I can change a nappy without being supervised, I can deal with an accident, I can put suncream on, it was a lot more responsibility.*

In the three months of her employment Chloe is reflecting on how much she has grown and now tackles the everyday tasks with confidence:

> *It felt good, like being able to actually do stuff and actually learn more. But my confidence has definitely grown ...*

Throughout this thesis I have advocated for practitioners to be qualified to Level 3 before being employed. My argument being that the knowledge, experience and practice gained will prepare them for employment. However the data lead me to consider whether a Level 3 qualification on its own is enough; I suggest that there is a need for a probation year, similar to teaching, with effective supervision as in social work. Amelia describes her supervisory experience which she values; the monthly meetings she has with her manager help her:

We have every month a meeting with the manager and she reflects on your work, it's like a staff profile to see where you are if there's any problems, stuff like that … especially with me as I am new and she guides me and if I have an idea she helps expand it for me, so how I can take it into practice. Not only does it help with activities, it helps to have the health and safety stuff, RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations), it's like a mini quiz we've got going on. She tests me on it and she knows that I've developed and I understand more. And sometimes she'll just ask me random questions, just so I'm used to it for when Ofsted do come in because I will be asked because I'm the newest one.

Amelia recognises the value of the support she receives in her professional development. Amelia has alluded to Ofsted, which may not have been on her radar as a student. She is aware of her accountability during an inspection, a further example of the responsibility she now has.

Reflecting on the difference between being a student and a practitioner, the newly qualified practitioners are rightly pleased with their growing confidence and performance. Whether aware of it or not, they are putting in to practice the learning from their courses. When challenged to apply a theory to their comments they are able to do so, which suggests they are unconsciously applying the learning (Harteis and Billett, 2013; Robinson, 1974). In talking with the newly qualified practitioners and the focus group participants, it appeared to me that they do not consider that they have specialist knowledge, they perceive it to be knowledge '*everyone has',* common sense (Vincent and Braun, 2011). They had not considered that others do not know the ages and stages of children's development, the need to tune in to the child's needs, how to promote a child's self-esteem and more importantly how, by reflecting on theory and research they are meeting the children's needs, providing developmentally appropriate practice. This is professional knowledge (Chalke, 2013; Brock, 2012) and needs to be recognised as such by the newly qualified practitioners and policy makers.

In the follow-up and progression survey, respondents were asked to rate how confident they felt in various aspects of practice. To facilitate consistency in their responses the overreaching EYE criteria were used; this enabled an evaluation of the student-practitioners' confidence levels in terms of the required standards set out by NCTL (2013c). Figure 6.10 shows a comparison in confidence levels between the follow up survey (S2) student-practitioners at the midpoint or end of their course and the progression survey (S 3) those who have completed their studies and moved in to employment or HE.

An aspect where respondents were less confident was reflecting on practice and identifying their own professional development. Reflective practice is well established in the EYPS (CWDC, 2006) and EYTS (NCTL, 2013a) standards for graduate practitioners, yet it is an addition to the Level 3 EYE qualifications (NCTL, 2013c). It could be argued that this is to be expected that

respondents were not confident in this aspect. It is worthy of note that throughout their course, student-practitioners are constantly required to reflect on their practice, particularly in their placement portfolios and there have been several examples of the newly qualified practitioners being reflective shown earlier in this chapter.
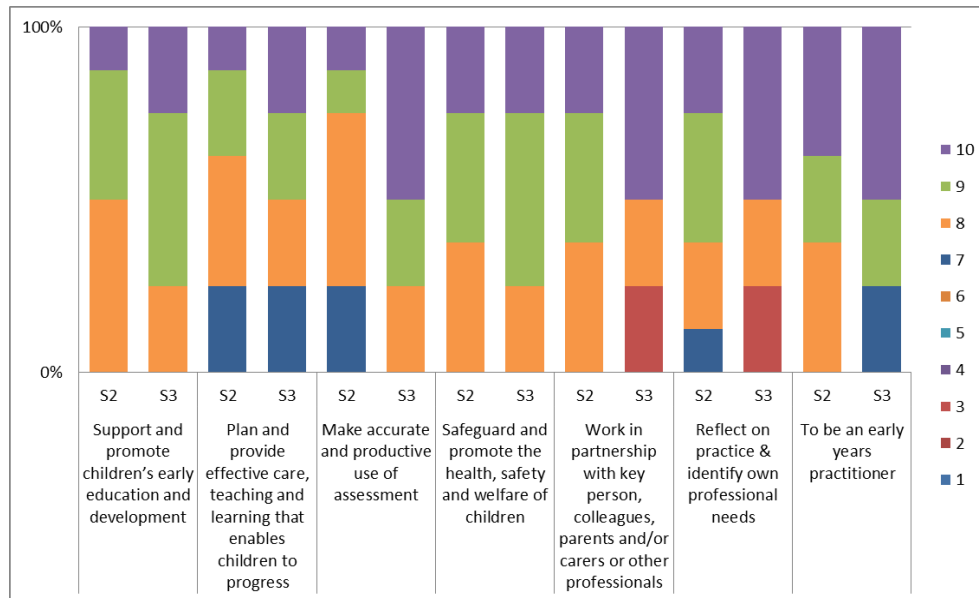

Figure 6.10 Confidence levels in areas of EYE criteria. Comparison between the follow up survey (S2 n=89)) and the progression survey (S3 n=20). 10 = a high confidence level.

Perhaps this is another misunderstanding in terminology. There are many definitions of reflective practice. Schön offers reflection in and on action (1983), Rose and Rogers (2012) suggest critical reflection and reflective thinking through action research, and requiring practitioners to:

> ... engage continuously with their understanding of their professional knowledge and its application as well as ensuring that their personal construction of what children mean to them and how they envisage child-centred practices of robustly formulated grounded in egalitarian principles.

This heavy definition locates reflection in the students' knowledge base and their personal values. Brookfield (1998) also offers a model of critical reflection using four lenses, each lens providing a stimulus for professional development requiring practitioners to look from different perspectives. With a myriad of definitions of reflective practice, in my experience not covered in the Level 3 course, it is not surprising that the newly qualified practitioners were not yet reflecting systematically and purposefully. When thinking about reflection specifically, they consider reflection to be an evaluation of an activity superficial reflection (Hanson, 2011) rather than these more complex definitions.

One reason for the drop in confidence levels in this area could be attributed to her developing understanding of what reflective practice means, and therefore a more accurate assessment is

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given, which ironically, would indicate they are being reflective. This was a concept that I explored in the interviews with the newly qualified practitioners and managers, their responses suggest difference of opinion as to what reflection is. As mentioned previously there is a tendency, in some cases, to conflate reflection with supervision or evaluation of an activity. When asked about reflection, Amelia, Chloe and Sharn discussed meetings with a supervisor or manager, to discuss children's progress or their own performance. In Sharn's case, the manager gave feedback on points to develop, based on an observation of practice. Amelia described a quiz in preparation for Ofsted. Chloe shared how she reflects on the day:

> *I reflect on it with my granddad at the end of the day when he picks me up, I tell him how my day has gone; I say 'I have a good day', this child's done this…what's gone well and if not gone so well… (I asked if this is useful) yes, he can then give me ideas and information on how I can improve, on what I could have done better. It gets me actually properly thinking about it, I start to think of what I could have done that so much better ... when I'm on the car on the way home, I think, I could have done that instead of what I did, it would have been so much better.*

Chloe's reflective practice resonates with Schön's (1983) reflection on action. In which she considers systematically by '*properly thinking'* about the events of the day and focusing on a particular child or activity. Chloe's reflection shows the value of having time to think and reflect. Research suggests that reflective practice is a core element of professional preparation and practice, one which practitioners develop, with support and the space to do so (Goouch & Powell, 2012; Moss, 2008). Urban et al. (2012), acknowledge the value of reflective practice, and argues that there is a need to do this across teams as well as individually. There is a consideration here for managers to encourage practitioners to critically reflect and also to allow time for this. Throughout the interviews with the newly qualified practitioners, they each had examples of reflective practice, yet seem to put no value on the practice or recognise it as a professional skill (Rose & Rogers, 2012; Hanson, 2011; Schön, 1983). Equally it appears that there is no provision for reflection within the settings, which would limit the newly qualified practitioners' development.

Value of Being Qualified Pre-employment

So far these data suggests that the Level 3 student-practitioners value being qualified before taking up employment, supporting the recommendation from the Nutbrown Review (2012b) and the CoRE findings (Urban & Vandenbroeck, 2011). Jane, the day-care manager (a graduate, with EYPS) was more ambivalent about pre-service qualifications than the student-practitioners. Although she noted that two recent appointments are Level 3 qualified with a CACHE Diploma:

> *They shone at interview because they did good practice and that's because they've had placement experience to draw on...*

She suggested that it would depend on the individual suggesting that if a potential candidate has '*the enthusiasm*' then this could be supported and then followed up with on the job training. She also questioned qualification as a measure of competence. Jane said:

> *Equally you can have those who do lots of qualification and can't put into practice so they can spout all the theories about who did what but they can't put into hands on practice...*

Jane's view challenges the notion of a qualification being a proxy for the practitioners' knowledge and experience. She did not expand on the type of qualification. I believe this view could be as a result of the recent proliferation of qualifications which employers found difficult to understand (DfE, 2013a; Nutbrown, 2012a). Returning to the discussion of an unqualified person with enthusiasm, Jane continued:

> *... sometimes it's a risk and it will be a risk that I discuss with my senior team, this potentially is a handholding situation probably for 6 months and if think we can do this.... and if we think we can because the rest of the team is stable then we will do it because it gives somebody that start.*

This is a nurturing approach and one which gives a manager an opportunity to develop a practitioner in line with their own approach and philosophy. This would mean there is a member of staff, not performing to their full potential, being counted in ratio and therefore responsible for children. In this scenario, much would depend on the quality of the setting and practitioners who are supporting them. One of the issues raised in the literature (Butler & Hardy, 2015; Mathers & Smee, 2014) is the quality of settings engaged in training practitioners, with an emphasis on good or outstanding settings (Nutbrown, 2012b). This does not necessarily address the issue of quality support and mentoring for newly qualified staff or staff in training. It is an issue raised by Early Years Teacher Initial Teacher training (EYITT) providers (EYITT West Midlands Network, 2016) who are finding it challenging to find sufficiently well-qualified mentors for EYTS students.

James, the Headteacher of the children's centre had a more definite view on the value of employing qualified staff. He reflected on the past practice of his setting's experience of employing unqualified practitioners who were employed mainly to work with children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). He felt '*this was a mistake*' and changed the practice to '*invest in a strong team of qualified staff that can provide an inclusive curriculum*', suggesting that there is value to practitioners having preservice experience and knowledge. We discussed whether ECEC should be a graduate profession. He suggests that it is the programme of study

that is important not whether a candidate is a graduate or Level 3 as long as it [programme of study] educates to practice. This links to the notion that a qualification is a proxy for what the practitioner has learned and knows. In England, the content of Level 3 ECEC qualifications is driven by political ideology (Schwandt, 2000) and regulated through the NCTL's EYE criteria (2013c), therefore, whatever the Government priorities are at the time, will be what are embedded in the qualification, maintaining state control and limiting the professionalisation of ECEC practice.

One of the key aims of this research is to identify the benefits of gaining a Level 3 qualification before being employed. The survey responses, unsurprisingly, were emphatic that studying before you work with children is essential giving following reasons:

> *… the experience gained with four different placements, will benefit the children much more. You will have plenty of ideas that you can contribute to improve the settings practice and routine. You will be aware of the EYFS and expected development stages so you can plan around a child's individual needs and know what can be set as their next steps (year 2 student).*

> *I would be too nervous to start working full time in a setting with zero knowledge understanding or experience regarding the job or responsibilities of the role (year 1 Level 3 student with a Level 2 qualification).*

> *I will be more qualified and will require less training and I will have a better understanding of how a setting works also I will have worked with a range of different age groups this will give me more experience (year 1 student).*

> *I chose to gain my Level 3 qualifications before finding a job in early years because I wanted to learn about the profession and gain a real understanding about what's involved in early years. From doing the course I have gained a lot of knowledge which I wouldn't have if I had just worked in the setting, such as theory, real information on legislation, etc*.

The respondents are recognising not only what they bring to the setting in terms of experience in other placements, their confidence and knowledge, but also, that their experiences benefit the children.

Chloe, Amelia and Sharn were equally emphatic on the benefits of qualifying before they took up their roles, citing knowledge of the EYFS, assessment, health and safety, confidentiality and safeguarding; they are confident in applying their learning:

> *… things that I learned at college just run through your mind they're like a habit (Chloe).*

> *I think if I had turned up with no information at all it would have taken time to learn it and it would have taken time away from the children to learn it (Sharn).*

Reflecting on her experiences of unqualified practitioners and apprentices in training Amelia commented:

> *… it's their first time in the nursery, they don't know what to do, never even heard of the EYFS, […] they have no actual experience of what to do, what the job is. […] I think it's best to go to college get the knowledge and experience first, I wouldn't be able to do it. It's like jumping in the deep end and not knowing what to do.*

As they moved into employment the newly qualified practitioners became very aware of the value of the placement experiences in developing the basics of practice, as Jane, the day-care manager noted when the students presented for interview. This suggests that the pre-service experience prepares students well for employment. They are aware of the role of the early years practitioner and they are able to contribute to the effectiveness of the setting more quickly than those who are unqualified.

Reflecting on the Journey

The students in the focus group, about to embark on their next step, either to Higher Education or in to employment, told their own stories about their experiences on the Level 3 course. Having asked the students to tell me how they 'got here' I was initially disappointed by the responses as previously mentioned, however I wanted to include them as they demonstrate the students' commitment to being capable, strong and clever practitioners (David, 2004), in spite of the challenges they faced along the way. (Transcripts and photographs of Grace's Identity box are in Chapter 3. Natasha and Bob's identity boxes can be found in Appendix 8).

Francesca (Figure 6.11) joined the Level 3 course after first studying A-levels. Francesca's story is not unfamiliar. In my experience working in FE, many students come to vocational course having tried 'A' levels and deciding that they are not for them. In Francesca' case and in many other students' stories, they were unaware of the vocational options at an FE college. As students with good GCSE results they were guided to A-levels and sixth forms. While this is not for discussion in this thesis, it could be argued that the deficit discourse attributed to vocational learning in England (Avis, 2014; NFER, 2014; Billett, 2013) has a negative impact on school leavers' educational choices and contributes to the low value attributed to vocational roles and in particular, work with young children (McDowall Clark & Baylis, 2012; Simms, 2006; Skeggs, 1997). In her review of vocational education, Alison Wolf (2011) acknowledged that 'For far too long vocational learning has been seen as the poor relation of academic learning' (p.6). Similarly Avis (2014) asserts the low value attached to vocational learning in England in contrast to the high status attached to vocational education in Germany (Billett, 2013).

> Francesca:
>
> *I've started out when I was leaving school, and it's like all grey and dark and started 6th form … and started subjects that I liked but then when I got down to do them at 'A' level I started to hate them and started to hate what it was doing and then I left the 6th form after a year… and then when I started to get in to silver (lighter colour) it's when I started college and met the people I know now and really started to enjoy what I'm doing and really got into it. Then, like down the path - the path that is where we are now … the gold is where I am now and finishing my goal*

Figure 6.11 Francesca

There is something for future research here about the independence of career advice offered in schools for young people, and about children making choices about their future at sixteen years of age. Having found her direction following a false start at sixth form, Francesca's use of the metaphor of the golden path, suggests her pride and sense of achievement at completing her Level 3 diploma. Francesca goes on to say, although she is near the end of her course and about to embark on a career in ECEC, despite the knowledge she has gained she is aware that she has more to learn:

> *I feel like I've just gone from school and then over like this course and then working with people who have been doing it for years I just feel like one of the younger ones and I still have a way to go before I can proper call myself a practitioner.*

Similarly Amanda (Figure 6.12) noted her apprehension about the next step. She too used the road metaphor, with a large question mark at the end.

> *I'm just thinking like it's weird like because I'm qualified to go out and to get like a job in a school or a nursery and it's like Francesca was saying, you don't feel right, you think like you don't have enough life experience and you don't quite feel like you are even though you are … but you just don't feel it … just don't feel ready*

> *My box is like a road and it starts when I was at school and I used to look after the other children in the younger years. Then it goes to college where did all my work and got loads of experience, at work placement. I just came to love it even more and more and want to work in it (ECEC). There are loads of clouds and a big question mark at the bottom of the box because you don't know what you future is going to be.*

Figure 6.12 Amanda

This apprehension about taking the next step suggests that the students are aware that there is more to the role of the early years practitioner than they have learned while studying, although they cannot articulate what IT is. In contrast to Amanda and Francesca's apprehension as being ready for employment, Lee recognised that having progressed from Level 1 to Level 3 (4 years in college) she had gained sufficient knowledge, experience and confidence to be employed.

> *I feel I've had a lot of experience so I wouldn't agree [with Francesca and Amanda] I'd say it's more like, that you yourself are ready. Are you are mature enough to step up to it? Obviously you're already, so you've just got to say, let's go let get on with it let's just do it*

Lee introduced notion of maturity being a factor in being ready to be a practitioner. Having progressed through levels, she and Amelia are twenty years old; Lee is recognising the value of maturity in being ready to be a practitioner. However Amelia, who had at this time just started work as a practitioner, offered the benefit of her experience:

> *As a student you think you know how they work things but you don't know anything, well you do know a lot but you don't know that much.*

Amelia's response reflected the views of Chloe and Sharn, recognising that being employed brings additional and unforeseen responsibilities.

Following this discussion I asked whether they thought there should be a minimum age for ECEC practitioners. Amelia was emphatic in her response:

> *I don't think that 16-year-olds are mature enough, I think some of them are but some of them you get and they are just so not ready … if they are crying over their work as much as they are, and crying about' oh I'm dreading going to placement…'*

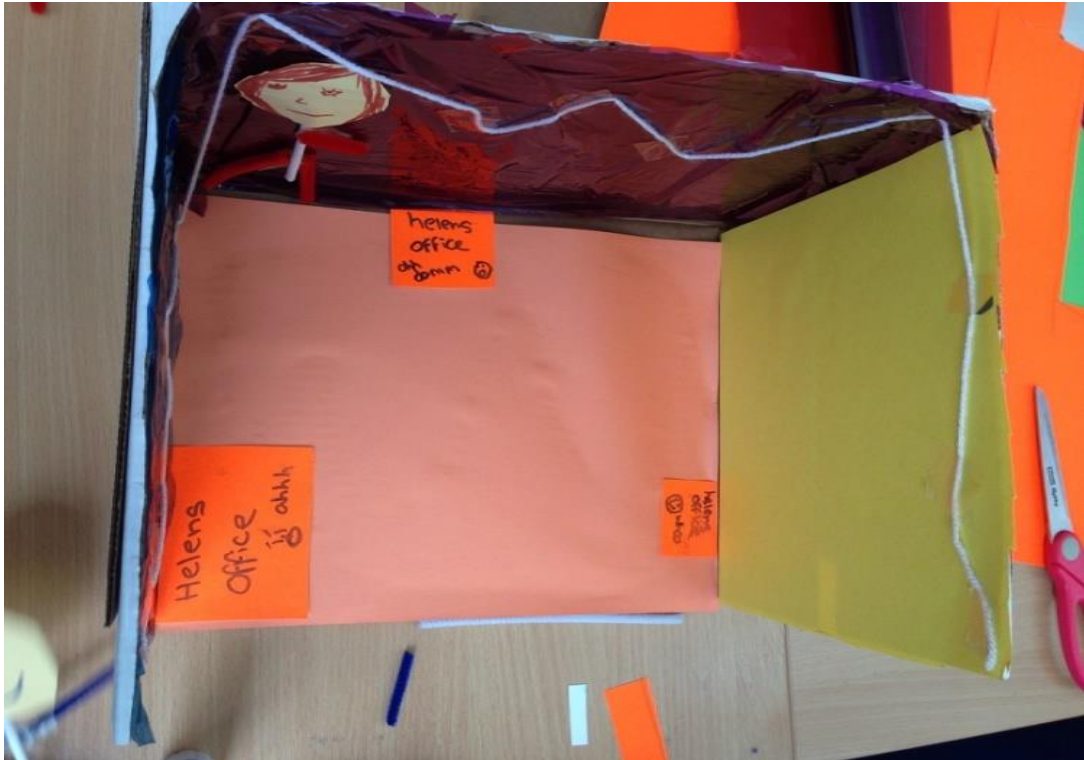Amelia is reflecting on her college experience as a mentor to the ECEC students on Level 1 and 2. She goes on to say:

> *… when I have gone in to work at placement last year, I was in a placement that had loads of just finished 18-year-olds and it was so uncomfortable because it was very bitchy because they're not that mature yet. I've been into an environment where they are little bit older only by one or 2 years but they are like so much more mature and just not so gossipy.*

There are several issues raised by Amelia's response, the unprofessional behaviours of some practitioners and why that behaviour is allowed to happen, and the relationship between age and maturity. The group suggested that this behaviour was allowed to happen as it was not challenged by managers and therefore it was a leadership issue. Natasha, Lee, Amelia and Francesca gave examples where they had experienced this on placement and were able to identify, where there was good leadership, and where it was ineffective. As students are influenced by the quality of the practices in their placements (Reccia & Minsun, 2010), this is of particular concern for work-based learners who have not been exposed to different practices. The impact of the quality of the placement on students development as practitioners is worthy of investigation in the future. In terms of age, the group agreed that practitioners, counting in ratio should be at least eighteen years of age, with at least a year of pre-employment study.

> *I think they should come to college at Level 2 and then maybe they could do an apprenticeship Level 3, when they've got a bit of knowledge … then you've got a bit of both so they should have something before they go into the workplace (Lee)*

Reflecting on her own journey, Lee (figure 6.13) acknowledges that she was not ready, at sixteen for work or for college. Lee would be the first to admit, she is not a typical student, however in my experience in FE, she is very typical of a Level 1 student who has left school without GCSEs and has not had a positive experience of education. The image of the diminishing size of my office shows how she is maturing, and her recognition that I am working with her to help her succeed. It has not been a smooth journey, but it is a successful one. Having gained her GCSEs in English and maths, she is completing the first year of her degree and has secured a post in a primary school. Lee's story is one that could have easily fitted in to the media's negative image of ECEC practitioners, yet her success shows her strength**,** determination and commitment to providing a quality service to the children in her care. Lee's journey exemplifies that becoming a qualified practitioner is not an easy road. Amelia's story also acknowledges the challenges of studying for her Level 3 diploma.

This is my box and it starts off on Level 1 where I was really angry and Helen's office this is really big because I was there often (smiles at me) then the line on the thing (string on the box wall) goes up and down on Level 1 and then it goes up when I went onto Level 2 and Helen's office gets smaller and it had less of the ups and downs and then I get to Level 3 and the office is all good, small, because things are good. Then the line goes up and down and straighter but not so much… I hopefully get to the goal at the end …

Figure 6.13 Lee

Lee would be the first to admit, she is not a typical student, however in my experience in FE, she is very typical of a Level 1 student who has left school without GCSEs and has not had a positive experience of education. The image of the diminishing size of my office shows how she is maturing, and her recognition that I am working with her to help her succeed. It has not been a smooth journey, but it is a successful one. Having gained her GCSEs in English and maths, she is completing the first year of her degree and has secured a post in a primary school. Lee's story is one that could have easily fitted in to the media's negative image of ECEC practitioners, yet her success shows her strength**,** determination and commitment to providing a quality service to the children in her care. Lee's journey exemplifies that becoming a qualified practitioner is not an easy road. Amelia's story also acknowledges the challenges of studying for her Level 3 diploma.

Studying was clearly an incredibly stressful process for Amelia (Figure 6.14) yet I would never have known it. She was a model student: 100% attendance, always engaged, punctual, met her

deadlines, all her work completed on time and to a good standard and received excellent placement reports. I now know this is the result of her *'blood, sweat and tears'*.

My box is basically me sitting in the corner at home crying over work because of being at work and I'm all confused. When I was on Level 2 and I was told I wouldn't do Level 3 and then was really upset and I got put on a Level 3 and then I was really confused with all the new stuff 'cos I've never done theories before and it was all been chucked at me. And then blood on the wall, this blood on the wall on the wall and hands is because of the writing, the headband, I've got a headband on because I was sweating, I sweated out puddles, puddles were the crying and my laptop is on fire because of how much it's been used … And the star … at the end of the year I am student of the year (boasting-laughter) and then I got employed by the nursery and that's brilliant!

Figure 6.14 Amelia

As previously stated, I was disappointed in the identity box activity. However, when revisiting the transcript of the focus groups, it occurred to me that three of the seven young women who participated, are students who have similarities to those in the media; young women with few or no GCSEs, uneducated, with few options, yet they are now successful . They have achieved their Level 3 National Diploma and acquired maths and English qualifications as well. Four are employed as early years practitioners, with one studying of her Foundation Degree and working as a teaching assistant, and one is in full time HE. It was their journey I hoped to tell, however the identity box activity did not elicit their life before coming to college. It focused on their experience of further education, the challenges that they faced along the way and the positive impact of having someone (members of staff) who believed in them, an FE system that provided the opportunity for vocational education and second chances, and that they could be successful.

The transformational quality of education, through the achievement of a qualification, is acknowledged in Chalke's (2015) research. The graduate practitioners in her study acknowledged the transformative nature of their foundation degree in developing their self-esteem as well as enhancing their personal and professional identity. Chalke (2015) emphasises the impact of the graduates' professional journey illustrated by:

> *the transformative process that occurs through engagem*ent with study. It enabled individuals to recognise and own knowledge as part of who they are and as an expression of what they do (p.147)

Chalke's findings resonate with the findings in this study, with the Foundation Degree being the catalyst for the students' transformations.

6.10 How Well do Level 3 Qualifications Prepare Students for Employment in ECEC and Meet the Demands of Policy and Employer Expectations?

The study aimed to identify the benefits of preservice qualification to the development of early years practitioners' practice and asked whether the Level 3 National Diploma qualifications met the demands of policy and employer expectations. The previous section identified that the student-practitioners and newly qualified practitioners had acquired a level of knowledge, skills and experiences. This suggests that employers can rely on the qualification as proxy for a minimum level of performance to the standards set by the NCTL (2013c) and, an indication of what they can expect of a prospective employee. However the analysis also demonstrated that there is inconsistency in student-practitioners' progress through their qualification

The findings show that there is a significant difference between being a student and a practitioner. The newly qualified practitioners were unprepared for the level of responsibility for children's care learning and development as they moved in to employment, and were left alone in charge of children. This realisation was a shock. Amelia's description of it being *big smack in the face* provides a sense of the impact of the responsibility and accountability the newly qualified practitioners felt. It is understandable that settings do not allow students to take that responsibility, as they are accountable for the safety and well-being of the children in their care. What this indicates is that the qualification itself cannot prepare the students for this level of responsibility, however engaging with the process does create a fund of knowledge and experiences to draw on. As Amelia, Sharn and Chloe note, without their two years of experience in a variety of settings and their subject knowledge they would have been at a disadvantage, which they recognise would impact on the children. This suggests the need for a revision of the structure of practice element of the Level 3 National Diploma qualifications to include the

necessity for student-practitioners to take on increasing responsibility for planning and delivering the curriculum and completing the documentation as in Initial Teacher Training (ITT) qualifications.

The purpose of vocational qualifications is to prepare students for the world of work. In many cases, for example hairdressing, construction and electrical engineering, vocational qualifications develop and assess the skills required to do that job. This presents several challenges for qualifications in the ECEC sector. First of all there is nomenclature. Without a consistent name, there is inconsistent recognition of the role as in skills-based vocational trades for example, hairdresser or plumber. Working in early years is more than a skills-based occupation. The unpredictable nature of working with children and families means that practitioners have to be responsive, problem solvers and able to apply their knowledge of theory as well as experience to a variety of different situations. In my discussion with James, he considered whether a sixteen year old was ready for this level of responsibility:

> *I have a general scepticism about whether you have really had enough kind of life experience at that age to take on .... to me it's in danger of reflecting the idea that anyone can do it ... and that would be my worry. And I think that you are called upon to make minute by minute judgements and decisions that are very demanding and obviously some 16-year-olds are able to do that and of course twenty-year-olds are not it's very hard to generalise. But I would say it would strike me as problematic but not based on any first-hand experience*

James' view indicates a level of practice that generally would be attributed to a graduate practitioner. James employs graduates (teachers) to lead practice, supported by Level 3 qualified practitioners. He recognises that the inequitable funding between the maintained and PVI affords him this luxury. This moves working in early education and care beyond the technical and into the realms of professionalism, which the literature argues are graduate level attributes (Eisenstadt, et al.,2013; Nutbrown, 2013; Moss, 2008).

Secondly, as discussed in Chapter 2, the sector is a mixed economy of PVI and maintained settings which have different staffing requirements in terms of level of qualification, adult to child staff ratio and career structures (DfE, 2014a). In the maintained sector a graduate teacher leads practice and, in the Foundation Key Stage, is usually supported by an assistant who may or may not be qualified. In the PVI sector, a Level 3 qualified practitioner can lead practice, supported by a Level 2 or unqualified practitioner. Practice and provision varies between settings (Penn, 2014) making it impossible to say whether the student-practitioners in this study meet the requirements of employers. The findings suggest that their knowledge of child development, regulatory requirements and pedagogy combined with their significant placement experiences is a definite advantage when starting their career. The analysis showed that

participants felt well prepared for the technical aspects of working with children, planning, observing and assessing progress and keeping children safe (see figure 6.12, p.121). These competences are those set in policy and reflect the ideology of the Government of the day (Ball, 2008; Schwandt, 2000). These are then translated into qualifications by Awarding Bodies, in consultation with employers. Given the varied nature of ECEC provision in England, it is possible that those consulted are not necessarily representative of this complex sector. In England, there is heavy reliance on the for-profit care settings (Penn, 2014); qualified staff cost more than unqualified, therefore it is possible that some employers are not in favour of qualified staff, based on financial considerations. Around 60% of income is derived from fees with the remainder drawn from range of public funding sources including tax credits (Laing and Buisson, 2011). Therefore employers may have different agendas, depending on their status.

The managers in this study had different opinions of the need for staff to be qualified before being employed. Jane (daycare manager) was ambivalent, suggesting she is more inclined to look at an individual's attributes whereas James, (Children's Centre Headteacher) valued the knowledge and experience of qualified practitioners. As previously mentioned, Jane did acknowledge that the Level 3 National Diploma candidates shone at interview suggesting there is value to an employer as pre-service qualified practitioners bring a level of work readiness, reducing additional training costs and the level of support needed. Lee described how she is taking given responsibility in her placement:

> *My role at my placement is to usually support the lower ability set which includes children with additional needs such as autism, ADHD and language barriers. I have worked also one to one with an autistic child doing my own intervention sessions I started doing this to help with his understanding of emotions. Then it progressed to when he had meltdowns. I was in control of calming him down. I have been given more responsibilities in my class to other students at the setting I am sometimes left on my own with the class as they are aware I have good classroom management.*

Lee's example demonstrates how considerable placement experience and knowledge has developed her confidence and expertise. Lee has progressed through Level 1, 2 and 3 early years courses which means, as well as gaining significant placement experiences and theoretical underpinning knowledge, she is twenty years of age. As previously discussed I believe there is an a argument for practitioners counting in the adult to child ratio , that is taking sole responsibility for children, should be over eighteen years of age, and qualified to at least Level 3. The teacher's trust in Lee's abilities suggests that this extended period of study and her maturity has prepared her well and meets the expectations of the employer. In this example, Lee is in a school, working under the direction of a qualified teacher. For Chloe and Sharn, working in private daycare, they were in sole charge on their first day of employment. While their previous experiences did give them confidence, the responsibility was something they had not

been prepared for. Again, there is not room in this study for a discussion on employers' staffing decisions in relation to staffing costs, although it would offer an interesting research opportunity in the future.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the competing aims identified in ECEC policy namely: school readiness (DfE, 2014a), closing the attainment gap (DfE, 2010), allowing women to work (HMT, 2004) and reducing social inequality (Field, 2010). Analysis of the data suggests that by following the Level 3 National Diploma programme of study and assessed work practice, student-practitioners are able to support children's care, learning and development. The data suggests they are able to meet the requirements of the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) definition of being school ready.

The participants indicate they are able to plan to develop children's knowledge and skills that prepare children for school. These include references to independence and literacy.

At the start of the course, there is awareness of the need to develop school ready skills of literacy and numeracy:

> *Teaching children in all areas of development with teaching them morals, the basics of numeracy and literacy and encouraging creativity.*

> *To teach them the basics of speaking, listening, reading, writing, counting. Early years practitioners are also responsible for ensuring that they comply with individual needs of children.*

> *Early year practitioners have a crucial role to play in finding ways of engaging and collaborating with children in writing, of creating interesting and purposeful opportunities to write both indoors and outdoors, and planning higher levels of adult-child interaction that support children's thinking.*

Getting children ready for school was at the forefront of the newly qualified practitioners' planning, for example, Chloe talked of developing children's literacy skills, doing 'Letters and Sounds (DfE, 2008), Amelia discussed how they introduce the children to the Oxford Reading Tree (Oxford University Press, 2015) characters by having some books and pictures of Biff, Chip and Kipper in the nursery and *a book that we've made with the characters in the books to introduce to the characters before they go to school so they've seen them in a book otherwise that have no idea who they are.* Amelia also talked of preparing the parents for the transition

> *the books that we've made we do ask parents to write in a separate book on how well the child does. It not only get the child ready for school and stories but gets the parents ready for school in writing in a book as they do in school.*

Chloe and Amelia discussed the importance of children being physically ready for moving up to school; being independent in using the toilet, hand washing and clearing away lunch plates. The newly qualified practitioners meet the requirements articulated in the EYE (NCTL 2013c) criteria; however the literature suggests that Level 3 is insufficient in developing the higher level reflective practice and critical thinking skills.

In response to allowing women to work (HMT, 2004) I suggest that the nature of participants indicating their ambition to work in the sector they are providing a continuing pool of talent for the future workforce. Furthermore, future enrolments on qualifications like the Level 3 National Diploma will be an indication of whether there is a sufficient number of developing practitioners to meet the demand for childcare places.

There is limited specific data that indicate student-practitioners and newly qualified practitioners in this study are contributing to closing the attainment gap (DfE, 2010b) and reducing social inequality (Field, 2010). In response to what is the role of the early years practitioner, there is a significant difference in the responses from participants at the beginning of their journey to those at the end. At the start of the course answers reflected the taught content of the course:

> *Helping children achieve their milestones by using the EYFS framework in their different area of P.I.L.E.S. Also, developing a relationship with the children and parents).*

At the midpoint of their course ideas about children reaching their potential appeared suggesting there is a growing awareness of children's individual difference and needs:

> *To care for children and teach them everything they need to reach their full potential.*
>
> *An early years practitioner should also ensure that they help the child to reach their full potential and give them any extra support.*
>
> *The role of an early years practitioner is to help and support children within their development by encouraging them to progress further to the next stage. To offer support and help for children who are behind with their milestones and to create a stimulating safe environment for the children to learn in.*

By the end of the course, responses become more detailed and attend to children feeling valued and safe as well as engaging parents and safeguarding:

> *As a practitioner you have a duty of care towards the children. This means that you have to make sure that you support the children and meet all of their needs. You need to put all the children first and make sure that you encourage and support them to meet their full potential whilst keeping them safe and eager to learn. You should make learning interesting and fun for all the children whilst keeping your setting and learning environment inclusive and promote equality and diversity. As a practitioner it is your duty to make sure all children are supported and given equal opportunities so they can*

all achieve. You should see each child as equal but understand they are all individual. But remembering the welfare of the child is paramount so the safety of all children should be considered at all times. Practitioners also need to be able to work as part of a team with fellow practitioners and need to be able to communicate effectively with them. They also need to be able to work with other agencies working as part of a team having effective communication with them. You also need to be open and friendly with everyone in the setting including parents. It is also important to have positive and trusting relationships with the children and parents. You should also be reliable as the children depend on you, as their educator.

This comprehensive response is reflective of many of the student-practitioners' articulation of the role of the practitioner at the end of their course. The focus of responses is on meeting the needs of individual children, inclusion and responsibility for developing relationships with children and families to enable effective communication to support individual needs. This responsibility is reflected in a response from one of the mature students in the follow up survey, now studying a Foundation Degree in Early Years. She considered how her view of the role of the practitioner has as changed since starting her Level 3 course:

> *Being early years practitioner is much more holistic role ... As a parent myself, I find this role no less of a responsibility of a future moulded by me. I find it more demanding the further I research into early years development.*

These more complex definitions of the role, indicates the impact of the learning process on the participants' understanding of the disparity in children's early experiences and therefore their role in closing the gap. The literature states that outcomes for children are improved when they engage with qualified practitioners, and these data indicate that the Level 3 National Diploma programme of study has provided the space for student-practitioners to make a difference; however a longitudinal study would be required to show the impact. If we consider Ofsted grades as the arbiter of meeting Government standards then settings with 75% of staff qualified to Level 3 or above are twice as likely to be graded outstanding (Ofsted, 2015) therefore the Level 3 National Diploma can be considered as meeting the requirements of policy at this time. I raise a concern here about the expectations of Level 3 practitioners. The EYFS (DfE, 2014a) only requires lead practitioners to have a Level 3 qualification therefore as a new policy initiatives emerge, for example multi-agency working (Anning, 2005), children's poor literacy and early years education's role in ameliorating social disadvantage (Field, 2010) and the introduction of the two-year check (DfE, 2015b), this knowledge has to be embedded in to the Level 3 qualification. This makes the Level 3 early years qualification programme of study intensive in comparison to other Level 3 National Diploma courses in other subjects; hence Amelia's reference to *blood, sweat and tears* and a *laptop on fire*. I argue that this is evidence of a need for a career structure to include graduate level practitioners as recommended in the Nutbrown Review (2012b). The overwhelming evidence in the literature does indicate a

graduate level qualification (Taggart, et al., 2015; Mathers and Smee, 2014; Eisenstadt, et al., 2013; Sylva, et al., 2010, 2004). Sylva, et al. (2004) found that when Level 3 practitioners work with teachers, those practitioners' practice is better than where there is no teacher. Not only do graduates make a greater difference for the most disadvantaged children, but also having a graduate leading practice means they have had more time and space to acquire and accommodate the additional knowledge and skills.

Summary

In analysing the data what emerged was the transformation process. This is represented by the model of the Three Dimensions of the Developing practitioner: Principle Dimensions, Professional Dimensions, and Practice Dimensions. However, these changes are not consistent; they are not representative of each participant. As exemplified by the focus group narratives, each person had a different starting point, taken a different route and, has had different experiences at college and in placements. The constant in their experiences is the Level 3 qualification. I argue that the Level 3 National Diploma qualification is a proxy for what the student-practitioners know and is a catalyst for their development as practitioners.

The Three Dimensions of the Developing Practitioner show the process of student-practitioners' transformations during the course. They have developed the Dimensions of Practice, understanding how to care for children, and families and to keep children safe. They have a clear understanding of the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) requirements and how to plan for learning. They recognise the place of Principles, their personal characteristics, that orient them to work with young children and that facilitate their enjoyment and passion for the work. And for some students, there is transformation in to the Professional Dimension, where they are able to 'step up' and exercise professional judgement, embrace new found autonomy and have learned to 'play the game' (Basford, 2016). The participants' development meets the requirements of employers and the demands of policy in terms of technical performativity. The implications of the findings for student-practitioners, employers, learning providers and policy makers are considered in the next Chapter.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This final chapter has three purposes. Firstly, to identify the key findings of the study and consider the implications of this new knowledge for student-practitioners, employers, policy makers and learning providers. I then reflect on the research process and consider the limitations of the study and make recommendations for further research and as a final point I reflect on my personal research journey.

This research set out to use a mixed-methods approach to explore the benefits of pre-service qualifications to the development of early years practitioners' practice. In doing so, the study provides a coherent understanding of the experiences, knowledge, skills attitudes and dispositions gained by Level 3 early years student-practitioners as they prepared for employment, adding to the limited literature (Vincent and Braun, 2011; 2010; Colley, Diment, and Michael, 2003) regarding this group's contribution to the ECEC workforce.

This was done by asking and answering these questions:

- What knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions are required of an early years practitioner?
- How do the Level 3 National Diplomas develop students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions?
- How well do Level 3 National Diploma qualifications prepare students for the ECEC workforce and meet the demands of policy and employer expectations?

I acknowledge that the findings in this study are partial and situated (McNaughton, 2005). The data were gathered from one hundred and fifty-eight student-practitioners, studying full-time for a Level 3 National Diploma, from seven institutions in England. This inquiry is located within a postmodern paradigm. The students' responses brought forth multiple truths as their experiences are socially situated in time, academic achievement, mode of study, and the differing and varied environments of their college based study and work placements.

7.2 Key Findings and the Implication for Policy and Practice

I argue that the findings present a reimagined vision of early years student-practitioners incongruent with the deficit discourse in policy, the media and the literature (DfE, 2013; McDowall Clark and Baylis, 2012; BBC, 2008;Osgood, 2007; Alexander, 2002;).The findings show the young, developing practitioners as motivated, dedicated, knowledgeable and

passionate about their contribution to children's learning and development. The study adds to the body of knowledge about ECEC qualifications and professionalisation of the ECEC workforce (Brock, 2012; Nutbrown, 2012a; Osgood, 2007). The professionalisation agenda is focused on the existing workforce and graduate student-practitioners. In contrast this study explored the preceding stage, before employment and offers insight in to what and how the student-practitioners learn as they progress through their course, using the model of the Three Dimensions of the Developing Practitioner (figure 5.3).

A key finding of this study is that the qualification stands as a proxy for what the student-practitioners know and is a catalyst for their personal and professional development. The findings demonstrate that the transformation from student to practitioner is different for each participant. I introduced the metaphor of alchemy to represent the inexplicable and diverse transformations of the student-practitioners as they engaged with their learning, academic and practical

The findings show that the student-practitioners' transformations are at different stages at the end of their course; they are a work in progress. This notion of a work in progress challenges the expectation that the newly qualified practitioners are work-ready. It indicates the need for a supported, transition period to prepare students for taking responsibility of being in sole charge of children's care learning and development. I offer two solutions to this problem. One is to rethink the way the qualification is structured and emulate the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) model. In this model, student teachers take over the responsibility for a class in increments, progressing to a full timetable at the end of the course. This could ameliorate the shock of taking on responsibility and prepare them for the documentation and paperwork. An alternative approach could be a transition or probation year, in which newly qualified practitioners work alongside experienced practitioners and gradually take over the responsibilities. The ideal situation, which is well documented in the literature (Nutbrown, 2013; Eisenstadt, et al,, 2013; Sylva, et al., 2010; 2004) is for a graduate-led practice with Level 3 practitioners in a supporting role which could eliminate the 'shock' of the responsibility for Level 3 practitioners.

These findings make a strong case for a fully qualified, minimum Level 3 workforce, as recommended in the Nutbrown Review (2012b). The knowledge, skills and experience the participants develop during their course provide a positive step towards improving the quality of ECEC provision. I believe that the evidence shows that if practitioners are qualified before being employed they are more confident, knowledgeable and capable, therefore contribute more effectively to the quality of the provision, leading to improved outcomes for children. The

findings only consider the full time, National Diploma level qualifications, that include 750 hours of assessed placement in a variety of settings and underpinning theoretical knowledge. Therefore a comparison cannot be made between these findings and other types of qualification for example NVQs or other competency based qualifications. This type of robust qualification was recognised as a measure of quality by stakeholders in the Nutbrown Review (2012b) and the findings indicate that there is much to be gained by practitioners engaging with this type of learning experience. This would require a change to the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) regulation, requiring all practitioners counting in the adult to child staff ratio to have a full and relevant Level 3 qualification (NCTL, 2014).

The findings also showed a disconnect between the language of the qualification and the language of professional practice. The newly qualified practitioners conflated supervision with reflective practice. Amelia, Chloe and Sharn recounted meetings with their supervisors when asked about reflecting on their practice. They discussed evaluating activities and rehearsing responses for Ofsted. However throughout the interviews they shared many examples of reflective practice, for example, Sharn's thoughtful reflection on the impact of a staff change for the babies in her setting. Another example of the language used by the learning provider and the language used in the setting is that of assessment. Student-practitioners were very familiar with observations yet they did not see observation as an assessment tool. This disconnect has implications for awarding bodies in construction of the qualification and for learning providers to ensure they use a shared language to aid the transition from student to practitioner.

The findings show student-practitioners value the vocational qualification in preparing them for employment. Several respondents had come to the National Diploma course after first doing A-levels. The research indicates that this was due to the low value placed on vocational learning by schools, parents and the general public (Wolf, 2011; Cooke & Lawton, 2008). There is a need to improve the status of vocational courses to be of equal value to academic study. In addition, careers advice needs to reflect the positive aspects of vocational learning for all students, rather than perpetuating the low-value image by referring those with low academic achievements to vocational courses.

An emerging issue for consideration is how the newly qualified practitioners' agency is constrained by policy. The practitioners in this study appear, as yet, unaware of how their practice is shaped by political ideology and Governmentality (Schwandt, 2000). While they may not consciously challenge, there is evidence of some newly qualified practitioners beginning to, for example Chloe's awareness of the inappropriate literacy activities and Sharn's advocacy for her babies. Powell and Goouch (2012) noted, that for the baby room practitioners in their study,

'the busy-ness of their daily lives leaves very few 'cracks' within which political dialogue and challenge can flourish' (p.123). Participating in professional development provides a vehicle for early years practitioners to engage in critical dialogue and to critically reflect on their practice. When given the space to do so, the quality of practice improves and also the practitioners sense of agency (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). This was particularly evident in Basford's (2016) study on assessment practices. Through dialogic interaction, the Early Childhood Studies graduates began to question assessment policy and practice. Similarly, Chalke's (2015) Foundation Degree graduates found the process of engaging in higher education provided that critically reflective thinking space. In Grenier's (2013) work on developing practitioners' observation skills, it was the professional dialogue that enhanced the practice. To ensure ECEC practitioners continue their learning journey, finding a space for dialogic interaction, for example through communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) where practitioners have the opportunity to critically reflect on their practice, current research and policy direction is essential. This has implications for employers to fund time away from the children and for policy makers to establish a regulatory body that requires continuing professional development, as in the Nursing profession. Learning providers could engage with their alumni to create a community of practice and practitioners should commit to engaging with continuing professional development.

The placement experience is a vital component of the qualification in the transformation, and preparation of students for employment in the ECEC sector (Nutbrown, 2012b; Urban, Vandenbroeck, Van Laere, Lazzari and Peeters, 2012; Reccia and Minsun, 2010). Through placement they develop their confidence and acquire practical skills, as well as understanding how the workplace functions. They understand the importance of reliability, how to develop relationships with children and colleagues and how to communicate. The findings in this study offer examples of students' motivation increasing when in a quality environment, for example Lee's developing confidence in her school placement and Amelia's recognition of the good example set by the practitioners in her setting. Since starting this study, I have moved from the college to work at a University. I realise now that it is not necessarily the level of qualification a student is engaged with. These basics are learnt through a Level 3 National Diploma and are an excellent foundation on which to build practice. These basics need to be in place whether studying a Level 3 or higher education.

In the next section I reflect on the research process and consider the limitations of the study and make recommendations for further research.

7.3 Reflecting on the Research Process

The rationale for this study was to understand how the experiences of student-practitioners following a Level 3 Early Years National Diploma programme of study prepared them for employment in the ECEC sector. The neo-liberal market economy has had a significant impact on the changing content of the role of Level 3 early years practitioners. The regulatory requirements of the EYFS (DfE, 2014a) positions Level 3 practitioners in the PVI sector as leaders, with the same objectives and responsibilities as graduate teachers in the maintained sector, without the status, financial recognition or level of training (Mathers and Smee, 2014; Eisenstadt, et al., 2013; Gamabro, Stewart, and Waldfogel, 2013; Nutbrown, 2013). This equity of responsibility is not in the public domain and Level 3 practitioners are perceived as lacking in educational capital and a view of 'anyone can do it' prevails, perpetuated by poor quality examples of practice sensationalised in the media (The Telegraph, 2015; Mail Online, 2012; BBC, 2008). Policy rhetoric focused the quality of early years qualifications (see 2.2). In Chapter 1 I established my position as an advocate of pre-service qualification and the quality of the National Diplomas offered by CACHE and BTEC. In designing this study I aimed to foreground the positive qualities of the Level 3 National Diploma student-practitioners and to provide them with a space in the literature to exemplify the value of their contribution to ECEC practice. To this end, I have used the participants' words throughout the project to reflect their voices in this thesis.

The survey was designed to engage a range of perspectives from different learning providers as I was conscious of bias that may result if I relied on students from my own institution. The use of quantitative and qualitative research methods were an important part of the research design. The quantitative data from the surveys provided a demographic profile of the student-practitioners including their previous experiences, academic achievements and details on the structure of their course. The qualitative survey data enabled me to construct a model of the developing practitioner. A further benefit of the survey was that it enabled me to recruit participants for the focus group and interviews.

The focus group consisted of student-practitioners from my home institution. As discussed in Chapter 3, I was concerned that my position as the students' head of department may constrain their responses, however I believe our familiarity enabled the students to speak freely. Constructing the identity boxes provided thinking time for the participants, which brought forth thoughtful and rich data. The resulting data proved useful in identifying student concerns about their learning experiences and the transition in to employment. I had thought, at the start of this research that I would be able to say the Level 3 National Diploma produced well-qualified

practitioners that were ready for employment. The focus group also illuminated how their different life experiences impacted on their learning journey. It became clear that there were other factors that contributed to their development as practitioners but it was not possible to identify what it was that created the change.

I would have liked to conduct more interviews but there were only the three volunteers. That said the rich data the participants shared provided an opportunity to explore the impact of their learning in practice in fine detail. My own insider knowledge of the content of their courses enabled me to see opportunities to make their learning visible by asking the practitioners to think about the theory related to their examples of practice. The small number of interviewees helped me to capture the emotional responses of the newly qualified practitioners. For example, when talking about the overwhelming feeling of responsibility when being left alone in charge of the children and the realisation that there was no safety net, that they are responsible for all aspects of the role.

The limitations of the study are that the number of participants is low compared to the high numbers of annual enrolments on Level 3 Diploma courses. The study only considers the impact of one type of qualification and mode of study. This study focused on the developing practitioners and revealed an insight in to how their engagement with the Level 3 Diploma course shaped their understanding of early years practice and prepared them for employment.

As a result of my study further research should be conducted on the newly qualified EYEs to investigate whether the new criteria makes a difference to what Level 3 practitioners know and can do and the end of their course. Reflective practice is a new criteria in the EYE qualifications; how newly qualified EYE reflect on practice would be worthy of further research. The focus of this study is on the students' learning; further research should be conducted with the tutors and lecturers delivering early years courses to understand the impact of their input on the developing practitioners' knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions and how they prepare students for employment.

7.4 My Contribution to Knowledge

The following points indicate my unique contribution to the field of Early Childhood Education and Care

- I present an alternative view of the Level 3 student-practitioner, as one of an emerging professional, a work in progress. The thesis has demonstrated that a qualification acts a proxy for what students know, and that there are common elements in their transition

from student to practitioner, however transitions are asynchronous. This transition is theorised using the model of the Three Dimensions of the Developing Practitioner. This model has potential value for ongoing research and for evaluating early years student-practitioners' progress.

- The process of undertaking and achieving a qualification are the catalysts for the transformation from student to practitioner. This thesis supports the importance of the understanding of developmental theory and its application to practice as a central pillar of early years qualifications. Thus indicating the need for policy to reflect the value of qualified practitioners and stipulate that all practitioners counting in the adult to child staffing ratio should hold the minimum of a Level 3 qualification which comprises of assessed theory and practice

- This thesis establishes a baseline of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions acquired by final cohorts of Level 3 National Diploma graduates before the introduction of qualifications mapped to the EYE criteria (NCTL, 2013c).

- Developing caring relationships and communication continue to be important aspects of ECEC practice

- Child development continues to be an essential knowledge base for ECEC practice

And finally

- This thesis contributes to the ongoing debate about professionalisation of the ECEC workforce; highlighting the disparity between the rhetoric and reality in policy and the literature. As previously discussed, the notion of professionalism is complex. Much of the literature indicates professionalism is attained through extended study, at graduate level. Policy indicates a Level 3 qualified practitioner as being a professional, by virtue of the being the only qualification mandated in the EYFS while advocating for graduate led practice. The literature suggests, to claim professional status, would require the establishment of a set of standards, set and monitored a by a professional body. Practitioners would be required to register to attain and maintain their professional status, as in Nursing. The disparate nature of the workforce and the settings in which they work, leaves ECEC practitioners without a united voice and therefore renders articulation of an ECEC professional impossible.

7.5 Concluding Thoughts

I have enjoyed conducting this research and have learned so much about the research process. I have been aware of how my positionality led to the final focus on the Level 3 student-practitioner experience and a desire to challenge and change the deficit discourse to that of educated and motivated young practitioners. The student-practitioners and newly qualified practitioners at the heart of this thesis have presented a positive image of young early years practitioners in contrast to the deficit ontological and epistemological view. Their energy, enthusiasm, passion and sheer delight in achieving their qualification and moving into employment was an honour to share. I return to David's (2004) inspirational words:

> 'If we regard children as, then we must show that the people who work with them are also brilliant, capable, strong and clever' (p.27)

I believe this thesis shows that the participants, at the end of their course, are emerging as brilliant, capable, strong and clever practitioners (David, 2004), albeit at different levels. This strengthens my belief in the value of a qualified workforce, with qualifications achieved before counting in the adult to child staff ratio. It also strengthens my belief in a graduate-led workforce, supported by Level 3 qualified practitioners. The findings in this study show that the participants have a good understanding of the technical practices. However, the literature is persuasive that graduate level study develops practitioners' critical thinking and reflexivity, enabling them to challenge policy and practice.

At the time of gathering my concluding thoughts there was a Government consultation on the GCSEs requirements for EYEs. The proposal was to accept functional skills qualifications rather than GCSEs as the sector reports the difficulty in recruiting and retaining Level 3 practitioners. I believe this to be a retrograde step. The GCSE pass rates are a national problem, the focus should be on schools to increase the pass rate. There are incoherent and incongruent policy decisions being made. A return to functional skills limits the progression opportunities for practitioners. The EYT (NCTL, 2013a) entry requirements are GCSE, English, maths and science. As the current Government favours a neo-liberal market economy, then perhaps market forces could impact on the financial incentives to attract candidates with GCSEs.

The political intervention in ECEC practice continues to oppress the ECEC workforce creating boundaries to the professionalisation of ECEC. This thesis raised several issues relating to the content and delivery of the qualifications. Above all three issues remain under explored:

- What is the Government's definition of a professional ECEC practitioner?

- The development of shared language between theory, qualifications, regulations and practice
- The quality of the placement experience

These aspects will be the focus of my future research.

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Appendices

1. Nutbrown Recommendations

2. Early Years Educator Criteria

3. Early Years Teacher Standards

4. Ethical Approval

5. Data Analysis

6. Questionnaires

   a. Questionnaire Template: Initial Survey 1

   b. Questionnaire Template: Follow Up Survey 2

   c. Questionnaire Template: Progression Survey

7. Identity Box transcripts

Appendix 1- Nutbrown Review Recommendations and Government Responses

Source: Nutbrown, C. (2013) Shaking the foundations of quality? Why 'childcare' policy must not lead to poor-quality early education and care (pages 3 -6).

Recommendations	Recommended action
1) The Teaching Agency should develop a more robust set of 'full and relevant' criteria to ensure qualifications promote the right content and pedagogical processes.	**Accepted.** Teaching Agency will consult on revised set of 'full and relevant' criteria and proposals for the Early Years Educator.
2) All qualifications commenced from 1 September 2013 must demonstrate that they meet the new 'full and relevant' criteria when being considered against the requirements of the EYFS.	**Accepted in principle**, but timescale changed to September 2014. The Teaching Agency's 'full and relevant' consultation will state that we will ensure that new Early Years Educator Level 3 qualifications will be in place from 2014.
3) The previously articulated plan to move to a single early years qualification should be abandoned.	**Accepted.** The Teaching Agency's 'full and relevant' consultation will state this plan will not happen.
4) The Government should consider the best way to badge qualifications that meet the new 'full and relevant' criteria so that people can recognise under what set of 'full and relevant' criteria a qualification has been gained.	**Accepted.** The 'Early Years Educator' title will offer a recognised badge of quality for qualifications which meet the new 'full and relevant' criteria.
5) The EYFS requirements should be revised so that, by September 2022, all staff counting in the staff:child ratios must be qualified at level 3	Still under consideration and subject to consultation
6) The EYFS requirements should be revised so that, from September 2013, a minimum of 50 per cent of staff in group settings need to possess at least a 'full and relevant' Level 3 to count in the staff:child ratios.	Still under consideration and subject to consultation.
7) The EYFS requirements should be revised so that, from September 2015, a minimum of 70 per cent of staff in group settings need to possess at least a 'full and relevant' Level 3 to count in the staff:child ratios.	Still under consideration and subject to consultation.
8) Level 2 English and mathematics should be entry requirements to Level 3 early education and childcare courses.	**Accepted in principle.** The Teaching Agency's 'full and relevant' consultation will set out that entrants to Level 3 Early Years Educator courses will be expected to have secured at least a C grade in GCSE English and mathematics. We will consult on proposals on how this might be made a requirement, including by inserting a requirement for English and maths GCSEs into the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework, in due course.
9) Tutors should be qualified to a higher level than the course they are teaching.	**Accepted in principle.** DfE will work across Government (i.e. with BIS) to help Further Education and other post-16 providers to promote good practice in this area.
10) All tutors should have regular continuing professional development and contact with early years settings. Colleges and training providers should allow sufficient time for this.	**Accepted in principle.** DfE will work across Government (i.e. with BIS) to help Further Education and other post-16 providers to promote good practice in this area.
11) Only settings that are rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted should be able to host students on placement.	**Accepted in principle.** DfE will work across Government (i.e with BIS) to help Further Education and other post-16 providers to ensure that placements are normally only in settings

that are rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted.

12) Colleges and training providers should look specifically at the setting's ability to offer students high quality placements.

Accepted. DfE will work across Government (i.e. with BIS) to help Further Education and other post-16 providers to promote good practice in this area.

13) The Department for Education should conduct research on the number of BME staff at different qualification levels, and engage with the sector to address any issues identified.

Keep under review. The Teaching Agency's 'full and relevant' consultation will seek views on whether or not the proposals for the content and standard of new qualifications have equality implications, and we will consider including questions in future Childcare and Early Years Provider surveys.

14) Newly qualified practitioners starting in their first employment should have mentoring for at least the first six months. If the setting is rated below 'Good', this mentoring should come from outside.

Accepted in principle. Settings should consider how they can put mentoring arrangements in place for new front line staff.

15) A suite of online induction and training modules should be brought together by the Government that can be accessed by everyone working in early education and childcare.

Accepted in principle but no action by Government. Rather the sector/settings should seek to draw this together.

16) A new early years specialist route to QTS, specialising in the years from birth to seven, should be introduced, starting from September 2013.

Not accepted. We agree with Professor Nutbrown that there is a need to transform the status of the profession and we want more high quality graduates to consider a career in early education. We do not, however, consider a route to the award of QTS is necessary to do this. We will introduce Early Years Teachers who will be specialists in early childhood development trained to work with babies and young children from birth to five. The training route and the new Teachers' Standards (Early Years) will build on the strengths of the EYPS programme. Early Years Teacher Status will be seen as the equivalent to QTS, therefore entry requirements to Early Years Teacher training courses will be the same as entry to primary teacher training. This change will give one title of 'teacher' across the early years and schools sectors which will increase status and public recognition.

17) Any individual holding Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) should be able to access routes to obtain QTS as a priority.

Not accepted. Those with EYPS are graduates already trained specifically to work with babies and children from birth to five years. Existing Early Years Professionals will in future be seen as the equivalent of Early Years Teachers. Early Years Professionals will therefore not need to obtain QTS to increase their status, although routes are already available to QTS if they wish to take them.

18) I recommend that Government considers the best way to maintain and increase graduate pedagogical leadership in all early years settings.

Accepted. We will introduce Early Years Teachers to lead the further improvements in quality we want to see. We will set out funding arrangements for Early Years Teachers in due course.

19) I am not recommending that the Government impose a licensing system on the early years sector.

No action for Government

Appendix 2 – Early Years Educator Criteria (NCTL, 2013c)

EYE Criteria

1.1 Understand the expected patterns of children's development from birth to 5 years, and have an understanding of further development from age 5 to 7.

1.2 Understand the significance of attachment and how to promote it effectively.

1.3 Understand a range of underpinning theories and philosophical approaches to how children learn and develop, and their influence on practice.

1.4 Analyse and explain how children's learning and development can be affected by their stage of development and individual circumstances.

1.5 Understand the importance of promoting diversity, equality and inclusion, fully reflecting cultural differences and family circumstances.

1.6 Understand the importance to children's holistic development of: ☐ speech, language and communication ☐ personal, social and emotional development physical development

1.7 Understand systematic synthetic phonics in the teaching of reading, and a range of strategies for developing early literacy and mathematics.

1.8 Understand the potential effects of, and how to prepare and support children through, transitions and significant events in their lives.

1.9 Understand the current early education curriculum requirements.

1.10 Promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice.

2. Plan and provide effective care, teaching and learning that enables children to progress and prepares them for school

2.1 Plan and lead activities, purposeful play opportunities and educational programmes which include the learning and development areas of current early education curriculum requirements (EYFS and National Curriculum)

2.2 Ensure plans fully reflect the stage of development, individual needs and circumstances of children.

2.3 Provide learning experiences, environments and opportunities appropriate to the age, stage and needs of individual and groups of children.

2.4 Encourage children's participation, ensuring a balance between adult-led and child initiated activities.

2.5 Engage in effective strategies to develop and extend children's learning and thinking, including sustained shared thinking.

2.6 Support and promote children's speech, language and communication development.

2.7 Support children's group learning and socialisation.

2.8 Model and promote positive behaviours expected of children.

2.9 Support children to manage their own behaviour in relation to others.

2.10 Understand when a child is in need of additional support.

2.11 Plan and provide activities to meet additional needs, working in partnership with parents and/or carers and other professionals, where appropriate.

3. Make accurate and productive use of assessment

3.1 Understand how to assess within the current early education curriculum framework using a range of assessment techniques.

3.2 Carry out and record observational assessment accurately.

3.3 Identify the needs, interests and stages of development of individual children.

3.4 Make use of formative and summative assessment, tracking children's progress to plan next steps and shape learning opportunities.

3.5 Discuss children's progress and plan next stages in their learning with the key person, colleagues, parents and/or carers.

4. Develop effective and informed practice

4.1 Demonstrate a good command of the English language in spoken and written form.

4.2 Explain the importance of continued professional development to improve own skills and early years practice.

4.3 Engage in continuing professional development and reflective practice to improve own skills, practice, and subject knowledge

5. Safeguard and promote the health, safety and welfare of children

5.1 Know the legal requirements and guidance on health and safety, security, confidentiality of information, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

5.2 Identify and act upon own responsibilities in relation to health and safety, security, confidentiality of information, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

5.3 Plan and carry out physical care routines suitable to the age, stage and needs of the child.

5.4 Understand why health and well-being is important for babies and children and promote healthy lifestyles.

5.5 Understand how to respond to accidents and emergency situations.

5.6 Demonstrate skills and knowledge for the prevention and control of infection.

5.7 Carry out risk assessment and risk management in line with policies and procedures.

5.8 Understand safeguarding policies and procedures, including child protection, recognise when a child is in danger or at risk of abuse, and know how to act to protect them.

5.9 Maintain accurate and coherent records and reports and share information, only when appropriate, to ensure the needs of all children are met.

6. Work in partnership with the key person, colleagues, parents and/or carers or other professionals

6.1 Work co-operatively with colleagues and other professionals to meet the needs of babies and children and enable them to progress.

6.2 Work in partnership with parents and/or carers to help them recognise and value the significant contributions they make to the child's health, well-being, learning and development.

6.3 Encourage parents and/or carers to take an active role in the child's play, learning and development.

Appendix 3 - Early Years Teachers Standards (NCTL, 2013a)

An Early Years Teacher must: 1. Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge all children.

1.1 Establish and sustain a safe and stimulating environment where children feel confident and are able to learn and develop.

1.2 Set goals that stretch and challenge children of all backgrounds, abilities and dispositions.

1.3 Demonstrate and model the positive values, attitudes and behaviours expected of children.

2. Promote good progress and outcomes by children.

2.1 Be accountable for children's progress, attainment and outcomes.

2.2 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how babies and children learn and develop.

2.3 Know and understand attachment theories, their significance and how effectively to promote secure attachments.

2.4 Lead and model effective strategies to develop and extend children's learning and thinking, including sustained shared thinking.

2.5 Communicate effectively with children from birth to age five, listening and responding sensitively.

2.6 Develop children's confidence, social and communication skills through group learning.

2.7 Understand the important influence of parents and/or carers, working in partnership with them to support the child's wellbeing, learning and development.

3. Demonstrate good knowledge of early learning and EYFS.

3.1 Have a secure knowledge of early childhood development and how that leads to successful learning and development at school.

3.2 Demonstrate a clear understanding of how to widen children's experience and raise their expectations.

3.3 Demonstrate a critical understanding of the EYFS areas of learning and development and engage with the educational continuum of expectations, curricula and teaching of Key Stage 1 and 2.

3.4 Demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics in the teaching of early reading.

3.5 Demonstrate a clear understanding of appropriate strategies in the teaching of early mathematics.

4. Plan education and care taking account of the needs of all children.

4.1 Observe and assess children's development and learning, using this to plan next steps.

4.2 Plan balanced and flexible activities and educational programmes that take into account the stage of development, circumstances and interests of children.

4.3 Promote a love of learning and stimulate children's intellectual curiosity in partnership with parents and/or carers.

4.4 Use a variety of teaching approaches to lead group activities appropriate to the age range and ability of children.

4.5 Reflect on the effectiveness of teaching activities and educational programmes to support the continuous improvement of provision.

5. Adapt education and care to respond to the strengths and needs of all children.

5.1 Have a secure understanding of how a range of factors can inhibit children's learning and development and how best to address these.

5.2 Demonstrate an awareness of the physical, emotional, social, intellectual development and communication needs of babies and children, and know how to adapt education and care to support children at different stages of development.

5.3 Demonstrate a clear understanding of the needs of all children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, and be able to use and evaluate distinctive approaches to engage and support them.

5.4 Support children through a range of transitions.

5.5 Know when a child is in need of additional support and how this can be accessed, working in partnership with parents and/or carers and other professionals.

6. Make accurate and productive use of assessment.

6.1 Understand and lead assessment within the framework of the EYFS framework, including statutory assessment requirements (see annex 1).

6.2 Engage effectively with parents and/or carers and other professionals in the on-going assessment and provision for each child.

6.3 Give regular feedback to children and parents and/or carers to help children progress towards their goals.

7. Safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and provide a safe learning environment.

7.1 Know and act upon the legal requirements and guidance on health and safety, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child.

7.2 Establish and sustain a safe environment and employ practices that promote children's health and safety.

7.3 Know and understand child protection policies and procedures, recognise when a child is in danger or at risk of abuse, and know how to act to protect them.

8. Fulfil wider professional responsibilities.

8.1 Promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice.

8.2 Make a positive contribution to the wider life and ethos of the setting.

8.3 Take a lead in establishing a culture of cooperative working between colleagues, parents and/or carers and other professionals.

8.4 Model and implement effective education and care, and support and lead other practitioners including Early Years Educators.

8.5 Take responsibility for leading practice through appropriate professional development for self and colleagues.

8.6 Reflect on and evaluate the effectiveness of provision, and shape and support good practice.

8.7 Understand the importance of and contribute to multi-agency team working

Appendix 4 – Ethical Approval

The University Of Sheffield.

The School Of Education.

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Early Childhood Education

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Dear Helen

ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER

Are We There Yet?: Early Childhood Education and Care Students Journey to Becoming Practitioners

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 Cathy Nutbrown

Appendix 5 –Data Analysis

5a – Table of Survey Responses – Start, Middle and End of Course

start		middle		end	
Communicate	**19**	**patience**	**39**	**Promote Development/ achieve potential**	**8**
be caring	**13**	**Care/caring**	**37**	**Identifies special talents and needs. Gives equal opportunities to all children to allow them to reach their full potential, promotes inclusion, diversity and equality**	**7**
been organised	**13**	**Organisation**	**22**	**Educates through fun and play. Supports children's learning, one to one and in small groups. Encouraging and supporting children's learning**	**6**
Patience	**11**	**supportive**	**20**	**Organisation**	**6**
Trustworthy	**9**	**Confidence**	**14**	**Patience**	**6**
know / plan EYFS	**9**	**creative/ness**	**13**	**Caring**	**5**
being confident	**8**	**communication**	**12**	**communicate effectively**	**5**
Friendly	**8**	**a good understanding of children and their development**	**9**	**Planned and prepare curriculum-based activities to incorporate interests, likes and dislikes of the children. Taking into consideration the special needs of pupils and make them feel included**	**5**
Being creative	**8**	**Enthusiasm**	**9**	**be able to work in a team**	**3**
being reliable	**7**	**Friendly manner**	**9**	**Communicate with parents children and staff. Providing a level of continuity between parent**	**3**

				and practitioner	
Kind	7	Helpful	9	Completes observations to see how the children of developing. Observes and assesses learning and individual needs regularly	3
knowledge of all current and relevant legislation	6	Motivated	9	Kind /ness	3
knowledge of curriculum	6	Understanding	9	nurture and supports the child, provides a secure base for the child to grow and develop	3
being on time	5	Adaptability and flexibility	8	risk assessments, health and safety checks before children go home	3
Fun	5	empathetic	8	Care	2
To be Empathetic	5	Punctual	8	Considerate	2
Being confidential	5	Reliable	8	Flexible	2
Being patient	5	Fun	6	Good listener	2
Caring	5	Hard worker	6	Knowledge and understanding of theory and development	2
Commitment	5	Able to work in a team	5	Positive role model	2
Friendly	5	good listener	5	Safeguarding	2
knowledge of child development	5	Good Listener	5	Supportive	2
punctual	5	Happy	5	Supportive	2
Respect/full	4	Imitative	5	Using and applying knowledge of Government legislation and codes of practice	2
honest	4	positive attitude	5	work well in a team	2
confidence	4	dedicated	4	Ability to form relationships with parents.	1

Knowledge of policies and procedures	4	Energetic	4	adheres to policies and procedures	1
Listening	4	Knowledge	4	aids in process of transitions for child and parents	1
Professional	3	Passion	4	Approachable	1
role model	3	Professionalism and work ethic	4	Be confident	1
To be organised	3	Able to provide a range of activities	3	behaviour management	1
been respectful	3	considerate	3	Being inclusive	1
Good listener	3	Encouraging	3	Calm	1
good time management	3	imagination	3	Comforting	1
helpful	3	Leadership and management	3	Confidence in their own ability and in their team	1
knowledge of theory	3	Multitask	3	Cooperation	1
Positive role model	3	learning and developing	2	Creative	1
Team work skills	3	active	2	Educated	1
time management	3	care for - food, hygiene etc.	2	Firm	1
approachable	2	confidentiality	2	follow the EYFS, national curriculum, he scales	1
Enthusiastic	2	Creating appropriate activities/ lessons	2	Friendly	1
Working as part of a team	2	discipline - be able to	2	Happy	1
Being fair to all children	2	good teacher	2	Hard working	1
calm	2	humour	2	Has to be intrinsically driven	1
clever	2	Inspiring	2	Helpful	1
Hard working	2	Love for the job	2	knowledge of the EYFS	1
Interact with the	2	nurturing	2	maintain confidentiality	1

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children					
kind	2	open minded	2	Passionate about children	1
motivated	2	Professional	2	promotes understanding of the wider world around the children	1
Anti-discriminatory	1	reliable	2	respect	1
Being open	1	responsible	2	skilled observer	1
Calm	1	Smart	2	Welcoming	1
Communicating	1	stern	2	work under own initiative	1
initiative	1	Time management	2		
Confidentiality	1	role model	1		
Dedicated	1	supporting	1		
happy	1	Active Listening	1		
open mind	1	Collaboration	1		
Have consideration for others	1	Comforting.	1		
time management	1	Commitment	1		
Hygienic	1	concentration	1		
Listener	1	constructive	1		
love what they do	1	Fast working	1		
Non-judgemental	1	Full understanding of what children need	1		
polite	1	Good manners	1		
to help develop the children's skills	1	Guidance	1		
Trusting	1	Healthy	1		
Bubbly	1	innovative	1		
empathetic	1	Inclusive	1		
Enthusiastic	1	Independent	1		
enthusiastic towards children and parents	1	Kindness	1		
Extend learning of the child	1	knowing the signs of child abuse	1		
Fast learner	1	Knowledge of	1		

		childhood studies.	
Fun	1	knowledge of special needs	1
good interaction with the children	1	lead the children	1
Good morals	1	Objective	1
Good role model	1	Observation	1
Have an interest in child development	1	Outgoing	1
have considerations for others	1	polite	1
high self-esteem	1	Provide a stimulating environment	1
Imagination skills	1	Researching	1
knowledge of education	1	respectful	1
knowledge of other cultures	1	sociable	1
Leadership Skills	1	softly spoken	1
love what they do	1	Subject Knowledge	1
mature	1	Talking	1
open minded	1	thoughtful	1
Outgoing	1	trustworthy	1
Positive	1	understanding the children and getting down to their level.	1
problem solving	1	Versatile	1
Professional	1	Develop children's confidence	1
Progress the children's learning	1	ensuring the children are happy and safe	1
qualifications	1		

reading	**1**
reliable	**1**
speak another language	**1**
spelling	**1**
Supportive	**1**
thoughtful	**1**
planning	**1**
To be understanding	**1**
To be patient	**1**
To have an up to date knowledge	**1**
trustworthy	**1**
welcoming	**1**
writing	**1**
comply with legislation and codes of practice	**1**

Appendix 5a - Revised categories from the survey data

start N= 69			middle N=69			end N= 20		
communicate	19	PROF	communication	12	PROF	communication	12	PROF
caring for	18	PRAC	care/caring	37	PRAC	caring	5	PRAC
organised	16	PROF	organisation	22	PROF	organisation	6	PROF
patience	16	PRINC	patience	39	PRINC	patience	6	PRINC
trustworthy	9	PRINC	trustworthy	1	PRINC		0	PRINC
know / plan EYFS	10	PRAC			PRAC	plan and prepare cur	7	PRAC
being confident	8	PROF	confidence	14	PROF	be confident	2	PROF
knowledge of child develo	6	PROF	development: a good	11	PROF	promote Developme	8	PROF
friendly	9	PRINC	friendly manner	9	PRINC	friendly	1	PRINC
being creative	8	PRINC	creative/ness	13	PRINC	creative	1	PRINC
being reliable	8	PRINC	reliable	8	PRINC		0	PRINC
kind	9	PRINC	kindness	1	PRINC	kind /ness	3	PRINC
knowledge of all current a	6	PROF		0	PROF			
being on time	10	PRAC	punctual	8	PRAC			
fun	6	PRINC	fun	6	PRINC			
to be empathetic	8	PROF	empathetic	8	PROF			
being confidential	6	PRAC		0	PRAC	maintain confidentia	1	PRAC
commitment	5	PROF	commitment	1	PROF			
respect/full	4	PROF	respect/full	1	PROF			
honest	4	PRINC			PRINC			
knowledge of policies and	4	PRAC			PRAC	adhere to policies	1	PRAC
listening	7	PROF	good listener	6	PROF	be a good listener	2	PROF
professional	4	PROF	professionalism and \	4	PROF		0	PROF
positive role model	7	PRAC	positive role model	2	PRAC	positive role model	0	PRAC
good time management	4	PRAC	good time manageme	1	PRAC			
helpful	3	PRAC	helpful	9	PRAC	helpful	1	PRAC
knowledge of theory	3	PROF				theory	2	PROF
team work skills/ work as	5	PROF				To be able to work in	3	PROF
approachable	2	PROF				approachable	1	PROF
enthusiastic/ enthusiasm	3	PRINC	enthusiastic/ enthusi	9	PRINC	enthusiastic/ enthus	0	PRINC
fair to children	2	PRINC		0	PRINC		0	PRINC
calm	4	PRINC		0	PRINC	calm	1	PRINC
clever	2	PROF		0	PROF		0	PROF
hard working	2	PRINC		0	PRINC	hard working	1	PRINC
interact with the children	3	PRAC						
motivated	2	PRINC	motivated	9	PRINC			PRINC
anti-discriminatory	1	PRAC			PRAC		0	PRAC
open	1	PRINC		0	PRINC		0	PRINC
initiative	1	PROF		0	PROF		0	PROF
dedicated	1	PRINC	dedicated	4	PRINC		1	PRINC
happy	1	PRINC	happy	5	PRINC	happy	1	PRINC
open mind	2	PRINC	open mind	2	PRINC		0	PRINC
hygienic	1	PRAC	food hygeine	2	PRAC		0	PRAC
love what they do	2	PRINC	love for the job	2	PRINC	has to be intrinsicall	1	PRINC
non-judgemental	1	PRINC		0	PRINC		0	PRINC
polite	1	PRINC	polite	1	PRINC		0	PRINC
to help develop the childre	1	PRAC	develop confidence s	1	PRAC			PRAC
trusting	1	PRINC		0	PRINC		0	PRINC
bubbly	1	PRINC		0	PRINC		0	PRINC
passion enthusiastic towar	1	PRINC			PRINC	passion about childre	1	PRINC
extend and progress learn	2	PRAC	learning and develop	2	PRAC	educates through fu	6	PRAC
fast learner	1	PRINC		0	PRINC		0	PRINC
good morals	1	PRINC		0	PRINC		0	PRINC
high self-esteem	1	PRINC		0	PRINC		0	PRINC
imagination skills	1	PRAC	imagination	3	PRAC		0	PRAC
knowledge of education	1	PROF		0	PROF		0	PROF
knowledge of other cultur	1	PROF			PROF	identifies special tal	7	PROF
leadership Skills	1	PRAC	leadership and mana	3	PRAC			PRAC
mature	1	PRINC		0	PRINC		0	PRINC
positive	1	PRINC	positive attitude	6	PRINC		0	PRINC
problem solving	1	PROF			PROF		0	PROF
qualifications	1	PROF		0	PROF		0	PROF
reading	1	PRAC		0	PRAC		0	PRAC
speak another language	1	PRAC		0	PRAC		0	PRAC
spelling	1	PRAC		0	PRAC		0	PRAC
supportive	1	PRAC	supportive	20	PRINC	nurture and support	3	PRINC
thoughtful	1	PRINC	thoughtful	1	PRINC		0	PRINC
to be understanding	1	PRINC		0	PROF		0	PROF
to have an up to date knov	1	PROF		0	PRINC		0	PRINC
welcoming	1	PRINC		0	PRAC		0	PRAC
writing	1	PRAC		0			0	

5b – Table of Survey Responses – Start, Middle and End of Course

Professional	Practice Dimension	Principle Dimension
approachable	anti-discriminatory	being creative
being confident	being confidential	being reliable
clever	being on time	bubbly
commitment	caring for	calm
communication	extend and progress learning	dedicated
empathy	good time management	enthusiastic/ enthusiasm
Inclusive	helpful	fair to children
initiative	hygienic	fast learner
knowledge of child	imagination skills	friendly
knowledge of	interact with the children	fun
knowledge of	know / plan EYFS	good morals
legislation	knowledge of and application of policies	happy and procedures
listening	leadership Skills	hard working
organised	literate	high self-esteem
problem solving	positive role model	honest
professional	speak another language	kind
qualifications	supportive	love what they do
respect/full	to help develop the children's skills	mature
team work skills/		motivated
up to date		non-judgemental
		open
		open mind
		passionate
		patience
		polite
		positive
		thoughtful
		to be understanding
		trusting
		trustworthy

5c - Dimensions of the Developing Practitioner: Weighted Data

PRACTICE DIMENSION	START		MIDDLE		END	
caring for	18	0.26087	37	0.41573	5	0.25
safeguarding	6	0.086957	6	0.067416	7	0.35
keep children safe	12	0.173913	10	0.11236	1	0.05
know / plan EYFS	10	0.144928	0	0	7	0.35
being on time	10	0.144928	8	0.089888		0
being confidential	6	0.086957	0	0	1	0.05
knowledge of policies and procedures	4	0.057971	0	0	1	0.05
positive role model	7	0.101449	2	0.022472	0	0
good time management	4	0.057971	1	0.011236		0
helpful	3	0.043478	9	0.101124	1	0.05
interact with the children	3	0.043478	0	0	0	0
anti-discriminatory	1	0.014493		0	0	0
hygienic	1	0.014493	2	0.022472	0	0
to help develop the children's skills	1	0.014493	1	0.011236		0
extend and progress learning of the c	2	0.028986	2	0.022472	6	0.3
imagination skills	1	0.014493	3	0.033708	0	0
leadership Skills	1	0.014493	3	0.033708		0
literate	3	0.043478	0	0	0	0
speak another language	1	0.014493	0	0	0	0
supportive	1	0.014493	20	0.224719	3	0.15
	95	1.376812	104	1.168539	32	1.6

PRINCIPLE DIMENSION						
	START		MIDDLE		END	
patience	16	0.231884	39	0.438202	6	0.3
trustworthy	9	0.130435	1	0.011236	0	0
friendly	9	0.130435	9	0.101124	1	0.05
being reliable	8	0.115942	8	0.089888	0	0
kind	9	0.130435	1	0.011236	3	0.15
fun	6	0.086957	6	0.067416		0
honest	4	0.057971		0		0
enthusiastic/ enthu	3	0.043478	9	0.101124	0	0
fair to children	2	0.028986	0	0	0	0
calm	4	0.057971	0	0	1	0.05
hard working	2	0.028986	0	0	1	0.05
motivated	2	0.028986	9	0.101124		0
open	1	0.014493	0	0	0	0
dedicated	1	0.014493	4	0.044944	1	0.05
happy	1	0.014493	5	0.05618	1	0.05
open mind	2	0.028986	2	0.022472	0	0
love what they do	2	0.028986	2	0.022472	1	0.05
non-judgemental	1	0.014493	0	0	0	0
polite	1	0.014493	1	0.011236	0	0
trusting	1	0.014493	0	0	0	0
bubbly	1	0.014493	0	0	0	0
passion enthusiasti	1	0.014493		0	1	0.05
fast learner	1	0.014493	0	0	0	0
good morals	1	0.014493	0	0	0	0
high self-esteem	1	0.014493	0	0	0	0
mature	1	0.014493	0	0	0	0
positive	1	0.014493	6	0.067416	0	0
thoughtful	1	0.014493	1	0.011236	0	0
to be understandin	1	0.014493		0		0
	93	1.347826	103	1.157303	16	0.8

PROFESSIONAL DIMENSION						
	START n=69	weighted star	MIDDLE n= 89	weighted midd	END n=20	wieghted en
communication	19	0.275362319	12	0.134831461	12	0.6
organised	16	0.231884058	22	0.247191011	6	0.3
being confident	8	0.115942029	14	0.157303371	2	0.1
knowledge of child development	6	0.086956522	11	0.123595506	8	0.4
legislation	6	0.086956522	0	0	0	0
empathy	8	0.115942029	8	0.08988764	0	0
creative	8	0.115942029	13	0.146067416	1	0.05
commitment	5	0.072463768	1	0.011235955	0	0
respect/full	4	0.057971014	1	0.011235955	0	0
listening	7	0.101449275	6	0.06741573	2	0.1
professional	4	0.057971014	4	0.04494382	0	0
knowledge of theory	3	0.043478261	0	0	2	0.1
team work skills/ work as part of a t	5	0.072463768	0	0	3	0.15
approachable	2	0.028985507	0	0	1	0.05
clever	2	0.028985507	0	0	0	0
initiative	1	0.014492754	0	0	0	0
knowledge of education	1	0.014492754	0	0	0	0
Inclusive practices	1	0.014492754	0	0	7	0.35
problem solving	1	0.014492754	0	0	0	0
qualifications	1	0.014492754	0	0	0	0
up to date knowledge	1	0.014492754	0	0	0	0
welcoming	1	0.014492754	0	0	0	0
	110	1.594202899	92	1.033707865	44	2.2

Appendix 6 Questionnaires

6a - Initial Survey

Your course

3. What Early Childhood Education and Care Course are you enrolled on?

4. Where are you studying?

⭘ College of Further Education ⭘ Sixth Form College ⭘ School Sixth Form ⭘ Training provider

Other (please specify)

Level 3 Early Childhood Education and Care Students' Journey to Becoming ...

Dear Student. Thank you for participating in this survey, it will take about 15 minutes to complete. This research is to support my Doctoral studies at the University of Sheffield. The aim of this project is to explore how you develop your understanding of what it is to be an early years practitioner during your course and how ready you are for employment.
This survey is the first phase of the research, if you wish to be involved in follow up focus groups and case studies please include your contact details at the end of the survey or please contact me at helen.perkins@solihull.ac.uk for more information. Many thanks for your time and participation - Helen

1. Consent

☐ I confirm that I have read and understand the information for the above project

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that by completing this questionnaire I am giving consent for my responses to be included in the data

☐ 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.

☐ I agree to take part in the above research project.

2. I am studying a:

⭘ Level 2 Course ⭘ Level 3 Course year 1 ⭘ Level 3 Course year 2 ⭘ Part time course

5. English, maths & science grades: Please tick all that apply

	None	GCSE Grade E to G	GCSE Grade D	GCSE Grade C or above	Functional Skills Level 2	Key Skills Level 2	Adult Literacy/Numeracy Level 2	A level
English	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Maths	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Science	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How many GCSEs, Grade C or above, do you have in total?

[   ]

6. What is your age?

○ 16 to 18   ○ 19 to 21   ○ 22 to 24   ○ 25 to 30   ○ 31 to 40   ○ 41 to 50   ○ 51 to 59   ○ 60 +

7. What is your gender?

○ Female   ○ Male

8. What is your ethnic group? Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background

[   ]

9. In what county do you live?

[   ]

About Your Course

10. The Early Childhood Education and Care course was my first choice

○ Yes   ○ No

If 'no' please say what your first choice was and why you did not take that option

11. Early Childhood Education and Care will be my life long career

○ Yes   ○ No

What other careers are you considering?

12. Did you have any experience working with children before starting your course?

○ Yes   ○ No

If yes, please tell me about your experience

13. Your course is in two parts, theory and practice. How many hours per week are you in your work placement?

HOURS PER WEEK:

○ None   ○ 1 to 6   ○ 6 to 8   ○ 9 to 12   ○ 13 to 16   ○ 17 to 24   ○ 24 hours +

14. How many hours per week are you in lectures studying the theory part of the course?

HOURS PER WEEK:

○ None   ○ 1 to 6   ○ 6 to 8   ○ 9 to 12   ○ 13 to 16   ○ 17 to 24   ○ 24 hours +

15. Which part of your course do you enjoy the most and why?

16. When you finish your Early Childhood Education and Care course what are you going to do?

○ Seek Employment   ○ Progress to level 3   ○ Progress to Higher Education

Other (please specify)

17. My career goal is to be ...

○ A children's' Nanny   ○ A special needs support assistant   ○ Childminder

○ An early years practitioner   ○ A teaching assistant   ○ A health visitor

○ An early years teacher   ○ A nurse

○ A primary school teacher   ○ A midwife

Other (please specify)

And finally...

This is the last set of questions, they are about why you want to work with children and how you made that choice

18. Why do you want to work with children?

19. Please describe any advice and guidance you received when considering Early Childhood Education and Care as a career?

20. Who did you received advice and guidance from?

21. Please describe the role of the early years practitioner

22. What do you consider to be the three most important qualities of a Early Childhood Education and Care practitioner?

1
2
3

23. Please list 5 skills you consider to be most important for an early years practitioner to have

1
2
3
4
5

24. Thank you for your help with my research. If you would like to participate in the focus groups or case studies please add your email address here.

Level 3 Early Childhood Education and Care Students' Journey to Becoming Practitioners

Dear Student. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this second survey. The results from the first survey were really interesting and useful. It provided a clear idea of your views about being an early years practitioner.

This second survey is to see if and how your views have changed over period of time. as before it will take less than 10 minutes to complete.

This survey is the second phase of the research, if you wish to be involved in follow up focus groups and case studies please include your contact details at the end of the survey or please contact me at helen.perkins@solihull.ac.uk for more information. Many thanks for your time and participation - Helen

1. I am studying a:

◯ Level 3 Course and am just completing my first year   ◯ Level 3 Course and am completing my second year2

◯ Part time course

Your course

2. What Early Childhood Education and Care Course are you enrolled on?

[   ]

[   ]

3. What is your age?

○ 16 to 18   ○ 25 to 30   ○ 51 to 59

○ 19 to 21   ○ 31 to 40   ○ 60 +

○ 22 to 24   ○ 41 to 50

4. What is your gender?

○ Female   ○ Male

5. In what county do you live?

[   ]

6. When you finish your Early Childhood Education and Care course what are you going to do?

○ Seek Employment ○ Progress to Higher Education

Other (please specify)

[   ]

7. Have you changed your opinion about working with children?

☐ I still want to work with children   ☐ I do not want to work with children

If you no longer wish to work with children please say why

[   ]

8. My career goal is to be ...

- ( ) children's' Nanny
- ( ) early years practitioner
- ( ) early years teacher
- ( ) primary school teacher

- ( ) special needs support assistant
- ( ) teaching assistant
- ( ) nurse
- ( ) midwife

- ( ) Child-minder
- ( ) health visitor

Other (please specify)

9. Please describe the role of the early years practitioner (this is to see how your ideas may have changed over the year)

10. What do you consider to be the three most important qualities of a Early Childhood Education and Care practitioner?

1

2

3

11. Please list 5 skills you consider to be most important for an early years practitioner to have

1

2

3

4

5

12. List 5 key tasks an early years practitioner does

1

2

3

4

5

13. These questions are about your level of confidence in moving on to employment in Early years. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being not at all and 10 being very confident) how confident are you to ...

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Support and promote children's early education and development	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Plan and provide effective care, teaching and learning that enables children to progress	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Make accurate and productive use of assessment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Safeguard and promote the health, safety and welfare of children	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Work in partnership with key person, colleagues, parents and/or carers or other professionals	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Reflect on practice & identify own professional needs	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
To be an early years practitioner	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Is there anything you do not feel confident to do?

[   ]

14. If you are going in to employment following your course and would consider participating in the case study please add your personal email address here. Thank you for your help with my research.

[   ]

Level 3 Early Childhood Education and Care Students' Journey to Becoming Practitioners

Dear Student / Practitioner. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this final survey to see how you are progressing in your career or studying.. Even if you are no longer working/ studying in early years I would appreciate your final contribution.
The results from the original surveys were really interesting and useful. It provided a clear idea of your views about being an early years practitioner.
This final survey is to see if and how your views have changed over period of time. as before it will take less than 10 minutes to complete.
This survey is the final phase of the research, if you wish to discuss this further or prefer to talk through your responses please include your contact details at the end of the survey or please contact me at helen_perkins@outlook.com for more information. Many thanks for your time and participation - Helen

1. I am -

○ Studying a Degree level course (HND,

○ Foundation Degree

○ BA Hons, in a childhood studies related subject

○ B.Ed. (QTS)

○ BA Early Years Teacher Status

○ Employed in Early Years (or other setting working with children)

○ Employed in another sector (not working with children)

○ Studying another Degree (not related to working with children

○ If you are no longert working with or studying about children please say what changed your mind and add what you are doing

2. What is your age?

○ 16 to 18   ○ 25 to 30   ○ 51 to 59

○ 19 to 21   ○ 31 to 40   ○ 60 +

○ 22 to 24   ○ 41 to 50

3. What is your gender?

○ Female   ○ Male

196

4. Should Early Years Practitioners be qualified before commencing employment?

○ YES   ○ NO

Please say why

[text box]

5. Should Early Years be an all graduate profession like nursing and teaching

○ YES

○ NO

Please say why

[text box]

6. If you are employed as an Early Years practitioner, please describe your role (this is to see how your ideas may have changed over the year now you are an established practitioner)
If you are continuing your studying, please describe your role in placement

[text box]

7. Reflecting on your level 3 qualification:

	I was very well prepared	I was well prepared	Somewhat prepatred	Not at all prepared
How well did your qualification prepare you for employment?	○	○	○	○

Please explain why you have chosen this response

[text box]

8. What aspects / knowledge from your level 3 programme have been most useful in your new role as an employee or as an undergraduate?
Do you reflect, use, refer to them in your everyday practice?
Score one for the most used
5 for the least used

	1 Most useful	2	3	4	5	NEVER USED
Placement	○	○	○	○	○	○
Child development	○	○	○	○	○	○
Theory	○	○	○	○	○	○
SEN	○	○	○	○	○	○
Safeguarding	○	○	○	○	○	○
Activity planning	○	○	○	○	○	○
Observation	○	○	○	○	○	○
Child Health	○	○	○	○	○	○
Curriculum knowledge	○	○	○	○	○	○
Communication	○	○	○	○	○	○
Assessment	○	○	○	○	○	○
Health & safety	○	○	○	○	○	○
Safe environments	○	○	○	○	○	○
other	○	○	○	○	○	○

please add any iother units that were or would have been useful

[ ]

9. What do you consider to be the three most important qualities of a Early Childhood Education and Care practitioner?

1 [ ]

2 [ ]

3 [ ]

10. Please list 3 skills you consider to be most important for an early years practitioner to have

1 [ ]

2 [ ]

3 [ ]

11. List 3 key tasks an early years practitioner does

1

2

3

12. These questions are about your level of confidence in moving on to employment in Early years. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being not at all and 10 being very confident) how confident are you to ...

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Support and promote children's early education and development	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Plan and provide effective care, teaching and learning that enables children to progress	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Make accurate and productive use of assessment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Safeguard and promote the health, safety and welfare of children	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Work in partnership with key person, colleagues, parents and/or carers or other professionals	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Reflect on practice & identify own professional needs	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
To be an early years practitioner	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Is there anything you do not feel confident to do?

13. Many thanks for your participation over the 3 years. I have changed career and am now lecturing at the University of Wolverhampton. Your participation in my research helped me achieve my goal. I hope you achieve your goal, whatever career path you choose, I wish you well and thank you

Please add any further comments if you wish to do so
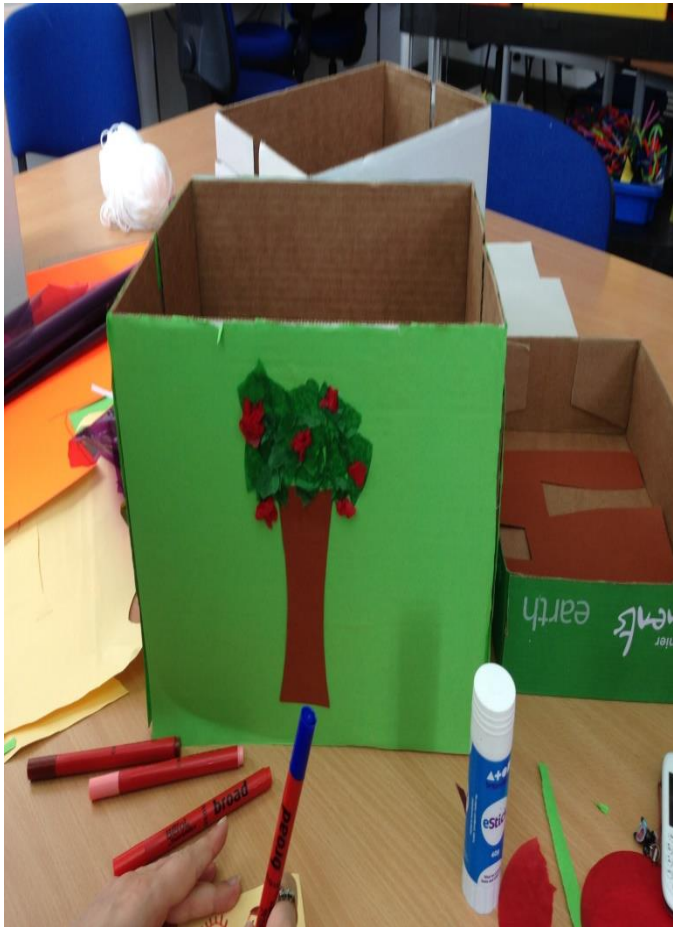
*Bob: It kind of started, when I was 6 well since my sister was born then my cousin, but then I realised I wanted to work with children. Inside my box I actually have a little baby (shows it) group ahh) and then it goes on to young children playing with football. And have got the word observe 'cos that's really the main thing, one of the main things you have to do when you working with children... and to help their development …*HP (encouraging) tell us about the outside of the box, if you haven't got more to say it's fine I'm not expecting you to speak half an hour (good humoured laughter from the group)
Bob: *on the outside as the sky and the sun clouds, and clouds flowers and trees and that's because like growing up I was always outside and now the children like to be outside when they play and you can do a lot of activities with them outside*
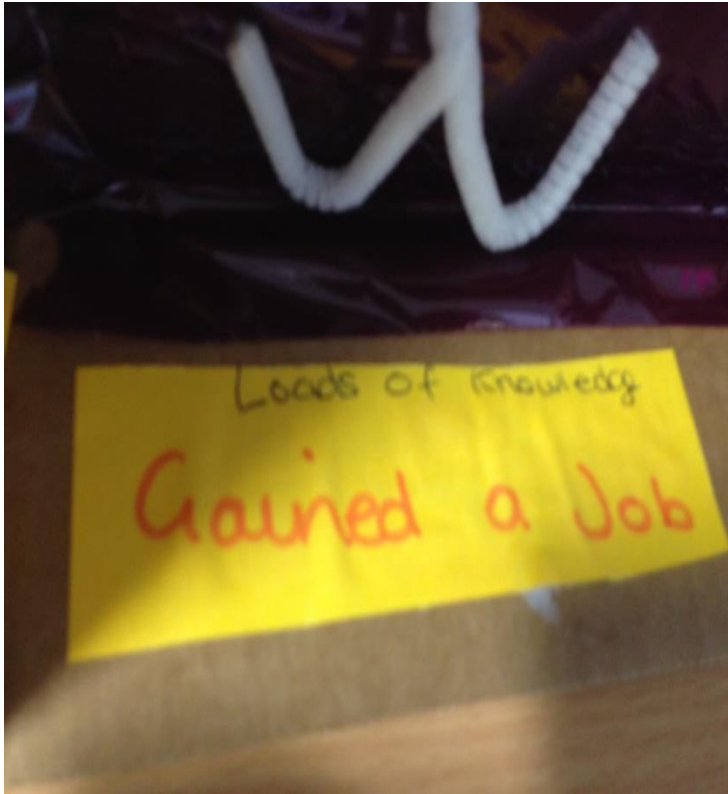
Natasha: I started when I came to college - I came here basically similar to Bob, mine started when my little brother was born I knew that I wanted to work with children since I have come here I've done my Level 2 and 3 and got a job and I've gained loads knowledge that I didn't have when I first started