

**Intergenerational Practice: A Participatory Action Research Study Investigating the Inclusion of Older Adults in the Lives of Young Children within an urban ‘Forest School’ Environment**

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***ABSTRACT***

This research emerged from a partnership developed between one pre-school setting and myself as a university tutor, and from my commitment to participatory ways of working. Within the pre-school, Early Years practitioners were eager to develop their offsite ‘Forest School’ provision further, and to engage in research, so participatory action research (PAR), which inclusively encourages participants to contribute to all aspects of the research process (Kemmis et al., 2014), was adopted. A Research Circle (Persson, 2009) was formed to create an arena for planning, development of the research questions, reflection and later analysis.

The main aim of the research project was identified and developed within the Research Circle where it was agreed that we would investigate the inclusion of older adults in the lives of young children within the urban Forest School environment. This mutual decision was inspired by recent practice within pre-school, by literature and current research. It also resonated with my prior experiences when working with young children. Six Early Years practitioners became my co-researchers and engaged in each stage of the research, to varying degrees. We worked in partnership to recruit, interview and welcome the older adults while the practitioners managed the Forest School activity as part of their usual practice. They also took responsibility for preparing the twelve children for research and supported them to participate and to make sense of their experiences. This thesis, submitted for examination for Doctor of Education (EdD), therefore examines the experiences of a newly formed company of participants, of varied ages from three to seventy-four, having a shared interest in working together and setting out on a journey to create new knowledge.

Societal changes and increasing lifespan reported by Vanderven(2011) and Yasunaga et al. (2016), among others, reveal examples of a growing amount of both familial and non-familial intergenerational practice, together with potential benefits and causes for concern. Our literature review considered how people of different generations interact and how they can learn from each other. Age-friendly environments (Steels, 2015) were then explored together with literature about ‘Forest School’ (Doyle and Milchem, 2012) and Place-Based Education (Mannion et al., 2010; Mannion and Adey, 2011). This literature identified a number of gaps in knowledge, including a focus on how the benefits associated with intergenerational practice occur (Park, 2015). A need for more qualitative data in respect of intergenerational interactions (Yasunaga et al., 2016) was evident. The research questions which emerged from the literature review sought to determine what occurs when older adults and young children are brought together in an urban forest school environment, with a particular focus upon interactions, knowledge exchange and benefits.

Data was analysed thematically resulting in four main findings, relating to the different forms of participation which emerged and their value for those involved: affective participation, collaborative participation, learning through intergenerational participation and challenging participation. The research indicates that investment in well-planned intergenerational relationships, where older adults and young children *choose* to engage with each other, is key to subsequent learning for both age groups. Furthermore, non-formal places afford a relaxed atmosphere and it is there where trust, essential for reciprocity in opportunities for challenge, can grow.

This collaborative research project is proving to be impactful. A case example has been included within a book for researchers, concerning research methods for social justice and equity in education (Atkins and Duckworth, 2019). In addition, the pre-school where the research took place is now engaged in another successful intergenerational project and members of the research team have attended Oslo Metropolitan University in order to share with academic and practitioners *HOW* participatory research can be embedded in partnerships between kindergartens and universities.

***ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS***

This thesis would not have been possible without the Early Years practitioners, my co-researchers, who welcomed me into their pre-school setting and trusted me to conduct this research. Diane, Jane, Katy, Ella, Caroline and Willow, it has been a pleasure working alongside you and I have revelled in my return to practice. In particular, Diane, you have travelled this journey with me from the start and have co-ordinated many meetings on top of the research duties. Thank you for your time and commitment.

Throughout the fieldwork the child participants, who demonstrated their capabilities in the Forest School environment, inspired me. Ashley, John, Olivia, Elle, Luke, Annie, Jack, Nate, Sophie, Libby, Sara and Austin you welcomed the visitors to your nursery and taught them so much about the forest. You showed them how you could share with others and work as a team. I do hope that you enjoyed finding things out and learning more about different people.

I am grateful too, to our older adults, Emily and Isobel, who embraced the challenge of the project. Your sense of adventure and fun, affinity with children and resilience were commendable. Without exception, you impressed all co-researchers.

In reflection upon my personal experiences, I now know that Granny Schults, who dedicated her life to children and young people, encouraging them to be the best they could be, also inspired this research. She was always on call to play her Northumbrian pipes, to teach about cloud formations and to challenge thinking. Her legacy lives on in a number of friends and colleagues. Likewise, many older adults who have taught me skills and developed my resilience throughout my life have also contributed to the instigation of this research project. This began with grandparents, neighbours and church members, then Girls’ Brigade leaders and friends. Nan, you continue to be inspirational. Now over 90, you are still attuned to young children. Because of you, I am always prepared and your friendship is special.

I am extremely thankful to everyone who has been involved in this EdD adventure. Firstly, my family who have endured my absences and mood swings, supervisors who challenged me academically, my friends who gave up asking when I would be finished, and my colleagues who provided encouragement. Anna, Paula, Kayleigh, Mam, Dad, Lucy, Alison, Liz, Michael, Maurice, Mel and Merlin, your encouragement and unwavering faith in me completing this thesis has spurred me on. To my Norwegian colleagues, Inger-Marie, Karen-Marie, Anne, Tove and Marit, I am grateful for your support and inspiration. Becky, thank you for coming in on the final straight and giving direction. I am now on first-name terms with my workplace security team and Ralphie the cocker spaniel thinks that he lives in my office. I could not have done it without you all.

My final acknowledgement goes to Great Grandpa. When the call for participants was first released, there was a flurry of interest. Not everyone was interested in participating in a prolonged Forest School research project, but some were eager to learn about the project or to offer ideas and, on occasions, they offered provocations to inspire practice. We will learn later about opportunities for those not directly involved in the research. Great Grandpa, who was not a research participant, maintained an interest throughout and created a poem for us. His synopsis is welcome and we thank you:

***From Great Grandpa:***

Children of the modern day,

Like their forebears, love to play**;**

I wonder what they think of me

(Going on for ninety-three)

Joining in their fun and games –

Though forgetful of their names**;**

It seemed to me that it would be

Very good, for them and me,

To find some common occupation

Which would, with shared participation,

Lead to outcomes manifold

To benefit both young and old.

With patience, tact, I'm sure I can

Enhance their information span;

Perhaps as well, before too long,

I'll help them knowing right from wrong.

What they give me, I do believe,

Is far, far more than they receive**;**

For me it's been a great surprise

To see the world through children's eyes.

The generation gap, I say,

Can be – *is* – narrowed in this way.

Now that this research project is complete, I dedicate the thesis to Luke, my grandson and accomplice. We have many adventures ahead.

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***CHAPTER 1***

***Introduction***

The notion of Early Years Practitioners engaging in their own professional development through research is well documented and is gaining in popularity (Pascal and Bertram, 2012; Leggett and Newman, 2019). However, there is room for further improvement in developing ‘authentic participatory methodology’ (Newman and Leggett, 2019, p.121) which can critique practice, engage with new knowledge and create sustainable change. This participatory action research (PAR) project was conducted alongside Early Years practitioners, as my co-researchers, who helped to determine the focus and the context of the research. The necessary and extensive relationship-building, together with discussions within Research Circles, which took place prior to the research and informed its development, are highlighted within this first chapter.

After providing a rationale for my choice of participatory methodology, the chapter illustrates the background to the research and the chosen context, Forest School, which emerged as an area for development during early discussions with co-researchers. Next, two key social concerns are introduced, namely, the potential stratification of society and children's lack of engagement with nature. These subjects also arose from early discussions and, in turn, led to the intergenerational focus of the research, within the Forest School environment. Finally, the aims and purpose of the chosen research are outlined and justified, and the chapter concludes with a summary of the structure of the thesis. I acknowledge that this thesis is presented in a slightly different format to the norm; one example being that the research questions emerge from the collaboration with co-researchers and are not pre-set. This is usual for PAR (Kalazich, 2013; Lovell, 2016) and is supported by Mannion (2019, p.3) who acknowledges how ‘good’ research does not necessarily follow a prescriptive format.

This thesis offers an original contribution to knowledge, not only in respect of the participatory approach with researcher and Early Years practitioners working together within Research Circles, but also within the findings from intergenerational activity within Forest School.

***1.1 Why did I choose Participatory Action Research?***

Robson (2011, p.15) advises researchers to determine their philosophical position prior to engaging in research, supporting the views of Savin-Baden and Howell-Major (2013) who assert that researchers can then choose appropriate research.

This thesis is clearly influenced by my personal experience and values (Hammond and Wellington, 2013, p.118) as throughout my life I have developed and maintained an interest in working with and supporting people of all ages in an education context. As a child I was encouraged to lead, to support and to serve others within a voluntary organisation, developing a sense of responsibility, an understanding of the value of community and gaining knowledge about the world. A number of inspiring adults guided me, allowed me to explore and challenged my thinking, but also nurtured me. In adulthood, and through work experiences, I have continued to seek opportunities to engage with and to support others in their development. This indicates a potential preference for naturalistic data (Silverman, 2014, p.xxii) and for valuing the contribution and perception that others can make to my research.

In my previous role as Nursery Educator, I recognised the expertise of staff who often felt undervalued or unfulfilled. With a lack of funding to access Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activity, or attend Further or Higher Education institutions, they sometimes missed out on opportunities to learn and develop. However, they were motivated and empowered when the opportunity arose to reflect and/or become involved in projects which involved the co-construction of knowledge under sound leadership. This concurs with the findings of a study by Coleman, Sharp and Handscomb (2016) which focused on leadership in Sure Start Children’s Centres. Furthermore, recently working as a tutor in Higher Education, using experiential learning theory (Kolb and Kolb, 2011), I have been able to support work-based learners (Shiel and Rhodes, 2007; Mpofu-Currie, 2015) throughout their studies. For example, certain modules have required students to identify areas for development and to undertake improvement projects within their workplaces. I have enjoyed this rewarding activity which has seen the development of personal and professional confidence, improved Ofsted ratings and has resulted in new job roles or engagement in further study for many individuals (Furu et al., 2018). These experiences inspired me to want to work alongside others in research.

Brannen (2005) cautions that researchers may develop habits or may not fully explore or exploit the most appropriate research methodologies and methods and that this may compromise the quality of the research. However, with my experience in working with others and my commitment to meaningful research, it seemed wise to utilise expertise, to build upon experience and to engage with practitioners to work collaboratively to develop knowledge and practice. I also identified and engaged with a range of literature (including Waring, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011; Silverman, 2014; Chevalier and Buckles, 2019), in order to ensure that the research would be robust, valuable and meaningful.

Qualitative methodologies, including PAR, are said to have ‘untapped knowledge-creating potential’ (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). Being a method of ‘intervention, development and change’ (Savin-Baden and Howell-Major, 2013, p.248), and reflective enquiry (Baum et al., 2006), PAR values collaboration, reflection and the voice of participants. PAR also supports co-production (Pahl, 2014; Horne and Shirley, 2009) as discussed in Section 4.3.4. These positive features made PAR sound appealing, yet caution was also heeded. PAR is time-consuming, requires commitment and, according to Hawkins, (2015) can be difficult to manage. However, I recognised the potential benefits of this form of research and was not deterred.

Reflecting upon previous experience and practice, and being informed by the literature, led to the consideration of a participatory project which hinged upon co-production. The use of co-production, defined and explained in Chapter 4, meant that all participants would later become involved in the development of the project. In particular, the Early Years practitioners were involved in all stages of the project to varying degrees, from co-production of the questions through to data analysis and interpretation. The processes involved in identifying a research site, and co-researchers, together with further detail of PAR, are outlined in Section 1.2 and in Chapter 4.

***1.2 Background to the Research***

A significant amount of ‘building work’ occurred prior to my research. While the entire research process will be reported in Chapter 4 (Methodology), this section explains how this project developed over time and Figure 1.0 shows the timeline of activity in the pre-planning phase.

As a university tutor, working predominantly with experienced undergraduate students from an Early Years background, and having previously trained as a nursery practitioner myself, I was aware of settings where practitioners engaged in reflective practice in an endeavour to offer the best provision for young children. Furthermore, such settings had an element of stability and the capacity to become involved in research. Consequently, when planning my research it was important draw upon such practice and there was potential to indulge in my broad areas of interest.

I initially engaged with Early Years practitioners who were final year undergraduate students on a work-based learning degree. For educators like myself, discussing research with students at this point in their degree course is an integral part of the learning process, particularly with students undertaking innovative dissertation projects. These projects and how they might be developed informed a wider discussion of research which, in turn, informed the development of my research questions. In particular, one student, Diane, who will be discussed more in Chapter 4, had studied the Forest School concept. She read widely, became Forest School trained and implemented the concept into the day nursery where she worked. Diane was eager to evaluate the provision and keen to further develop her own learning by engaging in research. My discussions with Diane helped to focus my thinking and ultimately led to my decision to adopt Forest School as a context for this study.

In addition, my discussions with the wider group resonated with the research by Mpofu-Currie (2015) which explored the conceptions of work-based learners and recognised how undervalued some practitioners felt, despite their expertise. My project therefore became an opportunity for Early Years practitioners to become involved in research, to have their voices heard and to make a difference in their own professional development and for the young children they support. This was achieved by adopting the participatory action research approach, a complex process involving both co-researchers and different groups of participants. Although the entire process will be discussed later, for clarity the pre-planning for the research process is illustrated in Figure 1.0.

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| ***Figure 1.0 - Pre-planning of Intergenerational Project***  **Timeline**  2 years  Relationship building and regular, effective communication throughout  Student undertakes study and work-based project related to Forest School and sets up provision.  s  Prior to  Project  Year 1  Student graduates. Initial meeting to discuss feasibility of research. Setting gatekeeper approached and informed.  Summer  Year 1 Winter  Reading and considering possibilities or research and dates.  Initial meetings with team leading to recruitment and informed consent.  Year 2  Spring  Research Circles commence: research questions developed, design discussed, ethical issues considered and ethical approval application made. |

***1.3 Making Connections and Developing the Research Circle***

Following the initial conversations with Diane, I was invited to her nursery setting to meet with the manager and to explore options for research with the staff team. At that time, it was not appreciated how many practitioners and children would later become involved nor how the research would develop. In order to focus our ideas as a potential research team I established a Research Circle (Persson, 2009) with interested parties at the nursery setting, consisting of practitioners and including Diane, the deputy manager. The development of my Research Circle will be discussed in further detail in Section 4.3.3, but, in short, the concept developed from the ‘study circles’ of the 1970s which provided education for the working classes. Currently, Research Circles are employed to enable university researchers and professionals in their field to engage with research-based development, resulting in new knowledge for all participants, through a participatory approach. They are mainly used in schools as a forum to reflect upon practice and can be organised in a variety of ways to suit different circumstances (Persson, 2009). The concept of Research Circles is also consistent with the work of Boyd et al. (2006), who advocated reflection, meetings and student-centred learning for students involved in their own learning. In the context of this research, it provided the opportunity not only to focus on the project but also for the nursery professionals, who eventually became participants, to reflect on and learn from their own practice.

Within the Research Circle, we had to maintain open minds, be creative and critically reflect upon practice in order to plan our next steps. This was a forum for exploration and discussion and the development of the setting’s Forest School practice was of high interest to all. This pre-planning phase, ahead of any research taking place, involved the evaluation of practice, discussion and reading, and these early conversations highlighted certain practical issues associated with the setting’s Forest School practice. Discussion focused on issues such as the involvement of families, how to share day-to-day activity, the lack of opportunity for recording observations due to the ‘busyness’ of Research Circle participants, and the overall benefits of the activity. We needed to be mindful of all of this as we began to explore recent and current research in order to plan our research project. It was essential to create and sustain the delicate balance of researcher-led enquiry in order to guide any future research and to meet any ethical requirements and deadlines, yet also to have the opportunity to collaborate with the practitioners and to investigate areas of interest to them, which could potentially develop their practice and community. Del Gaudio et al. (2017) warn of the time constraints of engaging in such ethical and responsible practice. However, it was essential that this crucial phase was not rushed. In addition, the process was also risky as there was no guarantee that discussions would lead to a research project. Furthermore, initial discussions and reading, prior to the research commencing, also raised some more contested discourses, including outdoor play and obesity. These prompted the study and will be treated critically (Chapter 2).

In this pre-planning stage, a Research Circle discussion identified that while one older adult was successfully involved on a voluntary basis within the life of the nursery, the impact of this activity had not been researched. In addition, at no time before this had older adults been invited to participate within the nursery’s Forest School activity. This offered one set of issues and opportunities. The Research Circle members also identified challenges in involving volunteers, such as safeguarding, but these were not deemed to be insurmountable. These discussions inspired new possibilities and challenged thinking, leading to the consideration of and planning for a participatory action research project investigating the inclusion of older adults in the lives of young children, within the Forest School context.

Before introducing the research project (Section 1.6), I will define ‘Forest School’ in relation to this research project and introduce the current international interest in children working with older adults, also known as ‘intergenerational activity’. The reason for this is that these, and other, subjects were read about before designing the research questions. A more detailed discussion of the literature is found in Chapter 2.

***1.4 What is Forest School and why is it relevant?***

Current Forest School activity in England was introduced by a group of nursery nurses from Somerset in the 1990s, inspired by their visit to nature kindergartens in Denmark, and has grown significantly since that time. Forest School can take a number of forms. Some Forest Schools operate on a daily basis in woodland, whereas other schools or nurseries utilise wooded areas available to them less frequently. The first Forest School Association (FSA, 2017) was set up in 2012, which introduced Forest School principles to be followed. Reasons for the introduction of Forest School will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Diane and her colleagues, who would become co-researchers in this research project, were already engaged in Forest School activity, within urban woodland, one day each week with children aged 3 and 4 years. This was predominantly working well and children’s learning was evident, but as reflective practitioners they were eager to evaluate their practice and to determine areas for improvement. Early discussions in Research Circles identified a number of such areas, including the potential for research. While I did not have personal experience of Forest School, and was not Forest School trained, as a former youth group leader and regular organiser of summer camps for children my interest in this activity was triggered.

The second area of interest which emerged from discussions, of working alongside older adults from a non-adjacent generation, also interested me as I had prior practical and professional experience of this. The co-researchers and I had found common interests upon which to develop our research project which could potentially benefit, and not disadvantage or do harm (Davies, 2017, p.96), to the children and others involved in the research.

***1.5* *Why Intergenerational practice?***

Intergenerational practice, further clarified and discussed in Chapter 2, refers to ‘cooperation and interaction between people of different generations’ (Heyman et al., 2011, p.436). This could relate to people of adjacent generations, as reflected in the report by Mannion et al. (2010), or non-adjacent generations also referred to as ‘skipped generations’ (Rosebrook and Larkin, 2003, p.142). The focus in this thesis, arising from the research interests of the co-researchers and because of their prior professional experiences, was about young children working alongside people of non-adjacent generations. This choice of research also attracted my interest.

My personal experience has led me to feel confident that there are potential significant benefits arising from young children being engaged with older adults from a non-adjacent generation. As a result of my positive childhood relationships with supportive grandparents and other older adults within the community, I was eager to involve people of all ages in the lives of my daughters. While both of my girls were fortunate to have their own local and nurturing grandparents, my youngest daughter also developed a love of outdoors from an inspirational family friend, known as ‘Granny S’, 63 years her senior. Granny S, was ‘like family’ (Davies, 2017, p.88). She encouraged my daughter to explore and question, to lead and to problem-solve. As a result, my daughter’s understanding of physical ability, disability, history and trust developed from a very early age. Whilst I do not attribute my daughter’s holistic development to Granny S, as many factors were involved, she certainly had an influence on my daughter’s development. She also played an active voluntary role in the local nursery and in a youth group, widening children’s horizons and encouraging inquiring minds. Following her death, one of the many responses to my social media post about her read:

*She [Granny S] was an amazing woman. I used to think she was teaching us map reading but as I got older I realised it was so much more. We were learning how to be self-reliant, to have respect for each other, nature and our environment. She was teaching us to be good citizens and young leaders and I have a lot to thank her for.*

*(Heslop, 2014)*

My professional experience has also involved intergenerational activity. As a nursery officer I used to encourage a visit from ‘Grandpa’ who would read stories or play piano, and from ‘Granny’ who played Northumbrian pipes. Today I know of a 90 year old who ‘works’ at a local primary school, someone who is articulate about the mutual benefit for herself and the children as she listens to them reading. Other older adults I know have developed a nursery library and supported young victims of crime, amongst other activities, while my god-daughter proudly shows others the knitting skills she has learned from her grandma. This reflects that within local Early Years settings, and families, pockets of expertise have already been shared by older volunteers with an interest in supporting children.

However, although there is a history of involving older adults in the lives of young children, and of many children learning from older adults and family members (Cunningham, 2006), not all children have such positive experiences and negative discourses must also be acknowledged. Furthermore, intergenerational tensions may emerge due to the differences in experiences and changes in society. I shall return to this discussion within Chapter 2, extending it with a summary of research undertaken on familial and non-familial intergenerational activity.

My personal and professional interest in intergenerational activity became more academically orientated through discussion with a research fellow in international ageing (Bailey, 2014) who offered advice about generations working together and suggested a plethora of reading material. Bailey (2014) also differentiated between older adults living in the community and those residing in care homes, something I had not previously considered. Following further discussion and reading, I came to understand that involving older people in the education of young children is seen to have benefits, despite these benefits not being clearly understood.

Elements of intergenerational activity have been evident for decades (Generations Working Together, 2019). Specific interventions began to emerge in America in the 1960s due to the identification of social and demographic issues (Rosebrook, 2002). These issues included ‘emotional separation’ and a ‘lack of engagement’ (p.30) between older adults and young children as well as the loss of some family networks (Swalb and Hossain, 2017; Ronald and Lennartz, 2017). Rosebrook (2002), whose research determined the social and emotional benefits of intergenerational activity for 3 and 4 year old children, posited that the significant reduction in interactions between people of different generations could account for society’s ‘generational disconnectedness’ (p.31) and that the ‘stratification of generations’ (p.32) could be seen to potentially have a negative effect on children’s development. The impact of children growing up in a society where they only relate to their own age group is potentially profound and might include effects such as loss of wider community and limited opportunities to learn from the more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978).

There have been a number of responses in tackling such issues. Some programmes have aimed to create links between older citizens, or non-adjacent generations, and children (Dellman-Jenkins, 1997). This activity is further simulated by international awareness of the growth of ageing populations and their visibility (Femia, 2008), together with declining birth rates (Yasunaga et al., 2016). Also, such programmes are intended to tackle the isolation and worthlessness felt by some older adults (DeVore et al., 2016). Further examples include the Maori community in New Zealand (Living the Language, 2014) who have developed ‘language nests’ to encourage parents and young children to speak with community elders in order to revive their declining language and cultural experiences. Furthermore, charitable organisations such as The Beth Johnson Foundation (2011), Age UK (Drury et al., 2017), Generations United (2019) in America and Generations Working Together (2019) in Scotland have become established to promote intergenerational activity, for mutual benefit for all ages.

Despite some attempts to develop intergenerational activity in the United States of America (USA) and more recently in the United Kingdom (UK), concerns about prejudice against older people remain (Hughes, 2013, WHO, 2016a). The World Health Organisation (WHO) posit that the lowest levels of respect of elders are in high income countries (2016a) yet the problems seem widespread, internationally.

The professionalization of intergenerational activity is relatively recent (Rosebrook and Larkin, 2003) and places an emphasis on the need to ‘reengage generations’ (Vieira and Sousa, 2016, p.396). Guidance and standards for intergenerational practice between people of ‘skipped generations’ were developed by Rosebrook and Larkin (2003, p.142) which included drawing upon knowledge of human development, effective communication, a commitment to collaboration and partnership, integration of knowledge from a variety of fields, evaluation and reflection (pp.139-141). Practice appears to vary considerably. Many intergenerational projects have involved elderly and frail adults, including those with dementia, while others appear to involve ‘community dwelling’ (Park, 2014, p.181) or independent adults. In principle, intergenerational practice appears to have benefits for all ages, yet Park (2014) recognised that that whilst there is literature relating to intergenerational programmes, and despite the way that knowledge about the effects and benefits are emerging for both older adults and children, ‘interventions from a cross-generational viewpoint are under researched’ (2014, p.181). Her international search of English language intergenerational literature, covering the years 1986 to 2014, focused upon community-dwelling older adults and non-familial relationships, yet was not limited to young children. Similarly, BERA and TACTYC (2014, p.16) identified a need for research which involves practice based upon human relationships which can support children’s development within Early Years settings. This thesis seeks to respond to these points by addressing gaps in the existing research. Therefore, it explores intergenerational activity in a Forest School context where the older participants might be described as ‘independent’ and the young children are based in an Early Years setting. The research project can now be introduced.

***1.6 Introducing the Research***

Having set the scene in the previous sections, I now turn to summarising and introducing the research project. This concerned a group of Early Years practitioners working alongside myself as the lead researcher to develop provision for young children in their care. It was a real-time project, embedded within practice, yet allowing the practitioners time and space to critically reflect upon their work, to read, to question and to become involved in research. The co-production of knowledge was key to this research from the start, as discussed in Chapter 4. As the project had potential to benefit the community, including the practitioners and children of the nursery setting, participatory action research (PAR) was deemed appropriate.

However, Hawkins (2015) advises that PAR can be messy and complicated, and this proved the case here. In addition to this the implementation of Forest School can be challenging, for example regarding finance, training and time (Dillon and Dickie, 2012). However, in relation to my research project, Forest School activity had already been established in the setting so issues such as finance and training were less relevant. Hawkins’ (2015) caution was heeded, yet despite careful planning and regular communication, the practicalities of managing a PAR project soon surfaced. The time taken for ethical approval, the sustaining of relationships, the negotiation, planning and recording would all prove challenging, yet would be overcome.

The nursery professionals who participated in the research circle rapidly became co-researchers who worked alongside me on all aspects of the development of the project including finding the focus, developing the research questions, developing the research tools and recruitment, data gathering and analysis. In addition, they also undertook nursery-based tasks such as preparing the children for the research activity and acquiring parental consent. This process is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

In summary, through these early Research Circles, practitioners confirmed that Forest School was the research context, and that there was a desire to explore the inclusion of older adults in the lives of young children. Practitioners eager to engage in the research began to read around the subject while I reviewed the literature to develop a thorough understanding of current academic thinking in the field (Chapter 2). This would all lead to firm project planning, development of the research questions, ethical approval and research activity (Chapter 4).

***1.7 Summary of the Chapter and Structure of the Thesis***

This thesis is presented in six chapters. This introductory chapter has outlined the factors which led to the development of this research. The Forest School context has been defined and discussed, as has the intergenerational context and some recent research. I have also detailed the significant relationship building required before the commencement of the project.

Chapter 2 offers a critical review of the literature, including benefits emerging from intergenerational activity (familial and non-familial perspectives), interactions and age-friendly environments. Knowledge exchange in relation to participatory intergenerational work is discussed in Chapter 3. Next, Chapter 4 outlines the complex but innovative methodology and data collection methods adopted, also justifying the data analysis. Chapter 5 presents and discusses the research findings while Chapter 6 summarises the entire thesis and considers implications for policy, practice and research.

***CHAPTER 2***

***Literature Review***

***2.0 Introduction***

Having contextualised the study in the introductory chapter, the main focus of this literature review is to present an overview of the research and other literature related to the inclusion of older adults in the lives of young children. Since the focus of this research emerged as part of the participatory approach this will, to a certain extent, be reflected in the literature review. After outlining the scope of the literature review, and clarifying terminology used in the thesis, relevant research on intergenerational engagement is discussed, both from familial and non-familial perspectives. This will incorporate a critical perspective of working in this way. Research focusing on interactions between young children and older adults is particularly of interest here and the potential benefits of intergenerational activity are also summarised, indicating areas of further research.

The parameters of the literature review were scoped and determined through my discussions with an intergenerational research fellow, and with the practitioners who would become my co-researchers. This was a wide, exploratory search, as the research questions had not yet been designed. Within Research Circles, the subject areas raised from initial discussions led myself and my co-researchers to literature concerning a diverse range of intergenerational activity worldwide, identifying historical aspects, main themes, conflicting terminology and theories used in intergenerational research. While my focus was University-provided data bases, practitioners accessed a mixture of peer-reviewed material together with resources from prior learning opportunities, professional journals and national press. While not all academically focused, this was still relevant as such information guides practitioners in today’s practice. In turn, this reading and subsequent critical discussion during Research Circles led to the creation of a table which listed key insights from each of the studies determining benefits, knowledge transfer / exchange and relationships / interactions. This supported the development of the research questions once areas of interest and gaps in knowledge were determined. This initial search was also necessary to understand key terms used within the field. Furthermore, while the practitioners already had a working knowledge of Forest School, a deeper understanding was necessary in respect of the appropriateness for the research context and this later led to a search on age-friendly environments and the outdoor environment. As the term knowledge exchange appeared in intergenerational literature, this aspect will be examined in Chapter 3.

An essential part of the literature review was my exploration of definitions of salient terms, such as ‘intergenerational’, ‘young child’ and ‘older adult’, to ensure there is an effective focus to the initial searches and clarity in the final study. The term ‘young child’ is relatively straightforward and is used in this study to describe children aged three and four years. Literature searches also included the terms ‘pre-school’, ‘kindergarten’ and ‘nursery’. However, when searching literature from different countries I was mindful that definitions may differ due to the age that children start school in those countries. While pre-school children in England are under five years old, other pre-schoolers, for example in Scandinavia, may be six years old.

From looking at the range of definitions and developing our own we realized that few fit neatly with each other, that the use of terms varied, and that no single definition fits all circumstances. The literature also incorporated terms such as ‘community dwellers’ (Park, 2014, p.181), ‘grandparents’ (Coall and Hertwig, 2011, p.1; Strom and Strom, 2016, p.25), ‘elderly adults / elderly persons’ (Murayama et al., 2015, p.305); ‘older care home residents’ (Cook and Bailey, 2013, p.410) and ‘persons with dementia’ (Galbraith et al., 2015, p.357), amongst others. In collaboration with Research Circle members a decision was made that a functional working definition would be adopted for this study where the term ‘older adults’ would be used to refer to participants who had retired and left any full-time employment, so having potentially more time to participate. The term also differentiated them by age from the nursery practitioners and young children and served to emphasise who was to be recruited. In this context, whilst no age limit was imposed, they would be people who felt they were ready to accept a challenge and wanted to engage in the research. Hence, community dwellers, who may or may not be grandparents, were sought. Although the volunteers in this research project answered the call for ‘older adults’ and therefore self-defined as such, this functional working definition was subsequently altered by the volunteers themselves once the research commenced as they preferred to be known by their first names.

The term ‘intergenerational’ was more problematic as literature searches revealed that this had a number of applications. It could, for instance, be applied to parents and children, (Duvall and Zint, 2007; Mannion et al., 2010; Casiro et al., 2011; Brown et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2017), as well as to individuals from a non-adjacent generation (Proietti et al., 2013; Morita and Kobayashi, 2013; Martins et al., 2019) or three generations working together (Birditt et al., 2012; Wexler, 2011). Furthermore, there were no clear age-bands, given that, for example, some of the research involving non-adjacent generations involved adult students and older adults (Schroeder et al., 2017), whilst other work used different age bands or groupings which cannot be readily compared. Research involving three generations, for example, tended to be familial rather than non-familial, including Birditt et al. (2012) who explained the variability among families in relation to relationships and Deindl et al. (2017) who argue how grandparents’ material and cultural resources can impact upon their grandchildren’s lives. In these cases, however, the emphasis was not upon young children and older adults working and learning together.

Taking note of all of the definitions in the field, and having read a broad spectrum of literature referring to intergenerational activity, I decided not to focus upon intergenerational examples of parent/child relationships during this literature review as the aim was to investigate the impact of non-adjacent generational activity. I also identified that much research was conducted about familial relationships, such as between grandparents and grandchildren, as well as non-familial relationships. This was explored in relation to grandparents and young children and some of this work that will be discussed here, as there was a possibility that grandparents could be included in research undertaken for this thesis. Non-familial intergenerational activity also became a focus, given its significance for this study. The next section explores this, revealing gaps in research about such activity. Intergenerational interactions and age-friendly learning environments are examined in order to justify the choice of the Forest School environment as a context for the research. Benefits of intergenerational activity emerge from the review of the literature relating to familial and non-familial activity, interactions and knowledge exchange. The process was iterative and I have continued to engage with new work in this area.

***2.1 Intergenerational Engagement***

There is a history of including people of different generations in the lives of young children, as outlined in Chapter 1, with potentially both positive and negative implications. Until the 18th century, a child was viewed as a ‘little adult’ (Heywood 2018, p.2), yet less valuable, and from the age of around seven (Aries, 1962, p.411) they would work, play and learn alongside adults of all ages. Children were functional within the family; for example by supporting with tasks, maintaining the family name or sent out to work to earn money, as this was deemed right at the time (Heywood, 2018, p.50). However, this also left children vulnerable to exploitation and neglect. In an interesting parallel, older adults, in France and England in particular, prior to the 18th century lacked respect from others (Aries, 1962, p.31). It appears that young children and older adults had some similarities at that time.

By the late 18th century, the modern construct of childhood was beginning to emerge (Aries, 1962; Heywood, 2018) and societal change was occurring. A significant text which influenced child rearing practices at that time was ‘Emile’ (Rousseau, 2013), originally published in 1762, which echoed some of the child-raising ideas of other educational reformers such as Locke (Jimack, 1984), and denounced the neglect and maltreatment of some children (Boto, 2010). ‘Emile’ was based upon a fictitious young boy who was tutored by an adult in what Rousseau deemed an ideal way to develop morals, to be nurtured and to have an affinity with nature – and to avoid the vices in society.

Delving into Rousseau’s life and theories it, at first, seems rather incredulous that he became a pivotal figure in child development. The first issues arise as the fictitious ‘Emile’ was modelled upon a young rich boy who was guided by a tutor, in nature. Possibly due to the period of time that the text was written, this favoured the ‘boy’ as few girls were deemed worthy of an education. Also, while Rousseau, and the Romantics, idealised childhood not all children had access to the same experiences, learning arenas or beliefs. In addition, there was no research carried out to test the reliability of Rousseau’s theories. Furthermore, Rousseau’s own life choices appear to contradict his assertions, as his own children were taken into care (Rowbotham, 1930, p.386).

Yet, despite the flaws in Rousseau’s beliefs and criticisms of his philosophy of education (Gray, 2009), Jonas (2016, p. 145) explains how Rousseau’s ideas were ‘rich with educational insights’. One example is that he demonstrated how ‘the notion of Haltung’ is essential to pedagogical practice. According to Eichstellar and Holtoff (2011, p.36) the German term Haltung translates as ‘attitude, mindset, ethos’ and affects how we ‘conceptualise the people we interact with’. Within social pedagogy, Haltung includes how we connect with others, including respect for them, a set of principles that extend to all humans, irrespective of age. This becomes of particular interest in the research findings when we see how young children and older adults interact and also when we consider the recent growth in intergenerational activity which is shifting from the familial to non-familial, and moving from ‘unigenerational to intergenerational framings of education and learning’ (Mannion, 2016, p.11).

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Rousseau has inspired many educationalists who followed him (Gray and McBlain, 2015). His theories led to consideration, by others, of the socio-cultural learning environment, and ‘the impact of positive early interactions’ (Conkbayir and Pascal, 2014, p. 4) which remain relevant in today’s practice. Meanwhile, experiences for children continue to differ (National Children’s Bureau, 2013, 2015) and experiences of ageing also alter between cultures (Fung, 2013).

The following section focuses upon examples of two main types of intergenerational engagement – the familial and non-familial - taking into account the potential strengths and issues that may occur.

***2.1.1 Familial Intergenerational Engagement***

Familial intergenerational engagement differs worldwide (Martinez-Carter, 2013) and there is an array of practice, which may be influenced by laws or by cultures. Given that, in some countries, such as in the Mediterranean and Latin America, multiple generations regularly live in the same accommodation, this could indicate regular opportunities for positive intergenerational engagement. This is true in some cases (Mollborn et al., 2011) but the situation is not straightforward. For example, Calzada and Brooks (2013) discuss the family solidarity in some Mediterranean countries, comparable with Japan and South America, yet recognise the ‘overburdening of families’ (p.531) in relation to care. Regarding Latin America, Daude and Robano (2015) consider the lack of intergenerational mobility, and how inequalities span generations, thus indicating that some familial intergenerational engagement may have negative outcomes.

Different issues are reported in countries such as England and in the United States of America (USA) where older adults are more likely to live away, and be disconnected from their families (Rosebrook, 2002). Here, it is reported by some that older adults may become residents in retirement communities or access social care and may feel lonely (Martinez- Carter, 2013; Duerden, 2018). While this could potentially reduce the care burden and mobility inequalities experienced in the Mediterranean and in Latin America, for example, the geographical and emotional disconnection and age segregation may cause ageism, which will be discussed below. All of this indicates that some older adults may have more contact with their families than others and that, worldwide, there are similarities in the need for consideration of provision of the growing ageing population (Femia et al., 2008; Yasunaga et al., 2016) and to bring generations together in a way that is mutually beneficial.

Much of the literature on familial intergenerational activity focuses upon the ways in which some grandparents support the care of children in family homes. Reasons for this include the fact that life expectancy is growing in developed countries (Yasunaga et al., 2016), and that many parents have to work outside the home and struggle with the cost of childcare (Schober and Scott, 2012). Therefore, it is not surprising that grandparents in many of those countries, for example within Europe and America, are becoming increasingly involved with the care of the grandchildren (Coall and Hertwig, 2010). Research conducted by Fergusson et al. (2007) revealed how in British life the extended family is vital, with 44% of grandchildren being cared for by their grandparents. The extent of this care is not clear.

Significantly there has been an interest in the impact of grandparents caring for their grandchildren upon their own emotional and physical health (Coall and Hertwig, 2011; Di Gessa et al., 2016). According to Di Gessa et al. (2016), their longitudinal study of grandparents in Europe determined that where grandchild care complements parent care, the effect for grandmothers (across Europe) is significant and positive, with potential health benefits identified. They recommended that further research would be required to identify the activities undertaken between grandparents and grandchildren which contributed to these benefits, and recommended qualitative studies to determine this. They also recommended further research into the difference in results for grandfathers. While no negative outcomes were identified for grandfathers in Di Gessa et al.’s (2016) research, the same significant health benefits were not noted for grandfathers as they were for grandmothers.

Grandparents caring for children also has an effect on ‘verbal fluency’ for grandparents of both genders (Arpino and Bordone, 2014, p.337) and it is a social activity which may be beneficial for grandparents’ ‘cognitive functioning’ (p.338). In this study, and that of Di Gessa et al. (2016), the benefits were greater where the care was occasional, and not intensive, perhaps attributed to the fact that there are stronger familial relationships and support. While grandparents may be motivated to invest time and money in, and safeguard, their own grandchildren (Coall and Hertwig, 2011), it is recognised how looking after young children may be demanding both ‘physically and emotionally’ (Di Gessa et al., 2016a, p.867).

When grandparents have a desire to be involved with their grandchildren, it may be more ‘rewarding and beneficial for health’ (Di Gessa et al., 2016a, p.877). This differs from the experiences of grandparents who feel obliged to look after the children or who have enforced caring roles. For example, kinship carers may experience challenges, including poor health, if they are the child’s main carer (Di Gessa et al., 2016a; Statham, 2011), even when socio- economic conditions are considered. This element of choice in engagement is significant.

The substantial body of literature concerning grandparents providing practical childcare support and economic development within the family (including Fuchsberger et al., 2012; Luo et al., 2012; Arpino and Bordone, 2014; Pulgaron et al., 2016) has been explored. However, it is more often related to care and practical support for families, or to the benefits for grandparents, rather than related to children’s learning. Given the aims and purposes of this thesis, this literature is acknowledged, but not discussed in detail. In contrast, it was necessary for me to examine any research involving learning opportunities between grandparents and grandchildren and to identify whether there were potential benefits for the children as well as for the older adults.

Many activities undertaken by grandparents and grandchildren together, whilst informal, are potentially educational, but research involving learning between these groups remains scarce, signifying the importance of studies such as this one to bring new knowledge. Di Gessa et al. (2016a) discuss joint activities to include the child learning the grandparent’s skills, although the actual skills and activities are not known. Others (Gregory et al, 2004; Mollborn et al., 2011) urge the importance of involving grandparents in the lives of young children to support their cognitive development. Research by Mollborn et al. (2011) which set out to examine who matters in a young child’s life, explained how African American children showed significant behaviour and cognitive development when their grandparents were involved with them. However, they acknowledged that there can be differences between racial and ethnic groups, or families, and while some children may benefit others may not. This caution is wise as core family values and attitudes may differ and not all outcomes may be positive. For example, some grandparents may model and teach undesired behaviours or language while in extreme circumstances there could even be the intergenerational transmission and persistence of criminal behaviour (Spapens and Moors, 2019). In other research, Jessel et al. (2011) focused upon informal literacy and language learning in bilingual and monolingual households in London. This determined that the grandparent and grandchild relationship has a ‘reciprocal quality’ (p.37) with the two generations learning together. Examples were offered of learning taking place in the home and findings were interpreted using sociocultural theory. This element of reciprocity is of interest as Knight et al. (2014) explain how reciprocity is lacking in intergenerational projects, despite examples where this is not the case (Jessel et al., 2015; Kelly, 2015). Furthermore, Mannion (2012, p.386) deems reciprocity to be an essential ‘principle for intergenerational practice’.

Given that some families live miles apart, and in order to support and develop the reciprocity in absent or long-distance grandparent and children relationships, digital technology has helped to fill the gap. Kelly (2015) reported upon a long-distance relationship between a pre-school child and her grandparents utilising SKYPE to scaffold learning. This small-scale study primarily focused upon developing and maintaining family relationships across a distance. However, it was also made apparent that the child learned through interaction and developed leadership and creativity skills through the process. This scenario could resonate with key ways in which children learn, as highlighted within the Characteristics of Effective Learning (Stewart, 2011). Similarly, Kelly’s (2015) research gives evidence of new learning in relation to technology, communication development and reciprocity. However, this type of research raises the question of whether there are also limitations in respect of social skills and collaboration on tasks; demonstrated by difficulties encountered when activities extended beyond the scope of the camera (p.36), and in the lack of identification of non-verbal cues (p.38), attributed to the nature of the activity.

Strom and Strom (2016) say that caution is needed regarding ‘age segregated conversation’ (p.41) as technology may be new to some participants and they may be unfamiliar with its use. However, in Kelly’s (2015) research, although the grandparents were novices with technology (p.43), they were willing to learn. This potential digital divide between generations was suggested by Prensky (2001) in relation to teachers, or ‘digital immigrants’ (p.2), and students, or ‘digital natives’ (p.1), yet was refuted by Guo et al. (2008) as being misleading when their research result showed no significant difference between the age groups. What this indicates is that some negative discourses remain about different generations working together which may need to be examined further. In addition, there may be occasions where some older individuals require extra support with new technologies and language (Strom and Strom, 2015), but this could equally apply to other age groups.

It has already been discussed how some families live far away from each other and need to be creative to maintain bonds (Kelly, 2015). However, further research reported that some families experience limited, or no, grandparent support, whether due to working grandparents or families living apart (Kenner et al., 2007, Davis et al., 2008). O’Connor (2013) discusses how many changes and fragmentation within Early Years have emerged as a result of urbanisation, and Rosebrook (2002) cautions of a potential stratification of society. This view is supported by Newman et al. (1999, p.130) who explain how older adults are often ‘deprived of the opportunity to pass on their wisdom, knowledge and skills’. This may be partly addressed by SKYPE or other technology as Kelly (2015) argues. This might also function as a rationale for extending intergenerational activity, given that it can encourage social connectedness and ensure that individuals feel valued (Knight et al., 2014). Such activity would be relevant to grandparents and equally to unrelated older adults. Although Schindlmayr (2006) suggests that government policies tend to prioritise environmental issues and economic planning over social concerns, potentially hindering personal development and social capacity, Mannion (2016, p.2) explains how policy is now promoting intergenerational learning. It appears that progress is being made, at least in some areas.

Policy is now framing intergenerational learning as an important area for develop-

45 ment toward more cohesive and sustainable futur2016, p.2)

Despite some areas of caution, it appears that there can be reciprocal benefits for both grandparents and grandchildren engaging in intergenerational activity. However, although families may be the most direct opportunity to engage with people of different generations, this may not be available to everyone. We now need to explore potential benefits for older adults and young children who do not have the opportunities to be involved with each other. The next section will investigate research involving non-familial intergenerational engagement and will begin to determine how we can encourage and offer opportunities for all who wish to engage in intergenerational activity.

***2.1.2 Interventional Non-familial Intergenerational Engagement***

In recent years, intergenerational activity, also known as ‘Intergenerational Practice’ (Cook and Bailey, 2013, p.410) or ‘intergenerational program’ (Park, 2014, p.181), or ‘intergenerational intervention’ (Park, 2014, p.182), has grown in popularity in some countries, including England and the USA. This has been developed for a number of reasons, including to address certain societal issues such as negative attitudes of children towards older adults, ‘individualism’ (Hernandez and Gonzalez, 2008, p.293), depression among a growing number of older adults who require more varied lifestyle opportunities (Femia et al., 2008) as well as a reduction in intergenerational interaction (Rosebrook, 2002; Uhlenberg and Gierveld, 2004; McConnell and Naylor, 2016). Such activity is often through informal activity or more formal programmes, for, as the Beth Johnson Foundation (2011, p.4) states:

*Intergenerational practice aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contributes to building more cohesive communities. Intergenerational practice is inclusive, building on the positive resources that the young and old have to offer each other and those around them*

Many intergenerational programmes have focused upon the mental health benefits for the elderly (Hernandez and Gonzalez, 2008; Murayama et al., 2015, Park 2015) including for those with depression or in care homes, in an attempt to address social isolation and to reduce stereotypical assumptions of various age groups. Although originally a ‘unigenerational’ issue (Mannion, 2016, p.11), it now aims to bring together various age groups. This is important as research by Abrams et al. (2009), which analysed surveys on ageism in Britain, identified ageism being experienced by both the young (under 30s) and older people (over 70s) in society (p.68). This corroborates the view of North and Fiske (2012) in respect of older people. They discuss the roots of ageism, including socio-cultural theories, arguing that modern social structures and the growth in literacy among young people meant that they no longer require the expertise and wisdom of older people. However, North and Fiske (2015, p.174) later reported the scarcity of research in respect of how older generations view younger generations. As age matters most to the young and to the old in society then such discrimination may threaten their ‘self-worth’ (Abrams et al., 2009, p.48). What is more, Abrams et al. (2009) explained how face-to-face contact between various age groups, in everyday life, is vital as the development of friendships is the most powerful form of contact and reduces the possibility of individuals becoming disconnected from society. Yet they acknowledged that such relationships between the age groups are quite rare in Britain. They found that ‘age-related attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices are firmly embedded in British society’ (Abrams et al., 2009, p.137) and suggested finding solutions to bridge the generation gap. Caution was also highlighted, in respect that if intergenerational programmes are not suitably planned and delivered, differences could be reinforced, rather than ameliorated (Abrams et al., 2009, p.139).

What the research of Abrams et al. (2009) indicated was that some attitudes mirrored those of the 14th century, when Dante stated that an individual begins their ‘final period of decline’ at the age of 45 (Heywood, 2018, p.2) resulting in them becoming devalued. Conversely, Hooyman and Kiyak (2014) posit that stereotypes seen historically about older people are changing and, in some areas, there is growing evidence of their strengths and contribution to society. Certainly, as the awareness of age segregation has risen in the UK (Drury et al., 2017; United for All Ages, 2017; BBC, 2017), and the importance of intergenerational activity is identified, activity is becoming more widespread. The first United Kingdom community nursery and social enterprise opened in London in September 2017 (BBC, 2017a) while summer 2017 saw Channel 4’s experiment (University of Bath, 2017) introducing ten four-year-olds into a retirement home. The latter aimed to determine what older adults and young children could learn from each other.

The systematic review of intergenerational programmes (2004-15) undertaken by Canedo-Garcia et al. (2017), identified that intergenerational programmes are more prevalent in the field of gerontology, followed by health and then education. This possibly accounts for the large focus on well-being over learning. The USA were found to have the most empirical intergenerational studies (30), with Japan having 4, the UK 3 and other countries also having low numbers. They advised the use of ‘virtual interventions’ (p.9) to help reduce social isolation, although the limitations expressed by Kelly (2015), as identified earlier, did not appear to be considered.

Of the plethora of emerging intergenerational activities and research, many involve adolescents or university students and older adults (Hernandez and Gonzalez, 2008; Strom and Strom, 2015; Strom and Strom, 2016; Wexler, 2011). While the older children and young adults are not the focus of this thesis, such research was not discounted as certain aspects could also have relevance to young children working with older adults, especially where mixed generations are involved. One example, also a concern, is that intergenerational tensions may surface due to a conflict between modern and traditional values or learned practice. For example, as Strom and Strom (2015) have argued, use of terminology (and thus understandings) can change over time and between generations leading to potential tensions and misunderstandings. Similarly, the life skills and experiences of different generations have the potential to lead to tensions, as noted by North and Fiske (2015) regarding different generations within the workplace. In an Early Years context, for instance, and at a more structural level, issues such as safeguarding and the associated policies and procedures may be unfamiliar to older generations, or different to their own experience. Similarly, teaching approaches have changed significantly over time. Although this can cause some discomfort and resistance (Rodd, 2006) as change can be unwelcome, adults working together in a supportive environment may benefit from experiencing and learning from such conflicts given that discussing practice can challenge thinking and promote ideas. However, it is crucial to consider young children if there is a conflict between individuals or in practice. Donaldson (1978) notes that a child can be confused if the context or language of the learning environment is inconsistent or unclear, so when planning and conducting intergenerational research it is necessary to be mindful of this, be prepared to address any issues which arise, and intervene sensitively.

Further learning arises from North and Fiske (2015) who, when discussing individual, interpersonal, institutional and international concerns in the workplace (and beyond), indicated that intergenerational activity in the workplace can actually promote tension. While their research involved adults and not children, it is reasonable to assume that the tensions could occur in other circumstances. North and Fiske (2015, p.173) highlight the need for valuing age diversity, assisting older adults to avoid adopting stereotypes and to promote collaborative working between the generations. This advice is important as, according to the surveys scrutinised by Abrams et al. (2009), older people do not deem themselves incompetent as their younger counterparts may do. Equally, younger people do not view themselves as ‘unfriendly’ (Abrams et al., 2009, p.135) according to the stereotypical views of the older adults. It appears that when workplaces promote an intergenerational culture, it could help to dispel any stereotypical ideas and benefits may emerge. What the work of North and Fiske (2015) implies is that some thought needs to be given to intergenerational activity planning, to determine what works and what should be avoided. Proactive and considered plans are preferable to ad hoc ‘bumping into’ (p.174) which can create misunderstandings and resentment. The suggestions made by North and Fiske (2015) contributed to the development of the methodology within this thesis.

A number of reviews of intergenerational studies have been conducted (Gualano et al., 2017; Park, 2015; Martins et al., 2019). Gualano et al. (2017) reviewed 27 non-familial studies of which 10 (eight from the USA and two from Japan) determined the positive impact of intergenerational programmes on pre-school and school-aged children’s attitudes towards the elderly. The remainder of the studies focused mainly on benefits for the older adults, including upon their well-being. Parks’ (2014) review of eleven non-familial studies (from 1986 to 2014) to determine the potential benefits of intergenerational activity for ‘community dwelling older adults’ (p.181), found these to be enjoyment, social well-being and opportunities to pass on knowledge to the next generation. This search, which evaluated projects from Canada, USA, Brazil and Japan helpfully offers planning considerations for those wishing to undertake such activity and begins to indicate where young children may benefit from such interactions.

Studies involving young children working with elderly participants often demonstrate a positive impact on young children as well as for the elderly, as noted earlier. Femia et al. (2008) involved children from kindergarten to second grade (USA) in their exploratory study of the potential benefits of intergenerational engagement. Results determined that children participating in the programme had ‘higher levels of social acceptance, a greater willingness to help and greater empathy for older people’. In addition, they displayed ‘more positive attitudes and were better able to self-regulate their behaviour’ (Femia et al., 2008, p.272). A study conducted by Skropeta et al. (2014), which involved older people, carers and young children, instigated intergenerational playgroups. Results included the development of friendships and meaningful engagement. One of the largest studies is a Japanese intervention (Yasunaga et al., 2016) involving people from the community as well as older adults and school children. Participants engaged in the Japanese intergenerational REPRINTS programme which involved three strands, the first being ‘intergenerational engagement’ drawing upon the generativity element of Erikson’s (1963) lifespan model of development, and using picture books in their interactions. Next, older adults were encouraged to develop relationships with one another and finally ‘lifelong learning’ to sustain cognitive development. Quantitative data was collected before the start of the programme, at the end of the first year and at the end of the second year. While this provided detail such as the frequency of interactions and was useful for large data sets, the researchers recognised the need to refine their methodology for future studies as although some benefits were determined, they were unable to state how they occurred. The use of qualitative or narrative analysis was suggested for future research.

While lessons can be learned from wider research, and an understanding of the rationale for intergenerational activity gained, it is vital to now refocus upon literature which concerned young children engaging with older adults. This is also where further gaps in the literature can be noted. As discussed earlier, in my exploration of salient terms, this search proved rather problematic due to the differences in terminology used across countries and settings. Furthermore, while some young children have been involved in a number of studies and interventions (for example, Dellman-Jenkins, 1997; Lee et al., 2007; Morita and Kobayashi, 2013; Murayama et al., 2014) their main focus may still be upon the older adults. Murayama et al. (2014) offer one example of this as they set out to clarify the effect of their intergenerational programme on the mood of older adults. In conclusion, they acknowledged the need for intergenerational programmes where the elderly can establish and build relationships with children in the community as such programmes could potentially result in ‘key health promoters’ among [older adults] ‘by enhancing ‘intergenerational ties among communities’ (Murayama et al., 2014, p.312). Within this research project children played a key role, but their views were not sought and their voices not heard. Equally worrying is that in a number of studies, including the intervention by Morita and Kobayashi (2013, p.1) involving pre-school children, which ‘brought smiles and conversation’ to the older adults, permissions were given by the principals of their schools or by parents but there is no indication that the children were prepared for the activity or were happy to participate. This ethical omission indicates a lack of children’s voice and a power imbalance between adults and children. I shall return to this discussion later.

Park’s (2015) search of intergenerational studies (from 1986 to 2014) was undertaken in order to determine the benefits of intergenerational programmes for children and young people. Familial relationships were excluded and the programmes originated from North America, Brazil and Canada. None of the studies were from the UK. An impact was noted upon the children’s attitudes towards older adults, and upon their social development yet, significantly, there was a lack of detail about ‘the exact mechanisms of how these benefits could occur’ indicating a gap in knowledge. Park (2015, p.4) concluded that children can benefit from interactions with older adults. The nature of such interactions will be explored in Section 2.2.

Further, research by Proietti et al. (2013) has confirmed that young children getting to know older adults can lessen the discriminatory disadvantage older adults often experience. They argue that even a small amount of experience with older adults can have a ‘progressive and cumulative effect’ (p.9) to combat discrimination. Conversely, a four-week-long intergenerational research project undertaken by Babcock et al. (2016) to counter ageism measured no significant impact. The researchers attributed this to the participants being in adolescence rather than in the early years, arguing that by the time children are that age stereotypes are ‘ingrained’ (p.283). The reason for the positive outcomes in the study by Proietti et al. (2013) with three-year-old children may arise from the fact that young children do not tend to judge others and desire reciprocity (Moll and Khalulyan, 2017). Positive results may also depend upon the prior life experiences of the children and whether they have already engaged with people of different ages and backgrounds. If the suggestion made by Babcock et al. (2016) is correct, and if there are benefits for young children through intergenerational activity as well as for the older adults, then consideration should be given to pertinent and meaningful interventions. Designing such interventions in order to ‘stimulate knowledge transfer and intergenerational learning’ is advocated by Bratianu and Orzea (2012, p.610). Further clarification on the potential benefits for young children was sought in order to ensure that any research plans would be ethical and in the best interests of the young children, as well as for the older adults.

According to Catalano et al. (2004), attachment to adults other than your parents fosters resilience. Given the importance of emotional wellbeing in young children and current reports of significant mental health problems in children and young people (Mental Health Foundation, 2018; Turner 2018), I needed to explore this claim further. The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2015, p.2) reminds us of how children facing adversity can succeed if they have both a biological resistance to such pressures and have ‘strong relationships with the important adults in their family and community’. In some families and cultures (being mindful of the potential familial issues discussed earlier) extended families can fulfil this role well, as has been seen in the Maori community (Living the Language, 2014) and within church communities. Although it could be argued that the prime reason for intergenerational activity in the latter context is about commitment to the church and its survival in future (Menconi, 2010), the Baptist Union of Great Britain (no date) and the Evangelical Alliance (2015), are promoting intergenerational activity as offering many benefits, including shared learning opportunities.

Next, consideration was given to the activities upon which the intergenerational projects were based. The earliest intergenerational intervention programmes involved sedentary activities with the elderly in care homes, possibly reflecting general cultural expectation about the age and physical ability of the older adult participants in those interventions and as well as ease of arranging an activity in limited space. Examples of such activities include adults sharing their experiences or stories with young children (Pasupathi et al., 2002; Gigliotti et al., 2005) or young children performing for and interacting socially with the elderly (Morita and Kobayashi, 2013). Many of these studies report benefits for all involved, including increased social interaction (Pasupathi et al., 2002; Hendricks and Cutler, 2004), empathy (Femia et al., 2008) and intergenerational learning (Duvall and Zint, 2007; Fair and Delaplane, 2015). However, more recent interventions are beginning to broaden the scope of the activity and seize opportunities which can benefit more people (Mannion et al., 2010) and more than one generation (Birditt et al., 2012).

As the road to intergenerational activity and learning widens (Mannion, 2016) and warnings about sedentary behaviour being a hazard to health (World Health Organisation, 2016) are prevalent, the intergenerational activity focus appears to now be including diverse activity, including more physical alternatives, although examples are yet to be seen within the Forest School environment, the context for this thesis. For example, McConnell and Naylor (2016, p.234), from Canada, explored the feasibility of undertaking an intergenerational physical intervention, deeming physical activity to be a ‘novel approach’. Describing demographic changes noted in the introduction of this thesis, they discuss the physical ability, wealth and education of current ‘senior citizens’ who are retiring earlier and with disposable income. Many older adults, living in the community rather than in care homes, are now becoming the focus of researchers such as Tomioka et al. (2016) who aim to engage the elderly in social activities, not only to ensure they have purpose in life in order to deter functional decline but to draw upon their experience and to promote social capital. McConnell and Naylor (2016) recommended future interventions that would include greater communication with volunteers together with consistency of activity schedules. In Belgium, Mouton et al. (2016) planned a physical intergenerational intervention over a three month period. The aim of this was primarily to combat major health issues as well as social and economic ones. Relationships and ageism stereotypes were assessed in relation to the intervention. Whilst this research was about grandparents and grandchildren of school age, there is no reason why it could not have included non-familial participants. The researchers concluded that physical intergenerational work could lead the way for interdisciplinary interventions.

This recent work suggests that accessing the untapped potential of older adults who have retired, yet have the time and desire to engage with young children, is feasible and relevant. However, it does not mean that intergenerational activity would appeal to all and one issue could be the motivation to engage in such activity. Erikson (1950) posited that middle adulthood is the period when adults often develop an interest in guiding the next generation and without that opportunity to demonstrate generativity, they may stagnate. Furthermore, in older adulthood, the importance of relationships is also key. Vanderven (2004) discusses how Erikson’s lifespan model of development is still ‘predominant’ (p.83) in the field of intergenerational activity, due to the absence of a replacement and despite potential issues with it due to societal changes and increasing lifespan. An example of this is presented in the work of Yasunaga et al. (2016). However, Bratianu and Orzea (2012, p.607) consider that within intergenerational programmes, particularly those where individuals are unrelated, there remains a challenge to create ‘necessary motivation for knowledge exchange’. Martins et al. (2019) urge the need for further research into ‘participants’ motivations’ (p. 107).

So far, the literature has indicated that intergenerational programmes, despite lacking clarity in definition and a conceptual framework (Vanderven 2011; Martins et al., 2019), have a number of benefits for all concerned, but there are factors that make some more successful than others. Benefits of bringing together generations within the Forest School environment is still a query, due to the absence of literature in this area. While not all intergenerational projects have yielded positive results, this review of the literature has shown that intergenerational interaction is positive in principle and there are potentially a number of benefits for all involved (Devore et al., 2016). This particularly appears to be the case for the older adults when working alongside young children, so contributing to my thesis and its focus on young children working alongside older adults. With this is mind, and as it is posited how intergenerational interaction improves life chances for children (United for All Ages, 2019), the following section will focus specifically on interactions between older adults and young children.

***2.2 Interactions between Older Adults and Young Children***

In this section, I examine interactions and the learning potential within them. Attention is paid to ways in which interaction occurs and the role trust and power relations can play in this.

According to Castiello et al. (2010, p.1), from birth, and even in utero, humans are ‘wired to be social’, suggesting that they learn in exchanges with others and that, for most, it is a need to be fulfilled. Interactions form the basis for knowledge transfer and mutual social, emotional and cognitive enrichment and have been discussed in intergenerational research (for example, Shaffer, 2008; Heyman et al., 2011; Clare, 2015). Instructional Development and Leadership, Pacific Lutheran University , Tacoma , Washington Newman et al. (1999) examined the nature of interactions between elders and children in the USA using the Elder-Child Interaction Analysis. Their research was based upon schoolchildren being mentored by adults, rather than focusing on pre-school children, but this study helpfully determined the most commonly observed interactions including instruction, questioning and encouragement and made me further consider the nature of interactions. The editorial of Learning, Culture and Social Interaction (Daniels et al., 2012) expands the definition of interaction to include not only face-to-face engagement, but also interaction involving technologies (Fuchsberger et al., 2012), and whatever is culturally and socially relevant for any given community. This, together with literature from Early Years about the ways in which children and adults communicate (Flewitt, 2005; Malaguzzi 1993; Fisher, 2016) served to guide the interpretation and analysis of data, as shown in later chapters. Yasunaga et al’s. (2016) conclusions about their Japanese interaction analysis tools were also significant, due to their insistence on the need for qualitative or narrative analysis, so justifying the use of qualitative data in this thesis.

One study conducted in Oxfordshire, England, between 2010 and 2014, aimed to develop practice among practitioners within the Early Years sector (Fisher and Wood, 2012). This action research was practitioner-led and although it did not focus upon elders and young children, the methodology and findings are relevant to this thesis due to the involvement of practitioners and its use of respectful pedagogy. I will return to this aspect shortly. This was a collaborative project focused upon exploring effective interactions, and understanding how they are initiated and sustained, as well as determining attributes of effective practitioners. Observations of interference in child-led contexts and didactic adult-led sessions which ‘teach’ rather than ‘facilitate’ were discussed, and the research pertinently recognised that ‘effective interactions are frequently with someone and not everyone’ (Fisher and Wood, 2012, p.124), and that reciprocity is essential. Overall, the research determined that conversations are more effective where there is trust, a feeling of being relaxed and when a child WANTS to speak with an adult (Fisher, 2016, p.43). Furthermore, Fisher (ibid, p.76) argues that for adults, interactions are more effective when they have no agenda and there are only a few children working with each adult, concluding that through interactions with others both parties can connect, form a partnership and be involved in collaborative activity (Fisher, 2016, p.76).

Moreover, understanding the ways in which young children interact with others is of paramount importance both for those working alongside children, and for the interpretation of data. Depending upon their age and stage of development, and desire to interact, children may or may not be verbal. For example, Flewitt (2005) discusses how children express themselves in a variety of ways including non-verbal signs, gesture and through their drawings. This mirrors the Reggio Emilia philosophy (Malaguzzi, 1993) which values the connection between adults and children and acknowledges a child’s use of many non–verbal languages, described as ‘The Hundred Languages’ of children (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006, p.8). These ‘languages’, or ways of communicating, include glances, gestures, artwork, dance and storytelling, among others. Educators working alongside young children, and researchers, need to be able to tune in to these young children to truly understand what they are saying.

Embracing respectful pedagogy is essential as the issues relating to power imbalance, such as coercion and the ability to influence others, are widely discussed both within education (Foucault, 1977; Lee and Recchia, 2008; Ladkin, 2017) and within Participatory Action Research (Call-Cummings, 2019; Chevalier and Buckles, 2019). Furthermore, Taft (2015) discusses power within an intergenerational context. Despite the growth in children’s rights, concern remains that power is often retained by adults, with children being coerced into action or being compliant with parents (Sevon, 2015) or teachers (Ladkin, 2017). Although this may be true in some situations, others actively promote children’s agency (Clark, 2010; Taft, 2015) in order to promote children as competent individuals and to value their thoughts and rights. Of concern here, and something to be mindful of, is that Taft (2015) identifies ‘adult dominance’ (p.472) in an intergenerational context and posits that the world for children and adults is not equal so that ways to ‘interrupt adult power’ (p.472) need to be sourced. However, this could have been within the Peruvian context in which she was working. Children do have some strategies to attempt to shift the power balance, including certain behaviours (Lee and Recchia, 2008) and through play (Marsh and Bishop, 2014). However, the balance of power does not only relate to adults and children and it is not straightforward.

Foucault (1977) explains how power in relationships is never static but shifts with interactions and as relationships develop. Kirby and Gibbs (2006) agree, within a participatory context. This indicates that the power relations can occur between any individuals, regardless of age, in many situations. Even when aware of the potential issues of power imbalance, practice differs and individuals of any age could be inadvertently affected. Conversely, according to Ghirotto and Mazzoni (2013), adults’ power can be beneficial for children. It can be a resource which can enable new things to happen and may develop ideas further. This indicates that power may also be positive. What is clear is that an awareness of power relations is essential so that when an imbalance occurs, as it inevitably will, voices can be heard, responses can be made and all individuals can be respected while any inappropriate patterns of behaviour can be sensitively challenged.

Returning to the nature of interactions between older adults and young children, historically, Cunningham (2006, p.50) reports how children learned from their elders as stories were told and songs repeated. However, following [debated] concerns about societal changes (Putnam, 1995), the decrease in ‘significant interactions between generations’ (Rosebrook, 2002, p.30), and the loss of traditional languages, the literature identifies several ways in which this issue has been addressed. For example, the Maori language nests (Living the Language, 2014) where parents and children were encouraged to speak with elders from their community, so maintaining linguistic tradition. Such interventions lean towards sociocultural perspectives on development and learning (Maynard, Waters and Clement, 2013), building upon Vygotskian ideas that learning and development are embedded within cultural, historical and social contexts. Within this and other interventions (Thirumurthy and Szecsi, 2012), there is an emphasis on a child interacting with and participating in their social or cultural context. Devore et al. (2016) have recently published an overview of needs, approaches and outcomes in the USA which further urges the development of opportunities for regular interactions between older adults and young children which focuses upon ‘culturally sensitive practice’ (p.223). Achieving culturally sensitive and effective practice in relation to such interventions is critical, highlighting the importance of ongoing research which explores and evaluates the impact of different forms of intervention.

However, the evidence required to implement interventions is not always clear. For example, Putnam (1995), referring to America, discussed the decline in connections between individuals and the resulting loss of trust and reciprocity. The reasons he cited are questioned (Rae, 2002), and may have some nostalgia attached. In a similar way, individuals have written about their childhood experiences stating how these differ from those of their children (Attenborough, 2014; Monroe, 2014; Louv, 2010) and this resonates with the romantic notion of childhood discussed by Marsh and Bishop (2014).

With all of this in mind, it appears that a number of intergenerational interventions have been developed which identify how children interact with others, but less is known about how older adults and young children interact with each other for mutual benefit and in order to learn. Drawing upon the field of psychology, where learning is accepted as social and cultural, can explain further.

Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory demonstrated that learning grows from experience with others and that children (and adults) develop within a ‘social matrix’ (Gray and MacBlain, 2015, p.93). In this guided learning, both parties are active participants in the learning process, which involves observation, collaboration and social interaction (Shaffer, 2008, p.90). Vygotsky also argued that any learning gained would depend upon the quality of that interaction and the potential for knowledge exchange (Shaffer, 2008, p.90). According to Tudge and Winterhoff (1993), it does not matter whether the interactions are child-to-child or child-to-adult; it is the context that matters and that the more experienced individual could support the less experienced. While this can explain a number of behaviours demonstrated by children (and others), no account is taken of biological influences (Nabavi, 2012; Raine et al., 1997) and how individuals conceptualise what they observe and who they liaise with.

In the 1960s, Bandura (1977) conducted research to determine whether social behaviours can be learned by observation and modelling. This has been much criticised, for being unethical and an unnatural situation for the children, one example being that the research was undertaken at a university where the environment was unfamiliar for the children. Bronfenbrenner (1979) built upon Bandura’s ideas, with the ecological systems theory (Shaffer, 2008). This argued for the importance of the environment and that it was essential that observations took place in the natural environment. While both theorists acknowledge the part played by others in a child’s development and acknowledged social learning, Bandura placed more emphasis on self-efficacy and cognitive development than Bronfenbrenner who focused upon influences such as family, environment and community (Gray and MacBlain, 2015).

New perspectives continue to emerge in the quest to determine how children learn from others (Heyman, 2008; Koenig and Sabbagh, 2013). Heyman (2008) advises how children as young as three understand that some people are more reliable than others, while recent interest in children’s selective social learning explains how children do not ‘blindly trust the words of others’ (Koenig and Sabbagh, 2013, p.399). This recognises that children are able to identify more knowledgeable others in their world in order to glean information although how they interpret that information may depend upon their stage of development and prior experiences.

Given that Vygotsky argued strongly how children’s learning is enhanced through interaction with a knowledgeable other, and that the direction of the interaction does not matter (Tudge and Winterhoff, 1993), it is reasonable to suggest that interactions may inspire learning across generations, and may include adults learning from a knowledgeable child. The literature regularly mentions ‘adults’ or ‘children’ within learning arenas and how children learn in conscious collaboration (Trevathen, 2002; Trevarthen and Delafield-Butt, 2017), but there is less specific mention of older adults in learning opportunities: those adults from non-adjacent generations who may have the time, desire and experience to work with young children for mutual benefit. It appears that these older adults are an under-used resource in the education of young children and opportunities are being missed for the promotion of interdependence between generations. Building upon interactions between older adults and young children, knowledge-exchange between these groups will be explored in Chapter 3.

Furthermore, the importance of the environment for appropriate interactions to take place needs to be heeded. Prior to investigating such appropriate age-friendly environments, it must be remembered that simply bringing individuals together in an appropriate environment does not necessarily create optimum learning opportunities as the formation of valuable, equal and respectful relationships is key to supporting development. According to Eichstellar and Holtoff (2011), trust is essential within effective social pedagogical relationships and this takes time to develop. This relational pedagogy which underpins the Reggio Emilia philosophy (Malaguzzi, 1993) and draws upon the principles of constructivism and socio-cultural theories (Papatheodorou and Moyles, 2009), develops communities of learners where adults and children can grow whilst learning together. This is also an area of interest of BERA and TACTYC (2014) who called for research exploring relational pedagogies ‘to nurture and sustain social capital in Early Years communities’ (p.16). In respect of intergenerational activity, families may already have the trust, but in non-familial situations, this may need to be grown.

This section has determined that humans are social beings who interact in various ways appropriate to their culture. The ways in which interaction occurs has been identified and caution has been heeded regarding power relations. Through interaction, learning can be gained and this is enhanced by trusting relationships. I will now explore research and literature regarding appropriate age-friendly environments for intergenerational activity to occur.

***2.3 Age-friendly (Learning) Environments***

Within the introduction of this thesis, I indicated that two key social concerns were identified. The first of these was the potential stratification of society, and the second, as discussed here, being the lack of engagement with nature experienced by today’s children (O’Brien, 2009; Louv 2010; Moss, 2012; Ridgers et al., 2012; Project Wild Thing, 2013) possibly due to urbanisation (O’Connor, 2013). MacFarlane (2017) discusses how children today ‘are better at identifying Pokemon characters than real animals and plants’ and offers examples from recent studies which demonstrate a lack of ‘natural literacy’. Meanwhile, Gelsthorpe (2017), working with the Natural History Museum, published a literature review warning of the effects on health and wellbeing of a disconnection from nature. It is suggested by all of this work that contemporary children in urban areas have fewer natural environments in which to play (Harris, 2015). This was one of the initial drivers for the development of my research project, although consideration of the romanticised notion of childhood discussed earlier, wider reading (Christensen and O’Brien, 2003; Kraftl et al., 2013; Duhn, Malone and Tesar, 2017) and further consideration of what constitutes an age-friendly environment caused an initial troubling of the direction of travel. Duhn et al. (2017), in particular, challenge us to consider the current discourse and to consider what can be learnt and taught through urban nature childhoods’ (p.1357). Recent reading has led to an awareness of sociomaterialism (Fenwick, 2015) and to the importance of how the environment, materials and humans interact. This will be considered later during the analysis phase of this thesis, but for now, this section continues by defining an age-friendly environment and considering an appropriate place for intergenerational activity to take place.

Several considerations were crucial at the outset, from the co-researchers’ point of view. Being respectful of the ethos of the participating nursery setting, it was vital to ensure that the environment, or place, could be used by all participants to create valuable learning experiences. The focus was upon the entire group, as is the case within the Reggio Emilia philosophy (Malaguzzi, 1993; Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006). The space needed to offer open-ended opportunities for all ages.

Following on from the intergenerational literature, which often places intergenerational activity and interventions in schools, care home and in family homes, I began to explore literature on all-age learning environments. The first works I identified looked at ageing populations and urbanisation. These issues have caused governments to consider how best to involve all residents in their local communities (Fitzgerald and Caro, 2015) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) has proposed the creation of age-friendly environments (Steels, 2015). One could assume that an age-friendly environment would be suitable for all ages, however, WHO focuses upon the importance of developing a supportive environment for older adults where they can stay connected with others, remain healthy and active, and in which support is available where necessary. In addition, WHO (2016) explains that age-friendly cities and communities should be respectful, flexible and responsive, and promote older people’s inclusion in community life. They argue for the recognition of the capacity and resources of older people and for the provision of opportunities for volunteering or engagement that can lead to more fulfilling lives.

While WHO (2016) indicates benefits for older adults from engaging with green spaces and the outdoors, particularly for those aged over 65 (p.17), these are also significant needs for young children. The WHO (2016) report emphasises the value of urban green spaces in alleviating stress and promoting social cohesion, while research by James et al. (2016, p.1344) builds upon the ‘biophilia hypothesis’, explaining how natural environments may reduce stress and increase ‘physical activity and social engagement’. In addition, Nelsen (2017) discusses a recent European study which outlines how ‘access to nature reduces depression and obesity’, while also documenting the benefits of outdoor play (Clements, 2004, p.68). Encouraging older adults to spend time outdoors in green spaces offers an interesting parallel with the current emphasis on children needing to spend more time engaging in outdoor activity (Savery et al., 2016; O’Brien and Murray, 2006; O’Brien and Murray, 2007).

Early Years literature abounds with references to the importance of the learning environment, advocating that the environment is key to learning opportunities (Fisher and Wood, 2012, Fisher, 2016, p.55). For example, Malaguzzi (1993), creator of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, posited that the environment was the child’s third teacher (Strong-Wilson and Ellis, 2007), with the first and second being their parents and teaching practitioners, while Robson (2012) explains how experience and the environment are key to brain development. Internationally, cultural influences have also been documented as being key to the learning environment and ethos. For instance, New Zealand’s Early Childhood curriculum, Te Whariki (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017, p.12), advocates active exploration of the environment and is firmly rooted in family and community. It states: ‘I come not only with my own strengths but bring with me the gifts, talents and strengths of my family, tribe and ancestors’ (p.12) which respects culture as well as the environment. This resonates with the concept of Ubuntu, which originates in the Xhosa/Zulu culture, meaning ‘a person is a person through other persons’ (Oppenheim, 2012, p.369). Ubuntu is an African way of life which requires respect, compassion and reciprocity. Individuals may help themselves but should also consider how they are supporting others and building the community. Marston (2012) explains how Ubuntu maintains a family’s feeling of connectedness during terminal illness while Grange (2012) highlights how Ubuntu creates a moral obligation to care for environmental issues. The shared norms and values, sense of belonging and positive relationships evident within Ubuntu are also relevant to social cohesion which, according to WHO (2016) is associated with green spaces. Furthermore, Malone and Waite (2016) summarise five significant reviews from the UK and abroad (Rickinson et al., 2004; Malone, 2008; Gill, 2011; Dillon and Dickie, 2012; Fiennes et al., 2015) which identify significant evidence of the impact of outdoor learning on children’s lives. Given that the literature urges social cohesion and stresses the importance of green spaces for health benefits, this suggests that bringing young children and older adults together within an outdoor environment could be relevant across ages, cultures and continents and therefore be applicable to many.

Within Early Years education, environments are provided by adults who care for and educate children. For example, Bilton (2002, p. 73) suggests that by taking the curriculum outdoors, certain children will be more engaged and will be learning in a style best suited to them. Following the Reggio Emilia philosophy, practitioners should advocate ‘a pedagogy of relations, listening and liberation’ for all (Moss, 2016, p.173). The characteristics of such environments include the importance of communication friendly spaces (Jarman, 2013) which includes reduced noise (Dockrell and Shield, 2006), natural light (Jarman, 2009) stimulation, time and experiences (Fisher, 2016). Ridgers et al. (2012) also advocate the free use of space and time, rejecting a timetable, which they argue can restrict children’s play. Not being constrained by time, slowing down to listen and time to reflect re all key ingredients for a suitable environment (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006). Assessment of such environments could be undertaken using Laevers’ (1998) Leuven Scale. While normally used to determine children’s wellbeing and involvement within an environment, delivering a masterclass to professionals in 2017, Laevers’ explained how his well-being and involvement scales are relevant to all, regardless of age and ability.

Furthermore, although not focusing specifically upon older adults and young children, Mannion (2012) discusses the importance of place in intergenerational activity, while linking it to learning. In 2013, Mannion et al. introduced ‘place responsive pedagogy’ (p.803) which requires educators to be flexible and creative and to be able to respond to the place for learning. They suggested that outdoor natural places were suitable for such activity.

Despite the nostalgic view of nature in the media, which has influenced many, research has shown that outdoor activity can be beneficial for all ages. For humans of any age, co-existing in an urban area, this opens up new possibilities (Duhn et al., 2017). As the co-researchers in this research project wanted to develop their current Forest School provision, and this is an outdoor, urban green space, it was relevant to determine the suitability of Forest School for intergenerational activity.

***2.3.1 The Growth of Forest School: a suitable place for Intergenerational Activity?***

Playing outdoors in western educational theory has been considered of importance since the 18th century (Williams-Siegfredsen, 2012) and has influenced today’s practice. Rousseau’s ideas of children growing up in a healthy natural environment, as discussed earlier, were developed by Pestalozzi into a child-centred pedagogy (Williams-Siegfredsen, 2012, p.18). Other theorists and pioneers followed. Froebel’s first kindergarten in 1840 advocated access to the open air for young children in Germany and the first outdoor nursery was developed in London, in 1914, by the Macmillan sisters (Cree and McCree, 2012; Liebovich, 2018), with a focus on supporting the deprived children through education, and hygiene, in order to reduce social disadvantage.

While nature kindergartens began in the 1950s in Denmark, current Forest School activity in England, particularly within the arena of Early Years Education, emerged and was developed in the 1990s following the Bridgwater College nursery nurses’ visit to Danish pre-schools. This coincided with the implementation of the Children Act (1989) which established the duty of local communities to safeguard children and to champion their best interests and subsequently led to regular policy and curricula changes. While some of these (such as Desirable Outcomes for Children’s Learning’, (SCAA/DfEE, 1996), followed by various iterations of the Early Years Foundation Stage (Department for Education, 2017) raised the profile of early education and care, some restrictive safeguarding and welfare requirements caused practitioners to err on the side of caution when undertaking outdoor activity. However, these risk-averse elements were removed in September 2014 (Department for Education, 2014). Public concerns about childhood obesity (Public Health England, 2015; Nelsen, 2017), although contested (Campos, 2006; Medvedyuk, 2017) and the hype over the decline in outdoor play opportunities (Maynard, 2007; Forest Education Initiative, 2014) as well as lack of access to nature (Nelsen, 2017) may also have fuelled the interest. It should be noted that the Forest School context addressed in this thesis is not that which originated in America in the 1920s, where the ‘Forest School’ was a venue where adult forest workers were trained (Yale Forest School, 1920). Rather, in the United Kingdom, Forest School relates to a form of outdoor play and learning (Leather, 2017).

Forest School differs from outdoor play in a number of ways. Building upon the nature and forest kindergarten concepts in Nordic countries, Forest School enables participants to have a hands-on approach to learning in a woodland environment. It has been argued that experience in such an arena should be regular for the children, led by experienced practitioners and follow the Forest School principles (O’Brien and Murray, 2007; Knight, 2009; Williams-Siegfredsen, 2012) with the process being regarded as more valuable than the end product.

However, there is a range of practice under the umbrella term ‘Forest School’. Some Forest Schools operate daily in woodland, whereas other settings transport their children one day per week to a woodland area, or even set aside an area of the school grounds for such activity. These variations may depend upon resources and practicalities, or the rapid increase in provision and marketing of the concept (Leather, 2017). What all practice does have in common is a commitment to the Forest School ethos. The Forest School Association (FSA, 2018) argue that six principles should be followed if the experience is to be classified as ‘Forest School’ activity. These principles state that the activity should take place in a woodland over a period of time, arguing that the activity should promote the holistic development of participants, involve risk and learner-centred activities and be led by qualified practitioners. The principles also state that Forest School should be inclusive and a means of working and learning outdoors. Moreover, Knight (2011, p.2), suggested that it take place ‘preferably but not exclusively in a wooded setting’, contradicting the principle noted above about activity taking place in woodland. This contradiction may be one reason for the range of practice while another may stem from the lack of understanding of Forest School pedagogy (Leather, 2017). The divergent approaches and types of access mean that other aspects of Forest School may differ between settings. All the same, some features appear in every setting, particularly low child: adult ratios. Generally, there is one adult to four children, a huge contrast to traditional learning environments (Williams-Siegfredsen, no date; Maynard, 2007). These ratios have similarities with intergenerational activity.

The first Forest School Association (FSA) (2017) was created in England in July 2012. Since the inception of Forest School in England, a number of books and resources have been developed to advise upon the implementation and delivery of the concept (Williams-Siegfredsen, 2012; Knight, 2013; Constable, 2012; Doyle and Milchem, 2012). Research in the field is also emerging. Given that Forest School is comparatively new, this research generally looks at small-scale initiatives (Mackinder, 2015; Harris, 2015; Elliott, 2015; Savery et al., 2016) and largely involving pre-school or primary children. Case studies of completed activity (Ridgers et al., 2012; Elliott, 2015) and action research (Maynard et al., 2013) are popular methodologies. As Forest School becomes further established, it is to be hoped that more longitudinal studies, such as that conducted by McCree, Cutting and Sherwin (2018) will follow in future. McCree et al. (2018) determined, over a three-year period, that there were some benefits for the small group of primary-aged children in their cohort, particularly identifying the children’s connection to nature. They also noted differences in provision and demonstrated concern about the comparative lack of funding by government, despite evidence of the value of this form of learning.

There is, given the rural nature of much of the Forest School activity, an inevitable emphasis on rural settings in the research. However, Elliott’s (2015) case study of a primary school was conducted in an urban area, as is my research. Another issue Elliott (2015) articulated, is that future research should explore links with educational attainment, something partly addressed by McCree et al. (2018). Likewise, Mannion (2012) argues that ‘any intergenerational practice must always involve an educative element’ (p.386). This indicates that education, or learning, is important in both Forest School as well as in intergenerational activity.

There has also been an interest in gender and family in research relating to Forest School. Savery et al. (2016) whose research was conducted in a rural area, suggested involving families, particularly men, more within the Forest School activity, with the aim of discovering whether parental perceptions to risk altered over time as a consequence. The idea of family involvement inspired me and I acknowledged that familial intergenerational research would be acceptable. Harris’ (2015) query as to how the benefits of Forest School would be revealed over time, and how environmental citizenship would be affected, were also of interest to me although it was recognised that this would be beyond the scope of this thesis.

Research has also begun to identify potential benefits of Forest School. Savery et al. (2016) noted that team-building, relationships and social development were identified as benefits by the practitioners involved. Earlier research by O’Brien (2009) noted improvements in confidence, motivation, concentration, language, communication and physical skills. However, whilst informative, none of these studies involved non-adjacent generations. Instead, they were related to children and their teachers or practitioners rather than significantly older adults.

In conclusion, as both Forest School and Intergenerational activity appear to be gaining popularity and credibility in research, policy and practice, using Forest School as a context for this study provides an opportunity to build on existing literature in relation to both of these areas by exploring the potential benefits of such activity for both children and older adults. Of course, planning research requires more than just gathering people of various ages and placing them in a natural environment. Mackinder (2015) determined that training is vital for all adults attending Forest School. This then led me to question whether it was prudent to involve older adults, who may not be trained, as suggested by Savery et al. (2016), and also to consider what the benefits might be and for whom. This indicated that careful planning was required before this research could be conducted, along with other considerations, including where it could take place and how. Further details as to how this was determined will be discussed in Chapter 4.

***2.4 Chapter Summary***

The literature has so far determined how children learn through interactions with others and has discussed the outcomes and potential benefits of both familial and non-familial intergenerational programmes, particularly for older adults working alongside children. It is also apparent that few interventions involve more than one generation. The literature also identified the need for a suitable environment for learning to take place, for all ages, which favours natural, preferably green, spaces with natural light and room for exploration, as well as connectedness with others. The literature flagged up that there can be barriers or a need for caution related to the kinds of activities described, given that there is a risk of tensions, but the potential benefits for young children and older adults appear to make addressing barriers worthwhile. In effect, the literature suggests that measured risks can create fortuitous circumstances. As the Canadian Mental Health Association (2008) posits, ‘If we trust the inherent wisdom in communities and respect the insights that come from experience, new kinds of knowledge will emerge’. However, what has not yet been discussed is the nature of the learning that was to be facilitated within the intergenerational programme.

Moss (2011, p.165), discussing the Reggio Emilia philosophy, explains how learning is the building of knowledge or meaning-making and that it must not be confused with gathering of information. Moss also argues that co-construction of knowledge involves problem-solving and the pedagogy of listening and relationships. Importance is attached to connections made within knowledge-construction and they must not be rushed. This is sound guidance for the development of the intervention for this thesis.

The term ‘knowledge exchange’ (and similar phrases such as ‘exchange of knowledge’) are often used in relation to intergenerational activity (Hatton-Yeo, 2008; Jessel et al., 2011; Gamliel and Gabay, 2014). In the next chapter, I examine the concept of knowledge exchange, given that one of the aims of such intergenerational activity is to encourage all participants to benefit from the experience and develop knowledge.

***CHAPTER 3***

***Knowledge Exchange through Participatory Work***

***3.0 Introduction***

The previous chapter has examined a diverse range of ways in which older adults and children can relate. Although learning from such interactions has been explored, it has not been to such an extent as to scrutinize the exchange of knowledge between the generations. This section will focus on these finer details, beginning with defining the term ‘knowledge exchange’. It will identify where and how this occurs, and how potential barriers can be overcome. Particular attention will be paid to the relevance of knowledge exchange within Early Years education and intergenerational activity.

Prior to commencing the discussion, however, it is important to define the salient terms. Knowledge can be defined as ‘explicit’, meaning that which is found in readily available documents (Botha et al., 2008, p.13)**;** it can also be ‘embedded’, which is the knowledge found in organisations such as in rules but for which the reason is not always known (Gamble and Blackwell, 2001, p.17-18). Furthermore, it can be ‘tacit’ or ‘implicit’, so may include beliefs and experiential knowledge (Botha et al., 2008, p.13).

The literature suggests that it is vital to include tacit knowledge in the concept of knowledge exchange. Gamble and Blackwell (2001) state that a lack of focus upon tacit knowledge reduces the capacity for innovation while Ozmen (2010, p.1862) describes tacit knowledge as ‘the glue that holds all knowledge together and makes sense of it’, explaining that it is fundamental to progressing knowledge. In addition, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) argue that the interaction of tacit and explicit is important to the creation of new knowledge.

The final significant term in the following sections is ‘sticky knowledge’. This term was coined by Szulanski (2003, p.13) to describe situations where difficulties were encountered with knowledge transfer in businesses and to explain why best practice did not always spread through organisations. He argued that when the transfer of knowledge was ‘sticky’, this was due to barriers of a number of kinds, which he defined and then offered solutions for, as described further below.

***3.1 Defining ‘Knowledge Exchange’***

There is no consensus regarding the term ‘knowledge exchange’. According to Baker (2016, p.8), it is about ‘sharing ideas and making good things happen’, although he also argues that few people have heard of the term. The Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement (2016), asserts that knowledge exchange involves problem solving and mutual learning while the University of Oxford (no date) states that it is ‘the mutually beneficial sharing of ideas, data, experience, and expertise, and involves collaboration between researchers and external organisations or the public’. What these definitions do have in common is allusions to knowledge exchange being a social activity involving a degree of reciprocity. This is supported by Minshall (2009), who defines knowledge exchange as ‘a ‘contact sport’; it works best when people meet to exchange ideas, sometimes serendipitously, and spot new opportunities’. Each definition connects with views expressed in the literature review, despite not being related to Early Years education per se, as the language of reciprocity, mutual learning and problem solving all resonate with intergenerational practice and interactions. This becomes even more apparent when additional definitions are explored.

Whilst the meeting of individuals or groups could be spontaneous or planned, it is necessary to gather individuals together for transfer of knowledge to occur. The literature so far has determined that the act of bringing people together is not sufficient in itself for knowledge exchange to occur and that factors such as sharing a common purpose, facilitating effective interactions, and the environment are key factors in the support of knowledge exchange. Working together and seizing opportunities could be key steps to improving humanity and reaching new understandings (Baker, 2016). However, these more abstract and generalised considerations do not address who the term ‘knowledge exchange’ is relevant to.

Universities, including the University of Oxford (no date) and the University of Edinburgh (2017) discuss knowledge exchange in relation to academic staff coming together with people from the wider community to exchange ideas and expertise and we have already learned how Szulanski (2003) referred to work organisations. However, it appears that this concept also appears outside of these contexts, with examples found in agriculture (Farm Credit East, 2017), primary schools (IDOX, 2016), in intergenerational activity (Jessel et al., 2011; Gamliel and Gabay, 2014) and in charities (UNICEF, 2015).

To begin with the example of a charity, UNICEF (2015) defines knowledge exchange as a ‘systematic approach to sharing tacit knowledge… to connect… to achieve improvement in results… essential to achieve continual learning from experience and apply that learning to improve our work’. UNICEF (2015) also states the importance of bringing practitioners together so they can learn from each other and from experience. They recognise the benefits of overcoming challenges and developing better ways of working through this approach, although their definition only includes tacit knowledge. UNICEF (2015) also provides a knowledge exchange toolbox which they describe as filled with useful activities to aid ‘sharing, discovery and co-creation’. This toolbox does offer many ideas for engaging in knowledge exchange activity**,** however, on closer inspection, it is more suited to adults and to indoor arenas, not to young children or outdoor activity. I would suggest that it could be helpful when working with Early Years practitioners.

It appears that knowledge exchange spans a variety of situations involving people of different ages and backgrounds, particularly in the workplace, although not exclusively. If knowledge exchange can connect individuals, and there is an element of reciprocity involved, it is reasonable to consider that knowledge exchange could also be transferable between individuals of any age where there is an opportunity to learn from each other. This could potentially relate to individuals of all ages working together in intergenerational activity for this thesis, as will be considered in the sections below.

***3.2 Knowledge Exchange in relation to Early Years education and intergenerational activity***

As noted above, UNICEF (2015) define knowledge exchange as a way of sharing tacit knowledge. Brown and Duguid (1998) define tacit knowledge as ‘know-how’ (p.91) and Early Years practitioners, among others, draw upon such tacit knowledge on a regular basis. For example, within the nursery context, practitioners read facial expressions of babies and attune to their needs based upon their experience and intuition. Tacit knowledge is derived from personal experience (Wellman, 2009) and includes learned skills and expertise (Botha et al., 2008). Tacit knowledge was first defined by Polanyi (1966) who deemed it to be more valuable than explicit knowledge. He argued that it was incredibly difficult to capture or communicate and that it is under threat of being lost forever unless it is passed on (DeLong, 2004). The notion of passing on may indicate an older person sharing knowledge with a younger one, but could also relate to a more knowledgeable other (child) sharing their expertise with another person, such as a visitor to the child’s nursery. This is supported by the Canadian Mental Health Association (2008), who state on their website that: ‘recipients of knowledge in one context may be the producers of knowledge in another’. Another point of interest is that experience (Wellman, 2009) and expertise (Botha et al., 2008) mentioned in respect of knowledge exchange are key terms included within the review of intergenerational activity literature by Park (2014) and Park (2015).

As stated in Section 2.2 Vygotsky (1978) posited that children’s learning is enhanced from interaction with a knowledgeable other and it was suggested that this learning could happen between generations. While some people may expect adults to be the experts, this is not necessarily the case as it will depend upon the prior learning experience of individuals, regardless of their age. Minshall (2009), with reference to the academic context, recognises that when new people join a group or workforce, they bring new knowledge with them. This could have implications for any research activity such as that of this thesis where volunteers enter the domain of young children. Through collaboration expertise is widened and so new perspectives may be gained. What is more, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) explain that new knowledge is created when tacit and explicit knowledge interact with each other. Their knowledge exchange model, along with others, will be discussed in Section 3.3.

So far, we have determined the varying definitions of knowledge exchange and have considered that the concept may apply to all age groups. It is now necessary to consider how we can identify knowledge exchange in practice.

***3.3 Identifying Knowledge Exchange***

It has been determined in the previous sections that knowledge exchange works best when people connect and share ideas. However, if knowledge exchange is to be identified in practice then it is essential to know how it occurs and how to identify it in order that the learning can be captured and for the value to participants to be determined.

Several researchers have developed models which enable us to identify how knowledge is created and exchanged. Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (1995) model of knowledge creation, derived from Polanyi’s (1966) concept of tacit knowledge, consists of three elements; the model itself, the Japanese concept of *ba* and knowledge assets. There are four modes of knowledge conversion within Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (1995) model: socialisation (tacit-to-tacit), externalisation (tacit-to-explicit), combination (explicit-to-explicit) and externalisation (explicit-to-tacit). Knowledge, then, is created by interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge, within the context known as *ba*. This is where some difficulty lies, as *ba* does not translate smoothly from Japanese to English. It is however often described as the space or environment where knowledge is shared, created or used. Knowledge creation is deemed to be continuous rather than static. The Forest School environment, the place for the research within this thesis, could be described as *ba* as it is a space where knowledge is shared.

Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (1995) four knowledge assets; experiential, conceptual, routine and systemic, are recognised as being invaluable to businesses. However, Ozmen (2010) explained that these assets could be transferred to education. His recommendations included the importance of cooperation and collaboration to facilitate opportunities for tacit knowledge sharing and the inclusion of technology for knowledge management. Of greatest interest to this research is Ozmen’s suggestion that ways to generate knowledge could include activities such as ‘joint problem-solving, expert-novice cooperation, reflective evaluation and storytelling’ (Ozmen, 2010, p.1864). These elements were all noted in respect of my planning of the methodology for this thesis and for data analysis.

Szulanski (2003) conceptualised the stages of knowledge transfer as initiation, implementation, ramp-up and integration. This was built upon by Elwyn et al. (2007) who identified four milestones in the knowledge exchange process within healthcare contexts. In this study, I have considered this in relation to Early Years education. Firstly, there is the transfer seed, a recognition that a knowledge gap exists or that there may be a better way of doing things. An example of this could be when an Early Years practitioner observes that a child does not know how to use a particular tool and is becoming frustrated. Secondly, the decision to transfer knowledge is made, for example the practitioner may ask the child whether they would like some help. Modelling and assistance can then be offered (implementation) and the child has the opportunity to practice before achieving mastery (integration). This readiness to learn resonates with Biesta’s (2013) work, where he explores the difference between ‘learning from’ and ‘being taught by’ (p.449), and whether individuals are open to the ‘gift of teaching’ (p.460).

Developing the work of Elwyn et al. (2007), in highlighting how knowledge exchange occurs in practice, Ward et al. (2012, p.298) produced a five step framework of knowledge exchange:

* Problem identification and communication
* Analysis of context - Japanese concept of ‘ba’ (Ray and Little 2001) which foregrounds interactions, shared experiences and networks and explain how these interact to create knowledge exchange
* Knowledge development and selection
* Knowledge exchange activities/interventions
* Knowledge use

This clearly has similarities to the model created by Elwyn et al. (2007) but additionally includes the context and a prompt as to what activity was undertaken. Consideration is also given to the fact that Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (1995) work omitted ‘the need for difference in knowledge levels’ (Bratianu and Orzea, 2012, p.610) between the parties in order for knowledge transfer to occur. In this thesis, during analysis, it was this model developed by Ward et al. (2012) that was employed by myself and the co-researchers working together to identify where knowledge exchange occurred during the research. Examples are offered in Chapter 5.

This body of literature suggests that knowledge exchange is a valuable construct and could be relevant to all ages. However, the literature also suggests that some caution is required. As noted above, it must be remembered that tacit knowledge includes beliefs and judgements (Botha et al., 2008) that may differ between generations and which will be personal. Further, we have already been made aware of potential intergenerational tensions (Strom and Strom, 2015). In addition, in order for knowledge transfer to occur, Elwyn et al. (2007) explain that barriers in relation to knowledge, source, recipient and context need to be overcome. Examples of barriers to successful knowledge transfer and how they can be addressed are offered below.

Bringing new adults into the lives of the children through this research meant that not only was a robust recruitment process required to ensure safeguarding, but practitioners needed to be alert to any differences in practice and beliefs so that they could be sensitively challenged if required. Alongside this, we needed to be aware that embedded knowledge (Gamble and Blackwell, 2001) such as routines, exists in all workplaces, including Early Years settings, and that it may not always be the best practice, even if it is comfortable and familiar. The presence of volunteers and different ideas, then, could have challenged current ways of thinking and resulted in critical discussion of practice. This could be positive in principle and lead to positive change, but as Rodd (2006) states, it can be a challenge for some individuals to manage.

***3.4 Identifying and overcoming barriers to knowledge exchange***

As noted earlier, the concept of ‘Sticky Knowledge’ (Szulanski, 2003, p.13) was used to describe barriers to knowledge transfer in businesses. It integrates communication theory and knowledge transfer and so highlights gaps between what we know and what we do. Szulanski (2003) also wondered why knowledge gained in one place does not transfer easily to another and identified nine predictors of ‘stickiness’ (p.25) which included the motivation of the individual(s) with the knowledge, whether the information is trustworthy, the ability of the recipient to receive the information and difficult relationships between the participating individuals. Elwyn et al. (2007), drawing upon Szulanski (2003), identified that barriers to the knowledge transfer process existed in the context of healthcare and suggested where improvements could be made. They determined that the relationship between the source of the knowledge and the recipient should not be ‘arduous’ (p.6), but within ongoing collaborative relationships, and that individuals should be motivated both to learn and to support others. They agreed that the ability of the recipient to absorb and retain the knowledge may be relevant.

I wondered how these findings would transfer into the context of early childhood education and found it rather problematic. Some of the ‘sticky’ issues faced in the workplace arena, such as difficult relationships and lack of motivation as noted by Bratianu and Orzea (2012), appear less relevant within Early Years. This seems to be primarily because of the different nature of the relationships between young children and their carers – whether older or younger adults – which differ significantly to those in the workplace, irrespective of how ‘collaborative’ working relationships might be. Not only is reciprocity evident within Early Years (Moll and Khalulan, 2017) with children and their educators willing to engage and children being ready to learn, but where volunteers offer their time to work with young children, they are usually motivated and may have a desire to guide the next generation (Erikson, 1950). Contrary to Elwyn et al.’s (2007, p.4) argument that ‘knowledge-sharing and cooperation are unusual’ and that ‘sharing knowledge is an unnatural act’ (p.5), in my experience in the Early Years setting this is not the case either with the young children or participating adults.

Of course, caution was still needed given that the sharing of trustworthy information and the ability of the recipient to receive the information could also be ‘sticky’ areas and it was feasible that other barriers might have presented themselves. For example, the relationships may not be trustworthy, information shared might not be credible or accurate, or relationships could break down and individuals lose interest or trust. This reflects what Malaguzzi (Moss, 2011, p.167) warned of in relation to knowledge, reminding us that it is a ‘tangle of spaghetti’, and so highlighting that information and knowledge are different.

Essentially, the literature explored implies that knowledge exchange could take place between older adults and young children within the Forest School environment. Munoz et al. (2015, p.295), discussing businesses, suggested the importance of focusing upon the role of groups within knowledge exchange. Whilst no mention was made in this research of ages, groups could consist of individuals who span generations. It is also vital to acknowledge that knowledge exchange flows in different directions and is not just one way (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2008) and that the development of a learning culture is of importance (Biesta, 2011, p.202). This suggests that opportunities for individuals to come together with a common purpose and willingly share knowledge, over time, could lead to new learning.

At this point it is relevant to refer back to Polanyi (1962, p.606) who asserted the importance of ‘indwelling’ by experiencing and understanding events. This ‘indwelling’, or living an experience, where learning is gained, links to Kolb’s (1984) learning cycle. This can be related to the way that learning is knowledge building (Moss, 2011) and that the co-construction of knowledge involves problem-solving and relational pedagogy. The spiral element, which incorporates Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (1995) model of knowledge creation, includes such collaboration and offers a continuous spiral of learning. Reflection on practice is also essential for all participants (Kolb, 1984) and this is discussed in Chapter 4, as well as being threaded through later sections of this thesis.

***3.5 Chapter Summary***

In this short chapter, definitions of the types of knowledge and of knowledge exchange have been shared and discussed in relation to Early Years education and participatory activity. Models to identify the occurrence of knowledge exchange have been explored, with the model by Ward et al. (2012) identified for use during analysis of data (Chapter 4). I also gave consideration to overcoming the identified barriers to knowledge exchange.

Informed by the literature from Chapters 2 and 3, the co-researchers and I then developed one overarching research question and three sub-questions:

**What is** **the impact of engagement between older adults and young children in an urban ‘Forest School’ environment?**

The sub-questions were:

1. How do young children interact with older adults within an urban Forest School environment?

2. What is the nature of the knowledge exchange between young children and older adults within an urban Forest School environment?

3. What are the benefits of integrating different generations within an urban Forest School environment (for adults and children)?

These questions, and this project, seek to develop practice in this area. In addition, in response to the absence of literature in the area of intergenerational activity amongst community-dwelling older adults and young children in outdoor environments such as Forest School, this research is intended to address that gap in the literature and contribute to the emerging body of knowledge in this research area. The next chapter will outline the methodology, data collection methods and ethical considerations.

***CHAPTER 4***

***Methodology***

***4.0 Introduction***

This research project arose as a result of a conversation with a student. As a Higher Education tutor I work alongside a number of students to support the development of their practice and, on occasions, they indicate an interest in further study or action once they have completed their initial studies. Given that this was the initial stimulus for the research, I was aware from the outset of the project of the tensions inherent in my need to gain access to a setting and of the potential power relations involved given my job role and relationship with ex-students or practitioners at that setting. This meant that honesty and openness were essential throughout the research to address potential issues. I did not want individuals to feel coerced into participation and I wanted to engage in research that was mutually beneficial.

After introducing the practitioners (known as co-researchers following ethical approval) and acquainting with the research setting, I will discuss Participatory Action Research (PAR), including its role in Education. I then outline the extent to which I drew on participatory approaches in this research project and justify the use of PAR.Ethical considerations continue to permeate the thesis, and specific sections are assigned to the subject within this chapter. The methodology chapter also explains the approach to data collection, management and analysis. Due to the complexity of the project design, tables have been developed to provide clarification of the processes.

This research project hinged upon co-production and involved Early Years Practitioners, in the roles of co-researchers, in the research design, data collection and analysis, to varying degrees. I introduce them first. Other participants, the older adults and young children, will be introduced later in this chapter.

***4.1. Meet the Co-Researchers***

This group consisted of Forest School trained (or in-training, or interested) Early Years practitioners, each with a minimum level 3 qualification and employed by the research setting (see Figure 4.0), who were actively engaged in outdoor activity with children from the setting for one day per week. There were six in number initially, although only three attended each fieldwork session and numbers fluctuated for the Research Circle attendance. This flexibility allowed for holiday and sickness periods. Despite the co-researchers having different personalities, ages and experience, they were united in the philosophy of the value of outdoor play and enhancing learning experiences for young children. Not only did they articulate this, but it was demonstrated by their interest in the outdoors, in their undertaking of Forest School training and from their commitment to the research.

***Figure 4.0 - Meet the co-researchers***

***4.2 Research Setting and Field Site, plus early negotiations***

The pre-school setting that embraced this research is a non-profit cooperative based in a city in the north of England, providing for children aged from six months to five years. The setting’s ethos encourages children and practitioners to participate in decisions that affect them, an ideal setting given the participatory nature of the research.

During her undergraduate study prior to commencement of this research, Diane, one of the co-researchers, identified the need to enhance outdoor provision at the setting. She conducted an independent study, followed by a work-based project, which enabled her to develop and lead off-site Forest School activity (Knight, 2011) for children aged three plus. The activity in local woodland had been sustained for over a year at the time the research was considered, and an evaluation of the activity by nursery staff identified potential areas for further development, by the time my research project was mooted.

The fieldsite is an off-site, public, woodland location, which is visited by the aforementioned research setting. It is reached by mini-bus from the pre-school, with the children and practitioners experiencing a twenty-minute drive in each direction.

In times of austerity, when opportunities for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) are slight and budgets are tight, the management of this nursery setting welcomed discussions with me in order to further promote their Forest School activity. This meant that a professional relationship was already developed and the ‘gatekeepers’ (Ashley, 2012, p.35), in this case the nursery manager and the management committee, including practitioner parent representatives, were already aware of the potential mutual benefits. However, at this early stage I could not assume that research would be conducted given that the gatekeepers had a reputation to maintain. They also needed to consider whether research was appropriate for their setting (Cohen et al., 2011) and we needed to discuss the form of the research. For example, a case study approach (Scaife, 2004; Yin, 2009) would have been a possibility, relating to the recent Forest School activity, or, Participatory Action Research (PAR) involving the practitioners as co-researchers.

I created an initial PESTCLEE analysis (CIPD, 2017) (Appendix 1) and shared this with the setting’s manager in order to determine mutual benefits. This form of analysis is often used in marketing or business and considers the political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors to consider when contemplating a project or plan. The final ‘E’ refers to ‘ethical’ and ‘educational’ and further detail about ethical considerations are found in Section 4.6. An initial meeting was then arranged between the nursery manager, the deputy manager and myself (Agenda - Appendix 2). The manager then needed to cascade this information to the setting’s committee, for their consent to be obtained. At this stage, research possibilities were discussed, PAR was preferred due to the ethos of the setting, and a further meeting was arranged (should consent be given) for the setting members who were potentially interested in becoming part of a research group. There was a risk that consent would not be given by the setting. In addition, although the setting manager was willing to offer some time for workplace meetings, as CPD, given that the research would require some own-time commitment, there was an additional risk that there would be no interest from the practitioners. All I could do was wait. None of my worries materialised. Consent was given by the setting and, within two weeks, I was informed of interested parties who wanted to engage in research.

The research group was named the Research Circle (Persson, 2009), and will be discussed in greater detail below. It linked nursery practitioners and University staff, building the foundations for this thesis. In early discussion, practitioners confirmed their preference of working with me in an exploratory way to further develop practice. Participatory Action Research was confirmed. Being a method of ‘intervention, development and change’ (Savin-Baden and Howell-Major, 2013, p.248) and one which offers the opportunity to reflect upon and examine current practice from the practitioner perspectives, this process offered collaborative working and the potential to enhance practice.

Subsequently, much of the research design, including choosing the location of the research and development of the research questions, happened in collaboration with the co-researchers, given that this was a co-produced research project. However, I encountered difficulties. While I attempted to maintain collaborative decisions throughout, it became apparent, over time that I needed to retain overall control of certain processes. For example, while the co-researchers contributed to the work that led to ethical approval, it was my responsibility to submit the forms and to adhere to the conditions. A similar dilemma was noted by Atkins (2013), as she considered the tensions when researching with marginalised learners. Consequently, whilst methodological decisions are highlighted throughout this chapter, the specific challenges relating to delivery of PAR are discussed in Section 4.3.1.

Moving on, I will outline and justify the research approach, then discuss the implementation of the Research Circle.

***4.3 Research Approach***

This section outlines the use of Participatory Action Research (PAR), including within Education then continues by outlining the extent to which I drew on participatory approaches, and justifies these actions.

***4.3.1 Review of the Literature - Participatory Research, incorporating Education***

Participatory Action Research (PAR) has a focus on social action (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019) and is used in a number of fields including human geography (Kindon et al., 2007), early childhood education (Hawkins, 2015), and many other arenas including health and community development.

There are three main roots, or traditions, of PAR, named by Chevalier and Buckles (2019, p.38) as rational-pragmatic, psychosocial-transformative and critical-emancipatory. While each has its own focus, all are based on real life situations and appear to overlap in some areas, though having some distinct differences. The first, rational-pragmatic, draws upon the work of Lewin (1946) in solving problems and transforming organisations (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). The second tradition, psychosocial-transformative, based upon the work of the Tavistock Institute in London (Streck, 2014), involves individuals of different disciplines working together, using ‘psychoanalytic and open systems’ in order to effect organisational change. This tradition is inspired by Habermas (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019, p.47) who advocates ‘time out’ from research for reflection and dialogue. Examples have included working in heavy industry as well as in community settings and supporting those working through complex situations such as aspects of social change or tackling a lack of motivation in groups (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019).

The third tradition, critical-emancipatory, inspired by Freire, is a forum for community development, for rethinking traditional education, exploring novel ways of working, and has a focus upon dialogue and action (Hawkins, 2015; Chevalier and Buckles, 2019). Freire (1972) and Fals Borda (1988) expressed the view that research should transform education by working collaboratively alongside others, reflecting upon and changing social practice and PAR was developed further in the 1980s by action researchers from Australia and Europe wanting a more critical and emancipatory form of action research (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Hawkins, 2015). The new form of critical PAR required collective responsibility for the research and action, within an open communicative space (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005) and a planner to assist the undertaking of critical participatory action research is available (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon, 2014).

In a similar way, the critical participatory action research described by Kemmis et al. (2014) is education focused. It involves a commitment to participation, may consider disadvantage, gender or ethnicity in education and focuses on social justice. Critical PAR has a focus on creating ‘new possibilities… using communicative action [and] engaging in research as a social practice (Kemmis et al., 2014, p.12).

As the name suggests, Participatory Action Research involves research, participation and action, also known as the ‘three pillars of PAR’ (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019, p.21). These each overlap but meet to integrate research and real life (Kemmis et al., 2014). PAR has certain elements that make it unique (Kemmis et al., 2014), including ‘collective participation’ (Cohen et al. 2011, p.349), with voices being heard and agendas for change being developed (Kalazich, 2013; Bezzina, 2017). It is democratic in that, rather than being researched, the participants are actively involved in the processes and are empowered to make decisions. Zuber-Skerritt (1992) advise how, in research like this, the participants own the research as the stages within an action research cycle involve planning, acting, observing and reflecting. According to Baum et al. (2006) the aim of PAR is to engage participants in reflective enquiry and to create change in their world, although caution must be heeded here as promises made by researchers may lead to potential distress if no change is realised (Klocker, 2014, p.37). Furthermore, consideration must be given to the levels of participation. It will be seen within this chapter how there are varying levels of participation for those involved in the research.

Due to the diversity of PAR, and the areas in which it appears, Chevalier and Buckles (2019) advise that it is difficult to generalise about PAR approaches as they are complex and context specific. Even the definition can cause confusion. According to Munn-Giddings (2012) and Opie (2004), some authors differentiate between action research (AR) and participatory action research (PAR), with Cohen et al., (2011), for example, arguing that PAR is more political than action research. Yet others do not differentiate, and often use the terms ‘interchangeably’ (Munn-Giddings, 2012, p.72). Zuber-Skerritt et al. (2015, p.4) assert how ‘action learning continues to evolve from diverse philosophical assumptions, theories and conceptual frameworks’. McNiff and Whitehead (2011, p.11) recognise that some use the terms ‘collaborative action research’ or participatory action research‘, but they question the need to do so due to the nature of action research being participative and collaborative. Some understanding of the origins helps to clarify this confusion, yet PAR is not straightforward.

PAR has been described as a ‘trickster’ (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019, p.11) and ‘messy’ (Hawkins, 2015, p.464) due to its eclectic mixture of design possibilities and power imbalances (as discussed in Chapter 2). Chevalier and Buckles (2019, p.20) note how PAR requires a certain amount of courage to facilitate, particularly in relation to ‘communication among participants’ and explain how PAR, although related to everyday life, is more than just praxis. It must be rigorous and add to knowledge. However, Hawkins (2015) explains how Action Research appeals to educators as it relates to their own practice and Freire (1982) suggested we should be ‘learning to do it by doing it’ (p.29).

Each of the three traditions operates with varying methods and tools to collect data, ranging from the traditional surveys, focus groups and so on (rational-pragmatic), or life histories (psychosocial-transformative) or the use of no planned tools and simply offering a communicative space to see what emerges (critical-emancipatory) (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019, p.55).

PAR can be a way of actively engaging marginalised people in relevant ways (Kramer-Roy, 2015; Lykes and Scheib, 2015). It can also be used to prepare teachers as researchers (Esau, 2013). While Freirean projects related more to testing novel forms of adult education (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019), Fals-Borda (2006) developed PAR based upon community needs, knowledge and action. Guided by the theoretical aspects of the roots of PAR, coupled with personal experience and a commitment to participation, I continue by outlining and justifying my own approach to PAR.

***4.3.2 Drawing upon and Justifying Participatory Approaches***

I drew upon the critical-emancipatory history of PAR (Freire, 1972; Freire, 1982) which aligns with Kemmis et al.’s (2014) critical participatory action research. Initially I considered four aspects of Freire’s work which mirror my own values and which I believed would contribute to a sound PAR research study: lived experience of participants, dialogue, praxis and developing consciousness. First, the lived experience of participants gives meaning to the research. As participants own the research (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992) then they can make decisions about their own lives and demonstrate their knowledge, making research real and meaningful. This was my aim for the Early Years practitioners in my research. Secondly, PAR’s collaborative nature resonates with Freire’s theory of dialogic action (Shih, 2018). Dialogue involves mutual respect and working collaboratively with others, not in a hierarchical or manipulative way. Dialogue inspires trust and a commitment to others, while it may include humour, silence and critical thinking. This resonated with the ethos of the research setting. The third aspect, praxis, involves informed action based upon a balance of action and theory while the fourth, developing consciousness, relates to the knowledge which emerges from the participation, action and research. Rule (2011) reveals how he developed the idea of a dialogic space, understanding it as a ‘zone of engagement underpinned by values of trust, openness and responsibility that enables dialogue at interpersonal, intrapersonal and discursive levels’ (p.938). This type of forum could be useful within education. For example, Pascal (2019, p.153), acknowledging Freire, recently urged the employment of a ‘dialogical approach’ in a European Journal, due to some unprofessional and disrespectful comments emerging therein.

I have been mindful of criticisms of Freire’s work often due to interpretation, historical context and varied practice (Gonzales-Monteagudo, 2014). One example, which Freire criticised himself in later years, was in relation to the gendered language he used (Rule, 2011).

I now continue by outlining the development of Research Circle (Persson, 2009), a dialogic space and where research planning could begin and develop.

***4.3.3 The Development of the Research Circle***

Five months before any data collection commenced, I instigated the development of a Research Circle (Persson, 2009). While this will be discussed in greater detail later (Section 4.5.1) as a data collection method it is vital to introduce this here as it was a crucial phase prior to the research commencing. This space was created as a ‘zone of engagement’ (Rule, 2011, p.938), and based at the research setting, where practitioners (then co-researchers) could meet to enter into dialogue, discuss possibilities for participation, action and research, and make decisions on aspects that matter to them (Taylor and Kent, 2014). It was also essential to have a safe space where relationships could be formed, ethical considerations discussed and research planned.

Research Circles were developed originally to enable University researchers and professionals in their field (usually teachers, although there is no restriction) to develop practice (Persson, 2009), resulting in new knowledge for all participants. There are four variants of Research Circle (Persson, 2009, p.13); in this case the circle was based upon ‘a question to be answered’ as this was deemed most appropriate for this research. The Research Circle also links with the work of Boyd et al. (2006) who advocated reflection, meetings and student-centred learning for students involved in their own learning and PAR’s communicative space (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005; Chevalier and Buckles, 2019).

The notion of Research Circle resonates with my personal experience of delivering action learning techniques (O’Neil and Marsick, 2007) as a Higher Education tutor. Both methods engage in critical reflective practice and are based upon experiential knowledge (Kolb and Kolb, 2011). However, whilst a skilled facilitator leads action learning, the Research Circle is ‘led’ by a researcher, but there is more of a democratic approach, as the lead researcher does not have to lead the discussion (Persson, 2009). There is often a shift of power – an emancipatory perspective – resonating with PAR, and there is a goal of engaging in research for change. It is definitely not a focus group (Cohen et al., 2011), as they tend to be contrived as opposed to being collaborative. All the same, some of the issues associated with focus groups such as poor attendance and veering away from the main subject (Cohen et al., 2011, p.436) can emerge in Research Circles.

The Research Circle is appropriate for linking university, pre-school and research in a principle of reciprocal exchange (Persson, 2009, p.7) and having been inspired by Persson’s (2009) work I introduced the practitioners (and potential co-researchers) to this democratic concept during an initial lunch-time meeting at their workplace. I took care not to coerce individuals to participate (see ethics section, 4.6, for further details). It was an open invitation for practitioners interested in engaging in research.

Five interested practitioners attended this first Research Circle meeting (and later committed to the research). Another was interested but unable to attend. Attendance did not determine the level of participation or interest, as although sometimes participants missed due to other appointments, they were still encouraged to share their observations and received updates. For example, on one occasion, I was informed, ‘Jane isn’t at work today, but she has sent her observations and floor book entries for us to discuss’. This was helpful and showed commitment. I typed up notes from each of the meetings shared them with all co-researchers so they could check progress and comment further where desired. This was time-consuming but helped to develop the underpinning relationships and effective communication upon which co-production of knowledge hinges.

Following ethical approval, the Research Circle was critical to all aspects of the project. Within this context there developed an iterative cycle of ‘plan, act, observe, reflect’ (Munn-Giddings, 2012, p.72) with each stage informing the next. The Research Circle meetings were intended to be a forum to plan and conduct the research and to analyse the data. An important part of the procedure for PAR was to seek the views of the practitioners about conducting the potential study, and indeed the focus and content. This was also significant given that this research was to belong to both the setting and to myself, indeed it was critical in order to fulfil the ethical obligations of this study. This proposal to use Research Circles was warmly received and instigated further discussion about research questions, possibilities, feasibility, timing and participation, as well as the opportunity to further reflect upon practice.

This Research Circle group lasted for the duration of the research, 18 months. Persson (2009) states that this is a natural lifespan for such a group. The content of the Research Circles is further discussed in Section 4.5.1.

***4.3.4 Co-producing the Research Agenda, leading to Research Questions***

Given the commitment to use co-production I realised that the methodology I adopted needed to value the participation of all parties and needed to allow for mutual planning, action and critical reflection. As I already knew that the potential partner setting was eager to develop practice and engage in research, there was the opportunity for change and impact. Embracing membership of the recently formed United Kingdom Participatory Action Research Network (UKPRN, no date), I received further advice about the potential of PAR and methods of data collection. In addition, attendance at a lecture by Persson (2009) about Research Circles proved inspirational and influenced the development of my research design as Persson made the concept sound manageable and meaningful. All of these actions strengthened my commitment to co-production of knowledge alongside interested parties.

According to Filipe et al. (2017), ‘co-production’ was a term which first emerged in the 1970s, and is now used in a number of ways in contexts such as service-improvement and research and has been adapted to include principles of social justice. One example is offered by Pahl (2014), who indicates that universities seek ways of generating knowledge with partners in the community. Banks et al. (2019) have published an array of examples, again with a community approach. Filipe et al. (2017, p.1) propose that co-production is an ‘exploratory space and a generative process that leads to different, and sometimes unexpected, forms of knowledge, values, and social relations’. Within all aspects of co-production lie the underpinning relationships upon which it thrives.

As stated earlier, prior to commencing this research, professional relationships were developed between the university researcher (me) and a community setting (pre-school). I anticipated that the practitioners at that pre-school who chose to proceed with engagement in research would become my co-researchers, being ‘empowered' to make decisions about things they are involved in (Horne and Shirley, 2009, p.3). Because of this, every endeavour was made in my own research not to be too controlling or prescriptive (Cohen et al., 2011), although a certain structure was needed for the setting and for the gathering of data. However, the term ‘empowerment’ proved problematic. One example of this is that in my research, initial meetings were held between the setting’s gatekeeper (the manager), the deputy manager and myself, as this was essential for initial planning and negotiation, but the practitioners were not included. Had consent not been granted, then the practitioners would not have had the same opportunities to participate.

I knew that I wanted all interested parties to be able to be involved in all stages of the research but was aware that this does not always happen in practice (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019, p.259). Furthermore, while practitioners and I worked alongside each other, I still had to have some control over the direction of the research in fulfilling the requirements of the qualification I was working towards, necessitating a degree of compromise.

Goh and Loh (2013) accept that the giving of power indicates that if participants are given a voice, or choice, then they will experience an increase in power. However, Call-Cummings (2018, p.386) argues that the ‘giving’ of power is ‘paternalistic’ or can indicate a power imbalance. Chevalier and Buckles (2019, p.257) agree. They maintain that the level of participation may not be equal and in some cases, ‘democratic participation is not respected’. Through her work, Call-Cummings (2018) discusses a shift from the traditional view of empowerment, where participants have power bestowed on them, to one where all stakeholders have the opportunity to create knowledge that is of use to wider society in ethical and real ways. In my research, one example of ensuring that the practitioners could participate in a way that was meaningful to them was by the creation of a choice board activity, where different aspects of research were included, such as reading, taking photographs, data analysis and recruitment of participants. All practitioners indicated their areas of interest. It was my aim to build upon strengths and to offer choice and areas for new challenge where desired. It was vital that all contributions of the participants were recognised, and valued (Tandon, 2005), as this research project was about a community of Early Years practitioners working together, taking a pride in their work and being encouraged to develop provision for young children in their care. This offered both the opportunity for their prior knowledge and interests to be respected and to blend that with further action (Tandon, 2005). Consideration of these choices, together with the flexibility for part-time working, childcare and other commitments, meant that different forms of participation were possible. It should be noted that there are different forms of participation [for all participants] and that equality of opportunity may include different ways of being involved.

As the research project possibilities were discussed, the shared process meant that the skills and ideas of each individual could be drawn upon in order to develop research questions, to consider the venue for the research and to ensure that the research was meaningful for the group. There were a number of concerns in this early phase. Not only is co-production not easy, as the development of relationships and commitment of participants is essential to the success of any study, but at this point ethical approval was not guaranteed and the focus was not yet clear. However, dialogue commenced in the first Research Circle meeting. Without exception, all practitioners were interested in the development of their Forest School provision but I quickly learned that everyone had different interests and skills. For example, Jane wanted to produce an explanatory leaflet for parents and children while Diane was eager to evaluate and enhance current provision. Katy and Willow explained how practitioners were so busy with managing activity and children that there was concern about being able to record observations and they wondered it that could be overcome by having extra help in the Forest. Cathy knew that her practical involvement would be limited but she was eager to read, to take photographs and to engage with the children in nursery. It also became apparent that the nursery did not normally encourage volunteers, although there was no real reason for this. At this point, the practitioners were focused upon practice. They needed to widen their reading around research, and ethics.

Discussions between practitioners and myself determined they were already aware of benefits in Forest School activity for children in their early years (O’Brien and Murray, 2007) and that preliminary research findings demonstrate the impact of Forest School upon children’s learning and development (Pimlott-Wilson, 2017). This then led to wider reading for all of us. Wider reading included an emerging body of literature about the benefits of older adults working alongside young children (Davis et al., 2008; Duvall and Zint, 2007; Femia et al., 2008) as well as participatory research (Durham University, 2012). In turn, this led me back to the development of the literature review. The second Research Circle meeting was planned for two weeks hence. This approach proved fruitful, as between the two meetings, the deputy manager and the practitioners e-mailed me to state they were now ready to become co-researchers in the project. This allayed my fears somewhat. A further meeting consolidated the information required for the ethical approval forms.

The enthusiastic buzz which greeted me at the second meeting demonstrated the interest in engaging in research and the focus was determined immediately. This indicated to me that discussions had continued in the setting in my absence and that the practitioners were making choices. Inspired by an older woman who regularly supported an indoor pre-school activity and had a perceived impact on the children, together with some reading material sourced by Jane about intergenerational relationships (Park, 2014), the practitioners had some suggestions. They anticipated that there could be mutual benefits for older adults and young children by engaging in intergenerational activity, particularly where the environment is right and relationships flourish.

It was decided by the practitioners that the purpose of the research could be to investigate the importance of including older adults in the lives of young children, within the urban Forest School environment. The absence of intergenerational projects conducted with preschool children and older adults in Forest School was noted, inspiring this research and enabling a contribution to knowledge in this area. The research questions were being planned. This is contrary to the traditional ordering of research as the research questions emerged and were generated after the literature review, and in response to shared interests. Ethics followed this initial planning phase.

Initial concerns were noted. Some practitioners wondered whether older adults would join them in Forest School and, if they did, what the value would be. Diane was a little worried, and indicated her reticence, saying,

*What happens if the children ignore them [older adults] or do not engage? I hope I don’t find myself making it [conversations] happen out of concern for the older people volunteering if the children are not interested*

However, Cathy reassured her saying ‘they’ll be fine… they love visitors’. Not only was Katy interested in ‘what the children could learn from older adults’, but Jane wondered ‘will we learn anything’ and ‘where will it take us?’ By the end of the meeting, after discussing the possibilities, Diane said she felt ‘motivated and excited’, while everyone began to plan what they would like to do… and the ethical approval process began.

Negotiations in the Research Circle determined that older adult volunteers could be recruited to work alongside the co-researchers in the Forest School environment and potential roles were discussed. I suggested undertaking the project for a set period of time, ensuring that any volunteers were able to accept the commitment, that it did not demand too much of them or waste their time, and that it did not affect other aspects of nursery life. The group decided that the project fieldwork in Forest School should take place over a six-week period, one day per week. Outside of that time, preparatory activity and reflective floorbook activity would be carried out with the children, as would pre- and post-fieldwork interviews with older adults. Research Circles were planned to run for 18 months.

Risk was involved here, as there was no guarantee of any older adult volunteers coming forward. However, in my previous role as a nursery officer, I had regularly organised visits from older adults to support the delivery of music sessions or story-time within the nursery setting, activity that was neither researched nor written about, yet seemed productive and rewarding, and I was hopeful. Furthermore, as intergenerational activity was emerging in the public domain, there may have been a heightened interest in the work. The emerging research from this project would build upon such prior experience (Kolb and Kolb, 2011) and was motivational. I was also aware from the outset that PAR is, as Hawkins (2015, p.464) stated, ‘messy’ and that a sense of adventure is required.

The core research question which emerged from the second Research Circle, and which was submitted for ethical approval, was established as:

**What is the impact of engagement between older adults and young children in an urban Forest School environment?**

Sub-questions, based upon the review of the literature and discussions with my co-researchers, include:

1. How do young children interact with the older adults within an urban Forest School environment?

2. What is the nature of the knowledge exchange between young children and older adults within an urban Forest School environment?

3. What are the benefits of integrating different generations within an urban Forest School Environment (for adults and children)?

To get to this stage was, in itself, a long and intense process. The building of relationships, which enabled the project to take place, began over a year before commencement of data collection). During that time, a culture of trust and mutual professional support grew. The practitioners, turned co-researchers, actively engaged with the focus of the research. The design respected the co-researchers, both professionally and personally (Opie, 2004) and was sensitive towards the implications of power relations (Opie, 2004; Hawkins, 2015).

Before moving on to introduce the child and older adult participants who were recruited in this research project, I offer a summary diagram, Figure 4.1, that shows the stages involved in the research. This was created due to the complexity of the project design and offers a visual overview of the various elements, groups, processes and individuals involved.

|  |
| --- |
| **Figure 4.1 - Stages in Research Project from Start to Completion** |
| **Timeline**  Identification of setting and initial discussions with ‘gatekeeper’.  **Prep-preparation**: Diane undertakes study and work-based project related to Forest School and establishes provision for pre-school children. Diane graduates. Reading around the subject. Preliminary discussions.  Year 1  Summer /  winter  Year 2  Spring  Initial meetings with Team  Reading and planning  Within Research Circles: Research Questions developed, design discussed, ethical issues considered. Ethical approval sought and granted.  Research circles – monthly at first, then weekly during fieldwork reverting to meetings as required  Recruitment of older volunteers and children – requiring informative documentation and written consent  Year 2  Relationship building and regular, effective communication throughout  summer  Reflection and analysis (iterative cycle – through diaries, floor book and Research Circles)  both in-action and on-action  Initial interviews with volunteers  Year 2  September  Year 2  Preparation of Children and  planning for fieldwork  Fieldwork  Blog  post research interviews  Summer /  Autumn  Year 2  Children’s celebration event at nursery  Autumn  Analysis phase plus Family Event  Year 3  Smaller group of participants for analysis & reflections |

**Writing /Dissemination of findings Years 4/5/6**

***4.4 Meet the Participants***

There were three categories of participant within the research**:** the Forest School trained (or in-training) practitioners (also referred to in this thesis, post ethical approval, as co-researchers), the young children, and the older adult volunteers. Overall there were two older adult participants aged between 70 and 75 and twelve children aged between 3 years 8 months and 4 years, working alongside six Early Years practitioners who acted as co-researchers. Pseudonyms were selected by older adults and most co-researchers, although co-researcher Diane chose to retain her own name. Young children were given pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

As a reminder, co-researchers were introduced in Figure 4.0. Figure 4.2 introduces older adults and child participants. However, it seems pertinent to offer a brief profile here of the older adults (Emily and Isobel) as it will create a pen-portrait of these volunteers. The names of the children and co-researchers are also offered as an aide-mémoire.

***Emily****, at 70, was a retired primary school teacher. Her daughter-in-law had alerted her to the research project, as she felt that it would be something she would like to get involved in. Having experience in other volunteering roles, and being active and independent, this was a challenge Emily accepted. Emily did have a grandchild at the setting in question, but this grandchild was not participating in Forest School activity at the time. At her initial interview, Emily’s expressed her concern at her potential patience levels with young children, due to having been retired for a decade. She thought she may be ‘rusty’ and ‘de-skilled’ as well as a ‘little nervous’ about ‘changes in practice’. She explained that she had experience with children, was interested in nature, and art, and thought that this would be a fun opportunity to which she could devote time, so was willing to share her experiences.*

***Isobel,*** *aged 75, was a retired Health Visitor. She was a neighbour of one of the practitioners at the setting and was invited to participate due to her interest in children and various volunteering roles. She did not have any other link with the research setting. In her first interview, Isobel outlined her interest in the outdoors and how she relished the opportunity to give her time to support children, and others. She believed she could listen, teach, share experiences and just enjoy the process. She was, however, quite worried about her physical ability.*

***Co-researchers:*** Diane, Jane, Katy, Ella, Cathy, Willow

***Children:*** Ashley, John, Olivia, Elle, Luke, Annie, Jack, Nate, Sophie, Libby, Sara, Austin.

***Figure 4.2 - Meet the Participants***

Note: participants selected their own information for sharing

***4.4.1 Roles and Responsibilities of the participants***

The roles and responsibilities of the three groups of participants differed, partly due to the group they were in, but there were also differences within the groups, often relating to personal choice rather than deliberate omissions. I shall explain below.

* ***The Practitioners (also in the role of co-researchers)***

Each of the six co-researchers was required to carry out their usual role within the woods, which included planning, caring for the children and observing during the sessions. Additionally, for the purpose of the research project, in nursery the practitioners worked alongside the children to record their reflections from Forest School using the floorbook activity (see Section 4.5.3). Through the Research Circles, nursery practitioners, as co-researchers, volunteered for different research-based tasks (Cohen et al., 2011), such as interviewing or preparing the children for the research, according to their respective interests and skills and reflecting with children post-activity. They also maintained a personal reflective diary, which was intended to inform the Research Circles. As time progressed, the Research Circles also became the forum for planning, discussing observations and initial data analysis. The nursery’s policies and procedures were followed, for example in relation to safeguarding.

Working alongside the children, with the children selecting content, the co-researchers created a blog for families. Bazeley (2013, p.70) suggested developing a blog, something which mirrored the advice of the Sheffield School of Education’s ethics panel (Appendix 4). While a blog was instigated and used by the co-researchers, informed by the children, the ethical restrictions of the setting meant it could not be fully used, in respect of gaining feedback from parents.

Post-research, the co-researchers worked alongside the children to plan and prepare for celebration events.

* ***Children***

The twelve children attending the Forest School were current nursery attendees. They were a group due to be part of the next iteration of Forest School activity and permission was sought from their parents, by the nursery setting, for their inclusion in the research project. The children were aged between 44 months and 48 months at the commencement of the project. No additional requirements were made of the children outside of their usual everyday activity as the co-researchers felt this was their natural environment and they did not wish to add any additional pressure on to them. They explored and played within the Forest School environment and then engaged in some reflection in floorbook activity once back at nursery. Reflection, supported by their key adults, was also part of their usual activity. Reflecting upon activity, viewing photos and videos and making sense of their experiences in a variety of creative ways with their co-researchers was more age appropriate and meaningful for them than, for example, attending the Research Circle. Children’s reflections usually occurred in the field, on the journey back to nursery and in floorbook activity in the nursery as discussed in Section 4.5.3.

Hart (1992) discussed how participation is a process of making decisions about your life and the community in which you live. He suggested that children should be involved in meaningful projects with adults and developed a metaphor of a ladder of eight levels of participation, from non-participation through to child-initiated shared decisions with adults.

Although the children in this research project were not involved in the initial planning and decision making of this research project, which could be determined as non-participation (Hart, 1992), they were fully involved in the weekly plans as the research progressed. As discussed later, Jane prepared them for the research and sought their views. They worked alongside their key practitioners to select photographs and stories to be added to their family-facing blog, often suggesting plans for the weekly activity, which was acted upon or enabled by the co-researchers and older adults. Furthermore, once the project was completed, the children invited the older adults to their nursery, a completely spontaneous idea which was acted upon by the co-researchers, in parallel participation. Children prepared food, set tables and enjoyed play in a different context, activity involved, focused and engaged. To our research team, the children’s participation was of great importance, but it needed to be relevant, and not tokenistic or distressing. Hart (2008) has since updated his thinking, stating that his ladder has often been misinterpreted and we need to think more broadly about how children participate in their communities, partly addressed by Shamrova et al. (2017). Shamrova et al. (2017) explain how challenges are faced with young children and PAR and that participation varies widely. They recommend reporting the children’s age, their depth of involvement, the distribution of power and when children are introduced to the research and suggest creating methodologies for young children to participate in PAR (Shamrova et al., 2017, p.407). I suggest that the methods employed here for young children were respectful and afforded the children safety alongside their usual grown-ups, but freedom to be creative, to participate when ready and to make their views known. Many examples of this will be presented in Chapter 5.

Post-research, the children created a display with their practitioners to share their research with families at a celebration day. The competencies of these children will be seen in Chapter 5 while their preparation for research and ethical considerations are discussed in Section 4.6.

* ***Older Adult Volunteers***

Once the ‘gatekeeper’ (Cohen et al., 2011, p.79) was fully satisfied and the nursery practitioners were prepared as co-researchers, all consent forms were signed (Appendices 4 to 8) and the recruitment for the older adult volunteers got underway.

It was necessary to recruit older adult volunteers as none were acting in that role prior to the project. Up to six would have been acceptable to the setting, although only two were finally recruited. The group felt that it was essential not to have too many adults as it could overwhelm the children in the forest, but we also had to consider what would happen in the case of adults dropping out or being ill. Co-researchers were respectful that some older adults may have been unable to attend the research for a number of reasons, such as geographical location or time commitment. Alternatives were made available, including helping with the nursery garden, and other tasks which did not require such a lengthy commitment or attendance.

The process of recruitment was conducted by the co-researchers at the nursery setting as they were familiar with the families. They sent out correspondence electronically explaining the research and inviting any grandparents or older family friends to apply for a participatory role. Given that participation was required, the correspondence requested volunteers to have an affinity with young children, to be interested in nature and to be eager to develop learning experiences for young children.

The recruitment process involved older adults applying for the post (to ensure that this was the right role for them), completing a medical form (for safeguarding and information sharing in the field) and the initial interview (Appendix 3).

Volunteers were required to attend an initial interview at a mutually convenient location in order to determine reasons for engaging in the research, to ask questions and to begin to form a relationship with the team members. They were offered a reflective diary in which they could record their thoughts and use as an aide-mémoire for the final interview.

Two volunteers were invited to attend the Forest School days (one day per week over a period of six weeks), to engage with the group. Clear guidance was offered in the form of a letter (Appendix 6), supported by discussion at the initial meeting and interview (Appendix 3).

Throughout the research project, the older adults were invited to join in activity, to be spontaneous and to introduce activities, stories and ideas as desired. They were invited to participate in the Research Circles in order to analyse the data, but they both chose to decline. Emily said she preferred the ‘fun bit’, meaning the day time in the forest, while Isobel cited time commitments. When invited to nursery by the children post-research, however, they both chose to accept.

The three groups of participants met at the ‘crossroads’ (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019. p.28), choosing to engage with each other. Their interests, previous experience, commitment to the research and their interactions with others then determined their actions. Sometimes, for the co-researchers, the interest in the children’s learning would take priority over the research, but there was no set curriculum. The curriculum was the forest with its changing landscape, weather and passers-by, and the band of participants, all exploring together. We were then ready to commence data collection, in the outdoor, age-friendly environment (James et al., 2016; WHO, 2016).

***4.5 Data Collection Methods***

Within this section, each of the data collection methods employed in the research is discussed. These include Research Circles, observations, interviews, floorbooks and reflective diaries. The floorbooks and reflective diaries informed the interviews and Research Circles. The children’s reflective conversations with key adults, and floorbook entries, were crucial in planning the next stages of activity and sharing children’s views.

***4.5.1 Research Circles***

On receipt of ethical approval, the Research Circle meetings enabled me to work alongside the co-researchers, gathering data, sharing ideas and engaging in reflective practice. Each circle was planned to last for up to two hours, and to be held at the research setting. The Research Circle guide (Persson, 2009) offered explicit advice for conduct and was shared with the team for purposes of transparency and clarity.

Although initial planning suggested monthly meetings might work best, they became weekly during the fieldwork as participants wished to discuss the observations in a timely manner. This had time and cost implications for the co-researchers, but they deemed the investment worthy both for professional development for all, including my return to practice as lead researcher (Denscombe, 2010, p.134), and for personal interest.

Another shift in relation to the Research Circle came about regarding the timing of meetings. Initially meetings were held at the end of the day, but participants soon realised they were exhausted following fieldwork and had not had time for personal reflection, so the day after the fieldwork was suggested instead. This demonstrated the flexibility of all concerned in order to meet changing needs. In addition, flexibility was also required to accommodate holidays and other responsibilities, so there was some irregularity in participation at the meetings.

Each Research Circle had a flexible agenda, determined by the participants. Progress to date was shared, observations (Section 4.5.2) were discussed, photographs were used as prompts and discussions with the children post-fieldwork and in the floorbook (Section 4.5.3) were analysed. Large flip chart sheets papered the meeting room, reminding everyone of the research questions and allowing space for sharing ideas. Post-it notes were available for thoughts to be displayed as appropriate as these would become part of the initial analysis of data (Section 4.7.2).

According to Dellman-Jenkins (1997), successful studies have included the involvement of the senior (older) adults (volunteers) in activity planning. In the context of this research, however, although the older volunteers were aware of the Research Circles, they declined to attend, partially due to the time commitment involved (Isobel). Ideas were discussed with the volunteers during fieldwork, and entries were made in their diaries (Section 4.5.5) which could be used as an aide-mémoire and informed their final interviews (Section 4.5.4). The Research Circles following the fieldwork sessions were electronically recorded, and transcribed, and other Research Circles were minuted, material that was incorporated into the data set (Munn-Giddings, 2012).

According to Persson (2009), all Research Circles end with a product. This may take the form of a publication, dissemination of learning, or celebratory event. Furthermore, when managing a project, an abrupt ending is not recommended and ‘closure’ (Lock, 2007, p.491 is deemed necessary. The National College of Teaching and Leadership (no date) tend to focus this phase on writing a report and personal reflection, where within health, and some businesses (Dwyer et al., 2007; Lock, 2007) there is also a respect for stakeholders, a recognition of transition and even a celebration (Dwyer et al., 2007, p.166). The research team decided it to be good practice to share findings with all stakeholders in the project, and so several ‘events’ were planned. The first, for the children, which was inspired by a child’s request (Jack), occurred the week after their fieldwork had ended. This was designed as a meal, and playtime, within the nursery to which volunteers were invited. A second event, several months later, occurred as the children were due to leave nursery to move to school. Children’s parents and grandparents were invited to a garden party where photographs from the research project were displayed and I was invited to share progress of the research project with them. Children were involved in the planning and delivery of both events.

During the final Research Circle, I planned to engage all practitioners in the ‘Nominal group technique’ adapted from Gibbs et al. (1988), cited as relevant within action learning by Cohen et al. (2011, pp.357-8). This technique is used successfully within my current Higher Education practice to evaluate programmes of study and has the flexibility to be adapted. Individuals are equally offered the opportunity to share ideas but it is highly structured and specifically addresses itself to subsequent action. Unfortunately it proved impossible to get everyone together for this process to occur. Instead, and in an attempt to give equal status to all respondents, aspects of the Delphi Technique were adopted (Hsu and Sandford, 2007; Cohen et al., 2011, p.357; Pearson et al., 2018). This resembles the Nominal group technique, but it was conducted in writing and on-line. Each respondent was asked to reply to a series of evaluative questions and prompts. Once again, this proved difficult regarding time commitments and not everyone participated. However, this did obtain evaluative responses that informed the reflections on the project.

The following table (4.0) outlines the main Research Circle Meetings undertaken, although additional short meetings and emailing of updates have also taken place in order to share progress with the team and to check some interpretations of data, for example.

***Table 4.0 - Research Circle meetings and content:***

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Purpose** | **Attendance [C means co-researcher, numbers indicate which co-researcher]** |
| July 2014 | Initial discussions to determine location and possibilities of research | C1 |
| 23rd March 2015 | Gatekeeper follow-up meeting. Then initial negotiations and suggestions all undertaken within the ethos, policies and procedures of the setting. | C1 |
| 2nd April 2015 | Exploration with interested parties and determining focus of research. Commitment. | C1, C2, C3, C5, C6 |
| 15th April 2015 | Questions, ethics discussed, potential responsibilities, planning – including data collection and work with children. It was agreed to interview the volunteers both prior to the project and after (see Section 3.6.4), to make observations in the woods (Section 3.6.2) and to record the views of the children in a floorbook at Nursery | C1, C2, C3, C5, C6 |
|  | *Ethical approval application submitted and obtained* |  |
| 29th July 2015 | Ethical approval obtained, consent form distribution and collection arranged (see Section 3.7.2 for documentation), responsibilities shared, roles selected, planning, negotiating dates | C1, C2, C3, C5, C6 |
| 6th August 2015 | Recruitment of older volunteers and interview planning | C1  All involved in recruitment and forms |
| 7th September 2015 | Pre-fieldwork meeting. Sharing responsibilities, questions, update. | C1, C2, C3 |
| 8th September 2015 | Sharing observations, discussion about and critical reflection upon practice. Planning. | C1, C2 |
| 16th September 2015 | Sharing observations, discussion about and critical reflection upon practice. Planning. | C1, C5, C6 |
| 22nd September 2015 | Sharing observations, discussion about and critical reflection upon practice. Planning. | C1, C2 |
| 30th September 2015 | Sharing observations, discussion about and critical reflection upon practice. Planning. Recontact Ethics committee re possible involvement of parents. | C1, C2, C6 |
| 15th October 2015 | Sharing observations, discussion about and critical reflection upon practice. Planning. | C1, C2, C4 |
| 21st October 2015 | Sharing observations, discussion about and critical reflection upon practice. Planning. | C1, C2, C4 |
| 9th November 2015 | Child celebration event at Nursery | C1, C2, C3, C4 |
|  | Update Meetings in nursery with email contact |  |
| 26th March 2016 | Progress | C1 |
| 11th June 2016 | Progress | C1 |
| 23rd June 2016 | Analysis of data – plus several other follow up dates | C1, C2, C3, C4 |
| 26th August 2016 | Celebration event and dissemination at Nursery | C1,C2,C3,C4,C5,C6 |
| 31st August 2016 | Discussions and reflections (with email opportunity) | C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6 |

***4.5.2 Participant Observations***

It was essential that I, as the lead researcher, should be a participant observer (Angrosino, 2012, p.165). I needed to adopt the ‘least adult role’ (Mayall, 2008, p. 110) in order to meet the children in their world and observe the experience of the participants. While Opie (2004, p.128) recommends that the lead researcher should act as ‘observer as participant’ rather than ‘participant as observer’ or ‘complete participant’, in order to retain objectivity, it was impossible to be that unobtrusive as children naturally engage with others in their environment. This led to my attempting to observe and record, yet also remain involved. Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007) consider this as part of the ‘spectrum of observation’ (p.80). They acknowledge the difficulties faced, but explain how different kinds of observations can be achieved and justified.

Both I and the co-researchers, who were also participant observers, are, as trained Early Years practitioners used to recording evaluative observations, although this was quite different due to the volume of observations, and my focus on the research questions. It was later noted by the practitioners how they valued observing their children with the older adults. Where possible, these were contemporaneous notes made in diaries, although some were written up soon afterwards, as advised by Cohen et al. (2011, p.474), given that memory fades. This created a more accurate record for later interpretation. Those observing were mindful of the possibility of selective attention of the observer (Cohen et al., 2011, p.473) although as all were involved, this was less likely and the interpretations did not belong to one person. The clarification of interpretations was useful. For example, when Jack reacted in a certain way during Week 1, the co-researchers were able to say that this behaviour was not usual for him. I did not know that.

Photographs were taken to support observations and some videos were recorded of interactions which would later inform Research Circle discussions. There were still challenges however, as when engaged with children it is difficult to juggle activity and note-taking.

Evaluative observations would usually be collected for the children's learning journey records as it is a statutory requirement (in England) (Department for Education, 2017, p.13) for practitioners to observe children, assess their development and to plan for the next steps, improving practice and provision (Palaiologou, 2008). Despite using the research questions to frame the observations, some other moments occurred which could not be ignored. Examples occurred when a child demonstrated mathematical development and an observation was required for her profile. This showed that the co-researchers were ever mindful of the Early Years statutory Curriculum (Department for Education, 2017). These events had to be separated out later from the data.

Although observations can disturb natural activity (Cohen et al., 2011, p.471), it was evident that the children involved in this project were used to outdoor activity and were comfortable in the presence of key adults and interested adults (Flewitt, 2005). Reactivity (Cohen et al., 2011) was noted initially in respect of the fact that there were new adults to engage with. Hammond and Wellington (2013) caution of the observer ‘effect’ (p.64) which means that the presence of others may affect the observations. Although every effort was made to ensure that participants, as interested adults (Mayall, 2008), blended in and joined in the activity, the presence of new people does change the dynamics of the relationship and the space. Initially some observations were descriptive and not always focused upon answering the research questions. However, focusing upon research questions [for example by making notes on flip charts] when discussing the observation data in Research Circles enabled the selection of appropriate material and evaluation to occur prior to final analysis.

Challenges arose for all of us. Reflecting upon the practice of making field notes, practitioners were reassured that I, too, found the juggling of roles difficult. They had struggled for months trying to simultaneously play with the children and record observations and found that having extra adults in the environment created valuable observation and reflection time. As the project progressed, an additional element was set up by the practitioners to allow further reflection upon the experiences, when it was determined by the Research Circle members that a blog would be useful for the parents and children to share their learning experiences.

***4.5.3 Floorbooks***

After each activity, once back in the nursery setting, working with their respective key adult, the children recorded their memories, thoughts and stories from Forest School. Floorbooks were key to this recording. Such books (Mindstretchers, 2018) are deemed a child-led approach to consultation, observation, planning and documentation in children’s learning. They were developed by Warden (2015) and link well to the visual methodologies of Anthamatten et al. (2012) and the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2011) which aim to understand the views of children, listen to children and determine and what is important or troubling to them. This is very much in line with the assertion that Early Years practitioners should be committed to listening to the voice of the child (Early Education, 2011).

Using floorbooks, which involved the children and their familiar practitioners working closely together, enabled the voices of children to be heard. It was additionally important as reflections frequently emerged after the event and permeated play opportunities when back at the nursery, thereby enhancing any observations made in the field. There were also occasions where children engaged in role play back at their nursery setting would mention the older adults. This sometimes led to further records being made in their floorbook as their thoughts were recorded. Some vignettes, demonstrating play and thoughts emerging from the experiences during Forest School activity, are shared in Chapter 5.

***4.5.4 Interviews with the Older Adult Volunteers***

The initial interviews were conducted by me, as lead researcher, together with one co-researcher Diane who had articulated her interest in being involved in this process. They were held at a mutually convenient time and place. A one-to-one interview was originally planned, and the involvement of an extra person meant there were complications with arranging a mutually convenient time as well as there being extra notes to transcribe (Denscombe, 2010). However, this offered the advantage of the nursery setting being fully involved in the recruitment of the volunteers and for relationships to begin to develop from the very start.

Considering the ‘interviewer effect’ (Denscombe, 2010, p.179) and Hammond and Wellington’s (2013, p.91) caution about interviews being ‘unnatural conversations’, the interviews were therefore designed to ensure that they were more of a discussion, in a comfortable, mutually convenient location and time. During these initial interviews it was important to ask specific open-ended questions (Denscombe, 2010) about the volunteers’ motivation for embarking upon the project and what they could contribute, as well as offering them an opportunity to ask questions. With consent, these interviews were electronically recorded and later transcribed, ready for coding and analysis. It was also appreciated that the volunteers had the right to change their mind at this stage, which would have been perfectly acceptable (Cohen et al., 2011). Alternative ideas for involvement were available in case of need, created in response to a suggestion made by the ethics review panel (ethical approval letter - Appendix 4).

It was an advantage that both the co-researcher and I had previous interviewing experience; the co-researcher had interviewed potential staff in the workplace, and I had experience of interviews from a previous career as a police officer where they were used in order to glean evidence. Even so, we had limited experience of the use of interviews in a research context. We were aware of the need to be sensitive to the interviewee’s feelings, using prompts where needed and respecting their views (Denscombe, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011; Mears, 2012; Hurworth, 2012). Roberts-Holmes (2005, p.110) explains the requirements of interviewer skill including the need for open questions and how probing is required to help to clarify points and confirm meaning. Opie (2004) queried the honesty of participants during interviews although also suggesting that any dishonesty was unlikely to be deliberate. In addition, guidance from Cohen et al. (2011, p.425) was followed.

Hammond and Wellington (2013, p.14) explain how questions can affect the nature of the research, so, to the best of our ability as novice researchers, we ensured the questions the research team developed for the first interview were meaningful, non-threatening and clear (Appendix 10). To further set the tone of the interview as supportive and informal, the questions were emailed to the volunteers in advance so they could prepare answers or formulate their own questions to clarify points.

This initial interview had more than one purpose. It was intended to explore the suitability of the applicants, develop their familiarisation with the team members and to determine a baseline for the project. Although it was hoped that the volunteers would be willing and able to proceed, it was acknowledged that they or we could decide the project was not appropriate for them after discussion. However, once a volunteer confirmed their involvement (Appendix 6), they were assessed in terms of needs such as transport to the venue or clothing to wear in the forest.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted after the six-week fieldwork, enabling the older adults to reflect upon the research and to share their findings. After reminding the older adults of the overall research questions, they were given a list of interview questions (Appendix 11). These questions varied slightly according to individual experiences.

***4.5.5 Reflective diaries***

As a ‘valuable complement’ to the interviews (Hammond and Wellington, 2013, p.49), and to the Research Circles, the co-researchers and the older adult volunteers were invited to keep a paper based reflective diary from the start of the project. It was made clear that they only needed to share what they felt comfortable with, thereby respecting privacy (Hammond and Wellington, 2013) and allaying any concerns about intrusion (Bell, 2005, p.181), either during the fieldwork or the final interview. Reflective writing can motivate ‘teachers’ engagement in reflective thinking’ (Kahles, 2014, p.101).

Bazeley’s (2013) advice was our guidance regarding detail in the field notes, including recording real words spoken and reflective notes, and observations which were recorded digitally on the same day.

Finally, given that Opie (2004) states how delaying the recording of observations has disadvantages, the diaries became a good method of recording promptly (on occasions contemporaneously). Not only was this more reliable and aided memory, but the diary content was available for Research Circles and the final volunteer interview and informed the analysis.

***4.6 Ethical Considerations***

Ethical considerations have permeated this project from the relationship building that took place prior to commencement through to its final stages. As a researcher, I always endeavour to be reliable, respectful, honest, and accountable for my actions, behaving with professional courtesy and integrity at all times (BERA, 2018; EECERA, 2014). In doing so I also show my commitment to the community of educational researchers (BERA, 2018). In addition, working with people in a participatory way has a very strong requirement of respectfulness to all (Durham University, 2012) and for the moral principles of the profession, in this case Early Years, to be adhered to (Hammond and Wellington, 2013). Richardson (2019) reminds of being respectful to non-participants too. While she refers to children and urges the importance of them not feeling left out when some peers are engaging in research, in this research project it was also relevant to grandparents who were interested but lived too far away, or were unable to participate for other reasons. We ensured that other opportunities were available in these cases. This openness led to surprising outcomes including a poem from Great Grandpa (abstract), a visit from grandparents from China, and children not involved in the research ‘viewing the older adults as superheroes’ (Ella).

This section continues by highlighting key ethical issues which arose during the research and stating how they were addressed.

***4.6.1. Gatekeeper, Co-researchers and Power Relations***

BERA (2018) urges consideration of the responsibilities of researchers to participants. Consequently, even before ethical approval was sought and negotiated access was gained an initial meeting with the setting manager (the ‘Gatekeeper’), and another with prospective participants began to explore some of the anticipated ethical considerations. I shared regarding my background and current role, the purpose of the research and it was agreed that anything undertaken should be of mutual benefit. The manager had previously experienced what has harshly, but effectively, been called ‘rape research’ (Lather, 1986, p.75), where the researcher’s aims are fulfilled but the setting receives nothing in return, and my approach was appreciated.

In this research it was of importance that the setting’s reputation should be respected and that research activity would not compromise their reputation. Policies and procedures of the setting had to be followed and national guidance, for example in relation to safeguarding (HM Government, 2018), was adhered to. Preparatory documentation (Appendix 12) ensured that all actions were ethical. It was also important to consider ethical principles to be applied by ‘insider-researchers’, as discussed by Durrant, Rhodes and Young (2011, p.35). These could include working together in complicated relationships, and in workplaces, and having access to sensitive information.

Unexpectedly, one of the co-researchers became a student at my institution. Apart from the introduction of a potentially significant power imbalance within the research (Robson, 2011) I needed to declare this potential conflict of interest as it could compromise the trustworthiness of my work (Singapore Statement, 2010; BERA, 2018). For this reason, to ensure that neither our work together at the setting, nor our student/tutor relationship were compromised, I ensured that all of the co-researcher’s student work was marked by an independent tutor in addition to myself. It is difficult to say whether this student status had any impact upon the research. On the one hand, the research subject was not connected to her studies. However, on the other, the co-researcher was one of the most engaged and read widely, which informed the research.

Although I planned for the co-researchers to work alongside me and for their participation to be balanced and equal with my own, with their views and findings respected, I was constantly mindful of potential power relations. Firstly, my position as a university lecturer was problematic in that I was seen as the ‘lead researcher’ by the practitioner co-researchers, with a further complication being that I had initially suggested engaging in research in order to complete my doctoral studies. At this point, I needed to determine whether I was a co-researcher, lead researcher or something else. As Hawkins (2015) points out, others too have struggled to find the most appropriate terminology to describe themselves in situations like this. I initially decided to use the term ‘facilitator’ as this differentiated between myself as the doctoral student, and the practitioners. On later reflection, considering how Kemmis and McTaggart (2005, p.285) were troubled by the ‘concept of facilitation’ and after reading the advice of Atkins and Duckworth (2019), I realised the importance of maintaining a slight lead, in order to co-ordinate and maintain the integrity of the study. I remained mindful of, and was reassured by, the struggles experienced by Atkins (2013). I ended up as ‘lead researcher’ in name, while endeavouring to ensure that the co-researchers could make informed choices and could use their expertise to truly contribute to the development of the research project.

Surprisingly, although I was ‘lead researcher’, this did not mean that I was leading the research project at all times. This was because the co-researchers had certain responsibilities (Section 4.4.1) such as obtaining consent from parents, or negotiating times for the fieldwork to occur, which meant that they were in control of those aspects. As recruitment was conducted alongside the field site, on their terms, I was a supporter in that process as these were essential steps to ensure the safeguarding of individuals and to maintain the integrity of the setting. This was also apparent in the way that the nursery setting retained the photographs and floorbooks due to strict permissions and later, when the Forest School blog was developed, the children chose the content while the co-researchers populated it. This sometimes meant that I had to wait for responses and had to trust others to conduct the work.

Other power relations, related to the nursery setting from which the Forest School activity grew, emerged as potentially problematic. I was already aware that the setting’s deputy manager and co-researchers were not necessarily in equal roles of responsibility within the nursery setting, and held different levels of study, so I wondered whether this may inhibit some individuals from being open and honest in their views, or whether they could be coerced into participating. These were key ethical considerations which had to be firstly acknowledged and then addressed, for example through the recruitment and through data collection methods. Atkins and Duckworth (2019) discuss such institutional contexts and how they can affect responses. Furthermore, there was the power imbalance between practitioners and the children. While I was aware of the ethos of the nursery setting and had visited previously, I wondered whether children and practitioners shared decision-making or whether practitioners always took the lead. Issues of informed consent with young children and the extent to which they are respected are well documented (Christensen and James, 2000; Nutbrown, 2011; Yamada-Rice, 2017; Atkins and Duckworth, 2019), and this guidance was crucial in developing the data collection methods.

A further concern, raised by co-researchers, was that one of the older volunteers we recruited was a retired school teacher. Co-researcher Jane, in particular, worried about being judged on her practice, something that I had not anticipated. Fortunately, perhaps due to good luck rather than careful planning, once the co-researchers began to work alongside the older volunteers they very quickly recognised the strengths in each other and formed a strong team. Potential power imbalances in research require strategies to overcome such issues. I was reassured somewhat by Luff and Webster (2014), drawing upon the work of Dewey (1922, p.314), who advised how ‘our intelligence is bound up…with the community life of which we are a part. We know what it communicates to us, and know according to the habits it forms in us’.

Addressing my concerns about potential power imbalances involving the children, I learned rather quickly that the field site ethos valued participation and shared decision-making; it valued young children’s views and saw children as capable individuals (James and Prout, 2015; Christensen and James, 2017). This ethos seemed to permeate other relationships in the setting too, but I could not be complacent. The building of relationships and mutual trust between all participants remained a focus throughout the research project. Initial planning involved building upon the individual skills, strengths and interests of the practitioners and they selected their tasks to be completed. This not only aided motivation but supported ownership of the research (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992). The interests of the children and the older adults also informed planning and everyone played their part.

***4.6.2 Ethics and Older Adult Volunteers***

Recruiting older adults to work within the setting required the formulation of a volunteer policy and an updated risk assessment. Diane attended to this. In response to a parent’s enquiry, Ofsted guidance was checked. It was determined that a Disclosure and Barring (DBS) Check (Gov.uk, 2013) was not required for each of the volunteers due to their infrequent attendance. However, good practice prevailed and each of the older adult volunteers, and the facilitator, did have a DBS in place. On reflection, this was probably a wise decision as relationships with the children developed rapidly and having a DBS in place both supported the feeling of confidence in the volunteers and could have allayed any parental fears.

During their initial interview, the older adults were informed that observations and photographs might be taken, that there would be no payment (although transport would be offered and packed lunches provided, as required) and that they would be invited to a final interview at the end of the research. Email contact was maintained throughout between the older adults and myself. This included ensuring whether they had the correct equipment for the fieldwork.

***4.6.3 Ethics and Young Children***

Roberts-Holmes (2018, p.62) stresses the importance of gaining the voluntary agreement of all participants in a research project, as this is respectful and aids effective communication and reliability. While this was possible for co-researchers and older volunteers, gaining ‘informed consent’ (Denscombe, 2010, p.132) from young children is less straightforward. In the past, consent from parents or teachers for children has been deemed sufficient (Hughes and Helling, 1991) and this form of consent was gathered in this instance, as it was necessary for setting policies and procedures as well as University ethical approval. However, this approach can be seen as problematic, as discussed by Gallagher et al., (2010) and Coyne (2010, p.227) as it ‘fails to recognise children’s capacities and accord children due respect as persons in their own right’.

We saw earlier how not all intergenerational work is respectful of, or perhaps ignores the ethical requirements, of all participants (Morita and Kobayashi, 2013). Whether this is because some participants are deemed to be lacking in capacity or too young to consent, it is not clear. However, it is essential to comply with Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (BERA, 2018). Some children are able to articulate whether they are happy to engage in activity or not (Flewitt, 2005). For others, we may need to observe their body language, for example to see if they move away from people they do not want to engage with. Co-researchers were also able to observe body language for evidence of discomfort, remembering that all participants must have the right to withdraw from research at any point (BERA, 2018).

Due to the children in this research being 3 and 4 years of age, developmentally appropriate ways of working alongside them, to help them to understand what it means to be involved in research, were explored and discussed with the co-researchers. Dockett et al. (2013) advocate gaining assent from the children and offer ways in which this can be done, using emojis. From experience, I know that children do not always understand what the emoji means, however, this approach may be useful for some children. Yamada-Rice (2017) found using simplified research sheets and consent forms problematic, and instead shared examples of meaningful activities such as using stories and games to help children to understand the subject. In further work, Ghirotto and Mazzoni (2013) trouble the children’s rights-based approach and urge the need to involve adults. They see adults’ power as having a positive impact upon children’s ideas (p.300) and advocate a ‘mutual and interdependent relationship’ (p.307). Within this research project I was eager to engage with the children in a developmentally appropriate way, for the co-researchers to take the lead and for appropriate decisions to be made.

The co-researchers in this research project are the key adults who work with the children on a daily basis and know them well. They were keen to introduce the research project to the children in ways that were appropriate to them. Jane took the lead on this, within the nursery setting, supported by colleagues. To introduce the concept of ‘research’, or ‘finding things out’, Jane read the story of the Little Mole (Holzwarth and Erlbruch, 1994) to the children. In this story, not only is the little mole on a mission to find out the answer to a problem, he has to ask questions, meet different people, including experts, and explore the area. In an unusual twist, the little mole retaliates when he finds out who the offender is. This led to an ethical discussion with the children about how we treat others, about respect and what the alternatives could have been. This promoted the children’s interests in finding things out, questioning, looking, thinking and suggesting solutions to an array of daily activity. Next, the children were shown photos of the two older adults (provided by the older adults). It was explained to them that these people would like to come along to Forest School – and they were invited to comment. All responses were positive. While Austin believed that the volunteers looked ‘old’ and ‘nice’, Elle compared them to her grandma, before saying, ‘I think when Isobel comes to Forest School she will see some glass and step on it…we need to tell those ladies about Forest School and what we do’. This suggests that these children had positive views about these new older adults, wanted to welcome them to the Forest School and needed to keep them safe. This view was supported by the fact that these children later readily engaged with the older adults on their arrival in Forest School. The children did not once show concern about meeting these new adults and were all eager to engage in activity with the older adults.

As the project progressed, and children were engaged with activities, their individuality and expertise had to be respected (Early Education, 2011). Their voices needed to be heard and contributions valued. In play, back at the setting, children’s thoughts were recorded in the floorbooks (Section 4.5.3), with their permission gained before photographs or drawings were added to the resulting nursery blog or displays (Cohen, 2011, p.132).

Open and respectful communication with children and their families has been essential for the duration of the project. Parent information sheets were distributed, for instance, and individual consent forms were employed (Appendix 8). Furthermore, it was possible for some children whose parents did not want them to participate in the project, or for children who did not attend nursery on the project day, to still engage in Forest School activity, simply at a different time to those children involved in the research. Equally, they were not excluded from the story telling or floorbook activities if they chose to join in. This is an important consideration in order to avoid the non-participant children feeling excluded or unworthy of involvement (Richardson, 2019).

***4.6.4 Anonymity and Confidentiality***

Respecting the advice of Cohen et al. (2011, pp.471-2), all photographs and videos that were taken in the field were taken using the nursery cameras and stored at the nursery. With permission from the setting, parents, and children themselves, it was agreed that selected photos could be used for dissemination purposes. All personal details of the children, except their age and name, have been retained in the nursery setting in order to comply with the Data Protection Act (1998), latterly Data Protection Act (2018), and university guidance. All consent form copies have been retained in the setting. Original consent forms are with the lead researcher, stored in a cabinet in a locked office.

The names of the children and the older adults have not been used in dissemination. With regard to confidentiality, and similar to my own experience in prior research, Dockett et al. (2013) found that children want to keep their own names as they do not understand the need for pseudonyms, but nor do they yet understand the impact of using their real names. All participants were initially allocated code numbers, but pseudonyms were created for the dissemination of results, including the writing of this thesis. However, Bell (2005) warns of difficulties with anonymity and confidentiality. Although actual names may not be mentioned, and the setting not identified in this thesis, participants may be identified by association with others and for this reason full anonymity could not be promised. For example, certain aspects of nursery life are shared in nursery publications and on displays or on their website and participants can ‘see themselves and be seen by others’ (Simons and Usher, 2000, p.8) in photographs. Pring (2003) discusses the moral dilemmas associated with revealing the identity of and truths within research associated with vulnerable individuals and this was discussed in depth before any final decisions were made.

There was a slight difference in terms of anonymity regarding the co-researchers, in that they could, given their role, choose whether to use their name or opt for a pseudonym. Where they said they ‘weren’t bothered either way’ I asked them to provide a pseudonym in case they changed their minds later, knowing that the selection of a pseudonym by participants themselves is deemed to be more meaningful to them (Allen and Wiles, 2015). However, Diane was eager to keep her true identity. She, together with some other co-researchers, have already expressed an interest in writing for publication following the study and by doing so they will waive their right to anonymity (Parker, 2005) and be identified. The implications of this decision were discussed, and agreement was reached.

***4.7 The Process of Data Management and Analysis***

This section outlines the management and analysis of the data and explains decisions made in order to demonstrate the reliability of the process.

***4.7.1 Data Management***

Following Bazeley’s (2013) advice, the co-researchers and I collected data, ensured it was well organised, and kept it safely. Photographs, floorbooks and copy consent forms were retained in the setting, following their own guidance. Digital data is retained on a password-protected computer in a locked office while paper data is retained in a locked office, thus protecting anonymity and preserving the data. See Table 4.1 for an overview of the data and storage. See also Section 4.6.4 re anonymity and confidentiality.

**Table 4.1 - An Overview of the Data Management**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Data** | **Who involved** | **Actions** |
| Field-notes  Observations  (and photos) | All co-researchers and older adults | My observations were typed up in full as soon as possible, together with reflective notes. The notes from practitioners/co-researchers were incorporated within the Research Circles. Volunteers /older adults shared their notes in final interviews.  (photos kept in setting) |
| Research Circle discussions (following Forest School sessions) - (recorded)  Post-its  Floor books | Lead Researcher, Co-Researchers and contributions from Children | Floorbook entries and observations shared (verbal and on post-its).  Checking for mis/interpretation.  Initial themes considered.  Reflection and planning for next steps.  All transcribed. |
| Interviews 1 and 2 | Lead Researcher and Diane, with Adult Volunteers | Transcribed immediately by me |
| All Storage on password protected computer drive or in locked office. Labelled by date and codes. Photos and floorbooks kept in setting. | | |

Data comprised of my field-notes and observations, transcriptions of discussions occurring at the Research Circles during the time of the fieldwork, floorbook entries, post-it ideas from the co-researchers and interview transcriptions from the older adults. Field-notes were typed up immediately after the event and also filed in date order. Meaningful codes, then later pseudonyms, were applied to the participants as advised by Bazeley (2013, p.64). Bazeley (2013) had also advised about the untidy nature of data analysis, suggesting that it was vital to have excellent organisation from the start. Although interviews do not need to be transcribed fully for ethnographic/naturalistic analysis (Bazeley, 2013, pp.71-72) , and it is indeed a time-consuming process, full transcription of these and Research Circle discussions allowed all participants to read and reread the data as required. It was also easier for me, to revisit, to manage and later analyse the data.

***4.7.2*** ***Initial Analysis – Stage One - Research Circle Discussions***

Analysis of the findings occurred in two stages. Stage one involved the initial collaborative sense-making which occurred during fieldwork and the Research Circles with the co-researchers and I working alongside each other. This process inspired thinking and planning. Transcripts were available to all.

As advised by Silverman (2014, p.392), memos were written, by me as the lead researcher, and by co-researchers, throughout the data collection and analysis period to identify early patterns and concepts that emerged. The collected data was explored, both individually by co-researchers and collaboratively in Research Circles in order to identify patterns and to begin to make sense of the findings.

Looking at data together in Research Circles meant that potential links were reflected upon weekly, so all the co-researchers were immersed in the data. Bazeley’s ‘pathway to analysis’ (2013, pp.101-111) was an ideal starting point for analysing this data, as from ‘purposeful play’ to ‘investigating a puzzle’ and ‘exploring the data with a team’, the pathway resonated with the participatory approach of this research. A conscious decision was made to use Bazeley’s work in our initial analysis. This chosen approach meant that themes emerging across the lifespan of the research and connections made between the weeks were easier to identify. This ‘pattern finding’, for us, was best done manually, as noted by Angrosino (2012, p.167). It is possible that NVIVO could have given the same results, but my preference was for the messy and visual, perhaps drawing on past experience of research. Also, the co-researchers seemed deterred by training to use the software and to organise the data on line. I worried that I may have influenced them, but I do not think that I did. Analysing in a group, with the observations, drawings and notes created felt like true immersion in the data.

Observations made in the field by co-researchers were discussed during Research Circles together with an exploration of floorbook entries made by the children, with co-researchers as their scribes. It was intended to add an example of a floorbook page here. However, we did not have permissions from all children or their parents for any of the complete pages in the floorbook. Instead, examples from the floorbook, where permissions were granted, are added within Chapter 5 in order to illustrate the findings. The use of visual methodologies, those employing photographs and recordings (Mitchell, 2011), had been considered at the outset of the project. However, in the end the Research Circles were used as a forum for exploring this data. One reason for this is that some parents were happy for the photographs and recordings to be used in the Research Circle, and in nursery, but not for them to be shared with a wider audience. Practitioners/co-researchers were able to discuss the observations in the Circle, thus ensuring anonymity for those families, and only permitted relevant photographs were then used to illustrate findings, so respecting everyone’s views.

Co-researchers considered the relevance of the observations in relation to the research questions, while looking for patterns in the data. Another reason for discussing the observations with practitioners/co-researchers during Research Circle was to check for conflicts in interpretation (Opie, 2004). Although we had all gathered observations, I had recorded the most due to my role as lead researcher. Given that observation was my main focus this was not surprising. I was also aware of Kelly’s theory of personal constructs (Winter, 2013) and that interpretations of field events would differ. As we were all busy with different children and activities, the Research Circle ensured a more holistic version of events. Bazeley (2013, p.121) argues that participants are not often involved in analysis, so it was especially pleasing to see this group of Early Years practitioners eager to make sense of their findings and experiences. Patterns and themes began to emerge during interpretive reflection on the field notes and photographs supported this reflection as an aide-mémoire. Co-researchers used post-it notes to record their thoughts during the meetings, which were then put on pre-prepared flip charts (See Appendix 13, one example of how interpretation of the data began) which served to remind everyone of the research questions.

In playful activity with the data, mind-maps (Buzan, 2002) (See Appendix 14, one example of a mind-map) were created of all the key words which related to the research questions. Further, grids and notes were developed, for example, a grid which indicated the frequency and nature of interactions, acknowledging where they originated and noting any key points for later inclusion. The analysis undertaken by co-researchers in stage one helped with thinking processes and considered where vignettes might illustrate the data. These vignettes, descriptive and illuminating accounts began to span weeks of the research. Diane, Jane and Ella showed particular interest in interpreting this data.

I had been concerned that as the co-researchers were all from an Early Years background, they may have been trained in a similar way and may have developed ‘similar beliefs and assumptions’ (Cohen et al., 2011, p.295), so ‘consensus collusion’ (Reason and Rowan, 1981, p.244) was a possibility. However, as co-researchers it was vital to clarify what had been observed. It emerged from the Research Circle that the co-researchers varied in experience so discussion was meaningful, and discussions ultimately challenged some thinking. The later, separate, coding of my observations and of the interviews enabled triangulation. I had also had some initial concerns about using this time-consuming form of analysis, especially given that despite the willingness of practitioners to analyse the data (Bazeley, 2013), this required extra commitment for them. However, interested parties were not deterred, and continued to engage.

Significantly, as Persson (2009) advises that data analysis should be conducted in an iterative cycle of critical reflection throughout the study, these initial actions were appropriate. However, it lacked the systematic, thorough analysis required for a robust research project. One example of this was that, as noted, the co-researchers were particularly interested in the children’s learning and so had a tendency to focus upon this area of interest, some elements of which did not relate fully to the research questions. This was important to them and to the children’s development, so could not be discounted, but it was necessary to link back to the research questions and not to be constrained by setting requirements. For this reason, all data was analysed thematically following the initial phase.

Bazeley’s (2013) process of ‘read, reflect and connect’ (p.101) was influential in this project. The earlier ‘play’ stages conducted by the co-researchers, with me, addressed the sub-questions and raised discussions about connections, relationships, learning from other people, intergenerational activity and new ways of working, among others, and this paved the way for the thematic analysis conducted by me alone, which produced a response to the overarching research question. This was subsequently shared with members of the research team for clarification (Burnard et al., 2008, p.431). There was little difference between the two phases, but the second was more systematic.

***4.7.3 Generation of Categories and Themes – Stage Two analysis***

Once all data was collated, read and reflected upon, and some themes had been suggested, formal thematic analysis began. It was agreed by the group that I would do this, in consultation with co-researcher Diane. This was a time consuming and thorough process which occurred outside of the larger Research Circle meetings, in smaller meetings which took place in a confidential space. Each data set (Research Circle including floorbook entries, my observations, and interviews) was reread systematically in turn and key words and phrases that would help to answer the research questions were highlighted with coloured pens in open coding. Some of the data was not coded. This included some informal discussion within the interviews and some work-related discussion within the Research Circles. While these were relevant to the practitioners, and helped to answer questions for the volunteers, they were not relevant to the research questions. According to Burnard (2008, p.430) this is usual practice.

Research Circle Data (which included the reflections of the children and observations of co-researchers) was coded first, followed by my field observations and transcripts of interviews with the older adults. At this stage, the advice of Cohen et al. (2011, p.540) proved correct. The data was so rich and extensive that the selection and organising process was labour intensive and there was the potential to be exposed to conflicting subjectivities, so I had to remain respectful of any differing opinions. I also had to be mindful of the need for a final report to be produced that captured differing viewpoints and reflections from the various participants and for this reason I attached some notes of observations and areas of interest to the words and phrases to maintain an audit trail of information for later reference and potential clarification. Within the analysis of each of the three data sets (Observations, Research Circles incorporating floorbooks and interviews), a focus on answering research questions meant that attention was paid initially to key words in the research questions such as ‘benefits’, ‘interaction’ ‘knowledge exchange’ and overall ‘impact of engagement’, all with an intergenerational focus.

Having highlighted each of the key words and phrases gathered from the Research Circles, I created a typed document refining all open codes, showing links to the research questions, notes and indicating which data set they were from. This was useful later when I needed to return to certain data for detailed examples. I cut them out, then arranged and rearranged them into categories which would help to answer the research questions, as recommended by Bazeley (2013, p.181) (See examples in Appendix 15). Although co-researchers were invited to participate, only Diane participated.

Using these areas as a main focus, key terms and phrases within the data were arranged under emerging categories and themes. This was an inductive approach (Burnard et al., 2008, p.429), popular within qualitative research. This process was repeated for observations and for the interviews. The audit trail included a note of which of the interviews the data came from and which week the observation originated. This was necessary to see patterns emerging over the weeks of the research and examples are included in Chapter 5.

A grid was then created which merged and refined some codes and indicated where codes spanned the data sets. This analysis identified patterns and themes when working through the data and I determined 44 initial categories. There was some crossover of categories, clearly shown colour-coded in Table 5.0.

Some codes spanned all areas while others were situated in just the one, which was not a surprise. For example, in my observations I would not have known about a change of behaviour in a child unless I was informed of this by someone who knew them well. Nor would I have known that practitioners were questioning their practice or that older adult volunteers had particular concerns, unless they shared them at interview or in Research Circles.

Refinement of the categories led to the creation of four main themes, agreed by the co-researchers. These were subsequently refined once more following advice from my supervisor (see Figure 5.0 + Chapter 5), for ease of dissemination.

**4.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has explained the research approach and stages and shown how co-production with co-researchers impacted upon the work that was done. It describes the ethical foundations of the project and the complications emerging from aspects of data gathering, working with a number of individuals in different roles, and through participatory research. It has also stated how the research question and sub-questions developed and were responded to by co-researchers, offering a picture of how they were explored in the Research Circle. This aspect of the project is given considerable attention, as it had many positives in relation to engaging the co-researchers in initial data analysis. Further, this chapter has outlined who took what role and what this meant for the role of lead researcher.

In addition, the chapter has outlined the organisation and the initial and thematic analysis of the data. The following chapter will present the data and discuss the key findings that emerged, illustrated using vignettes, interview extracts and images from the process.

***CHAPTER 5***

***Data and Discussion***

***5.0 Introduction***

Within this participatory action research project I set out to work alongside Early Years Practitioners, as co-researchers, in research which was meaningful to them and which built upon their current practice. By way of Research Circles these co-researchers opted to develop their urban Forest School provision by introducing older adults to everyday practice with young children and engaging the children as participants in the research. The first four chapters introduced the research, reviewed the literature and outlined the methodology employed; this chapter now presents the data and findings from this research and discusses their significance.

Participatory research methods seek out unheard voices (Institute of Development Studies, 2018; Cowie et al., 2014). This research offers an opportunity for the views of all participants – in this case practitioners, who were also co-researchers, older adults and young children –to be foregrounded in different ways. I introduced the participants in Chapter 4. However, although I acknowledge my role as lead researcher in describing and interpreting the co-researchers’ reflections on the process, they are inextricably woven with my own throughout this chapter and within Chapter 6.

Before I discuss my findings, I present a summary of my data in Table 5.0.

***5.1 Presentation of the Data***

This analysis identified patterns and themes when working through the data, and 44 initial categories were determined. See Table 5.0. The categories which spanned data sets, and which were applicable to more than one research sub-question, are clearly colour coded. Some codes spanned all areas while others were situated in just one, which was not a surprise. For example, in my observations I would not have known about a change of behaviour in a child unless I was informed of this by someone who knew them well, such as a practitioner. Nor would I have known that practitioners were questioning their practice or that older adult volunteers had particular concerns, unless they shared them at interview or in Research Circles.

**Table 5.0 Initial 44 Categories determined from the data**

Key:

* orange – challenging
* blue – collaborative (interactions)
* green – affective
* red intergenerational learning

RC = research circle, obs =observation;

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Link to Research Question** | **Category** | **RCs** | **Obs** | **Interview** | **Comment / for later use (aide memoir)** |
| **Benefits**  **(B)** | Overcoming anxiety (perceived and actual)/ emotional issues/ problem solving (and red)and orange | √ | √ | √ | wellies. emotional anxiety. hills. (Sophie) Lack of Patience (E). All participants had fears. Spider House Week 2 (Jack) |
| Overcoming anxiety (perceived and actual)/ problem solving / physical worries also red, and orange, and green | √ | √ | √ | Physical ability / gradients and demands of FS. OAs. Nate assisting I to camp – spontaneous. Also Elle. |
| Opportunities/ surprise | √ | Also KE | √ | Behaviour (jack). Daredevil E but could also be fun wk6. |
| Changing attitude /Questioning practice (and red) | √ |  | √ | Guidance, blog, observe. Can do things previously thought impossible. |
| Behaviour changes (and red) | √ |  | √ | RC reflections |
| Recall/ reflection/ storying | √ | Also KE and I | √ | Floorbooks. children. Practitioners later reflections to be kept for results/discussions |
| Inspiring others (parents, practitioners, children) | √ |  |  | Blog (and challenging others just by working together) |
| Time / unhurried / calm | √ |  | √ (also I) | Calm. Austin. |
| Learning new language | √ | Also KE and I |  | Older adults and children |
| Skill development / learning | √ | √ | √ | Mastery of raking Wk 3/5 (Jack) |
| Fun (and red) | √ Also I | √ | √ | For child and adults E |
| **Knowledge Exchange**  **(KE)** | Children as experts(and orange) | √ | √  Also I | √ | child asserting competence /recognised as (Luke, Olivia, Elle) |
| Challenging assumptions. Difference and diversity (re age & ability)(and orange) | √ |  | √ | Old people have sticks and scooters… so volunteers not old |
| Sharing personal experiences | √ | √ Also I | √ Also I | Austin, Ashley, Annie, John, Libby - all children. E and I |
| Learning from others through experience and tacit knowledge | √ | √  Also I | √ | Scraper / rake. Wk 3 Jack  Broomstick Week 6 .leaves.w3 Austin |
| Working and playing together / turntaking (all) | √ | √ | √ | From wk 1 |
| Skill development and learning | √ | √ | √ | Annie |
| Learning via books | √ | √ |  | Olivia, Elle, Sophie, jack |
| Non judgemental/ inclusive | √ | Also I | Also I | In conversation and practice |
| Different ways of working and thinking also orange | √ | √ | √ | E I plus pracs |
| Environment (weather, location, nature – observe/inform) also orange | √ | √ | √ | (also in I- to practise) |
| Emotional resilience and green | √ | √ |  | Tackling new things – step/tree |
| **Interactions**  **(I)** | Physical connection – hand holding, touch, hug, boundaries, body lang | √ | √ | √ | And physical challenge  Sara -floorbook |
| Written letter (and red) | √ |  |  | Not stated in interview but informed by practitioner |
| Empathy/ helping / sharing | √ | √ | √ | Elle, Olivia, Nate, |
| Verbal connection – request help, questioning, naming, encouraging, informing, instructing, | √ | √  Also KE | √ | Turn taking, |
| negotiation, feeling safe and secure | √ | √ Also KE | √ | Annie |
| Patience (and time) | √ |  | √ |  |
| Emotions (enjoyment, love, fear) | √ | √ | √ | Annie, Sophie, Elle, all children |
| Respect | √ |  | √ | Jack |
| Invitation to play | √ (also KE) | √ | √ | Ashley, Austin, Sophie |
| Trust (bond, friendship) also red | √ | √ | √ | Lunch time logs wk 5. Holding tree Wk1. jack |
| Listening | √ | √ | √ |  |
| Praise | √ |  | √ |  |
| reassurance / confidence building/ encouragement | √ | √ | √ |  |
| Negotiation (from conflict too) |  | √ |  |  |
| Playing collaboratively/problem solving / teamwork | √ (also KE) | √ | √ Also B | And demonstrating learning |
| Making choices | √ | √ | √ |  |
| Manners/ gratitude | √ also B | √ | √ | Wk1 ‘thank you for helping’ |
| Relationship building | √ | √ | √ |  |
| Humour |  | √ |  |  |
| Demonstrating | √ | √ |  |  |
| Body language | √ | √ |  | Sara |
| Turn taking |  | √ |  |  |
| Reflecting (related to Intergenerational way of working) |  | √ |  | Floor book activity |

***5.2 Refining the Categories to Determine Themes***

The categories were arranged into four main themes and, following supervisory advice, these were refined once more for ease of dissemination. This was more of a terminology alteration rather than altering our data. The final themes were arranged relating to the types of participation which emerged from the data in this context:

1. Affective Participation – including the feelings and attitudes noted. Green
2. Collaborative Participation – including interactions (physical, verbal, written) Blue
3. Learning through Intergenerational Participation – distinct examples of difference made because of young children and older adults engaging. Red
4. Challenging Participation – Including problem-solving and overcoming difficulties. Orange

These final themes were shared, discussed and agreed with co-researchers. Figure 5.0, below, shows how the categories were configured into themes.

There is some overlap between the themes, and many more examples could have been added. However, I have, for clarity, presented a series of examples of data that demonstrate and make explicit how the range of responses were understood and organised under each theme.

It is important to reflect at this stage on the initial research questions and how the findings that emerged from the initial and thematic analysis relate to them and to the participatory approach.

In considering the impact of engagement between older adults and young children in an urban Forest School environment, some co-researchers were concerned at the outset about the potential lack of engagement between older adults and young children within that context, and that interactions (sub question 1) may not occur, or that support may be required. They were also aware that interactions are best where they are not forced (Fisher, 2016). However, they were surprised by the developing connections, rapid engagement and working together. This was determined as **collaborative participation**.

**Figure 5.0 Determining themes from the research data (see also Table 5.0)**

The anticipatory fears, emerging concerns and array of emotions, both positive and negative, which emerged through the research were determined as **affective participation**. The reason for this is that emotions can affect our learning, or knowledge exchange (sub question 2), and some emotions challenged participants, creating noted benefits (sub question 3). Furthermore, the findings determined that there were a number of scenarios where learning occurred which were unique to the older adults and young children engaging. These examples of learning would not have happened without the presence of the older adults. This was determined to be **learning through intergenerational participation**. Finally, multiple benefits were noted for all participants, including the co-researchers, as they experienced physical and cognitive challenges, creating the final theme of **challenging participation.**

The four themes, discussed in turn, are illustrated with examples from the data such as interview extracts and images from the process and with vignettes, as advocated by Bazeley (2013, p.124). I define vignettes here as short descriptive accounts which bring the data alive, although I acknowledge that they are used in differing ways in various disciplines (Kandemir and Budd, 2018; Palaiologou, 2018).

These vignettes began to develop through the Research Circles as the co-researchers and I interpreted the data and the way in which they were chosen varied. Some were inspired by children’s responses (Appendix 17) while others emerged from the ways in which practitioners may reflect on individual children’s responses and the changes they observed. For example, Jack’s vignettes emerged because the notable difference in his behaviour, learning and emotional development caused astonishment and deep discussion among the co-researchers throughout the duration of the research. They identified changes which they believed could only be attributed to the presence of the older adults. Ashley’s vignette was inspired by co-researcher Cathy, who emailed me details of their reflective conversation back at nursery. Austin and Sophie’s vignettes arose because of co-researcher reflections, while Isobel’s story was one of her highlights of the research and Emily’s benefits came directly from her interviews. The vignettes adopt structures appropriate to their content and consequently differ, reflecting Miles, Huberman and Saldana’s (2014) comment that there is no firm guidance regarding the writing of them. Some vignettes were written by me alone and others became shared narratives as different perspectives and observations were included. The examples and vignettes in this chapter endeavour to bring the research to life, whilst remaining rooted in the data. To reiterate, the research questions which emerged from the Research Circles, as a result of employing a participatory approach were:

**What is the impact of engagement between older adults and young children in an urban ‘Forest School’ environment?**

The sub-questions were:

1. How do young children interact with older adults within an urban Forest School environment?

2. What is the nature of the knowledge exchange between young children and older adults within an urban Forest School environment?

3. What are the benefits of integrating different generations within an urban Forest School environment (for adults and children)?

**5.3 Theme One: Affective Participation**

The theme of affective participation emerged as ‘affect’ was a strong topic of discussion throughout the research. This section describes some of the emotions and feelings experienced and / or discussed by participants as they engaged in this research. I will explore the changes in emotional responses related to the stages of the project.

The concepts of affect and emotions are woven into human life and span disciplines (Slaby and von Scheve, 2019). They are at the core of everyday activity, of relations with others and with materials (Fenwick, 2015), and are essential to consider when investigating real life situations. Emotions may be brief and intense, rising from within. They can be positive or negative and influence our actions.

Affect may be apparent in situations where power relations operate. In the wider world, affect permeates political and media communications in a controlling or powerful way, for example with opposing debates regarding Brexit or the refugee crisis (Slaby and von Scheve, 2019). Equally, individuals may be affected by power relations within research or within an educational group situation, as discussed earlier. This may affect participation (Kirby and Gibbs, 2006).

Emotions fluctuate. Each day we may have feelings of excitement or distress. We may be engaged or frustrated, and our experiences can potentially promote or impair learning (Green and Batool, 2017). Immordino-Yang (2016) informs how developments in neuroscience have taught us that emotions are central to memory-making, decision-making and critical thinking, based upon an individual’s current understanding of the world which can develop with experience. This indicates that careful consideration needs to be given to the participants’ emotions and feelings during research, as well as cognitive development, as their affect can influence participation and learning.

I begin by presenting the feelings experienced by participants prior to meeting in the Forest School as this pre-preparation was a crucial stage which had the potential to impact upon later engagement, interactions, knowledge exchange and benefits. Indeed, the emotional responses changed with the stages of the project and this will be made clear. Within Chapter 4 we saw how, prior to the fieldwork taking place, the children expressed no concerns (although as educators we were aware that concerns may emerge). While their enthusiasm to meet and support the older adults or ‘visitors’ was observed, the children offered supportive suggestions about preparing the older adults for the research and keeping them safe. This indicated an interest in engagement and a care for others. According to the co-researchers, this may have been due to the prior experiences of the children in Forest School as they had previously experienced inclement weather, litter and so on. We also noted the interest, yet fears, of the co-researchers, wondering how, or if, engagement would happen. Meanwhile, older adults were being recruited and their feelings before taking part are now shared:

***Despite some concerns, older adults were motivated to engage with young children in the outdoor environment***

The initial call for participants for this research project captured the interest of older adults Isobel and Emily, and they responded. In their initial interviews, both Emily and Isobel explained their lifelong interest in the outdoors, of ‘camping’ (Isobel and Emily) and ‘gardening’ (Isobel) as well as their work with children in their pre-retirement careers and voluntary roles. Emily had ‘not previously heard of Forest School’ but ‘fancied doing something new’ and was eager to know more. Explaining her reasons for taking part, Emily said:

I like contact with young children. I don’t do much for children now. I mean, it’s 10 years since I retired and I was heavily involved with children for most, well, all of, my career so this is the ideal opportunity... I’m quite enthusiastic about things… it’s an opportunity to play and to explore with children outside…without having the ultimate responsibility (but you do still feel responsible). (Emily, 4 September 2015)

While Isobel responded:

I think this will be a lovely opportunity to work with these children in an environment that’s fresh, friendly and lovely for them to learn so many things … Oh, I’ll *love* being with the children. I’m sure *I’ll* learn from *them* as well.

(Isobel, 5 September 2015)

This research project offered both Emily and Isobel an opportunity to re-engage in an environment that appealed to them and to build upon their prior interests. Emily was motivated by the chance to learn something new, by the outdoor environment and by engagement with children, as well as the lack of overall responsibility. This indicates a change of role from being a teacher or parent, and I will return to this later. Isobel too was excited by working alongside children – particularly in the outdoor area – with an expectation from the start of the project of a ‘mutual learning opportunity’. For both Emily and Isobel, there was an emotional connection both with children and with the place where Forest School would occur. Their interest could be attributed to their earlier life experiences and that they could anticipate enjoyment. Buman et al.’s (2010) study used a narrative approach to explore barriers and motivators to physical activity in older adults by firstly determining how experiences across the lifespan may affect current thinking, then demonstrating how ‘beliefs and experiences formed at a young age were manifested over time to determine current behaviours and attitudes’ (p. 223). Emily and Isobel had prior experience of the outdoors, and of working with children. They valued both yet were not engaged with either at the start of the research project. The project offered them an opportunity to engage in an area of interest, which was relaxed and informal, and to challenge themselves while supporting others.

Intergenerational activity occurs in a ‘place’ (Mannion et al., 2010, p. 8), and this place, the Forest School, enthused both volunteers. They were intrigued by the novelty of the situation and were willing to share their time and skills. Furthermore, despite their initial concerns, these women were still eager to embrace the challenge, suggesting that in addition to the motivations suggested by Agate et al. (2018), an element of challenge, and choice, may also have been relevant to the women’s participation. In addition, the length of the activity and commitment expected were also relevant as ‘six weeks is just right – I have a busy life!’ (Emily).

Despite this enthusiasm, both participants also had concerns and expressed them in their initial interviews. Emily was hesitant, saying:

I’m not sure how I’ll get on because I haven’t done anything outdoors for a while. I’m a bit rusty… but I like trees and the countryside and being surrounded by nature – I used to be in the Woodcraft Folk – we’ll see how we go and whether I’ve got the patience (Emily, 4 September 2015).

Isobel too had concerns, yet remained confident, and clarified:

I can’t walk as far as I could at one time. I’m a bit more restricted… but it’ll be fine… I love the outdoors (Isobel, 5 September 2015).

In this context, Emily and Isobel were motivated to participate as, in addition to wanting to work alongside children and their practitioners, the place, the activity and the timings suited their interests. While socio-emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen et al., 1999) suggests that time influences goals and that older adults are more likely to focus upon activity which gives ‘affective gain’ (Lim and Yu, 2015, p.2), these findings are also a contribution to knowledge.

The findings are inconsistent with those of Martins et al. (2019, p.106) who, in their systematic review of a wide variety of intergenerational programmes, found that the contact between the generations was the factor for success of any intergenerational programme and not the activity itself. Also, as highlighted in the literature review, Martins et al. (2019, p.107) called for further research into ‘participants’ motivations’. In my research, the women were eager to work with young children, confirming the intergenerational contact desire, yet the outdoor activity was also a challenge and a motivator for Isobel and Emily. The planned intervention invited intergenerational activity to take place (Bratianu and Orzea, 2012) while the non-formal, carefully considered, location where this intergenerational activity was situated was significant (Mannion, 2012). This indicates that not only were these women cheered up by the prospect of working with young children but their choices were based on sought out experiences that offer them autonomy and challenge.

However, it cannot be assumed that all older adults would feel the same way. Isobel was excited to get involved, but said she had faced some opposition from friends who ‘thought I was crackers going in the forest for six weeks’ reminding us that we cannot assume an older population is homogenous in their dispositions and experiences just as children are not (James and Prout, 2015). Isobel remained undeterred.

This data is of particular interest as Martins et al. (2019, p.107) urge the necessity of investigating the ‘…implications, and knowledge of participants’ motivations’ in intergenerational projects. Agate et al. (2018, p.399) suggest that motivation for engaging in intergenerational research can depend upon ‘affordability of the opportunity, physical access, general interest in offerings or emotional connectedness’ and each of these elements were present in this study. For example, the Forest School project was freely available to the older adult participants, with lunch and transport to and from the venue offered as required. Both women were eager to work with young children and were excited by the outdoor woodland, despite underlying fears.

These findings imply that the participants in this research project were motivated by the activity due to their interests, but it is not known whether they would have been drawn to different activity, for example by reading within the classroom, or with a different age group. It also appears that one-size-does-not-fit all, and different people may be motivated by different opportunities. The fieldwork phase was about to bring many more feelings and emotions to the fore. I move on to consider feelings in the fieldwork phase.

***Children were affected by the older adults, and by the environment***

This section was influenced by the co-researchers observations and discussions in Research Circles. As Forest School educators used to working with these children, they could identify changes in the atmosphere and in actions of the children.

*As the minibus arrived at Forest School, Elle (3 years 10 months) excitedly shouted, ‘there’s Emily… where’s the other grown up?’ Jack (3 years 10 months) commented ‘She’s called Isobel, Elle’. As they looked out of the windows, Isobel appeared. ‘There she is’ shrieked several excited voices.*

[Jane and Kay field notes. 15 September 2015].

*Annie (3 years, 10 months) disembarked from the minibus and held out her right hand with palm outstretched. She paused for a moment then tilted back her head, closed her eyes and put out her tongue. Isobel stood near her, watching and waiting. Moments later Annie told Isobel, ‘was catchin’ raindrops’.* [My field notes. 15 September 2015]

*Luke (4 years) stood beneath a horse chestnut tree and called out, ‘Let’s go on an adventure’ followed by ‘oh! the mushroom’s gone’.*

[My field notes. 15 September 2015]

These observations indicated that these children seemed happy to be in that place and were willing to engage – with people and with the environment. According to the co-researchers, their actions were usual for this group. As children disembarked from the minibus, they were immediately immersed within a sensory environment and responded in different ways to the stimuli. While Jack, Sophie and Elle immediately went to greet the older adults, Luke was ready for action. He wanted to explore the environment, with others, and recognised changes therein since his last visit. Annie was quieter, pausing to feel the rain. Important for all is that each child was able to experience the environment, to meet new people and, as desired, to experience awe and wonder of the place they were in. Demonstrating characteristics of effective learning (Stewart, 2011; Woods, 2015), children were engaged, motivated and were beginning to make choices. Embracing a place-responsive approach (Mannion et al., 2013; Lynch and Mannion, 2016), the co-researchers facilitated learning by returning to familiar places, which change with the seasons, and where new provocations are found. They welcomed the children’s varied responses.

Although responses to the environment were anticipated, co-researchers were rather surprised by the rapid engagement with the older adults, having expected their children to be more hesitant. Cathy said, ‘the first thing that struck me is that the children just seemed to integrate’ and Willow agreed, saying ‘it was interesting that they don’t see them [older adults] as any different to us, and still going to them for support and guidance’. Contrary to this, Isobel had expected this engagement, saying ‘I think it’s because all young children have a thirst for knowledge and willingly engage’. In saying this, Isobel confirmed she was ‘drawing upon her varied personal and professional experiences with children’. A possible reason for any conflict of opinions could be individual experiences and learning from literature. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate children’s literature, calls for the gaps in literature to be filled and to promote positive ageing (McGuire, 2016) are forthcoming.

Many more emotions were recorded, including distress, happiness and determination and these are present across all themes in vignettes. The first vignette, Jack’s Journey, demonstrates a variety of emotions displayed by one of the children, Jack (3 years 10 months), during his first morning with the older adults in Forest School. Jack’s example was chosen as his observations span all four themes across the six-week period of the project, and shed light on each of the research questions.

***Vignette: Jack’s Journey, Part 1***

Following Jack’s excitement at meeting the new older adults, and during that first morning as he played independently alongside Isobel, Jack was observed by Isobel watching a spider crawling on the ground. As it crawled over twigs and soil, Jack began to make something with his hands.

Jack: ‘I’m making a spider house’.

Isobel ‘that’s a good idea, I wonder what you will include?’

Jack: ‘a playground… the spider goes there and there... and there’

Jack quietly continued to create the spider house independently. Then disaster struck. Someone accidentally stood on the structure and Jack’s tears flowed. He sobbed in frustration. Needing reassurance, Jack looked towards Isobel for support. He was clearly competent at creating structures, but was overwhelmingly distressed. Isobel calmly acknowledged his upset and suggested they could rebuild it, saying ‘do you want me to help you?’ Jack nodded… paused… the tears stopped… and Isobel sat alongside Jack as he calmly reconstructed it. ‘But’, said Isobel, ‘could this happen again? What could we do to prevent it happening again?’ Jack suggested writing ‘a flag to tell people what it is and keep off’. He drew a ‘spider’ on his flag, writing for a purpose. On completion, Jack smiled, and looked pleased by his achievement. Co-researcher Jane reflected upon this incident stating ‘I was really proud of him today... making progress’.



*Figure 5.1 The Spider House*

Jack appeared to draw comfort from the presence of Isobel, and possible explanations for this will follow. Isobel recognised and respected Jack’s feelings. He had a reason to be upset and he responded to Isobel as she appeared equally concerned about his spider house (and perhaps the well-being of the spider). Isobel did not interfere with the development of his spider house but had the time to sit alongside Jack while he rebuilt it, encouraging his thinking. Jack was calmed by the presence of the older adult, yet he engaged with the materials available to him and worked independently to reconstruct the spider house. He smiled with satisfaction on achieving his goal. This suggests that both the older adult and the materials available to Jack affected his actions and subsequent satisfaction and suggests that sociomaterial approaches (Fenwick, 2015) are relevant with the merging of human influence and non-human objects and places.

This example of Isobel being a calming influence on Jack was just one example in the data of the lack of hurry and calm atmosphere developing in the presence of the older adults in Forest School. This is not to say that calm is always the preferred state. Children will experience a range of feelings and emotions and ideally will experience and be able to talk about these feelings (Standards and Testing Agency, 2019) in order to develop emotional competence (Housman, 2017) and emotional literacy. The terminology and expectations of emotional development can differ internationally and between families too (Corapci, Aksan, and Yagmurlu, 2012).

***A sense of calm developed in the group as older adults and young children worked alongside each other***

Once the older adults were introduced to the Forest School, the practitioner co-researchers noticed an overall feeling of ‘calm’ and a lack of hurry developing in the group, which influenced activity. This was an enhancement to their usual experience within the same place. Diane stated ‘I can’t quite explain it but there was a sense of calm and tranquillity brought to the group by their [the older adults] involvement’. Diane recognised the impact of this calm on the practitioners, which in turn resulted in an unhurried and relaxed experience for all of the children, but particularly for Jack, Austin and Sophie. She pondered the reason for this:

I *wondered whether this was the influence of how in awe we were of the capabilities of the older adults… their getting involved in the outdoors with demanding young children, or whether it was due to us all having the same focus…*

The possible reasons for this sense of calm were contemplated in a Research Circle. Aspects of the setting’s usual pedagogy were discussed, including child-led play, freedom of choice and the impact of play in outdoor natural environments, benefits all discussed by Coates and Pimlott-Wilson (2019) related to their Forest School research. I also wondered whether adult - child ratios made a difference. However, all of these aspects were present when Forest School usually took place without the older adults, including reduced ratios when students or visitors were present. We felt that something different was occurring.

The co-researchers turned to data from the older adults to seek answers. Emily spoke about the fact that she could take her time in the course of everyday activity, something which she attributed to getting older. She argued that, in comparison, ‘young parents (or teachers) always need to rush’ given having so many other responsibilities. Emily also considered:

*when you get older … you look and suddenly realise you’re walking past all this stuff you have missed before… In slowing down and having the time… you discover things that you didn’t even know were there*

Emily expanded on this, recommending stepping back, taking time and following a child’s lead in order to see what would happen next. She felt that she could be ‘totally relaxed and flexible’, revelling in the lack of ‘ultimate responsibility’. While the co-researchers aimed to follow the lead of the children, they recognised their often frenetic activity to set up camp, to organise transport and to complete planned activity, may affect the children differently. As the weeks of the research project progressed, Jane and her co-researcher colleagues continued to acknowledge how a sense of calm was pervasive, something that apparently had a significant impact upon individuals. When asked about further about this in interview 2, Emily responded:

*I did feel totally relaxed. I didn’t feel that I sort of… I had to take any responsibility for them [children] and I mean it does kick in to a certain extent when you have done it all your life…but the more relaxed you are, the calmer the children are and the atmosphere is incredible… you’re more patient because you don’t have the responsibility.*

The data suggests that the presence and participation of Emily and Isobel, who were interested and involved participants, generated a particular sense of calm in the group that was beneficial for everyone. Emily’s data provided a potential reason for this when reporting that she felt ‘totally relaxed’ with the children, partly because she knew that she did not have ultimate responsibility for them. Emily argued that she would not have been able to work like this when she was younger, because she would have been in a position where she had to take responsibility. However, as she no longer had to do that, the result was her being ‘more patient’ with the children and in her approach. Emily’s response is consistent with elements of wisdom suggested by Meeks and Jeste (2009), which include prosocial behaviour, tolerance, understanding of self and balanced emotions. Wisdom is deemed important for society and is often apparent in older adults (Lim and Yu, 2015).

The calm atmosphere also had an impact upon other children and the vignette below, Austin’s story, is another example from the data which illustrates how the calm environment encouraged him to talk at length about his family and other interests. This vignette arose due to the co-researchers’ astonishment at the depth of Austin’s knowledge and experience. Previously he was often quiet and said little about his family. Co-researchers had engaged in discussion with the group of children about grandparents and older adults, but Austin had not contributed to that discussion. The vignette describes how it is possible that Austin, working alongside older adults in a relaxed environment, was reminded of his recent experience of visiting his grandparents. Austin clearly benefited from the calm, unhurried atmosphere, the place and opportunity, and the fact that the older adults took time to really listen to the children.

***Vignette - Austin’s Story***

Austin (aged 3 years 11 months) became engaged in a spontaneous, creative, broomstick-making activity using sticks and ivy found in the forest. This activity had been initiated by children, then supported by Isobel. Austin knew that Isobel was a Grandma as this was discussed earlier. Lunchtime followed this activity and everyone assembled at camp. Usually at this point in time, children and practitioners would eat lunch together and reflect upon the morning. However, today, Austin sat on a tarpaulin, shuffled himself into position next to Isobel, and began to talk:

Austin: My Grandpa is called Opa… He’s Dutch… He lives in Amsterdam… he has a playground and a sand pit outside his house…. [Pause] … C\* lives in the countryside in a different country. My Granny’s just called Granny… [taking a bite of sandwich] I like China… you get two aeroplanes… It’s colder here, we are nearer to the Arctic. In China they have flats… in Amsterdam there are funny flats there…

Isobel: What do you mean?

Austin: [shrugging shoulders, holding outstretched palms and looking puzzled] very strange… they have two bedrooms and a big couch.

Isobel watched Austin as he spoke, nodding and responding at intervals, but not interrupting his train of thought. Austin was relaxed. His facial expressions indicated happiness and enthusiasm. He gesticulated with his hands as he described his experiences. Isobel stayed still, eating her lunch and appearing relaxed. Their engagement lasted for almost twenty minutes, longer than usual, with Austin taking the lead in the conversation.

[My field notes, 21 October 2015, confirmed by, and contributed to, by Isobel]

The active listening by Isobel encouraged Austin further. He was relaxed and comfortable; he trusted Isobel and wanted to converse with her. The conversation then triggered further discussion, unrelated to grandparents, including Austin teaching Isobel about Power Rangers, informing of his holiday and even inviting Isobel to his home. Although this observation could be deemed an interaction, and therefore collaborative participation (Theme 2), it was this child’s opportunity to be heard and to be recognised that was important. He felt important and appeared to revel in his audience. There was no time limit, no rush to move on and the pair could indulge in the moment.

Co-researchers Jane, Ella and Diane all commented that they had learned more about Austin in that one day than they had done previously. The time and interest afforded to Austin, by this person who was a grandparent, and an active listener, was pivotal in him being able to choose to articulate his thoughts and to share his personal experiences.

Austin found an ally in Isobel, in part because she was interested in him (Mayall, 2008) and also because he made connections to his recent experiences with his own grandparents. The unhurried nature of the activity, in that place, combined with Isobel’s relaxed body language and active listening, enabled dialogue and extended lunchtime conversations. The subsequent discussion meant that Austin had an opportunity to engage with someone who had the time to listen to him and to respond appropriately. This should not be taken to imply that the practitioners and co-researchers did not invest time in the children - they did. However, they were ultimately responsible for the children, the meals and the activity, which were not part of the older adults’ role. The fact that Isobel did not have the same responsibilities appeared to have a positive impact on her availability in the setting in that she had more time to give, and was more relaxed, facilitating rich and positive interactions with the children during extended lunchtime conversations. This, in turn, was appealing to Austin, and he seemed even more delighted to have the opportunity to discuss his grandparents. Isobel’s willingness to listen to Austin and to support him revealed unknown information about his life and experiences to the observing co-researchers. It may also be that the way of communicating, and any prompts used and lack of questioning were more familiar to his usual experiences (Flewitt, 2005a, p.213). Jane reflected upon this and other examples of a similar kind later in the project, recognising implications for practice by saying:

*…before completing the project I hadn’t thought about working alongside other people [and]* *seeing how inspired the children were by the older adults made me realise that they could learn so much more from the knowledge of the volunteers*

Jane continued:

*This project has helped me to open my mind to the importance of older adults working with children. Within day nurseries and in my experience, staffing within day nurseries seem to be quite young and therefore children may be missing out on the older generation*

Fisher (2016) argued that successful interactions between adults and children take place when they are in a relaxed environment where there is no agenda to follow. So, with extra interested adults to connect with the children and the freedom of the natural environment (James et al. 2016; The World Health Organisation, 2016) the findings suggest that bringing the older adults into the Forest School environment, the combination of material and human aspects, presented benefits for children by interacting with others and learning in an unhurried way.

Furthermore, the affect of the fusion of older adults, the natural environment and young children is of interest here. Some would call this an entanglement of social and material aspects (Fenwick, 2015; Orlikowski, 2010) or an assemblage (Mannion, 2019, p.1) where the human (the participants) and the non-human (the forest and materials within) may affect each other. Returning to Jack’s vignette, the provocation of the sticks and the spider inspired his activity, but the calm presence of the older adult, whom he trusted, supported his frustration and challenged his thinking as well as valuing his work and emotional responses. The merging of material and the human affected Jack’s experience. In turn, this affected the co-researchers who had time to observe their children. This has potential implications for practice as when older adults work alongside young children in this way, it affords the practitioners time to observe, reflect and to see their children through the eyes of others.

Many more examples of affective participation appeared within the data and some of these will emerge within other themes. For example, some emotions experienced by the children occurred as they collaborated with others, or were challenged by the environment while feelings of the older adults emerge within Theme 4: challenging participation.

This section has offered evidence as to how the engagement of interested older adults with young children, in activity which motivated them and in a place that inspired them, created a calm and unhurried atmosphere. Overall, it has demonstrated the importance of taking affective relationships into account and that slowing things down and valuing emotional responses, without feeling responsible, can be productive. Although this is just one small study, it is interesting that it does not fit entirely with some existing literature (Martins et al., 2019) and highlights that we need to call into question some assumptions that we might make about particular age phases.

**In summary,** data analysis shows that in an informal, unhurried, outdoor context, when motivated older adults and young children are brought together, it brings a sense of calm, which is mutually beneficial to all.

I will now consider aspects of Collaborative Participation, with a particular focus upon interactions between older adults and young children.

**5.4 Theme 2: Collaborative Participation**

This theme focuses upon the interactions which took place within the research and is informed by the types of interactions as discussed in Chapter 2. It initially arose from the co-researchers’ observations of interactions, in response to the first sub-question, which seeks to determine how young children interact with older adults within an urban Forest School environment. These observations, together with my observations and the reflections of children and older adults, revealed the varied nature of the interactions and how the frequency and quality of the interactions developed over the six-week period of the research. In turn this led to firm bonds being formed between the children and older adults. Vignettes from Sara and Jack illustrate these points, together with reflections from other participants. The reason for my choice of vignettes, is that they illustrate different approaches to interacting; Jack interacted verbally from the start of the research, while Sara took her time to engage and interacted mainly through body language and drawing (Flewitt, 2005a; Malaguzzi, 1993). I begin with Sara’s vignette.

***Vignette: Sara’s experience [Shared Narrative: Sara, Kay, Isobel, Jane]***

Sara (3 years 11 months) hovered near her known adults, with a solemn face, and observed as others engaged with the older adults. Emily said, ‘I did say things to her occasionally, but I could see that she was studying me in a sort of ‘I’m not quite sure who you are’ kind of way so ‘I sort of backed off and waited for her to come [to me]’. In time, Sara began to interact.

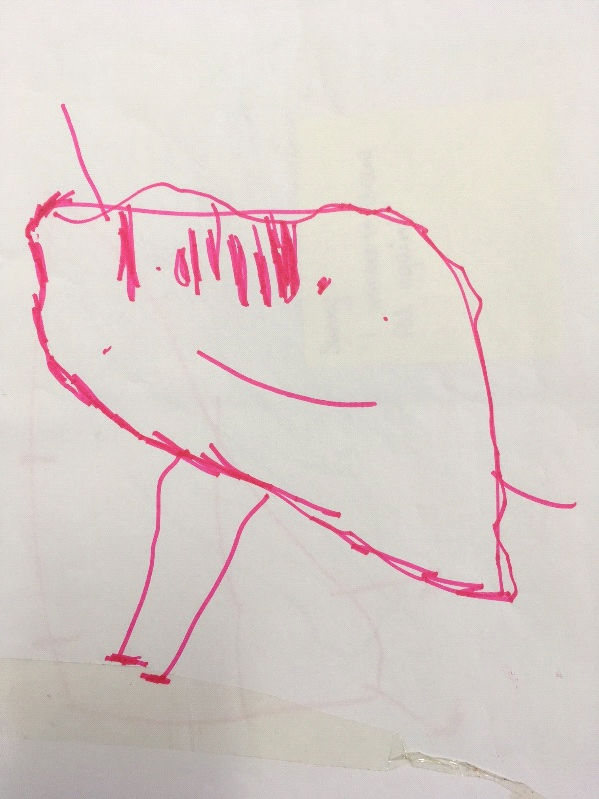
Isobel reflected upon one activity where she was engaged in discussion with several children about a wind chime they had discovered. Due to the lack of wind, each child was taking it in turn to make the chime move, and sound. Sara stood nearby, watching the group. Isobel noted Sara’s body language as she positioned herself near the group, but aside, and looked first to the wind chime and then to Isobel.

Isobel (to Sara): ‘I think you want a turn, do you?’

Sara: nodding, quietly said, ‘yes’.

Isobel: ‘I think it is Sara’s turn now… she has been waiting very patiently’.

The children, who had all had at least one turn by this time, agreed. Sara gingerly stepped forwards, gently shook the wind chime and beamed a huge smile. Later, back at nursery, as the co-researchers reflected upon activity with the children, Sara drew a picture of Emily in floorbook reflections and said, ‘*This is Emily. She’s happy. These are her shoes. I like Emily, she’s nice’* (see Figure 5.2).



*Figure 5.2: Floorbook reflections: ‘Emily’ by Sara:*

Sara appeared to be more confident with her familiar adults in Forest School within the early weeks, and it took her a little longer to engage fully with the older adults, showing that children may have some concerns that develop over time. However, she still had a desire to participate in activity and was supported in expressing her views (Shier, 2001) which she did initially through body language, eye contact and drawing. It was apparent that although both of the older adults offered smiles and warm greetings to Sara, they did not force her to interact with them. The co-researchers were pleased with Emily’s decision not to force interactions with Sara as this showed respect for her decision (Flewitt, 2005a). Equally, Isobel’s interpretation of Sara’s body language was deemed sensitive by the co-researchers as this enabled Sara to make a decision to participate in a way that was right for her (Hart, 1992) and to achieve her desired goal.

Furthermore, at nursery, the co-researchers with whom Sara was more comfortable at that time, were able to reflect upon Forest school activity with Sara, leading to her sharing her views of the older adults through drawing, and by selecting blog content for the nursery’s Forest School blog. At this stage Sara was involved in decision-making (Shier, 2001) for nursery practice. In terms of practice, this vignette implies that the unhurried approach enabled trust to develop between Sara and the older adults and Sara maintained control of the situation until she was ready to engage. This has clear implications for other intergenerational projects.

The second vignette for this theme returns to Jack (aged 3 years 10 months) who readily engaged and interacted verbally with the older adults, Isobel and Emily, from the outset. I chose Jack’s Journey as an example as elements of his story were reflected in the responses of all of the children and it offers a continuity across the lifespan of the research. Jack’s vignettes span all four themes and they respond to each of the research questions, although the main focus here is upon interactions which led to bonds being made between Jack and the older adults.

***Vignette – Jack’s Journey – Part 2***

On his initial arrival at Forest School, Jack immediately connected with Isobel. Used to spending time with his own grandma [confirmed by co-researcher Cathy, Research Circle 2], he seemed eager to engage with this new person. At first, Jack hovered near the visitors, saying ‘look at my hat’ or (action: rubbing two sticks together) ‘this is how you make fire’ as well as pointing out ‘the shoe tree’ and other aspects of the environment. Jack’s main focus was the new adults. He and his friend Elle wanted to ‘teach the ladies about Forest School’ and Jane mused about how ‘strange [it was] to see him going off with someone else’.

Later that day, and following the spider house incident discussed in Theme 1, Jack handed Isobel a large stick-like branch saying, ‘hold my tree please’. Despite co-researcher Jane reflecting ‘I can’t believe that Jack gave his tree to someone else’, Isobel did as instructed, standing patiently for over ten minutes in the same spot. When reminded about Isobel by co-researcher Diane, Jack returned to her, spontaneously saying ‘thank you for holding my tree’. Co-researcher Jane reported that Jack giving Isobel his stick was a ‘massive deal… he must really trust her ‘cos it’s so not like him’.

When a letter arrived at nursery from Isobel, Jack was very interested, and a response was triggered (this will be explained further, below).

Before leaving for Forest School (Week 3) Jack asked a practitioner for a jumper (reminding them that Isobel had suggested in Week 2 how ‘two layers are better than one to keep you warm’). He had remembered and trusted Isobel’s advice. Jack later spontaneously shared his binoculars with Isobel. At this point, recognising how Jack was ‘learning new language, self-care and social skills from Isobel’, and how ‘they really cared about each other’, co-researcher Jane said, ‘It is amazing after only three weeks how important these people [older adults] are’.

Week 4 created a challenge. Ashley and Nate slipped their hands into Isobel’s as they walked along through the forest. Jack hunched his shoulders and looked visibly disappointed. Co-researcher Jane suggested to him that he could wait his turn to hold Isobel’s hand. Jack then approached older adult Emily, who soon became another ‘best friend’. Co-researcher Ella recorded Jack saying: ‘I want to go to the Bat Den… come on Emily, are you coming?’ Emily called back, ‘I’ll come with you… come on’ and off they ran.

Isobel was absent in Week 5 and Emily remained Jack’s best friend. Jack demonstrated his raking skill (learned from Isobel in Week 3 -see Theme 3) and developed his knot-tying and untying skills, guided by Emily (see Theme 3). He even pushed boundaries by tying Emily up (and later releasing her). At lunchtime, the new buddies sat relaxed with their backs to a log, deep in discussion. There were no time pressures and Emily recalled ‘chatting openly and honestly about personal interests and imaginative ideas’. Co-researcher Ella reported this behaviour, saying: ‘… Jack was sitting right back against the log and Emily was sitting right back and engaging with him, It was really nice to see Jack like that’.

By Week 6, the final week of the project, Jack played occasionally with Emily and Isobel who both encouraged the involvement of his peers. Now, towards the end of the project, Jack was playing with his peers, particularly John, in meaningful activity. Just before leaving Forest School, on the final day, Jack called to his new friends, ‘You’re coming to nursery next week, aren’t you?’ checking their acceptance to come for lunch and play. The reason for this, in Jack’s words, was ‘I love Emily and Isobel coming to Forest School. They are fun… cause they help me to do things…and knots’ (Floorbook entry).

[My field notes. Also shared narrative with Jack, Cathy, Isobel, Jane, Diane, Ella].

Within this vignette, it can be seen how Jack expressed himself through body language, verbal interaction and in writing and that his bond with Isobel and Emily developed over the period of the research. Given that Moll and Khalulyan (2017) remind us how children crave reciprocity and do not judge others, it is possible that these children, including Jack, may just have been engaging in their usual way with new group members, or in an appropriate way (Fisher, 2016). However, the data suggests that something more was happening. Co-researcher Jane indicated that the interest and trust shown by Jack towards Isobel was unusual for him, as he did not usually ‘bother with new people’. Instead, Jack demonstrated an immediate connection with Isobel, then Emily, which the co-researchers attributed to his own positive experiences with his grandma.

Jack’s immediate and growing trust of Isobel, and Emily, can be explained by reference to Vanderbilt, Liu and Heyman (2011, p.1378) who set out to discover how pre-schoolers can determine the reliability of individuals, and cite research which suggests that preschool children do understand how some people are more reliable than others (Heyman, 2008) . Findings from their research (Vanderbilt et al., 2011) showed how four-year-olds do not fully understand the requirements for trusting someone but that they could identify traits from others’ past behaviours. Furthermore, children do not ‘blindly trust the words of others’ (Koenig and Sabbagh, 2013, p.399). Vanderbilt, Liu and Heyman (2011) summarised that ‘children’s reasoning about who to trust is closely intertwined with their developing understanding of mental life’ (p.1379). This recognises that children are able to identify more knowledgeable others in their world in order to glean information, although how they interpret that information may depend upon their stage of development and prior experiences. In addition, this would corroborate the co-researchers’ view that Jack’s positive experiences with his grandma contributed to his rapid relationship and trust with Isobel and Emily. If the trust was there, as he knew he could rely upon his grandma, then this could contribute to him greeting and interacting with the new older adults so eagerly. When distressed about the ‘spider house’ (Theme 1), Jack was sensitively encouraged by Isobel to rebuild his construction. On other occasions, Jack also retained the information shared with him by Isobel, including in relation to the jumpers, showing how he deemed her knowledge to be reliable. The early interactions and bonds that resulted led to examples of learning for Jack including emotional resilience, practical skills and collaborative play, supporting Vygotsky’s theory that social relations precede development (Shabani, 2016).

By contrast, not all children have prior experience with grandparents or older adults and nor are all lived experiences positive. Concern could have arisen that they would not be able to engage in the same way as Jack or Austin. Consistent with earlier work by Proietti et al. (2013), the data seem to imply that although every child willingly interacted with both adults to varying degrees during the lifetime of the project, where children (such as Jack and Austin) had pre-existing, positive experience of older adults, for example in relationships with their own grandparents (as confirmed by the co-researchers), they more readily engaged and interacted with other older adults. However, other children, who did not have pre-existing relationships did, over time, also develop trust and positive relationships with both older adults meaning that such experiences, with positive role models are even more essential for children without the experiences. So, although those with experience interacted more readily, no children were coerced to engage and all children soon embraced the older adults and accepted them as a part of their group.

Isobel reflected upon the significance of Jack’s vignette in Interview 2 and made links to events in later weeks (see Themes 3 and 4). Despite her choosing not to attend the Research Circles the research boundaries blurred here a little, in a productive way, as Isobel (and Emily on other occasions) began to analyse what was occurring and was interested in the research questions. Isobel began by identifying strengths of the engagement with children and practitioners. As a retired Health Visitor she appeared to prioritise the children’s well-being over their learning and kept detailed reflective notes and insightful comments, demonstrating how she had got to know the children and practitioners rather well. These have been used to support the development of the vignettes and were handed to the co-researchers.

It could be argued that such support given by Isobel to Jack, may have been offered by practitioners. However, the co-researchers’ evaluation of the full day’s activity and subsequent actions back at nursery led them to determine how the relationship had been building between Jack and Isobel during the morning and trust had formed rapidly. They agreed that none of them would have stood with a stick for ten minutes, but Isobel had the time and patience to do as requested.

Furthermore, the developing bond between Jack and Isobel was promoted by the arrival of the post person at nursery the following day. The letter writingmentioned in Jack’s vignette, began when Isobel spontaneously sent a letter to the nursery children, after day one, thanking them for allowing her to visit Forest School and saying how much she had enjoyed the experience. This provoked conversations. The letter writing was unplanned, and the responses were unexpected. Isobel also wrote that she was looking forward to returning the following week. Isobel had not informed the practitioner co-researchers of her intention to write to the children, but owing to interest the letter generated among all of the children, she continued to write one letter each subsequent week. Letter writing came naturally to Isobel as she learned the etiquette as a child. She also knew the ‘thrill of receiving letters’ and how this process could support literacy development. Although letter writing is a cultural tool, many say that it is becoming a ‘lost art’ (Garfield, 2013; Higgins, 2012) with the internet era being cited as one cause, as emails or text messages are now the most familiar forms of communication.

The letter writing triggered great interest and each week, as they anticipated the arrival of the ‘postie’ (Elle), the children became eager to be the one who could open the envelope and for the content to be read to them. This act also inspired other children who did not attend Forest School activity, leading to them becoming engaged in storytelling (Section 5.6.6) and later, at the final celebration event, welcoming the older adults as their friends too. Jack, and other children then wrote their own letters and drew pictures in response. This activity ran alongside the floorbook activity, and supported planning for subsequent weeks (by practitioners and children working together), developing symbolic mark-making skills for some children. This not only aided reflection upon Forest School sessions, but built upon the speech and lived experiences which occurred in the Forest School, and developed thinking (Vygotsky, 1998). It appeared that Isobel had triggered an interest in the children and co-researchers, with written letters, inspiring them to work collaboratively in planning and responses. This was authentic, situated, affective literacy practice rather than contrived activity.

As the interactions between the children and the older adults increased, so did the bonds. By Week 4 there was spontaneous hand-holding and informal pet names given to adults by some children. For example, Elle called out, ‘let’s go Emmy’, to Emily as she urged her to join in an activity. Elle was developing an informal connection with Emily (which Emily appreciated) and the two partners ran off together to play, thereafter engaging in activity. By Week 6, boundaries were starting to be pushed during play because of growing familiarity, and in fun. An example of this occurred when children climbed onto Emily as she pretended to sleep at lunchtime and Emily remarked that, by that point, she felt ‘a full member of the team’. Consistent with Fisher’s (2016) research, the interactions were supported by the relaxed atmosphere, the developing trust between the participants and the desire for mutual interaction. This has implications for both practice and future research. Although the children initially appeared to trust and welcome the older adults, the consistent approach over several weeks enabled more in-depth interactions and bonds that may not have been observed after one or two sessions. This appears to mirror the findings of Martins et al. (2019, p.106) which determined how ‘a longer follow up, with weekly/biweekly sessions’ would be preferable to one-off activity. Furthermore, it is important who we introduce our children to, from a safeguarding point of view, as they can be so trusting.

In summary, within this theme, data analysis shows that when older adults and young children collaborate in varying ways over time over time, in a calm, non-formal, urban forest school environment, respectful, trusting relationships build. Trust is key for reciprocity.

Furthermore, indications of a uniqueness of activity between these age groups is emerging and it is to that we now turn.

**5.5 Theme Three: Learning through Intergenerational Participation**

This section presents the findings which relate to the theme of Learning through Intergenerational Participation. The theme initially arose from the Research Circles when observations were scrutinised and, using Ward et al.’s (2012, p.298) 5-step framework of knowledge exchange, it was determined where and when knowledge exchange had occurred specifically between the older adults and young children. Not only was it found that the knowledge exchange went in different directions (from child-to-adult, adult-to-child), but also that some of the exchanges would not have occurred without the older adults and young children working together in this context. This theme responds to all research questions, but mainly the second sub-question related to knowledge exchange. Reflections within this section from co-researchers, the generation between the young children and older adults, show how they too learned and benefited from the experience.

Some aspects of the data appeared unique to generations working alongside each other and it is upon these that the section focuses. The section begins with three specific examples of children learning in engagement with older adults, as identified by the co-researchers. Next follows an example of joint decision-making, and collaboration, between Isobel and Elle which also led to new learning. Finally, examples of how the children emerge as experts in the environment are presented.

***5.5.1 Children learning from older adults: examples from the co-researchers***

The learning that took place within the project occurred in many different forms; however, the learning that was of most interest to the practitioner co-researchers was the children’s. Within their roles as Early Years practitioners, they regularly plan for and observe learning opportunities, so they were eager to identify learning and share it with each child’s key person, and to add the observations to Learning Journals back at nursery. Learning Journals are records of each child’s learning and achievement, linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage, which are developed within the nursery and shared with parents. A significant number of observations related to such learning and development and this was a natural process as the children were the focus for the practitioners. However, only the observations and data which included the older adults were used for analysis in respect of the research in this thesis. In determining the learning for the children, it was important for me to identify aspects that the child would not have had if the older adults had not been present.

The data suggests that all children learned from the older adults throughout the research (See Appendix 16 for examples of learning between older adults and young children as discussed in Research Circles), and examples of children’s perspectives are offered at Appendix 17. It was from these responses that the vignettes and examples were drawn and expanded upon. There were numerous examples of explicit and tacit knowledge-sharing, three of which were discussed by the co-researchers and are shared below. In addition, by being introduced to and working alongside the older generation, further benefits emerged for the children. The children became experts in the Forest School as they, unprompted, began to teach these older adults. By working alongside the older adults, the children also gained a growing awareness of difference and diversity, aspects explored later.

In their reflections, and by referring to Ward et al. (2012), co-researchers identified examples of learning which would not have occurred for this group of children without the presence of the older adults. The first example grew from the trusting bond developed between child and adult which enabled a readiness to learn. The second example involved a coaching technique which is not normally used by the practitioners and finally, the third example includes historical knowledge not known to the practitioners in this instance. The first example occurred in Week 3 when children were selecting and using tools in their play.

***Vignette - Jack’s Journey, part 3 – The Scraper – adult-to-child, then child-to-child***

Within Forest School, a trolley was available with various tools and gadgets on. Children were independently selecting their chosen tools. Jack (3 years, 10 months) asked for a ‘scraper’ tool, picked it up, and began to use it. Observing this, Isobel realised that Jack did not know the correct name for the tool.

Isobel: Would you like to know the real name for that?

Jack: Yes

Isobel: It’s a rake.

Jack: It scrapes very well… you try

Isobel: What do you want me to do?

Jack: Scrape the leaves.

Isobel: OK, I will rake the leaves (modelling the correct use of the word and effective use of the tool – pulling back rather than pushing forwards, then return the rake to Jack)

Two weeks later Jack collected a rake from the trolley. He named it correctly and demonstrated its use to his peer, John. Co-researcher Jane commented to Jack how he had learned that from someone. Jack remembered that Isobel had taught him how to use the tool, as well as teaching him the correct name for it.

In this context, knowledge exchange was facilitated by a range of factors. The older adult concerned, who was not a teacher, had the time, skill, and insight to teach and support Jack in a sensitive manner, as well as having tacit knowledge (for example, the ability to name and use the tool correctly). Furthermore, she skilfully positioned him as the leader of the activity. Thus, Jack was able to internalise the learning (Dalkir, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978), build his knowledge, and subsequently to utilise it in a confident manner. It was an explicit moment of learning. Biesta (2013, p.457) explains that a teacher is not solely someone in a professional role, but can be someone who ‘has indeed taught us something [or] revealed something to us and that thus we have been taught’, so it could be argued that these older adults were teaching the children. They were allowing the learning to be revealed, rather than didactically teaching. Co–researchers discussed whether this learning could have occurred between a practitioner and a child and acknowledged that it could have been possible. However, they believed that, in this case, because of the trusting bond Jack had developed with Isobel, he was ready to listen to her, to learn and to be taught. This new knowledge, not just curriculum-based but skills related to tool use and the craft of gardening, then later supported the other children in their skills development as Jack shared his learning with them. Subsequently, another example occurred during play, when Emily was seen to coach Jack into developing a new skill. Once again, this was a strategy not used by practitioners in current practice.

***Vignette - Emily coaching Jack to untie knots (Ella)***

This example occurred towards the end of a lengthy game which involved Emily, Jack (3 years, 10 months) and Olivia (4 years). Together they had pulled a large tree branch which had been tied to Emily’s waist with a rope.

Olivia and Jack had tied the knots which tethered the tree branch to Emily. Olivia believed Emily was ‘strong and could pull it’. Olivia did not need any help to tie the knots as she was ‘a good knotter’ [sic] and Jack, having practised his knots over the past few weeks, was growing in competence. The rope was secure.

On reaching the ‘camp’ and the site where they wished to rest the branch, Jack began to untie the rope to free Emily. He struggled. Emily did not do it for him. Instead she gently guided his actions, by saying, ‘all you need to do… is push that bit through there and through there. You’ll be amazed… it’ll all just come away so quickly’. Jack listened, completed the actions and succeeded.

(Field notes , Ella and Kay 15 October 2019)

The co-researchers discussed how Jack had learned from his older friends. ‘He was so proud of himself…we wouldn’t have guided or coached like that would we…he looked really proud that he had done that...and the next knot he did himself’, said Ella as the discussion developed about learning from a more knowledgeable other. Ella noted ‘the different language that they [older adults] might use in comparison to how we would use’ and offered examples of how the ‘children seemed to respond better to the interaction’, which resulted in the difference in ethos and approach between the older adults and the practitioners being discussed. As a result of practising knot-tying with Emily and Isobel in Week 2, coupled with Emily’s coaching to untie complex knots in Week 5, Jack was observed in Week 6 competently tying and untying knots during play with his friend John. The situation in this vignette may cause concern for some practitioners. Had they been working with a group of children then they may not have wanted to be tied to a tree branch, or may have needed to be untied more quickly. However, Emily was working alongside a practitioner and children. She did not have overall responsibility and embraced the play. It will be seen later how Emily declined activity which worried her, so she knew her boundaries. From a practitioner’s perspective it was acceptable to check that the older adult was comfortable with the situation she found herself in.

Despite MacKinder (2015) stating that all adults in Forest School should be trained, these older adults were not Early Years or Forest School trained, yet played a pivotal role. While the older adults in this research project were selected for their interest in, and affinity with, children, this observed benefit may not occur with all adults. What is clear though, is that there are *some* adults who are not trained to work with young children who have the ability to work alongside children, and their practitioners, offering something extra to the children’s lives, yet without having ultimate responsibility for everyday activity. They can also have an impact upon the practitioners who work alongside the young children daily. As practitioners are responsible for the children and develop their curriculum, then if they are influenced the children may be impacted upon too.

Discussion about children learning from older adults later led to practitioners questioning whether they adapt their practice sufficiently to meet the needs of all children. Early in the research project, it had been noted by Diane that ‘the older generation tend to instruct/deliver information’ to the children at first about what they could see. Examples included naming items in the woods and using cultural tools (Vygotsky, 1978) such as pens, paper, and books that they brought with them to assist children to explicitly identify nature. This had created a little concern for the co-researchers, as it was not usual practice for them. They were initially also unsure about the ‘coaching’ element described in this vignette. However, after observing the impact of the engagement with the older adult upon Jack they later acknowledged that the children had learned different strategies to glean information which suited some children more than their usual practice.

Diane: ‘*we encourage children to be thinkers... but Ella thinks Jack responds to the guidance and Emily didn’t do the knot for him but talked him through it and guided him to learn a skill…do we differentiate enough when it comes to individual children?’*

Ella*: ‘…Maybe we’ve got things to learn from these two… I think the problem is … this is the way you have been trained and you do it… but this gives you a different perspective’*

Diane: ‘…*it does. It makes you question it doesn’t it. We’re all about differentiation… but do we do it enough when it comes to supporting individual children’*.

Ella*: Yes, I think they’ve taught* ***us****!*

There are implications for practice here. It appeared that Jack was learning from the older adults in a way that appealed to him. He trusted them, listened to them and demonstrated the learning at a later stage. Furthermore, practitioners then recognised that children learn in various ways and that practice may require adaptation from their usual approach in order to meet the needs of all children. As practitioners are the main educators within a nursery setting, this reflection from observing older adults with young children could lead to an appropriate flexibility within their practice with the consequence of other children learning indirectly from the older adults. For some children, the explicit guidance and expertise was rather important. Hart (1987) highlights the difference in childhood worldwide and how in some rural areas, and cultures, children have responsibility from a young age. Children seek opportunities to create structures and may need guided support to develop the required skills. Furthermore, this example shows how the expertise in the Forest School was not always static. The expertise shifted from practitioner to older adult to child in ‘porous exchange’ (Potter and McDougall, 2017, p.84),

While some activities were observed in the field, it was not until later, when the children returned to nursery and reflected upon their experiences with their practitioners, that the learning became evident. The third example occurred when Ashley returned to her nursery and explained about her day to her key person, co-researcher Cathy:

***Vignette – Ashley, Isobel and Pooh Sticks (Cathy)***

Crossing the burn, on the small white bridge, Isobel showed Ashley (3 years, 8 months) and some other children, how they could drop a small branch on one side of the bridge, then cross to the other side of the bridge and see it floating down the burn. She explained how she used to play this when she was a little girl. This game of ‘*pooh sticks’* intrigued the children as they watched the flow of the water carry their stick along in the current. Back at nursery, Ashley reflected upon her day at Forest School with her key person and co-researcher, Cathy, who had not been in attendance.

Ashley to Cathy: ‘Isobel showed me on the bridge you go to the other side and you can see your stick come out from under and the other side… Isobel is a clever lady because she knowed [sic] how that worked…. I think she is a grandma … [Cathy: why do you think that?] ‘because I think she is one’.

This new game of ‘Pooh Sticks’ generated interest and was a game that the generations could play together. Ashley demonstrated good recall of the day’s activities and this later led to a deeper interest in the lives of others as new perspectives were introduced and explored. Cathy decided that the children were having ‘their horizons broadened’ by these older adults. Once again, it could be argued that any adult may have introduced such a game, however, this would not have happened for these children. Co-researchers said they had not considered the ‘Pooh Sticks’ game previously and not all were aware of it. Through discussion with the older adults, the children and the practitioners became aware that this game would have been played by many children in earlier decades (Marsh and Bishop, 2014), and led to an awareness of ‘The House at Pooh Corner’ (A.A. Milne, 1992). In other words, teaching the children how to play ‘Pooh Sticks’ was embedded in a cultural context linked to an older generation. This was evidenced by the fact that having described the game (positively) to Cathy, Ashley then said ‘she is a grandma’, which shows that she was aware that she was learning something through the context of information being passed down from someone of an older generation. What is more, this then led to Emily relating stories about when she was ‘a little girl’ which included historical and local knowledge, giving the children further access to this privileged information. Vygotsky assumes that such social interaction is the basis of learning and development (Shabani, 2016). It is not just about teaching past skills, it is about being involved in a shared activity, which interests both parties. It widens perspectives and is a path to new learning.

Vanderven (2004) in her work on the development of intergenerational theory posited that ‘relationships may not develop until an activity is introduced’ (p.81). The Forest School activity was a *fait accompli* so had not been considered as an activity on its own, yet the continued smaller activities that occurred weekly undoubtedly triggered interest, and enabled the bonds between the age groups to grow. This then led to later reflection and learning for all involved.

Reflection upon Ashley’s vignette, which included co-researchers also learning from the children’s reflections, has a number of implications for both research and practice. Firstly, the importance of involving practitioners as researchers has ensured that the children’s reflections are captured and that sense can be made of their experiences. Had I been the sole researcher, I would have missed out on valuable data as interpretations and learning often occurred away from the field. Secondly, as an implication for practice, this demonstrates the importance of taking time to reflect upon activities with children, such as in Cathy’s reflections with Ashley, as this is when you can glean insights into their thinking and understanding. Once again, this productively disrupts who is the expert.

Each of the three examples in this section has suggested that older adults should be encouraged to work with young children. When children trusted these older adults, who had the time, skill and insight to support their learning, children were open to listening and learning. The data also demonstrated how children enjoyed listening to stories and playing historical childhood games. In addition, when the intergenerational activity was facilitated by practitioners this had further advantages. Not only did the older adults have less responsibility, but the pressures on the practitioners were also reduced. The practitioners could observe their children working with other adults and so learn more about them, sometimes leading to adaptation of their own practice. Ella said how she had, ‘… felt inspired by [older adults’] knowledge and what they have to offer to both myself and the children’. Jane agreed, explaining how she had become, ‘more open about the older generation working in Early Years and the positive effect this can have on children’.

Despite Elwyn et al. (2007) stating that research suggests knowledge-sharing not to be a natural act, and Knight et al. (2014) stating how reciprocity is lacking in intergenerational projects (see literature review), neither of these issues appeared to be the case within this research. Instead, the data showed that both young children and older adults were eager to share ideas and knowledge with each other. This could be accounted for by Brink (2017, p.22) who equates late life learning’ to ‘preschool learning’, recognising the similarities in ‘self-directed informal learning’ which occurs in both age groups. Knowledge-sharing occurred readily between these adults and children indicating that these age groups can learn from each other and that older adults are potentially an under-used resource in the learning experiences of children.

Of further interest here is that the practitioners, the generation between the older adults and the young children also learned from the experience. Yet, in research, consideration of three generations working alongside each other in a participatory way is rare. Yasunaga et al. (2016) discussed three generations working together, but did not consider the experiences of the third generation. Vanderven (2004) highlighted the tensions of three generations working together, although her work is related to families which differs from this research which has a non-familial nature. She pointed out that when there is a three-way relationship, there may be a stronger bond between two people with the third being outside of that bond. Also, the pairings can shift with different situations. Conversely, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), in considering the requirements for knowledge development in business, suggested a model of managers in the middle forming a bridge between frontline staff and senior managers. The model in this research appears to mirror that, with practitioners being a bridge between the children and older adults. In the literature review, it was pointed out that in the Japanese concept of *ba* (Nonaka and Konno, 1998), barriers are removed in an environment that emphasises care, trust, commitment and love. The findings show that within this group, the three generations worked well together. The activity was of common interest and no tensions between the generations was noted.

This section has offered three examples of children learning from older adults and has considered how this learning may have occurred. In addition, the practitioner co-researchers have also learned from the experience by having their views challenged through a porous exchange of expertise. I now move to examples of older adults learning from, or because of, children.

***5.5.2 Older Adults Learning from Children***

During analysis of the data, it was apparent that both older adults had learned from the experience of working alongside the children. Firstly, there was the content knowledge, including the relearning of information. Next, there was the personal growth; relating to aspects of learning which challenged the pre-conceptions of the older adults. The content knowledge will be shared here, while the challenging personal growth will feature in Theme 4.

The data revealed numerous examples of the children imparting their knowledge and sensitively advising the older adults. For example, John, in an attempt to ensure the visitors were comfortable, advised, ‘the log is for leaning your back on’. The adults may already have known this information and, as reminded by Malaguzzi (Moss, 2011), this information-sharing differs from learning. However, careful observation, reference to Ward et al. (2012), and later interviews determined where the knowledge exchange took place. This process was able to identify the learning in those ‘sticky’ moments when you know something important has happened but you need to keep returning to it to make sense of the situation. The co-researchers supported this explicit and tacit knowledge sharing, by sharing reading material about Forest School with Isobel and Emily, and by answering their questions. They were also observed in the field discussing the reasons for their actions with both Emily and Isobel.

Some knowledge-sharing related to new skills and safety aspects, for example when Emily was learning how to use tools and when Libby advised her ‘remember the Kelly kettle is hot’. Emily later reflected upon the new skills learned. She was inspired by the young children and their knowledge and competence and how she had learned new skills and language, with one example being the Kelly kettle. Emily said, ‘I’ve never seen one of those before you know. It heats the water amazingly fast. I’ll have to work out how to slip that into conversation!’ There are many more of these examples.In contrast to the finding of Strom and Strom (2015) who cautioned about the way generational differences can cause misunderstandings, for instance in the use of terminology, Emily was eager to learn this new language. This mirrors the findings of Kelly (2015), where the grandparents were also eager to learn.

The next example demonstrates how Isobel was enabled to re-learn some forgotten knowledge due to anticipated inquiry, which led to collaborative learning. Prior to her retirement, Isobel used to spend quite a lot of time outdoors and was able to spontaneously identify leaves, flowers and trees. This knowledge had been partially forgotten as it had ‘not been needed in recent years’. Drawing upon her tacit and experiential knowledge, Isobel knew that using a tool such as a tree identification book could act as an aide-mémoire when she was asked questions by the children. She was eager to relearn some skills and knowledge in order to help the children to learn. The following vignette illustrates how learning occurred in this instance:

**Vignette -** **Isobel’s Story: ‘re-learning names of trees and flowers’**

Elle (aged 3 years 10 months) was collecting leaves which had fallen from the tree (Observation Week 3). She wondered why they were different. Some were brown, some green and orange. Some were ‘crinkly and pointy’ and some ‘flat and shiny’. She asked Isobel the reasons for this.

Isobel was aware of her limitations and ‘rusty’ knowledge so, anticipating questions from the children, brought memory prompts such as a nature book with her in her backpack to help with identification of trees and other woodland items. Isobel showed Elle this book, ‘I wonder if we can find the answer in this book?’ and together they looked at the book to try and identify the leaves and berries they had found. They began by looking for ‘a small leaf with bumpy edges’.

Isobel: ‘Is that the same as that?’(pointing to a leaf and a picture in the book)

Elle: ‘No’

Isobel: ‘look at the shape’

Elle: ‘No… yes, but yes… It’s a different colour’

Isobel: ‘so why is that one green (in the book) and that one orange (in Olivia’s hand)?’

Elle: ‘I don’t know’.

Isobel: ‘What happens to leaves in the autumn?’

Sophie: (overhearing conversation) ‘…orange’

Elle: ‘and they fall off the trees’.

The leaf was identified as an oak leaf and other examples followed. Later that day, when another child was trying to identify a certain berry, Elle said ‘it might be in Isobel’s book’. The following week, during play, Elle ran up to Isobel and slipped her hand into Isobel’s saying, ‘Isobel, Isobel, can you read your book to me?’

Three weeks later, Isobel, walking alongside Ashley and Elle, commented ‘there are an awful lot of leaves today’. Elle responded, ‘Yes, cos’ it’s autumn’. They then ‘caught’ (Elle) and compared some leaves, with some independent and accurate identification.

Isobel was adamant that she had learned from the children by refreshing her knowledge, and learning more about ‘berries they could eat and berries that they couldn’t'. Had she not been ‘supporting the children’, she would not have revisited the knowledge and therefore concluded that she learned from them.

[Shared narrative: Isobel’s notes and my field notes]

Having the opportunity to engage with, and to work alongside, young children and to anticipate their questions, gave Isobel the impetus to re-learn lost knowledge in order to support the children and she regarded this learning as a benefit. This finding troubles a traditional view (Erikson, 1950; Carstensen et al., 1999) that people in older life were less interested in learning. Vanderven (2011) argues that this may once have been the case, but with societal changes and extended lifespan, the age groupings devised by Erikson may no longer be appropriate.

The data showed that Isobel was eager to learn and to redevelop her skills. She did not provide answers but scaffolded children’s thinking and named the trees and plants, as appropriate, learning personally in the process. Although the focus of this section is older adults learning from young children, the example also demonstrates the prior knowledge of the children who were able to compare and, with support, recall what happens to leaves in the autumn. This had not been discussed earlier that day. Elle also remembered where information could be gleaned and was later able to share that learning with peers, signposting them to Isobel’s book as a learning resource, thus demonstrating the knowledge transfer discussed earlier. This suggested that, in this case, it was very beneficial for the children to have the involvement of interested older adults with them, who were not practitioners.

It could be argued that the children may have learned collaboratively with their practitioners and that this form of learning was not unique to intergenerational learning. However, for these children, the autonomy Isobel had to decide to bring a book to Forest School was a new way of working for the co-researchers who had initial reservations about this form of explicit–to-tacit knowledge exchange. Diane explained how they would not normally take a book to Forest School and would only have provided one if the children had asked, or they may have searched on the internet back at nursery. However, when asked about this observation during Interview 2, Isobel said that she learned from books at school and justified her approach, saying:

*At one time I used to know every leaf, every tree, every bird, because we did so much of that and you see you get a bit rusty if you don’t keep up with it… if a child asks you something and you don’t know you should be saying, I don’t know but we’ll find out, you know.*

As a result, and in discussion, the co-researchers acknowledged that their usual practice could have been a missed opportunity for learning, as the benefits arising from the different approach were noted for all parties. This then led to the co-researchers questioning their practice and recognising areas for development, something that would not have been identified without the participation of the older volunteers.

While the adults were clearly learning things from the children, a major advantage emerged for the children too in that they were given the opportunity to be experts in their environment, and to teach the adults about Forest School activity.

***5.5.3 Children as teachers***

Thematic analysis of the data determined that there were two further benefits gained by the children over the course of the research project which would not have occurred without working alongside the older adults. The first was that the presence of the older adults seemed to encourage the children to teach the older adults due to them being new in the Forest and the children identifying their learning needs. The second was that that the children developed a growing awareness of age-related difference and diversity. These aspects were not taught to the children, but emerged from the engagement. While linked, the growing awareness of difference and diversity traverses both Themes 3 and 4, but fits best with the ‘porous exchange of expertise’ (Potter and McDougall, 2017, p.84), which influenced and overcame the challenges faced. For now, I will focus upon how the children became teachers in the Forest School environment.

This section offers several snapshot examples of children being eager to share their knowledge with the older adults:

***Example 1. Prior to meeting the older adults (Elle):***

Elle: we need to tell those ladies about Forest School and what we do [Floorbook]

The data shows how the presence of the older adults afforded the children opportunities to teach, and to be experts in their environment. Even before their arrival, some children, including Elle, were eager to teach the new Forest School attendees. This desire was apparent from the start of the fieldwork so when Isobel and Emily arrived they were both inundated with children wanting to point out features within the environment. Elle was one of those children who was keen to induct new people into a place.

***Example 2. Guidance given during play (Luke, Annie and Libby)***

As Emily sat sideways on a fallen tree (now a train), saying, ‘Right, I’m on the train’, Luke advised her, ‘Emily, do it like Annie is doing it... you won’t fall off’. Libby called (to the practitioners) ‘we’re doing teamwork’.

[My field notes, 29 September 2015]

In example 2, during play, examples of teaching strategies emerged. Luke watched Emily climb onto the fallen branch then advised her how to sit securely. To Luke, sitting astride the train was preferable, and more stable. Annie modelled the action and Libby recognised they were working together, so articulated this to the practitioners.

***Example 3. During play***

Jack (to Isobel): Can you help me to make dynamite?

Isobel: I don’t know how

Jack: Look at your tablet and you’ll see how to make it

Isobel (puzzled): a tablet?

Jack: Yeah! - a tablet. You just get your tablet and write d- ai- nam- ite (punching his hand with his finger) and it shows you

Isobel: I don’t have a tablet

Jack: Oh. I have. All you do is take the sticks and you wrap the string round it

Isobel: I think I prefer making a hedgehog house. Why do you need dynamite?

[My field notes 22 September, 2015, confirmed by Isobel’s field notes].

In the third example, Jack suggested that Isobel should ‘look at a tablet’ in order to determine answers to a problem. Isobel later commented ‘I thought tablets were small pills that you take for certain conditions’ and genuinely did not know what he was referring to. This *was* a mismatch in terminology, as identified by Strom and Strom (2015), but Isobel was willing to listen and to learn. Although she had taught children to use books as a source of information, Jack was able to teach Isobel about new technology as her lack of knowledge provided him with an opportunity to do so. No examples were recorded of children not understanding the older adults’ terminology.

Following on from the ‘tablet’ scenario, the older adults were introduced by Diane to the new nursery blog, set up to record Forest School activity, and which the children could independently access to reflect upon their activities. This resulted in the older adults expressing astonishment at the children’s competence regarding the use of technology.

The children were scaffolding the older adults’ learning within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). The environment was right, the social context relevant and there was the presence of more knowledgeable individuals (children) who could share knowledge of modern cultural tools and practices. The older adults were willing to listen and to be taught. Davis-Unger and Carlson (2008) explain how in order for teaching to happen, there must be a recognition that there is a difference in knowledge between yourself and the learner. The children in this research project appeared to identify the needs of the older adults and readily advised or supported them to develop their knowledge. This advice was received well by the older adults which in turn pleased the children and encouraged them to support further. Furthermore, Davis-Unger and Carlson (2008) highlighted the evidence suggesting how children’s teaching skills correlate to executive function and suggested there should be further opportunities for children to teach others. Qu (2011, p.133) agreed, suggesting ‘informal tutoring’ or ‘collaborative work’ to be beneficial and suggested future research should focus upon interaction with peers in order to develop executive function. I would argue that our intergenerational work demonstrates that peers can potentially be individuals of any age.

Moriguchi et al. (2015) posited that when young children teach others rules, this may improve their executive function and reported upon an intervention which involved children teaching puppets or dolls, rather than human beings. Their rationale for this was that as social interaction and executive function may be dependent upon each other (Moriguchi, 2014) they chose an intervention for individuals who may struggle with social interaction. However, while this may work for some children, it would not allow young children to collaborate and reason with other people or to develop the different perspectives as suggested by Qu (2011).

Working alongside older humans who had the same ‘goal’ as they did (Qu, 2011, p.549) appeared to benefit the young children. The older adults were their peers, apparently with equal status, and a shared power (Shier, 2001), and this enabled children to identify learning needs, to demonstrate actions, to offer advice and to teach others. Their participation was facilitated, as there was no hierarchy of relationships (Kirby and Gibbs, 2006) and they were recognised as more knowledgeable others (Istead and Shapiro, 2014).

The next examples will lead us toward the theme of Challenging Participation. These examples relate to children’s perceived areas of development for the older adults, as identified by some children, which became learning experiences spanning the generations.

**Example 4: Identifying the need to teach older adults about running (Austin)**

Austin: (concerned that Isobel couldn’t run fast) ‘she will have to warm up first… I can show her’ [Floorbook, Jane and Austin]

**Example 5: The need to teach Shelter Building (Luke)**

Luke: (recognising Emily’s failure to be able to build a shelter and confiding in Diane): ‘She’s a grown up and she didn’t do the right thing. She didn’t find the right sticks to keep it up’.

Diane: Who could teach her?

Luke: You and Jane and me

Olivia: She’ll have to come back after the next day to practice

[Research Circle 16 September 2015, Diane and Kay field notes]

The children endeavoured to find solutions to any difficulties faced by the older adults and drew them into a culture of shared learning. These solutions appealed to the older adults, further developing the bonds between the age groups. Early observations indicated that that children perhaps initially did not fully understand the limitations experienced by the older adults. However, as co-researchers continued the discussions in floorbook activity with the children back at nursery, the development of the children’s critical thinking became apparent. Not only did they consider the issues faced by the older adults, but they began to wonder why some grown-ups did not already know certain things and considered how they, or others, could teach the necessary skills. Their understanding emerged in the field and was recorded in observations (see Theme 4).

**Example 6: Following rules, yet demonstrating competence (Olivia)**

Isobel (reflecting): Probably the most worrying time was when Olivia decided she wanted to go off along another branch and she told me because I was near her, and in the Forest School rules we have to tell someone if we go somewhere

Olivia: I want to go along there

Isobel: I might not be able to find you

Olivia: It’s all right, I’ll find you

Isobel (reflecting): But there were a few moments I was really quite anxious because she was out of my reach. She trusted me, but I thought if she walks off beyond the fallen log and slips I wouldn’t have been able to get to her. But somebody else would have done. That was my only anxious time.

Example 6 was written and reflected upon by Isobel. She was worried as she knew her own physical limitations and was concerned that if anything happened she would not be able to reach Olivia. However, she did not want to deter her and said, ‘I may not be able to find you’ (while noting the location of the nearest grown up who could help if needed) to which Olivia replied, ‘It’s all right. I’ll find you’. Olivia had a firm belief in her abilities as she was familiar with the surroundings and knew what she wanted to do, demonstrating self-efficacy, resilience and a mastery of her task. Her confidence reassured Isobel, who did not stop her from her adventure.

These examples reflect how the older adults were willing to engage with the children. They pushed themselves to achieve, but did not take any unnecessary risks and put plans into place should they be less able to support as they hoped, as shown by Isobel above. They also allowed the children to make decisions and to take the lead. The children were very aware that these older adults were members of the group and everyone mattered.

There was no age barrier, no judgement, only collaboration and a sense of belonging. This was evident when Isobel reported, ‘I didn’t ever feel that I was a spare part’ and reflected that she has worried ‘a little’ about this. This suggests the importance of the development of further intergenerational activity as the negotiation and mutual support appear to encourage social-connectedness and ensures that individuals feel valued (Knight et al., 2014). Additionally, this could also have an implication for practice as, when faced with manageable dilemmas, children can problem solve, take the lead when ready and feel a sense of satisfaction that they have helped others. Forest School provision is a place where this can happen. The children’s engagement in teaching was evident, together with their growing knowledge of difference and age-related diversity.

In summary, data analysis shows that in an informal outdoor context, when young children work alongside older adults, and where trusting relationships have developed, both parties learn reciprocally. Furthermore, when three unrelated generations worked together there were no tensions noted, while learning and skills development were apparent for all groups.

The next theme outlines challenges faced by the participants and the learning gained from embracing them.

**5.6 Theme Four: Challenging Participation**

This theme highlights the challenges faced by the participants and presents the observed approaches to problem-solving and overcoming difficulty which led to learning. Consideration is also given to the prior fears and assumptions of older adults and co-researchers, first mentioned within the theme of affective participation, and how they were overcome, as well as to unexpected challenges arising for all participants.

What became clear from the data is that the presence of the older adults seemed to inspire children to adopt strategies to deal with problems, while the older adults adopted strategies because of their engagement with children. Each age group inspired one other and the identified strategies will now be shared.

***5.6.1 Strategy: Intrinsic Motivation***

As indicated previously, the older adults had fears and held assumptions about their abilities prior to attending Forest School. Although they stated they had enjoyed the outdoors in the past, they both reported that they were out of practice in such activity. In particular, Isobel was concerned that she could not ‘walk as far as I could at one time’ and Emily wondered whether she would have the ‘patience to work with young children’. However, despite their prior worries, they were eager to participate in this project. Despite their health concerns and the fear of the unknown, they appeared intrinsically motivated to succeed.

One example to confirm this occurred in Week 1 for Emily when she admitted not realising ‘how cold it could be’ spending a block of time outdoors. Co-researchers wondered whether she would return for future weeks due to her discomfort. In Week 2, however, demonstrating a motivation to continue, and despite torrential rain, Emily arrived displaying her new coat and talking about her thermals, strategies adopted to deal with the cold. She did not give up but had overcome the issues, and was now prepared for the cold weather, demonstrating resilience.

***5.6.2 Strategy: Honestly stating, and explaining, concerns***

The data revealed that whenever the older adults were afraid or unsure of what to do, or were invited to do something they deemed dangerous, they continued to articulate their thoughts. Rather than hiding the issue, they were honest and open, and this appeared to enable the children to consider alternative actions or to coach them to succeed. Isobel’s early challenges occurred in Week 1. She was observed walking at the back of the group and chatting with some children. At lunch time she sat on a log and ate a picnic lunch with the group. Afterwards, due to a little stiffness, she tried to stand up, but was unable to.

Isobel: Excuse me everyone, I have a problem (The children looked at her).

Isobel: I can’t stand up. Can someone help me please?

Diane: ‘Oh dear, what can we do?’

[Kay field notes, 8 September 2019].

Jack and Elle immediately came to Isobel’s aid. Elle took hold of Isobel’s hands and tried to pull. Jack pushed her from behind. Nate picked up some rope and tried to attach it to Isobel and Isobel waited patiently for them to consider their strategy as a co-researcher gently scaffolded their thinking. The final decision was to push and pull, which succeeded. Isobel thanked them. Reflecting upon this situation, and her physical limitations, Isobel [Interview 2] said:

*…the majority of the time it was fine because the children were never really all together … so I just engaged with the children that were hanging back. There was one time when I’d been sitting a while and I must have been cold and I could hardly get up and Elle pulled me up from the front and Jack gave me a great thump in the back to push me up [laugh]… and that worked quite well!*

In this example, it was interesting to note that Isobel was honest with the children about the difficulty she was facing in standing up. Yet, the situation was not treated as a deficit, but rather a problem that needed to be solved. ‘Had I been with friends I might not have admitted that I couldn’t stand up’, said Isobel. However, her honesty (and her recognition of this potential learning experience), alerted the group to the issue and a solution was sought. Isobel engaged the children and used her physical inability as a learning experience.

Emily used the same strategy. Olivia, Jack and Emily were pulling a large branch across the field. Olivia decided that Emily was the strongest so the game developed with Emily tied to a rope, pulling the branch ‘like a horse’ [Emily], led by Jack and Olivia. Emily urged them to go slowly down the bank which was covered in leaves. She said, ‘I get worried a bit… when you get older and go bump on the ground you hurt a bit more than when you’re little… I’m not good at getting up again either’. The children reassured her. ‘You’ll be fine’, said Olivia and encouraged her to just go as fast as she could.

There could have been a concern about the older adults challenging themselves inappropriately. However, despite Emily allowing herself to be tied up by children [Week 5] and challenging herself, for example in relation to climbing on the train (tree trunk) in Week 4, she also acted responsibly and knew when to decline certain activity. Emily knew her limitations and gently explained these to the children, thereby extending their understanding of diverse abilities. A further example of this occurred in Week 5 when Olivia tried to persuade Emily to cross a fallen log. She replied, ‘I’m not very clever at balancing any more’ to which Olivia offered, ‘Shall I show you again?’ and ‘hold my hand’ then demonstrated log crossing to her, with arms outstretched. Emily politely declined on this occasion and the children accepted her rationale.

Having a duty of care for the children and the visitors, the co-researchers needed to be respectful of any limitations (including physical limitations) so these were anticipated during the fieldwork in case assistance was required, thereby adhering to the ethical conduct of research. The co-researchers were used to supporting the children but did not know what to expect from the older adults. Consequently, it was a surprise to them that, when challenges arose, the older adults were not perturbed. They competently sought solutions, often involving the children, and appeared to demonstrate an intrinsic motivation to push themselves to achieve. The children accepted and accommodated limitations, therefore contributing towards an ethos of mutual care and respect. The Forest School principles encourage learners to take appropriate risks within the environment (Forest School Association, 2018) which are developmentally relevant and this place allowed participants of all ages to challenge themselves, and to reflect upon those challenges, to identify the learning gained.

During her second interview, Emily discussed how she regularly shared personal experiences which greatly interested the children. She talked about when she was a little girl and shared stories about local history and artefacts found in the woods. She also explained how she did not mind sharing her lack of knowledge with the children, saying, ‘I did tell them that I couldn’t do knots, ‘cause they kept asking me to tie things and I kept - well, I can only do one knot and that’s it!’ Emily also reflected about being reminded by Luke that ‘I didn’t build the shelter right’ although it was apparent that Olivia felt she could learn by practising the skill.

A lack of experience, ability or a fear in the older adults did not deter the children. Children welcomed the older adults as group members, as part of their team, and the knowledge deficits of the older adults or their lack of experience were viewed more as problems to be solved. The data indicates that it may be beneficial to include older adults in early childhood education. The children appeared to benefit from the calmness generated by Emily and Isobel and the older adults were not regarded as teachers by the children, but rather as equals. Part of the reason for that was that they were not afraid to show their limitations. The children seemed to benefit from this and worked with the adults in a way that did not happen with their practitioners.

Maynard (2007a) discusses the tensions between Forest School leaders and Early Years teachers and where the former encourage risk-taking and the latter maintain responsibility for the children, and follow the curriculum. She concluded that the battle was not between the individuals, but between ‘two dominant discourses’ (p.389), the varying educational traditions with different goals and values. Furthermore, Harris’ (2017) research identified that leaders in Forest School see themselves as facilitators of learning rather than didactic teachers. In this research, everyone was learning together, on an equal footing, based upon interests and materials sourced in the environment. Boundaries were more fluid and everyone was in a learning cycle. This ethos was an extension of the Participatory Action Research and Research Circles approach.

Although it was not the intention at the outset, these fluid boundaries extended to the research itself. The older adults contributed to the observations and analysis. In addition, the children may not have been co-researchers but they explored the role of the researchers in their play and that extended so that a culture of research began to develop. One example of this was when Elle wanted to ‘find things out’ with Isobel (Section 5.5.2).

***5.6.3 Strategy: The limitations of older adults, and mutual fears, acted as a stimulus to some children***

Theolder adults’ limitations and challenges, especially in terms of their physical ability, seemed to serve as a stimulus to some children. As the older adults identified and talked through the issues, or modelled their own fears and attempts, this proved to encourage children to address challenges too. Sara (3 years, 11 months) was one example of this. In Week 2, Sara observed Isobel, who was articulating her fear and challenging herself to get down a large step near a muddy riverbank. Sara had not achieved this step before either, but on seeing Isobel openly try to do it, Sara unexpectedly said, ‘I think I can do that step’ and did so independently, despite having not achieved it, and showing fear, previously. By watching and listening to Isobel, Sara was actively encouraged to challenge herself.

The next example demonstrates the experiences of one child, Sophie (4.0 years). Sophie was possibly the most anxious child within the group at first, requiring regular reassurance and encouragement. While co-researchers and both older adults supported her on occasions throughout the research project, Sophie’s bond with Isobel specifically enabled her to develop her confidence and skill. She later demonstrated this independently.

***Vignette- Sophie’s Incline***

Sophie seemed a little uncomfortable in the Forest School context (Observation Week 1). She knew the practitioners and was familiar with the surroundings, but she attempted to avoid puddles and mud showing anxiety if her ‘sparkly wellies’ got dirty. Sharing this worry with Isobel, Sophie was reassured that they could be cleaned later and also learned how ‘you can wash your wellies in a puddle’. Sophie also appeared concerned about exploring the steep inclines in the forest. As other children ran off to play, Sophie hovered near the older volunteers who did not run ahead either, but watched those who did.

After lunch, Sophie initially followed her peers and a practitioner as they scrambled up a high muddy bank. Turning around, almost at the top of the hill, she froze with fear as she saw how high up she was. With encouragement and support from the practitioner, Sophie managed to return to the base of the hill. She tried to go up again, with practitioner support, but did not like it. She shook her head and stood firm. Sophie then returned to a log situated at the base of the hill, where she felt safe, and sat down to watch the others.

Isobel saw Sophie sitting alone on the log, near the base of the hill where her peers were playing. ‘May I join you?’ asked Isobel. Sophie patted the log, in agreement. They began to talk and shared their mutual concerns about the height of the hill. Isobel wondered what else they could do, suggesting playing on the smaller, adjacent hill, or exploring in the bushes. After a few moments, Sophie said, ‘I’m going to try the smaller one’ and headed off to an adjacent mound of earth, checking behind her to see if Isobel was following. Sophie was not yet confident, but Isobel allowed her to take the lead in a short adventure around the small hill and bushes, where they found interesting stones and leaves and walked on uneven ground (Observation Week 1).

In Week 2, Sophie was observed independently practising her skills on inclines, taking small steps up and tiptoeing down again, then repeating the actions. When she noticed Isobel watching her she exclaimed excitedly, ‘I couldn’t do that yesterday!’ (Observation Week 2).

In her reflections, Isobel recalled this activity and said how she valued the opportunity to support Sophie in her development. Co-researchers acknowledged this too. Sophie was safe; ***they*** were engaged with other children and practicalities, and accepted that they may have missed this opportunity to support her needs at this time, due to their other responsibilities. They also recognised that Isobel honestly stating her fears and taking the time to discuss solutions with Sophie was pivotal in Sophie’s development. This was noted in later weeks when Sophie demonstrated her new coping strategies to practitioners, for example by calmly cleaning her ‘muddy wellies’ in a puddle (Research Circle 3) and citing Isobel as her source of information. She still needed help to find (perfect) conkers, to climb over logs and to aid some decision-making, but gradually, over the research period, she learned to have fun in the forest even when getting muddy (noted by Emily and Isobel, Interview 2 and observations).

Within this vignette, Isobel identified a child’s fear of a particular situation. By taking time to understand the nature of the fear, and having experienced something similar herself, Isobel was able to tune-in to the child’s thinking and work with her, at her pace, enabling her to problem-solve and to overcome the challenges faced. To Isobel, it did not matter whether she climbed the hill or not, but her priority at this time was to listen to Sophie and to support her emotional wellbeing and physical development. At the same time, Sophie reciprocated by trusting Isobel; she was ready to listen and open to suggestions in order to find solutions to her challenges faced, and to allow knowledge transfer to take place (Biesta, 2013).

It could be argued that co-researchers may have offered such inspiration to Sara and support to Sophie. However, in reflection, co-researchers discussed a number of reasons for this not being the case. Sara had stayed alongside her key person in Week 2, but had observed the older adults closely. Practitioners and children had undertaken certain challenges that day, but Sara did not follow them. It was only when Isobel articulated her concern, and wondered whether she could achieve the step, that Sara burst forth to prove that she could do it, apparently challenging herself. This was totally unexpected. In Sophie’s situation, the co-researchers’ main priority was for the children’s safety but also they were not frightened of the hill or the mud, indeed if they were they hid it. Mutual fears meant that there was also some mutual recognition with regard to physical limitations amongst the older adults and some of the children. They understood one another and were therefore able to offer mutual support. This appeared to be a trigger for Sophie to challenge herself. It is appreciated that not all adults will be attuned to young children as in this situation, but where they are the benefits are obvious. This suggests that older adults should be encouraged to work alongside young children in this way.

***5.6.4 Strategy: Continuity of support from others***

For some children, the continuity of support, and calmness discussed in theme 1, served to allay their fears or support their emotional development. Jack, whose vignettes have spanned the themes, offers a firm example of this. We have read about his distress, the bond developed with older adults and about his learning gained through working with older adults. By Week 6 Jack had matured in self-regulation, possibly due to the support, both practical and emotional (Whitebread, 2016), offered by Isobel and Emily.

***Vignette - Jack’s Journey Part 4 – overcoming emotional challenges***

During Forest School activity Jack learned to share his belongings with others, developing trust and drawing upon his older friends (Emily and Isobel) for emotional support as required. By Week 6, Jack was playing independently and confidently with his friend John and also demonstrating his new skills back at nursery. Co-researcher Jane, also Jack’s key person, explained how she had observed Jack during the session. Jane explained how on this occasion:

Jack had hung the rake on a branch. Another child (Luke) came along and took it off. I expected a meltdown. But he didn’t. He just stood and watched (possibly a little anxious) but he watched and Luke used it then hung it up again. [It was] an absolute breakthrough for him. Absolute breakthrough’. Jane continued, ‘this week was brilliant…. absolutely brilliant week.

The observations of the co-researchers were pivotal in identifying these changes. Co-researchers knew the children well and, while these situations were observed by the older adults and myself, the co-researchers knew the children’s starting points and areas for development so could more accurately evaluate the changes observed. All co-researchers were convinced that the relationships between Jack and Isobel/Emily were key to his development and their observations and reflections asserted the influence that the older adults had upon Jack. For example, Ella noted, ‘they’ve just guided and helped him in little ways but he’s had their sole attention. That’s been a big thing for him, it really has’.

The data suggests that the continuity of Jack’s engagement with these older adults was key to Jack’s development. They respected each other, invested time in their interactions and engaged in meaningful activity. When stressful situations occurred, Jack was gently and calmly supported by Isobel and Emily, even by their presence, resulting in a ‘turning point’ (Veresov and Fleer, 2016, p.5) in his behaviour.

Emily and Isobel discussed their support of Jack, suggesting that the flexible ethos of the provision was important to the children as they ‘chose what they wanted to do’ (Isobel). To Isobel, this element of choice was crucial. She continued, ‘… we were flexible in that if they [children] chose something else or wanted to do something you could do it with them and then you would enjoy it as well’. Children and other participants were not bound by a restrictive curriculum but were enabled to follow their interests and were intrinsically motivated to learn, and the older adults were willing partners in their activity. Gray and MacBlain (2015, p.142) discuss how interest is the best stimulus, linked to Bandura’s self-efficacy, and once again this has implications for provision in respect of the Early Years curriculum. It seems to underline the importance of allowing children to choose their activities as it makes the activity more enjoyable and productive for everyone.

Considering the views of the older adults, co-researchers discussed whether the Forest School environment could also have played a part in Jack’s emotional development. It is acknowledged that the outdoor environment may reduce stress (James et al., 2016), and can contribute to behaviour changes (Roe and Aspinall, 2011; Chawla et al. 2014; Ulset et al. 2017; McCree et al. 2018), so this may have been a factor and must be acknowledged. However, Jack had attended the Forest School previously without a noticeable change in his demeanour. Working alongside these older adults, in contrast, had a marked effect on him, as they ‘helped me to learn things… and knots’ (Jack).

***5.6.5 Strategy: Children and adults working together enabled porous learning about***

***each other***

A plethora of examples could have been chosen to support this strategy. My first example concerns Emily who had previously articulated concern about the level of patience she may have with young children. Working alongside the young children overturned her prior assumptions about their behaviour and the following vignette illustrates examples of substantial benefits for Emily as she faced her fears and overcame challenges.

***Vignette: Emily’s benefits from overcoming challenges faced***

At her second interview, when asked about the challenges faced during the research project, Emily immediately reflected upon the cold of Day 1, which she overcame in future weeks by purchasing a warmer, waterproof coat and wearing her thermals. She also explained how ‘I was a little cautious at first’ but recalled ‘I did not have long to wait to be welcomed by the children’.

Emily realised that she could not ‘run up and down the hills as my knees don’t do what they used to’, but her fears, as articulated in Interview 1, ‘just evaporated’ as she met the children and practitioners and was ‘completely relaxed in the Forest School environment’. Emily found the children to be ’kind and thoughtful’ and this ‘challenged her stereotypes of children today’, such as ‘some children [in the] supermarkets...who you’d dearly like to deal with’. She developed ‘new skills’ such as ‘using a kelly kettle’ and ‘had fun’ seeing the younger practitioners ‘doing the physical things’, for example when she encouraged Ella to use the tin tray to slide down the hill (confirmed by Ella, who called Emily a ‘daredevil’) and she pondered the difference in health and safety over the generations. Emily also reflected upon young children learning as ‘it was a great experience for them. It was amazing’. ‘We were all ...doing things [at the end] that we didn’t do at the beginning’, stated Emily as she reflected upon lying on the forest floor preparing lunch with the children (Figure 5.3). Emily felt ‘more patient, relaxed, without stress’ and found the whole experience to be ‘much more brilliant than I expected it to be’. She reported that it was ‘fantastic… incredible…amazing…’ and concluded ‘‘I didn’t realise that they could do that so young… be involved… sharing…I can enjoy myself with a group of children more than I thought I could without having to worry about what’s happening’*.*



*Figure 5.3 Emily and children preparing lunch, using tools and sharing*

Integration with young children and practitioners appeared to offer substantial benefits for Emily. At the outset she had the confidence to embrace the opportunity of the Forest School project, but needed resilience and determination to persevere with the challenges. Midway through the project, Emily said, ‘Eee, I’m really quite enjoying it’, as she reflected upon this ‘not now usual’ activity and how she and the children seemed to motivate each other. The co-researchers were ‘in awe’ of Emily’s contributions and felt that by Week 6 the many benefits of the project were manifold for all ages. Co-researcher Ella had not expected to see an older person so engaged and relaxed and said:

*…it was really lovely to watch… her language about what they were going to do, and her experiences…*[she said] ‘*I know this is going to happen and what do YOU think’… I liked seeing her lying on the floor and you definitely wouldn’t consider her old... I thought, I couldn’t even get down there.*

Having had the opportunity to become involved in challenging activity, Emily made new relationships which led to new learning and overcame challenges, as she learned about the diversity and difference in the behaviour of these young children within the Forest School. Furthermore, Ella recognised the difference in the physical demeanour of Emily, over the period of time she spent with the children on the project, and acknowledged her contribution to the children’s development.

Emily’s ‘attitude and mindset’ (Eichstellar and Holtoff, 2011, p.36) had, then, been altered by her experiences. This could be explained by Allport’s (1954) contact theory, used within Teater’s (2018) research. Although originally introduced within race relations, contact theory is also used for bringing two age groups together to challenge stereotypes. In order for change to occur, four elements are required. In this example with Emily, all four elements were present. There was support for the activity within the social environment and cooperative interaction was evident. Next, the older adults and young children appeared to have an equal status within the group, with regard to their participation, and they were able to choose their activities. Although Teater’s (2018) research focused upon anxious older children working with older adults, it is reasonable to suggest that contact theory could work where adults engage with young children too. Contact theory may explain how Emily displayed anxiety and uncertainty prior to the intergenerational activity and only when she worked alongside the children and the anxiety was reduced, she was able to relax and play with the children. Similarly, the preconceived ideas of the practitioners about the old and young engaging were challenged. In addition, it is also possible that, learning from high quality personal relationships, such as those argued by Canvello and Crocker (2010) to contribute to physical and mental well-being, may have altered Emily’s perception of children, and thus influenced her future relationships with them.

The next example concerns Nate and Isobel. It occurred on a day when Nate and Isobel had been exploring a fallen tree. They had discussed how trees grow, what makes wood rotten and had looked for insects. The groups then moved on towards a camp site up a hill.

***Vignette: Nate spontaneously helping Isobel***

The site for the lunch time camp was halfway up a hill, in an area thick with trees. The floor was carpeted with fallen leaves. There were two ways to go. One was very steep and involved a climb, the other way was more of a gentle slope. They all made their choices. Some of the children chose the steep route and headed off with Jane and Emily. The others began to walk up the sloping path.

Isobel was last. She walked slowly, stopping every few minutes to ‘admire the view’. Nate reached camp. He looked around and, unprompted, walked back down the hill, smiled at Isobel and took her hand as they slowly walked alongside each other, up the slope, to camp.

When asked why he had helped, Nate said ‘She couldn’t get up the hill’ When asked how he knew that, he replied ‘I saw her’.

Isobel reflected upon this saying: ‘*Nate was very caring. I was slower than the rest but he came back and helped me to the camp’*.

[Kay, Isobel, Field notes 21 September 2015}

Nate was very caring and used his initiative to offer support. This indicated the care and concern for others that emerged within the children due to working alongside each other. Ella reflected upon this, saying how at the start of the research the children were ‘convinced that everyone could do the same as everyone else’. The older adults were just new people, but over time, and possibly due to older adults articulating their concerns and from children observing differences in their older friends, the children’s growing awareness of difference emerged. This was from a point of caring and problem-solving rather than negativity (Hernandez and Gonzalez, 2008). For example, Jack mentioned how Isobel had helped him with his zip, but she had struggled as her fingers were ‘old’. Nevertheless, he had waited until she succeeded, demonstrating patience. This patience was not taught to them, but emerged from working and playing alongside one other in close proximity. For some children, such as Nate and Jack, this was displayed in their actions, for others the floorbook activity and discussions demonstrated their understanding.

***5.6.6 Strategy: reflecting together after the event***

Jane reported how the floorbook discussions about age and ageing began when Austin asserted, ‘I’m nearly turning into a grown up’ but Olivia commented, ‘No, you have lots more years to go’, and proceeded to explain how older grown-ups have grey hair. This was a point of debate as Olivia’s grandma did not have grey hair and ‘she’s the oldest in the world’. The conversation progressed into comparisons about the grown-ups in their lives, including grandparents. It included their diverse interests, their abilities and their dislikes.

Following Week 5, John realised that ‘some grown-ups have more energy than other grown-ups’ provoking him to conclude that this could be caused by ‘how much they eat or drink... or if they are old’. It is not clear whether he learned this from connecting with the older adults in the field or whether he had learned this from elsewhere, but he demonstrated his understanding of difference between the needs and abilities of human beings. After Week 6, discussions developed further into age-related biological changes and consideration of aids that may be required to support physical ability. For example, Jack said, ‘My grandma is old because her hand goes all blue…she’s got a brown walking stick for inside and a black one for outside’. A discussion about death then followed.

Jack: ‘*when you get old you go to graveyards. People carry you and then you die. They bury you up’*

Olivia: *‘or in a glass case. When someone dies you kiss them and they wake up’* [knowledge based upon fiction].

Jack: ‘*no you don’t wake up… but Isobel and Emily aren’t really, really old. So they don’t die’*.

The data revealed that the children did not display ageism or negativity towards the older adults as determined by Hernandez and Gonzalez (2008), nor did the children ‘treat them derogatorily’ (p.293). The children were merely observing, curious and making sense of their experiences and the findings seemed to support the view of Moll and Khalulyan (2017) that young children do not judge others, as discussed in the literature review.

Furthermore, the care and concern shown for the older adults was also apparent. This was demonstrated by Jack who remained adamant that Isobel and Emily were ‘old but not very old’. The co-researchers discussed potential reasons for this; including the bond Jack had developed with the older adults that he did not want broken. In addition to not wanting them to die, he concluded that as in his story books ‘old people have scooters and sticks’, and given that Isobel and Emily did not have these aids, then this meant that they were not really old.

Co-researchers recognised that the presence of the older adults encouraged an interest in age-related difference and diversity and they wanted to develop this by extending their library. Jane recalled her search for books relating to older adults and grandparents but noticed ‘when you look you realise that you are lacking in books about certain subjects’. At that point, the only books she could source involved older adults using walking aids or dying. Although she purchased new books for the nursery, she continued to find it difficult to source books related to active grandparents, adventures or positive views of ageing. In addition, the few journal articles sourced on the topic were American (Larkin et al., 2013; Scheffel, 2015; Whitehouse et al., 2018). Although it is beyond the scope of this research project, exploring children’s intergenerational literature was considered by the co-researchers for future research.

The data shows that the presence of the older adults provoked valuable discussions between the children about their concept of age and the manifestations and implications of ageing. The engagement with the older adults additionally fostered an interest in the lives of others. The listening culture of the nursery enabled the conversations to take place and the relationships enabled honest views to be shared and solutions to be sought. The growing awareness of difference and diversity, for the children and for the co-researchers, has implications for practice as undertaking carefully planned and relevant intergenerational interventions with young children could enable them to develop and maintain positive views of older adults.

On one occasion, in an attempt to create their own literature, co-researcher Jane scribed a story created by the children. The narrative introduced Emily and Isobel as the main characters.

***Vignette: Story Created by Jack, Sara, John, Olivia, Elle, Annie and peers.***

*One day at Forest School there was a big bad wolf… Isobel and Emily scared the wolf away and he shouted don’t let the hair on your chinny chin chin… Isobel and Emily flew into space where there were aliens and monsters. They were scared but said ‘stop that’s silly, we are in space’... Isobel and Emily flied back to earth, back to Forest School. They walked to the top of a mountain, they wanted to climb to the top… they couldn’t get to the top because there was a wolf breathing dragon fire. They needed some help…*

Within their story, the children determined how Isobel and Emily experienced fears, yet they also showed bravery, determination to get to the top of the hill, and knew how to problem-solve. They also required assistance. This story demonstrated the experiences of the children coupled with their knowledge, including that drawn from literature. As the story progressed, the children’s own problem-solving discussion ensued about how help could be given to reach the top of a mountain if you were ‘frightened’ or ‘old’ or if your ‘legs are too thin’ or ‘tired’. Suggestions included a ‘rope’ (Olivia), ‘an escalator’ (Sara) or ‘a fire hose’ (John) or a ‘wheelchair’ (Ashley). ‘No Ashley’, said John, ‘the wheelchair would just roll down. Just use a lift’. ‘We could push them up, but you need two partners’ suggested Elle. ‘Maybe you could use a digger’, pondered Annie. The discussion continued with the realisation that sometimes things do not go to plan but you can find a solution, ‘if you have a partner’ (Olivia). The example also demonstrates how children’s experiences will not cease with the end of a Forest School activity, but may permeate further activity and influence their friends and peers. This has implications for practice. The reflective and participatory culture developed within and through the Research Circles, and the careful preparation of all participants, enabled reflection to permeate practice.

***5.6.7 Strategy for Practitioners: to embrace challenge and prepare for research***

At the start of this research project, co-researcher Diane articulated concern that engagement between older adults and young children would not occur. Emily had similar fears. However, the fears of Emily and Diane were shown to be unfounded as data later revealed how every child voluntarily interacted with each older adult over the six-week period of the data collection, with positive results. This alerted the co-researchers to the fact that the thinking of the adults (whether co-researchers or older adults) was being challenged. By careful preparation and commitment to working alongside a researcher, the initial fears had been overcome.

Preparation had been fundamental to this research, not only to ensure that appropriate older adults were recruited to work with children, but so that all research team members could collaborate and begin to build trust. These are essential elements for a successful research project (Stanley and Anderson, 2015), but particularly important for one that involved the participation and collaboration of so many different people who did not necessarily know each other well, if at all. This planning helped to ensure that the children were very positive about welcoming the older adults into their environment, even though they were unknown to them.

The data suggests that a potential barrier to intergenerational activity is likely to be the adults involved worrying about engagement between adults and young children which has implications for future intergenerational studies. Beynon and Lang (2018) recognised the concerns many people have in new situations, despite having excitement too, explaining that it takes a while for trust to grow and confidence to develop. To explain this they recorded the thoughts of the ‘nervous elders’ prior to their intergenerational singing intervention (Beynon and Lang, 2018, p.47), and so flagged up the importance of ensuring the comfort of the participants in the early stages as they are pivotal to the success, or otherwise, of the research. Although their views mirrored those of myself and co-researchers, research papers usually report only on the impact of the research, not these preparatory aspects, meaning that they rarely indicate the significance of planning and may not identify or acknowledge the concerns of the adults. This is an implication for future research and projects of this kind.

**Summary of theme -** Data analysis indicates that in an informal, calm outdoor context such a Forest School, where older adults and young children choose to collaborate in varying ways over time, and build trust, they motivate each other to embrace challenge and to learn. Such intergenerational practice enables older adults to overcome anxieties and to challenge themselves to engage in chosen activities. Meanwhile, children are shown as experts in their field and practitioners are able to reflect critically upon practice.

***5.7 Chapter Summary***

The chapter has presented and discussed the findings from thematic analysis conducted by the lead researcher, enhanced by the observations, insights and analysis of the co-researchers and participants. It has explained how these findings respond to the research questions, offered some original contribution to knowledge, and has identified some implications for practice and future research.

Thematic analysis identified four main themes of: affective participation, collaborative participation, intergenerational participation and challenging participation. Vignettes throughout the chapter illustrated how the participants engaged in the research and how the findings emerged. The substantive findings from the four themes are shown in Table 5.1:

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| --- |
| Table 5.1 **Substantive Findings from the four themes**:   1. **Affective Participation**: Data analysis shows that in an informal, unhurried, outdoor context, when motivated older adults and young children are brought together, it brings a sense of calm, which is mutually beneficial to all. 2. **Collaborative Participation:** Data analysis shows that when older adults and young children collaborate in varying ways over time, in a calm, non-formal, urban forest school environment, respectful, trusting relationships build. Trust is key for reciprocity. 3. **Learning through Intergenerational Participation:** Data analysis shows that in an informal outdoor context such as Forest School, when young children work alongside older adults, and where trusting relationships have developed, both parties learn reciprocally. Furthermore, in this research, when three unrelated generations worked together there were no tensions noted, while learning and skills development were apparent for all groups.   **Challenging Participation:** Data analysis indicates that in an informal, calm outdoor context such a Forest School, where older adults and young children choose to collaborate in varying ways over time, and build trust, they motivate each other to embrace challenge and to learn. Such intergenerational practice enables older adults to overcome anxieties and to challenge themselves to engage in chosen activities. Meanwhile, children are shown as experts in their field and practitioners are able to reflect critically upon practice. |

Chapter 6 will now summarise the key findings, highlight the strengths and limitations of this research methodology then will further outline implications for practice and future research. In addition, the contribution of this research to knowledge and practice will be discussed.

***CHAPTER 6***

***Conclusions***

***6.0 Introduction***

This chapter draws conclusions on research whose premise was co-production (Filipe, 2017, p.1). By creating a Research Circle (Persson, 2009) in collaboration with Early Years Practitioners, who became my co-researchers, I led an investigation of the inclusion of older adults in the lives of young children. The literature review (Chapters 2 and 3) informed the methodology as well as the focus of the research which was to examine how older adults and children participated together in a Forest School environment.

The research questions we initially established focused on interactions, knowledge exchange and benefits. In addition to the co-researchers, key participants were the twelve young children attending the Forest School and two older adult volunteers recruited for the research project. The research design employed the qualitative research techniques of interviewing and observation (Kitto et al., 2008). In addition we used more novel ‘participatory methodology’ (Newman and Leggett, 2019, p.121) in the form of Research Circles which incorporated the use of floorbooks (Warden, 2015) ensuring that the perspectives of all participants were included.

Thematic data analysis (Bazeley, 2013) led to the identification of four interrelated themes related to the types of participation which emerged: Affective Participation, Collaborative Participation, Learning through Intergenerational Participation and Challenging Participation (findings are presented and discussed in Chapter 5).

This chapter provides a summary of the findings, the research design and the processes followed in the research itself. Finally, I discuss implications for practice before next steps are outlined.

***6.1 Summary of the findings***

This research makes a contribution to three main areas, participatory methodologies in education, intergenerational activity and for outdoor education, such as Forest Schools. The findings are summarised here in relation to the way the different forms of participation emerged.

* **Affective Participation**

Affective engagement was a main discussion point with co-researchers from before and throughout the research. Prior to the research taking place the older adults voiced concerns about their own physical ability and potential patience with the young children, while co-researchers worried about how or whether the two age groups would interact. Yet, despite these concerns, the older adults’ strong motivation to work with the children in the Forest School environment, as articulated in their initial interviews, laid the foundation to engage in intergenerational activity. Martins et al. (2019) suggests further research is required into participants’ motivations for engaging in intergenerational projects. These women were motivated to work in the outdoor environment with young children, saw it as a mutual learning opportunity, as the chance to engage in a new experience and went on to enjoy their experience. However, this research is a small scale study and it cannot be assumed that these motivations would be applicable to all situations or to all older adults.

The children seemed to benefit from the unhurried, calm atmosphere within the Forest School. We are already aware of the value of the Forest School environment (Coates and Pimlott-Wilson, 2017), however, the co-researchers observed some unexpected behaviours within a number of children which they attributed not only to the Forest School but to the presence of the older adults. Children such as Austin and Jack had attended the Forest School previously, but only when the older adults were present was the change in their demeanour noted. This ‘assemblage’ (Mannion, 2019, p.1) of people and place affected these children. Austin began to talk extensively about his grandparents in lunchtime discussion while Jack appeared to benefit from the attention paid to him by the older adults: the different language they used and the varied techniques employed, including coaching. Both of these children became affectively engaged with the older adults. See vignettes relating to Austin and Jack in Chapter 5. Without these observations being recorded and analysed, the impact of such engagement would not have been realised, thus further contributing to knowledge.

Thus, the findings indicate that in an informal, unhurried, outdoor context, when motivated older adults and young children are brought together, it brings a sense of calm, which is mutually beneficial to all.

* **Collaborative Participation**

Over the course of the entire project all children interacted with the older adults to varying degrees. By way of observation, and consistent with the work of Fisher (2016), it was identified how these interactions strengthened, leading to firm bonds between the older adults and young children.

Some children (including Jack and Elle) interacted readily, as they were eager to induct these new adults into their environment. Other children (including Sara and Annie) were less eager. However, the older adults did not coerce the children into interacting. Instead they smiled and waited for the children to interact with them, thus respecting their views. Sara expressed her acceptance of the older adults through drawing and body language (Flewitt, 2005a) and maintained control over her feelings until she was ready to act. Vanderbilt et al. (2011) highlight that children’s trust of others will depend upon prior experiences and their stage of development. The research project included unplanned provocations, generated by the older adults, including letter writing and books. These inspired further thinking and discussion between the participants and led to collaborative learning.

While some children may have had prior positive experiences with older adults, others may not. The findings from this research suggest that projects such as these may provide the opportunity for young children to have new experiences with, and learn from, older adults not related to them. Furthermore, such projects may also be a way of supporting children facing challenges in their lives as they develop relationships with important adults in their community (The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2015, p.2).

In summary, data analysis shows that when older adults and young children collaborate in varying ways over time, in a calm, non-formal, urban forest school environment, respectful, trusting relationships build. Trust is key for reciprocity.

* **Learning Through Intergenerational Participation**

This theme illustrates how children and older adults not only exchange explicit knowledge but learn from each other in a ‘porous exchange of expertise’ (Potter and McDougall, 2017, p.84). The usual hierarchy in education was disrupted (Kirby and Gibbs, 2006), the knowledge-sharing was natural – despite Elwyn et al. (2007) saying it does not occur naturally – and reciprocity was evident, despite Knight et al. (2014) saying this is rare in intergenerational projects.

All participants reported benefits from the intergenerational participation, including the co-researchers, and examples of knowledge-exchange between the participants were identified by using Ward et al.’s (2012) 5-step framework. As reported by Ashley, children learned games such as Pooh sticks (Milne, 1992) from the older adults and numerous examples appear in Chapter 5. Older adults suggested that their involvement is best when they do not have ultimate responsibility for the children.

As noted in the findings, children were eager to teach the older adults. They inducted them into the Forest School and offered guidance. Furthermore, they identified the older adults’ learning needs and set out to teach them, for example Luke wanting to teach Emily how to construct a shelter. This indicates that MacKinder’s (2015) suggestion of all adults attending Forest School needing to be trained does not consider the crucial role of others with whom the children may come into contact and who may enhance provision. Untrained individuals, who work alongside teachers, can widen children’s perspectives and offer something more to their learning experience. In turn, practitioners can be influenced too, as they begin to question their practice.

In this way, in an informal outdoor context such as Forest School, when young children work alongside older adults, and where trusting relationships have developed, both parties learn reciprocally. Furthermore, in this research, when three unrelated generations worked together there were no tensions noted, while learning and skills development were apparent for all groups.

* **Challenging Participation**

Significantly, the older adults were determined to embrace challenges, and they adopted strategies to overcome their fears, which were highlighted in the first theme. These included dressing for the inclement weather and using their lack of knowledge or ability as learning experiences for the children. Their honesty in sticky situations, such as when they were unable to climb on steep slopes, or stand up from a log, acted as a stimulus for some children leading to problem-solving (Section 5.6.2) and self-challenge (Section 5.6.3). On occasions, their fears mirrored those of the children (see vignette, Sophie’s incline) and they were able to discuss their worries together and seek solutions in an ethos of challenging participation. The older adults were viewed as equals by the children. They were learning together within the Forest School environment and boundaries were blurred.

As a consequence of these experiences, following immersion in the Forest School environment with young children (Teater, 2018), Emily’s mind-set was altered (Eichsteller and Holtoff, 2011) and she recognised that she can enjoy herself with young children. In addition, the children learned about the needs of others, and of difference. These were demonstrated in the field, for example when Nate helped Isobel up to camp, and within floorbook activity with their practitioner co-researchers.

Furthermore, while Forest School leaders identify as facilitators (Harris, 2017) rather than teachers following a set curriculum, the co-researchers stated that they would not have expressed the same fears or limitations as the older adults. The presence of the older adults offered something different which impacted upon the learning, apparently in a spontaneous way (Bratianu and Orzea, 2012).

These findings demonstrate how bringing together these people (namely practitioners, older adults and young children), within a well-planned and informal Forest School environment can be productive for all ages. The reason for this is that where older adults and young children choose to collaborate in varying ways over time, and build trust, they motivate each other to embrace challenge and to learn. Such intergenerational practice enables older adults to overcome anxieties and to challenge themselves to engage in chosen activities. Meanwhile, children are shown as experts in their field and practitioners are able to reflect critically upon practice.

***6.2 Reflecting upon the research design***

This section reflects upon the research design, with specific focus on Research Circles (Persson, 2009). Research Circles have been a positive arena for discussion, research and practice development. Having now worked alongside co-researchers and participants during the lifespan of this Participatory Action Research (PAR) project, I can conclude that this methodology and the development of the Research Circles and other data collection methods supported well the purpose of the research. Research Circles were new to both me and to the co-researchers and there was an element of risk involved in adopting them. Jagau and Offerman’s (2018) research indicated that ‘conformity matters’ (p.232) to most people when working individually, but they will take riskier decisions when working within a group, or perhaps for reasons of social responsibility. The involvement of co-researchers in this study reflects this as well as guidance by Kitto et al. (2008) who highlight the importance of aspects such as rigour, reflexivity and credibility in qualitative research. There were many strengths of the Research Circles which stemmed from the careful pre-planning and commitment of the co-researchers, Diane reflected:

*The Research Circle discussions have been an essential part of the project and have provided the best opportunity to engage in professional dialogue, this has brought about a new element of professional standard for each practitioner involved…It has broadened my awareness into how early year’s educators can be a part of change and developments which impact on better outcomes for children in settings.*

Furthermore, Jane said:

*Research Circles have helped me to try out new ideas and not be afraid to ask questions and get involved in discussions. It is from these discussions we can truly develop our practice*

Solvason (2013, p.95) explained the necessity to ‘empower our Early Years practitioners to become capable researchers’ and this mirrors the Reggio Emilia approach (Rinaldi, 2006). Despite being new to empirical research, the co-researchers already regularly engaged in wider reading and evaluation of practice and were ready for that next step. Goodfellow and Hedges (2007, p.187) urge that Early Years practitioners can be deemed professionals if they ‘systematically engage in enquiry into their own practices’ so this was a potentially a further step in their professionalism. It also demonstrated the potential for research informed practice for the practitioners, individually, in teams and developing this as a culture in the wider sector through shared good practice.

The Research Circle brought strengths and challenges in equal measure. The extensive pre-planning processes were fundamental to the research and project design. The time and effort invested in this phase, from both sides, cannot be underestimated and may be off-putting for some researchers, however, the rewards, as indicated by Diane and Jane, were apparent. It was essential to be reliable, ethical and committed to the task in hand. There is an element of risk in undertaking intergenerational activity which can raise issues at the planning stage (Jarrott and Smith, 2010; Yasunaga et al., 2016) and that advice was heeded. There was still an element of luck in the recruitment of participants, and Yasunaga et al. (2016) cite this as one potential issue. Still, in respect of intergenerational work, North and Fiske (2015) advocate sound planning as proactive and considered plans are preferable to ad hoc ‘bumping into’ (p.174) which can create misunderstandings and resentment.

Jane commented that ‘the worst part of the project was trying to get all of the researchers together at the same time’. I had anticipated this as co-researchers have varied family and work commitments, so flexibility was key. This lengthy and complex research process allowed trust to develop within the team and for exchange of views from all co-researchers which contributed to the validity of the data.

Despite this activity requiring extra time and effort, Pain and Raynor (2016) explain how co-produced research should involve partners throughout and should generate impact, so I deemed their involvement important. It should be noted that the co-researchers involvement in data analysis is a novel approach (Bazeley, 2013, p.121), yet this added an insightful dimension to the research.

***6.3 Reflecting upon the research design (with a specific focus upon ethical considerations and those affected in absentia)***

All participants were treated and acted respectfully (see Chapter 4 Methodology), throughout this research. In addition to this however, it was realised that ‘others’ not involved in the research project were affected by it and the ethos of respect was extended more widely. Even though a child may not be involved directly, things occurring around them can impact upon their development (Gray and MacBlain, 2015). For example co-researchers Ella and Jane reported how other nursery children, not directly involved in this particular research project, soon began to talk about Isobel and Emily as their own friends, even before they had met them. Jane suggested that it was ‘similar to children seeing a famous person on a magazine’. Isobel and Emily became ‘heroes’ who inspired them and were incorporated within their play and within group story making. After the research project, when Isobel and Emily were invited to nursery, *all* children welcomed them and engaged with them. This also supports Richardson’s (2019) view that ethical considerations should extend beyond the participants for inclusion purposes.

Furthermore, in order to share experiences of Forest School with families, co-researchers created a nursery blog. Participating children then had the opportunity to choose content and stories and to share their adventures with family members (with the appropriate permissions in place) and their families had the opportunity to share the learning and experience. Further opportunities were also offered for older adults interested in volunteering, but who were unable to participate in this research project. Mockler and Casey (2015, p.135) explain how ‘good practitioner research is ethical practice’ and this aspect never wavered throughout.

***6.4 Limitations of the Study***

The limitations of this study are acknowledged within this section. First, this was a small-scale study, which was based in one setting. However, the implementation of the Research Circle that spanned the lifetime of the project and incorporated reflective diaries and floorbooks from participants, together with robust recording of all meetings, meant that data was reliable.

Secondly, the two older adults who volunteered for this study were retired from professional backgrounds and they had an interest in working with young children. This was a strength in respect of the data collected but must be acknowledged, as findings may differ with the involvement of other older adults.

***6.5 Implications for Future Research***

This research has some implications for future research:

* **The implementation of a Research Circle can provide a useful network for research and should be considered by researchers and practitioners.**

It is already known that engaging practitioners in research can be meaningful as they have insights into their setting, professional background and children, and can act as a bridge between academia and practice (Pascal and Bertram, 2012; Leggett and Newman, 2019). In order to do this, the implementation of a Research Circle (Persson, 2009) is a useful network for the implementation of practitioner research.

Established practice in the Forest School was the starting point in this research to enable continuity for the children. Not only were the co-researchers the facilitators of this project in the field, they supported the recruitment and prepared children for the research. They enabled children to reflect upon their activities, post fieldwork sessions, in order to make sense of their experiences (Warden, 2015; Einarsdottir et al., 2019) and these reflections were incorporated in Research Circle meetings. One example of this occurred when Cathy conversed with Ashley during post fieldwork activity and it was not until this stage that her thinking and understanding was revealed. This would have been missed had I been a sole researcher.

Time to reflect post fieldwork is essential. Research Circles provided a flexible, safe, dialogical space for the planning, reflections and analysis to take place. It is important to expect the unexpected as engaging in research may challenge thinking, beliefs or practice. This can result in adapting or creating policies or may even cause discomfort, and through Research Circles these concerns can be explored. Despite the challenges, the co-researchers recognise the value of engaging in research. Jane wrote, ‘Research Circles have helped me to try out new ideas and not be afraid to ask questions and get involved in discussions’ while Diane highlighted that ‘Involvement in projects like this with a researcher could be the way forward for Early Years Practitioners’.

* **Barriers to intergenerational research of this kind may include the concerns of practitioners and potential participants.**

Such potential barriers became apparent during the planning stage and were reflected upon later by practitioners. For example:

*What happens if the children ignore them [older adults] or do not engage? (*Diane, planning stage)

*My knees don’t do what they used to.* (Emily, prior to the research)

*I think when other people are there and you feel like you are being watched… I felt a bit nervous… and then I got into it.* (Jane, in reflection)

If well-prepared and qualified practitioners feel anxious when working alongside volunteers, and volunteers still have fears about their ability and participation, then this has implications for research, and for practice. Careful planning is essential for trusting bonds to develop in order that learning may occur and anxieties may be overcome. Research Circles can also support this. Isobel’s reflections highlighted the barriers and concerns that were raised at the start of the Research. Yet, the barriers were perceived rather than actual and were lowered by engagement in research and practice.

***6.6 Implications for policy***

* ***Early Years Provision and Education in general, should consider how they can embrace all-age learning within informal outdoor contexts.***

As the data showed, within an informal outdoor environment such as Forest School, where motivated older adults are present with young children and their practitioner / teacher, it brings a sense of calm. This then leads to the formation of trust, and reciprocity, which brings opportunities for all parties to challenge themselves and to learn.

Intergenerational learning in this thesis focused upon children aged under 5 and adults over 70 years of age. Both groups were motivated by the choice of activity and by each other while children were afforded the opportunity to teach others and to develop executive function.

***6.7 Implications for Practice***

* **Opportunities should be sought for older adults to work alongside young children, informally, in early childhood education as there can be mutual benefits for all.**

Intergenerational activity can teach children new perspectives and also enable children to teach others. There are ***some*** adults who are not trained to work with young children who have the ability to work alongside children, and their practitioners, offering something extra to the children’s lives, yet without having ultimate responsibility for everyday activity. Furthermore, not only can intergenerational activity affect the participants, but those ‘in absentia’ may also be affected (See Great Grandpa’s poem, abstract). Furthermore, Undertaking carefully planned (Makri et al., 2014) and relevant intergenerational interventions with young children could enable them to develop and maintain positive views of older adults (Teater, 2018). Co-researcher Ella confirmed, ‘We could do with a resident grandparent’.

* **Non-formal places, such as the urban Forest School environment, afford a relaxed atmosphere. In such a context, when motivated older adults work alongside young children, trusting relationships develop which leads to opportunities for learning and challenge. Attitudes can also be altered.**

By immersion in an informal outdoor context such as the Forest School environment, and by engaging with people of different generations, fears can be overcome and opportunities can be presented for new ways of working. Reflections from participants and from co-researchers identified:

*It was ‘fantastic… incredible…amazing… I can enjoy myself with a group of children more than I thought I could without having to worry about what’s happening’.* (Emily)

*This project has helped me to open my mind to the importance of older adults working with children.* (Jane)

Bringing older adults and young children together also impacted upon the third generation: the practitioner co-researchers. What became clear from engaging in reflections with the co-researchers, was the marked effect that this research project had had upon them and their practice. This was highlighted in the reflections of co-researchers:

*I did not expect to find I’d develop such strong views on the importance of ensuring that children have the opportunity to spend quality engagement and educational experiences with older adults and younger adults working together.* (Diane).

*They have taught us.* (Jane)

*The presence of the older adults manifested a positive impact over the younger adults and in my opinion it developed a stronger team who were on even footing together.*  (Diane)

Acting as facilitators, or a ‘bridge’ between these two age groups, the co-researchers provided a safe environment, free of significant responsibility, for the older adults while the older adults inspired and challenged the co-researchers. Because of the impact upon the practitioners, this will filter through to the children as the nursery curriculum is planned and when future research is conducted. In order for this to happen more widely within the early years sector, the barriers to intergenerational activity (Chapter 6.5), for example the co-researchers’ concern that interactions may not happen, must be overcome.

* **It is essential not to coerce children to engage with adults as they will interact in their own time and bonds will then form.**

Some of the children within this project eagerly engaged with older adults from the outset, but this was not the case for all children. Children will interact in their own time and their views must be respected. This has implications for other intergenerational projects, particularly for example where nurseries join up with day care or homes for the elderly. Taft (2015) highlights how adults tend to retain power in intergenerational situations and this is an area of caution.

* **As flexibility of provision, and choice of activity provided the best stimuli for both children and older adults, this has implications for the Early Years curriculum and for intergenerational practice.**

Within this research, the older adults were not only motivated by the informal outdoor activity and by working with young children, they were able to use their initiative to introduce relevant activities to the children (including letters and books). Instead of didactic teaching, the learning emerged from the interested adult and the environment. Isobel reflected upon how ‘This was a wonderful experience but …it’s a shame it can’t be available for all’. By saying this, Isobel meant that not all children participate in Forest School type activity with their settings, also identified by Harris (2015). Nor are opportunities like this readily available for older adults. Isobel recognised that they, the children and the older adults, within this research project were fortunate to have the experiences they did. Furthermore, co-researchers benefitted from the research project, with one example from Ella who said how the practitioners were able to ‘stand back and observe the children working with other adults’.

Internationally, the literature (Chapter 2) identifies the tensions arising from the diversity in cultures, values, beliefs and interpretations relating to intergenerational research and practice. In this small scale intergenerational project, in England, rich participations have been observed. This suggests that efforts should be made to disseminate and widen opportunities for intergenerational engagement in informal outdoor places such as Forest School. The concerns raised by the co-researchers and participants in this study may be addressed through careful preparation and training.

***6.8 Summary***

This thesis contributes to the body of knowledge that highlights the value of intergenerational activity and suggests that opportunities should be sought to involve older adults in the lives of young children within early childhood education, particularly within informal outdoor places such as Forest School.

The research indicates that investment in well-planned intergenerational relationships, where older adults and young children *choose* to engage with each other, is key to spontaneous knowledge exchange and subsequent learning for both age groups. Furthermore, non-formal places such as the urban Forest School environment, afford a relaxed atmosphere and it is there where trust, essential for reciprocity in opportunities for challenge, can grow. In addition, the middle generation, the practitioner co-researchers, can benefit by learning new perspectives, developing their reflective practice and enhancing their professionalism.

***6.9 Next steps***

It is now over three years since completion of the research project and in that time a number of significant developments have occurred.

**Continuation of intergenerational activity** – the nursery setting has continued to develop its intergenerational activity and is currently involved in an allotment project. Jane wrote:

*We now run an allotment… and we have a lovely mature lady…who is absolutely fantastic with the children. Her knowledge is incredible and the children immediately respect and listen to her. There is also another elderly gentleman who works there occasionally and one child found a piece of rock which the gentlemen then went on to explain how rocks are formed and gave it a specific name (one of which I would not know or remember). The child then returned to nursery to inform all of his peers and we began a small piece of work on rocks, something that would not have happened without the knowledge of the gentleman.*

Diane acknowledged that this way of working would not have occurred without the practitioners being involved in the Forest School intergenerational project.

*Before completing the project I hadn’t thought about working alongside other people and thought this would be something we would do ourselves, seeing how inspired the children were by the adults made me realise that they could learn so much more from the knowledge of the volunteers.*

In relation to the subsequent allotment project, Ella wrote,

*… I feel the (research) project allowed me to feel more confident in beginning the allotment project working alongside a group of allotment volunteers who are all of the older generation. I have felt inspired by their knowledge and what they have to offer to both myself and the children. I look forward to learning each week as well as the children and feel having spent time in the woods learning about these possibilities has driven me forward making me want to see where we can go next.  As I have learned so much from one of the volunteers in particular she made me want to educate myself further which is the reason I signed myself up to do a horticultural course.*

**The nursery blog**

The nursery blog, set up during the research project, has continued, along with the redevelopment of the setting’s website.

**Forest School handbook**

A child and parent friendly handbook was created by Jane, to induct families into the Forest School.

**Publication**

Our research methodology features in *Research Methods for Social Justice and Equity in Education* (Atkins and Duckworth, 2019).

**Seminar attendance, Norway**

Later this year, one co-researcher and I attended a seminar about participatory approaches between university and kindergartens. While I delivered a lecture about participatory methods, the co-researcher delivered her first-ever international presentation about her experiences as a co-researcher. As a team we plan to write about our experiences.

***6.10 Final Note***

I initially chose Participatory Action Research (PAR) to offer Early Years practitioners the opportunity to engage in research. Through conversations within the Research Circle, the Forest School was confirmed as the context for the research, as this was already a component of the nursery curriculum. Informed by the literature and by professional needs (Early Years sector), further discussion led to the introduction of intergenerational research to the Forest School. This methodology provided for the organic changes.

An intergenerational project necessitates the involvement of a variety of people of different ages and therefore their backgrounds, experience and motivations will differ. PAR proved a productive methodology for this project which engaged a variety of individuals aged from three years to seventy four years, working collaboratively within an urban Forest School environment. The amalgamation of experiences, ages and materials provided a dynamic learning environment.

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**Appendix 1**: PESTCLEE analysis – draft

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *Factors affecting organisation* | *Implications for Organisation* | *Relative Importance (linked to this project)* |
| *POLITICAL* | EYFS changing scene of EY, parental involvement and focus on outdoors  2 yr olds in schools | How can these requirements be met effectively.  PI not always possible when working – but potential of grandparents being involved  More competition out there. | The needs of young children still need to be met in a more restricted and competitive environment  Meets EYFS reqs |
| *ECONOMIC* | Less support from LA (eg graduate leader fund cut)  2,3,4 year old funding  Sustainability | Less income and fewer opportunities for CPD for staff  More challenges | Although there is no funding per se, support from the researcher can support CPD for staff and enhance practice opportunities.  USP |
| *SOCIAL* | Obesity  Lack of engagement with nature – reasons? Urban or time for example? Use of leisure time  Demographic changes – split families | How to improve parental / family involvement | Active  Natural environment  Meeting new people of different ages  community |
| *TECHNOLOGICAL* | Use of leisure time- IPads, TV, computers – playchanging? | Persuading parents of children’s learning needs | Exciting project to determine that children do not all need the latest I Pad – and focus upon real needs/ balance of life |
| *CULTURAL* | Diverse nature of EY settings and families within | How meet needs? | Cultural continuity  Inclusive to meet diverse needs |
| *LEGAL* | EYFS  Health and safety  Safeguarding  Data protection | Legislation must be adhered to  includes risk assessment  Consider volunteers | Considered in ethical issues and negotiated with the setting management |
| *ENVIRONMENTAL* | Urban area – no direct access to woodland | This has already been developed – further development possible | Continues the outdoor development of the setting and evaluates practice. Familiar environment to children and staff. |
| *ETHICAL and EDUCATIONAL* | Early Education Code of Ethics (2011)  EYFS | Act respectfully throughout  Consider best balance between education and care. Adult led and child initiated activity. | Care and education.  Holistic development  Staff CPD. Planning and evaluation time. |

*Based upon http://pestleanalysis.com*

**Appendix 2*:*** Agenda for Initial Meeting at Nursery Setting

**\*\* Nursery Setting \*\* Research Meeting @ \*\*\*\***

**\*\*date\*\***

**Agenda**

1. **Progress to date**

* **DBS copy for K**
* **Ready to progress with ethical approval**
* **\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* progress and questions**

1. **Review of Documentation**

* **Setting Consent Form**
* **Parent Information Letter**
* **Parent Consent Form**
* **Participant Information Sheet (who are the participants)**
* **Participant Consent Form**
* **Volunteer Position Description**

1. **Considerations and anticipated questions**

* **Co –researchers**
* **Timescale**
* **Dissemination / journal articles /**
* **Contacts on the participants sheets**
* **Insurance**
* **Transport**
* **Data storage**

1. **Anything else?**
2. **Next meeting /steps**

**Appendix 3:** Initial Recruitment Form (Older Adults)

#### Initial Recruitment Form, Health Care Sheet and Initial Interview – for older adult volunteers

Initial Recruitment Form

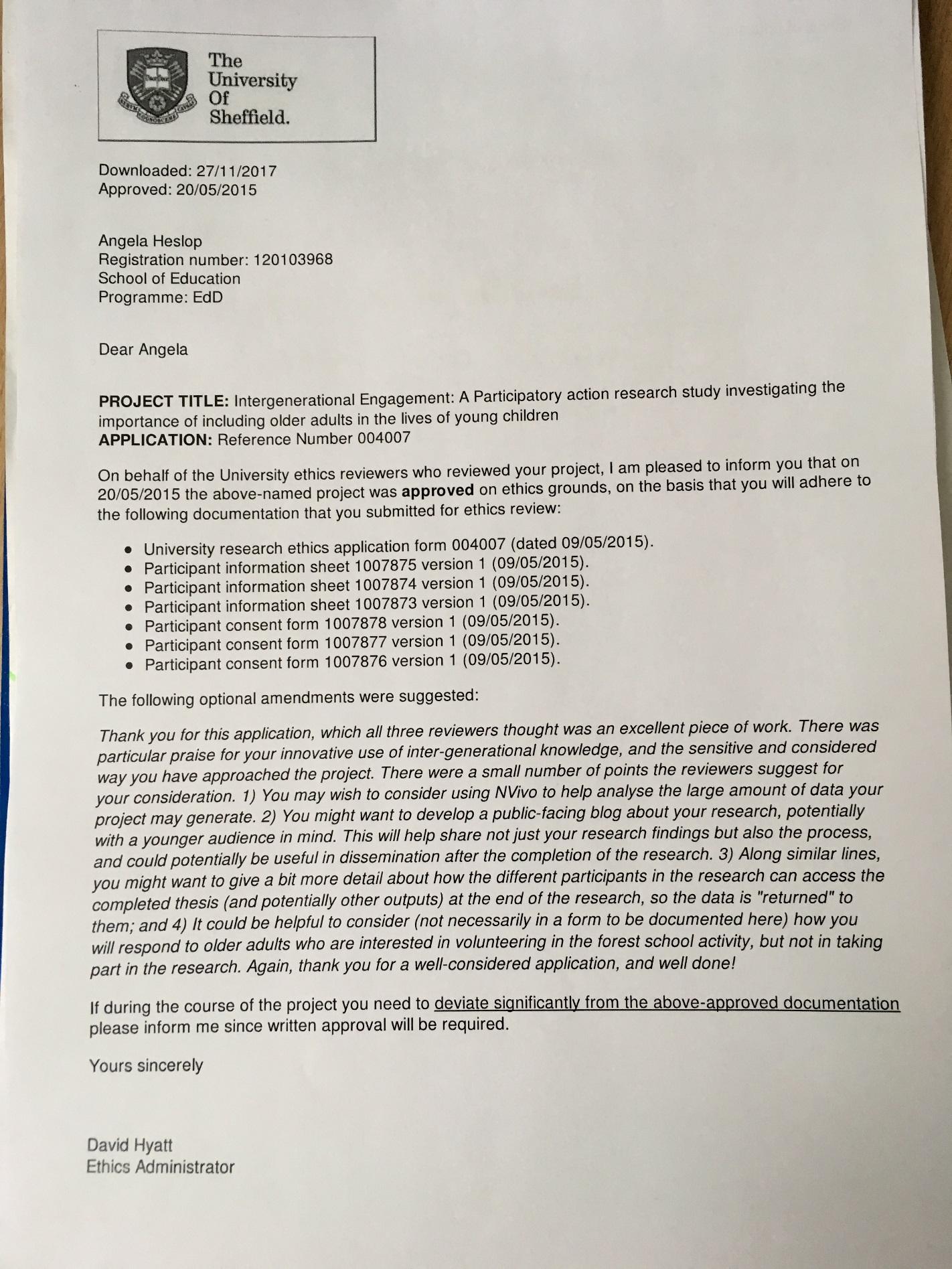
*All recruitment will be conducted in line with the nursery policies and procedures. The initial recruitment and health details will be carried out/ requested by the setting. The first interview with the Lead Researcher and a co-researcher from the setting will follow the format on page 3 of this document.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name |  |
| Date of birth |  |
| Home address |  |
| What is your previous experience in working with or caring for young children (under 5s): |  |
| What is your previous experience of volunteering? |  |
| Why do you want to be involved in this research project? |  |
| What experiences do you have of the outdoor environment which may be relevant to this project? |  |
| What can you bring to this project (in terms of expertise, interest, time, values etc?) |  |
| Referee:  (name/address/relationship) |  |
| Signed:  Dated: |  |

Health Care Information

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name of Volunteer |  |
| Age / dob |  |
| Home address |  |
| Contact telephone number |  |
| Contact e mail address |  |
|  |  |
| Medical condition/ diagnosis plus details of any medication taken: |  |
| Any symptoms that the researchers need to be aware of? |  |
| Any actions which need to be taken in relation to known conditions? |  |
| GP details |  |
| Emergency Contact details  Name and contact number / address |  |
| Any dietary needs? (as the nursery will provide lunch as required) |  |
| Who is responsible in the case of an emergency: | Individuals must declare their conditions  Researchers will have telephone access / transport and first aid as required. |
| Copies of form with: | Individuals, Lead Researcher, \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* Nursery |
| Signed (Volunteer): | Date: |
| Signed (researcher): | Date: |

**Appendix 4:** Ethical Approval Letter

******

**Appendix 5:** Setting Consent Form

#### Setting Consent Form and Agreement

|  |
| --- |
| Title of Research Project:  Intergenerational Engagement: A participatory action research study within an Urban Forest School Environment, investigating the importance of including older adults in the lives of young children.  Name of Lead Researcher: Kay Heslop  Setting: \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*  (Please initial boxes)   1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated *[insert date]* explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project. As a setting we wish to engage in this research project. 2. The Committee has already been approached by setting management   and agreement has been given.   1. I understand that the ‘\*\*\*\*\*’ setting policies and procedures will be adhered to throughout the research. 2. The practitioners involved will be co-researchers and will act in the best interests of the children they care for and the ethos of the setting. They may withdraw at any point without repercussions. 3. We will assist with the recruitment of volunteers who will be expected to adhere to our volunteer policy. 4. Data will be collected and analysed by the lead researcher and co-researchers. It may be stored at a secure location within the lead researcher’s workplace. Personal details of children and families attending ‘\*\*\*\*\* will remain within the Nursery Setting unless individual consent is otherwise given. 5. Findings may be disseminated at a later stage. Before this occurs, the research team will obtain consent from management. 6. I agree for \*\*\*\*\*\* staff to engage in this research project as appropriate. I understand that the setting’s name will not be linked with the research materials unless express permission is given at a later stage for dissemination purposes.     \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Setting manager Date Signature  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Name of person taking consent Date Signature  (*if different from lead researcher*)  *To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Lead Researcher Date Signature  *To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*  Copies:  *Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project’s main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.* |

**Appendix 6:** Information Sheet (Older Adult) and Consent Form

#### Participant Information Sheet (Older Adult Volunteers)

1. **Research Project Title**

Intergenerational Engagement: A participatory action research study within an Urban Forest School Environment, investigating the importance of including older adults in the lives of young children.

1. **Invitation to Participate**

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

1. **What is the Project’s Purpose?**

Staff and children at \*\*\*\* nursery are currently involved in ‘Forest School Activity’. This is a recently established programme which develops engagement with nature and enables children to learn skills outdoors.

Literature informs us that previous generations engaged more with nature than current generations (Maynard 2007, National Trust 2013). We are also informed of the benefits of intergenerational activity (Rosebrook 2002, Liu and Lin 2014). Due to this, and in order to build upon the work already being carried out, practitioners from the setting will be working alongside the lead researcher to determine the benefits, if any, of integrating different generations in an urban Forest School environment and observing the interactions between the age groups.

The project will commence in Spring 2015 with the main fieldwork taking place in

Summer / Autumn 2015 over an agreed period of about 6 weeks. Analysis and writing

will be completed by October 2016.

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

Older adults volunteering for the research will demonstrate an affinity with young children, a love of the outdoors and a sense of adventure.

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

It is up to you whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be

given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form). You can

still withdraw at any time without it affecting you in any way. You do not have to give

any reason.

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

The first stage will be to follow the setting’s current volunteer policy. On successful completion, the older adult volunteers will then be invited for an initial interview (approx. one hour) which will determine reasons for engaging in the research, interests and expectations. This will be conducted at a mutually convenient location. You will then be invited to attend the Forest School Days (one day per week, approx. 10am to 2pm) over a period of six weeks to engage with the group and learn together. Observations and photographs may be taken by the researchers. A final interview will be conducted to reflect upon the process and you will be later informed of the outcomes.

Although there is no payment for engagement in the research, the lead researcher will be able to arrange transport for the volunteers if required. Packed lunches will be provided by the nursery for participants.

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

All adults involved must adhere to the policies and procedures of the nursery setting.

No smoking is permitted and photos of the children may only be taken on the nursery camera. You will be asked prior to participating if you have any pre-existing medical conditions which we need to be aware of and a health form must be completed in case of emergency.

In the Forest School environment, you will explore, play and engage with the children. However, the nursery staff will remain ultimately responsible for the children and you will not be alone with them at any time. Weekly activities will be determined as the project progresses and it is hoped that you will enhance their experiences.

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

As the fieldwork will be carried out in the woods, it is important that everyone wears comfortable outdoor shoes and has appropriate outdoor clothing. We may be able to lend you some waterproof clothing if necessary. We would not want anyone to be exposed to risks that are greater than their usual lifestyles and for this reason you must feel comfortable with the outdoor environment.

Another potential disadvantage is the time factor.

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

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will determine the benefits of integrating different generations within the Urban Forest School Environment.

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

In this case, then the reason will be shared with the participants.

1. **What if something goes wrong?**

The volunteer policy of the setting will be followed locally and if you have any concerns, please contact the lead researcher Kay Heslop ([edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk) ) or the Setting’s manager / deputy manager \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* or \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* If you have any concerns about the way the lead researcher has conducted the research, you may contact her supervisor \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*. If the complaint is not handled to your satisfaction then it is possible to contact the Head of Department of Education at Sheffield, \*\*\*\*\* who will then ensure the complaint is dealt with through the appropriate channels.

1. **Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

**For older adults:** All the personal information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential between the researchers/co-researchers.

In respect of the research data, you will not be identified in individual responses as pseudonyms will be used.

You will not be identified in any reports or publications unless you opt to be.Although individuals will not be named in the process, if researchers decide to write a report at a later date then this may identify the authors and potentially the nursery by association. This means that full anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

1. **What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the project’s objectives?**

In attempting to determine the impact of engagement between older adults and young children in an Urban ‘Forest School’ environment the lead researcher and co-researchers will observe the interactions between children and older adults. It is important that we ask you questions too in order to determine your previous experience and interests and to determine whether this matches what is written in the literature.

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

To make later analysis easier, interviews may be recorded using a Dictaphone. Photos may be taken in the woods and there is a possibility that video footage may be taken.

The audio and/or video recordings of your activities made during this research will be

used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures.

No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one

outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

1. **What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The entire project will be written into a thesis for the lead researcher’s doctorate, due to be completed in late 2016. You will not be identified in this. In addition, the nursery setting may wish to share results with families. Journal articles may also be written to inform and to inspire future practice.

Data collected by the co-researchers may also be used within the nursery setting to

Inform the learning journeys of the children involved.

1. **Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research is not funded. It is being conducted by Kay Heslop, EdD student at Sheffield University and supported by \*\*\*\*\*\* Nursery, \*\*\*\*\*\*.

1. **Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been ethically approved via the Department of Education’s ethics review procedure at Sheffield University.

1. **Contact for further information:**

If you would like further information about the project, please contact either of the following:

Kay Heslop (lead researcher) EdD student at Sheffield University, tel: \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*. E mail: [edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk) or \*\*\*\* (co researcher and deputy manager of \*\*\*\*\*\*), tel: \*\*\*\* email: \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

You will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep as well as a copy of the signed consent form.

Thank you for considering taking part in this project.

Kay Heslop

#### Participant Consent Form

|  |
| --- |
| Title of Research Project: Intergenerational Engagement: A participatory action research study within an Urban Forest School Environment, investigating the importance of including older adults in the lives of young children.  Name of Lead Researcher: Kay Heslop (co-researchers will be nursery staff)  Participant Identification Number for this project:  Please initial box   1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet  dated 29th July 2015 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project. 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. *The* *lead researcher, Kay Heslop, may*   *be contacted on \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* or at* [edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk)   1. I understand that my personal information will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research unless I choose to be. 2. I understand that interviews may be recorded, photos taken and video or audio recordings made. These will aid analysis and illustrate conference proceedings or lectures.   5. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research   1. I agree to take part in the above research project.   \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Name of Participant Date Signature  (*or legal representative*)  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Name of person taking consent Date Signature  (*if different from lead researcher*)  *To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Lead Researcher Date Signature  *To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*  Copies:  *Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project’s main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.* |

**APPENDIX 7:** Information Sheet (co-researcher) and Consent Form

#### Participant Information Sheet (Co-researchers)

1. **Research Project Title**

Intergenerational Engagement: A participatory action research study within an Urban Forest School Environment, investigating the importance of including older adults in the lives of young children.

1. **Invitation to Participate**

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

1. **What is the Project’s Purpose?**

You are currently involved in Forest School Activity within your job role and with children from your nursery setting. This is an established programme which you value and upon which you reflect in order to provide the best for the children in your care. Your setting also values the support of at least one older adult volunteer within daily routine. Literature informs us of the benefits of intergenerational activity (Rosebrook 2002, Liu and Lin 2014) and we are also informed that previous generations engaged more with nature than current generations (Maynard 2007, National Trust 2013).

This research project will be based within the Forest School activity already being conducted and will, in addition, introduce the involvement of older adults within the Forest School environment. These older adults may be current or new volunteers. It is hoped that the older adults volunteering for the research will demonstrate an affinity with young children, a love of the outdoors and a sense of adventure.

Primarily the project is an opportunity to determine the benefits, if any, of integrating different generations within the urban Forest School environment and observing the interactions between the age groups.

The project will commence in Spring 2015 with the main fieldwork taking place in Summer / Autumn 2015 over an agreed period of about 6 weeks. Analysis and writing will be completed by October 2016.

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

As an experienced practitioner who already engages in Forest School (FSA) activity and who has already shown an interest in the research project, you are being invited to participate as a co-researcher. You know the children in your care, you are familiar with nursery setting practice and policies and you have a link with families and other practitioners for effective communication.

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

It is up to you whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be

given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form). You can

still withdraw at any time without it affecting you in any way. You do not have to give

any reason.

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

**Co-researchers (practitioners**) will meet initially in April 2015 to discuss plans for the research. A Research Circle will be formed and regular meetings (to be determined by the group) will be held to plan, to discuss progress and to analyse findings. Different individuals may offer to work on different aspects according to personal and professional interests and methods used may include photos, observations or even the development of a blog. You will still engage in Forest School Activity as usual, but will work alongside the lead researcher and older volunteers. Fieldwork will take place in summer /autumn 2015 and it is anticipated that the final stages for you will be completed by December 2015, although detailed analysis and writing up will take longer (until late 2016 for those interested in this aspect). As co-researchers, practitioners will be invited to be involved in the development and all stages of the research.

**Older adult volunteers** will be interviewed by the lead researcher and one co-researcher and will be recruited in accordance with the setting’s Volunteer Policy.

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

As a co-researcher, and practitioner, you will firstly care for the children in the Forest School environment as you usually do. You will follow the setting’s policies and procedures.

For the research, you will attend the ‘research circle’ (timings to be determined by the group) to plan, to reflect upon activity and to analyse observations or photographs (for example). The exact activities will be determined by and carried out by interested individuals within the group. These may include observing and recording the interactions between children and the older adults when at Forest School.

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

The main disadvantage is potentially the additional time to be taken in planning and reflecting upon the activity. You will also be working alongside other adults ‘in the woods’ and while you are not responsible for them, you may need to advise them of procedures at certain times.

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

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will determine the benefits of integrating different generations within the Urban Forest School Environment.

It is hoped that as a co-researcher, this project will build upon your prior experience

and interests and further develop skills of enquiry. Also, by being situated in the outdoor

environment, there is the opportunity to develop children’s engagement with nature and for

practitioners to reflect upon and further develop practice in this area.

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

In this case, then the reason will be shared with the participants.

1. **What if something goes wrong?**

The volunteer policy of the setting will be followed locally and if you have any concerns, please contact the lead researcher Kay Heslop ([edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk) ) or the setting’s manager / deputy manager \*\*\*\*\* or \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*. If you have any concerns about the way the lead researcher has conducted the research, you may contact her supervisor \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*. If the complaint is not handled to your satisfaction then it is possible to contact the Head of Department of Education at Sheffield, \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* who will then ensure the complaint is dealt with through the appropriate channels.

1. **Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

**For Practitioners/ Co-researchers:** Although individuals will not be named in the process, if researchers decide to write a report at a later date then this may identify the authors and potentially the nursery by association. This means that full anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Pseudonyms will be used for individual responses.

1. **What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the project’s objectives?**

In attempting to determine the impact of engagement between older adults and young children in an Urban ‘Forest School’ environment the lead researcher and co-researchers will observe the interactions between children and older adults. Your contribution to the interpretation and analysis of these observations will be valuable. It will also be important to determine your reflections on the process.

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

To make later analysis easier, research circle meetings may be recorded using a Dictaphone, or minuted. Photos may be taken in the woods and there is a possibility that video footage may be taken. The audio and/or video recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures.

No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one

outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

1. **What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The entire project will be written into a thesis for the lead researcher’s doctorate, due to be completed in late 2016. You will not be identified in this. In addition, the nursery setting may wish to share results with families. Journal articles may also be written to inform and to inspire future practice.

Data collected by the co-researchers may also be used within the nursery setting to

Inform the learning journeys of the children involved.

1. **Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research is not funded. It is being conducted by Kay Heslop, EdD student at Sheffield University and supported by \*\*\*\*Nursery, \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*.

1. **Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been ethically approved via the Department of Education’s ethics review procedure at Sheffield University.

1. **Contact for further information:**

If you would like further information about the project, please contact either of the following:

Kay Heslop (lead researcher) EdD student at Sheffield University, tel: \*\*\*\*\*\*\*. E mail: [edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk) or \*\*\*\*\* (co researcher and deputy manager of \*\*\*\*\*\*, tel: \*\*\*\*\*\* email: \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

You will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep as well as a copy of the signed consent form.

Thank you for considering taking part in this project.

Kay Heslop

#### Participant Consent Form – Co-researchers

|  |
| --- |
| Title of Research Project: Intergenerational Engagement: A participatory action research study within an Urban Forest School Environment, investigating the importance of including older adults in the lives of young children.  Name of Lead Researcher: Kay Heslop (co-researchers will be nursery staff)  Participant Identification Number for this project:  Please initial box   1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet  dated 29th July 2015 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project. 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. *The* *lead researcher, Kay Heslop, may*   *be contacted on \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* or at* [edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk)   1. I understand that my personal information will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research unless I choose to be. 2. I understand that interviews may be recorded, photos taken and video or audio recordings made. These will aid analysis and illustrate conference proceedings or lectures.   5. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research  I agree to take part in the above research project.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Name of Participant Date Signature  (*or legal representative*)  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Name of person taking consent Date Signature  (*if different from lead researcher*) *To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Lead Researcher Date Signature  *To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*  Copies:  *Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project’s main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.* |

**APPENDIX 8:** Information Letter (Parents for children) and consent form

#### Participant Information Sheet (Parents / Carers)

1. **Research Project Title**

Intergenerational Engagement: A participatory action research study within an Urban Forest School Environment, investigating the importance of including older adults in the lives of young children.

1. **Invitation to Participate**

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

1. **What is the Project’s Purpose?**

Staff and children at \*\*\*\*\* nursery are currently involved in ‘Forest School Activity’. This is a recently established programme which develops engagement with nature and enables children to learn skills outdoors.

Literature informs us that previous generations engaged more with nature than current generations (Maynard 2007, National Trust 2013). We are also informed of the benefits of intergenerational activity (Rosebrook 2002, Liu and Lin 2014). Due to this, and in order to build upon the work already being carried out, practitioners from the setting will be working alongside the lead researcher to determine the benefits, if any, of integrating different generations in an urban Forest School environment and observing the interactions between the age groups.

The main fieldwork for the project will take place in Summer / Autumn 2015 over an

agreed period of about 6 weeks. Analysis and writing will be completed by October

2016.

1. **Why has my child been chosen?**

Your child is already engaging in Forest School Activity within the nursery.

1. **Does my child have to take part?**

It is up to you whether or not to allow your child to take part. If you do decide to

allow this, you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a

consent form). You can still withdraw your child at any time without it affecting them

in any way. You do not have to give any reason.

1. **What will happen to my child if they take part?**

Before starting the research project, the children will be informed, by their practitioners, that there will be some visitors at Forest School and will be asked what they feel about this. They will be informed that their practitioners will be ‘finding things out’ about how people learn from each other. They will be informed they can join in if they want to, but that they do not have to.

Your child will attend Forest School as usual. They will be cared for by their usual practitioners and will interact with the visitors, if they choose to, when in the woods.

Observations and photographs may be taken by the Lead Researcher (Kay Heslop) or co-researchers (nursery staff), as usual, to inform your child’s learning journey. These observations and photographs may also be analysed by the researchers in order to determine the impact of engagement between older adults and young children in an urban Forest School environment.

1. **What does my child have to do?**

Your child will attend Forest School as usual. They will be cared for by their usual practitioners and will interact with the visitors, if they choose to, when in the woods. The visitors will remain the same for the duration of the project.

The nursery staff will remain ultimately responsible for the children. Weekly activities will be planned as the project progresses. They will be based upon children’s interests just as they are currently.

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

As the children will be meeting new adults there is the potential that they may feel shy or uncertain about this, however we hope that this will be a positive experience for the children and adults involved.

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

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will determine the benefits of integrating different generations within the Urban Forest School Environment.

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

In this case, then the reason will be shared with the participants.

1. **What if something goes wrong?**

The volunteer policy of the setting will be followed locally and if you have any concerns, please contact the lead researcher Kay Heslop ([edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk) ) or the Setting’s manager / deputy manager \*\*\*\*\* or \*\*\*\*\*. If you have any concerns about the way the lead researcher has conducted the research, you may contact her supervisor \*\*\*\*\*\*. If the complaint is not handled to your satisfaction then it is possible to contact the Head of Department of Education at Sheffield\*\*\*\*\*\* who will then ensure the complaint is dealt with through the appropriate channels.

1. **Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

**For children:** All of your child’s personal information will be kept strictly confidential and retained within the nursery setting.

In respect of the research data, your child will not be identified in individual responses as pseudonyms will be used.

Although your child will not be named in any reports or publications, if researchers decide to write a report at a later date then this may identify the authors and potentially the nursery by association.

1. **What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the project’s objectives?**

In attempting to determine the impact of engagement between older adults and young children in an Urban ‘Forest School’ environment the lead researcher and co-researchers will observe the interactions between children and older adults.

Photographs will be taken only with the nursery camera and written observation records will be retained by the researchers. They may also be used to inform your child’s learning journey.

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

Photos may be taken in the woods and there is a possibility that video footage may be taken using the nursery camera. The audio and/or video recordings of the activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures.

No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one

outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

1. **What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The entire project will be written into a thesis for the lead researcher’s doctorate, due to be completed in late 2016. Your child will not be identified in this. In addition, the nursery setting may wish to share results with families. Journal articles may also be written to inform and to inspire future practice.

Data collected by the co-researchers may also be used within the nursery setting to

Inform the learning journeys of the children involved.

1. **Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research is not funded. It is being conducted by Kay Heslop, EdD student at Sheffield University and supported by \*\*\*\* Nursery, \*\*\*\*\*.

1. **Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been ethically approved via the Department of Education’s ethics review procedure at Sheffield University.

1. **Contact for further information:**

If you would like further information about the project, please contact either of the following:

Kay Heslop (lead researcher) EdD student at Sheffield University, tel: \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*. E mail: [edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk) or \*\*\*\*\* (co researcher and deputy manager of \*\*\*\*\*), tel: \*\*\*\*\*\* email: \*\*\*\*\*\*\*

You will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep as well as a copy of the signed consent form.

Thank you for considering taking part in this project.

Kay Heslop

#### Participant Consent Form (Parent /Carer)

|  |
| --- |
| Title of Research Project: Intergenerational Engagement: A participatory action research study within an Urban Forest School Environment, investigating the importance of including older adults in the lives of young children.  Name of Lead Researcher: Kay Heslop (co-researchers will be nursery staff)  Participant Identification Number for this project:  Please initial box   1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet  dated 29th July 2015explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project. 2. I understand that my child’s participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should they not wish to answer any particular question or questions, they are free to decline. *The* *lead researcher, Kay Heslop, may be contacted on \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* or at* [edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk) 3. I understand that my child’s personal information will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my child’s anonymised responses. I understand that my child’s name will not be linked with the research materials, and they will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research. 4. I understand that interviews may be recorded, photos taken and video or audio recordings made. These will aid analysis and illustrate conference proceedings or lectures.   5. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research  I agree to take part in the above research project.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Name of Participant Date Signature  (*or legal representative*)  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Name of person taking consent Date Signature  (*if different from lead researcher*)  *To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Lead Researcher Date Signature  *To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*  Copies:  *Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project’s main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.* |

**APPENDIX 9:** Information Sheet re Parent/Carer Feedback and consent form

#### Participant Information Sheet (Parent / Carer feedback)

1. **Research Project Title**

Intergenerational Engagement: A participatory action research study within an Urban Forest School Environment, investigating the importance of including older adults in the lives of young children.

1. **Invitation to Participate**

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

1. **What is the Project’s Purpose?**

Staff and children at \*\*\*\*\*\*\* nursery are currently involved in ‘Forest School Activity’. This is a recently established programme which develops engagement with nature and enables children to learn skills outdoors.

Literature informs us that previous generations engaged more with nature than current generations (Maynard 2007, National Trust 2013). We are also informed of the benefits of intergenerational activity (Rosebrook 2002, Liu and Lin 2014). Due to this, and in order to build upon the work already being carried out, practitioners from the setting will be working alongside the lead researcher to determine the benefits, if any, of integrating different generations in an urban Forest School environment and observing the interactions between the age groups.

The main fieldwork for the project is taking place in Summer / Autumn 2015 over an

agreed period of about 6 weeks. Analysis and writing will be completed by October

2016.

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

Your child is already engaging in Forest School Activity and current research within the nursery and you may have some valuable information to support the research.

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

It is up to you whether or not you take part. If you do decide to participate, you will

be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form). You

can still withdraw at any time without it affecting you in any way. You do not have to

give a reason.

1. **What will happen if I take part?**

You may wish to share your thoughts with your child’s key carers (who are the co-researchers in this project) in writing and these can be recorded to share with the research team. Some parents/ carers may opt to be interviewed by the team to share their views and experiences. If an interview takes place, this will occur at a mutually convenient location, possibly the nursery.

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

You may choose to offer written feedback about your child’s experiences to support the development of the project. If relevant, some parents may be interviewed about their experiences at a convenient time and location.

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

There is no payment or reward for taking part but some parents and carers may value the opportunity to offer their feedback. Any feedback given would be in your own time and on a completely voluntary basis.

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

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will determine the benefits of integrating different generations within the Urban Forest School Environment.

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

In this case, then the reason will be shared with the participants.

1. **What if something goes wrong?**

The volunteer policy of the setting will be followed locally and if you have any concerns, please contact the lead researcher Kay Heslop ([edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk) ) or the Setting’s manager / deputy manager \*\*\*\*\*\* or \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*. If you have any concerns about the way the lead researcher has conducted the research, you may contact her supervisor \*\*\*\*\*\*. If the complaint is not handled to your satisfaction then it is possible to contact the Head of Department of Education at Sheffield, \*\*\*\*\*\* who will then ensure the complaint is dealt with through the appropriate channels.

1. **Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All of your personal information will be kept strictly confidential and retained within the nursery setting. In respect of the research data, you will not be identified in individual responses as pseudonyms will be used.

Although you will not be named in any reports or publications, if researchers decide to write a report at a later date then this may identify the authors and potentially the nursery by association.

1. **What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the project’s objectives?**

In attempting to determine the impact of engagement between older adults and young children in an Urban ‘Forest School’ environment the lead researcher and co-researchers will accept feedback from parents regarding their child’s involvement.

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

If you submit written feedback, this will be retained for analysis by the research team. Should you choose to be interviewed at a later date, then an audio recording will be taken. The audio recordings made during this research will be used only for analysis and the content used for illustration in conference presentations and lectures.

No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one

outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

1. **What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The entire project will be written into a thesis for the lead researcher’s doctorate, due to be completed in late 2016. Your child will not be identified in this. In addition, the nursery setting may wish to share results with families. Journal articles may also be written to inform and to inspire future practice.

Data collected by the co-researchers may also be used within the nursery setting to

Inform the learning journeys of the children involved.

1. **Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research is not funded. It is being conducted by Kay Heslop, EdD student at Sheffield University and supported by \*\*\*\*\* Nursery, \*\*\*\*\*.

1. **Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been ethically approved via the Department of Education’s ethics review procedure at Sheffield University.

1. **Contact for further information:**

If you would like further information about the project, please contact either of the following:

Kay Heslop (lead researcher) EdD student at Sheffield University, tel: \*\*\*\*\*. E mail: [edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk) or \*\*\*\*\* (co researcher and deputy manager of \*\*\*\*\*), tel: \*\*\*\*\* email: \*\*\*\*\*\*

You will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep as well as a copy of the signed consent form.

Thank you for considering taking part in this project.

Kay Heslop

#### Participant Consent Form (Parent /Carer – not for child)

|  |
| --- |
| Title of Research Project: Intergenerational Engagement: A participatory action research study within an Urban Forest School Environment, investigating the importance of including older adults in the lives of young children.  Name of Lead Researcher: Kay Heslop (co-researchers will be nursery staff)  Participant Identification Number for this project:  Please initial box   * + - 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet  dated 2nd October 2015explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.       2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. *The* *lead researcher, Kay Heslop, may be contacted on 0771 5814854 or at* [edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:edp04akh@sheffield.ac.uk)       3. 3. I understand that my personal information will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and they will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.       4. 4. I understand that interviews may be recorded, photos taken and video or audio recordings made. These may aid analysis and illustrate conference proceedings or lectures.   5. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research   1. I agree to take part in the above research project.   \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Name of Participant Date Signature  (*or legal representative*)  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Name of person taking consent Date Signature  (*if different from lead researcher*)  *To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Lead Researcher Date Signature  *To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*  Copies:  *Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project’s main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.* |

**APPENDIX 10:** Sample Interview Questions for Initial Interview with Older Adults

|  |
| --- |
| **Sample Interview Questions for Initial Interview with Older Adults**   * Please share with me any previous experience you have of working with or caring for young children (under 5s): * And any experience of volunteering? * What drew you to become involved in this research project? * What do you hope you might gain from being involved? * What experience do you have of the outdoor environment (eg parks, the coast, gardening, walking)? * What do you particularly like about being in the outdoor environment? Is there anything that you dislike? * What do you think you can bring to this project (in terms of expertise, interest, time, values etc?) * How do you feel about embarking upon this project? * Any questions?   *Details will then be shared of arrangements for the fieldwork and any transport or equipment required.* |

**APPENDIX 11:** Sample Interview Questions for Second Interview with Older Adults

**Sample Interview Questions for Second Interview with Older Adults**

Reflecting back on your initial interview, you had some fears and concerns about the project (groups of children, patience, wet conditions) were these founded?

The children seem to have accepted you into the group. Why do you think this is?

Certain children were eager to engage with you. How did they do this? Why do you think they did this?

What have you shared with the children / taught them?

What have you helped the children with?

How have you overcome issues?

What have the children told you / shown you?

What have you learned from this project?

How have these experiences altered your thoughts about young children, if at all?

*Thank you for your support*

**APPENDIX 12:** Preparatory Documentation

**Preparatory Documentation**

***Initial Documentation:***

Setting consent form- outlining expectations of both the setting and the researcher with signature from the ‘gatekeeper’

Participant Information Sheet and consent form – separate forms for each co-researcher, signed

Parent information sheet and consent form – forms signed by a parent for each of the children participating in the project

Volunteer Information Sheet and consent form – signed by each volunteer

Ethical review – developed by the Team and completed then submitted by the facilitator.

***Setting responsibilities:***

Staffing /travel/ costs/

Risk assessment - updated

Volunteer policy - developed

Recruitment for older volunteers – in order to meet setting requirements

Medical forms for volunteers in case of emergency retained at the setting and carried in the field in case of emergency.

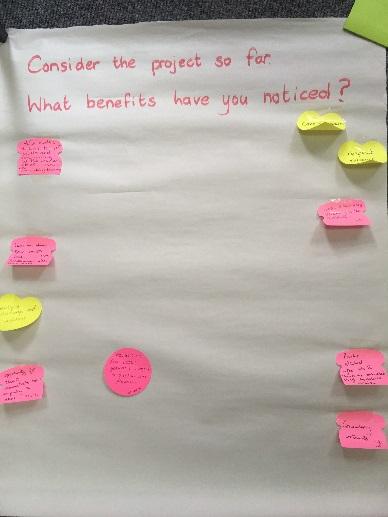
DBS forms checks (although these were not deemed essential, it was recommended as good practice. Both volunteers and the facilitator had DBS checks).

Informing parents and collecting consent forms

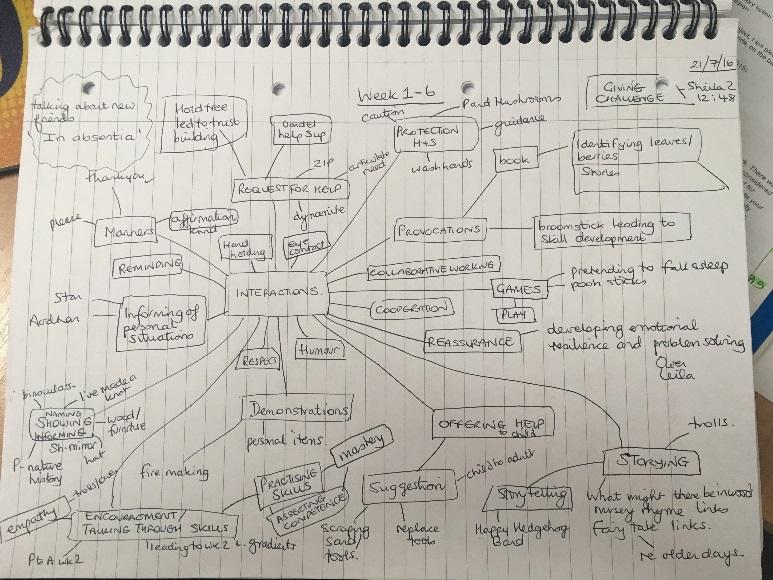
Reflective diaries given to all adult participants to use as an aide memoir where necessary

Camera /video supply and storage

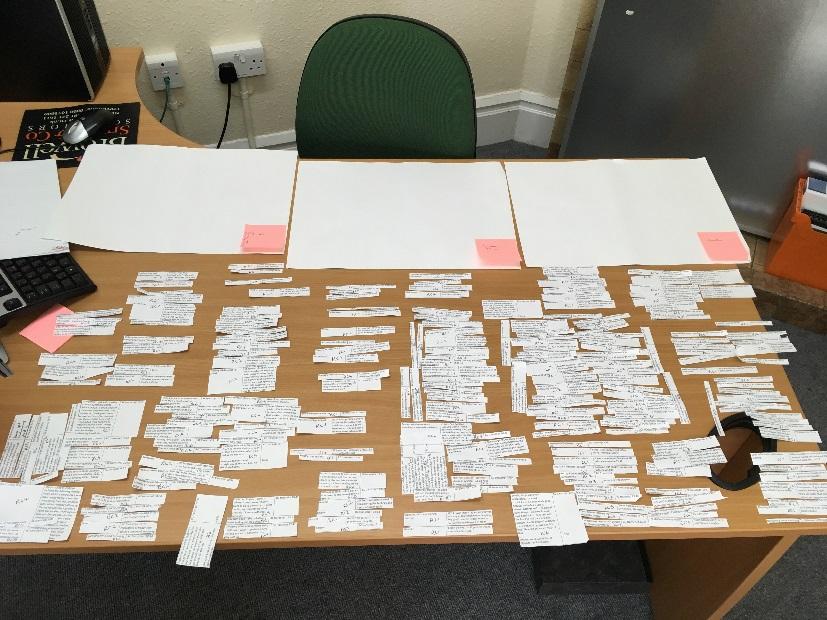
**APPENDIX 13:** Example of post-it notes recorded by practitioners during Research Circles

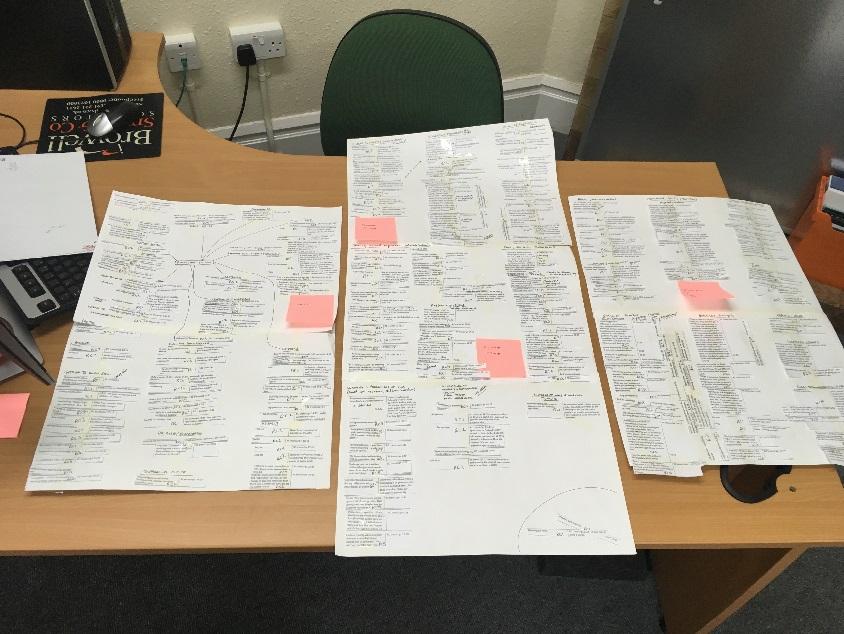
**

**APPENDIX 14:** Example of Mind-Map



**APPENDIX 15:** Research Circle Data examples





**APPENDIX16:**Examples of learning occurring between generations

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Knowledge holder** | **recipient** | **action** | **observation** | **Why relevant** | **Category** |
| Older adult (Isobel) | Child (Ashley) and  Co-researcher (Cathy) | Pooh Sticks game over bridge | Learns new game and informs key person and children on return to nursery - | New game, not played by practitioners | Tacit knowledge  Demonstrating  Recall/reflection |
| Older adult (Emily) | Olivia and Jack | Coaching re untying knots | knot untying | Progression from knot tying | Skills development  collaborative |
| Older Adult (Isobel) | Children (Sophie and Jack) | Empathy, encouragement, | First mentioned in Figure 4.2 the incline and Section 5.3 Jack’s journey. | Isobel’s tacit and experiential knowledge led to… | Emotional resilience and behaviour changes |
| Child (Elle) | Older Adult (Isobel) | Informs adult where she is going(following rules) Adult worried but child says, ‘It’s ok, I will find you’ | Understands child’s competence and self-efficacy | Difference in practice | different ways of working and thinking  changing attitude |
| Children | Older Adult (Emily) |  | Didn’t realise children were so competent |  | changing attitude  skills development |
| Child (John) | Older Adult (Emily) | Informs adult how to sit comfortably | John : the log is for leaning your back on |  | Experiential knowledge  children as experts |
| Child (Jack) | Isobel | Fire making | Rubbing sticks together |  | Experiential  Child as expert |
| Luke (and others) | Emily | Making a shelter | Emily’s shelter wasn’t very good | Emily needs to return to learn how to do it and be supported by others | Experiential  Child as expert |
| Older Adult (Isobel),  Child (Olivia),  Co-researcher Diane  Learning together | | Used reference book to ID leaves and trees | Olivia asked Isobel to see her book to identify items – collaborative approach | Diane says they wouldn’t take a book- unless child asked for it | learning from books  tacit, experiential and explicit knowledge  collaborative |
| Older Adult (Emily) | Co-researcher Ella and children | Taking measured risk in play | Using a tin tray to slide down the hill | Risk taking | Fun  questioning practice  reflecting |
| Older Adult (Isobel) | Children and Co-researcher Diane | Making broomsticks using material found in the woods | Isobel used Ivy instead of twine to fasten the broomsticks | Practitioner Diane said I would have used string, not ivy, so you taught me to improvise | skills development |
| All Children | Co-researcher | Observing children with older adults | Seeing children from a different perspective | Learning more about the children and their interests | reflecting |
| Practitioners | Older adult (Emily) | Shared book re Forest school | Emily shared her delight in this new reading material | This was new practice which was of great interest to Emily. | learning new language (Kelly Kettle) |
| Children  (Older adults – indirectly) | Children  Co-researchers | Creating stories | Occurred back at nursery | Building upon their experience with older people, the group was able to create a story | Experiential knowledge  Recall / reflection / storying  negotiation |

**APPENDIX 17:** In discussion with children: Children’s perspectives for sharing

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| name | What did you learn from Isobel and Emily | What did you teach /show Isobel and Emily? |
| Ashley | Cooking, stories, using a stick tool, making music, the stick under the bridge | if you fall down you only climb back up |
| John | They cook | Rolling down the hill |
| Elle | I borrowed Isobel’s book and we found leaves… brown ones and orange ones.. and the broomstick | balancing |
| Olivia | Emily said that when she was a little girl she used to have long hair | I pulled Emily up the hill..she couldn’t get up the hill’ |
| Luke | They listened to me and learned to climb | How to make a shelter |
| Annie | lots | Headlice under the stone |
| Jack | Knots | How to make fire |
| Nate | Isobel knows about wood and furniture and how trees stay alive and insects like the dark | We went to Africa, but not really. I got stuck in the mud |
| Sophie | How to clean my wellies in a puddle and we found shiny conkers | ‘If you be very quiet there might be little birds’. |
| Libby | teamwork | Forest school |
| Sara | playing | Making a fire |
| Austin | Making broomsticks | Power rangers |